Sunday, August 2, 2020

Lesson: I Samuel 13:5-14; Time of Action: 1041 B.C.; Place of Action: Michmash and Gilgal

Golden Text: “And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him” (Luke 5:11).

I. INTRODUCTION. I’m sure that most people have heard the saying, “Stay in your lane.” Most often it’s used to remind people to do only what they were asked or called to do and nothing more. Although God gave the priesthood the responsibility of offering sacrifices, occasionally He would allow or even instruct the judges (see Judges 6:25-26) and even kings to perform that priestly practice (see II Samuel 6:12-13). In the time of the judges, God appointed Samuel to the role of prophet and priest in Israel. Unless the LORD gave other directions, only Samuel was permitted to offer sacrifices. In this week’s lesson, we see that Saul who was anointed king of Israel, didn’t stay in his lane, but moved into the lane of priest and wrongly offered sacrifices that were reserved for Samuel to do.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. After being privately anointed as king of Israel (see I Samuel 9:26-27; 10:1), later Saul was publicly installed as king (see I Samuel 10:24) after
Samuel told the people that by wanting a king they had rejected the LORD (see I Samuel 10:19). At that time, Samuel reminded the people what kind of kingdom Saul would have (see I Samuel 8:10-18; 10:25). Sometime later, the Ammonites encamped near Jabesh-gilead and threatened to attack them. But the elders sent word to Saul, who after the Spirit of God came upon him gathered a large army and defeated the Ammonites (see I Samuel 11:1-11). Following this victory, Saul’s kingship was confirmed by the people (see I Samuel 11:12-15). At that point, Samuel confirmed his integrity with the people (see I Samuel 12:1-5). Then Samuel recounted God’s past deliverances of Israel (see I Samuel 12:6-11). He also warned the people of what would happen if they disobeyed the LORD and encouraged them to refrain from following idol gods and remain true to Jehovah (see I Samuel 12:20-22). Chapter 12 ends with Samuel declaring that he was obligated to always pray for Israel, but if they sinned, both the people and their king would be consumed (see I Samuel 12:23-25). After Saul had reigned about two years over Israel (see I Samuel 13:1), feeling a Philistine threat, he decided to attack first. Saul gathered about three thousand men and took two thousand with him to Michmash and mount Bethel, and a thousand went with Saul’s son Jonathan in Gibeah (see I Samuel 13:2). Jonathan led an attack on the Philistine garrison that was located at Geba, but Saul took credit for the victory (see I Samuel 13:3-4). This is where our lesson begins.

III. THE PHILISTINE THREAT AGAINST ISRAEL (I
Samuel 13:5-7)

A. The Philistines assemble to attack Israel (I Samuel 13:5). Our first verse says “And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven.” When “the Philistines” heard about their defeat at their garrison in Geba, they prepared for a general campaign against the hated Israelites (see I Samuel 13:3-4). So the “Philistines” drew together for battle with a tremendous army. Many believe that the number of “chariots” should be understood to be “three thousand” instead of “thirty thousand.” Whether that’s true or not is irrelevant. The point is that the “Philistines” had a huge army to go against “Israel,” so many that their number was likened to “the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude.” As the “Philistines” prepared for battle, “they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven.” It is believed that “Michmash” and “Bethaven” were in close proximity to each other, but the exact location of “Bethaven” is unknown. However, “Michmash” was about seven or eight miles from Jerusalem which was in the eastern part of “Israel.” This would indicate that when the “Philistines” camped at “Michmash,” east of “Bethaven” they had entered deep into Israelite territory. But at this time in Israel’s history, Jerusalem was named Jebus because it was inhabited by the Jebusites and was not under Israel’s control (see Joshua 15:63).
B. The Israelites fear for their lives (I Samuel 13:6-7).

1. (vs. 6). This verse says “When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.” Jonathan’s victory at Geba now appeared to be a curse and not a blessing because it had drawn a very large enemy into the land. As a result “the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,).” The term “in a strait” can mean “hemmed in,” or “distressed” as indicated by the phrase “for the people were distressed.” So the Israelites realizing how outnumbered they were began running like scared rabbits before the enemy looking for anyplace they could find to hide as seen in the words “the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.” The rugged hills mercifully provided natural hiding places in which they could survive during emergencies.

2. (vs. 7). This verse says “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.” But as the people sought hiding places, some of them didn’t even feel safe in the rugged hills, so they left the area completely. We are told that “some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.” The tribe of “Gad” along with the tribe of Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh had chosen to
live east of the Jordan because the land there was suitable for raising cattle (see Numbers 32:1-5, 33). The major part of this territory between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee was called "Gilead," and this was the area the frightened Hebrews fled to. In the meantime, "Saul, he was yet in Gilgal." This is a reference to "Gilgal" in the Jordan River valley near Jericho. "Saul" had called an army to "Gilgal" at the first report of the Philistine invasion (see I Samuel 13:4). Because it was on the extreme eastern edge of Canaan, "Gilgal" was relatively safe from invasion for the time being, and was a good point from which to launch a counterattack. In addition, it was the location prearranged by Samuel for "Saul" to come to get instructions from the LORD (see I Samuel 10:8). However, those who were with "Saul" at "Gilgal" didn’t feel any safer in numbers for "all the people followed him trembling." These were the troops that "Saul" had summoned to fight, but they faced that with fear. This can be explained in part by the simple fact that the Philistine army was so large. In addition, Saul’s men were inadequately equipped with weapons. We are told later that the Philistines upon invading the land had removed all the smiths (a reference to blacksmiths) from Israel so that the Hebrews couldn’t make swords and spears. Therefore, in this incredible situation, only "Saul" and Jonathan were fully equipped for battle (see I Samuel 13:19-22). No wonder that the men trembled!

IV. THE TRANSGRESSION OF SAUL (I Samuel 13:8-12)
A. Saul’s predicament (I Samuel 13:8). This verse says “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.”

When “Samuel” anointed Saul, he ordered him to tarry or wait for him “seven days” in “Gilgal,” promising that at the end of those “seven days” he would surely come to Saul, and offer sacrifices and give him instructions on what he should do next (see I Samuel 10:1, 8). So Saul in obedience to the prophet’s directions “tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed.” Saul waited for the appointed length of time, but as the end of the seven days drew near, “Samuel came not to Gilgal.” In other words, “Samuel” had not yet arrived as the seventh day was drawing to a close. To make matters worse, the already frightened men with Saul were becoming impatient and probably were looking for any excuse to call off the campaign. Some people as we are told “were scattered from him.” Saul faced the prospect of losing his entire army if he waited any longer. He too was losing his patience. In retrospect, we can see that God designed these circumstances to test Saul’s faith. Losing the major part of one’s army is not a calamity when God fights for His people. This had already been proven in the case of Gideon and his three hundred men. Who knows what God might have done for Saul and his remnant of men if he had waited patiently for God’s guidance (see Psalms 37:7; 40:1)? Note: Saul was experiencing what all Christians do at some point, a conflict between faith and sight (see Habakkuk 2:4; II Corinthians 5:7). Saul had his orders from God as spoken through the Prophet “Samuel” to wait at Gilgal
for seven days. God often trains leaders by sending tests. These spiritual experiences equip His servants for tasks ahead. Saul’s test was beginning to take shape. With the mighty Philistine forces breathing down his neck, what would Saul do? Would he trust and obey God? This was an important time in his spiritual development. Few, if any people become effective servants without God’s slow, methodical process of spiritual developing that involves learning to trust and obey Him alone.

B. Saul foolishly offers a sacrifice (I Samuel 13:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). This verse says “And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.” Fearful of losing the rest of his men, “Saul” gave the order to “Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings.” In Israel’s worship, the “burnt offering” was one that was totally consumed on the altar. It signified the complete consecration of the worshiper to the LORD (see Leviticus 1:8-9). The “peace offerings” were given to signify fellowship with God. The fat was burned, and the rest was eaten by priests and the worshiper who brought the “offering” (see Leviticus 3:1-5; 7:11-15, 34). In this case, “Saul” only offered the “burnt offering.” However, he had to know that unless God said otherwise, the law declared that only a priest could offer sacrifices as part of their duties in the tabernacle (see Numbers 3:5-10). In addition, it is clear from the text that “Saul” understood the importance of waiting until Samuel
came, otherwise he would not have made as many excuses as he did for not waiting (see I Samuel 13:11). Since he didn’t have the patience to wait until the end of day seven, “Saul” would never know what the LORD might have done for him and Israel (see Psalms 27:13-14). It’s strange how the same man who was so reluctant to become king (see I Samuel 10:20-22) quickly stepped into the priest’s office by offering sacrifices.  

**Note:** Saul’s sin was that he thought it was okay to offer sacrifices without Samuel, even though he was not a priest or a prophet. However, since he was now a king, maybe he presumed that he could do anything, but later King Uzziah paid dearly for doing what “Saul” did (see II Chronicles 26:16-23). Samuel had promised that when he arrived he would show “Saul” what God wanted him to do (see I Samuel 10:8). But “Saul” was so self-sufficient that he thought it wasn’t necessary to wait for a prophet of the LORD, even if it meant that Samuel would pray for him as well as advise him. Just in case there are some of us who wonder what else could “Saul” have done, consider this. He could have sent any messenger to Samuel to find out if anything had changed; to present Saul’s situation to him, and to receive fresh directions if it was necessary. Certainly, there had to be many among the Israelites who were fast and swift enough to do that. Instead, “Saul” chose to do what he knew was wrong—offer the sacrifices himself. Samuel, a descendant of Levi, was qualified to offer sacrifices (see I Chronicles 6:33-38), but “Saul,” a Benjamite was not. Knowing that it was God’s will for him to wait for his instructions from Samuel, “Saul” still disobeyed so that he could be on his way to the battle with the few
soldiers he had left (see verses 7 and 8). As far as “Saul” was concerned, the ritual had to be performed, so he did it. The truth is, if he had really valued the LORD’S help in battle, he would have honored God’s revealed will as well as the prophet Samuel whom God had designated as His spokesman.

2. (vs. 10). This verse says “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.” It’s possible that “Saul” may have proceeded to offer the “peace offerings” also if Samuel hadn’t arrived when he did, for we are told that “as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came.” On the same day and within the prearranged time, “Samuel” arrived “and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.” The word “salute” here means “to bless” (see I Samuel 15:13). “Saul” went out to “bless” “Samuel” as if he now thought of himself as a priest empowered to “bless” as well as offer sacrifices. But “Saul” should have gone out to be blessed by the prophet. “Saul” undoubtedly was happy to finally see “Samuel” and perhaps was anxious for him to finish the ceremony he had started by offering the “peace offering.” By this time, “Saul” was ready to settle for the ritual without the prophet, but now he could have both, and God’s blessing might even be greater!

C. Samuel questions Saul’s actions (I Samuel 13:11-12).
1. (vs. 11). This verse says “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...” As “Saul” approached to greet “Samuel,” the prophet asked “What hast thou done?” This must’ve cut short Saul’s greeting and put him on alert that all was not well. Much like God’s question, “Where art thou?” to Adam (see Genesis 3:9), Samuel’s question was not intended to get information. It was designed to not only accuse “Saul” but also to draw from Saul’s own mouth the self-condemning reason for why he sinned. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit had revealed to “Samuel” Saul’s disobedience before he arrived. Now “Saul” was immediately called to give an account of what he had done. But he was not ready to confront his behavior as being sinful. Instead he chose to justify it as being necessary, and from a purely human viewpoint his reasons made sense. His first reason was “I saw that the people were scattered from me.” If he waited any longer he would have no army at all. Second he said “and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash.” It had appeared to “Saul” that “Samuel” would not come within the “appointed” time of seven days, and the enemy was preparing “at Michmash” to attack. If we look closer at Saul’s response here, it seems that he was partly blaming “Samuel” for what he had done. In my opinion, the most disappointing part of Saul’s behavior was his attempts to justify himself with excuses instead of repenting. When we have blundered and failed and
disobeyed, genuine repentance and confession is the only way back to God’s favor and fellowship.

2. (vs. 12). This verse says “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.” Since it appeared to Saul that Samuel might not arrive in time, he said to Samuel “Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD. Saul concluded that the sacrifice and “supplication unto the LORD” (meaning a prayer) were both essential to a victory for Israel. So he said to the prophet “I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.” Saul’s impatience and desire for God’s blessing led to his disobedience. Yes, he does own what he did but he implied that he went against his conscience to do it, for he said “I forced myself and offered a burnt-offering.” But it seems that Saul was boasting about his behavior instead of repenting of it. Perhaps he was boasting that he had gone against his convictions and reluctantly did what he knew he should not have done. Maybe Saul believed that he had no other alternative and as a last resort he “offered a burnt offering.” But this should not have even been an option for him. Only superstition could have convinced Saul that a ritual done in disobedience could result in any good. Many people still follow Saul’s doctrine that a good end is justified by sinful means. But Scripture condemns such an idea (see Romans 3:7-8). Genuine faith always shows itself in obedience, but disobedience is the fruit of unbelief.
V. THE END OF SAUL’S KINGDOM ANNOUNCED (I Samuel 13:13-14)

A. Samuel Rebukes Saul (I Samuel 13:13). This verse says “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.” In response to Saul’s explanation, “Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly.” The word “foolishly” can mean acting without intellectual understanding. But here it means to act irrationally without considering what those actions mean spiritually. Saul’s rashness came from fear. A man who was confident in the LORD would have acted wisely. “Samuel” then declared that Saul’s foolishness was evident in the fact that he had “not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee.” The commandment was very simple: Wait for “Samuel” to offer sacrifices and to bring God’s words. However, this proved to be too hard for “Saul” in his trying circumstances. If “Saul” had waited for “Samuel” as he was instructed, the prophet said “for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.” In other words, if “Saul” had obeyed, the LORD would have established his kingdom over “Israel forever.” Scripture does teach us that God’s commandments are “not grievous” or not too hard for us (see I John 5:3). However, that does not mean that His requirements are not demanding. But anyone can fulfill
God’s requirements when in faith they draw on His moral strength.

**B. The consequences of Saul’s actions (I Samuel 13:14)).** Our final verse says “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.” Instead of God establishing Saul’s kingdom in Israel forever, Samuel tells Saul “But now thy kingdom shall not continue.” This does not mean that it would be stripped from him during his lifetime, but that his dynasty would come to an end. The national leadership that would have continued through Saul’s descendants was cut short because of sin. Samuel concluded his words of judgment by telling Saul that God had chosen someone to replace his shortened dynasty. Samuel said “the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart” (see Acts 13:22). This “man” whom God had “commanded (or chosen) him to be captain over his people” was David, the son of Jesse from the tribe of Judah (see I Samuel 16:1, 12-13). If Saul was not sure of the consequences of his actions before, he was now. Unfortunately, later on Saul would demonstrate this same sinful behavior again (see I Samuel 15:1-3, 5-11, 12-24). Samuel also gave Saul the reason for the consequences of his sin. He said it was “because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.” This judgment that God pronounced on Saul may seem harsh for one act of disobedience, but we must remember that Saul’s sin involved disregard for the spiritual leader through whom God had chosen to speak to
Israel. His sin also deprived Israel of divine instruction from Samuel during a time of national crisis. Finally, Saul’s sin was a symptom of a spiritual flaw in Saul; a failure to trust God which disqualified him from leading God’s people.

**Note:** Saul’s disobedience reminds us of two biblical principles. One is that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (see Hebrews 11:6). Saul’s name does not appear among the heroes of faith probably because he made his decisions based on fear (see verse 12; I Samuel 15:24). The other is that “to whom much is given much will be required” (see Luke 12:48). Because Saul was leading God’s people, he was measured by a high standard, and so are we (see James 3:1). Sadly, Saul fell short of the standard God set for him. But let us walk by faith so that we will meet God’s standard and please Him.

**VI. Conclusion.** This week’s lesson reminds us that there is never a good or legitimate reason to disobey God. Saul knew that he shouldn’t have carried out the duty of a priest; that was not his lane. But he still tried to justify what he had done. We can never justify or give a good reason or excuse for disobeying God. God will not tolerate disobedience because it shows a lack of faith and trust in Him. As a result of Saul’s disobedience, he would not only cease to be Israel’s king, but God would give the kingdom to Israel’s greatest earthly king—David, who was “a man after God’s own heart” (see I Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22). As Christians, we must realize that disobedience, even if it is partial obedience is still
disobedience. It will only bring us pain and sorrow and trouble that can affect our future generations.

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