Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 13:1-15

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1 Samuel 13:1-15

(Samuel will no longer be Israel's judge as the people have desired a king to lead them. He will continue to act in a priestly and prophetic office, but he will no longer be the political/military leader of the nation. Saul will be Israel's king. He will be their military/political leader. There will be a division between the sacred and the secular. The sacred will guide the secular.)

Verse 1

¹ *Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.*

- Saul served as Israel's king for 42 years.

Verse 2

² *Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Mikmash 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.*

- To defend Jabesh-Gilead, Saul had assembled an army of 330,000 men (see 1 Samuel 11:8). After the victory there he sent most of the soldiers home. However, he maintained a standing army of 3,000 men. 2,000 were under his command and 1,000 were under the command of his son, Jonathan.

Verses 3-4

³ *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!" ⁴ So all Israel heard the news: "Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines." And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.*

- Details are sketchy here. But, at some point, Jonathan, Saul's son, attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba. He was successful and won the battle.

- When word of Jonathan's victory reached the Philistine commanders, they were outraged. They now understood that Israel's intentions were unfriendly.
- So, Saul again summoned an army. The army was to gather at Gilgal.
- Notice that the secular does not reach out to the sacred in any of this.

Verses 5-10
⁵ The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikmash, east of Beth Aven. ⁶ When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. ⁷ Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.
Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸ He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. ⁹ So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. ¹⁰ Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.
- The Philistines assembled against Israel with an overwhelming force. Chariots were the latest military weapon. The Philistines have 3,000 of them. Israel has none. The Philistine soldiers cannot be counted.
- When Israel saw the force assembled against them, they were afraid and began to desert Saul.
- Apparently, Saul sent for Samuel to come and bless his fearful army. Samuel said that he would come to Saul in seven days. But seven days passed, and for whatever reason, Samuel was delayed. He did not come, and he sent no word to Saul about why he was delayed.
- Saul's army was deserting. Saul knew that something needed to be done to stop the desertion. Samuel's blessing on the army was to be the action that would encourage the army. But Samuel did not show.
- Saul ordered the offerings to be brought to him and he acted in Samuel's place making an offering to God himself. In so doing, he broke the separation God had imparted between the secular and the sacred.
- Just as Saul finished offering the offerings, Samuel arrived.

Verses 11-12
¹¹ "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 Mikmash, ¹² 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."

- Samuel angrily confronted the king.
- Saul tried to explain away the problem. He said that things were looking bad. He said that he was worried and had not sought the Lord's blessing. Samuel had failed to arrive at the appointed time. So, he felt compelled to take things into his own hands. He acted in Samuel's place. It was not his fault. He had to do something!

Verses 13-14

¹³ "You have done a foolish thing," 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. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

- Because Saul had not listened to the voice of the sacred, to wait upon the Lord, he was disqualified from secular office. His dynasty would end with his rule. Another man, one who would wait on the Lord, would follow Saul as Israel's king.
- Saul's disqualification was that he failed to trust God and took matters into his own hands.

Verse 15

¹⁵ Then Samuel left Gilgal and went up to Gibeah in Benjamin, and Saul counted the men who were with him. They numbered about six hundred.

- Samuel left Saul and Israel's army without blessing them.
- The army under Saul had dwindled to only 600 men. Even Saul's standing army of 3,000 had deserted.
- The secular had assumed sway over the sacred. The order of things was out of balance and things looked bad for God's people.