

Context:

- CHs 13-15 highlight the "Fall of King Saul."
- Israel is in battle against the Philistines, who largely outnumber them, and have a monopoly on all the weapons (CH 13).
- So far it has been Jonathan, Saul's son, initiating and leading the battles (CH 13, 14:1-23)

**SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 14:24-52 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food. <sup>25</sup> Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. <sup>26</sup> And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. <sup>27</sup> But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. <sup>28</sup> Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint. <sup>29</sup> Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. <sup>30</sup> How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great." <sup>31</sup> They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint. <sup>32</sup> The people pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground. And the people ate them with the blood. <sup>33</sup> Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." <sup>34</sup> And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there. <sup>35</sup> And Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first altar that he built to the Lord. <sup>36</sup> Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." <sup>37</sup> And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day. <sup>38</sup> And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today. <sup>39</sup> For as the Lord lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But there was not a man among all the people who answered him. <sup>40</sup> Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." <sup>41</sup> Therefore Saul said, "O Lord God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. <sup>42</sup> Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken. <sup>43</sup> Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die." <sup>44</sup> And Saul said, "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan." <sup>45</sup> Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. <sup>46</sup> Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

(Summary statement of Saul's reign)

<sup>47</sup> When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them. <sup>48</sup> And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. <sup>49</sup> Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. <sup>50</sup> And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. <sup>51</sup> Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. <sup>52</sup> There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.

V52 is significant because it tells us that Saul, despite his many accomplishments, never fully accomplished what God had specifically called him to do, which was to "save God's people from the hand of the Philistines" (CH 9:16).

\* This is the main emphasis of this text: to highlight Saul's failures as king.

### **THE FAILURES OF KING SAUL:**

#### **1. He was more concerned about his own agenda, than about God's agenda (v24)**

- "I am avenged on my enemies": this is all about Saul, not about God.
- The foolish oath: Saul made it, not because God required it, but because he wanted to ensure that God would grant him victory, even at the cost of his men suffering of hunger.

\* This is a massive failure because Israel's kings were called to be kings who were all about God's agenda, leading and guiding the people of God according to the Word of God.

#### **2. He was more interested in using people, than caring for them (vv24-30)**

- Saul was clearly not interested in the well-being of his soldiers, otherwise he would have allowed them to eat.
- He saw his troops as tools to be used to accomplish his own agenda, rather than people who needed to be led, fed, and strengthened to accomplish God's purposes.

#### **3. He played a role in causing the people to stumble (vv31-33)**

- Because of Saul's foolish oath, the people were "very faint" (V31) after having pursued the Philistines for about 26km (Michmash to Aijalon), without any food. This sets the stage for what happens in v32, when the people commit the serious sin of eating meat with blood. (see *Leviticus 17:10-14* on eating blood with meat)

\* Saul is not guilty for making the men sin (everyone is responsible for their own sin), but he certainly is guilty of creating the circumstance (with his foolish oath) that made it easier for the soldiers to sin.

#### **4. He called upon the Lord only when it would serve his own benefit (vv33b-37)**

- It is obvious that Saul is not a man who normally calls upon the Lord. In v35, we see that he builds an altar for "the first time" and in v36, it is the priest who suggests that Saul should inquire of the Lord before battle.
- Saul only calls upon the Lord because he is absolutely desperate, facing an unwinnable battle (humanly speaking; see CH 13), and he fears that God might not grant him favor because of the great sin his soldiers have just committed by eating blood.

\* He calls upon the Lord, more out of religious obligation, hoping to gain the favor of God, rather than out of love for God or sorrow over sin.

## **5. He was more zealous about dealing with other's sin, than with his own (vv38-46)**

- Saul was so zealous about other's sins, that he was willing to have even his own son Jonathan killed if he was guilty (v39)
- \* Jonathan is pointed out, not necessarily because he is guilty, but to confront Saul on his own foolishness.
- Sadly, Saul cannot see how dark his heart has become, where he is willing to kill even his own son over some honey.

### **WHAT ABOUT US?!**

- If the main point of this text is to tell us to not be like Saul, then we are in trouble because Saul's failures are our failures.

#### *Then what hope do we have?*

- The point of this text is to point us to look for, and long for, a much better King: a King who does not fail in any of the ways that Saul did.
- Our hope is that this King has come, in Jesus Christ, not to condemn us for our failures, but to save us.

#### *\* Jesus did what Jonathan did not*

- Jonathan was willing to die to pay the price for something he did (v43), but he didn't; he was rescued (v45)
- Jesus was willing to die to pay the price for *everything* that He didn't do (every single one of our sins), and He did; He was not rescued, but He was crushed and forsaken by His Father on the cross, so that we would never have to be.

#### *Our response:*

- In light of our incredible gospel hope, we must believe in the gospel, so that we do not despair over our many failures, but rather we can continually repent boldly, knowing that there is always sufficient grace for all of our sins, secured by the blood of Jesus.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. One of Saul's failures was that he was more concerned about his own agenda, than about God's. In what ways is this true of you? Share some specific examples of how you struggle in this area. What practical steps can be taken to help stir up your affections for the Lord, so that you might love Him and place Him first in your life?
2. The way Saul treated his soldiers showed that he was more interested in using people than caring for them. Who in your life do you find yourself guilty of treating this way? Explain. What steps can / will you take to have this attitude changed in you?
3. Saul making his foolish oath of not allowing his men to eat, played a role in causing them to stumble in the bloody meat ordeal. Who in your life are you guilty of playing a role in causing them to stumble? Explain. What steps can / will you take to avoid doing this?

4. Another one of Saul's failures mentioned in the sermon was that he only called on God when it served his own benefit. In what ways are you guilty of this? What particularly helps you to seek God, not only when you need something from Him, but simply because you love Him? In other words, what can we do to ensure that our hearts are longing for, and desiring after our Lord?

5. The last failure of King Saul mentioned in the sermon was that he was more zealous about dealing with the sins of others, than with his own sins. Who in your life are you regularly and honestly confessing your sin to? And who in your life is confronting, challenging (and encouraging) you in your "blind spots" (areas of sin in your life that you may not be aware of)? If no one, why is that, and who can you reach out to do this? If there are people you do this with, share about what impact this has had on your character development.