



## KINGDOM TRANSITION • Snapshots from the Reign of Saul

### What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

I Samuel 13:1-15:35

In these three chapters, we see snapshots of Saul's reign over Israel. It's a pretty depressing picture. Saul, though he is tall, choice, and handsome (9:2), is simply a terrible leader who looks out for himself and his reputation more than seeking the Lord and providing for his people. This narrative section shows mistake after mistake on Saul's part. After defeating the Philistines in 13:1-7, he carelessly makes a sacrifice to God after becoming impatient waiting for Samuel. Immediately, Samuel lets Saul know that because of this, God will replace him with a "man after his own heart" as king (13:14). In chapter 14, Saul makes a stupid vow that said anyone who ate anything would be put to death. It's a foolish thing because the Israelite men had just been to battle. Saul's son Jonathan actually is the first to eat something! By God's grace, Jonathan's life is spared. Finally, Saul is given a chance to do the Lord's work in battle again by completely destroying Amalek. Instead of heeding God's command, Saul keeps some things for Israel; this makes God angry. Though Saul's intentions may have been right (he wanted to make sacrifices to God), he disobeyed the command of the Lord. Our passage's message is loud and clear: Saul is not a man after God's own heart and one day God will bring a king who will be faithful to what he commands.

#### Saul Sins Against the Lord (13:1-23)

Almost as quickly as Saul took the throne he is told that his kingdom will soon come to an end. The Israelites are engaged in a battle with the Philistines. It isn't looking good for Saul and his men. During the battle, Saul waits seven days for Samuel to show up. Becoming nervous, and most likely impatient and stressed, Saul did exactly what he is not supposed to do: he offers the burnt offering and peace offering to the Lord. As if that wasn't bad enough, Samuel shows up soon as Saul finishes the offering. Talk about bad timing! After Saul gives his excuse, Samuel forcefully says, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God...your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after His own heart" (vv. 13-14).

This is just the beginning of a troubled reign for Saul. The point of this episode is to show Saul's imperfections and selfish desires. Instead of waiting on the Lord, he takes matters into his own hands. When Samuel says that God has sought out a man after His own heart, He is immediately referring to David, who will succeed Saul as king. However, this also points to the greater David, Jesus Christ, who will be the ultimate King, perfect in everything that God commands.

### What's the Big Idea?

Although Saul is Israel's king, his lack of obedience and leadership and his unwillingness to accept responsibility for his actions point to a deficit in his heart relationship with God and the need for a true king who has a heart after God's own.

### What's the Problem?

No human authority can ever be obedient to God in all that he commands. Still, our tendency is to look to kings and rulers as the ultimate display of leadership and greatness.



### Jonathan's Valor, Saul's Vow (14:1-52)

Our narrative jumps in time as it begins with the phrase "One day" in 14:1. Jonathan, Saul's son, has a crazy idea to go up to the Philistine camp with his armor bearer. One would think Jonathan has a deranged death wish, but verse 6 tells us that it was his faith in the LORD to save Israel that motivated him. Extreme faith in God may take you to severe situations. Being the king's son, Jonathan probably could have gotten away with not fighting, but he is full of hope in God and knew Israel would be delivered, so he courageously goes where other men will not. Jonathan leads by example, whereas Saul so often led by his title. One of the greatest lines in the movie *Braveheart* comes from William Wallace when he said, "Men don't follow titles, they follow courage." We see that in Jonathan and we will see that in David, and of course, we find that ultimately in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Later in chapter 14, it says that the men of Israel were hard pressed from battle. Saul makes a foolish vow that anyone who ate that day would surely be put to death. Jonathan did not hear of the vow and ate some honey. Despite the absurdity of such a vow, Saul was going to stick to his promise and kill his son! Still, because of Jonathan's faithful courage in battle, the people proclaimed, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel?" Their question hits home for Saul and he spares Jonathan's life. Saul is well on the highway to become a self-centered leader who is more concerned with his image than of the welfare of his people.

### God Rejects Saul (15:1-35)

The last section of our narrative is particular saddening. Saul receives a direct command from the LORD, given by Samuel, yet he cannot fulfill it. Saul is told to destroy Amalek and all the Amalekites' property, but he spares Agag and some animals. God is so grieved that he even says to Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments" (v. 10). Could you imagine God saying that about you? No doubt Saul is burdened by his sin because of the earthly consequences (his kingdom would not last), however he is not burdened by the fact that he offended Almighty God. We know this because Saul did not repent genuinely. In verse 25 he says to Samuel, "Please pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the LORD." Notice that Saul did not go to God for forgiveness. He asks Samuel – a mere man! Saul's heart at the beginning of this narrative was drifting far from God, but now we can say it is quite a ways down the river.

### Conclusion

Pray that the group will realize the inevitable imperfections of human rulers, and that we cannot put all (or any) of our stock in them to provide guidance and protection. Lead the group to the understanding that Jesus is our ultimate King. He has never disobeyed and He is the complete fulfillment of the man after God's own heart.

### What's Our Response?

We must humbly submit to and follow God, the only true King of kings and Lord of lords.

## What Are the Questions?

I Samuel 13:1-15:35

### LAUNCH

Think of a time when you've been under poor leadership. How has that experience motivated you to seek better leadership in the future or be a better leader yourself?

### EXPLORE

#### Read I Samuel 13

1. What do you observe about Saul and Jonathan in verses 1-7?
2. What do verses 8-10 say about how Saul handles it when Samuel doesn't show up?
3. How does Saul respond in verses 11-12 when Samuel confronts him on his disobedience?
4. What does Samuel say in verses 13-14 about Saul's disobedience?

#### Read I Samuel 14

5. How would you describe Jonathan's faith in your own words based on verses 1-15?
6. What order does Saul give in verse 24, and how does it affect Jonathan?
7. Why do you think the author mentions in verse 35 that Saul built his first altar to the LORD after defeating the Philistines in battle?

8. How would you contrast Jonathan and Saul as leaders based on this chapter?

#### Read I Samuel 15

9. What does God command Saul to do through Samuel, and how does Saul respond?
10. How does Saul respond when Samuel confronts him about his disobedience?
11. How does Samuel characterize Saul's disobedience in verses 22-23?
12. What are the consequences of Saul's disobedience?
13. What do verses 12 and 30 say about Saul's focus in the face of his disobedience?

### APPLY

14. In what ways can you relate to Saul's failure to take responsibility for his actions and passion for his own image?
15. How does the obedience of Jesus and our submission to Him free us from the need to blame-shift, deny responsibility for our sins and shortcomings, and maintain a certain image?
16. Read Hebrews 10:5-10 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How does Jesus fulfill our longing for a perfect King, and how do we as His followers benefit from His perfect kingship?

## What Are the Answers?

1. Saul leads by position, but Jonathan leads by example.
2. He takes matters into his own hands.
3. He makes excuses and fails to take responsibility.
4. He says it was foolish and that it would result in God passing over him as king and searching for a king after His own heart.
5. Jonathan entrusts himself to God and takes action.
6. He says that none of his men may eat till he avenges his enemies, but Jonathan unknowingly disobeys his order and stands condemned.
7. Perhaps because he expected Saul to have acknowledged the LORD prior to this.
8. Jonathan is full of faith and trust in God; Saul is rash and unthinking.
9. He tells him to utterly destroy the Amalekites, leaving no person or animal alive. Saul disobeys by killing the people but by leaving the king and the best animals alive.
10. He denies and rationalizes.
11. It's as bad as idolatry.
12. God decides to take away the kingdom from him.
13. He's focused on himself and what the people think of him instead of on God.
14. Allow the group to discuss.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. He obeys the Father perfectly and sets us apart for Him as a result of His obedience.

## Memorize

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.

I Samuel 13:14