

March 29

1 Samuel 13 and 14

Did it surprise you to see how weak the nation of Israel had grown? The gains made in the victory of Samuel over the Ammonites in the east had apparently been quickly lost to the Philistines who invaded from the west, and once again, the Israelites found themselves helpless and at the mercy of their enemies.

There is a mighty contrast in the chapters that we read today between Saul, who, though he pays lip service to the God of Israel, in fact, demonstrates little in the way of real faith, and his son Jonathan, who has obviously "caught" the spirit of the old prophet Samuel and who is ready to attempt great things for God.

Saul protests his allegiance to God. He carries out sacrifices, (albeit presumptuously) and imposes spiritual "duties" on the people of Israel. But for all of the form, there is no power, and for all of the protestations, there is no faith, and only partial obedience. Saul's failure to wait for Samuel may not seem to us as a failure of such magnitude that he should lose his kingdom over it. Nevertheless, both Samuel and the Lord considered it to be a most grievous offense.

**First** of all, Saul violated one of the fundamental principles of this newly established theocratic monarchy, which was that the king would never act independently of the law and the prophets. Saul was not a priest or a prophet. He had no right, even if he was king, to usurp those offices.

**Second**, this was a great offense because it showed how shallow Saul's faith in God really was. He offered the sacrifice because, in the face of the Philistines' army, men were starting to defect from his own. 'If I wait much longer,' he reasoned, 'they will all run away.' What that showed is, that though he said he was trusting God, Saul really trusted the strength of his army. He apparently didn't remember the victories of Gideon, Samson and the other judges.

The **third** thing that made Saul's sin so grievous (and so modern) is the attitude that it betrayed: 'Incomplete obedience and lack of faith are not important if I just perform the right rituals and pay lip service to God.' That seems to be about where King Saul was in his thinking. And that is precisely where thousands upon thousands of professing Christians are today. 'I'm not willing to completely obey because it is both inconvenient and uncomfortable. And I don't really want to completely trust in God. I am, however willing to pay him lip service and go through the motions of a ritual. Maybe that will be enough to secure His blessing.' Saul's religion was very shallow, and though God gave Israel the victory, He did not bless King Saul.

Saul's lack of discernment is evident again in our reading by the foolish vow he made regarding the ban on eating food on the day of battle. The curse was wrong to begin with -- it was capricious and arbitrary. It was not made with any intention of giving glory to God. In the very same breath as it is given, Saul said it would last "until I have

avenged myself on my enemies." There is no recognition whatever of God in that, and it may well be that in those words we have the clearest mirror available with which to look into the soul of Saul. Just like Jephthah before him, and Herod after, Saul is too proud to recognize that he has made a foolish vow and repent of it, but fortunately, unlike those other two fools, this one is prevented from being carried out by the rebellion of his soldiers, who will not allow him to execute the only one, his son Jonathan, who actually demonstrated genuine faith in God that day.

Which brings me to my closing comments for the day...Did you catch Jonathan's statement in chapter 14 verse 6 to his armor-bearer before they approached the Philistine outpost? "PERHAPS the Lord will act in our behalf..." In another translation it says, "IT MAY BE that the Lord will work for us..." Jonathan wasn't convinced that God would come through the way he hoped...but he acted anyway. Why? Jonathan knew his God. In his next line he said, "Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few." Jonathan knew the power of God could overcome any odds. He believed and put his faith into action.

So how about you? What PERHAPS scenario is in your life? Is there a decision you need to make but you are afraid of the outcome? Is the fear of the unknown holding you back from thinking God may act on your behalf? Just like Jonathan was sure of God's character, are you sure of God's character? That "NOTHING can hinder the Lord from saving?" Sometimes walking by faith means we need to take action and sometimes walking by faith means we need to rest and wait on God. Even though Jonathan was not certain of the outcome of his action, he WAS certain of the power of God. Whatever PERHAPS you are dealing with today remember God honors those who walk by faith not by sight. In Hebrews we are reminded, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." PERHAPS God is waiting to act on your behalf.