



Catalog No. 1637  
 1 Samuel 13:1-15  
 Twentieth Message  
 Brian Morgan  
 June 6th, 2010

# WAIT ON THE LORD

SERIES: THE CROSSING FATES

What are you after in life? If you ask the average person on the street, most say they just want to be happy, or they want their children to be happy. N.T. Wright, in his new book *After You Believe*, writes: “Forget happiness; you are called to a throne. How will you prepare for it? That is the question of virtue, Christian style.”<sup>1</sup> We might also ask: How does God prepare us for it? The answer, as we have observed in John Han-neman’s teaching on Paul’s New Covenant ministry, is that suffering is the tool God uses to perfect our faith.

**In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:6-7 ESV)**

For the next six weeks we will return to our studies in 1 Samuel. In the last series (1 Samuel 8-12) we traced the transition of Israel’s govern-ment from the spontaneous rule of charismatic judges to the centralized power of an earthly king. After Samuel’s three decades of faithful service, the elders asked him to step down and appoint a king as his successor: “Now appoint for us a king...that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (8:5, 20). To Samuel’s amazement, God accommodated their request. He gave them a king “just like all the nations have”: Saul, the privileged and physically impressive son of Kish.

Surprisingly, Saul begins his reign with an impressive military victory against the Ammonites, giving Israel high hopes for their new leader. After Saul’s great victory, Samuel gathered the people to Gilgal to address them one last time, and in his final speech as judge officially turns the kingdom over to Saul.

In this next act, chapters 13-15, God is going to put Saul through three tests in order to perfect his faith as God’s representative king. Why three? Peter Leithart observes that these tests are similar to mankind’s three “falls” in the early chapters of Genesis.<sup>2</sup>

Original Creation	Task	Human Relation	Sin in Genesis
Garden	Worship	Heavenly Father	Adam: Rebellion
Land/field	Work	Abel = Brother	Cain: Fratricide
World	Witness	Stranger	Sons of God: Intermarriage

The pattern above reveals God’s design for humanity to reign in life as a royal priesthood (Gen 1:26; Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:5) that is in right relation with God (worship), the community of faith (love), and the world (witness). Thus it seems logical that God would put his representative king through similar tests.

Saul’s Three Tasks	Human Relation	Saul’s Sins
Worship = Wait for Samuel	Samuel = Spiritual father	Usurps Samuel’s role in worship
Work = holy war	Jonathan = Son	Attempts to kill Jonathan, his son
Witness = Amalek under ban	Stranger = Sinners	Disobeys God’s command

Sadly, Saul will fail all three tests, which makes it clear that walk-ing by faith is not natural to us. Our faith doesn’t grow automatically; it must be worked out with dogged determination and perseverance, which Saul’s son, Jonathan, beautifully illustrates. These chapters will be

an excellent follow-up to our studies in the New Covenant, providing us living illustrations of true and false faith, fleshed out in the characters of king Saul and his son, Jonathan. If we will give serious attention to these texts, there will be no question as to whether we are growing in our faith, like Jonathan, or becoming stagnant under the guise of religion, like Saul.

## I. Instructions for the First Test of Faith: “Step out by faith...then wait” (1 Sam 10:5-8)

Saul’s first test of faith will be to confront the ominous Philistine pres-ence. Under Samuel’s leadership, the Israelites had driven the Philistines back to their coastal borders. Now, early in Saul’s reign, their threatening presence reappears in the hills around Bethel, and they had set up an outpost in Saul’s hometown, Gibeah. When Samuel first anointed Saul, he gave him three signs that were designed to give him the psychologi-cal support he needed to embrace his new identity by faith. The third sign was designed to provide him confidence and courage to defeat the Philistine threat.

**“After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim, where there is a gar- rison of the Philistines... Then the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you.” (10:5-7)**

Once the Spirit rushed upon Saul, he was to “do whatever his hand finds to do”—which meant to attack and destroy the Philistine outpost. Faith meant stepping out and trusting God’s Spirit to empower him to confront evil in his hometown.

**“Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.” (10:8)**

After Saul attacked the outpost, Samuel knew the Philistines would launch a counteroffensive. But Saul need not worry; he was to go down to Gilgal, where he was to wait seven days and then Samuel would come and give him his instructions for holy war. The king’s faith will now be tested by having to wait on the Lord and making worship a priority over the expediency of decision-making in the midst of a crisis. Worship is the most important thing we can do when in crisis, for without worship our minds are not renewed and we cannot think clearly (Rom 12:2). But sadly, worship is the one thing we normally forgo when we are in crisis.

## II. Philistine Hornets Stirred Up (1 Sam 13:1-7a)

### A. Saul’s Choice Men (13:1-2)

Saul was [30] years old when he began to reign, and he reigned [40] and two years over Israel. Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent. (1 Sam 13:1-2 ESV)

In the aftermath of his former victory, Saul exudes abundant confidence. Giving the appearance of faith, he surrounds himself with an elite corps of troops and, like Gideon, sends the rest home (Judg 7:8). He divides his troops into two companies. Jonathan commands the smaller unit at Gibeah and Saul maneuvers his larger force to higher ground at Michmash. “The location was strategic, since it was near a crucial pass on the Way to Ophrah, a road in Israel’s highlands that led to Geba.”<sup>3</sup>

But without prayer, Saul’s confidence is deadly, for it has blinded him to his earlier disobedience. He never carried out the prophet’s injunction to remove the Philistine administrative center immediately upon his return to his hometown in Gibeah. The command came with a promise: “The Spirit of the Lord will rush upon you...Do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you” (10:7). When Gideon was first called by God to judge his people, he faced a similar test to his faith. God commanded him to tear down the altar his father had built to Baal and build an altar to the Lord on top of the stronghold. Because Gideon was fearful of reprisals from his family and the townspeople, he did the deed at night when no one was watching. But at least he did it. Saul, on the other hand, does nothing.

#### B. Jonathan Initiates, Saul Reacts (13:3-4)

**Jonathan defeated the garrison [or “killed the governor”<sup>4</sup>] of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear.” And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. (13:3-4)**

But while Saul refuses to act, his son Jonathan, who is now deployed in Gibeah,<sup>5</sup> takes the initiative and assassinates the governor, trusting in the prophetic promise given to his father. When those who are in positions of responsibility refuse to act, God has others who rise up and courageously do what is right. What does that tell us about faith? Do you feel obligated to wait for those who are supposedly responsible to confront evil, or do you feel the freedom to confront injustice, oppression or evil independent of approval? When Jesus ministered in Galilee, evil was rampant everywhere and the Jewish authorities seemed powerless to liberate the oppressed, heal the sick, or drive out demons. Had Jesus waited for the approval to do good from the existing authorities, the demons would still be alive and well in Galilee. Likewise when Peter and John were commanded by the high priest and Jewish council “to speak no more to anyone in this name,” they replied: “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). This is especially important for us to remember in an election year. As Christians we want good government, which only happens when people of integrity are in office. But on the other hand, the church, armed with the gospel of light and love and truth, has more power to effect good for our communities than government ever can. So walk by faith and be free to do what is right, whether you have approval or not.

When Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost, it was like striking a hornet’s nest. The news traveled fast. Saul knew that the repercussions would be swift and furious from the Philistine camp, for Israel had made itself a stench to the Philistines; worse yet, because “the Philistines are the first to hear the news, Saul can now forget any idea of surprise.”<sup>6</sup> Saul is forced to make a national recall of the troops he just sent home. Such a reversal makes the king look indecisive, calling into question his ability to lead. We get the impression that there is a rift emerging between father and son.

In response to being upstaged by his son, Saul sends out a national press release taking credit for what his son did. To mask his feelings of insecurity, he summons his troops to battle in derogatory, demean-

ing tones: “Let the Hebrews hear.” “Hebrew” comes from the verbal root meaning “cross over.” The word was originally used by foreigners who considered Israel to be second-class citizens. Its sense resembles our modern expression “from the other side of the tracks.” Like an angry coach berating his team at halftime, Saul invokes a name designed “to arouse his people’s pride and fortify their will to resist.”<sup>7</sup> But as many of us have painfully experienced, being berated with derogatory names does little to truly motivate. Though the troops are called up, they lack the energy and dedication they displayed in chapter 11 when they were motivated by the “fear of the Lord” and “came out as one man” (11:7).

Faith, on the other hand, motivates people by believing in them. In April I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg speak to parents at Gunn High School. Dr. Ginsburg is a nationally recognized pediatrician specializing in adolescent medicine at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, and recently authored *A Parent’s Guide to Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Your Child Roots and Wings*. Speaking to a packed auditorium, he shared his passion working with “at risk” kids. Over the years he has listened to countless stories of abandonment, sexual abuse and drug addiction. As the adolescent pours out his or her painful, sometimes gut-wrenching story, he listens for that one thing that is remarkable about the child. This audience of upscale parents was stunned by the profound simplicity of his message: kids need someone to believe in them.

#### C. The Philistine Invasion Sends the Hebrews Fleeing! (13:5-7a)

**And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes [thickets is perhaps a better translation] and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. (13:5-7a)**

It would take great faith for the king to obey Samuel’s command to wait for him at Gilgal in the face of a Philistine invasion. From a military point of view it made no sense for his troops to abandon their superior positions in the hill country and go down into the depths of the Jordan Valley to spend a week in “church.” But faith often defies human logic. To Saul’s credit, he obeys, knowing he cannot operate a military campaign without prophetic sanction.

As soon as Saul’s troops vacate their outpost in Michmash, the Philistines quickly take possession of it and use it as their base of operations to launch an all out offensive. When the massive military machine comes into view, all Israel quakes in fear. Their fear is driven by what they “see.” The sheer numbers are overwhelming. The Philistines have as many chariots as Israel does soldiers; their troops are “like the sand of the seashore,” too numerous to count. When the people see that the army is “hard pressed,” their fear gives way to panic and panic turns into desertion. They flee en masse, like frightened animals, seeking shelter in any suitable place that provides cover—in caves, thickets, rocky crags, cisterns, even in tombs (an apt metaphor of what fear does to our humanity). Whenever we are governed by our “eye-gate,” we immediately lose the perspective of faith and are susceptible to paralyzing fear. This is why the most common command in Scripture is, “Do not fear.” Faith, on the other hand, is governed by the “ear-gate” (“Hear O Israel!” Deut 6:4), which leads us into the promises of God.

It seems Saul’s methods of motivation do little to raise the bar of courage. On the contrary, the people live up (or “down”) to the king’s expectations and embrace their name. When you call the people Hebrews, they become Hebrews indeed, “crossing over” the sacred boundary of the land, abandoning their people, their land and their God. The

mass desertion leaves Saul's remaining troops trembling. Under Saul's leadership we wonder if there is any faith left in Israel.

We would do well to remember that the law made provision for troop reduction before engaging in a conflict (Deut 20:1-9). Battles in Israel were never won by numbers, but by faith. Before each battle the priest took his stand before the assembled troops to remind them that this was not their battle, it was the Lord's, and the outcome was determined by faith. If for any reason a soldier had a divided heart and could not be single minded in his faith, he was encouraged to go home: "And the officers shall speak further to the people, and say, 'Is there any man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go back to his house, lest he make the heart of his fellows melt like his own.'" (Deut 20:8)

Desertion posed no threat to Jonathan's faith, for in the next scene he tells his armor bearer, "nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few" (14:6). If Saul had that perspective of faith, desertion would not have posed a threat to his security. So how will he do in the waiting game?

### III. The Waiting Game (1 Sam 13:7b-15)

#### A. The King Plays Priest (13:7b-9)

**Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. (13:7b-9)**

How difficult it must have been for Saul to wait patiently day after day while his entire kingdom seemed to be giving way beneath his feet. Fokkelman describes the scene: "Saul is suffering a great loss of tempo on the chessboard of military strategy and no 'ordinary' general would ever dare to accept such drastic sacrifices in time and strategic space. Imagine the position. A small and poorly armed army must sit idly by while a supreme invasion spreads over the land."<sup>8</sup>

The escalating number of desertions must have been unbearable to endure. The days wear on and on, and still there is no sign of the prophet. But as sunset approaches on the seventh day, Saul can wait no longer. Taking matters into his own hands, he crosses the holy boundary and offers the burnt offering without waiting for Samuel. The implications are staggering, as Peterson explains: "Saul intrudes into matters he has no business... His offering of the sacrifices was not a mere technical violation of an agreement; it is interpreted as a lack of trust in God, motivated by fear of losing his position and power... Saul has, in effect, just abdicated his throne. Instead of living in the fear of God, he lives in the fear of the Philistines."<sup>9</sup>

#### B. The Prophet Arrives (13:10-11)

**As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him [or "bless him"]. Samuel said, "What have you done?" (13:10-11)**

Typical of God's timing, the prophet suddenly appears at the eleventh hour. Saul is surprised and stunned by his appearance. Like a child caught with his hands in the cookie jar, Saul races to greet the prophet with his head held high. Samuel cuts through Saul's niceties with the accusatory: "What have you done?"

#### C. Supreme Logic (13:12)

**And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the Lord.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." (13:12)**

With no sense of guilt, Saul sets forth a watertight case of reasoned logic that covers every aspect of the situation. It is an exquisite masterpiece of deflecting blame and distancing himself from all responsibility—a technique we all have mastered from the time we were children. Saul details his thinking process before Samuel, beginning with the clarity of his observations ("When I saw"), to his thoughtful reflection ("I said"), culminating in his unusual action ("so I forced myself").

Like Adam when he was confronted with his sin, Saul shifts the blame to others, including God's representative. First, it was the people's desertion; second, Samuel's failure to arrive on schedule; and third, the Philistine advance. Yet, in the midst of this threefold pressure Saul prides himself that he held onto the critical tenet of Israel's faith: without God's favor there will be no victory. So what is a king to do? With his people about to be swallowed up and no prophet in sight to invoke God's blessings, the king became a priest, "So I forced myself. Once you truly understand the circumstances and pressure I was under, I'm sure you'll agree that what I did, though highly unusual, was my only option."

#### D. The Truth in Black and White (13:13-14)

**And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (13:13-14)**

Samuel could have taken Saul's logic apart line by line, but he doesn't. Instead, he brushes aside Saul's excuses and condemns him with just one word (in Hebrew): "You played the fool." For the prophet there was but one issue: Saul had disobeyed the Lord's command (four times he uses the verbal root). This is the one essential quality that God desires for his king. He is to be "a man after his own heart," one who completely surrenders to his will and keeps the commands of God at all costs, as both Jonathan and David exhibit. Fokkelman further explains: "Only by surrendering himself completely to God would he have been able to withstand the test and yet discover the charismatic answer to the emergency situation as disclosed only to the faithful, surpassing their knowledge."<sup>10</sup>

Because of his disobedience, the consequences are devastating. Saul learns that there will now be no possibility of an enduring dynasty; in fact, God has already chosen his replacement. Many scholars feel Samuel is too extreme in the consequences, or that Saul is an innocent victim of God. Elie Wiesel, perhaps the most influential writer to emerge from the Holocaust, finds Samuel a tad unreasonable: "Why was Samuel late? Why did he make his king and his people wait for such a long time? If he had an unexpected obligation to meet, a call from God for instance, why didn't he dispatch a messenger to inform the king of the emergency? Whatever the reason on either side, Samuel's reaction to Saul's alleged haste does seem a bit unreasonable."<sup>11</sup>

Walter Brueggemann, one of the most popular Old Testament commentators, goes further and champions Saul's cause. In his view, Saul "did not offer the sacrifice greedily, eagerly, or aggressively, or preempt the power of the old priesthood. Saul could hardly be more deferential." Samuel, on the other hand, is "peevish," "cunning" and "plays a daring, brutal game with Saul's faith," by passing judgment on Saul for commandments and promises he was never given. In the end, Saul is ousted because of a Lord-Samuel-David alliance, one that came into being "before he ever joins the struggle."<sup>12</sup> The bottom line is: Samuel is unprincipled, and God's character is called into question. Bill Arnold points out that John Wesley takes an altogether different view: "[Wesley] states that disobedience to an express command, though in a small matter, is actually a great provocation. And indeed, there is no little sin,

because there is not a little God to sin against. In general, what to [humans] seems a small offense, to him who knows the heart may appear a heinous crime.”<sup>13</sup>

#### E. The Parting of Ways (13:15)

And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. (13:15)

After the prophetic censure, Saul does not speak. He has no words of repentance or contrition. Samuel does not press the matter; he simply gets up and leaves without offering any of the sacrifices he came to make; and Saul goes back to work and numbers his troops as if nothing had happened. Leithart insists, “Every leader sins. But those leaders who refuse to accept responsibility for sin and turn from it will find that they have nothing left to lead.”<sup>14</sup> Eugene Peterson’s conclusion to the scene is gripping: “It will take a while for the collapse to become apparent, but we, the readers, know that from now on we will be reading the story of the dismantling of Saul as king—and that will have nothing to do with the Philistines; it will have been caused from within, by his defection from God. The inner world of obedience to God is far more “real” than the outer world of war.”<sup>15</sup>

Israel’s first king fails his crucial test of faith and with it loses his dynasty. Like Saul, how often do we fail to step out by faith and trust the Spirit of Christ within us to empower us to confront evil and bring justice and grace to a situation? And when someone finally has the courage to confront the circumstance by faith, how often do we join in, motivated by guilt, yet lack the spiritual sensitivity to address the situation? How often when the crisis comes are we driven by the tyranny of the urgent to forsake prayer and worship?

#### IV. Our King, the True Man

The key to growing in our faith is to take our eyes off of ourselves and fix our gaze on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith (Heb 12:2). Immediately after Jesus’ baptism the Spirit drove him into the wilderness, where he faced three similar tests of faith. The second test was perhaps the most severe:

**And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’” (Luke 4:5-8)**

The devil has authority to hand over worldly success to whomever he chooses, and offers the whole package to Jesus. It was the glory without the cross. But Jesus chose worship over pragmatism and learned to wait on God. During his ministry he told his disciples that he only spoke what he heard the Father speaking, and only did what he saw the Father doing. Because of his continuous dependence of God, he was never drawn by the tyranny of the urgent and had an uncanny ability to wait in the midst of a crisis. When Jesus heard that Lazarus, the one whom he loved, was sick, “he stayed two days longer in the place where he was” in order that God would be glorified through it (John 11:3-6). During his darkest hour in Gethsemane, when everyone was deserting him, he remained faithful through torturous bloody sweat, and drew strength, waiting on the Lord. On the cross he endured three excruciating hours while hell unleashed its full arsenal upon his soul. In the waiting his faith was perfected, for he was confident that God would vindicate him.

I have set the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.  
Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;  
my flesh also dwells secure.  
For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,  
or let your holy one see corruption.  
You will make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Ps 16:8-11)

Jesus learned to wait on God, to trust in God fully. He did not fail, and because he did not fail, we are assured that by faith we will reign with him. Amen.

1. N. T. Wright, *After You Believe* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 76.
2. Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2003), 79-81.
3. Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 148.
4. On the meaning of “garrison,” Fokkelman writes, “Literally the ‘posted one’. The word can mean three things: (1) A governor or prefect, (2) a military post, (3) a column or pillar... The destruction of such a symbol of the occupying power is basically substantially the same as killing a representative; in both cases the enemy is challenged and compelled to act.” J. P. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 28.
5. “Regarding Geba’s frequent textual confusion with Gibeah, J. M. Miller (1975: 165) proposed that the two names are linguistic variants of the same toponym.” P. Arnold, “Geba,” *ABD* 2:921.
6. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 29.
7. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 30.
8. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 35.
9. Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (WBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 79.
10. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 42.
11. Elie Wiesel, *Wise Men and Their Tales: Portraits of Biblical, Talmudic, and Hasidic Masters* (New York: Schocken, 2003), 167.
12. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 99-102.
13. Bill T. Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 203.
14. Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 83.
15. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*, 79.

© 2010 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino