

“Kingdom Crumb: The Fall of Saul”—1 Sam 13:1-14

INTRO:  Friend of mine moved to Albania for ministry

- Shared how visit they visited friend in apartment
 - ⊙ In stairwells there were signs of decay
 - ⊙ Paint peeling, exposing crumbling concrete
 - Assumed this was an old build from soviet era
 - Friend told him it was less than 2 years old
- How does something so new get so bad so soon?
 - ⊙ Poor materials & poor standards.
 - ⊙ That’s a combination for quick decay in anything
- And that’s a good description of Israel’s first experience as a kingdom
 - ⊙ Poor material to work with in King Saul
 - ⊙ Poor standards he operatd by early on & on & on
- Chapters 13-15 chronicles the fall of Saul
 - ⊙ Samuel’s First rebuke, 13:1-15
 - War against Philistines (13:16-14:23)
 - ⊙ Cursing of his son (14:24-46)
 - More Wars (14:47-52)
 - ⊙ Rejection of Saul (15:1-35)

Saul’s fall fr/grace shows how twisted obedience can never move us forward in God’s kingdom plan.

- A Blemished Record and Hints of Trouble
- Delayed Obedience with Mixed Results
- Outrageous Trespass and Twisted Faith
- Dynastic Change in the Kingdom Plan

I. A Blemished Record and Hints of Trouble, v. 1

1 Saul was *thirty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned *forty two* years over Israel.

- This is the 1st of many times the OT will tell us about the start & end of a king's reign at beginning of story
 - ⊙ Cf regal record at beginning of David's reign
 - ⊙ **2 Sam 5:4**, David was thirty years old when he became king, *and* he reigned forty years.
- There's an intriguing problem in this verse
 - ⊙ Notice the italix for "30" and "40"
 - ⊙ Heb =, "Saul was ... year old when he began to reign, and he reign ... two years over Israel"
 - It's as if some numbers are missing
 - Some versions actually have blanks in them!
- There have been many attempts to clarify it
 - ⊙ NASB rendering (= NIV) is probably right in terms of the #s that would go in
 - Saul's son Jonathan was leading military campaign, so Saul was at least 30, maybe older
 - **Acts 13:21**, Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.
- As true as all that is, it's possible that the author has intentionally left out some numbers of the text
 - ⊙ Anybody reading this in Hebrew would know something was not right
 - ⊙ This isn't the way you write a royal record
 - ⊙ As if #s have intentionally withheld to imply Saul's relative insignificance and spiritual childishness
 - ⊙ **Bill Arnold**, "The [royal] formula introducing Saul is as defective as the king himself!"
 - ⊙ He had a blemished record in many ways

- If you travel around Egypt, you'll see many statues of Pharaoh's with their noses broken off
 - ⊙ Intentional vandalism to diminish legacy of their predecessors & spirit power
 - ⊙ This strange, inspired v.e may be way of showing how Saul's legacy = nothing compared to David
 - Sad to leave this life with a mixed legacy
 - When people have to be creative to think of commendable things to say at memorial

II. Delayed Obedience with Mixed Results, vv. 2-7

A. The Overdue Overthrow of Geba, vv. 2-4

1. The Buildup of the Royal Brigade, v. 2

2 Now Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel, of which 2,000 were with Saul in Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, while 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah of Benjamin. But he sent away the rest of the people, each to his tent.

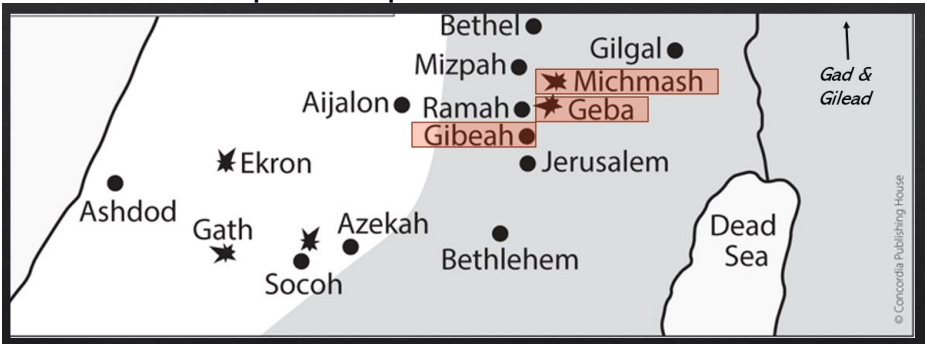
- These numbers = small compared with 330,000 who marched with him against Ammon — less than 1%
 - ⊙ = his standing army, his imperial guard
 - ⊙ Others could be called up when needed, but these would be permanently commissioned
- All the places in v. 2 = central hill country
 - ⊙ Saul assembles army at Michmash, hilly village a few miles NW of his town of Gibeah
 - Good place to assemble army since Philistine chariots couldn't maneuver there
 - It was a couple miles north of Geba, a place where Philistines had major outpost in Israel
 - ⊙ Saul is getting his troops ready for something that should have been done some time earlier

- Before we look at that, notice something surprising
 - ⊙ Jonathan, Saul's eldest son, is 1st mentioned here
 - ⊙ But there's no word of him being in that position
 - ⊙ Normally, he'd be thought of as Crown Prince, the heir apparent to the throne
 - But Saul's dynasty will be abortive
 - No son will succeed him to a legitimate throne

2. The Routing of the Enemy Garrison, vv. 3-4

3 Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, & the Philistines heard of *it*. Then Saul blew the trumpet thruout the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." 4 All Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, & also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were then summoned to Saul at Gilgal.

- Here's a map of the places mentioned



- ⊙ Saul assembles troops at **Michmash**, which is in the hill country of **Bethel** **SLIDE**
- ⊙ Contingency w/Jonathan down to **Gibeah** **SLIDE**
- ⊙ Jonathan leads troops a few miles inland and takes out the Philistine garrison at **Geba** **SLIDE**
 - Israel to North & South & East hears about it
 - And so do Philistines to West
- ⊙ The troops then reconvene at **Gilgal** **SLIDE**

- If U only read this story, sounds like all is well & good
 - ⊙ But this story is picking up from **10:5-8**
 - ⊙ Samuel gave Saul instructions about what he was supposed to do before becoming king
 - He'd meet people in predicted circumstances
 - Spirit would come upon him at Geba
 - ⊙ Geba was Israelite town where Philistines had setup a garrison
 - ⊙ Spirit would enable him to do something about that place—to take it out!
 - Then Saul was to go to Gilgal, wait 7 days 4Sam
- But Saul never did that in ch 10 **SLIDE**
 - ⊙ He went to places, met people, was filled w/Spirit
 - ⊙ But he didn't do this hard thing God told him to do
 - Part of Saul's purpose was to deliver Israel from Philistines (**9:16**)
 - He was supposed to be man of valor and prove God's strength in battle
 - Then when he went to Gilgal, everyone would be thrilled to accept him as king
 - ⊙ Instead, Saul went back home and wouldn't even tell his father what Samuel had told him
 - Samuel changes plans and goes to Mizpah
 - There he convenes a kingmaking counsel and convinces people to affirm Saul as king
- It's been some time since then, maybe 2 years
 - ⊙ Finally, Saul gets his act together and arranges for the that menacing outpost to be taken out
 - Philistines could not be allowed in heartland
 - Plus, Geba was supposed to be a Levitical city, a place where priests lived
 - Philistine influence had to go! Long time ago!

- ⊙ Better late than never
 - Delayed obedience is better than no obed.
 - But it is still a kind of disobedience
 - We need to be people who are quick to obey!

- Nonetheless, there's victory at last
 - ⊙ Saul blows rams horn trumpet to call attention
 - ⊙ Like a battle trumpet to herald their victory
- All the Israelites learn of it, & so do all the Philistines
 - ⊙ Israelites become odious to Philistines
 - ⊙ Lit, "became a stench to Philistines"
 - ⊙ And Philistines decide to something about these stinking Israelites

B. The Overwhelming Buildup of Philistia, vv. 5-7

5 Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots & 6,000 horsemen, & people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance; & they came up & camped in Michmash, east of Beth-aven.

6 When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits. **7** Also *some of the* Hebrews crossed the Jordan into the land of Gad and Gilead. But as for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

- **V. 5** Philistines prepare a massive counter offensive
 - ⊙ I should mention that some ancient versions of this text say Philistines had 3000 chariots
 - That's probably correct, because 3000 chariots would need 6000 horsemen
 - Chariots usually had at least 2 drivers **SLIDE**
 - ⊙ This was 1 of largest chariot forces in ancient days—something Philistines were famous for

- ⊙ And along with it was massive infantry, more than could be counted
 - Israel was supposed to one day be a people more than the sands of the sea
 - But here their enemies who are swarming land

SLIDE

- Ever feel like life is exactly the opposite of the promises we have in our Lord Jesus?
 - ⊙ That everything's against U, that ⊕'s forgotten U?
 - This wasn't first time this language was used
 - Joshua (11:40) faced uncountable enemies
 - Gideon, too (Jdg 7:12) ...
 - God brought Israel out of impossible odds, and He'll do it again in next chapter
 - ⊙ And He can do it for you and me, too
 - ⊙ Hes = everlasting Expert at turning things around
- **V. 6**, But as Israel hears what Philistia is doing, they're seized with panic
 - ⊙ Philistines take over the meeting grounds that Saul had just used at Michmash
 - ⊙ Hebrew soldiers go into survival mode
 - ⊙ They hide themselves where they can in the rough
 - ⊙ **Harry Hoffner**, "What a sorry sight Israel's armed forces were ... They have abandoned him, running like scared rabbits to hide in holes in the ground."
- **V. 7**, some of them even cut east, crossing the Jordan to be with tribe of Gad and region of Gilead
 - ⊙ Israel had defeated Ammon there
 - ⊙ Now Israel had complete control of that territory
- Things looked so bleak
 - ⊙ Israel demanded a king like Saul to fight battles
 - ⊙ And now they've deserted him in face of a force that was far superior in weaponry & experience

Transition: At least their king is safe at Gilgal

- Well, he's safe from his enemies, but not fr/himself
- If evr there was any1 who was his own worst enemy,
- That's what the flesh is to us, isn't it?

III. Outrageous Trespass & Twisted Faith, vv. 8-13a

A. Corruption of the Prophet's Instruction, v8-9

8 Now he waited 7 days, according to the appointed time set by Samuel, but Samuel did not come to Gilgal; & the people were scattering from him.

9 So Saul said, "Bring to me the burnt offering & the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering.

- Saul was at Gilgal (v4), a move that spared him
 - ⊙ This was the place that Samuel had told him to go to in 10:8 after taking out Philistine garrison
 - ⊙ But that was a long time ago
- Maybe Saul thought Samuel had given up on him
 - ⊙ Text doesn't say Samuel was actually late
 - ⊙ He probably showed up on the 7th day
 - ⊙ But by start of that day, Saul gave up
- Two kinds of offerings were to be made: **Burnt offering & peace offerings**
 - ⊙ Burnt offering was for atonement & intercession
 - ⊙ Peace offerings were for celebration
- Saul is way out of his wheelhouse here, as we'll see
 - ⊙ He was not to take initiative in this way
 - ⊙ This is one of the recurring sins of God's people throughout Bible—taking ungodly initiative
 - Israel wanted a king too soon
 - Saul wanted a ceremony too soon
 - There are all sorts of things we might want too soon and we'll do foolish things to get them

B. Confrontation w/a Prophetic Word, vv. 10-13a

10 As soon as he finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him *and* to greet him.

- Saul made it through half of the rituals before Sam showed up, probably in mid-morning
 - ⊙ Term **to greet him** = “to bless him”
 - ⊙ Ironic, though Saul as goes out to bless Samuel, he’s in the process of cursing himself

11 But Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “Because I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the appointed days, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, 12 therefore I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.’ So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.”

- Samuel says just 2 words in Hebrew text, and Saul replies with 27
 - ⊙ Answer reveals he’s a man full of fear, not faith
 - ⊙ He had to do it before all were gone & all was lost
 - ⊙ Phrase **I forced myself** → I felt obligated
- But he obviously didn’t understand God’s **favor**
 - ⊙ **Robert Bergen**, “It is ironic—and symptomatic of Saul’s spiritual dullness—that the king believed he could obtain the Lord’s favor through an act of disobedience.”
- Forms of false thinking:
 - ⊙ That he had authority to overstep his bounds
 - ⊙ That his dwindling numbers mattered w/God
 - ⊙ That ritual was more important than obedience
 - He treats sacrifice same way Israel treated ark
 - **God cannot / will not be manipulated**

13 Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you,

- The **foolishness** here is not accidental but willful
- This particular phrase, to act foolish, shows up just 4 times in this way
 - ⊙ All 4 times its in a story of a prophet confronting a king over sin
 - ⊙ Speaks of acting foolishly in self-reliance
 - This is not just a naïve mistake
 - This is error that comes from “someone with a poor attitude toward God” (Hoffner)
- Saul didn’t really respect Samuel’s authority
 - ⊙ When he first was introduced to Samuel, he was told he was in charge of sacrifices (9:13)
 - ⊙ People waited for ceremonial meals until he had done his work
- He didn’t realize how they were built upon the Torah itself in how a king should & shouldn’t function
 - ⊙ Torah separated role of priest and king
 - ⊙ Kings might instigate sacrificial offerings, but always in conjunction with the priests
 - ⊙ Saul thinks as king, he can do it all—just like pagan priests functioned as high level priests

IV. Dynastic Change in the Kingdom Plan, vv13b-14

A. The Loss of Saul’s Dynasty, vv. 13b-14a

13b... for now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. 14 “But now your kingdom shall not endure.

- God’s sovereign plan all along was for David
- **But He knows what could have been**

- ⊙ When you and I witness to people, we don't need to worry with whether they're elect or not
- ⊙ We can tell them that good that the gospel will do for them if they will believe

- Notice that this isn't saying Saul's kingship is over
- It's that he will have no dynasty
 - ⊙ His beloved son Jonathan would die in battle
 - ⊙ His son Ishbosheth would sort-of reign for 2 yrs, but he never really had kingdom control
- No, the kingdom would pass to another

B. The Man of God's Choosing, v. 14b

14b ... The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

- This phrase **a man after His own heart** is often thought to mean, "a man with a heart like God's"
 - ⊙ But that's doesn't seem to be entirely true
 - ⊙ It seems rather to mean, "a man upon whom God has set his heart," "a man God has chosen"
 - I've looked at all the times this phrase and ones like it appear in Hebrew Bible
 - And I've seen that in other ancient languages, this same idiom refers to one's choice
 - When Nebuchadnezzar set up a puppet king in Jerusalem, a Babylonian chronicle says this, "He encamped against the city of Judah & on the 2nd day of the month Adar he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice [lit., "a king according to his heart"] he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon."

- Now, God chose David because he knew David was a man who loved Him and would follow Him
 - ⊙ **16:7**, But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for ⊖ sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.
 - ⊙ But in the end, THIS phrase is more about God’s choosing than David’s qualifications
- Term **appointed** = commanded, indicating fully authoritative decision
 - ⊙ Related to term “**commanded**” which Saul broke
 - ⊙ ⊖s **appointment** must refer to sovereign decree
 - Sam doesn’t anoint David until ch 16
 - Yet God had David in mind for long time
 - Bk of Ruth shows how God was at work doing works of grace generations before David came
- Saul is another Eli (2:30-36) who seemed promising but in the end couldn’t hold on to the promises
- Saul is another Adam
 - ⊙ Head of his people who violated direct word fr/⊖
 - ⊙ Both shifted responsibility onto others
 - ⊙ **R Bergen**, “Because of sin Adam lost the opportunity 4 eternal life in the garden; 4 the same cause Saul lost the opportunity for an enduring dynasty in the Promised Land.

CONCLUSION:

Saul’s fall fr/grace shows how twisted obedience can never move us forward in God’s kingdom plan.

- Saul was the kind of king that Israel had wanted,
 - ⊙ David was the man of God’s own choosing
 - ⊙ Thru him & his line would come so much good
 - It changed all of history, actually
 - From him came the ultimate chosen One

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
We're not the right man on our side
The man of God's own choosing
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus—It is He
Lord Sabaoth his name
From age to age the same
And he must win the battle.

