

The LORD fulfilled Israel's desire for a king by giving them Saul, a man that has impressed them with his physical attributes. However, Saul was not a man with a heart to follow the LORD and this fact begins to show itself in chapters 13 and 15 as he demonstrates that he would rather follow his own heart and understanding than to trust in the LORD and obey Him.

1 Samuel 13:1-6: Two years into his reign as king of Israel, Saul decided to go on the offensive by assembling a small force of 3,000 soldiers and attacking the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, an Israelite city in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. The Philistines responded by sending a vast army of 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and foot soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore (v. 5). The men of Israel became distressed when they saw such a mighty army preparing to fight against them and so they began hiding in caves, thickets, and anywhere else they could find.

1 Samuel 13

7 And *some of the Hebrews* went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. 8 And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel *had appointed*: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

“And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead” – These were apparently civilians who crossed the Jordan in order to be as far away from the Philistines as possible. They knew the Philistines would likely indiscriminately kill anyone they encountered when they attacked.

“As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling” – Saul had a trumpet blown throughout the land (v. 3b), calling the men of Israel to meet him at Gilgal to defend Israel. While the civilians were fleeing across Jordan, Saul waited at Gilgal for Samuel to arrive to make offerings to the LORD and to ask for His guidance. These were the standing instructions from Samuel when Saul was in need of guidance from the LORD (1 Sam. 10:8). As Saul was waiting, his men were trembling in fear because they were hopelessly outnumbered by the Philistines. Israel wanted a king to fight their battles (1 Sam. 8:20) and now their king has them facing an apparently hopeless battle.

“And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed” – This time was in accordance with Samuel's instructions (1 Sam. 10:8).

“but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him” – After the appointed seven days, Samuel had still not arrived and fear was taking its toll on Saul's men. They were beginning to desert him due to their fear of the enemy's overwhelming numbers.

9 And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. 10 And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

“And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering” – Fearing that he might not have an army left if the offerings to the LORD were not made soon, Saul oversees them himself in Samuel's absence. Saul apparently doubted Samuel would arrive in time and ultimately did not trust that the LORD would take care of things.

“And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came” – Samuel arrives just as the offerings are being completed. Had Saul trusted Samuel's promise to meet him there and waited a bit longer all would have been well.

“and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute [bless] him” – Hearing that Samuel has come to the camp, Saul goes out to greet and honor him as the man of God.

11 And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and *that* thou camest not within the days appointed, and *that* the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; 12 Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

“And Samuel said, What hast thou done?” – Samuel must have seen and smelled the smoke and other evidences that the offerings had already been made before his arrival.

“And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash” – Saul gives three reasons for making the offerings himself: 1) his army was deserting; 2) Samuel did not show up when he promised he would; 3) the imminent danger of the Philistines attacking. Saul's second reason hints at shifting some of the blame onto Samuel for being late.

“Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD” – Saul was afraid that the Philistines might attack before he had asked for the LORD's help and guidance in the upcoming battle.

“I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering” – Saul claims to have had no choice but to take matters into his own hands and offer the burnt offering that was Samuel's duty to offer.

13 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

“And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly” – Saul relied on his own reasoning and decided to take matters into his own hands instead of obeying the instructions the LORD had given through Samuel.

“thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee” – The commandment from the LORD was that Saul should wait for Samuel to come to make the offerings and give him guidance from the LORD (1 Sam. 10:8).

“for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever” – The LORD blesses obedience and if Saul had obeyed then the LORD would have allowed Saul and his descendants to continue to reign over Israel. However, Saul's self-will demonstrated that he was not a man after the LORD's heart.

14 But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.

Saul has forfeited his right to a continuing kingdom and the LORD will replace him with another man He has found that will obey Him. This “man after his own heart” refers to David, who will have a heart to obey and will be the earthly ancestor of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

1 Samuel 13:15-23: Samuel leaves Saul and goes to Gibeah. Meanwhile Saul counts his men and discovers that he only has 600 men left after the rest had deserted. The text also points out that there were no swords or spears among Israel’s soldiers except for Saul and his son Jonathan because the Philistines had forbidden them. Instead, the Israelites had only farm tools and implements with which to fight.

1 Samuel 14: Jonathan, the son of Saul, demonstrated his trust in the LORD by going up to the garrison of the Philistines with his armor bearer. He recognized that the LORD could give victory with only a few men and so the two men attacked the garrison. The victory that the LORD gave them over that garrison continued to spread into the rest of the Philistine army, who got so confused that they began killing one another. Saul and his men took advantage of the confusion and attacked the Philistines and was later joined by the men who had earlier deserted. “So the LORD saved Israel that day” (1 Sam 14:23a).

1 Samuel 15

3 Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

Some time later, the LORD gives Saul a mission to destroy Amalek completely in retribution for attacking Israel when they came out of Egypt. This was to fulfill the LORD’s command in Deut. 25:17-19. Saul is to kill men, women, children, and all livestock. Nothing of Amalek is to remain alive.

4 And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. 5 And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley. 6 And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites.

As Saul prepares for the battle, he sends word to the Kenites to leave so that they are not slain along with the Amalekites.

7 And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah *until* thou comest to Shur, that *is* over against Egypt. 8 And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

The LORD gives Saul victory over the Amalekites, however Saul does not completely obey the LORD’s command. He kills all of the Amalekites except for Agag, the Amalekite king, and brings him back alive.

9 But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all *that was* good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing *that was* vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.

“**But Saul and the people spared Agag**” – Saving Agag was not an act of mercy. In those days it was common to capture the enemy king alive so that they could humiliate him and celebrate their victory over him. The Philistines did the same to Samson (Judges 16:21-25).

“**and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly [completely] destroy them**” – Instead of destroying all the livestock as the LORD had commanded, they kept the best for themselves as the spoils of war.

“**but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly**” – They killed the worthless animals in order to say that they obeyed the LORD.

Verses 10-19: The LORD informs Samuel of Saul’s disobedience and so Samuel goes to Saul with the message that the LORD has rejected him as king. Saul claims to have obeyed the LORD but Samuel states that the sounds of the livestock gave evidence to the contrary. Saul uses the excuse that the best animals were saved to be sacrificed to the LORD, but Samuel states what the LORD has said about Saul’s disobedience.

20 And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.

Saul still claims to have obeyed the LORD by destroying the Amalekites even though he saved king Agag. He then shifts the blame to the people who took the things that should have been destroyed to be used as sacrifices to the LORD.

22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as *great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion *is* as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is* as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king.

Samuel states that the LORD values obedience more than burnt offerings and sacrifices. He compares rebellion against the will of God to witchcraft (divination – getting spiritual guidance from a source other than God) and stubbornness to iniquity and idolatry. When we disobey God because we are following our own will, it is no better than following false gods (idolatry) or getting our guidance from spiritual sources other than God.

1 Samuel 15:24-35: Saul finally admits his sin but still wants Samuel to show him honor in front of the people. When Samuel refuses, Saul tries to restrain him and accidentally rips Samuel’s cloak. Samuel states that the LORD will also rip the kingdom from Saul because He has rejected Saul from being king. After another confession from Saul, Samuel relents and worships with Saul. Afterward he slays Agag himself, completing the task that Saul should have done.