

I Samuel

Lesson 20 - Chapter 13 and 14

First let's get our bearings. Sha'ul was now the recognized and undisputed King of Israel; however his main support and loyalty came from the 8 northern Israelite tribes and to some degree those 3 tribes to the east of the Jordan River. The 2 southern tribes of Judah and Simeon were not open opponents of Saul, but they were rather ambivalent and Saul must have recognized that fact and so his recruiting for his military came mainly from among the loyal group of 8 tribes.

As we pick up today we're at a time just after Saul had neutralized the main (or least most immediate) foreign threat on Israel's eastern front, the Ammonites as led by Nachash (we read about this in chapter 11). But on the western front the Philistines had grown bolder and more aggressive, and by means of the carrot and the stick they had again established a significant presence upon Israelite land. The stick was their professional and well-trained army that they used to oppress and control and threaten; the carrot was that any of the Israelite clans and tribes who would not resist them would be considered either allies or non-combatants and thus generally left alone to continue ruling themselves and living peacefully. Naturally they had to do the Philistines' bidding, provide some labor for various Philistine projects, fight alongside them if need be, and pay some tribute (taxes) to help support the Philistine cause.

There is no record of Saul taking vengeance at this point in his reign against these few Israelite tribes and clans who availed themselves of the Philistines' offer of friendship in exchange for loyalty. A couple of reasons for this are that 1) it was generally only the southern tribes and clans who did this because the Philistines were on their border and they were in the most danger. 2) Is that Saul understood it was an arrangement of self-interest and self-protection, no so much a repudiation of Saul's leadership or a desire to give up their Israelite identities. And besides, King Saul still wasn't quite at a point of sufficient political strength to convince the other tribes to punish the highly regarded and esteemed tribe of Judah for this transgression.

As it is in most societies while the leadership might be anxious to make war for one cause or another the people usually aren't (even when they ought to be). There is no question that Saul was correct in his calculation that the Philistines had to be dealt with or Israel would simply become Greater Philistia; but convincing people who just wanted to farm and tend to their flocks and vineyards that armed conflict was needed is another matter. We only have to look at the 20th century to see how long tyrants with world domination in mind were allowed to run amok before the more powerful nations could muster the political will to oppose them. And even then the people were reluctant and all through the wars vocal opposition continued.

As was also typical, Saul's sons were his senior army officers. Y'honatan was apparently the most prominent of the bunch. King Saul had begun a campaign to push the Philistines back to their sea coast nation and so had troops stationed at Gibeah under Y'honatan's leadership and others were at a strategically important place called Mikhmas under Saul's. The campaign

had bogged down for the lack of interest of the Israelite people and because the Philistines had been somewhat careful not to get overly aggressive in hopes of not arousing too much Israelite passion that would boil over into open rebellion. What they didn't count on was Saul's impulsiveness and his personal need to find a cause to rally all Israel to loyalty to him.

Jonathon, being part of the royal family, shared his father's ambitions and mindset so he assassinated the Philistine governor of the city of Geba for no other purpose than to incite the Philistines to step up their aggression that would in turn force the up-to-now reluctant Israelite clan and tribal leaders to join with Saul to fight the Philistines.

Let's pause now and read all of 1st Samuel chapter 13.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 13 all

Y'honatan's murder of the Philistine governor of Geba had its desired effect; the Philistines saw this as open rebellion NOT just as an act of a local group of malcontents but rather as a work of King Saul who represented the nation of Israel. Therefore as the Philistines ratcheted up their pressure, the people of Israel realized they now had no choice but to resist, so they assembled at Gilgal to ready for battle. Why Gilgal? Because it was typical of the Israelites to gather at their holiest place to ask for Yehoveh's blessing and direction before engaging the enemy.

Verse 5 says that the Philistines brought 30,000 chariots to do battle; this is a copyist error. There weren't 30,000 chariots in the entire known world combined at this point in history. And the number probably wasn't 3,000 either because even that quantity of chariots is beyond the scope of a relatively small nation as Philistia to have in its arsenal, so it would be only speculation to say how big the chariot brigade might have been.

Nonetheless it was formidable, there were many troops on horses (this was only slightly less terrifying than chariots) and some large but undefined number of foot soldiers as well. Let me pause to say that whether regarding foreigners, Hebrews, or worshippers of God in general, when we see the Biblical phrase "as many as the grains of sand on the seashore", this is but hyperbole. It is a Middle Eastern saying that means "a large number". It doesn't mean infinite or beyond the ability of our number system to count. It just is trying to communicate a large but undefined or unknown quantity.

The Philistines set up their battle encampment at a place called Mikhmas, which was a bit east of Beit-Aven. Many Israelites were so terrified at this turn of events that they left their homes and villages and hid out in caves, in the crevices of large rocks, even in empty water cisterns. Others fled to the Trans-Jordan, undoubtedly many having relatives there willing to take them in. But those men who came to fight for Saul remained strong and with resolve and so they stayed with Saul at Gilgal as they waited for Samuel to show up to bring God's oracle to them before the start of what would be a great and pivotal battle. Apparently Saul was told by Samuel that he would arrive at Gilgal within 7 days. Seven being a number of divine completeness is a way of demonstrating that this looming war was seen as a holy endeavor. But from a practical matter we must remember that Samuel lived in Ramah and it took some

time for him to travel to Gilgal.

Now before we go any further, let me explain that there is a lot of confusion between the two names of Geba and Gibeah. Some translators have taken them to be the same place, but that is decidedly not the case. The problem is that they are both spelled the same in Hebrew (*gimel-vet-ayin*). Since ancient Hebrew does not have written vowel sounds, then this confusion is the case with a number of Hebrew words that are written the same, but pronounced slightly differently, thus meaning different things. In this case what we in English say as Gibeah is actually pronounced “Gee-bah”; the other location that we pronounce as Gebah, the Hebrews pronounce as “Geh-bah”. So we have Gee-bah and Geh-bah. Jonathon was in Geh-bah when he assassinated the Philistine governor.

Anyway Saul grew impatient waiting for Samuel to arrive in Gilgal; the 7 days came and went and no Samuel so King Sha’ul took matters into his own hands. There was an altar and a sanctuary at Gilgal, so King Sha’ul decided he would be the one to offer the sacrifices to the Lord. Without doubt there were priests at Gilgal because of its very holy status; but King Saul demonstrates here his casual disregard for God’s commands and ritual protocols. The ONLY Israelites legally allowed to offer sacrifices were the priests; not even the Levite workers were allowed to do this. Certainly no king (the political leadership) was allowed such a high privilege. But even more what we see if we properly translate the original Hebrew is that Sha’ul ordered that the **‘Olah** and **Shelamim** offerings were brought to him so he could personally officiate. The **‘Olah** is the supreme offering, and it is to be offered up only by the High Priest. The **Shelamim** sacrifices were voluntary offerings that (while technically could only be officiated by priests) were regularly offered up by laymen as family oriented sacrifices (a kind of hold over from the days long past when each family’s firstborn was the officiator of sacrifices, and each family had their own altar). And wouldn’t you know that King Saul offered the one sacrifice that ONLY the High Priest was to present to God: the **‘Olah**. And, of course, no sooner does he do this that Samuel shows up and essentially asks, “Just what in the heck do you think you’re doing?”

Saul’s answer (in verse 11) was that he was getting worried because many of his Israeli militia were packing up and going home right at the same time that the Philistines were building up their forces at Mikhmas and Samuel still hadn’t arrived. And so he continues to explain to Samuel that he “forced himself” to perform the sacrifice in order to gain the necessary favor with God. Samuel has no patience for this; he retorts that King Saul did a foolish thing by daring to go against Yehoveh’s Torah commandments simply because he felt it was expedient.

But this indictment of Sha’ul by Samuel now takes on the form of a judgment. And the judgment is that “your kingship will not be established”. This does not mean that the Lord is immediately canceling Saul’s kingship; rather it means that Saul’s son will not succeed him. There will be no dynasty of Saul (and this was always paramount in a king’s mind that his family continues on in power for generations).

There is a lot of disagreement by scholars over exactly what *mitzvot* (command) Sha’ul had foolishly broken. Literary critics in particular say the problem was that King Sha’ul was

usurping Samuel's role when he offered the sacrifice as a preface to holy war, and thus Samuel was jealous and upset. Others say that it was because Saul had broken Samuel's instructions to wait 7 days for him. A few claim that the problem was that Saul didn't properly acknowledge the Prophet Samuel's higher role as the divine messenger.

Frankly, these proposals are rather tortured ways of getting around the obvious just so a scholar can sound innovative. In verse 12 Saul admits that he personally offered the '**Olah** sacrifice. To which (in verse 13) Samuel directly responds "**You did a foolish thing, you didn't observe the commands of Yehoveh....**" It was Saul, a non-priest, presumptuously offering the greatest of all the sacrifices to the Lord that was the foolish thing. It was a very clear and specific Torah commandment that Saul was breaking that only priests could offer sacrifices and only the High Priest (and apparently Samuel as well) could offer the highest sacrifice, the '**Olah**. Further, while later we'll see David, Solomon, and other kings speak about the "many sacrifices they offered" (as a means to prove their personal piety), we see that what they meant by that was that they provided the sacrificial animals or were personally present at the ceremony. Priests were always involved. But here we see specifically that Saul actually performed the ritual sacrifice himself without a priest when he said, "I forced my self and offered the burnt offering". And the price for this rash and unlawful act on King Saul's part is severe.

It's interesting that we find utterly no response from Saul to this devastating judgment against him. No remorse, no argument, nothing. Instead the king just went about his business as usual. What are we to think of this? Well I take it to mean that Saul just blew it all off. I take it to mean that Saul thought that basically this was merely a personal feud between him and Samuel that would blow over in time.

But Samuel also told Saul that God has already decided on a replacement king, and it will be a man after his own heart (meaning after his own mind, his own thinking). It will be a man whose goals are God's goals and whose passions are God's passions. Once again we encounter a Hebrew term that is translated in English as prince; and that term is **nagid**. It's an important term because we'll see it later in the prophetic statements about the Messiah, calling him a prince, a **nagid**. And it means king in waiting. The designated future king, but not yet king. We know from what happens in the coming chapters of 1st Samuel that the designated future king is David. We also know from the New Testament that the designated future king that is also Messiah is Yeshua.

Later actions by Saul prove (I believe) my suggestion that Saul never took what Samuel said very seriously or perhaps he was simply so innately rebellious that he thought he had the power to thwart any attempt for another to take the throne from him. Remember my comments from the last lesson when I explained that the story of King Saul is essentially the story of the anti-king of Israel. So as we later get to the narratives of King Saul's desperate attempts to hang on to his throne and kill God's **nagid** David (knowing full well that this was God's will because Samuel told him so), we see this parallel with the attempt of the ancient spiritual anti-king (Satan) to do all he can to destroy God's spiritual **nagid** (the Messiah Yeshua) thinking he can thwart God's plan. But this kind of uneasy relationship between king and prophet would become the norm from here forward in Israel's history and it's easy to understand why. The

heavenly king has his agenda and the earthly king (who is merely a fallen man) his own. The Prophet presents the heavenly king's divine agenda to the earthly king but the earthly king always prefers his own. Conflict between king and prophet is inevitable.

After this clash with the king, Samuel departs for Gibeah (Saul's home town). Saul took a count and only about 600 men remained with him there at Gilgal. Remember that Saul had very little leverage over his army. This was still a voluntary militia and if the men decided they didn't want to fight, or they didn't like the leadership, or they got too scared, they simply went home.

Now various translations have Saul leaving with Y'honatan and the 600 men for Gibeah (Geebah), the same place Samuel went. However other translations have Saul and his men going to Geba (we already talked about why this name confusion exists). Geba (Geh-bah) is correct. We know this because of what comes soon; but in a nut shell, Geba was only a mile or so from Mikhmas (where the Philistines set up camp), and where the coming battle would occur, but Gibeah was at least 5 miles away. Events will show that the Philistine camp had to be very close to where Saul was located (we'll get there shortly).

The Philistines sent out 3 raiding parties. Their purpose was probably to project force by demonstrating control of the surrounding area such that they could march out with impunity. It was also to try and hunt down those troublemakers who opposed them too strongly. One group went north towards the Jordan River valley, another west (along the road to the coastal plain), and the 3rd group went south towards the wilderness to see if any attack from that direction might be imminent.

Then verse 19 detours just a bit to explain a very detrimental situation for the Israelites; they had few to no metal edged weapons. The Philistines on the other hand were known for their high degree of metals technology and they used it to their advantage in their weaponry. Iron was relatively new to the region and it was a significant advance over bronze, which was a much softer material. That meant that a soldier could literally break an enemy's bronze sword with his much harder, sharper iron sword. Therefore we see the high level of control the Philistines achieved over some areas of Canaan in that they were able to keep the Israelites from even possessing metal tool making equipment. An iron edged plow (even bronze) was far better than wood; but in order for an Israelite to buy or sharpen or repair a metal edged farm implement he had no choice but to go to the Philistines since Hebrews were barred from this craft. This enabled the Philistines to keep the Israelites from making metal weapons. So whatever the Israelite militia used in battle, it was quite inferior to the Philistine army equipment.

Whatever metal weapons Israel did have were given to the leaders; thus we read in verse 22 that King Sha'ul and his son Y'honatan had metal swords and spears.

The final verse of chapter 13 sets up the battle scene for chapter 14: ***"A garrison of Philistines had gone out to the pass of Mikhmas"***.

Let's move on to chapter 14. Although we won't get far, it's best to read this chapter through

so we get the whole story.

READ 1ST SAMUEL 14 all

Look at the map. Geba and Mikhmas were at opposite sides of a deep ravine. This ravine had been cut by running water over the eons, but now it was only a wadi. A wadi is a dry river bed that comes alive only occasionally upon a strong rain. Often the water actually flows a few feet underground and so a shallow well will access water. But most wadis are simply channels for water that comes temporarily from the seasonal rains or thunderstorms, and then they go dry again.

Israel's military camp was on the south side of the ravine, the Philistines occupied the north side, about a mile (or a little less) apart. The ravine itself was of strategic importance because it wound its way all the way to the Jordan River Valley, but also provided a good pathway that connected to the road that led to the Mediterranean Sea coast. This wadi, this ravine, was a natural highway suitable for caravans or for large groups of soldiers; so it was important to both sides to control it.

Verse 1 says that "on that day" Jonathan made a daring proposal to his armor bearer; they should (just the two of them) see what the Philistines were up to at Mikhmas. A logical question is: WHAT specific day is this referring to? There's two parts to the answer; first, it's referring back to chapter 13 (remember, breaking the Scriptures apart into chapters is a relatively modern invention) where it says, "A garrison of Philistines had gone out to the pass of Mikhmas". But the second part of the answer is that in the Bible, "on that day" or "in that day" doesn't necessarily mean "this 24 hour period we call a day". It's more referring to the context of the specific situation. So we could paraphrase this: "during the time that the Philistines had sent a garrison of soldiers and established a camp at Mikhmas". Or in another but complementary sense, "In response to the Philistines sending a garrison of soldiers to Mikhmas" (Jonathan made this proposal to his armor bearer). It could have been the next day, or a few days later, but it all had to do with the occasion of the garrison of Philistines going to Mikhmas.

Here we are kind of formally introduced to Y'honatan. It is made clear that King Saul is his father, and equally clear that Y'honatan was a chip off the ol' block. He was as head strong and impetuous as his father and so told his armor bearer that they ought to walk across the ravine and challenge the Philistines to come out and fight. King Saul knew nothing about this foray as he was back with his 600 troops in Geba, where he was camping under a Pomegranate tree. It was usual that a recognizable tree was where the military or governmental authority would station itself because it was easier to describe to a large contingent of people where to find the leadership. In other words in addition to it being a prime camping spot (always reserved for the leadership or the elite), an exceptionally big tree or in this case an exceptionally desirable tree (for its sweet fruit) was a good landmark.

Since this was a holy war, naturally Israel's High Priest was present. And here we are told that the High Priest was Achiyah, the great grandson of Eli. Eli was Samuel's mentor from the time Samuel was a little boy. Although it doesn't directly say that Achiyah was the **cohen** (or better,

cohen hagadol), the High Priest, it tells us that he was wearing the ephod. The ephod was that special ritual vest that was symbolic of the High Priest. By the way: as of this time there were competing High Priesthoods in existence. Eli's line wasn't of the proper lineage and exactly how it came to be that Eli (and now his grandson Achiyah) was the High Priest (at least for some of the tribes) is open to debate.

Now (and I think this is kind of interesting) watch how this issue of the High Priest subtly plays out but at the same time has a pretty significant role in Israel's history even though generally it goes unnoticed (although as we go along in Samuel, Kings, and so on I'm going to point it out to you). Eli and therefore his descendants were of the line of Ithamar (the youngest son of Aaron). Achiyah was of Eli's (and therefore Ithamar's) line, and therefore by the Law of Moses he had no divine right to the High Priesthood. The High Priesthood was supposed to go to the descendants of another son of Aaron, Eleazar. Somewhere along the line a power struggle took place and Eli's family won out.

So here we have **two** High Priests in existence and King Saul has the opportunity to do what is right, and put the proper High Priest back into power according to the Torah, but he doesn't. King Saul instead decides that Achiyah was to continue on as his government's High Priest. Here's the reason Saul made this decision: Eli's family was aligned with the 8 tribe northern coalition. Since Saul's tribe Benjamin was part of that same coalition naturally they recognized Achiyah as their High Priest and ignored the other one. And Saul wasn't about to rock the boat because he was mostly concerned with gaining loyalty from his people.

But in a couple of chapters, when King Saul dies and David becomes king, a new and different High Priest suddenly springs onto the scene: Zadok. And guess what; Zadok is of the line of Eleazar, the Torah authorized line of High Priests. Zadok was certainly around and operating during Saul's day (in fact he was Achiyah's competitor); however he was not recognized as High Priest by the northern tribes for political reasons. But Zadok WAS recognized by the 2 southern tribes (David's tribe was the southern tribe of Judah), as the proper High Priest so it is logical that when David became king he set aside the northern coalition's High Priest and installed Zadok as High Priest of his government. Now on the one hand while this was certainly the divinely right thing for David to do, on the other hand these things don't happen accidentally and David actually made a political choice. Although the Bible doesn't explain the details about how some of these political and governmental changes came about, nonetheless, it really helps for us to find out what was behind it because then we can see how God constantly moves hidden, unseen in His providence in the lives of men; balancing things out, bringing about His will, advancing history towards redemption, eventually punishing the wicked and vindicating the righteous (even though none of this is of particular concern to most of the leaders and primary characters involved).

Next week we'll explore this daring exploit of Y'honatan and his armor bearer as they confront the Philistines at Mikmas.