

SAUL'S SIN IN GILGAL

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Chapter 13 of the Book of First Samuel records a great sin committed by Saul, King of Israel. He, being a Benjamite, offered a burnt offering to the Lord with his own hands. There are important lessons to learn from a study of the situation in which Saul committed this sin, and about the nature of the sin itself. These lessons need to be learned so that we do not repeat his error.

The circumstances of Saul's sin

In 1 Samuel 13:7-8, King Saul went to Gilgal, “and he tarried seven days, *according to the set time that Samuel had appointed.*” After Samuel first anointed Saul and gave him three signs (1 Sam 10:1-7), Samuel told Saul, “*And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do*” (1 Sam 10:8). These words of Samuel were first spoken more than two years before the events of chapter 13 (1 Sam 13:1). We are not told whether or not Samuel repeated these instructions, or whether or not this was a standard procedure that Saul was to follow when he needed God's guidance through Samuel. But it is clear that Samuel's instructions for Saul to wait for Samuel seven days in Gilgal applied to this situation. That is why it says Saul “tarried seven days, *according to the set time that Samuel had appointed.*” But after Saul waited seven days, “Samuel came not to Gilgal” (1 Sam 13:8). We are not told why Samuel was delayed. But when Samuel did not come, “the people were scattered” from king Saul (1 Sam 13:8). For fear of the Philistines, who had gathered 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and an innumerable company of men (1 Sam 13:5), the men of Israel were hiding and fleeing (1 Sam 13:6-7). Saul was struggling to hold the few men that he had together (he only had 3,000 at this time to begin with, 1 Sam 13:2). Apparently, he had convinced them to wait with him for Samuel, but when Samuel was late in coming, then Saul's men scattered (leaving him with only 600 men, 1 Sam 13:15; 14:2). In his desperate struggle to keep these few men with him, “Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. *And he offered the burnt offering.* And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the

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(continued)

burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And 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; therefore 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*" (1 Sam 13:9-12).

Why Saul's sacrifice was sinful

Saul's burnt offering was a great sin (1 Sam 13:13-14; 1 John 3:4). Only Levites were authorized to offer burnt offerings (Num 8; 2 Chr 23:18; 29:34; 31:2; Jer 33:18), and Saul was a Benjamite, not a Levite (1 Sam 9:1-2). God never explicitly stated that a Benjamite could not do what Saul did. But that is not the point. The point is that Saul did what was *unauthorized*. God's silence does not give authority. God's silence is restrictive, not permissive, and this situation with Saul in 1 Samuel 13 is a clear example of that (see also Lev 10:1-2; 1 Kgs 12:26-33; 13:33-34; Heb 7:13-14). One of the reasons Saul sinned was because he acted hastily. Proverbs 19:2 asserts that "*he that hastes with his feet sins.*" Saul did exactly that. Samuel was faithful and did come as he had said, but Saul did not wait quite long enough (not to suggest that even if Samuel had not come at all then Saul would have been justified in his actions, because he still would not have been). As soon as Saul offered the burnt offering, Samuel arrived (1 Sam 13:10). Saul had a variety of excuses to try to justify his actions, but the bottom line is that Saul leaned to his own understanding (Prov 3:5) and did evil that good may come (Rom 3:8). His willingness to do that was his basic problem. We must not ever be like that. The ends do not justify the means. Saul was not justified in doing something God had not authorized in order to keep his soldiers with him. He was not justified because Samuel's arrival in Gilgal was delayed. The threat from the Philistines did not justify him. Nothing did. The lesson to be learned here is that we must never violate *any* command of God at *any* time for *any* reason. Those who do will receive damnation (2 Thes 1:7-10) and that damnation will be just (Rom 3:8).