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Samuel Rebukes Sha'ul

First Samuel 13: 1-15a

Samuel rebukes Sha'ul DIG: Combating the Philistine threat was to be Sha'ul's life work. What were Isra'el's odds of victory? How do Sha'ul's reasons for deciding to sacrifice sound to you? How did Sha'ul show pride? Unbelief? Impatience? Deception? What happened as a result of Sha'ul's disobedience? What, exactly, was Sha'ul's sin? How did God react to it?

REFLECT: What do you think you would have done if you were in Sha'ul's situation? When has God been "late" in keeping a promise to you? How often do you take matters into your own hands, as if to say, "It's OK God, I got this!" How has God tested your patience as He tested Sha'ul? Why does God test His people? What are the lessons of Sha'ul's sin?

If you had obeyed, ADONAI would have set up your kingship over Isra'el forever; but as it is now, your kingship will not be established.

The key to understanding this chapter is to realize that **Sha'ul** had finally gotten around to obeying **Samuel's** instructions, given to **him** at the time of **his public coronation** a year earlier (**to see link click By - Long live the King**). After providing **Sha'ul** with three supernatural confirmations of **his** anointing, **Samuel** commanded **him**, "**When these signs come over you, just do whatever you feel like doing, because God is with you. You are to go down ahead of me to Gilgal and wait there seven days, until I come and tell you what to do**" (**10:7-8**). The command to "**do what you want to do**" was a subtle way of directing **Sha'ul** to attack **the Philistines**, a command that **Sha'ul** did not keep at that time. So much had happened in the meantime! **Sha'ul** had been confirmed as **Isra'el's king**. **Samuel** had called on both **the king** and **the people** to be careful to obey **God's Word**, "**Only fear ADONAI, and serve Him faithfully with all your heart and thinking about what great things He has done for you! However, if you insist on doing evil, you will be swept away - both you and your king**" (see **Ca - Samuel's Farewell Speech**)! Perhaps it took a year of

thinking about this to work up **his** courage, and perhaps it was **Jonathan's** initiative that forced **his** hand, but **Sha'ul** finally committed **himself** to do as **the prophet** had directed.²⁷⁴

Pride (13:1-4): Now the account of **Sha'ul's** reign was about to begin, the formula that accompanies the record of each of **the kings** in the books of **Samuel** and **Kings** is inserted (for example **Second Samuel 5:4-5** and **Second Kings 12:1**). **Sha'ul was a young man when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years (13:1 The Message and Acts 13:21)**. As a result of **the Philistine** forces who maintained fortresses in **Israelite** territory, **He chose three thousand** trained men of **Isra'el**. **Two thousand of them were with Sha'ul at Micmash and in the hills of Bethel, and a thousand were with his son Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin;** both were central locations on the west side of the Jordan River, from which **they** could respond in virtually any direction. **The rest of the men he sent back to their respective tents (13:2)**. However, the fact that **Isra'el** was mustering **an army** put **the Philistines** on the alert. **They** had garrisons in different parts of the country and monitored the situation carefully.²⁷⁵

Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geva, about one mile southwest of **Micmash,** and **the Philistines heard of it**. Then, anticipating retaliation from **the Philistines,** **Sha'ul had the shofar sound throughout the land, saying, "Let the [Israelites] hear."** So all **Isra'el** heard that **Sha'ul had attacked the Philistine outpost, and thus made Isra'el a stench in the nostrils of the Philistines (13:3-4a)**. But **Sha'ul** didn't **attack the Philistine outpost,** it was **Jonathan**. So we see here the pride that begins to rise up in **Sha'ul** that would eventually lead to **his** destruction (**James 1:12-15**). And from this moment on, **Sha'ul** begins to have evil feelings toward **his son**. **He** would even go so far as to try and kill **him** (see [Ci - The Rescue of Jonathan](#)). This is where **the people** started to turn against **Sha'ul** and look elsewhere for a replacement, and **Jonathan himself** pointed to **David (23:17)**.

Thus, the people rallied behind Sha'ul in Gilgal, where **he** had been confirmed as **king** by **Samuel** and **the people (13:4b)**. It is never wrong for believers to begin practicing what **YHVH** has commanded - and as seen here, better late than never - and **Sha'ul** was following the words of **the prophet** given at the time of **his public coronation**. When in doubt, believers should simply obey **God's Word** as it applies to our situation. This is what **Sha'ul** did, and while it gained **him** universal scorn, we cannot fail to see this as the high-water mark of **Sha'ul's** entire

life and reign.²⁷⁶

Impatience (13:5-9): Meanwhile, the **Philistines** responded to **Jonathan's** assault with immediate, savage, and overwhelming force. **They assembled themselves together to make war on Isra'el** with **3,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and an army as large as the number of sand grains on the seashore. They came up and pitched camp at Micmash**, less than twenty miles **east of Bethel**. The overwhelmingly superior forces of **the Philistines**, superior in both equipment and in numbers, took **their** stand in the very area **Sha'ul** had occupied. **Sha'ul's troops** were so intimidated that **they hid themselves in caves, thickets, crevices, watchtowers and cisterns; while some of the [Israelites] crossed the Jordan to the territory of Gad and Gilead**, areas east of the Jordan River to escape the expected slaughter. **But Sha'ul was still in Gilgal** waiting for **Samuel**, where **all the people were eager to follow him** over the anticipated **Philistine** attack (13:5-7).

This was the first of **Isra'el's** three major battles with **the Philistines** in **Sha'ul's** reign (see **Cp - Goliath Mocks Isra'el**) and see **Dk - Sha'ul Takes His Own Life**). This was the beginning of **Isra'el's** war of liberation, although it wasn't finished until after **David** became **king** (see the commentary on **the Life of David Ce - David Anointed King Over Y'hudah**). **Sha'ul** knew **he** must soon make a move against **the Philistines** if **his** volunteer **militia** would stand strong. In fact, the small army that remained was armed with mostly farm tools. Only **Sha'ul** and **Jonathan** had **swords**, and **they** were made of bronze rather than iron. **He** was very nervous as **he** impatiently waited for **Samuel** to offer **the sacrifices** that preceded the battle, and demonstrated **Isra'el's** dependence on **the LORD**. It was a test.²⁷⁷



Meanwhile, **Sha'ul** had gone to **Gilgal**, exactly as **Samuel** had directed, to **wait seven days** until **the prophet** arrived. **He waited seven days, as Samuel had instructed; but Samuel didn't come and Sha'ul's** volunteer **militia began to scatter. So he** took matters into **his** own hands and said, **"Bring me the burnt offering** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ai - The Burnt Offering: Accepted by God**) **and the peace offerings** (see **Leviticus Ak - The Peace Offerings: At Peace with God**)," although **he** was from **the tribe** of **Benjamin** and wasn't a priest, **he offered the burnt offering (13:8-9)**. While it was true that **Sha'ul** was in a tough spot with more of **his army deserting** every single day, circumstances are never an excuse to ignore **God's** commands. **He** should have learned that no matter how many **soldiers** left **him**, **ADONAI** could still give **him** the victory. It is a serious matter for anyone to set aside **God's** requirements, but it is especially serious for those in spiritual leadership. Even today, **the Lord** has set certain requirements on those who can and cannot act in the capacity of spiritual leadership (**First Timothy 3:1-12** and **Titus 1:5-9**).²⁷⁸

How are we to understand the purposes of **ADONAI** at work through **Sha'ul**? **Samuel** had warned **Sha'ul** and **the people** in **his** farewell address to **fear ADONAI, and serve Him faithfully with all your heart and thinking about what great things He has done for you!** **Sha'ul** was trying to do that very thing, but everything was going wrong and utter defeat seemed inevitable. Did this mean that **YHVH** never intended for **Sha'ul** to succeed, so that **God** gave **him** a test that would strain any one of us to the breaking point? No! **The LORD** had offered **him** an eternal **kingship if only he had obeyed (13:13)**. The reality is that **Ha'Shem** does test **His people** with severe trials, giving grace to those who **trust Him**. **Moshe** learned to **trust ADONAI** with **his** back to the Sea of Reeds - which **God** parted to save **His** people and destroy the Egyptian army. Likewise, **Sha'ul** would need to **trust YHVH** in trying times if **he** wanted to see **God's** deliverance.²⁷⁹

Deception (13:10-12): As **Sha'ul** decays in character, we see **him** deceiving **himself** and others more and more. **No sooner had he** sacrificed **the Burnt Offering, than Samuel arrived on the seventh day**, only to be greeted by **the king** as if nothing had happened. But **Sha'ul** had violated the holy standards of **the LORD** by disobeying **the Torah** and the word of **His prophet Samuel**, who had told **him** two years earlier to proceed to **Gilgal** and to wait there for **him seven days** in anticipation of **Samuel's sacrifice (10:1-8)**.²⁸⁰ **Samuel** declared, **"What have you done?"** We are reminded of the voice of **the LORD** speaking to **Adam**

and Eve after **their** sin in **the garden (Genesis 3:9-13)**. Like **Adam** with **his fig leaves**, **Sha’ul** sought to cover **his** disobedience with an excuse. **Sha’ul** answered, “**When I saw that the army was deserting me, that you hadn’t come during the time appointed** (but it was still **the seventh day**) **and that the Philistines had assembled at Micmash**. **Sha’ul** reacted not by faith but based on what **he saw**. **He** feared losing **his** men and did not properly consider what **God** wanted **him** to do. **So I thought, “Now the Philistines will attack me at Gilgal, and I haven’t asked the favor of ADONAI,”** so I felt compelled to **offer the burnt offering**. From a human standpoint, **Sha’ul** did what **he** needed to do in a difficult situation. But from **God’s** point of view, difficult circumstances are never an excuse for disobedience.²⁸¹

Foolishness (13:13-14): **Sha’ul** had experienced **the LORD’s** favor in defeating **the Ammonites** (see **Bz - The Ammonite War**), but at the first sign of adversity, **he** failed the test. The penalty was severe. **Samuel** said to **Sha’ul**, “**You did a foolish thing. You didn’t observe the mitzvah of ADONAI** (making a sacrifice without being a priest). **If you had obeyed, ADONAI would have set up your kingship over Isra’el forever (13:13)**. We must take this statement at face value, however unlikely its fulfillment was. Therefore, at this point, **Sha’ul** was not rejected as **king**, it was just that **he** would not have an eternal dynasty.²⁸² **Sha’ul** needed to be reminded, as we need to be, that **God** is interested in the motives of **the heart**. What **Sha’ul** couldn’t grasp was the fact that character was, and is, the issue, and in that respect, **he** had completely failed. **His pride, impatience, deception, and foolishness** were all seen and judged by **Ha’Shem**, and **Samuel** announced the verdict: **But as it is now, your kingship will not be established (13:14a)**. This clearly demonstrates **YHVH** was testing **Sha’ul’s heart**. If **he** had remained steadfast in obeying **His** mitzvot, **God** would have established **Sha’ul’s** lineage on the throne of **Isra’el** forever. Instead, **Sha’ul** proved **his heart** was not committed to following **Ha’Shem** as **his Sovereign**, and thus, **God** found another **man** whose **heart** was aligned with **His**.²⁸³

This was a severe judgment, and we might be tempted to think that **Samuel** overreacted, having subjected **Samuel** to an unnecessarily long period of waiting, only to condemn **him**. But **Samuel** was trying to establish once-and-for-all the essential difference between **Isra’el’s** monarchy and all the other nations. In **Isra’el**, **ADONAI** is **King**, and obedience to **Him** must be absolute. It follows that anything short of that would lead to disqualification, being equivalent to rebellion against **YHVH**.²⁸⁴

ADONAI had already chosen **Sha'ul's** successor, **a man after His own heart**, and would **appoint him to be the leader over His people**, because **Sha'ul didn't keep ADONAI's command** to wait seven days. **Then Samuel left Gilgal and went up to Gibeah in Benjamin**, which at this point was safely in Jewish hands (**13:14b-15a**). If **the people** had been patient enough to wait for **God's** timing, **David** would have been **Isra'el's first king**. Nevertheless, **Sha'ul's** sin at **Gilgal** cost **him** the dynasty, and **his** future sin involving **the Amalekites** would cost **him his** kingdom (see [Ck - God Rejects Sha'ul](#)). **He** eventually lost **his** crown and **his** life (see **15:16-34** and **31:1-13**). **ADONAI** wanted **a king with a heart** that was aligned with **His**, **a man with a shepherd's heart**, and **He** found that kind of **a heart** in **David** (see [the life of David Ah - Samuel Anoints David](#)). **Sha'ul** was a warrior and nothing more; **he** was never **a shepherd**. But, **David** had **a shepherd's heart**, because **ADONAI** was **his Shepherd (Psalm 23:1)**.²⁸⁵

The lessons of Sha'ul's sin: What, exactly, was **Sha'ul's** sin? As Richard Phillips describes in his commentary on **1 Samuel**, the obvious answer was that **he** made **the Burnt Offering** without the authority to do so. Only a properly ordained priest could offer the burnt offering that would secure **God's** favor. But given the dire national circumstances that **Sha'ul** was facing, it is possible that **ADONAI** would be more concerned with the proper ritual for the offering of **His** sacrifices than with **Sha'ul's** need to get moving with organizing the war? The answer is "Yes." The sacrificial offerings of the priesthood were more important than **the king's** pursuit of the war. What we do in worship reveals our beliefs about who **the LORD** is and what **He** wants, so that our obedience in worship should receive priority in our lives. The sacrifices **Sha'ul** desecrated were holy, and they dealt with holy things, such as **God's** wrath against our sin and **His** atoning work in **Messiah** for our forgiveness. In the final analysis, it was more important for **YHVH** to be worshiped properly than for **Isra'el** to survive its war.

Several aspects of **Samuel's** rebuke apply to us. First, we notice that foolishness consists of violating the commands of **the LORD**. The **proverb** states: **Trust in ADONAI with all your heart; and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, then He will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6)**. **Sha'ul** violated this very precept in making the offering **himself**. Given the circumstances, it seemed best to him - even necessary - to violate the command of **God**. But it is never right to violate the command of **Ha'Shem**, who is sovereign over all circumstances and saves **His** people who **trust**

in **Him**. This applies to believers today in matters such as child-raising, dating, marriage, and the use of money and time. Whereas our society encourages independence in children, the Bible commands obedience to parents (see **Deuteronomy Bp - Honor Your Parents**). Whereas the world applauds sexual indulgence in dating, **God** requires purity and self-control. So it goes in virtually every other aspect of life. When worldly ideas conflict with the teaching of **God's Word** and especially with its clear commands, they are to be resisted, because, in reality, they are **foolish** (see the commentary on **First Corinthians An - The Foolishness of Worldly Wisdom**). As **Samuel** said to **Sha'ul**, so it could be said of us when our worldly "wisdom" leads us to violate **God's Word**, "**You did a foolish thing. You didn't observe the mitzvah of ADONAI, which He gave you (13:13a)**."

Second, we see that obedience to **God** is obedience to **God's Word**. The reason **Sha'ul** was guilty of breaking **God's** command is that he violated the word that **Samuel** had given **him**. Today, we receive the Word of **ADONAI** in the Scriptures. Some people complain that to revere the Bible is to make it an idol. But the Bible is **God's Word**, and the way that we worship and obey **God** is by obeying the teachings of the Bible. It was because **Sha'ul** treated **God's Word** without reverence that he was rebuked by **the Lord**.

Third, **Samuel** reminds us that if we want to do **God's work**, we must do it in accordance with **God's Word**. **Sha'ul** was not on some agenda of **his** own; **he** was serving **Isra'el** against its enemies. So what was the problem? The problem was that **he** did not serve **God** in accordance with **God's Word**, so that **he** was rebuked and rejected by **Ha'Shem**. Believers risk the same result today when we adapt the worship of the Church and plans for Church growth to worldly models copied from the entertainment and business worlds, rather than faithfully applying the kinds of worship and ministry taught and modeled in the Bible.

Fourth, we may be tempted to think that **Samuel**, and therefore **YHVH**, was excessive in **His** rebuke of **Sha'ul**. But this example shows us that what we consider to be small matters of negligence are often considered by **ADONAI** to be major indicators of **a heart** that is not devoted to **Him**. **God** looks on **the heart** as stated above, and it is in the small matters of life that our **heart's** true attitude is often revealed.²⁸⁶

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that **You** are almighty and **the Sovereign Ruler** of the universe! **You** are so much wiser, greater and more powerful than any*

ruler, be he king, prime minister or president. **Your** authority and power is far above all rulers. **You** are always to be obeyed. Sometimes rulers get “big heads” and pride gets in their way. But **You**, who are the greatest **Ruler**, humbled **Yourself** and became **a man** to take our sin punishment. How wonderful **You** are! **Who, though existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be grasped. But He emptied Himself - taking on the form of a slave, becoming the likeness of men and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled Himself - becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6-8).**

What a glorious act of humility that was rewarded with being lifted above every name and before whom all shall **bow!** **For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua every knee should bow, in heaven and on the earth and under the earth, and every tongue profess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord - to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).** It is a joy to be able to trust and follow **You** always, for **You** are so loving and wonderful! It is a joy to do things Your way. You always know best. In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen