

6. Saul Fails and Is Rejected by The LORD

(1 Samuel 13–15)

2.5 Saul's Major Failures are Revealed (1 Samuel 13–15)

2.5.1 Saul fights the Philistines and the people fear (13:1-7)

- **Take note** that this section follows the warning in 12:25 of the consequences of “doing evil.”

2.5.2 Saul unlawfully offers a sacrifice and Samuel confronts him (13:8-15a)

- 13:11-12 - Notice how Saul blames 1) his troops, 2) Samuel, and 3) the Philistines for his rash actions so that he was *forced* to offer the sacrifice
- 13:13 - the term “**command**” used in the Torah to refer to the LORD’s commands, places Samuel’s words on equal footing with those of the LORD. This basic idea is repeated throughout Scripture - ALL of the LORD’s revelation is equally authoritative. (See Pss 19:8; 89:31; 112:1; 119:6, 10, 19, 60, 96, 115, 131, 166, 176)
- 13:14 - Saul’s dynasty would not continue - it would be given to “a man after the LORD’s own heart” - David, who will be introduced in Chapter 16
- Like **Adam** before him, **Saul** does not listen to the voice of the LORD, makes excuses for his sin, and so his kingdom is taken from him.

2.5.3 Saul musters the men of Israel but at great disadvantage (13:15b-23)

- This setting implies that the Philistines had cut Saul and the troops off from any help from the northern tribes. Also, the Philistines had restricted Israel’s access to bronze and iron - especially for making weapons - and charged *exorbitant rates* for simple repairs on their farming tools.

**All of this puts Saul in a seemingly hopeless situation.*

2.5.4 Jonathan defeats a garrison of Philistines (14:1-15)

- Now we are in a different time and place from Chapter 13. Saul has established a public royal court with guards and an Aaronic Priest - Ahijah, Eli's grandson and descendant of Aaron.
- Beginning here, Jonathan is contrasted to Saul throughout the rest of the story. Whereas Saul is often fearful and faithless, Jonathan is courageous and faithful.
- 14:6 - "by many or few" - the LORD can save no matter how large or how small the army.
- 14:8-10 - Jonathan's "plan of attack" is so absurd, if it succeeded it would only be through the LORD's intervention!
- 14:10 - "The LORD has given them into our hand..." may be a play on Jonathan's name which means "YHWH has given" in Hebrew.
- 14:15 - the fact that 2 Israelites had killed 20 Philistines would most likely be taken by the Philistines as a sign that their gods were not with them.

2.5.5 Saul rallies the troops and the LORD saves Israel (14:16-23)

- 14:18 - **Saul summons the Ark** - According to **Deuteronomy 20:1-4 ff.**, Israel was not to go into battle before a Priest encouraged the people:

 "1 When you go out to war against your enemies, ... you shall not be afraid of them, **for the LORD your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.** 2 And when you draw near to the battle, **the priest shall come forward and speak to the people** 3 and shall say to them, 'Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, 4 **for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory.**"
- 14:19 - Saul stops the Priest short, showing his disregard for the Word of the LORD. This serves as more evidence that Saul is not fit to be King.

2.5.6 **Saul makes a foolish vow (14:24-30)**

- Here, Saul is requiring the troops to do more than the Torah prescribes. He may be trying to coerce the LORD's favor.
- 14:25 - "honey on the ground" - at this time, in the forests of Israel (the "land flowing with milk and honey" Exodus 3:8) bees made hives on/in the ground.
- 14:29 - "My father has made trouble for the land..." the verb "made trouble" is the same form used to describe Achan's sin in Joshua 7:25.

2.5.7 **The troops sin because of their hunger and Saul intervenes (14:31-35)**

- 14:35 - "Saul built an altar..." "Though no judgmental statements accompany the note that this was Saul's first altar, the tone of the note may be subtly condemnatory. Perhaps the writer is indicating that Saul was responsible for the construction of a high place at which sacrificial worship occurred, a practice that was forbidden for Israel once they entered the Promised Land (Deut 12:13-14)." [Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 160]

2.5.8 **Saul inquires of the LORD and He does not answer (14:36-42)**

- 14:41 - **Urim and Thummim** - Exodus 28:30 prescribes these to be placed on the High Priest's breast plate and used to inquire of the LORD. Traditionally, these have been thought to be stones/gemstones used to answer "Yes/No" questions. However, what these are and the process of using them is never described in Scripture.

2.5.9 **Jonathan is spared from the consequences of Saul's foolish vow (14:43-46)**

- This whole section summarizes the frailty of human kings: 1) the king can lead the nation to battle but cannot ensure victory, 2) the king can build an altar but cannot guarantee the presence of the LORD, 3) they king can make oaths and curses but does not have the power to empower or enforce either.

2.5.10 **The reign and family of Saul are summarized (14:47-52)**

2.5.11 **Saul is instructed to destroy the Amalekites but he spares King Agag in disobedience to the LORD (15:1-9)**

- The LORD's will to destroy the Amalekites goes all the way back to the days of Moses. See Exod 17:14–16; Num 24:20).
- 15:7-8 - Saul's "taking" and "sparing" of Agag again proves his disregard for the LORD's instruction. So does the army with the rest of the spoils.

2.5.12 **The LORD tells Samuel He regrets making Saul King (15:10-16)**

- 15:11 - The LORD's "grieving regret" recalls Genesis 6:7
- 15:15 - Again Saul tries to "spin" his sin into something good. All of this parallels the sin of Achan in Joshua 7.
- 15:15, 21, 30 - "the LORD *your* God

2.5.13 **Samuel confronts Saul with the Word of the LORD (15:17-23)**

- 15:22-23 - a Poetic summary of the most important aspects of theology related to this episode.

2.5.14 **Saul recognizes his sin but the LORD still rejects him as King (15:24-31)**

- Ultimately the sin of Saul is fearing people rather than fearing the LORD as Torah instructed. See Lev 19:14; 25:17; Deut 6:13, 24; 10:12, 20.
- 15:29 - "**the Glory/Everlasting One of Israel**" - Here Samuel gives the LORD a new title. That the LORD does not "lie" is certain. That He "does not have regret/change His mind" is partially ironic given the context. The main point is that the LORD has rejected Saul and will not change His mind on the matter.

"The apparent contradiction of statements that God does not change his mind with those that record him doing so is an old problem that has exhausted all the answers."

[Harry A. Hoffner Jr., 1 & 2 Samuel, 526.]

2.5.15 **Samuel kills Agag and grieves over Saul as the LORD regrets making Saul King (15:32-35)**