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Israel In Fear

Saul's Reign And Army (1 Sam. 13:1-2)

1 Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, 2 Saul chose for himself three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in the mountains of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent away, every man to his tent.

- Verse 1 has been a famous head-scratcher over the centuries. The reference to “one year” raises questions and so does the reference to “two years.”
- Some think the two years should really be read as something else.
- As for the *one* year mentioned, the Hebrew literally says *Saul was the son of a year*. This can literally mean that Saul was a one-year-old child. Important principles of interpretation can help us.
 - The clarity of Scripture: “*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.*” (Deut. 6:6–7)
 - Common sense: Saul wasn’t literally a one-year-child.
 - God’s Preservation of the Word: “*Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away.*” (Matt. 24:35)
 - Not reading things into the Word.
 - Scripture doesn’t contradict itself.

- Scripture is best interpreted by other Scripture.
- Some think Saul’s early career as king lasted a year, but this doesn’t jibe with the fact that he was *the child of a year*. This is likely a reference to his innocence.
- How long did Saul reign? In Acts 13, the Apostle Paul says that Saul reigned for 40 years. Josephus also says that Saul reigned for 40 years. Some say he reigned for two years, then for 40 more years after God took away His blessing, or 42 years in all.
- The number 42 is very significant as a picture of judgment, so that could be the case. (The Wilderness wanderings, Antichrist, and others.)
- Now Saul sends almost everybody home, except for three battalions of 1,000.

Jonathan

- One of the most sympathetic and likable figures in the Bible.
- Jonathan is courageous and active. Saul is timid and passive. Jonathan is very noble, whereas Saul is treacherous – even dangerous.
- Jonathan is a picture of Christians who are hated by the world because we support and make covenant with the true, coming King.
- *Yehonathan* = “gift of Yah.”
- Time has passed, and Saul may have been passive for years. His battalions are in the hilly terrain of Michmash. Does this also show him in a bad light?

Jonathan Attacks (1 Sam. 13:3-4)

3 And Jonathan attacked the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear!” 4 Now all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel had also become an abomination to the Philistines. And the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal.

- We don't know if Jonathan did this on his own initiative.
- Geba was in between the two Israelite army groups, and the Philistine garrison was strategically situated. Jonathan's attack was probably unexpected. He likely wiped out their entire garrison.
- Saul now says, "Let the Hebrews hear!" We don't know what he was driving at, but it could have been ironic or sarcastic.
- The encouraging effect of Jonathan's bravery will fade quickly. The people as a whole will lack courage in the face of the terrible retaliation that was coming.
- Gilgal was a place where God had rolled away the shame of His people, but now they were going to be ashamed again.

Fear And Desertion (1 Sam. 13:5-8)

5 Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth Aven. 6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in danger (for the people were distressed), then the people hid in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in holes, and in pits. 7 And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. 8 Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

- This is an absolutely massive army and the number of chariots is disputed passage is debated. The writing for 30,000 is very close to that for 3,000.
- Some ancient translations in languages other than Hebrew actually do say 3,000.

- It's also been suggested that this means 30 groups of chariots, or 30,000 vehicles of all kinds. Most scholars believe this was a copying error by a scribe.
- We don't believe the Bible contains any errors, but it's important to remember that only the original manuscripts were inspired by God. We have strong confidence in the Word, and there are literally thousands of manuscripts that agree with each other. Nothing important in the Bible is in doubt.
- *“Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered... in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known... they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The five percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.”* – Gleason Archer
- Seeing this massive army, panic sets in, and people flee as best they can.
- Some people remained and, with trembling, they followed Saul.
- What will Saul do now that Samuel hasn't come?

A Fateful Sacrifice (1 Sam. 13:9-14)

9 So Saul said, “Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.” And he offered the burnt offering. 10 Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him. 11 And Samuel said, “What have you done?” Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, 12 then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.’ Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.”

13 And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

- This is a terrible mistake on Saul’s part, and his first truly significant blunder.
- Saul says he felt compelled or forced himself.
- Notice Saul’s excuses. These things drive us to make spiritual mistakes also, in ministry and in all of life.
- Notice also that Saul never sent any messengers to find Samuel.
- Saul’s sacrifice not only violated Samuel’s command as a prophet, it was a violation of the Torah. Saul wasn’t a priest.
- Ironically, Saul thought he could get God’s favor by an act of disobedience!
- The consequences were grave, because no king could be above the Law. Saul hears now that his dynasty will come to an end.
- God has been looking for a man who seeks God’s heart, not one whose heart is after man and seeking man’s approval.

The Difficult Situation Of The Israelites (1 Sam. 13:15-23)

15 Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people present with him, about six hundred men. 16 Saul, Jonathan his son, and the people present with them remained in Gibeah of Benjamin. But the Philistines encamped in Michmash.

17 Then raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned onto the road to Ophrah, to the land of Shual, 18 another company turned to the road to Beth Horon, and another company turned to the road of the border that overlooks the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

19 Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, “Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears.” 20 But all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man’s plowshare, his mattock, his ax, and his sickle; 21 and the charge for a sharpening was a pim for the plowshares, the mattocks, the forks, and the axes, and to set the points of the goads. 22 So it came about, on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son.

23 And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

- Now Saul has lost 80% of his men. The Philistines begin to harass the people, and there’s little Israel can do about it.
- The Philistines exercised very powerful economic control by keeping the Israelites from possessing useful metals, and charging them a high price to take care of their agricultural implements.
- For Israel to prosper, and perhaps even to survive, they would need God’s help.
