

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

Lesson 7: Saul's Rash Offering and Jonathan's Faith -- 1 Samuel 13:1–14:52

Picture the scene. Saul stands at Gilgal with the wind whipping at his robe, and around him an army is melting away like spring snow. Six hundred men remain where thousands had stood. The Philistines are massing at Michmash, chariots and horsemen and people as the sand on the seashore, and somewhere down in the caves and thickets the men of Israel are hiding, trembling. Saul waits for Samuel, who said he would come. Seven days pass. The prophet does not appear. And in that pressure, with everything in him screaming to do something, Saul makes a choice that will define him.

We know that pressure, do we not? It comes when the bills outpace the paycheck, when the diagnosis hangs in the air, when the people we counted on scatter and the help we were promised seems late. In those moments a quiet voice whispers that we cannot afford to wait on God, that we must take matters into our own hands. Saul listened to that voice. He stepped past the boundary the Lord had drawn, offered the burnt offering himself, and told himself it was reasonable. It even felt spiritual. But it was rebellion dressed in religious clothes.

Then the story turns, and we meet a young man with a very different heart. Jonathan, Saul's own son, looks across a rocky pass at an enemy garrison and says to his armorbearer something breathtaking: "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (1 Samuel 14:6). Where his father saw shrinking numbers and reached for control, Jonathan saw the living God and reached for trust. Two men, the same crisis, two utterly different hearts. The contrast is the whole point.

This lesson is an invitation to look honestly at the two roads laid out before us in this chapter. One road is presumption: doing God's work God's way only when it is convenient, then improvising when His timing tests us. The other road is faith: trusting that the Lord is not bound by odds or numbers or our racing pulse. As we walk through Saul's rash offering and Jonathan's bold faith, the real question is not what they did long ago. It is which heart is forming in us, right now, under pressure.

Group Discussion: When the people around you scatter and God's help seems late, what is your honest first instinct, and what does this chapter say that instinct reveals about your heart?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life right now are you tempted to step past a clear boundary God has drawn, telling yourself it is reasonable because the pressure is real?

Read 1 Samuel 13:1–14:52

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. When you feel you must "do something" in a crisis, how can you tell the difference between God-honoring action and Saul-like presumption?
5. 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?
6. Where do you secretly believe God needs better odds, more people, or stronger resources before He can work through you?

7. 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?
8. In what specific area is God calling you to trade anxious control for the kind of quiet, obedient trust Jonathan showed?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 27:14, on the strength and courage God grows in those who wait on Him; Proverbs 3:5-6, on trusting the Lord rather than leaning on our own understanding; 1 Samuel 15:22, on obedience being better than sacrifice; Hebrews 11:32-34, on the faith that out of weakness was made strong; Isaiah 40:31, on those who wait upon the Lord renewing their strength.

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com