

CHAPTER 13

Those that desired a king like all the nations fancied that, when they had one, they should look very great and considerable; but in this chapter we find it proved much otherwise. While Samuel was joined in commission with Saul things went well (11:7). But, now that Saul began to reign alone, all went to decay, and Samuel's words began to be fulfilled: "You shall be consumed, both you and your king;" for never was the state of Israel further gone in a consumption than in this chapter.

I. Saul appears here a very silly prince.

1. Infatuated in his counsels (v. 1-3).
2. Invaded by his neighbours (v. 4, 5).
3. Deserted by his soldiers (v. 6, 7).
4. Disordered in his own spirit, and sacrificing in confusion (v. 8-10).
5. Chidden by Samuel (v. 11-13).
6. Rejected of God from being king (v. 14).

II. The people appear here a very miserable people.

1. Disheartened and dispersed (v. 6, 7).
2. Diminished (v. 15, 16).
3. Plundered (v. 17, 18).
4. Disarmed (v. 19-23). This they got by casting off God's government, and making themselves like the nations: all their glory departed from them.

<0130>1 SAMUEL 13:1-7

THE PHILISTINES WAR AGAINST ISRAEL

We are not told wherein it was that the people of Israel offended God, so as to forfeit his presence and turn his hand against them, as Samuel had threatened (<0125>1 Samuel 12:15); but doubtless they left God, else he would not have left them, as here it appears he did; for,

I. Saul was very weak and impolitic, and did not order his affairs with discretion. *Saul was the son of one year* (so the first words are in the original), a phrase which we make to signify the date of his reign, but ordinarily it signifies the date of one's birth, and therefore some understand it figuratively — he was as innocent and good as a child of a year old; so the Chaldee paraphrase: he was *without fault, like the son of a year*. But, if we admit a figurative sense, it may as well intimate that he was ignorant and imprudent, and as unfit for business as a child of a year old: and the subsequent particulars make this more accordant with his character than the former. But we take it rather, as our own translation has it, *Saul reigned one year*, and nothing happened that was considerable, it was a year of no action; but in his second year he did as follows: —

1. he chose a band of 3000 men, of whom he himself commanded 2000, and his son Jonathan 1000, v. 2. The rest of the people he dismissed to their tents. If he intended these only for the guard of his person and his honorary attendants, it was impolitic to have so many, if for a standing army, in apprehension of danger from the Philistines, it was no less impolitic to have so few; and perhaps the confidence he put in this select number, and his disbanding the rest of that brave army with which he had lately beaten the Ammonites (⁽⁹¹¹⁸⁾1 Samuel 11:8-11), was looked upon as an affront to the kingdom, excited general disgust, and was the reason he had so few at his call when he had occasion for them. The prince that relies on a particular party weakens his own interest in the whole community.

2. He ordered his son Jonathan to surprise and destroy the garrison of the Philistines that lay near him in Geba, v. 3. I wish there were no ground for supposing that this was a violation or infraction of some articles with the Philistines, and that it was done treacherously and perfidiously. The reason why I suspect it is because it is said that, for doing it, *Israel was had in abomination*, or, as the word is, *did stink with the Philistines* (v. 4), as men void of common honesty and whose word could not be relied on. If it was so, we will lay the blame, not on Jonathan who did it, but on Saul, his prince and father, who ordered him to do it, and perhaps kept him in ignorance of the truth of the matter. Nothing makes the name of Israel odious to those that are without so much as the fraud and dishonesty of those that are called by that worthy name. If professors of religion cheat and over-reach, break their word and betray their trust, religion suffers by it, and is *had in abomination with the Philistines*. Whom may one trust if not an Israelite, one that, it is expected, should be *without guile*?

3. When he had thus exasperated the Philistines, then he began to raise forces, which, if he had acted wisely, he would have done before. When the Philistines had a vast army ready to pour in upon him, to avenge the wrong he had done them, then was he *blowing the trumpet through the land*, among a careless, if not a disaffected people, saying, *Let the Hebrews hear* (v. 3), and so as many as thought fit came to Saul to Gilgal, v. 4. But now the generality, we may suppose, drew back (either in dislike of Saul's politics or in dread of the Philistines' power), who, if he had summoned them sooner, would have been as ready at his beck as they were when he marched against the Ammonites. We often find that after-wit would have done much better before and have prevented much inconvenience.

II. Never did the Philistines appear in such a formidable body as they did now, upon this provocation which Saul gave them. We may suppose they had great assistance from their allies, for (v. 5), besides 6000 horse, which in those times, when horses were not so much used in war as they are now, was a great body, they had an incredible number of chariots, 30,000 in all: most of them, we may suppose, were carriages for the bag and baggage of so vast an army, not chariots of war. But their foot was *innumerable as the sand of the sea-shore*, so jealous were they for the honour of their nation and so much enraged at the baseness of the Israelites in destroying their garrison. If Saul had asked counsel of God before he had given the Philistines this provocation, he and his people might the better have borne this threatening trouble which they had now brought on themselves by their own folly.

III. Never were the people of Israel so faint-hearted, so sneaking, so very cowardly, as they were now. Some considerable numbers, it may be, came to Saul to Gilgal; but, hearing of the Philistines' numbers and preparations, their spirits sunk within them, some think because they did not find Samuel there with Saul. Those that, awhile ago, were weary of him, and wished for a king, now had small joy of their king unless they could see him under Samuel's direction. Sooner or later, men will be made to see that God and his prophets are their best friends. Now that they saw the Philistines making war upon them, and Samuel not coming in to help them, they knew not what to do; *men's hearts failed them for fear*. And.

1. Some absconded. Rather than run upon death among the Philistines, they buried themselves alive in caves and thickets, v. 6. See what work sin makes; it exposes men to perils, and then robs them of their courage and

dispirits them. A single person, by faith, can say, *I will not be afraid of 10,000* (~~ORIS~~ Psalm 3:6); but here thousands of degenerate Israelites tremble at the approach of a great crowd of Philistines. Guilt makes men cowards.

2. Others fled (v. 7): They *went over Jordan to the land of Gilead*, as far as they could from the danger, and to a place where they had lately been victorious over the Ammonites. Where they had triumphed they hoped to be sheltered.

3. Those that staid with Saul *followed him trembling*, expecting no other than to be cut off, and having their hands and hearts very much weakened by the desertion of so many of their troops. And perhaps Saul himself, though he had so much honour as to stand his ground, yet had no courage to spare wherewith to inspire his trembling soldiers.

~~ORIS~~ 1 SAMUEL 13:8-14

SAUL REPROVED BY SAMUEL

Here is,

I. Saul's offence in offering sacrifice before Samuel came. Samuel, when he anointed him, had ordered him to tarry for him seven days in Gilgal, promising that, at the end of those days, he would be sure to come to him, and both offer sacrifices for him and direct him what he should do. This we had ~~ORIS~~ 1 Samuel 10:8. Perhaps that order, though inserted there, was given him afterwards, or was given him as a general rule to be observed in every public congress at Gilgal, or, as is most probable, though not mentioned again, was lately repeated with reference to this particular occasion; for it is plain that Saul himself understood it as obliging him from God now to stay till Samuel came, else he would not have made so many excuses as he did for not staying, v. 11. This order Saul broke. He staid till the seventh day, yet had not patience to wait till the end of the seventh day. Perhaps he began to reproach Samuel as false to his word, careless of his country, and disrespectful of his prince, and thought it more fit that Samuel should wait for him than he for Samuel. However,

1. He presumed to offer sacrifice without Samuel, and nothing appears to the contrary but that he did it himself, though he was neither priest nor

prophet, as if, because he was a king, he might do any thing, a piece of presumption which king Uzziah paid dearly for, ^{<4836>}2 Chronicles 26:16, etc.

2. He determined to engage the Philistines without Samuel's directions, though he had promised to *show him what he should do*. So self-sufficient Saul was that he thought it not worth while to stay for a prophet of the Lord, either to pray for him or to advise him. This was Saul's offence, and that which aggravated it was,

(1.) That for aught that appears, he did not send any messenger to Samuel, to know his mind, to represent the case to him, and to receive fresh directions from him, though he had enough about him that were swift enough of foot at this time.

(2.) That when Samuel came he rather seemed to boast of what he had done than to repent of it; for he *went forth to salute him*, as his brother-sacrificer, and seemed pleased with the opportunity he had of letting Samuel know that he needed him not, but could do well enough without him. He went out to *bless him*, so the word is, as if he now thought himself a complete priest, empowered to bless as well as sacrifice, whereas he should have gone out to be blessed by him.

(3.) That he charged Samuel with breach of promise: *Thou camest not within the days appointed* (v. 11), and therefore if any thing was amiss Samuel must bear the blame, who was God's minister; whereas he did come according to his word, before the seven days had expired. Thus the *scoffers of the latter days* think the promise of Christ's coming is broken, because he does not come in their time, though it is certain he will come at the set time.

(4.) That when he was charged with disobedience he justified himself in what he had done, and gave no sign at all of repentance for it. It is not sinning that ruins men, but sinning and not repenting, falling and not getting up again. See what excuses he made, v. 11, 12. He would have this act of disobedience pass,

[1.] For an instance of his prudence. The people were most of them scattered from him, and he had no other way than this to keep those with him that remained and to prevent their deserting too. If Samuel neglected the public concerns, he would not.

[2.] For an instance of his piety. He would be thought very devout, and in great care not to engage the Philistines till he had by prayer and sacrifice engaged God on his side: “*The Philistines,*” said he, “*will come down upon me, before I have made my supplication to the Lord,* and then I am undone. What! go to war before I have said my prayers!” Thus he covered his disobedience to God's command with a pretence of concern for God's favour. Hypocrites lay a great stress upon the external performances of religion, thinking thereby to excuse their neglect of the *weightier matters of the law*. And yet, lastly, He owns it went against his conscience to do it: *I forced myself and offered a burnt-offering*, perhaps boasting that he had broken through his convictions and got the better of them, or at least thinking this extenuated his fault, that he knew he should not have done as he did, but did it with reluctancy. Foolish man! to think that God would be well pleased with sacrifices offered in direct opposition both to his general and particular command.

II. The sentence passed upon Saul for this offence. Samuel found him standing by his burnt-offering, but, instead of an answer of peace, was sent to him with heavy tidings, and let him know that *the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord*, much more when he brings it, as Saul did, *with a wicked mind*.

1. He shows him the aggravations of his crime, and says to this king, *Thou art wicked*, which it is not for any but a prophet of the Lord to say, ^{<3848>}Job 34:18. He charges him with being an enemy to himself and his interest — *Thou hast done foolishly*, and a rebel to God and his government — “*Thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God*, that commandment wherewith he intended to try thy obedience.” Note, Those that disobey the commandments of God do foolishly for themselves. Sin is folly, and sinners are the greatest fools.

2. He reads his doom (v. 14): “*Thy kingdom shall not continue long to thee or thy family; God has his eye upon another, a man after his own heart*, and not like thee, that will have thy own will and way.” The sentence is in effect the same with *Mene tekel*, only now there seems room left for Saul's repentance, upon which this sentence would have been reversed; but, upon the next act of disobedience, it was made irreversible, ^{<1952>}1 Samuel 15:29. And now, better a thousand times he had continued in obscurity tending his asses than to be enthroned and so soon dethroned. But was not this hard, to pass so severe a sentence upon him and his house for a single

error, an error that seemed so small, and in excuse for which he had so much to say? No, *The Lord is righteous in all his ways* and does no man any wrong, *will be justified when he speaks and clear when he judges*. By this,

(1.) He shows that there is no sin little, because no little god to sin against; but that every sin is a forfeiture of the heavenly kingdom, for which we stood fair.

(2.) He shows that disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, is a great provocation, as in the case of our first parents.

(3.) He warns us to *take heed of our spirits*, for that which to men may seem but a small offence, yet to him that knows from what principle and with what disposition of mind it is done, may appear a heinous crime.

(4.) God, in rejecting Saul for an error seemingly little, sets off, as by a foil, the lustre of his mercy in forgiving such great sins as those of David, Manasseh, and others.

(5.) We are taught hereby how necessary it is that we *wait on our God continually*. Saul lost his kingdom for want of two or three hours' patience.

~~0935~~ 1 SAMUEL 13:15-23

SENTENCE PASSED UPON SAUL

Here,

1. Samuel departs in displeasure. Saul has set up for himself, and now he is left to himself: *Samuel gat him from Gilgal* (v. 15), and it does not appear that he either prayed with Saul or directed him. Yet in going up to Gibeah of Benjamin, which was Saul's city, he intimated that he had not quite abandoned him, but waited to do him a kindness another time. Or he went to the college of the prophets there, to pray for Saul when he did not think fit to pray with him.

2. Saul goes after him to Gibeah, and there musters his army, and finds his whole number to be but 600 men, v. 15, 16. Thus were they for their sin *diminished and brought low*.

3. The Philistines ravage the country, and put all the adjacent parts under contribution. The body of their army, or standing camp (as it is called in the margin, v. 23), lay in an advantageous pass at Michmash, but thence they sent out three separate parties or detachments that took several ways, to plunder the country, and bring in provisions for the army, v. 17, 18. By these the land of Israel was both terrified and impoverished, and the Philistines were animated and enriched. This the sin of Israel brought upon them, ^{<324>}Isaiah 42:24.

4. The Israelites that take the field with Saul are unarmed, having only slings and clubs, not a sword or spear among them all, except what Saul and Jonathan themselves have, v. 19, 22. See here,

(1.) How politic the Philistines were, when they had power in their hands, and did what they pleased in Israel. They put down all the smiths' shops, transplanted the smiths into their own country, and forbade any Israelite, under severe penalties, to exercise the trade or mystery of working in brass or iron, though they had rich mines of both (^{<888>}Deuteronomy 8:9) in such plenty that it was said of Asher, *his shoes shall be iron and brass*, ^{<632>}Deuteronomy 33:25. This was subtly done of the Philistines, for hereby they not only prevented the people of Israel from making themselves weapons of war (by which they would be both disused to military exercises and unfurnished when there was occasion), but obliged them to a dependence upon them even for the instruments of husbandry; they must go to them, that is, to some or other of their garrisons, which were dispersed in the country, to have all their iron-work done, and no more might an Israelite do than use a file (v. 20, 21), and no doubt the Philistines' smiths brought the Israelites long bills for work done.

(2.) How impolitic Saul was, that did not, in the beginning of his reign, set himself to redress this grievance. Samuel's not doing it was very excusable; he fought with other artillery; thunder and lightning, in answer to his prayer, were to him instead of sword and spear; but for Saul, that pretended to be a king like the kings of the nations, to leave his soldiers without swords and spears, and take no care to provide them, especially when he might have done it out of the spoils of the Ammonites whom he conquered in the beginning of his reign, was such a piece of negligence as could by no means be excused.

(3.) How slothful and mean-spirited the Israelites were, that suffered the Philistines thus to impose upon them and had no thought nor spirit to help

themselves. It was reckoned very bad with them when there was *not a shield or spear found among 40,000 in Israel* (~~ORR~~Judges 5:8), and it was not better now, when there was never an Israelite with a sword by his side but the king and his son, never a soldier, never a gentleman; surely they were reduced to this, or began to be so, in Samuel's time, for we never find him with sword or spear in his hand. If they had not been dispirited, they could not have been disarmed, but it was sin that made them naked to their shame.