

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 9A**

**FIRST SAMUEL**

**CHAPTER 13**

**INTRODUCTION**

It was after one year as king that Saul's true character was revealed. He had done quite well in delivering Israel from her enemies. But a person's military intelligence and prowess have no direct relevance to his character. This is true and applicable to all people in any period of history. We see this in the case of Saul. Similarly, just because a person is gifted as a businessman and able to turn a dying company around and make it into a multi-million enterprise does not mean that he has a good character.

The main thrust of chapter 13 is the exposing of the true nature of Saul's heart as seen from his behaviour toward God. No man is perfect and God knows this better than anyone of us. That is the reason He gave us 1 John 1:9 as a comforting and redemptive verse. But what he expects of us is that we do not cover-up our own sins and the sins of others by looking for scapegoats.

He desires all of us to own up to our sins and repent in our hearts. But Saul failed to do this. A person who covers up his own sins has only one main agenda, that is, to give people the impression that he is a "great and good guy". The veneer of goodness and respectability is his most important concern. False fronts and hypocrisies are the hallmarks of his life. He says one thing and does another. His words are empty like dark clouds with loud

thunder but no rain. Saul was just such an individual.

**COMMENTARY**

**The Result of Disobeying God**

—vv. 1- 4

The chapter opened with a summary statement that Saul had ruled over Israel for a year. Altogether, his reign would last 40 years (Acts 13:21). Saul had a standing army of 3,000 warriors. Of these, 2,000 were with him in Michmash and mount Bethel, while 1,000 were with his son, Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin (their hometown). Jonathan was mentioned for the first time and he was introduced as a capable soldier who could command and lead an army.

Jonathan, on his own initiative, went to smite a garrison of Philistines in Geba which was situated north of Gibeah towards the east. This indicated that the Philistines, who were settled on the south eastern part of Palestine, had encroached into inner Israelite territories. They were therefore a threat to the security of the Jewish community. In fact, they had attacked the villages and some of the Jewish inhabitants in these villages had joined them (14:21). Jonathan took the offensive and routed the Philistines camp in Geba. Saul heard of the news and instructed that an announcement be made that he had smitten the Philistines. He used the term "the Hebrews" to refer to his fellowmen (3:3). This use of the term showed a detached and impersonal way of referring to his people. The term "Hebrews" was commonly used by Israel's neighbouring nations to refer to them as "a people across the river (Jordan)". It was a condescending term. Potiphar called Joseph not by his name but referred to him as "the Hebrew" (Genesis 39:14, 17). The Egyptians despised the Jews and called them "Hebrews". A "Hebrew" means "a foreigner."

The truth was that in 1 Samuel 13:3-4, Jonathan did the killing and not Saul, *“And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.”* Saul took the credit for defeating the Philistines even from his own son Jonathan. Of course one might argue that Saul was king and as such all victories obtained by his men were his and Jonathan could be counted as one of his men. This argument would be true only if Jonathan had acted on Saul’s command. But Jonathan did it on his own initiative and the people heard it and the trumpet blew to sound off the victory call and announcement. But the announcement was that Saul instead of Jonathan had defeated the Philistines.

When a father robbed his own son, it made the sin even more heinous. Based upon this lie, he called all Israel to follow him into battle against the Philistines. Saul called the Israelites to gather in Gilgal.

#### **Saul’s Men Fled Like Grasshoppers —vv. 5-7**

The Philistines were gathered in Michmash (about 15 kilometres north-east of Geba). They had a large and formidable army numbering 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and a great number of warriors (13:5). When the men of Israel saw the threat before them, they were distressed. They were terrified. Some hid themselves in “the caves, and in thickets (crevices), and in rocks, and high places (hills) and in the pits”. Some even fled across Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead where their brethren the Reubenites and Gadites had settled. Saul and his army were in Gilgal as Samuel had instructed them to remain there till he arrived.

This reaction was typical of Israel when they had Saul as their king. He was a king like the nations around them. He looked good on the outside but was rotten on the inside. How could the army follow a king based upon a lie? They knew that Saul’s son Jonathan was the courageous and honourable man, not Saul. It was one thing to say that we were part of Saul’s army and another to act like an army in the face of overwhelming odds.

When push came to shove, the ultimate care and concern of every soldier was for himself. No one wanted to die for a dishonourable king. When the Philistines showed up with a great army, Saul’s army fled like grasshoppers. Some even hopped across the river Jordan to the Transjordan side.

#### **Saul’s Impatience and sin—vv. 8-14**

Saul waited for Samuel for seven days which was the set time agreed by Samuel. At the end of the seven days, Samuel had not arrived and the soldiers were scattered from Saul (13:8). In other words Samuel was late for the “appointment.” Bear in mind that it was a very dangerous situation that Saul and Israel were in. The appointment was a serious one and to be late for such a life and death appointment by Samuel was not something Saul could accept.

Impatiently, Saul ordered the burnt and peace offerings to be brought to him. Burnt offerings were done for the atonement of sins. Once the sins had been atoned and there was peace with God, then peace offerings would follow. Offerings were done only by the priests whom God had officially and personally appointed as His mediators to replace the first born sons in the days of Moses. Saul was a king, not a priest, and as such he should know better than to transgress the laws of God. To do what he did against the revealed will of God was a very serious sin. No one could elevate himself to the position of

priesthood unless he was appointed by God. Kings were rulers of men and not mediators of God to man or of man to God.

Saul thought that by making the burnt offering, he could please or placate the LORD. No sooner had he made that burnt offering, then Samuel arrived at Gilgal. Saul cordially approached to greet him. Samuel noticed that Saul had made a burnt offering. He asked Saul, "What have you done?" (13:11a). Saul, sensing Samuel's disapproval, first blamed the people for leaving him. Then he blamed Samuel for not coming on time as they had agreed. Thirdly, he blamed it on the Philistines who were already gathered at Michmash. He explained that the situation was dangerously precarious and threatening. The Philistines could come down upon him at Gilgal at any time had he not entreated the LORD. Therefore he made the burnt and peace offerings. Saul explained that he was compelled by circumstances to offer the burnt offering, thinking that it would please God. He said that he was "forced" into sacrificing the burnt offering.

All three "reasons" given by Saul seemed legitimate. Samuel was really late. The people had scattered. The Philistines threat was imminent. Was the threat really that imminent? If the threat was not that imminent then the urgency was not really there. Samuel's lateness was of little consequence and the people's scattering could have been easily resolved by calling them back once Samuel arrived. How far was Micmash from Gilgal? Saul and his soldiers were actually 15 km away from Micmash. There could be no justification for disobeying the clear instruction of God.

Samuel answered Saul, "You have done foolishly" (13:13). He had broken the commandment of the LORD his God. If he had kept God's

commandment, the LORD would have established his kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now his kingdom would be discontinued. The LORD would seek "a man after his own heart". The LORD would make this man the "captain" (ruler) over His people because Saul had not kept that which the LORD had commanded him (13:13, 14).

Samuel told him that if he had conducted himself in humility and obedience to God, the LORD would have established his kingdom forever. In other words, this incident was a test for Saul and Saul had failed. Samuel shared that the LORD had sought "a man after His own heart" (13:14). In the context, this phrase meant that the man would always be obedient to God. He would obey and trust God even if the people or circumstances were adverse to him. This man would desire to please God in all his ways. Saul was a different man for he was a man after his own heart. He desired only to please himself, finding scapegoats for his sins instead of repenting from them.

### **Samuel's Departure & Saul's Preparation—vv. 15-23**

Samuel then left Gilgal and headed for Gibeah in Benjamin. Saul numbered the people who were with him. The number had dwindled from 3,000 to about 600 men (13:15). Saul and Jonathan together with the 600 men also left Gilgal and made their way to Gibeah in Benjamin. But the Philistines remained in Michmash. The Philistines began to prepare for battle. They deployed one company of "spoilers" (raiders, soldiers) towards Ophrah in Shual; another company to Beth-horon; and a third to the border that overlooked the valley of Zeboim. They raided the villages and confiscated their swords and spears, and removed the blacksmiths. This meant that the Israelites could not make swords and spears (13:19). The Israelites then had to go down to Philistines' occupied territories to sharpen their

ploughshares, coulter (a vertical cutting blade for furrowing), axes and mattock.

The people from these villages, who were then with Saul and Jonathan, had no weapons to go to war. Saul and Jonathan only had their swords and spears. The Philistines could commute to and from Michmash without any trouble. The political situation was not good for the Israelites. The people there were subdued by the Philistines. Saul their king did not do anything to expel the Philistines. At the same time, the Philistines were cautious and wise not to attack Saul's stronghold in Gibeah yet. However, Jonathan, Saul's son had taken the initiative to drive out the Philistines. He had routed one of their garrisons in Geba. But the main force of the Philistines remained at Michmash.

### **PRACTICAL VALUES**

The penalty on Saul was severe. What was the essence of Saul's sin? Saul had disobeyed the LORD'S commandment. It was wrong of him to offer the burnt offering. Only priests could make burnt and peace offerings to the LORD (Leviticus 6:8-13). He should have waited for Samuel. He took matters into his own hands. In other words, he was so afraid of the Philistines that he took the liberty to offer the burnt offering hoping that the LORD would be pleased. In this respect, he feared man instead of God. His actions showed that he did not understand God. He thought that just by offering the burnt offering and the peace offering, God would be pleased. These were external things that God would accept if they were offered in accordance to His Word. God sees the heart of man. The heart must be right. Saul's actions showed that he trusted in his own judgment rather than in God.

Samuel had earlier reminded the people that the LORD their God would uphold His covenant (12:22). The LORD

had been faithful to His Word. At the time when the Spirit of God was upon Saul when he fought against Nahash the Ammonite, he had full confidence in God and even gave God the glory and honour. Now, he showed a lack of personal responsibility and integrity. When he realized that he had done wrong, he blamed Samuel and the people instead of admitting his mistake and repenting.

Saul committed the sin of situational ethics. My situation was very dire. My soldiers had fled. I was in mortal danger as the enemies were all around me. I must make my decision based upon what "I know" for a certainty would take place. In Saul's case he believed that he and his men would die! Who were the people of Israel? Saul really believed that they were his people. That was the first problem in Saul's life. The kingship was given to him by the LORD. He was to look after God's people not his. Israel was never his in the first place. This fundamental error in Saul's life caused him his kingdom. But that was not all. Saul had a strong desire for self preservation at any cost. The cost would include blaming and sacrificing anyone, Samuel included.

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**Monday:** 1 Samuel 13:1-14; Romans 8:5-8.

**Tuesday:** 1 Samuel 13:15-23; 1 Peter 5:8.

**Wednesday:** 1 Samuel 13:1-23.

**Thursday:** 1 Samuel 13:1-23.

**Friday:** 1 Samuel 13:1-23.

**Analysis:**

Text	Practical Values
1 Samuel 13:1-4	
1 Samuel 13:5-7	
1 Samuel 13:8-14	
1 Samuel 13:15-23	

**Discussion Questions**

1. What kind of father would rob his own son of his glory? Is it normal for a father to do such a thing? What is the normal father son relationship?

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2. Why were the people of Israel distressed and frightened? Would you be? What must a believer do to have the courage he needs in this world of fear?

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3. What do you think was the real sin of Saul when he offered the burnt offering -- was it doing the work of a priest, or a lack of faith, or looking for scapegoats or something else?

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4. Was the statement "Saul's kingdom lasting forever" if he had not sinned real? How could this be when God had already said that the sceptre will come from the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49:10?

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5. Why did Samuel not help Saul after he had rebuked him? Why were the Philistines allowed to remain in Micmash and control that portion of the Promised Land?

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