

This chapter gives us a look at Saul's leadership style. It's not good. He is slow to act at the start, leaving his son Jonathan to make the initial assault on the Philistines. He wavers on the necessity of consulting the Lord about the battle. Then he makes a vow intended to stiffen the resolve of the Israelite warriors but instead leaves them weakened in the face of the enemy and nearly leads to tragic consequences. Nothing he does seems quite right.

In our time, people who are natural leaders might seek the office of elder. It is reserved for those who have previously shown good leadership in their families and enjoy a good reputation in the community.

Saul does not seem to be in this category. His early bashfulness about accepting the monarchy appears fully justified. But, remember, the Spirit of God rushing upon him in 6:9, leading him to organize an attack upon the Ammonites. The Spirit can enable capabilities beyond our natural talents. Indeed, "administration" is listed as a spiritual gift in 1 Corinthians 12:28.

So God has made it possible for Saul to succeed despite himself. But Saul's reliance must be on God – his Spirit and His guidance through Samuel the prophet. But

Saul unfortunately chooses to trust his own absent leadership skills. There is no hint of Saul's consulting God in making the unfortunate decision to impose a curse that prevents the fighting men from eating. No doubt Saul sees it as masterful move. But the oath follows no direction from God and in the end weakens the bond between him and his people. They nervously tell Saul to suit himself in verse 40 then intervene to save the life of Jonathan in verse 45.

Saul has a season of success at the end of this chapter. But going forward we will see a mixture of stubbornness and indecision that disregards dependence on the Lord, and leads to the sad mix of frustration and insecurity that plagues the rest of Saul's life.

Notes

14:1 The garrison probably is one of the detachments of raiders sent out by the Philistines in 13:17-18.

14:21 Note that term "Hebrews" is a Philistine word (v.11) that is also used to describe those who are "collaborating" with the enemy. Saul calls the children of Israel Hebrews in 13:3, showing a lack of recognition for God's chosen people.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. How does Jonathan show more faith than Saul? Who else in Scripture does Jonathan's faith remind you of?
2. What might the Philistines be thinking when they invite Jonathan and his companion of "Come up to us"? Does the world ever beckon Christians in a similar way?
3. How do we see God's hand in Jonathan's victory?

4. Why does Saul ask for the ark (or possibly an ephod with the Urim and Thummim) in verse 18? Does he do rightly or wrongly when he changes his mind?
5. Does Saul's foolish oath in verse 24 have a New Testament analogy? What are some of its consequences?
6. What do we learn here about the relationship between Saul and Jonathan? How will that play out later?
7. What is the significance of Saul building his first altar to the Lord in verse 35?
8. Does Saul take the right course of action in verse 46?