

Out Ahead of God

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[0 : 00] Take your Bibles tonight. You can open them to 1 Samuel.

! I'm not going to read it on the front end. I'm going to wait and just kind of read it as we go along, rather than read it and then reread it. But I do want to introduce it, kind of set it up here.

Even though Saul, at this point, is now firmly established as the king of Israel. All right, he's their first king, Israel's first king, the king they always wanted, the king like every other nation.

And even though that is now a done deal, I mean, he's been anointed basically three times, or officially called king three times. It's kind of each time it's been more and more public.

It started with a private anointing, and then more public anointing, and then thirdly, his full inauguration as king. All right, so even though that is done, done deal, And even though Saul was, if you were here a few weeks ago, Saul was successful in, I guess you could say, his first official act as king, in the sense that he was able to bring together, to marshal together, the people of Israel to form a quite large army, 330,000 altogether.

[2 : 14] Not professional soldiers, not an army in that sense, but a kind of a citizen militia. Brought them all together and led them to defeat the Ammonite king Nahash, and his armies led them in a great victory.

We studied that back in chapter 12. All right, so even though all of that, has been done, and Saul, certainly, we would have to agree, showed himself a good leader at that point.

And yet, even though all of that is done, Saul is still largely untested. Untested.

I think you, if you've been following along, been here for our study, we have seen Saul in a number of scenarios, a number of contexts.

I think you have already been able to get a glimpse of Saul's shortcomings, and even if you didn't see it, I kind of reminded you of it a few times along the way.

[3 : 16] And we've been seeing glimpses of this. And for most of us, we know the end of the story. And so we've been able to make some of those connections ourselves, as we've been studying through these chapters.

But Saul is still untested, and he's about to be tested. He is untried. All right, yes, he did lead God's people to a great victory, but it was almost kind of on the spur of the moment, kind of just a sudden event, and boom, he's kind of forced into it.

And yet he performed well, or at least God enabled him to. But he's still untested, untried. And that's what this text tonight really is all about, the testing of Saul.

I think we should understand that everything that takes place in this passage from really allusions to the past, and we'll talk about that here in just a minute, to something that Saul does right here in the present, in this passage, that it is God moving to try him, to test him, to see if he will show himself worthy.

And so he's tested. So how does he do? That's what we want to discover as we look at this passage. Now, the first two verses, if you have your Bibles open there to 1 Samuel chapter 13, the first two verses really are introductory, kind of gives us an introduction to what is going to transpire in the chapter.

[4 : 50] And so if you just look at it real quickly, we'll just go through these two verses. There's something here that's quite weird. It may not seem so when I read it here in a moment, at least from my version, but I'll explain that.

And in verse 1 it says, Saul, this is the New King James Version. How many of you are looking at a New King James Version? All right. The rest of you are looking at something else.

There may be New American Standard, maybe some NIV out there, maybe ESV. And so I'm going to read it out of the New King James Version, and it's going to sound pretty straightforward, but it's

going to be quite different from what some of you are looking at.

And I'll explain that. But here's how it is translated in the New King James. Saul reigned one year. And when he had reigned two years over Israel, then I'll stop right there, because verse 2 tells us what he did.

What he did, or after these two years. And we'll get to that. But there is something strange about verse 1. And again, I know it didn't sound very strange if you were just listening to what I was reading, or if you were reading along in your New King James Version.

[6 : 08] There wasn't anything strange about it, but there's something quite strange here, because if you happen to be looking at another version, then you're going to see what I'm talking about. For example, some of you might have the NIV.

And the NIV reads, Saul was 30 years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel 42 years. Now, obviously, that is dramatically different from what I just read, okay?

Strange. Doesn't sound a bit like the New King James. And by the way, the King James is almost exactly like, or I guess I should say that New King James is almost exactly like, almost word for word, the King James.

And sometimes that's the case. All right, so strange. Strange difference. All right, let me read another version. New American Standard. Some of you have that out there. And it reads, Saul was 40 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 30 years over Israel.

Now, similar from the NIV, but different numbers, right? Different numbers. So what's going on here? You might want to know, and maybe you don't care.

[7 : 19] But I'm going to deal with it anyway. Okay. Well, actually, and who has an ESV out there? Just raise your hand. All right, so there's several.

Several of you. And so you've noticed something quite strange in your ESV. Actually, the ESV is the closest to the original Hebrew text.

But when I read it, you're going to think, well, this is really weird. And it'd be better if you could see it. But I'll try to explain what it is I'm reading.

Here's how the ESV renders it. Saul was dot, dot, dot, or blank year. Saul was blank years old when he began to reign, and he reigned blank, just blank there, and he reigned blank and two years over Israel.

Now, isn't that strange? Now, what's going on? Well, the answer is, and you may not like it, but the Hebrew text of this particular verse is incomplete.

[8 : 31] It's corrupted, in a sense. It's incomplete. It's blank. There's something missing. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, there's a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint.

You've probably heard of it. The Septuagint inserts the number 40 in that blank, or that second blank, really.

Well, the first blank and then 42 in the second. Which probably, by the way, is the reason or explains why Paul wrote in Acts 13.21, because Paul mentions Saul in the book of Acts.

Well, he didn't write Acts. Luke did, but it's Paul speaking here. In Acts 13.21, Paul said, And they asked for a king. He's referring to Israel. They asked for a king, so God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years.

So, he mentions his reign being 40 years, and it's very likely that Saul read from the Septuagint, so that's why he said what he said. Now, is the Bible wrong?

[9 : 39] Is it making a mistake here? Not necessarily so. Not so, I don't think. But there is just something missing in the Hebrew text here in 1 Samuel. I think probably the NASB and the NIV both insert numbers there, because then it just needs a number there.

I mean, that's obviously what's missing. A number. Now, historically, best we can surmise, Saul did reign around 42 years.

And so, we could just, as some translations have, just insert that in there. Forty and two years.

That's 42 years. And so, some versions of the Bible, and I think without exception, those versions of the Bible, like New American Standard, or New American Standard rather than NIV, they will have a little footnote there.

Even the New King James has a little footnote to tell you that, you know, we don't really know. And so, some numbers have been inserted here. Now, obviously, there's a big difference between what the New King James is saying and the New American Standard.

The New American Standard is talking about the years of Saul's reign, whereas the King James and New King James are talking about how long he reigned before the events took place that are recorded here in chapter 13.

[11:07] And it's very likely that the King James, and that heavily skewed, the New King James, is just looking at the only number that is provided in the text, two years.

So, they've kind of surmised as talking about two years have transpired. And so, they've done the best they can to give us a readable text. And again, the ESV is the only one that just gives us the actual, literal, word-for-word rendition of the Hebrew text.

And so, when the Hebrew text is missing words, it's left out in the ESV, too. Now, all of that to say this. The bottom line is, we don't really know how it should read.

Aren't you glad, you know, when pastors do that, they try to give all of these, you know, really complex explanations on this and that and the other and talk about versions and manuscripts and, you know, and all this.

And then, when it's all said and done, actually, we just don't know. And we don't. And I guess we could say that it doesn't matter.

[12:15] And yet, I would tell you that I really think that the more correct idea is not how long Saul's reign was, but how much time has transpired since the close of chapter 12, when Saul, you know, 11 and 12, when Saul has now become officially the king and, you know, has performed his first act.

And I think that's why the new King James and the King James translate the way they do, because we can say that at least a couple of years have elapsed since the days of chapter 12.

Verse 2 seems to indicate that, so let's go on to verse 2. Saul chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel. It really reads as if we're taking up the story from where we left off the last time.

He chose for himself 3,000 men of Israel. 2,000 were with Saul and Michmash in the mountains of Bethel. And 1,000 were with Jonathan.

Now, who's Jonathan? It just doesn't say in the text that it was Saul's son, but we know that, don't we, from the story. So 1,000 were with Saul, so he split the 3,000. Two for Saul, two for his son, Jonathan, and they are located in two different places.

[13:45] Michmash for Saul and his 2,000 and Gibeah of Benjamin. That would be kind of home territory for Saul and Jonathan.

Jonathan is taking up leadership there. Both these places are strategic locations in Israel, both on the Israel side of the Jordan.

And then it says, and the rest of the people he sent away every man to his tent. And who are they? Well, really those are the people from a couple of chapters ago who came together under the leadership of their new king and defeated the Ammonite army.

So not a lot of time has transpired here. And it's not unusual to think of it being a couple of years of, you know, and people are just now, you know, leaving the area and going back to their homes.

And so I think we don't know what verse 1 is supposed to read. We don't. And yet we can safely say that really very few years have transpired.

[14:54] And really this also points out another thing. What's going to happen here in the text is going to be very sad for Saul. Even though it won't take effect for really a number of years because Saul's reign will be 42 years if or take.

And yet here just two years into his reign after that first great victory against the Ammonites two years and Saul is tested and he fails the test and God God promises to take the kingdom from him. Even though Saul will go on and reign for another 40 years. give or take. Alright so by this time then Saul has been able to develop and train an army of 3,000 soldiers.

These would be professional soldiers. These would be men who are trained as soldiers and he divided them of course between him and his son.

Rest of the people some 30,000 300,000 of them he sent back home. Alright so that kind of gives us the introduction to it we're not a lot of years past Samuel's farewell address remember in the last chapter and the great victory of the Ammonites and the chapter before that and so now we're getting to the text and what what has happened what happens with Saul here and so here's my first point Saul's past reluctance as king that's the first thing that we see here it's not easy to see it because in order to see this we have to consider something that happened way back there in chapter 10 that has come back to haunt Saul and what happened way back there in chapter 10 I'm

going to turn to it here in a minute we're going to read it and I'll show you what I'm talking about but what happened back there was something that

[17 : 02] Saul should have done that he did not do because he was a coward he was at the very least I guess I'm being gracious to just say that he was reluctant something in the past he was reluctant to do and did not do and now it has come home to roost in this chapter and the only way that we can know and see this is to make a comparison between what takes place here in chapter 13 and some of the things that are said the details that are given and what transpired back there in chapter 10 now back in chapter 10 Saul has just been anointed but privately privately anointed king over Israel Samuel anointed it remember Saul had gone out to find some lost donkeys and he eventually met up with Samuel Samuel gave him some instructions on how to find those donkeys then he said you just let your servant go ahead

I won't talk to you a minute and Saul is anointed privately anointed as king but I want you to look back at chapter 10 and I want to begin reading in chapter 10 and verse 5 in chapter 10 verse 5 after that you shall come after that you shall come to the hill of God he's giving him instructions remember come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is now remember that by the way this is at Gibeah where the Philistine garrison is and it will happen when you have come there to the city that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with the stringed instruments the tambourine the flute harp before them and they will be prophesying then the spirit you remember we studied this passage and I don't know if you remember but I said there's something that Saul does not do here that's going to come back and haunt him and so he says then the spirit of the Lord will come upon you and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man and let it be these signs come to you that you do now note this that you do as the occasion demands for God is with you now based upon what I've just read what occasion do you think he might be referring to who is located what garrison whose garrison is located in this very place or near this place the listing garrison and I think it's clear that

Samuel is saying to Saul God God is upon you do do now what the occasion demands for God is with you that means you need to take care of this garrison right here right here now did he do that well no he didn't in fact eventually you're going to read we read in chapter 10 that Saul goes home one of the servants his uncle rather asked him what happened he found the donkey so forth and Saul related the story but he did not tell him anything about Samuel and his being anointed king and he did not do what the occasion demanded deal with the Philistines who right there in his backyard he allowed them to be now let's go to chapter 13 back to our text and starting with verse 3 and Jonathan attacked what did he attack the garrison of the

Philistines that was An-Gibba which is another name for Gibeah same garrison all right so here's Jonathan he has a thousand soldiers and he's young and he's brash and he's confident and he goes out there and he attacks the garrison there in Gibeah which his father should have done way back there in chapter 10 so Jonathan does this and the Philistines heard about it of course they would then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land saying let the Hebrews hear for all Israel heard it said that Saul had attacked a garrison of the Philistines which he did not do did he Jonathan did there's some speculation as to whether Saul took the credit for this or whether it was just simply that he's king and so everything done under his command would be accredited to him and we don't read anything about

Saul correcting them on that but alright so they all heard that Saul rather it was Jonathan and attacked the garrison of the Philistines and that Israel had also become an abomination to the Philistines that is literally they had become a stench to them they hated them they were going to deal with them and you know the people of the Philistines they got so upset and the people were called together to Saul at Gilgal then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and people as the sand which is on the seashore in the multitude and they came up and encamped in Michmash to the east of Beth-Avon alright now what's going on here yeah they're getting ready for war without a doubt I mean but what an army they put together here here's Jonathan and he takes his thousand soldiers and he does what the occasion called for and he attacks this garrison in Gibeah the very one that his father

[23 : 11] Saul should have attacked and didn't and he attacks and the Philistines they get you know really ripped over this and they get together this huge army here and and where at Michmash now who was supposed to be in charge of Michmash Saul with his two thousand so now when the men of Israel saw that they were in danger for the people were distressed then the people hid in

caves and thickets and rocks and holes and in pits and some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead as for Saul he was still!

and all the people followed him trembling then he waited seven days according to the time set by Samuel it just occurred to me I forgot to read something back there in chapter 10 go back to chapter 10 again you don't have to go back very far and notice in verse 8 you shall this is Samuel talking to Saul you shall go down before me to Gilgal and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offerings seven days you shall wait till I come to you and show you what you should do you see the similarity of the two stories in fact it's so similar that some liberal scholars want to say that really it's just retelling of the same story but little different circumstances and they don't believe it's historical to begin with so you know that's just what you have but actually I think it's a clue to us that what

Saul had been called upon by God and given every opportunity to do he did not do and so now here they've got trouble it's kind of come home to roost they go together you see God had anointed him God had put his spirit in him God had said through Samuel the prophet you do as the occasion demands for God is with you but he didn't do it he didn't do it and now he's about to pay for his past reluctance because an angry defiant Philistine nation a nation that will one day kill both Saul and his son Jonathan has now marshaled this huge army and for now the next several chapters in Samuel they're going to have problems with the Philistine it causes one to wonder what would have happened if

Saul had done what God commanded him to do anointed him to do filled him with his spirit to do way back there in chapter 10 so really the test that I'm talking about it really started back there he failed that one now he's about to undergo another test and he's going to fail that one too and so the second thing I want you to notice is not only Saul's past reluctance but now Saul's present disobedience his disobedience and so starting with verse 8 and we're back there again in our text in Samuel chapter 13 then he waited seven days according to the time set by Samuel so he obeyed Samuel right well almost he waited seven days but Samuel did not come to Gilgal and the people were scattered from him so here's the beginning of the test and

God has set up this test Samuel had commanded had told Saul wait seven days just like he did back there in chapter 10 now Samuel did wait then but then he did never go to battle but now he's waiting and he's waited seven days but he's not going to wait till the day is over and so he waited the seven days Samuel did not come to Gilgal and the people were scattered from him that is suddenly he's seeing his army disappear and so Saul said bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me and he offered the burnt offering now what is all this about well before Israel could go out to do battle they had to sacrifice to God they had to perform the sacrifice it would bring about God's blessing it was a part of his law and who was qualified to offer the sacrifice well not [28 : 07] Saul Samuel the prophet the priest and so God had commanded through Samuel wait seven days and I'll be there to perform this duty this point of worship and then you do battle then you could do the battle alright so what did Saul do he brings a burnt offering he offers a burnt offering himself on the seventh day he didn't wait till the day was over ample time to wait for Samuel Saul is not going to wait now it happened as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering you can imagine this he just finished this and here comes Samuel just as he finished it Samuel came and Saul went out to meet him that he might greet!

and I'm sure all along the way as he's going out to greet Samuel he's trying to think of what he's going to say to him he knows he's messed up so he's kind of rehearsed to himself his excuses and what he's going to say to Samuel something that's going to justify what he has done and so Samuel said what have you done I love that here's Saul coming out to meet proper courtesies and the niceties you know as the prophet of God and Samuel didn't want any of that what have you done Saul said when I saw that the people were scattered from me and that you did not come within the days appointed and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash then I said the Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal and I have not made felt compelled to offer the burnt offering and

Samuel said to Saul you have done foolishly now I wonder what do you think about I mean being a little bit hard on Saul here I mean here the armies of the Philistines have gathered and you know just their foot soldiers along they number equal to the number of the sands on the shore you know I mean that's an exaggeration of course but we're talking about many many thousands and thousands upon thousands of soldiers they're the enemy and here's Saul he's gathered his army

three thousand I think we can assume there were others you know citizen soldiers who've also joined and but now they're waiting first day second day third fourth fifth sixth they get into the seventh day but to obey the command he must wait the full seven days and by the way even if Samuel had not shown up on the seventh day that did not give Saul the authority to perform the function as the priest and so here's Saul he's seeing his armies dwindle they're they're leaving they're hiding out they're they're they're they're afraid and something must be done and you know he is seeing the respect that they have for him beginning to wane a little dwindle a little bit and can't have that and what am I supposed to do I'll just go ahead and sacrifice myself I just wonder what you think now doesn't it seem like Saul didn't have any other choice I mean I mean really what else could he do and and it really brings up the question is it of course even the question gives us the answer but is it ever okay to disobey

God is it ever okay to do I mean is there anything that would justify that I mean this is just a small thing isn't it I just burn it a little bit you know burn up a little offering and let's just give Saul the benefit of the doubt that he was very sincere in this I don't think he was but let's give him the benefit of the doubt very sincere very desirous of offering up a sacrifice to the Lord but these things matter to God and so is it possible is it ever possible to gain God's blessing through an act of disobedience I mean the question itself probably the answer to that is no it's never never never possible to gain God's blessing through disobedience and yet sometimes we not justify ourselves but you know perhaps God is you might we might think God's too severe here well you know

[33 : 36] I'm thinking about Adam back in the garden all he did was take a bite out of an apple look what happened look what it cost not only him but all of us so you know who are we to put God God to the test to require that God justify himself he's given his word his law it is to be obeyed and it is obedience to his law that brings blessing not obviously the other way sometimes maybe we might find it justifiable to maybe bend a little law or leave a little part of it off you know might be expedient for us and maybe in the end it might even benefit we might even say it benefits the kingdom of God and it's never okay someone has said the way forward for any leader who is struggling to exercise the power he or she has been given is not to seek to exercise a power he or she has not been given let me say that again the way forward for any leader who is struggling to exercise the power he or she has been given is not to seek to exercise a power he or she has never been given

Saul was never given the authority the power right duty offer up sacrifices unto the Lord not in the Old Testament and yet he did so we have Saul's past reluctance that came back to bite him and it will continue to be a problem all throughout his kingship all the way to his death and then we have Saul's present disobedience he obeyed but not completely not all the way and you know as I have kind of entitled this message he got out ahead of God and then one last thing Saul's future consequence consequence all this has consequence Saul rather is tested he is God is proving him here to see if he's worthy to be king of Israel and he's failed miserably and there's a consequence to it and it's really a very severe consequence!

and we could even say that there are really a couple of things really multiple things that are part of the consequence of Saul's disobedience verse 14 says but now your kingdom shall not continue that's the first consequence now God's not taking the kingdom away from him right at that moment he can he's going to continue to be king in fact if we understand the timing of this he's going to be king for another 35 40 years give or take decades as king of course it would be a troubled! time as king and so what is the full extent of this consequence well we have to start reading really with verse 13 look at it Samuel said to Saul you have done foolishly you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God which he commanded you for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever God would have done that establish Saul's kingdom forever what does that mean well it would be passed on to his sons grandsons and great grandsons it would be would go on from Saul but God is saying now it ends with you it ends with you so you could have had the kingdom forever that is your lineage would have carried on as the kings of [38 : 09] Israel but now your kingdom shall not continue the Lord has sought for himself a man after his own heart and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over his people because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you pretty severe serious consequence for disobeying God on this one matter now it's interesting that God says and this is not you know maybe a mystery to us who he's talking about here we know that it's going to be David man after God's heart but what does that very phrase mean well you think Saul from the beginning was a man after God's own heart well not if you not really not at all if you consider the person Saul and you

know his character how he performed his duties as king as king leadership and all that when you consider that how could he he disobeyed

God he's a coward how could that describe a man who would be after God's own heart no no in that sense no but it really is not talking about that it's talking about God's choice God's personal choice was Saul God's personal choice for king now whose whose choice was it was God's people Israel who did they want they wanted a king like all the other nations they wanted a tall dark and handsome I mean tall was head and shoulders above every other man good looking I'm sure look like a king he was not God's choice the man after his own heart who was David David and so it ends your kingdom ends with you there's not going to be any lineage of

Saul going forward Jonathan your son is not going to be king we know what happened to him died the very same day Saul died so what a consequence to pay for disobedience then Samuel rose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah Benjamin Saul numbered the people present with him about 600 men what a dismal ending now by the way whatever happened to these Philistines you know the army that had been assembled nothing in the scripture says they ever had the battle never a battle in fact Saul was to wait seven days for Samuel to come and eventually Samuel did come and it says nothing about Samuel ever offering up any sacrifice or performing any of that he went home Saul went home had 2,000 soldiers now he just has 600!

this is the consequence and the consequence is far reaching but there's another consequence mentioned here starts with verse 16 Saul Jonathan his son and the people present with him remained in Gibeah Benjamin but the Philistines encamped in Michmash so they're still there by the way they took control of it it's kind of a tit for tat Jonathan took over the garrison at Gibeah what did the Philistines do they they take over the one at Michmash that was under the authority of Saul then and here's the consequence then raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies one company turned onto the road to Ophrah to the land of Shual another company turned to the road of Beth Horon and another company turned to the road of the border that overlooks the valley of

Zeboim toward the wilderness so now they've got to he also has to deal with the Philistines with conflicts with them little skirmishes here and there and so forth and the Philistines taking over some territory that once belonged to Israel so it's not just you know that Saul has now God is ending his kingdom with him it's going to be over it could have been ongoing but no it's going to end with him and God is going to select someone else instead of him someone who's after the heart of God then there's going to be this constant problem with the Philistines and it's really a bad problem now there was no look at it in verse 19 there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel for the Philistines said lest the Hebrews make swords or spears what's this about well really what this is about is the

[43 : 44] Philistines they had captured all control over the latest technology and weaponry metallurgy they had all the blacksmiths they made sure that they had exclusive rights on the manufacturer of metal weaponry the Israelites all they had weaponry made out of wood and stone and you know spears and bows and arrows but in fact you're going to read here in fact I'll just go ahead and read it all the Israelites would go down to the Philistines to sharpen each man's plowshare his mattock his axe and his sickle and the charge for the sharpening was a pimp looked it up three quarters of a shekel of silver that still doesn't mean anything to it actually what it means is a whole lot of money a lot of money just for them to be able to go to the blacksmiths under the control of the

Philistines to have their farming implements sharpened and metal parts of it and this is really ingenious on the part of the Philistines because then they could make sure that the Israelites never took their implements their farming implements and had them fashioned into swords because they controlled the people who do that and charged them exorbitant amounts of money so not only do they have these conflicts with the Philistines but the Philistines have found a way for windfall and profits because they have all the blacksmith this is a terrible situation and the charge for the sharpening was a pimp I said that and so it came about on the day of the battle that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan but they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son so the only ones who had swords

Saul and John and so here we're getting close to the day of battle one of many to come and the Israelites are grossly under armed a terrible situation and the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash so we'll pick up the story because chapter 14 is a continuation of the story

and we'll pick that up as we look at it next time don't get out ahead of God and don't think that disobedience in some situations is going to be blessed by God never will be ever even if to us it seems very insignificant some little thing and obedience is full obedience or it is not obedience at all obedience here's a good definition obedience is doing exactly what I'm told to do when I'm told to do it with right heart attitude Saul failed all of those things and he's going to fail again as we go on in the story Thank you.