

Context:

- Israel's kings were not allowed to be like the kings of the nations around them, but rather they were required to submit to the word of God. In Chapter 12, Israel was warned that if they failed to obey the Lord, His hand would be against them to sweep them and their king away. However, if they obeyed it would go well for them.
- Unfortunately, this chapter marks the beginning of "The Fall of King Saul," as he fails to submit himself to the Word of God.

The Setting: 1 Samuel 13:1-4 (ESV)

¹ Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel, ² Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent. ³ Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." ⁴ And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.

- King Saul is finally getting around to doing what he was specifically appointed to do as king, which is to deal with the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 9:16). Saul has so far dealt with the Ammonites (CH 11), but the Philistines he has not dealt with yet, until now.
- However, Saul is not the one who initiates the battle, but rather it is Jonathan (his son), who does this even though he has only half the number of troops that his dad has (v2).
- There is a sense that Saul has been avoiding the Philistines in fear, but now he must confront them.

* Side bar on v1

- Troublesome verse because Saul was clearly more than a year old when he became king, and we know that he reigned for more than two years (Acts 13:21= 40 years)
- One way to understand this is as a theological statement: The narrator is making a statement that from God's perspective, Saul only reigned two years because he was rejected by God early on during his reign.
- Saul becoming king at one year old can be understood as the time between when he was first anointed privately by Samuel (1 Sam. 10:1) to when he was proclaimed publicly in front of all Israel (1 Sam. 10:17).

The Story: 1 Samuel 13:5-23 (ESV)

⁵ And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. ⁶ When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, ⁷ and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. ⁸ He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. ⁹ So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰ As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. ¹¹ Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, ¹² I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." ¹³ And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you." ¹⁵ And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. ¹⁶ And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. ¹⁷ And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual; ¹⁸ another company turned toward Beth-horon; and another company turned toward the border

that looks down on 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 themselves swords or spears.” ²⁰ But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, ²¹ and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. ²² So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them. ²³ And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

The Circumstance:

- Israel is in a troublesome situation. They are largely outnumbered (v5), the people are afraid and running away (vv6-7), the Philistines are surrounding them in every direction (vv17-18), and they have no weapons (v22).
- This leads Saul to cave under the pressure, and do something he was commanded not to do.
- * Can't be sure what exactly Saul was not commanded to do, but the main point is that he did not keep the commandment of God (vv13-14)

The Rebuke:

- “What have you done?” (v11). Same question that God asks in significant moments of disobedience (Eve: Gen. 3:13, Cain: Gen. 4:10, Achan: Joshua 7:19)
- Saul, now as the first king of Israel, in his blatant disobedience to God, is asked this same question.

The Response:

- Saul responds the same way Adam and Eve responded when they were asked this question in the garden: he blames! (v11)
- Saul then goes on to say that, given the circumstances, he simply had no other choice (v12). He just could not help himself, based on the situation. In other words, he excuses himself of sin.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)- ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

- Samuel's response is that Saul has “done foolishly” (v13).
- The Bible's definition of foolishness has nothing to do with your intellectual ability, but rather has everything to do with whether or not you keep the commandments of God.

The Consequence:

- Because of Saul's foolishness, he ends up losing the kingdom (vv13-14). His dynasty will not continue.
- * It may seem harsh that God strips Saul's kingdom away for his act of disobedience, but we must not forget that sin is not a small matter. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23)

The Mercy of God

- God exercises judgment on Saul, but not completely. Saul's kingdom is taken away, but he himself is still the king. At this point there is still room for Saul to repent and live according to God's commands.
- * Today, repentance is available to us because the promised King (v14, a man after God's own heart) has come.
- Immediately this is King David, but ultimately this is King Jesus, who perfectly obeyed all of God's commands, and who died to forgive us of all of our foolishness.
- Even in the worst of circumstances (facing the wrath of God over our sin), King Jesus did not falter, but obeyed the Father's will so that we could live forever, and by his grace, continually repent of our sins.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In response to Samuel's confrontation of Saul's sin, Saul acts just like our first parents (Adam and Eve) did and plays the blame game. In what ways are you guilty of blaming others, or circumstances, for your sin? What can help us to avoid blame-shifting and making excuses for our sin, and instead be quick to own up to our sins and repent?
2. The Bible's definition of "foolishness" is to reject the commands of the Lord. In what specific ways are you acting foolishly and why? In what ways can your CG help you in repenting of this foolishness?
3. The massive consequence of Saul's disobedience (losing the kingdom) may seem harsh, but that is only because we have made sin a small matter. Are there particular sins in your life (or in the lives of others) that you trivialize and treat lightly? If so, why is that? What can help you to take sin more seriously?
4. How does understanding the gospel help us to repent in the right ways? (Not as an attempt to earn our favor with God, but as a desire to please Him as His child).