

**File No. 54**

**I SAMUEL 13:1 — 14:23**

**SAUL DISOBEYS THE LORD / JONATHAN'S DARING DEED**

(SBS Bk 2 Story NoS. 31 & 32)

*Story Notes*

Saul now had a standing army of 3000 rather than the citizen militia that had sufficed before. However, his own tribal area remained under Philistine control and his kingship could not be affirmed without decisive action. This action came from his son rather than himself. As we see later, Jonathan was a man of faith, and so, of action. Saul seemed more ruled by his uncertainties than by God's call. The dilemma caused by mounting opposition and timid troops could be likened to the situation King Ahaz experienced later. Isaiah said to him: 'If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established' (Isa. 7:9).

The terms of God's call to Saul included waiting for Samuel to offer sacrifice before battle. The point was critical because a kingship with a life of its own, not tied to the word of the Lord, would undermine Israel as a theocracy. Saul's reasoning about waiting seven days seems reasonable but he admitted that he 'forced' himself. Offering sacrifice does not seem to have been the problem (cf. 14:34–35; II Sam. 24:25; I Kings 3:15) so much as disregarding the prophet. His thinking had become clouded with self-reliance. God made it clear that no dynasty would arise from this man.

Later on, David (II Sam. 24:10) and Asa (II Chron. 16:9) also acted foolishly (the word implies mental incapacity and self-reliance) in disregarding a prophetic command and they suffered severely.

When Saul was chosen by God he was chosen for the people (8:18), but God would appoint another king 'for himself' (13:14). The appointment would arise from God's own heart rather than out of the heart of the people. In this way, we are introduced to David who will occupy much of the latter part of the book. Saul would now have to live in the shadow of the one the Lord had in mind as his replacement.

Even still, Saul could have been like his father, a mighty man of valour (9:1), and remember Gideon whom God called a mighty man of valour (Jud. 6:12). Though the country was almost stripped of weapons and Saul had only 600 of his earlier 3000 men, victory could have been his. But it was his son Jonathan who showed what it meant to live under the kingship of God. 'Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few', he said.

Saul was informed that the Philistines had retreated, found that his son was missing (did Saul guess that he had caused the retreat?) but lacked confidence to act and called for the ark to get a further word from the Lord. Then he dispensed with this when he saw that the confusion among the Philistines was increasing. With troops regathered from defectors and the frightened, God gave Israel a great victory that day.

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