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1 Samuel 13

War with the Philistines

1Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,

Interestingly the King James is the only version I found that had vs one as I just read it. My next go to Bible Interpretation is the Berean Study Bible and it renders vs 1 this way.

1 Samuel 13:1 Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.

My understanding of this conflict among translations is that nowhere in the Hebrew text does it give Saul's age. So, to be true to the text the KJV simply reflects on the event of what happened in Saul's second year of the Kingship. All the other versions took the liberty of adding his age and even that spreads from 30 to 40 years of age. The fact is we do not know how old Saul was when these events took place.

2Saul chose him three thousand *men* of Israel; *whereof* two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and in mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent.

The first tactical decision of Saul was to select and train up 3,000 soldiers in preparation for Israel's next battle. In chapter 11 we saw Israel simply overwhelm a large force that had come against the remote city of Jabeshgilead. Israel was untrained in war and ill fitted with weapons relying on axes and forks. Their power was in their number and some tactical wisdom from Saul.

The only real mention of God in that chapter 11 was vs

6And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.

A threat went out to all of Israel from Saul and ostensibly from Samuel that all Israel needed to come to do battle. Israel responded with 300,000 people. In the two years that followed Saul selected young men and put them in his army. We are not told that they improved their weaponry nor what military training they received but as we read on neither seems to be well handled by Saul.

3And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear.

Saul had divided his force into two main battle groups. The larger of 2 thousand stayed with Saul and the other 1,000 were sent to serve under Saul's son Jonathan. Saul's intention was to use his

larger force as a defending force while Jonathan would use his smaller nimble force to attack an outpost of the Philistines.

As a note, Geba was within the boundaries set by God and given to Gad. The Philistines had taken that city as well as other land and Israel wanted it back.

Two things happened with the attack by Jonathan. Geba was retaken and of course the Philistines heard about it. At the same time Saul has the trumpet blown in all of Israel summoning again the people to prepare for battle.

An interesting note is that Israel has continued this path of a civilian military all these centuries later and can raise an army of a million soldiers in just a few days. The reason being in Israel all civilians serve in the enlisted reserves until they are 40 years old and officers until they are 45. This can be changed by the Knesset by a vote as to age of release.

Back to Saul, he knew he would stir up a hornet's nest by attacking the outpost of Geba and he would not be disappointed.

4And all Israel heard say *that* Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and *that* Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal.

Again, the Philistines were well manned and well armed. They had metal chariots and weapons of metal. As a warring nation they were well trained compared to Israel. The term that was attributed to the Philistines at the defeat of Geba was that Israel was an “abomination” before them.

5And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which *is* on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Bethaven.

The Philistine response was massive; thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen. The military was equipped with devices and animals that would simply run over another army. We are not told in general how many horses pulled the chariots, but history shows that for battle most were two horse chariots, one driver and one archer. So, at a minimum when the Philistines fielded 30 thousand chariots that would be 60 thousand horses.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=cqVU05shgvc>

As we know in the battle with Goliath the main method used for battle preparation was to amass your army in sight of your enemy. As with the Philistines they could put a well-equipped army in sight of Israel, striking fear in those they called an “abomination”.

6When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.

It is obvious but for clarity the term “strait” from Strong’s

Concordance means:

tsar: straits, distress

Transliteration: tsar

Definition: straits, distress

A hornet’s nest is probably a slight to what Israel saw on the field of battle from the Philistines. It was so frightening that many of those who were just farmers called out for battle hid themselves in caves, thickets, rocks, high places and pits.

7And *some of* the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

An interesting site that you can look up many campaigns of the Kings of Israel.

<https://ibiblemaps.com/saul-campaigns/>

Saul's Unlawful Sacrifice

8And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel *had appointed*: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him.

Apparently, Samuel had told Saul when they were planning this offensive against the Philistines that he, Samuel would come to Gilgal and offer a sacrifice and seek God's Wisdom in this endeavor. When Samuel was delayed, and we are not told why Saul committed an offense against God. That may have been the very reason God had Samuel delay was to show the heart of Saul before God and the people.

9And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

There was no misunderstanding as to who God appointed to bring offerings before Him. Any deviation was condemned by God and His Priests.

Numbers 8:17 But only you and your sons shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and what is inside the veil, and you are to perform that service. I am giving you the work of the priesthood as a gift, but any outsider who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death."

The only thing that saved Saul's life was that he did not enter into the Holy of Holies to make this offering. Still the offense was great and the punishment was significant.

Samuel Rebukes Saul

10And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him.

I am not worthy to judge any man and certainly not one chosen by God as with Saul, but as we read these next few verses see what sense you get as to what Saul is doing as he explains himself to Samuel.

11And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and *that* thou camest not within the days appointed, and *that* the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; 12Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

What is your take on Saul's defence?

13And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever.

When God sets up a kingdom such as that of the King, it generally is passed from father to son. We have seen that and will see that later. However, when a King steps beyond his God given authority God can and often does respond by removing the kingdom from that particular family. We see that with Saul and David. Again, between Solomon and his son.

14But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him *to be* captain over his people, because thou hast not kept *that* which the LORD commanded thee.

There was no discussion as to Saul's reasoning as to why he did what he did. It violated God's Law and was clearly an affront from this new king to the God of Creation.

15And Samuel arose, and gat him up from Gilgal unto Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people *that were* present with him, about six hundred men.

Not only was Saul to be un-throned but at this moment his selected troops had abandoned him. He had gone from 3 thousand soldiers to 600 soldiers. All the while the Philistines had mounted a military again of 60,000 horses and 30 thousand chariots along with another 6,000 calvary and a multitude of foot soldiers.

Philistines Raid Israel

16And Saul, and Jonathan his son, and the people *that were* present with them, abode in Gibeah of Benjamin: but the Philistines encamped in Michmash.

Gibeah and Michmash are just a short distance from each other. Michmash to the north of Gibeah where Saul and Jonathan and their 600 soldiers were.

17And the spoilers came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies: one company turned unto the way *that leadeth to Ophrah*, unto the land of Shual:

This term “spoilers” according to Strong’s Concordance is reference to “destroyers”. In other words, the Philistines sent out three raiding parties, each with a military mission that would weaken Israel.

The Philistines tactic was to attack smaller towns, the first was Ophrah located in Benjamin. Shual, means fox it was a district within Israel and as stated in Benjamine.

18And another company turned the way to Bethhoron: and another company turned to the way of the border that looketh to the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

“The Tactical Spread of the Philistines

- *Three prongs ensure coverage of Israel’s central hill country:*
 - *North (Ophrah/Shual) to cut off potential reinforcements from Ephraim.*
 - *West (Beth-horon) to control an ancient ascent toward the heartland (cf. [Joshua 10:10-11](#)).*
 - *East/Southeast (Valley of Zeboim) to guard the wilderness route toward the Jordan.”*

Israel without Weapons

19Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make *them* swords or spears:

Part of an invading armies tactics was to remove any ability of their enemy to craft or create weapons to be used against their adversary.

I would like to point out 2 thousand years later this same tactic is being used by China and Russia against the United States in particular and the west in general. To carry out much of crafting any type of computer guidance system for smart bombs, smart weapons in general requires access to what is called “rare earth minerals”. The US has gotten into the predicament of buying not only our rare earth minerals from our two biggest enemies but also our medicines. A tactical blunder than took years to surface and has placed the US at a tactical disadvantage that is being addressed now.

With Israel all the smelters had been closed or completely removed as the Philistines had conquered various towns that were developing this technology. Without smelters and trained black smiths no weapons could be formed to say nothing of not being able to repair plows for farming.

20But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock.

So, if an Israeli needed a plow sheer fixed he'd have to go to a Philistine forge and blacksmith to get his tools repaired. It is hard to believe that with all the conflict that trade was ongoing between farmers and blacksmiths.

Again, on that note, look at 2 thousand years later and who is America trading with? China and Russia. Trump is trying to get control of our deficit on rare earth elements by creating a military relationship with the Ukraine.

21Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads.

The Philistines had set a course to weaken Israel through technology. The Philistines had metallurgical technology that gave them bargaining power over Israel. The Philistines use what China uses today, planning out many years on how to overcome their adversary.

By controlling something your enemy needs to weaken them and they have to deal with you. In this case the Israelites didn't even have files to sharpen their own plow sheers and had to go to the Philistines. So, if you could not sharpen your farming instruments how were you going to make and maintain weapons of war?

22So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found.

The 600 soldiers Saul had, did not have a weapon among them. However, Saul and Jonathan each had a sword. The calculation then works out to be about 1 Israeli sword against 30,000 chariots.

One oversight by the Philistines and that is the God of Israel. The God of Israel with one man and a right heart.

God says:

James 5: 16Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

23And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the passage of Michmash.

To be continued:::::