**Saul acted foolishly**

Key Verse: 13:13-14 “"You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."”

Samuel’s farewell message was very clear and simple. He said to them, “If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God-good! But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.” Finally they had a king. However, the Israelites and the king both were bound to fear God and keep his commands. If they rebel against God, God’s hand will be against both his people and the king. This reveals that a king is not superior to God’s people but they are under God’s rule. Ordinary Israelites and the king are responsible for their evil deeds respectively. You may think that a pastor, a Bible teacher or a missionary has more spiritual responsibility or duty. You may feel fake peace hiding behind God’s servants. Each of us will stand before the judgment seat at the last day and God will judge us according to our deeds. (John 5:29, 2 Cor 5:10)

Now Saul became the first king in Israel. We don’t know how many years passed by after his ordainment. KJV says that two years passed after he became a king. But it is hard to believe that due to Jonathan’s age. Chapter 13 describes his first fatal sin against God. I pray that we may learn how to trust God in a crisis. I pray that we may learn what we should do when we sin.

**PART I SAUL ATTACKED THE PHILISTINE OUTPOST (1-7A)**

Look at verse 2. “Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Micmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes.” Saul had an army. It was to counter for the threat of the Philistine army. 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. Previously, Israel had only a militia that assembled in times of national threat. Now Israel has a professional army. According to 11:8, Saul mustered 330,000 men to defeat the Ammonites. He only chose 3,000 men out of 330,000. Was he confident of 3,000 chosen men or did he have faith in God? He needed more soldiers to defeat the Philistine army. Why did he send them back to their homes? Maybe he did not want to provoke the Philistines because Israel was subjugated to the Philistines at that time. He wanted to maintain the status quo to secure peaceful coexistence under the Philistine kingdom.

Who initiated the fighting? Look at verses 3-4. “Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Then Saul had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, "Let the Hebrews hear! So all Israel heard the news: "Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become a stench to the Philistines." And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.” Up until now Israel had enjoyed the temporary peace of subjected people without provoking the Philistine army. God chose Saul to deliver his people from the hand of the Philistines. But he had ignored God’s calling and wanted to maintain the current not so bad situation. But his son Jonathan was different. He attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba. It was unbearable for Jonathan to be subjected to the uncircumcised people. Jonathan woke up the Philistines and King Saul had no choice to declare the war with the Philistines. King Saul gathers the nation together at Gilgal to prepare for battle against the Philistines.

How did the Philistines react to this provocation? They went up and camped at Micmash, east of Beth Aven. The Philistines mobilized massive army with 3,000 chariots and 6,000 charioteers. The number of soldiers was as numerous as the sand on the seashore. It was a mismatch in size. Also they came up near Saul’s main camp in Micmash. That means they invaded deep in Israel’s territory. Jonathan had been bold enough to launch the initial attack against the Philistines. But the men of Israel were not bold enough to stand strong against their enemy. Panic spread among the Israel army. In great fear they hid anywhere they could or they fled across the Jordan River. This was a low point for Israel!

**PART II SAUL’S DISOBEDIENCE (7B-22)**

Look at verse 7b. “Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear.” Saul had a good memory about Gigal. It was the birth place of his kingship. The people still honored Saul as king, but they were quaking with fear. Then Saul waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people began to scatter from him. What did Saul do in this critical moment? Saul said, ‘Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.’ He knew the Philistines were assembling a huge army against him, and that once they were organized they would be much harder to beat. Saul probably felt that a quick response would give him the best chance to win the battle. Samuel had told Saul to wait for him at Gilgal. Then Samuel would preside over sacrifices, and Israel would be spiritually prepared for battle. The problem was that Samuel did not come to Gilgal and the people began to scatter from him. This added to Saul’s anxiety. The days dragged on, and Samuel hadn’t come yet. The troops were losing confidence in Saul as a leader, and beginning to scatter. Saul felt he was in a lot of trouble! He became impatient and offered the burnt offering. Saul plainly disobeyed God. Saul was a king, not a priest, and only priests were to offer sacrifices according to Leviticus 6:8-13. Saul had no business doing what only a priest should do.

Clearly, out of fear, out of panic, out of not knowing what else to do, Saul disobeyed God. Intention was good to seek God’s favor but he violated the command of God. He dishonored God to seek his favor. His deed was very superstitious as the Israelites brought the ark to the battle field with the Philistine in time of Eli believing that the ark would bring victory.

Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived and Saul went out to greet him. Look at verses 11-12. “"What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

Saul decided to offer the sacrifice not more than an hour before Samuel arrived! If he would have trusted God and waited one more hour, how different things could have been! The last moments of waiting are usually the most difficult, and tempt us most to take matters into our own hands. Samuel knew Saul had done something wrong. He could probably smell the sacrifice in the air! But Samuel was not looking for reasons or excuses. There were no valid reasons or excuses. All Samuel wanted to hear was confession and repentance. Saul’s response is a classic example of excuse making and failure to trust God. If Saul would have obeyed and trusted God, God would have brought victory over the Philistines with or without the people like the previous battle with the Philistine at Mizpah. But Saul blamed for Samuel’s late arrival. “If you would have come earlier, I wouldn’t have needed to do this.” We often try to blame our sin on someone else. But if Saul would have obeyed and trusted God, the Lord would take care of the Philistines. He could have cried out the Lord for the whole nation with a humble heart, but instead he did the *one* thing he must not do: offer a sacrifice. Even though Saul felt compelled, he was not supposed to be ruled by his feelings. He didn’t have to sin, though he felt like it.

What was Samuel’s response to Saul’s lengthy excuses? Look at verses 13-14. “"You acted foolishly," Samuel said "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." Samuel proclaims God’s judgment upon Saul’s household. Samuel said, “You acted foolishly.” Saul’s actions were foolish -- because they were willful disobedience to Samuel’s instructions.

Emergencies are not excuses for disobedience to God’s commands, but a test of our faith and obedience.God tests us by taking us to the limit as well, by taking us to the breaking point. When we reach our human limit, we must trust God more. God took Saul “to the limit” by delaying Samuel’s arrival to the last moments, but Saul could not wait. It was the test of his faith and obedience. To Saul, it was a golden opportunity to unite his army and demonstrate his faith in God Almighty. God tested Moses in front of the Red Sea. There was a huge sea in front and a mighty Egyptian army behind. At this emergency, Moses trusted God by obeying God’s command and he stretched his hand over the sea. (Exod. 14:21-22) The waters were divided and all Israelites crossed the Red Sea as on dry land. When we are pressed to our limit -- our faith and obedience are tested by whether or not we keep God’s commands, whether or not we obey Him.

Saul missed this golden opportunity to pass the test of faith and instead he took everything into his own hand. Now, his kingdom will die with him. God has already sought out and chosen a man after his own heart to be Saul’s replacement. All of this is the direct result of Saul’s disobedience. Yet there is forgiveness from God, but it is given to the humble heart. It has yet to be seen if Saul will humble himself before God and seek forgiveness and restoration. Because the actual judgment for this sin was so far off, we should regard Samuel’s pronouncement of judgment as an invitation to repentance. Many times, when God announces judgment, He changes his mind if His people repent. God does not expect us to be perfect. We sins and make a serious mistake or do stupid things. God is looking for a man who understands his heart and is willing to repent. When Saul was confronted with his sin, he offered excuses. When David was confronted with his sin, he simply said *I have sinned against the Lord* (2 Samuel 12:13). God was *looking* for this kind of man, and God found this man in an unlikely place. In fact, at this time, he was just a shepherd boy! God is using men and women after his own heart even today.

Since Saul did not sincerely seek God’s call to deliver his people from the Philistine, he could not trust God but disobey him in a crisis. We are leaders. We are leaders in our work places or school. We are leaders in our families. At least, we are a leader of ourselves. God will test us by taking us to the limit someday. If I am a coward today, I will not be a brave man tomorrow. That’s why trusting God and walking with God daily is so important for our spiritual journey. I pray that all of us may choose to trust God in a time of trouble by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice.