

Some scholarly thoughts on Samuel's confrontation with Saul at 1 Samuel 13.11-15

Recall 1 Samuel 10.8:

And you shall go down to Gilgal ahead of me; then I will come down to you to present burnt offerings and offer sacrifices of well-being. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do."

"Samuel cites no commandment that has been broken, nor can we construe one. **The commandment that seems to have been broken is, 'Thou shalt not violate Samuel's authority.'**" (Walter Brueggemann, 100)

"**His real obligation is simply to do nothing without Samuel**, without Samuel's 'showing him what to do' (10.8). Samuel is late. At the mythic level he is late because he is dead. He has become, as we say, 'the late Samuel.' He has completed his life as a judge (ch. 7). He has lived on to make a king, and he has made a king. He has delivered his valedictory. Now it is time for the king to be a king, to 'do whatever he sees fit, since God is with him.' (10.7). Which is what Saul does in 13.8-12. He judges the situation and takes action. He acts as a king acts, but his doing so brings Samuel back quick (as opposed to dead)" (David Jobling, 86)

"What the author of Samuel conveys by this striking episode is **how religion, even when sincerely believed, can be instrumentalized in power struggles** and how political rivals can shed moral qualms about treating the sacred as just another weapon to be opportunistically deployed in a competitive struggle for prestige and power." (Halbertal and Holmes, 27)

Reviewing various views on "what Saul did wrong," Keith Bodner, 125 concludes "**the central judgment of chap. 13 falls on kingship as an institution.**" (emphasis in original)

"Just as Samuel is unable to form a hereditary judgeship, so Saul does not have the prospect of an enduring royal house—a certainty that is ironically underscored by means of the early introduction of Jonathan in this very chapter without any genealogical reference to his father. The point here, in a nutshell, is that **Saul will not be allowed to choose his successor...**" (Keith Bodner, 125-26, emphasis in original)

"The narrative casually ignores the fact that many years have passed since Saul's selection as king and the event in ch. 13 and does nothing to decrease the **gravity of Saul's failure to obey Samuel's last instruction from 10.8.**" (Uriah Kim, 74)

"**Do vv. 13-14 represent a legitimate prophetic pronouncement expressing Yahweh's will**, or are they instead Samuel's warning to Saul about his possible future divine rejection in light of his failure to obey the earlier directions from 10.8?" (Diana Edelman, 79)

Saul's "speech is characterized by completeness and clarity...Saul here appears as someone who is soundly explaining his motives (in v. 11) and his decision-making (in v. 12) and has nothing to hide...Samuel may think that Saul has failed the test, but the narrator betrays no trace of any attitude of judgment or cheap superiority over the doomed king." (JP Fokkelman, 38)

"It is not difficult to see Samuel's subsequent accusation of the king as a trumped-up charge to keep Saul on the defensive and under his prophetic control..." 13:1-15 "are thus **about Samuel's present failure as prophet as well as Saul's future failures as king.**" (Robert Polzin, 129, 131)

"The audience might be expected to feel sympathy were it not for what the narrative has already established regarding the king's striking fearfulness. **Saul's character flaw**, it appears, is not so much the wrongdoing, but a habit of the heart that leads to the wrongdoing." (Paul Borgman, 24)