

Introduction: How Long Was Saul King?

1 Samuel 13:1 is a curious verse.

I don't spend a whole lot of time on chronology,
but this one is one of the most famous problems of chronology in the whole Bible.

In Acts 13:21 Paul says that Israel “asked for a king,
and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.”
But neither the Hebrew nor the Septuagint text of 1 Samuel 13 has anything more than “2 years.”
Many think that the author originally wrote down how old Saul was when he became king,
but the number has dropped out.
Two years is not sufficient for all of the events of 1 Samuel 13-31,
so many scholars agree that it must originally have been “something and two years.”
Many argue that Saul reigned for 42 years.

Many translation have tried to resolve the dilemma:
They make up an age for Saul!
And they make up a length of his reign!
But none are satisfactory.

I would prefer to say that there is nothing wrong with the text at all!
Literally it reads “Saul was the son of a year when he began to reign,
and he reigned two years over Israel.”
Saul had received a new identity from Samuel.
1 Samuel 10:9 says that “God gave him another heart.”
If 1 Samuel is talking about Saul's spiritual identity,
then the new Saul *was* in his first year when he began to reign,
and he appears to have reigned about two years,
before apostatizing.
In this scenario, there is no problem with the text at all!
Granted, it would be highly unusual,
since I cannot find any other instance where a king is given a spiritual birthday,
but then again, there is no other instance
where a king is given such an explicit spiritual birth!

I think this makes sense of the text that God has given us!

But it still doesn't help us with Paul's claim in Acts 13:21.

Why does Paul say that “God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin,
for forty years.”

For starters, you should understand that this is the chapter where Luke first calls him Paul.
Throughout chapter 13 Luke refers to him as Saul of Tarsus.

Saul is named four times, and in verse 9 we are told that Saul was also called Paul.
Then “Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, . . . said . . .”
And then after going on to Antioch in Pisidia, *Paul* preaches this sermon about Saul.

Saul of Tarsus was of the tribe of Benjamin.
He was some sort of relation to King Saul.
And *certainly* he was named after King Saul.

It is always important to pay attention to biblical names.
I neglected to do that last week.
Saul defeated Nahash the Ammonite.
Do you know what “Nahash” means?
Serpent.
King Saul has crushed the head of the serpent!

And yet, King Saul apostatized.
He had a high calling.
He was called by God to be his servant in going before the people of God,
and deliver them from their enemies.
Now his namesake has been called to be God’s servant in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles.
I said last week that the narrative of Saul of Gibeah in Benjamin
is either the story of the redemption of Benjamin,
or a bitter irony as Benjamin goes from bad to worse.

Do you think that Saul of Tarsus was unaware of this bitter irony?
The story of the redemption of Benjamin is found in Saul of Tarsus.
When Saul of Tarsus says in Philippians 3 that he is of the tribe of Benjamin,
and comments in verse 13,
“Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus,”
I cannot imagine that he was ignorant of his namesake’s failure to press on.

But I digress!
Why does Paul say that “God gave them Saul...for forty years”?
There is nothing in the OT that suggests that Saul reigned for 40 years.
But Jewish tradition said that he had reigned for 40 years.
Josephus recounts this tradition in his Jewish Antiquities.

Is there anything else that can help us?
1 Samuel 21-22 tells us that while David is fleeing from Saul,
Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, is the high priest.
So Ahijah would appear to have died,
and his younger brother has succeeded him as priest.
Saul then slaughters the priests,

and only Abiathar the son of Ahimelech survives.
Abiathar is a grown man.
Since Ahijah could not have been much older than 30 in 1 Samuel 14,
it would appear that Saul reigned for about a generation.

	Eli	
	Phineas	
	Ahitub	Ichabod
Ahijah	Ahimelech	(Samuel is same generation as Ahitub)
	Abiathar	(Saul is same generation as Ahijah & Ahimelech)
		(David is same generation as Abiathar)

In other words, the Jewish tradition is probably pretty accurate.
Paul probably uses the standard 40 years
as a way of saying that Saul reigned for a generation.
God gave them Saul . . . for a generation.
The text of Samuel does not tell us how long Saul reigned,
so the Jews used the standard number: 40–
because that is the length of a generation.

But in the absence of an inspired declaration in the OT,
Paul, like Jewish writers before him,
sticks with the safe number: 40—which in the light of the OT ambiguity,
no one would take as an exact number,
but it is generally accurate.

There are some who insist that every number in the Bible is precise,
and so construct elaborate chronologies.

I've never been convinced by that approach.

I think that round numbers are quite common—and maybe even symbolic numbers on occasion!

1. Saul Prepares for Battle against the Philistines (13:2-23)

*Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel,
² 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. ³ Jonathan defeated the garrison 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." ⁴ 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.*

*⁵ 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. ⁶ 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 and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns,
⁷ and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at*

Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.

⁸ He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. ⁹ So Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰ As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. ¹¹ Samuel said, “What have you done?” 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, ¹² 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 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. ¹⁴ 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.” 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. ¹⁶ And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. ¹⁷ And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual; ¹⁸ another company turned toward Beth-horon; and another company turned toward the border that looks down on the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.

Chapters 13-14 all recount Saul’s first battle against the Philistines.

Saul has an army of 3,000—

1,000 with Jonathan in Gibeah,

and 2,000 in Michmash a little ways north, but still in Benjamin.

Jonathan defeats the Philistine garrison at Geba,

which provokes the Philistines to send their army

(v4—“Israel had become a stench to the Philistines).

And so Saul summons all Israel to Gilgal,

which is by the Jordan River, a safe distance from the Philistines.

Meanwhile, the Philistines mustered their army and came to Michmash with 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and troops like the sand of the seashore.

30,000 chariots is unheard of.

Sisera had 900 chariots—and that was considered quite a large number.

The Syrians had 700 chariots and 40,000 horsemen in 2 Sam 10:18

(a more normal ratio)

Solomon had 1400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen in 1 Kings 10:26.

So “30,000 chariots” may be used as a symbolic number to say – “way too many”!

But when this large Philistine army invades,

the people of Israel hide in caves and rocks—even tombs and cisterns,

and many crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.
But Saul was still at Gilgal waiting for Samuel.
And he waits for seven days, as Samuel apparently had told him to wait.
But Samuel does not come,
and the people were beginning to scatter.
Why does Samuel delay?
This is Saul's first test since becoming king.
Will he trust that God will go before him?
Or will he seek to usurp God's place?
Remember Gideon?
Gideon had been given a reduced army—
will Saul have the courage to stay the course?!

*So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings."
And he offered the burnt offering.
And as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold Samuel came.*

In other words, as far as we can tell, the peace offering was never offered!
Kings had no business offering sacrifices.
Saul had usurped priestly authority,
and Samuel rebukes him.

*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.*

Already before his first battle against the Philistines,
Saul has failed.
Already God is looking for a new king—a king after his own heart.

But Saul is still king (the theme of the next 17 chapters will be "but *Saul is still king*").
And so the people go up after him against the Philistines—
but it is a reduced army: only 600 of his former 3,000 (one-fifth)
are still following him.

And three companies of the Philistines were sent out from Michmash to test the Israelite defenses.
Verses 19-22 are a parenthesis of sorts, commenting on Israel's lack of swords and spears.

¹⁹ *Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said,
"Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears."* ²⁰ *But every one of the Israelites went down to*

the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, ²¹ and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. ²² So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them. ²³ And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

We have seen before that the story of Joshua and Judges was set against the backdrop of the Late Bronze Age Collapse –
a period when all the major empires of the ancient world were collapsing.

Now – at the end of the 11th century, the new age – the age of iron – is beginning.

And the Philistines are guarding the new technology carefully.

Israel is outmanned – and outgunned!

How can a puny army of 600 ill-equipped soldiers fight off a force of thousands of chariots and 6,000 horsemen—not to mention several thousand foot soldiers?

Why do I go into such detail in retelling the stories of Saul and Jonathan?

I do this because I am a blacksmith.

These stories are the spiritual iron that compose the word of God –
which Paul tells us is the sword of the Spirit.

Too often the church is left ill-equipped to fight our spiritual foes.

Watch what happens next.

Israel has two swords – one for Saul, one for Jonathan.

How can a puny army of 600 ill-equipped soldiers fight off a mighty army?

Only through the sword of the Spirit wielded by faith!

This is what we do in our teaching – whether in Shepherding Groups, bible studies, preaching,
or in the day-to-day discipleship of conversation together!

If you need a spiritual blacksmith to help you sharpen your knowledge of the scriptures –
and how to put that sword to use –
let's talk!

2. Jonathan Goes Up against the Philistines (14:1-15)

14 One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armor, “Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side.” But he did not tell his father. ² Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men, ³ including Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. ⁴ Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. ⁵ The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba.

Notice that in verse 3 we are told that the priest is Ahijah – the son of Ahitub – Ichabod’s brother.
Saul is a rejected king.

Saul is turning away from Samuel – turning away from the word of the LORD –
so now Saul is relying on a rejected priest.

(Remember that the LORD had told Eli that his line would come to an end).

⁶ Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.” ⁷ And his armor-bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul.” ⁸ Then Jonathan said, “Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. ⁹ If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you,’ then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. ¹⁰ But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us.” ¹¹ So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, “Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.” ¹² And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer and said, “Come up to us, and we will show you a thing.” And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.” ¹³ Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. ¹⁴ And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow’s length in an acre of land. ¹⁵ And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic.

But then Jonathan, without the knowledge of his father,
went up with his armor-bearer to the Philistine garrison at Michmash.

Jonathan is a faithful man.

He probably would have been a very good king.

Jonathan himself gives us the rationale for his going up alone:

*It may be that the LORD will work for us,
for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.*

He has no particular promise from the LORD,
but he trusts in the LORD’s might to deliver.

And so he looks for opportunities to wield his sword!

But Jonathan says, if they invite us up,
then we will take it as a sign from God that he will give them into our hands.

And so when the Philistines invite him up,

Jonathan climbs up the cliff and quickly kills twenty of them,
throwing the whole Philistine camp into panic.

Just as Jonathan was the one who had won the first victory in 13:3,
so also Jonathan is the one who instigates the victory in chapter 14 as well!

You often hear people say that if you say “maybe” that’s not really faith.

Scripture says the opposite.

When you don’t have a thus saith the LORD – then you *don’t know* what God will do.

Faith does not dictate to God what God must do.

Faith believes God’s promises – and so *trusts* that he *will act* to deliver his people – who knows what God will do to save his people from their enemies!!?

3. Saul and the Defeat of the Philistines (14:16-23)

¹⁶ And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing here and there. ¹⁷ Then Saul said to the people who were with him, “Count and see who has gone from us.” And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. ¹⁸ So Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ark of God here.” For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel. ¹⁹ Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.” ²⁰ Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine’s sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. ²¹ Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. ²² Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle. ²³ So the LORD saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.

Meanwhile, the watchmen of Saul see the Philistines dispersing,
and then Saul notices that Jonathan is missing!

So in 14:18 Saul said “bring the ark of God here.”

Saul wants to inquire of the LORD,
because he is in doubt.

But as the priest, Ahijah, is inquiring of the LORD,
the disorder and tumult in the camp of the Philistines is increasing.

God never speaks through Ahijah.

Saul realizes that God is speaking loud and clear in the camp of the Philistines!

And so he says, “withdraw your hand.”

I can see what God is saying!

Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle.

The Philistines in their confusion start slaying each other.

Verse 21 explains why.

There were Hebrews who had joined the Philistines,
but now turn against them and fight with Israel.

The Philistines are having a hard time figuring out who is on what side.

When people who are wearing your insignia are fighting against you,
how do you know who your friends are?

Likewise when all the men of Israel

*who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim
heard that the Philistines were fleeing,
they too followed hard after them in the battle.
So the LORD saved Israel that day.*

4. Saul's Oath and the Ransom of Jonathan (14:24-46)

²⁴ And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food. ²⁵ Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. ²⁶ And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. ²⁷ But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. ²⁸ Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint. ²⁹ Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰ How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great."

³¹ They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint.

³² The people pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground. And the people ate them with the blood. ³³ Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." ³⁴ And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there. ³⁵ And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD.

³⁶ Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." ³⁷ And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day. ³⁸ And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today.

³⁹ For as the LORD lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But there was not a man among all the people who answered him. ⁴⁰ Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." ⁴¹ Therefore Saul said, "O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. ⁴² Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken.

⁴³ Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die." ⁴⁴ And Saul said, "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan." ⁴⁵ Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one

hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.” So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. ⁴⁶ Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

But that is not the end of the story.

Jonathan is being portrayed as the true deliverer of Israel,
while Saul is the troubler of Israel.

In order to inspire his troops, Saul had said,

cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies.

Saul has a bad habit of turning deliverance into difficulty...

Saul was not especially a brilliant tactician!

So when they find some honey in the forest,
no one will eat it.

But Jonathan, who had not heard his father’s oath, ate the honey,
and his eyes brightened.

When he is informed of the curse,
his response reveals his disdain for his father’s tactics!

My father has troubled the land!

That trouble is then revealed as evening falls.

The people were faint with hunger,
and so they *pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves
and slaughtered them on the ground.*

And the people ate them with the blood.

This was a *big no-no*.

Leviticus repeatedly warns against eating meat with the blood.

And when they report this to Saul,
he is faithful to God’s word and rebukes the people.

And they repent and bring the meat to Saul at Aijalon,
on the border of the land controlled by the Philistines,
and there Saul builds his first altar.

Then Saul says, let’s continue the attack during the night.

But the priest said, *Let us draw near to God here.*

And so Saul inquired of God,
and God did not answer.

Saul realizes that this means that there is a problem,
so he calls all the leaders together to figure out who has sinned.

Saul ominously swears an oath before Yahweh that even if Jonathan is the one at fault,
the one at fault shall surely die.

And of course, the lot falls to Jonathan,
and Jonathan confesses what he did and declares, *Here I am; I will die.*
Saul had sworn an oath “as Yahweh lives” and so he must fulfill his oath!
But the people, with greater wisdom than their king,
recognized that Saul’s original oath was foolish,
and they cancel the oath of their king.

And the people say, *As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground,
for he has worked with God this day.*

The people could see the hand of God.
They recognized that God had declared Saul’s oath and curse invalid,
by using Jonathan as his instrument to deliver Israel.
So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die.

But the consequence of this was that Saul was not able to pursue the Philistines any further.
Saul’s foolish oath nearly cost Jonathan his life.
But the time that it took for the people to ransom Jonathan
resulted in Saul’s failure to pursue the Philistines.

5. Saul’s Victories (14:47-52)

⁴⁷ *When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them.* ⁴⁸ *And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them.*

⁴⁹ *Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger Michal.* ⁵⁰ *And the name of Saul’s wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul’s uncle.* ⁵¹ *Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.*

⁵² *There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.*

Verses 47-52 tell us that Saul continued to have great success against his enemies,
and he routed them on every side.

He had three sons and two daughters,
and the commander of his army was his cousin Abner (we’ll hear more about him later!).

But while he had success against the Philistines,
he did not totally defeat them.

There was hard fighting all his days.

Already in the first two years of Saul’s reign God has told him that his will be a limited regency.

He is now the custodial king—
simply holding the throne for the man after God’s own heart.
If Saul had accepted that role,

who knows what he might have accomplished.

But Saul was not content with the role that God gave him.

As we'll see, Jonathan will be content.

He knows that he will never be king,

and he is content, because he is a true Israelite:

he wants what God wants.

I like the way Dale Ralph Davis speaks of the seeming tragedy of Jonathan's life:

"Maybe a tragic life isn't tragic if it's lived in fidelity

to what Christ asks of us in the circumstances he gives us." (p148)

Saul of Tarsus, the namesake and tribesman of Israel's first king,

was content to be but the messenger and herald of David's great son.

Indeed, Benjamin would be the one tribe outside of Judah that would remain loyal to David.

Jesus is the king after God's own heart,

who has established his throne in the heavens.

We should be content with the portion that he gives us,

even serving as his lowly messengers and servants.

And yet, to those who humbly submit to his lordship,

he gives the right to become children of God!

We would have been happy to be servants in Jesus' house,

but he has called us brothers,

and had made us sons of God, partakers in his own inheritance!