

## **The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide**

### **Lesson 7: Saul's Rash Offering and Jonathan's Faith**

#### **1 Samuel 13:1–14:52**

##### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

The aim of this lesson is to set the rash heart of Saul beside the trusting heart of Jonathan so the class sees, in living color, the difference between presumption and faith. Saul was not an atheist; he offered a sacrifice. That is precisely what makes him a warning to religious people. His sin was not abandoning worship but reshaping God's clear order to fit his own pressure and timetable. Help the class feel the squeeze Saul was under (vanishing army, advancing enemy, delayed prophet) so they do not stand over him in judgment but recognize his temptation as their own. Then let Samuel's sober verdict land: when we set aside the plain word of the Lord, even with sincere motives, we forfeit blessings we were meant to enjoy.

From there, turn the class toward Jonathan as the bright counterpoint. He had no more soldiers than his father, yet he had a different vision of God. "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" is the theological heart of the chapter. Press home that faith is not reckless; Jonathan still waited for a God-given sign before climbing. Yet his confidence rested wholly on the Lord's power, not on favorable odds. Tie this forward, without forcing it, to Romans 15:4 and the New Testament call to trust God under pressure. The heaviest weight (Question 9) should rest on what Saul's disobedience reveals about the heart God seeks, a heart that honors His word above our instinct to control.

Close by pressing the truth into daily life. Every person in the room will face a Gilgal moment this week, a place where help is late and the temptation to improvise past God's boundaries is strong. The goal is not merely to understand Saul's failure but to let the Lord Jesus form in us Jonathan's confident, obedient trust, so that when our numbers shrink, our faith does not.

##### **Question 1**

##### **Student Question:**

*What does Saul's decision to offer the burnt offering himself, rather than wait for Samuel, reveal about how he regarded the clear word and order of the Lord?*

##### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The chapter opens with Saul establishing a standing army and his son Jonathan striking a Philistine garrison, an act that provokes the whole Philistine nation to war. The numbers are staggering and one-sided: thirty thousand chariots and people as the sand on the seashore for multitude (13:5). Against this, Israel's soldiers hide in caves, thickets, rocks, high places, and pits (13:6). The stage is set not for a battle of armies but for a test of a heart.

Saul's instructions were clear. Earlier, Samuel had told him to go to Gilgal and wait seven days until the prophet came to offer sacrifices and show him what to do (10:8). The boundary was unmistakable: wait. Sacrifice was not Saul's office to perform; it belonged to God's appointed servant. The test was simple in form and brutal in pressure: would Saul honor God's order when obeying it cost him control?

Watch how Saul reasoned. The people were scattering, Samuel had not come within the time, and the Philistines were gathered (13:11). Each fact was true. Saul's mistake was not in seeing the facts but in concluding that the facts released him from the word. He "forced" himself, the text says, and offered the burnt offering (13:12). The verb betrays him; he overrode a conscience that knew better. Presumption rarely feels like rebellion from the inside. It feels like responsible necessity.

Here is the searching lesson. Saul kept the form of religion while discarding its heart, which is submission to God's revealed will. He would sacrifice to God so long as he could do it on his own terms and timing. That is the disease that hides inside religious people in every age: a willingness to worship God in ways that flatter our control, and an unwillingness to wait when waiting feels unbearable.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Saul's sin was not irreligion but presumption; he kept worship while abandoning obedience.
- God's clear word set the boundary, and the pressure of circumstances does not dissolve that word.
- True obedience is tested precisely where it costs us control of the outcome.
- Reformers of God's order, however sincere, set their judgment above the Lord's instruction.
- Waiting on God is itself an act of faith, not a passive failure to act (Psalm 27:14).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Have someone read 10:8 and 13:8–9 together; ask what exactly Saul was told and what he actually did.
- Discuss why "I forced myself" (13:12) is such a revealing phrase about the nature of presumption.
- Ask the class to name modern ways we keep the form of worship while sidestepping plain obedience.

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*Think of a time you grew impatient waiting on God and acted on your own. What did that hurried choice cost you, and what did it teach you?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question turns the mirror toward us. Saul's impatience is not an ancient curiosity; it is the universal human reflex when God's timing collides with our deadlines. Most of us can recall a moment we stopped waiting and grabbed the wheel, certain we could not afford to delay.

Notice that hurried, self-directed action almost always seems wise in the moment. Saul could have defended his choice with a straight face: the army was leaving, the enemy was near, the prophet was late. The cost only became visible afterward, when Samuel arrived and named the foolishness of it.

Encourage honest, specific reflection. The point is not to wallow in regret but to learn the shape of our own temptation so we recognize it sooner next time. Many of us have a recurring Gilgal: a particular kind of pressure where we reliably step ahead of God.

The hopeful side is that God uses even our hurried failures to teach us. The student who has been burned by impatience often becomes the steadiest waiter on the Lord. Romans 15:4 reminds us these accounts were written for our learning, and Saul's story can save us real grief if we let it.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Impatience usually disguises itself as responsibility, not rebellion.
- The cost of acting ahead of God is often hidden until after the fact.
- Recognizing the recurring shape of our temptation helps us resist it sooner.
- God can redeem the lessons of our failures (Romans 8:28; Romans 15:4).

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Invite a volunteer to share, briefly and humbly, a time impatience led them past God's leading.
- Ask what early warning signs (a racing pulse, "I have to do something") tend to precede such choices.
- Discuss practical habits that help us wait well rather than waiting anxiously.

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*How does Samuel's verdict, "thou hast done foolishly... now thy kingdom shall not continue" (1 Samuel 13:13-14), show us that God measures obedience differently than men measure results?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Samuel's words are devastating in their economy: "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God" (13:13). By the world's scoring, Saul had acted shrewdly, securing morale and a sacrifice before battle. By God's scoring, he had failed the one thing that mattered, keeping the commandment.

This is one of Scripture's great reversals of values. Men measure by results, optics, and crisis management. God measures by obedience. Saul's "successful" improvisation was, in heaven's ledger, foolishness, because wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord and bows to His word (Proverbs 9:10).

The verdict is sobering: "now thy kingdom shall not continue" (13:14). One act of presumption did not erase Saul on the spot, but it forfeited the enduring dynasty he might have had. Sin has consequences that ripple beyond the moment, and offices of trust are especially weighty. The Lord then speaks of a man after His own heart, foreshadowing David and, far beyond David, the King whose obedience would never falter.

Help the class feel both the justice and the patience of God here. The sentence is real, yet Saul reigns on for years. God is neither careless about disobedience nor hasty in judgment. He tells the truth about sin while extending time.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God measures obedience, not results; man's success can be heaven's foolishness.
- True wisdom bows to God's revealed word (Proverbs 9:10).
- Disobedience carries consequences that outlast the moment of choice.
- The promise of "a man after his own heart" points beyond David to Christ.
- God's justice and patience operate together; sentence pronounced, time still given.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Contrast how Saul's choice looked to men with how it looked to God.
- Ask why God calls keeping the commandment "wisdom" and breaking it "foolishness."
- Discuss what it means for leaders today that obedience matters more than crisis management.

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*When you feel you must "do something" in a crisis, how can you tell the difference between God-honoring action and Saul-like presumption?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the practical hinge of the lesson. Faith is not passivity; Jonathan acted boldly. Presumption is not the same as action; Saul acted too. The difference lies underneath the action, in whether we are submitting to God's word or overriding it.

A few tests help. Does the action keep clearly within what God has revealed, or does it require us to step past a known boundary? Is it driven by trust in God's power, or by anxiety about our

resources? Are we willing to wait if waiting is what He asks, or does waiting feel intolerable precisely because it threatens our control?

Saul fails all three tests; Jonathan, as we will see, passes them. Jonathan still waits for a God-given sign before he climbs (14:9–10). His boldness is fenced by submission. Saul's boldness leaps the fence.

Press the class to apply this to real decisions: a financial pinch, a strained relationship, a delayed answer to prayer. The question is never merely "should I act?" but "does this action honor God's word and rest on God's power, or does it quietly serve my need to be in charge?"

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Faith acts, but always within the boundary of God's revealed will.
- Presumption acts too, but it overrides God's word to relieve our anxiety.
- Godly boldness rests on God's power, not on favorable circumstances.
- Willingness to wait when God asks is a key test of whether we trust or merely control.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- List the three tests above and apply them to a real decision someone in the class is facing.
- Ask how Jonathan's waiting for a sign (14:9–10) shows that faith and patience belong together.
- Discuss the difference between "doing something" to obey God and "doing something" to soothe ourselves.

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*What does Jonathan's confession, "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6), teach us about the character and power of God?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Now the camera shifts to Jonathan, and the air changes. With only his armorbearer, he proposes to cross to the Philistine garrison, saying, "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (14:6). The sentence is a window into how Jonathan sees God. Numbers do not constrain the Almighty.

Notice Jonathan's humble "it may be" (14:6). He is not presuming to dictate to God; he is trusting God's power while leaving the outcome in God's hands. This is faith without arrogance, confidence without control. He seeks a sign, receives it, and climbs up on his hands and knees (14:13), and the Lord works a great deliverance.

The contrast with Saul could not be sharper. Saul looked at shrinking numbers and felt he had to seize control. Jonathan looked at the same kind of odds and felt free, because his confidence rested not in the math but in the living God who is not bound by it.

This reveals something glorious about God's character. He delights to save in ways that leave no doubt the victory is His. By many or by few makes no difference to the One who spoke galaxies into being. When we truly grasp this, the tyranny of the odds is broken, and we are freed to obey.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- God's power is not limited by numbers, resources, or odds (1 Samuel 14:6).
- Jonathan's "it may be" shows faith that trusts God while leaving outcomes to Him.
- Genuine faith is bold without being arrogant or presumptuous.
- God often saves in ways that make plain the victory is His, not ours (Judges 7).
- Confidence rooted in God's character frees us from the tyranny of the odds.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Have the class weigh the difference between Jonathan's "it may be" and presumption.
- Ask how believing "by many or by few" would change a fear someone is carrying.
- Discuss other Scriptures where God saves through the few (Judges 7; 2 Chronicles 14:11).

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*Where do you secretly believe God needs better odds, more people, or stronger resources before He can work through you?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question presses Jonathan's confession into our hearts. Most of us harbor a hidden conviction that God needs more before He can use us: more people, more money, more talent, a better platform, a stronger position. That conviction is a quiet form of Saul's unbelief.

Ask the class to locate the specific arena where they feel disqualified by smallness. A ministry idea shelved because the budget is thin. A conversation about Christ never started because we feel inadequate. A step of obedience postponed until conditions improve. Each is a place where we have functionally denied that God can save by the few.

The good news is that God specializes in the small and the unlikely. He has always loved to work through the outnumbered and the overlooked so that the glory is unmistakably His. Your perceived deficiency may be the very stage on which He means to display His sufficiency.

Invite honest confession here. Naming the lie out loud begins to break its grip. When we believe that the Lord is not restrained, we are freed to step forward with what little we have, trusting Him to supply the rest.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The belief that God needs better odds is a quiet form of unbelief.
- We often disqualify ourselves by measuring our resources instead of God's power.
- God delights to work through the small and outnumbered (1 Corinthians 1:27).
- Naming the lie of insufficiency loosens its hold on us.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Ask each person to silently name one place they feel “too few” to obey God.
- Discuss how 1 Corinthians 1:27 reframes our sense of inadequacy.
- Encourage one concrete, small step of obedience to take this week despite the odds.

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*How does Saul's foolish oath and the near-execution of Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:24-45) expose the difference between rash religious zeal and true wisdom from God?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Even in a chapter of deliverance, Saul's flawed heart keeps surfacing. He binds the people with a rash oath: “Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening” (14:24). The result is an exhausted, famished army and, worse, a near-tragedy. Jonathan, who had not heard the oath, ate a little honey and was refreshed, and his eyes were enlightened (14:27).

Saul's oath was zeal without wisdom. It sounded devout, even severe in its devotion, but it served no godly purpose and actually weakened the very victory God was giving. When Jonathan unknowingly breaks it, Saul is ready to execute his own son to keep face with his foolish vow (14:44). Only the people's outcry rescues Jonathan (14:45).

Set this beside Jonathan's clear-eyed faith and the contrast is complete. Jonathan's words bring life and victory; Saul's words bring exhaustion and nearly bring death. One man is governed by trust in God; the other by an anxious need to control through religious-sounding rules.

The lesson warns us against mistaking intensity for wisdom. Rash vows, harsh rules, and showy severity can masquerade as devotion while actually grieving God and harming His people. True wisdom is from above, gentle, reasonable, and full of good fruits (James 3:17), not the brittle zeal that would sacrifice a faithful son to save face.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Saul's rash oath shows zeal divorced from wisdom (1 Samuel 14:24).
- Religious-sounding severity can actually harm God's people and hinder His work.
- Saul's readiness to kill Jonathan exposes pride guarding its own face.
- True wisdom from above is gentle and reasonable, not brittle and harsh (James 3:17).
- Jonathan's words bring life; Saul's words bring exhaustion and near-death.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Ask why a vow that sounds so devout could be so foolish and harmful.
- Contrast the fruit of Jonathan's words with the fruit of Saul's words in this chapter.
- Discuss how to tell godly conviction from mere harsh intensity (James 3:17).

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*In what specific area is God calling you to trade anxious control for the kind of quiet, obedient trust Jonathan showed?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question moves from Jonathan's example to our own surrender. Most of us have an area where we grip control tightly, usually one where we have been hurt or where the stakes feel highest. There, anxious management has replaced trusting obedience.

Jonathan models the alternative: he assesses honestly, waits for God's sign, then steps forward and leaves the result with the Lord. He neither denies the danger nor lets it paralyze him. He simply trusts that the God who is not restrained will be enough.

Invite the class to name the specific arena. Is it a child whose future they cannot control? A health concern? A workplace where faithfulness feels risky? Surrender is not a vague feeling; it is a concrete handing over of a particular thing to God.

Trust grows by exercise. Each time we obey in the place we are tempted to control, the grip loosens a little more, and we taste the freedom Jonathan knew. The aim is one definite step this week: a prayer prayed, a fear named, an obedience offered, in the very place we have been clutching.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- We tend to grip control hardest where we have been hurt or where stakes feel high.
- Jonathan models honest assessment, patient waiting, and then bold, trusting action.
- Surrender is concrete, the handing of a specific thing to God, not a vague feeling.
- Trust grows by repeated obedience in the very place we are tempted to control.

### **Discussion Prompts**



- Ask each person to name one specific arena where they are clutching control.
- Discuss what a small, concrete act of trust would look like in that arena this week.
- Pray together, handing those specific concerns to the Lord who is not restrained.

## Question 9

### Student Question:

*Taking the whole chapter together, what does Saul's disobedience reveal about the kind of heart God seeks in those He calls to lead and to serve Him?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now we gather the whole chapter and ask the heaviest question: what does Saul's disobedience reveal about the heart God seeks? Layer by layer, the text exposes the heart God does not want. Saul honored God's word only when it was convenient (the offering), bound others with rash zeal (the oath), and guarded his own face even at the cost of his son. Underneath every failure lies the same root: a self that will not fully bow to God's revealed will.

By contrast, the heart God seeks honors His word above our instincts, trusts His power above our odds, and submits His outcomes into God's hands. That is precisely the heart Jonathan displays and, supremely, the heart of the King God would later raise up. The phrase "a man after his own heart" (13:14) is the hinge of the entire story, pointing past Saul to David and ultimately to Christ, whose obedience was perfect and whose trust never wavered.

Be careful here, pastorally. Saul's rejection from the dynasty is not the unconditional, arbitrary decree of a capricious God; it is the just response to a heart that repeatedly set aside the Lord's word. The warning is real and personal: one who begins with promise can drift through small compromises into ruin. This is why Scripture urges, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

Yet the chapter is finally hopeful. God is looking for a different kind of heart, and through Christ that heart can be formed in us. The Lord who searches the heart (16:7) is not merely auditing us; He is offering, in Jesus, to give us a new heart that loves His word and rests in His power. Saul shows us the heart to flee; Jonathan and Christ show us the heart to seek.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God seeks a heart that honors His word above convenience, trust above odds, surrender above face-saving.
- Saul's repeated self-will, not divine caprice, brought the just loss of his dynasty.
- "A man after his own heart" (13:14) points past David to Christ, the perfectly obedient King.
- One who begins with promise can drift into ruin through unguarded compromise (Hebrews 3:12).
- God does not merely measure the heart; in Christ He offers to transform it (Ezekiel 36:26).

- The warning and the hope stand together: flee Saul's heart, seek the heart of Christ.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Trace through the chapter the specific ways Saul's heart resisted full submission to God.
- Discuss how "a man after his own heart" finds its fullest meaning in Jesus.
- Ask how Hebrews 3:12 keeps this story from being merely historical and makes it personal.

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is forming you through this passage to wait on God and to trust Him when the numbers are against you.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The capstone turns from study to surrender, from understanding the text to letting it shape us. Jesus is not merely the subject of this Bible study; He is the living Lord who means to form His own waiting, trusting heart in you through it.

Think back over the chapter and ask where the Spirit has pressed. Perhaps it is a particular Gilgal where you keep grabbing the wheel. Perhaps it is a place you have written yourself off as too few. Perhaps it is a harsh, anxious rule you have imposed on yourself or others in the name of devotion.

Make it specific and personal. Growth in Christ does not come from admiring Jonathan but from obeying as Jonathan obeyed, in one real situation you face this week. Name the situation, name the trust God is asking for, and take the step.

Remember that the same God who was not restrained at Michmash is not restrained in your life. The Lord Jesus, the true King after God's own heart, lives to form His patience and faith in you. Cooperate with Him by waiting where you have rushed and trusting where you have controlled.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Spiritual formation comes through obedient practice, not mere admiration of good examples.
- Christ actively works to form His waiting, trusting heart in the believer (Galatians 4:19).
- Growth requires naming a specific situation and taking a concrete step.
- The God who was unrestrained at Michmash is unrestrained in our lives today.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Ask each person to name one specific situation this week to wait on God instead of rushing.

- Have the class complete the sentence: "This week I will trust God by ..."
- Close in prayer asking Jesus to form in each heart the faith of Jonathan.