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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2273 ~ Saul is Impatient.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

Under the leadership of Israel's first king Saul, the Israelites won their first great battle victory to protect a town from being captured by their enemies. The people, King Saul and God's prophet Samuel, went to one of Israel's meeting places at Gilgal to thank the Lord, confirm Saul as Israel's new king and celebrate their victory.

It was at this gathering that Samuel gave his farewell speech. Now that a king had been appointed, Samuel could step down from political and military leadership, but not spiritual leadership. Samuel had been Israel's leader since he was a youth. The first thing Samuel said in his speech was to check that the people had no complaints against him. He'd never used his leadership position for personal gain and had always treated everyone justly and fairly. When the people declared that Samuel was innocent of any wrongdoing, he told them that the Lord would be witness against them if they later tried to bring a charge against him. This shows from experience just how little faith Samuel put in the people behaving correctly.

Samuel repeated the main conditions of Israel's covenant relationship with God. If they feared Him, served and obeyed Him, they would be rewarded. But if not, they'd be punished. Even though the people had asked for a king for the wrong reasons, God would still grant them the blessings of the covenant they had made as long as they and their new king continued to obey Him.

At the end of Samuel's speech, he promised to continue to be Israel's spiritual leader and God's prophet by continuing to pray to God on behalf of the people and speaking to the people on God's behalf. He said that it would be a sin for him not to do so. God is sovereign but He gives people a choice: to obey or not to obey. Although the Israelites had made many bad choices along the way, when they repented, God in His mercy kept giving them new chances. And He does the same for us.

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Over time, King Saul become more and more distant from God's ways and no longer remained as a humble man under God's authority. Despite this, Saul's first son, Jonathan, showed himself as a man of faith. It was Jonathan who started the battle of Michmash written in Chapter 13 of 1st Samuel in the Bible. When Jonathan attacked the enemy Philistine camp there, the other Philistines heard about it and amassed a huge army to come against Israel. The Philistines were guilty of stealing more and more of Israel's land and by this time they were occupying the south-eastern part of Israel's Promised Land and ready to take more.

Saul summoned his troops to come to him at Gilgal. But when the soldiers of Israel heard that Saul had attacked the Philistines, many didn't want to war with the Philistines so not many men responded to the call. The Israelite soldiers were at a severe disadvantage against the Philistines, because they had only bows and slingshots while the Philistines had swords and spears. While the Philistines controlled the region, they didn't allow any blacksmiths in Israel. This meant that when the Israelites wanted to have their farming equipment sharpened, they had to go to the Philistines and pay them for their services. On the day of the Mishmash battle, only Saul and Jonathan had swords and spears but none of their men.

Saul waited at Gilgal for seven days as Samuel had instructed him so that Samuel could sacrifice to the Lord and pray on behalf of the people about the battle ahead. Each day when the soldiers in Saul's army heard more about the growing size of the Philistine army coming against them, they became more and more frightened, finally deserting Saul in droves for the safety of the hills and caves. In the end, Saul was left with only 600 troops. The soldiers truly had a lack of faith in their God. They seemed to have forgotten what God did for Gideon and his 300 soldiers.

When Samuel didn't arrive on time, Saul grew more desperate. The Philistines were bringing in their troops nearby and Saul's remaining men realised just how outnumbered they were, reasoning that they couldn't possibly win against such odds. So Saul took matters into his own hands and performed the priest's sacrifice on Samuel's behalf. Saul had been trying to buy God's favour by offering the sacrifice himself, but this wasn't necessary, as a simple prayer would have been sufficient. In God's sight, obedience is far more important than offering a sacrifice.

Just when Saul was finishing the sacrifice, Samuel arrived. Samuel asked Saul why he had done this forbidden thing in God's sight. Despite his earlier fears, Saul was now an arrogant man who thought he could perform Samuel's priestly role, which before God, he couldn't. Saul's sacrifice didn't please God or Samuel at all. Samuel was God's prophet and Saul had set himself up as Samuel's equal. By conducting the priest's sacrifice, Saul hadn't shown God or Samuel respect; he'd forgotten that he was a king under God's authority, and now thought he was God's equal too.

Samuel told Saul that he'd done a foolish thing and as a result, God would find someone else who would obey Him as king instead of Saul and his descendants. Then Samuel left. Saul was now in a worse situation than before. He moved his men eastward, closer to Michmash in central Israel, where the Philistines were camped.

Some days after this, Saul's son, Jonathan, left Saul's camp without telling him what he was going to do. Jonathan went with his servant to an outpost of the Philistines that had just been established on the northern side of a narrow mountain pass near Michmash. Jonathan believed that the Lord would give him victory over the Philistines and suggest a way by which the Lord might show them what to do.

Jonathan and his servant showed themselves to the Philistine warriors at the top of the pass and the Philistines told them to come up. This was the sign to proceed that Jonathan was looking for. So he and his servant confidently climbed up the cliff on their hands and knees and then attacked the Philistines waiting there. They killed about twenty of them. The Lord also sent an earthquake, which helped to cause all the other Philistines to panic and run away.

Saul's men on watch saw the distant Philistines running away in confusion and told Saul. Saul then found that Jonathan and his servant were missing from his troops. Because the Philistines were fighting each other in their confusion, Saul decided he should attack them straight away. He did then another foolish thing, which showed how unfit he was to be the king of Israel. He ordered his troops not to eat any food that day and put a death curse on anyone who did. Forcing his men to fast was just another attempt to buy favour with God. He wanted revenge on his enemies; his attitude showed that he wasn't fighting for the Lord or for Israel, but for his own honour and glory.

The Israelites who'd deserted Saul saw what was happening and come out of their hiding places to help. But Jonathan hadn't heard about Saul's fasting curse. While he was chasing the Philistines through a forest, where there was plenty of honey, he stopped to eat some. As a result, his strength was renewed. But as the other men didn't eat anything, by the end of the day, they were exhausted. Then a man told Jonathan about Saul's curse and Jonathan thought his father had been foolish. It meant that his men hadn't been able to kill as many of the enemy soldiers as they would have done if they'd eaten. Even so, the Lord had rescued Israel that day and it was God's victory, not Saul's.

After sunset when everyone had eaten, Saul thought that they should go on and attack the Philistines again during the night. Ahijah, the chief priest and the grandson of Eli's son Phinehas, was there with the troops and said that they should ask the Lord first. However, the Lord didn't answer Ahijah's question on Saul's behalf. Saul found out that God wasn't answering because Jonathan was under Saul's curse for having eaten some honey. Saul said he would kill Jonathan as he'd threatened to do in his curse. But God remained displeased with Saul's proud and wilful attitude. Saul was making plans and taking oaths according to his own impulses and not according to God's will or direction.

The people protected Jonathan and wouldn't allow Saul to kill him. They recognised that God had used Jonathan to give Israel a great victory that day. With both God and his men against him, Saul's leadership had proven ineffective that day. God had accomplished His purposes without him. Instead of continuing their attack on the Philistines, the Israelites all went home while the remaining Philistines went back to their own territory. Even though Saul was a flawed leader, God still used him to deliver the Israelites from their enemies.

What can we learn from this story of trouble for Israel? Saul showed signs of being impatient a number of times, when he should have been praying and asking God what to do. This quote is typical of many people: "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry but God isn't." God doesn't bow to our nervous haste or embrace the methods of our technology age. The person who would know God must give time to wait on Him.

The best example we have of a person who lived completely opposite to Saul's impatience is seen by the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's own precious Son. When Jesus was about 30 years of age and in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, a 3rd temptation is recorded in the Bible: Satan took Jesus to a place where together, they could see all the nations of the world. Originally Adam and Eve had been placed in charge of the world but Satan had won this off them when they disobeyed God and sinned. From that time on and to our present day, Satan has control over God's world.

During the 3rd temptation, Satan offered all the nations of the world to Jesus to rule immediately for a seemingly small price: Jesus just had to 1st bow down and worship Satan. If Jesus had done this, He would have lost His soul to sinfulness and become unfit to be the Saviour of the world. But Jesus knew that one day long after His ministry on earth was finished, He'd rule the entire universe for eternity. So he refused Satan's offer at the time. Jesus wasn't impatient. He knew the plan that His Heavenly Father had for Him and He followed it patiently without trying to take any shortcuts.

The secret of a Christian's spiritual blessing is simply trusting and obeying the Lord in all things. Psalm 119, Verse 2, says: "Happy are those who follow the Lord's commands, who obey Him with all their heart."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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