

# 1 Samuel 13

## A Man After God's Heart

### Introduction

People of God, allow me to state something so completely obvious you might think it offensive that I even feel the need to say this. You cannot please God, nor can you secure His favor, through disobedience.

That may sound obvious. But the reality is, we all find subtle ways to convince ourselves otherwise. We excuse disobedience by pointing to some greater crisis, some urgent threat, some seemingly noble lofty goal that we imagine justifies setting aside God's clear command. **In our minds, the problem in front of us outweighs the sin inside of us.**

But 1 Samuel 13 leaves no room for that kind of thinking. God is not honored by disobedient sacrifices. The LORD is honored by faithful, trusting obedience. When the pressure is high, and the cost is great, believing in God's Word is the most important thing.

### Saul's Test of Faith

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In 1 Samuel 13, King Saul finds himself in a moment of crisis. He has been king for two years, and he now has the beginnings of a small standing army—just 3,000 men. He

divides them into two companies: 2,000 remain with him at Michmash, in the hill country near Bethel, and 1,000 go with his son Jonathan in Gibeah, about five miles to the southwest.

Between these two outposts lies Geba, where a Philistine garrison is stationed. Jonathan attacks and defeats the Philistine outpost, and the news spreads quickly. Saul knows a massive retaliation is coming, so he sounds the trumpet and calls Israel to arms: “Let the Hebrews hear!”

That word—Hebrews—recalls Israel’s past as slaves in Egypt. By using it, Saul is summoning the people’s memory: “If you don’t want to be enslaved again, you must come and fight!”

So the troops gather at Gilgal—where just two years earlier, Saul had been publicly confirmed as king after defeating Nahash the Ammonite. It was also at Gilgal that Samuel had warned: “If you and your king do not obey the voice of the LORD, He will be against you.”

While Israel musters at Gilgal, the Philistines likewise muster their army to the just ten miles to the north of Gilgal in Bethaven.

And their numbers are terrifying. Thirty thousand chariots. Six thousand horsemen. Foot soldiers like the sand on the

seashore. Saul's few thousand are no match. Panic spreads. Just as in the days of Gideon, men begin to hide in caves, thickets, cisterns, rocks, holes, and pits. Some even fled across the Jordan River into Gad and Gilead—abandoning the land entirely.

Those who remain are trembling in fear.

And now the second part of Saul's testing arrives.

Back in chapter 10, when Samuel anointed Saul, he gave specific instructions: When the time comes to go to battle, go to Gilgal and wait seven days. I will come and offer the sacrifice. That was the command.

But now, the Philistines are only hours away—four or five hours' march. Their army is massive. And Saul has been told to wait... seven days?

The pressure is unbearable. The days pass. The enemy does not attack—but neither does Samuel appear. The few remaining troops begin to scatter. Saul's fear grows. His command is slipping. His faith is failing.

The scene is perfectly set for God to display His glory and salvation once again. Will Saul wait in obedience to the command of the LORD, and be saved? Or will he take matters into his own hands?

## The Cost of Impatience

Unable to wait any longer, Saul took matters into his own hands. He called for the burnt offering and the peace offerings and offered the burnt offering himself—something only a priest, not a king, had the right to do. And no sooner had he finished than Samuel arrived.

Saul went out to greet him, but Samuel's words cut straight through the scene: "*What have you done?*" Just as the Lord confronted Adam in the garden with that piercing question—"*Where are you?*"—so Samuel confronts Saul with the same spirit of divine interrogation.

We had once hoped that Saul might be the king Israel needed. He was tall, handsome, and humble. But now Saul's position as king has gone to his head and filled him with pride. Like Adam, Saul stretched out his hand in impatience to take what God had not given.

And like Adam, Saul makes excuses. His response reveals the kind of man he truly is. Adam blamed the woman. Then he blamed God—"*the woman whom You gave me.*" Eve blamed the serpent. Likewise, Saul shifts the blame in three directions. First, he says, "*I saw that the people were scattering from me*"—he blames the people. Then, "*you did not come within the days appointed*"—he blames the prophet.

Finally, “*the Philistines were assembling at Michmash*”—he blames the enemy. He concludes, “So I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD’s favor.’ So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering.”

He forced himself—as if pious desperation could justify disobedience. But God is not pleased with offerings brought in rebellion. You cannot seek the LORD’s favor in unbelief.

Samuel’s reply is direct and devastating: “*You have done foolishly.*”

The fool says in his heart there is no God. Saul’s failure was that he did not trust the Lord to save, but he trusted in himself to manipulate the situation to achieve victory. He treated God not as his covenant King, in whose words are eternal life, but as a pagan idol to be appeased through ritual offerings, sacrifices made to manipulate outcomes. This is not faith. Saul obeyed his fear rather than God’s word, and that is what sealed his downfall.

How many times had God fought for Israel against impossible odds? How many moments had He delivered them at the very last hour? Had Saul remembered the Red

Sea, Jericho, or Gideon's victory, he might have stood firm. All he had to do was believe, and wait. But he did not.

### **Psalm 33:16-22**

*<sup>16</sup>No king is saved by the multitude of an army;  
A mighty man is not delivered by great strength.*

*<sup>17</sup>A horse is a vain hope for safety;  
Neither shall it deliver any by its great strength.*

*<sup>18</sup>Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him,  
On those who hope in His mercy,*

*<sup>19</sup>To deliver their soul from death,  
And to keep them alive in famine.*

*<sup>20</sup>Our soul waits for the Lord;  
He is our help and our shield.*

*<sup>21</sup>For our heart shall rejoice in Him,  
Because we have trusted in His holy name.*

*<sup>22</sup>Let Your mercy, O Lord, be upon us,  
Just as we hope in You.*

True faith waits, because faith believes that God is the Savior, and not we ourselves. Saul failed that test. He did not wait. And in that failure, he exposed his unbelieving heart.

## A Man After God's Heart

Faced with mounting pressure, Saul looked at his circumstances and did not a stage for divine deliverance, he only saw danger. His heart was filled with anxiety, and fear, not faith. He tried to seek the favor of the Lord by disobeying His word. So the Lord tore the kingdom from him and gave it to a man after His own heart.

A man who would suffer in the wilderness before he ever dared lay a hand on the throne. A man who would not lift his sword against the Lord's anointed, though it cost him years in caves. A man who chose the path of obedience over expedience. A man who walked the way of a suffering servant, who waited on God to save him.

That man was David, the faithful Son, the rightful King of Israel. But it also of course looks forward to David's greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not turn bread into stones in the wilderness when he was starving to death. He did not summon angels to rescue Him, in Gethsemane. He did not come down from the cross when surrounded by his enemies. He willingly obeyed his father in his life, death, and burial. He descended into Sheol. And even there, when all seemed lost, He waited in perfect trust, believing that even if he made his bed in Sheol, God would be there to guide him up from the grave.

And because of this kind of faith, God has appointed *Him* as the Prince and Commander of His people. He is the King who reigns not by seizing power, but by humbly laying down His life, being obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, and waiting for the righteous vindication of God to deliver Him from all His enemies. And so God raised him up as ruler over all.

Have this same mind in you, children of God, which is yours in Christ Jesus.

## **You Reap What You Sow**

After Samuel departed, Saul retreated to Gibeah with what was left of his army—a mere six hundred men who were now getting ready to go into battle without God's favor, trembling with fear, and unarmed. Only Saul and Jonathan had weapons; the rest held farming tools. The Philistines maintained a total monopoly on iron. They had forbidden Israel from having blacksmiths, reducing God's people to dependence on them even for their agricultural survival. Even to sharpen a plowshare or sickle, they had to pay an extraordinary cost to their enemies. Total subjugation.

And then the Philistines moved to dominate the land. They divided their army into three raiding bands to pillage



the countryside at will, while a fourth force remained at Michmash—just a few miles from Saul’s camp in Gibeah.

It was a scene of utter humiliation. Saul could do nothing. The king who had disobeyed now stood powerless. His army was outnumbered, outgunned, demoralized, and surrounded. He had no weapons, no plan, and no word from the Lord. His sin had not only cost him the kingdom—it had brought shame and suffering upon the nation.

This was the bitter fruit of disobedience. The people were now reaping what their faithless, impatient king had sown. Just as Samuel had warned at Gilgal: *“If you and your king rebel against the command of the Lord, His hand will be against you.”* And so it was.

### **Making Excuses vs. Taking Responsibility**

One of the problems that men in particular, but people in general struggle with, is the problem of making excuses and not taking responsibility. It is a distinct sin of men and boys to make excuses for their faults, sins, and failures, so that it is always the fault of someone or something else about why they failed.

Saul, following the pattern laid down by Adam, blamed the people, the prophet, and the Philistines. He refused to take responsibility for his actions. So he lost the kingdom.

This is counterfeit masculinity. Counterfeit masculinity excels at making excuses. It's rooted in pride, not humble acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. When failure comes—and it will—pride demands an excuse. Pride must protect itself at all costs. But true masculinity accepts responsibility, even when it hurts, and is quick to give others the praise and recognition when things go right.

In 1 Samuel 13, Jonathan won a great victory over the Philistines at Geba. But who took the credit? Saul. He was quick to claim success for himself, but even quicker to dodge blame for his disobedience. That's counterfeit masculinity—taking glory for wins but shirking responsibility for losses.

Picture a young boy playing left field in a baseball game. He's out there, glove ready, and an easy pop fly comes his way. But he drops it. The game's on the line, and everyone's watching. When his parents ask him later, "What happened?" he says, "The sun was in my eyes." Or, "A bee was buzzing around me." Or, "The grass was slippery." Maybe he even says, "A fan yelled and distracted me." Church, that boy isn't just explaining a missed catch—

he's building a habit. and a habit of excuse-making that, if left unchecked, can lead him into grave spiritual danger.

This pattern of fending off a threat of wounded pride through excuse making is typical of males in sin, and yet it is thoroughly unmasculine. But a refusal to make excuses is right at the heart of a biblical masculinity.

In fact, boys need so much practice at this that they should be taught to accept responsibility even if the sun *was* in their eyes. Unfortunately, many boys learn the techniques of avoiding responsibility by their parents. Often times, when a boy does not make excuses it's because he doesn't need to – mom or dad do it for him. This is particularly the case when there have been consequences for the failure, whatever it is....

Parents, we need to hear this. Sometimes, we teach our kids to make excuses. When our son or daughter fails—at school, in sports, or at home—we jump in to “explain” it away. “The teacher was unfair.” “The coach didn't give her a chance.” We mean well, but what are we modeling? Our kids are watching and taking notes. If we make excuses for them, they'll learn to make excuses for themselves.

What he has learned from us is the practice of refusing to take responsibility for his actions, and to blame others. Our boys are learning how to reject masculinity.

Instead, we need to teach our boys—and all our children—to take responsibility. Imagine a father asking his son, “Why didn’t you finish your chores?” A good response, one that builds godly character, might be, “No excuse, Dad.” No blame-shifting. No spin. Just ownership. And fathers, when your son says that, accept it. Don’t push him to explain further or dig for excuses. Let him stand in that moment of responsibility. That’s how he grows into a man.

Now, let’s be clear: there’s a difference between making excuses and giving a truthful explanation. If a mom asks her son, “Why were you late for dinner?” it’s okay for him to say, “I got a flat tire” or “There was an accident on the highway.” That’s not an excuse; that’s an honest answer. But if he says, “It’s not my fault—the watch you gave me stopped working,” then we’ve got a problem. The difference is in the heart. An explanation seeks to inform; an excuse seeks to escape.

Church, here’s the good news: when we learn to take responsibility, something powerful happens. Authority naturally flows to those who own their actions. Think about it. Who do you trust more? The person who admits

their mistakes and learns from them, or the one who's always got an excuse? God entrusts leadership to those who are faithful in the small things (Luke 16:10). When boys learn to say, "I was wrong," they're learning what it means to be a young man. When young men learn it, they're becoming grown men. And when grown men live this way, they're reflecting the character of Jesus Christ.

Jesus never made excuses. When He went to the cross, He took responsibility—not for His own sins, because He had none, but for ours. He bore the weight of our failures, our pride, our excuses. And because He did, we're called to follow Him.<sup>1</sup>

Had Saul modeled this kind of leadership he could have retained his throne. But instead God gave it to a man after His own heart. Which brings us to Christ.

## **Christ, the Man After God's Own Heart**

Jesus Christ was a man after God's own Heart. The very mission of His life was to assume responsibility for sinners, and to shoulder the blame that rightly belonged to us. Even when the people had abandoned him, the Father had forsaken him, and the enemy advanced against him, Jesus perfectly submitted to His father's will and word, and

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Future Men*, 22-23.

offered up himself as the true sacrifice to God. He never made excuses—and more than that, He took full responsibility for sins that were not even His own. And as a result, all authority in heaven and earth was given to Him, and he acquired the favor of God for sinners. And by his obedience many sinners were righteous.

That's masculinity. That's leadership. That's godly responsibility.

So when we call you men to stop making excuses and start taking ownership, we're not just appealing to moral grit and discipline—we're calling you to follow Christ. A man who won't take responsibility for his own failures will never understand the weight of what Jesus did on the cross for him. But a man who learns to say, "It was my fault. I own that" and says it with humility and repentance—only then can he begin to grasp the grace of a Savior who took the blame for him.

And that, brothers, is the path to true masculinity and leadership. Not blame-shifting. Not protecting your image. That is Christlike leadership and masculinity. And it is something that is gravely missing in many men today.

## Point Two: It Is Better to Accept Defeat Than to Disobey God

The second point is this: *It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. It is better to be defeated in faith than to succeed in disobedience.*

Saul failed to grasp this. This was not a small mistake. It was a direct violation of God's word. Saul knew the command: wait until Samuel comes, and then act according to the word of the Lord. But because of the stress and anxiety from the pressure of the situation, Saul thought that disobedience was the only practical path to survival. He feared military defeat more than spiritual unfaithfulness. He thought that keeping control of the situation mattered more than keeping covenant with God.

But Saul's reasoning was worldly. His failure was not strategic—it was spiritual. He forgot what Deuteronomy 17 had said about kingship in Israel: the king's primary duty was not to secure victories, but to obey the Book of the Law. He was to read it daily, to fear the Lord, and to rule in humble submission to God.

Saul's job was obedience, not outcome. Yes, the people wanted a king to fight their battles—but salvation still belonged to the Lord. After his first military success, Saul

had rightly said, “The Lord has worked salvation in Israel” (1 Sam. 11:13). But when fear and pressure came, that confession vanished. He no longer trusted the Lord to save. He took matters into his own hands.

He should have waited. He should have obeyed. But he didn’t. And God rejected him as king.

This temptation is not unique to Saul. It stalks us today. When life presses in—when crisis looms, when outcomes seem uncertain—we are tempted to believe that the end justifies the means. We convince ourselves that compromise is necessary. That disobedience is excusable. That our good intentions somehow sanctify our sinful methods.

But they don’t.

In the kingdom of God, the ends never justify the means. God is never pleased with sin—even when it’s committed in pursuit of a “good cause.”

Take the man who desires a godly home. He wants his wife to respect him, his children to obey him. These are good desires. But if he pursues them through ungodly means—by being harsh with his wife, and yelling at his children and exasperating them, if he refuses to take responsibility for his sins and refuses to apologize —then he’s sabotaging



the very goal he claims to seek. You can't build a righteous household with unrighteous tools.

The same applies to wives. You cannot nag, manipulate, or belittle your husband and expect that such tactics will transform him into a godly leader. You're not helping him—you're dishonoring the Lord's command. You're not building up your home—you're tearing it down with your own hands.

Or consider the zealous Christian who wants to defend the truth. He fights for orthodoxy. He calls out false teaching. Good. But in doing so, he becomes bitter, harsh, slanderous, and cruel. His doctrine may be sound, but his spirit is carnal. He has abandoned the way of truth in his defense of truth.

When confronted, he says, "Now is not the time to be gentle. The stakes are too high." But the apostle who said, "Fight the good fight," also commanded, "Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11–12). The same Spirit who gives boldness also produces kindness and self-control. A warrior for truth who lacks the fruit of the Spirit is not to be admired—he is to be rebuked.

People of God, *The Lord does not bless disobedience.* The urgency of the moment does not excuse rebellion against His word. The pressure you feel does not permit you to sin against others. There will always be some “emergency” we can use to justify doing what God forbids. But God is not mocked. He does not bless disobedience, no matter how noble it may appear.

It is not your job to manage the outcome. That belongs to God. Your job is to trust and obey.

True faith waits. It does not panic. It does not manipulate. It does not excuse sin in the name of righteousness.

In the eyes of the world, patient obedience may look like weakness. Faith in God may look like failure to act. But in the eyes of heaven, our faith is the victory that overcomes the world: trusting God’s promises to save and keeping God’s commands, is life.

Those who possess this kind of faith, are like the Lord Jesus, who was a man after God’s own heart. Amen.