



Study #5: Shattered Directions

I Samuel 13-15
Week of 10/18

In our last study, we saw a shattered nation and learned how God warned the Israelites about what it would be like to have a king rule over them. Unfortunately, they ignored the warning.

In 1 Samuel 9-12 we learn that God is gracious and merciful, however, to bless Israel instead of destroying them for their rejection of Him. Saul is chosen and anointed as king by Samuel and then he goes right to work and defeats the Ammonites in battle. Finally, now that everything seems to be in order for Israel, Samuel gives a goodbye speech with a bit of advice for God's people. They are distraught that they sinned against God by asking for a king. Samuel encourages them, however, to not look back at their evil, but look forward and keep following the Lord with all their heart (1 Samuel 12:20). This passage shows that God takes sin and rejection of Him and turns it into redemption for His people. This is yet another reminder for us that God is gracious and merciful and deals with His people in such a compassionate way.

As we move to the passage for this week's study we see snapshots of Saul's reign over Israel. It's a pretty sad picture.

*One commentator put it this way: "From a secular standpoint Saul was ideally equipped to be king; he was regal in appearance, had a demonstrated capacity to protect Israel's material interests by devising and executing successful military strategies, and enjoyed popular support. However, as this section makes clear, Saul and his kingship were fatally flawed and doomed to failure. From the standpoint of Samuel and the biblical narrator, the reason for Saul's failure is simple: **the king was a spiritual rebel against the Lord's word...** Through these early actions Saul established a pattern of disobedience and poor judgment from which he would not deviate. As a result, his dynasty would cease upon his death."¹*

***This is just the beginning of a troubled reign for Saul.** The point of this study is to show Saul's shattered directions and selfish desires. **Instead of waiting on the Lord, he takes matters into his own hands.** This pattern would displease the Lord greatly and would result in God seeking out a man after His own heart, while He is immediately referring to David, who will succeed Saul as king, it also points to the greater king, Jesus Christ, who will be the ultimate King, perfect in everything that God commands.*

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

¹ Bergen, R. D. (2001, c1996). Vol. 7: 1, 2 Samuel (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

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.

Chapter 15 is particularly heartbreaking. 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" (1 Samuel 15:10).

Could you imagine God saying that about you?

No doubt Saul is burdened by his sin because of the earthly consequences; however, he is not burdened by the fact that he offended God. We know this because Saul did not repent genuinely. In 1 Samuel 15:25 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 has allowed numerous opportunities to turn back to God go by as he takes step upon step away from God and the restoration and redemption he so badly needs.** A wonderful lesson for every Christian who thinks that decisions apart from God have no adverse impact on one's life and future. This realization will cause us to invite Christ into every plan and activity we have **no matter how it may change our timeframes and preferences.**

Open It

1. Describe a time when you found yourself lost. How did you feel during that time? How did you go about finding your way back?

Read It: 1 Samuel 13–15

(Our study covers a large portion of scripture with lots of action. Take time to read it in its entirety to learn about the story. For your study and questions we will break up the passage so it is more manageable.)

Explore It

2. Describe the scene in 1 Samuel 13:1–7.
3. How does Saul show himself to be obedient in verses 8–12? In what way does he disobey in the same text?

What excuse does Saul give for his disobedience?

What types of excuses have we used in the past to rationalize or justify certain actions that violated some principle or conviction or command of God?

Why are we so prone to explain away our disobedient ways with these excuses?

How do these excuses help us to feel better about our sinful decisions? What do they keep us from doing?

9. How different would the story have been had Saul waited for Samuel both for that moment and for Israel's future?

Describe a time when waiting on God for something was hard, and discuss the consequences of the choice you made, good or bad.

1 Samuel 14

10. Read 1 Samuel 13:4–7 and 14:6–8. Contrast the difference in responses to the leadership of Saul and his son Jonathon.

Describe the type of leadership it takes to move people from their comfort zone into big steps of faith as the armor bearer did.

*When an individual heart is moved by a strong conviction of duty, it may be that God means through that **one man's conviction to move the world**... Learn, my friends, every one, from this, never to be faithless to any conviction given to you, though, as far as you know, it is given to you alone. Make very sure that it **comes from the God of truth**. But don't stifle it, under the notion that you are too weak to bring anything out of it. Don't reason that if it were really from God, it would be given to others too. **Test it in every way you can**, to determine whether it be right. And if it stands these tests, manfully give effect to it, for it may bear seed that will spread over the globe.³*

11. When has God convicted you to take a big step of faith for Him? How did you discern that it was God's leading?

How did God prove himself faithful in the process? What was the outcome of that step of faith?

It seems that Saul's image suffers greatly, ever since his impressive defeat of the Ammonites at Jabesh-gilead in chapter 11. Saul has been humiliated by the Philistines, not only by their occupation of Israel, but by the way they capitalize on their iron age technology (13:19–23). Much of Saul's embarrassment is the direct result of Jonathan's initiative in attacking the Philistines. Now that he sees the Philistines suffering defeat at the hand of the Israelites, Saul determines to make them pay for his humiliation. His fight with the Philistines becomes personal. It is not God's battle, or even Israel's battle; it is his battle and his victory.

And so Saul puts his men under an oath: no one is to eat until evening. The men are to fight on an empty stomach. Saul appears to reason that this will avoid wasting valuable time (and daylight?) by stopping to prepare and then eat a meal. (Since Saul has not really planned this battle, neither he nor his men are

³ <http://bibleoutlines.com/library/pdf/1samuel.pdf>

really prepared for the day's events.) There are no ready rations for the men to eat on the run, or so it appears to Saul. So he forbids his men to eat all day long and to fight the entire day without nourishment.

Saul is wrong on two counts. First, he is wrong in thinking his order will produce a greater victory for the Israelites over the Philistines. It seems to Saul that his orders will result in more time in pursuit during the precious daylight hours, and thus more Philistines will be killed. It doesn't work out that way. As the Philistines seek to retreat toward their own land, the battle spreads eastward, first to Beth-aven (14:23) and then to Aijalon (14:31). The Israelites pursue the Philistines over 20 miles of mountainous territory, and this without food. The Israelites become weary and weak with hunger and are not able to pursue their enemies as vigorously as they might if properly nourished.

Saul is wrong on yet a second account. He is wrong to suppose that the only way for the Israelite warriors to be fed is by means of a "home-cooked meal," which will take a long time. After all, this is not the day of "fast food," and Saul does not think there is any hope of obtaining a quick boost of energy. He is wrong. God has the "fastest" food available. He has strategically placed a flow of honey in the forest, and it takes no time at all to eat this honey. The soldiers, like Jonathan, only need to thrust their staff in the midst of the honey, take it out and place it in their mouths. There is no faster or finer food around. This is the finest, most natural nutrition for which anyone could hope. It makes "Gatorade" look pathetic.

12. We are told in 1 Samuel 14:24 that Saul gives an oath. What are oaths and what good or bad can come from us using them?

What shortcomings do we learn about Saul when it comes to his issuing such an oath?

What type of response does Jonathon give regarding his father's oath? Why are Jonathon's words to the people so wise?

13. When have the decisions of your leaders put you in a difficult situation?

When have you been pushed too hard by those in authority? How did you respond?

What motivates leaders to make those types of leadership mistakes?

What should our biblical response be when following such difficult leadership?

1 Samuel 15

14. Read 1 Samuel 15:1–3 very carefully. What exactly did God tell Saul to do?

What does Saul do in verses 4–9? What is God's response?

Besides God telling him, how does Samuel know that Saul has disobeyed?

Notice again how beautifully the flesh rationalizes, how it never accepts responsibility for its actions. Saul says, "I carried out the command of the Lord, but they spared the best." Typically the flesh will obey God as long as it does not cost anything. The people didn't mind killing the men, women, children, infants and worthless of the flocks, but when it came to the best of the flocks, what happened? This is when the flesh will never obey God. When it really costs what you want, then the flesh springs into action. That is exactly what you see here.⁴

15. In what ways can you relate to Saul's failure to take responsibility for his actions and passion for his own reputation?

⁴ <http://bibleoutlines.com/library/pdf/1samuel.pdf>

16. What lessons do we learn about what God requires of us from Samuel's words in 1 Samuel 15:22–23?

How should these lessons help form our decisions and plans moving forward?

17. Why did the LORD respond so strongly to Saul's disobedience? Do you think this response was fair? Why or why not?

In the language of the OT, God is said to "repent" when a change in the character and conduct of those with whom he is dealing leads to a corresponding change in his plans and purposes toward them. His repentance is not to be understood as his regretting his action, nor is it a sign of changeableness. His promises and threats are often conditional (Jeremiah 18:8–10).⁵

18. 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?

19. Read Hebrews 10:5–10 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. How does Jesus fulfill our desire and need for a perfect King, and how can we as His followers benefit from His perfect leadership?

Take time to pray, asking God to give you an obedient heart that is quick to trust and obey. Seek forgiveness for your times of partial obedience by taking full responsibility for your sin and revel in the fact that Jesus loves you and forgives you and desires that His people live with humble and contrite hearts so that they are always ready to serve God when He calls.

⁵ <http://bibleoutlines.com/library/pdf/1samuel.pdf>