

Message #28

I Samuel 13:15-23

Several years ago, there was a very faithful businessman who loved God. He was a man that God had greatly blessed and prospered in business. He was very successful and made a lot of money. But then he started to drift and plug more into the world than He did God. Little by little, the things of God became less and less important. He drifted into a spiritual coma. After a while things began to unravel. He became discontented with his job, which had been a fabulous job, he started neglecting some of his responsibilities and ultimately he filed for bankruptcy. This was a man of God, who at one time was on top of the world in every area of life, but he lost his focus and his whole world caved in. It took some time, but finally he got refocused and sure enough, God once again blessed him and prospered him.

That story of an individual is also the same story of a nation. That kind of thing happened time and time again in the history of Israel. God would start blessing the nation Israel and then the nation Israel would forget about God and lose its focus. So God would let their national world cave in. Israel would find herself in deep trouble surrounded by various enemies and threats. Then someone would rise up and wake up and realize we have done wrong. We need to refocus and get back in a right relationship with God. They would cry out to God, and sure enough God would come to the rescue.

That really is the essence of the next historical section in the book of I Samuel. At this point Saul is the king of Israel. He had a great start to being king. He had a major victory over the Ammonites and the nation honored him. Then his son Jonathan had a victory over the Philistines and Saul was prancing around exalting himself.

But then the Philistines decided to come up against Saul and Israel, and when Samuel didn't act quick enough for Saul's liking, by getting to Gilgal as soon as Saul wanted, Saul decided he would take things into his own hands and started offering sacrifices to God, which he did not have the authority to do (13:11-13).

This action was the beginning of Saul's demise. This was a major sin issue in the mind of God. He crossed a major line. His attempt to usurp the authority of Samuel was the same kind of thing Satan did in trying to usurp the authority of God. Saul was usurping the authority of God and God was about to let his world cave in. The point to see here is this:

WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE DISOBEY AND DO NOT REPENT OF THEIR DISOBEDIENCE, GOD WILL PERMIT THEM TO BE SURROUNDED BY VARIOUS INTIMIDATING AND THREATENING THINGS; BUT IF THEY WILL REPENT AND DO WHAT IS RIGHT, HE WILL LEAD THEM TO GREAT VICTORY IN SPITE OF THEIR PREVIOUS FAILURE.

What we will ultimately see from this history is that God is a God of amazing grace. In this specific section of Scripture, there are three historical facts brought out in this narrative history of Israel:

NARRATIVE HISTORICAL FACT #1 – There had been a depletion of numbers in the army of Israel. **13:15-16**

We may recall that when this all began, Saul had 2,000 men with him and Jonathan had 1,000 men with him (13:2).

When we come to these verses, when Samuel leaves Gilgal, Saul was left with 600 men (**13:15**). The meeting he had with Samuel did not increase numbers, they decreased the numbers. The numbers had decreased and not even 1/3rd of the men were left.

According to **verse 16**, Saul and these 600 men went to Geba, located on the southern side of the valley and the Philistines now occupied Michmash, which is on the north side of the valley. So things had been completely reversed.

We may recall that Saul originally was in Michmash (13:2) and the Philistines were in Geba (13:3) and now it is Saul and Jonathan who are in Geba and the Philistines are in Michmash.

When God's people disobey God, the enemy ends up winning and God's people end up losing. Things get reversed. The people who aren't right with God succeed and the people who are supposed to be right with God don't succeed.

If God's people lose their focus and their reverence, God can allow enemies to dominate. A person who was once a shining light for God can end up a complete disaster.

Now keep in mind the Philistines have big numbers. They have 30,000 chariots; 6,000 horsemen and so many foot soldiers that they are like the "sand of the sea" (13:5). They are camped less than four miles away from Israel.

On the other hand, the Israelites, who are God's people, are down to Saul and Jonathan and 600 men. Obviously, from a strict military perspective, they are greatly outnumbered and outmatched. But they have the one thing on their side that is all they need for victory: **they have God. Getting victory with God on your side is never an issue of numbers.**

God was about to teach that lesson to Saul and all of Israel. Israel will experience one of the greatest victories over the Philistines in I Samuel 14, but at this point she did not know it. All she knew and could see is that she was greatly threatened and greatly outnumbered.

Now it is nice when the numbers are good, but our confidence must never be in the numbers, but in the Lord.

But here is the thing. If we disobey God and don't deal with it, we can expect negative consequences. God may permit us to be threatened and outnumbered. But in those intimidating moments, we need to run right to God for that is where we will find victory.

NARRATIVE HISTORICAL FACT #2 – There was an intimidation of Israel by the army of the Philistines. **13:17-19**

The Philistine army was very impressive and intimidating. They split up into three groups of marauding raiders. They decided to take over the entire land. They would use their numbers and threats and intimidations to disarm the people so they had no way of defending themselves.

According to **verse 17**, one group went north toward Ophrah, which is about 6 miles from Michmash.

According to **verse 18**, a second group went west toward Beth-horon, 10 miles from Michmash.

According to **verse 18**, a third group went east toward the wilderness, toward the valley of Zeboim, which is probably the Jordan valley.

So the Philistine objective is to take charge of all of the land of Israel.

The two verbs “turned” used in **verse 18** are all in a Hebrew Imperfect tense that indicates there was a starting point and a continuation of the action. This was not some blitz rush attack, this was a very systematic military campaign that continued and was sustained for a long time.

From verse 19 we learn that one of the things the godless Philistines did was to travel from place to place and to confiscate the people's weapons. Their goal was to take away weapons and stop weapon production of the Hebrews. They would get rid of blacksmiths who could make those weapons. Blacksmiths were able to make swords and spears. **These Philistine raiders were on a mission of national disarmament. This was a power crazed group who wanted to dominate the people. In their mind it was okay for them to have the weapons, but they did not want anyone else having weapons.**

It was not uncommon for a political power to deport blacksmiths or kill them (II Kings 24:14, 16; Jer.24:1). **Don't miss this point; it is a dangerous evil thing when political powers try to take away your weapons. This never makes any society safer, it makes it vulnerable.**

We are living in a time when certain politicians want to take away your weapons and your ability to defend yourself, which is your constitutional right. God never wanted His people to be defenseless, whether O.T. or N.T.

For example, Nehemiah told the people who were building the wall to keep working, but keep a weapon near them in case enemies attacked (Neh. 4:15-23). In fact, he wanted armed servants protecting the people.

Ezekiel said a watchman had a job to look out for and protect the people and if he didn't do his job, God would hold him accountable (Ez. 3:1-9). Asaph said the job of one godly is to rescue and deliver the weak and needy from the hand of the wicked (Ps. 82:4). Even Jesus told His own disciples when He was leaving to go purchase a sword (Luke 22:36). Every N.T. believer has a God-given right to individual freedom on any matter, including whether or not to own and have weapons (Romans 14:1-4).

Criminals and psychotic killers love to attack innocent, defenseless people. Criminals and psychotic killers do not obey laws. So if some law is made that wants to take away weapons from good, law-abiding citizens, the criminals and psychotic killers will not turn in their weapons because they don't obey laws.

We do have a responsibility to submit to government—Rom. 13:1-5; Titus 3:1; I Pet. 2:13-14. This assumes that government is not asking us to do something contrary to the word and will of God.

In that case, we must obey God rather than men. For example, when Peter and John were told by the government that they were no longer to preach truth about Jesus Christ, they said we aren't going to obey you (Acts 4:18-20). When Peter was again brought before the political and religious leaders who gave him strict, direct orders to stop preaching Christ, he said, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were told by the government to bow down to a golden image, they refused to submit (Daniel 4:18). When Daniel was told by the government to stop kneeling down and praying, he refused to submit (Dan. 6:13).

When government orders God's people to do things, every individual must decide in his or her own conscience whether it violates the word of God. Each must be fully persuaded in their own minds after carefully weighing the whole counsel of God.

But you can know this, it has always been evil and arrogant political powers who want to disarm God's people. Even though many do this for popular political gain, behind this is an evil desire for dominant power and control. This is true physically and it is also true spiritually.

One of the nations today that has totally disarmed the people is North Korea. The reason for this is the ruthless and godless politicians want total control of the people and they do not want the people to be able to defend themselves. If you are in North Korea and happen to be a Christian, they will kill you and there is no way you can defend yourself.

That is the same Philistine philosophy that is found right here in this text.

This Philistine domination over the iron and blacksmiths would continue until a king will rise up and put a stop to it, and his name was David (I Chron. 22:3).

It appears as though Israel is completely helpless. She is outnumbered. She has no weapons. All she has to defend her is her God. Her God will prove to be plenty.

There are some observations we want to make here:

Observation #1 - One of the great tactics of the enemy is to take away our security.

Observation #2 - When we do not face our disobedience, we may find ourselves faced with some major threat.

Observation #3 - When we are so outnumbered so that all we can depend on is God, God will prove to be all we need.

NARRATIVE HISTORICAL FACT #3 – There was a complete dominance of Israel by the Philistines. **13:20-23**

This is so sad because Israel is the nation of God and yet she is being totally and completely dominated by the Philistines. There are two dominating facts brought out here:

Dominating Fact #1 - Israel had to submit to the Philistines to get workable farm equipment. **13:20-21**

Israel was in a state of total dependency on God because she was being totally dominated in every way by the Philistines.

According to **verse 20**, Israel had to go down to the Philistines to sharpen their farming tools. Each person had to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock (pick axe), his pitch forks, axes and hoes.

Not only did they have to go to the Philistines to get these tools sharpened, but according to **verse 21**, they had to actually pay 2/3rds of a shekel to get them sharpened.

This was an astronomical fee. To put this in some perspective, ½ a shekel was a ransom tax that was to be given to God for every person over 20 (Ex. 30:11-16). So the people of Israel are actually paying more money for farm tools than they are for humans.

So what we have here is a government domination that has taken away the weapons and put huge taxes on the people.

God does not want His people living like this. This was not His will. God's will was that His people were self-sustaining and self-governing.

Dominating Fact #2 - Israel had to submit to the Philistines and they had no weapons. **13:22-23**

Israel had lost her weapons. Saul's decision to not obey God had been a costly one. The only weapons Israel had were the armed guys surrounding Jonathan and Saul. The rest of the people were defenseless.

Now after the Philistines had disarmed the Israelites, she moved out to the pass of Michmash. They figured they could defeat Israel and take what they wanted.

From a human perspective, Israel looks totally and completely helpless and defenseless. She doesn't have good numbers and she doesn't even have any powerful weapons, except there is one possible weapon she could potentially have: **she could have God on her side.**

When you have God on your side, He can get you out of horrible situations. If God is for you, no one can be against you. God will prove to be plenty.

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS:

- 1) There will be times when we have disobeyed God that we will feel all alone and abandoned. In those very moments, we need to draw close to God.**
- 2) Our enemy wants to take away our weapons not because it makes us safer, but because it makes us more vulnerable.**
- 3) There will be times in our lives when we feel totally outnumbered and intimidated and it appears as if we will lose. Draw near to God and we will not lose.**
- 4) There will be times when we will be forced to depend completely on God and when those moments happen, God will prove to be enough.**