

**Meadgate Spring 2019
The Early Kings**

Session 4 – Saul (Part 2)

Bible background – 1 Samuel chapters 13-15

Introduction

Is there anyone in your family 30 years old?

That is how old Saul was when he became King. There was no previous manual on how to be a king of Israel – they had never had one .Unlike our current scenario in the UK, there was **no real protocol** to follow

*“First impressions can be deceiving, especially when the image created by a person’s appearance is contradicted by his or her qualities and abilities. Saul presented the ideal visual image of a king, but the tendencies of his character often went contrary to God’s commands for a king. Saul was God’s chosen leader, but this did not mean he was capable of being king **on his own**.*

During his reign, Saul had his greatest successes when he obeyed God. His greatest failures resulted from acting on his own. Saul had the raw materials to be a good leader – appearance, courage and action. Even his weaknesses could have been used by God if Saul had recognized them and left them in God’s hands. His own choices cut him off from God, and eventually alienated him from his own people”¹

Saul has won his first victory (against the Ammonites), validating the people’s choice of him as king. In chapter 13 Saul now chooses 3000 men from Israel, keeping 2000 with him and sending 1000 men with his son Jonathan. Jonathan attacks the Philistines at their outpost in Geba. Saul takes the credit for Jonathans’ actions, using this as a summons to gather more troops.

¹ Character Notes on Saul, Life Application Study Bible (NIV), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1988, p.457

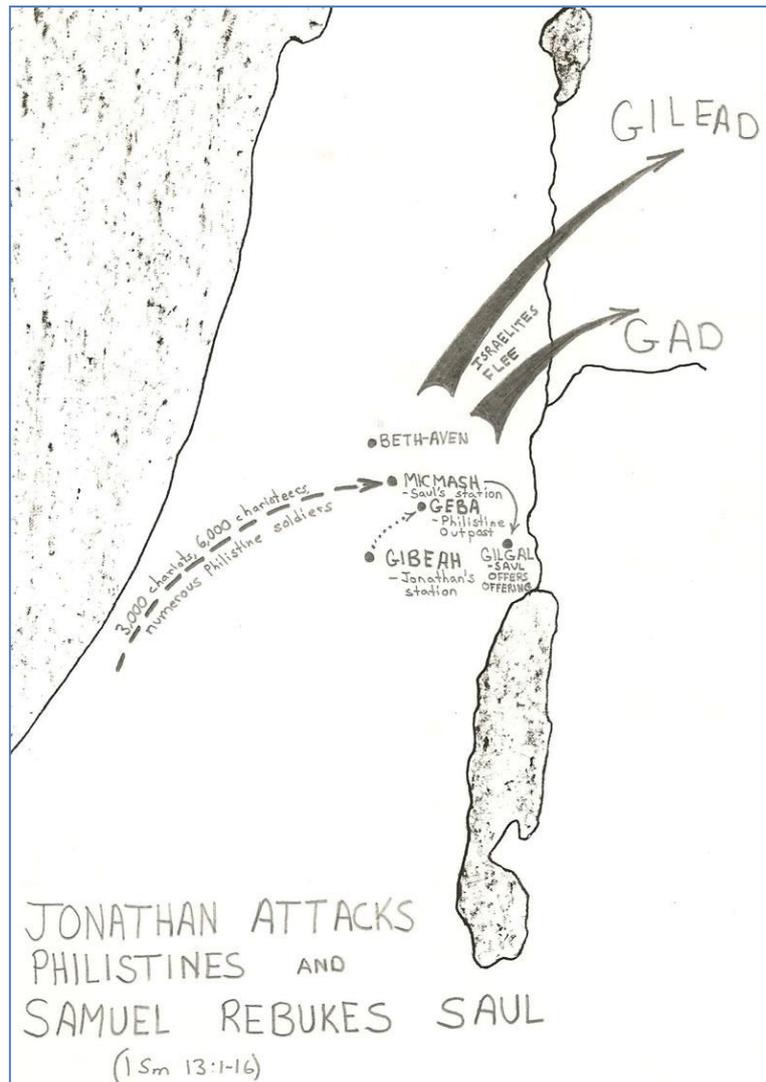


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3000 Philistine chariots and 6000 charioteers and soldiers “as numerous as the sand on the seashore” attack in response to Jonathan’s actions. (1 Sam 13:5). This was a **sudden reversal of what Saul expected.** The Israelite soldiers feared what they saw – understandably – and went to hide.

POINTS TO PONDER



- How do you react when someone else gets the credit for something you have done well?
- How do you react to overwhelming odds against you?

Saul stays in hiding with troops who were “quaking with fear” (1 Sam 13: 10). Samuel had told Saul to **wait** for him to come and sacrifice before battle commenced. (1 Sam 10:8) He had specified that he would be there in 7 days, but Samuel did not arrive as planned. We

can only begin to wonder at the tension this caused amongst the soldiers, and some of them started to scatter.

Saul takes matters into his own hands, and makes a sacrifice himself. This was explicitly forbidden by God (Deut 12;5-14), and against Samuel's specific command. Under pressure, he disobeyed God. He was doing a good thing, by offering a sacrifice, but **he did it in the wrong way.**

True character is demonstrated when tested under pressure.

Look closely at the next passage:

"Just as he (Saul) finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.¹¹ "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash,¹² I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favour.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

1 Sam 13:10-12

POINTS TO PONDER



- *Saul has previously taken credit for Jonathan's brave action against the Philistines.*
- *What is Saul doing here?*
- *What is Samuel's reaction (1 Sam 13:13-14)*
- *What is Saul left with?*

Samuel has given us an **important clue** to the future in 1 Sam 10: 14. God is looking for someone to lead the nation who will be a man "**after His own heart**".

The Philistines had **the psychological** advantage, but also a **technological** one.

1 Sam 13: 19-22 reveals that Israel had no weapons, and no blacksmiths, who might have been in a position to sharpen farm implements into weapons. In fact, the Israelite army was in the unusual position of having to pay Philistine blacksmiths to sharpen tools for them! Against such superiority, the Israelites were at a serious disadvantage. Only the royal family had weapons. They could only win battles with God's help, and God wanted to give the nation victory without reliance on swords , so that they realised that God alone was their strength.

Chapter 14 opens with Jonathan again making an attack on the Philistines, but this time in great secrecy. He and his armour-bearer showed incredible bravery, acknowledging that “Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few” (1 Sam, 14:6) The Message Bible reads:

“No one can stop GOD from saving when he sets his mind to it.”

Trusting that God will give them a sign as to whether to proceed or retreat, Jonathan and his aide, acknowledging that it is God who will give victory (1 Sam 14:12), move forward. That day, they **killed 20 Philistines**. As a result of this one event, the Philistines went into panic mode, a panic “sent by God” . (1 Sam 14:15)

POINT TO PONDER



Sometimes God can use a small “skirmish”, or a few steps taken in obedience, to win a much larger victory than you expect

The fleeing Philistines made the Israelites sit up and take notice. There is an unusual verse where Saul asks the priest Ahijahto bring the Ark of God (Ark of the Covenant). As the tumult from the Philistine camp increases, Saul tells the priest to “**withdraw his hand**”. (1 Sam. 15:19)



This is probably a reference to the **Urim and Thummim**, which were probably identical flat small stones, about an inch across, one painted black and the other white. When someone in leadership wished to “enquire of the Lord” they would usually ask the priest a closed question (Yes or No?) The stones would be held in a slim back pocket behind the priestly breastplate. The priest, having prayed for an answer, would reach in and bring out just one of the stones, without looking at them. A white stone – the Urim, which means “Light” - meant “Yes” and the black stone (Thummim) meant “No”. For Saul to have **rushed the priest**, telling him to “**withdraw his hand**”, possibly shows **more impatience** on Saul’s part – not wanting to wait for a divine answer.

Many of the Israelites who had previously hidden now emerged to join the pursuit of the Philistines. These men, however, were somewhat stressed:

"Now the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, "Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So none of the troops tasted food."

1 Sam 14:24

There were obvious implications here:

- *The men were too tired to fight, being very hungry*
- *Saul did not realise (because Jonathan began this attack in secret) that Jonathon was unaware of the oath*

Beware of making rash oaths (cf. Jephthah!)

When the army entered the woods, there was honey on the ground, and Jonathan ate, feeling much better (he got a quick sugar rush!) One soldier immediately commented:

"Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, 'Cursed be any man who eats food today!' That is why the men are faint."

29 *Jonathan said, "My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey.*

30 *How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?"*

1 Sam 14:28-30

The Israelites, still hungry, went into battle against the Philistines. They won, but were so exhausted, that they fed on meat that still contained blood, which was strictly against God's law. Saul is made aware of this, and commands that the meat be prepared properly, telling them not too "sin against the Lord" (14;34). It seems there is one law for the king, and another for his subjects. Saul is also now building an altar, which should be a job for a priest.

Again Saul is making rash decisions- the soldiers have fought all day long, without real food, then Saul tells them to continue to fight at night and plunder them until dawn, leaving none alive.

Note the response of the soldiers:

"Do whatever seems best to you" (14:36)

It could have been said with a smile on their faces, but it sounds rather weary! The brave priest suggest that they enquire of God if this is a good idea, and Saul asks his Yes/No question, but God did not answer him that day. (14;37)

Why not?

POINT TO PONDER



- How do you react when God says “No”?
- How do you react when God says nothing?

Because God does not answer, Saul **assumes someone has committed a sin**. Again we see a very rash comment from the King:

“Saul therefore said, “Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today.³⁹ As surely as the Lord who rescues Israel lives, even if it lies with my son Jonathan, he must die.” But not one of the men said a word.

1 Sam 14:38-39

As the lot falls on Jonathan, Saul swears that Jonathon will die. Note the instant reaction of Saul’s men:

*“The men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die — he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for **he did this today with God's help.**” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.⁴⁶ Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own land.”*

1 Sam 14:45-46

Even though the Philistines withdrew after this battle, we read **that Saul continued to fight “valiantly” :-**

“Saul extended his rule, capturing neighbouring kingdoms. He fought enemies on every front — Moab, Ammon, Edom, the king of Zobah, the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he came up with a victory.⁴⁸ He became invincible! He smashed Amalek, freeing Israel from the savagery and looting.”

(1 Sam 14:47-48 from THE MESSAGE)

1 Samuel Chapter 15

In this 15th chapter, we see the beginning of the end for Saul. Samuel tells Saul that he is to attack and utterly destroy the Amalekites, as punishment for the way they had treated Israel in the Wilderness. They were to destroy EVERYTHING, men, women, children, infants, cattle sheep and donkeys.

"Why did God command such utter destruction? The Amalekites were a band of guerrilla terrorists. They lived by attacking other nations and carrying off their wealth and families. They were the first to attack the Israelites as they entered the Promised Land, and they continued to raid Israelite camps at every opportunity. God knew that the Israelites could never live peacefully in the Promised Land as long as the Amalekites existed. He also knew that their corrupt, idolatrous religious practises threatened Israel's relationship with Him. The only way to protect the Israelites bodies and souls was to utterly destroy the people of this warlike nation and all their possessions, including their idols"²

POINTS TO PONDER (2 SLIDES)



- *This does not sit easily with today's modern world. We live in an age of God's mercy, where we are to show His love, rather than his annihilation, of other people and nations.*
- *This is particularly true in a multi-cultural society*
- *It sometimes seems unilateral, and unjust, that we have to corporately deal with certain ideologies that seek to destroy others who do not agree with them, whilst still maintaining that Jesus is "The Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6)*
- *The Bible clearly states that we shall be known as Christ's disciples by our "fruit" (Matthew 7:16-20), and that we should "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else(1 Thess. 5:15).*
- *However, God still wants us to utterly destroy any idol worship within us, and ensure that we live lives faithful to Him and to His word.*

Having received a clear command from God, through Samuel, Saul disobeys.

"But Saul and the army spared (King) Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs — everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed."

1 Sam 15:9

Selective obedience is just another form of disobedience

God tells Samuel what has happened, stating:

"I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." 1 Sam 15:11

² From Commentary notes on 1 Samuel 15:2,3, Life Applications Bible

God was **not saying he had made a mistake**. God was sorrowful at what had happened.

What was Samuel's reaction (1 Sam 15:11)? He was:

- *Troubled*
- *He cried out to God*
- *He stayed awake praying all night*

As he tried to meet Saul the next morning, he found an even bigger problem; Saul had set up a monument to himself "**in his own honour**", and had left to go down to Gilgal (1 Sam 15:12). **Saul is now taking all the credit** that should have belonged to God, and is effectively setting up **an idol to himself**.

In 1 Sam 15;13-21, we read of how far Saul is prepared to go to distance himself from responsibility:

"When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."

*14 But Samuel said, "What then is this **bleating of sheep in my ears**? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?"*

*15 Saul answered, "**The soldiers** brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest."*

16 "Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied.

*17 Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. **18** And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.' **19** Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?"*

*20 "But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. **21** The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal."*

Note how Saul tries to squirm out of it, to make himself look good? He blames his soldiers for the plunder, then tries to put a spiritual spin on this!

Samuel then pronounces a truly damning response:

*"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king."
1 Sam 15:22-23*

Saul pleads for forgiveness, but none comes. As Samuel turns to leave, Saul catches the hem of the prophet's robe, and it tore. Samuel tells the king that God had "torn the kingdom from you today" (15: 28)

Note:

There are a number of instances in Scripture where the hem of a garment has significance. The most well-known is the woman who touched the hem of the garment of Jesus and was healed (Matthew 9:20). We will also note an incident with David in later studies involving the hem of a garment!

One final afterword to this tragic stage in Saul's life is that Samuel actually returns with Saul to Gilgal, when Saul audaciously asks Samuel to **honour him before the elders!** Samuel demands that King Agag of the Amalekites, who Saul was supposed to kill, is brought before him. Agag assumes he will live; Samuel puts him to death himself, completing the command of God. Samuel goes to Ramah, where he ministers, and has his home base, and Saul goes to Gibeah. Gibeah is Saul's home. They are in opposite directions from each other, but only a few miles apart. **Samuel and Saul are now estranged from each other**, and even though Samuel mourns for Saul, they never meet again.

FINAL POINTS TO PONDER



- *What happens when we only obey in part?*
- *Why was Saul still effective after he had sinned (see 1 Sam 14:47)?*
- *Why was God grieved that he had made Saul King?*