



Community Group Discussion Guide

November 3, 2024

1 Samuel 13: 15-23; 14 1-23 | Like Father, Like Son?

MOTIVATE

⇒ **Starter question: Can you give a biblical or historical example of a son who surpassed his father?**

DISCUSS

1 Samuel 13-15 is devoted to Saul's early reign. These chapters expose Saul's inadequacies and his unsuitability to serve as king. Saul may have enjoyed some military success, but he was a failure as a covenant leader who was meant to be accountable, faithful, courageous, and obedient to God.

Saul failed to follow Samuel's instructions regarding sacrifices before battle. Samuel informed Saul that, as a result, his dynasty would not endure. "A man after God's own heart" would be appointed to succeed Saul instead of his own son, Jonathan (1 Samuel 13:8-14). The tragedy of that loss to Saul's family becomes apparent in 1 Samuel 14 when Jonathan demonstrates his leadership qualities. He would have made a fine king. These chapters describe and defend the rejection of Saul by means of contrast between father and son. (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

The other level of Saul's rejection was more subtle than Samuel's condemnation. There was decaying spiritual character in Saul's life. He made foolish and careless decisions at each step, which eventually took on greater consequences as the narrative unfolds. In essence, these chapters answer one of the book's leading questions: Who may serve suitably as Israel's king? Saul functioned as a negative answer and became the foil for another king, who will be the ideal.¹

- ⇒ **Why was Saul not suitable to serve as Israel's king?**
- ⇒ **Why is "compare and contrast" a useful Bible study tool?**

In 1 Samuel 13:15-23; 14:1-23, Saul's son, Jonathan, proved to be a bold and daring officer, leading a courageous attack against the Philistines and rallying the Israelite army to stand firm against the enemy.² By contrast, Saul was disengaged. He had no communication with Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:1, 17, 27) and it appears Samuel played no role in the continued war with the Philistines under Saul's leadership. These verses also contrast the way Jonathan and Saul expressed their relationship to Yahweh. Whereas Saul publicly dishonored the Lord through fear-inspired disobedience, Jonathan honored God with his fearless faith.³

- ⇒ **How is it possible for God's anointed to be such a failure? Do you have personal examples of gifted leaders failing at leadership?**

1 Samuel 13:15-18 *And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. 16 And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but the Philistines encamped in Michmash. 17 And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual; 18 another company turned toward Beth-horon; and another company turned toward the border that looks down on the Valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.*

¹ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 211). Zondervan.

² Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 94). Holman Reference.

³ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 212). Zondervan.

Saul, Jonathan, and Israel's depleted troops deployed from Gilgal to Gibeah, Saul's capital city in Benjaminite territory. Meanwhile the Philistine force set up their camp at nearby Michmash. The Philistines then split their troops into three detachments of "raiding parties" to surround the Israelite army and to prevent them from using key roads around Gibeah. These actions not only secured the Philistine position but also sealed off Saul's camp from receiving reinforcements.⁴

⇒ **Why is it important to pay attention to the hopelessness of the Israel's situation?**

1 Samuel 13:19-23 Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears."**20** But every one of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle **21** and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. **22** So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them. **23** And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.

If being surrounded by a hostile, superior enemy wasn't bad enough, the weapons arsenal held by the Israelites was inferior. The Philistines and their blacksmiths controlled the metal trade and charged high fees to sharpen and repair plowshares, mattocks, axes, and sickles. The Philistines refused to make iron or bronze weapons for the Israelites, effectively limiting their arsenal.

The result is that on the day of battle, only Saul and Jonathan among the Israelites were armed with sword and spear. The rest of the army had weapons made of wood or stone—arrows, slings, clubs, or stone knives.⁵ Presumably the Philistines knew how inadequately Israel was prepared for war. It seemed clear: Saul and his forces were in danger of annihilation.⁶

⇒ **What does it seem the Israelites are always tempted to do in hopeless situations?**

⇒ **Yet, what does God repeatedly do on their behalf?**

⇒ **How can you apply this to your current hopeless situation?**

1 Samuel 14:1-5 One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side." But he did not tell his father. **2** Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men, **3** including Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. **4** Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. **5** The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba.

While Saul remained on the outskirts of Gibeah with a small contingent of 600 men, Jonathan and his armor-bearer secretly launched a covert military foray a minor Philistine outpost. Neither Saul nor the people knew Jonathan was doing this.

In verse 3, the reference to Ahijah is notable. He was with the Israelite troops as a royal chaplain, wearing the priestly ephod as if he could be consulted in order to seek Yahweh's favor. Emphasis is given to Ahijah's carefully phrased genealogy: *Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh*. This recalls the disastrous history of Eli, Phinehas, and Shiloh as well as God's rejection of Eli's priestly line. It also calls to mind that Ichabod's name means "the glory has departed" (1 Samuel 4:21). This reveals something of the inner life of Saul, who had apparently lost Samuel as his spiritual advisor. His own royal glory rejected, where else would we expect Saul to be than with a relative of "Glory gone"?⁷

⁴ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 94). Holman Reference.

⁵ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 94). Holman Reference.

⁶ Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 199). Zondervan.

⁷ Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (pp. 208–209). Zondervan.

- ⇒ **How is this further evidence that Saul will never succeed as king?**
- ⇒ **What happens when we look to other sources for divine direction?**
- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: This text is compelling the reader to examine sources of authority in his or her life. It raises the question: Who is the Samuel in my life? Or have I replaced Samuel with Ahijah? Have I turned instead to hear another word that is more pleasing or more attuned to my personal ambitions or desires? The Bible consistently shows the folly of turning to any other source.⁸**

1 Samuel 14:6-10 *Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.” 7 And his armor-bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul.” 8 Then Jonathan said, “Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. 9 If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you,’ then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. 10 But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us.”*

While Saul was not faithful to the covenant and disobeyed the Lord, Jonathan took courage and remained faithful. Jonathan did not determine his actions on his own. Each step was punctuated by the acknowledgment of God’s will. Jonathan and his armor-bearer were heavily outnumbered and at a strategic disadvantage. But Jonathan was unimpressed by the Philistine’s greater numbers and undeterred in his belief that Yahweh would deliver Israel.

His words to his loyal armor-bearer reveal Jonathan’s character and commitment: “Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.” Jonathan reminded his armor-bearer of his hope that God would act on their behalf. In the face of overwhelming opposition, Jonathan’s fearless faith activated the Torah promise of Deuteronomy 28:7: The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you.

Jonathan determined a specific sign that would indicate to him that God had given the enemy into his hands. Jonathan’s plan would only succeed because he had the courage and insight to determine the will of God and to follow His direction.

- ⇒ **Why must those who lead first seek to be led by God?**
- ⇒ **What encouragement do you receive from Jonathan’s courage and faith in God?**
- ⇒ **Do you have a specific situation in your life to which you can apply this encouragement?**

1 Samuel 14:11-12 *So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, “Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.” 12 And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer and said, “Come up to us, and we will show you a thing.” And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.”*

When the two men arrived at the Philistine outpost, God gave Jonathan the sign indicating he could proceed with his attack. Jonathan’s tactics defied military logic. He found an established enemy outpost with superior strategic position—a camp on top of a steep hill, approached it, then revealed his position to the enemy. When the enemy invited him to fight, Jonathan and his armor-bearer scaled the steep hill—thereby exposing themselves to attack and exhaustion.

- ⇒ **How does Jonathan’s statement to his armor-bearer reveal his faith in God?**
- ⇒ **How do you come into this kind of faith?**
- ⇒ **Why do we each need “a Jonathan” in our faith journey?**

⁸ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 214). Zondervan.

1 Samuel 14:13-15 *Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. 14 And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow's length in an acre of land. 15 And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic.*

Climbing up a steep cliff to get to the enemy, Jonathan and his armor-bearer arrived at the top, fought with the Philistines, and killed about twenty men in a small area about the size of half an acre. Jonathan's surprising victory panicked the Philistines. A perfectly timed earthquake confirmed that this was a panic sent by God. God honored Jonathan's brave leadership and used his faithfulness as a catalyst for a great salvation.

- ⇒ **How does this narrative demonstrate what kind of king and leader Jonathan could have been?**
- ⇒ **Thinking ahead, is it apparent why David greatly treasured his friendship with Jonathan?**
- ⇒ **What does this victory reveal about God?**

1 Samuel 14:16-19 *And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing here and there. 17 Then Saul said to the people who were with him, "Count and see who has gone from us." And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. 18 So Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here." For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel. 19 Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."*

Saul's lookouts saw the dispersion of the Philistines, and it was discovered that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were missing. Without waiting to obtain divine guidance, Saul called for the Ahijah to bring the ark of the covenant. But inexplicably, Saul suddenly stopped Ahijah and rushed to the battlefield with what was left of his army. This sudden reversal once again exposed Saul's uncertainty and is a reminder of his previous failure to wait for Samuel's arrival in order to offer sacrifices.

- ⇒ **Why does godly leadership require courage, but also require waiting on the Lord?**

The implication is that Jonathan was a leader who took God-directed action, while Saul simply responded to his circumstances. Saul's lack of concern for the direction of the Lord continued to be an ongoing problem for him.

- ⇒ **How do you move from simply reacting to your circumstances to seeking God's guidance in all things?**

1 Samuel 14:20-23 *Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. 21 Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. 22 Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle. 23 So the LORD saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.*

Jonathan's bravery had already triggered panic in the Philistine army. This panic turned into massive defeat, as Saul led Israel's forces against them. Hebrew mercenaries who had joined the Philistine encampment went over to Saul and the Israelites during the confusion. In addition, the Israelites who had fled and hid themselves in the hill country heard of the rout and joined the battle in hot pursuit. Neither Saul nor Israel received credit for the victory, for "the LORD saved Israel that day."⁹

⁹ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 95). Holman Reference.

- ⇒ **Why is it vital believers remember and take courage that the Lord will lead us out and fight for us?**
- ⇒ **How does Jonathan’s courage demonstrate that God can use one individual as a starting point to rescue His people?**

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: Unfortunately, Saul’s reliance on Ahijah was only the beginning of his search for another way. Saul serves as an illustration of one of the truths of biblical salvation history: God’s people are not supposed to navigate our own course. Whether the nation of Israel as a whole or individual believers, God’s people have not been created for self-determination precisely because faith implies dependence on Him. Any other source for guidance and direction will end in ruin. We are to listen to His way, in the full conviction that no other will satisfy.¹⁰

- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: As Saul was condemned once he turned from Samuel to find guidance in other sources, so modern believers must be warned against neglecting or abandoning God as the source of truth and light.**¹¹
- ⇒ **Why must you recognize you are incapable of finding within your own being the measure by which you can rule your own life?**¹²
- ⇒ **Are you committed to God and His divine counsel?**

2. Pray: Ask God to continue to guide and direct us. Pray that, even in the face of overwhelming opposition, He will empower us to stand faithfully and courageously under His leadership for His Kingdom. Praise Him that He is trustworthy, holy, and just. Commit yourself to God and His truth.

STUDY

- Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:
- *Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 94-96.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 199-215.
- *Shepherd’s Notes, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 24-25.

¹⁰ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 213). Zondervan.

¹¹ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 213). Zondervan.

¹² Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 213). Zondervan.