

• Jonathan defeats the Philistines

**A leader out of touch with God**

1. Will be confused and indecisive in implementing God's will

2. Has to resort to artificial methods of gaining authority

• Foolish measures undermine Saul's authority

• A confused man making things worse

• Jonathan breaks the vow he did not know about

3. Can be strangely 'religious'

While Jonathan was waging war in the Philistine camp, Saul's watchmen noticed the commotion<sup>□1</sup>. Saul discovers that his son is missing from the camp<sup>□2</sup>. He begins to get the ark, which apparently has been brought from Kiriath-Jearim for use in the war. Perhaps he feels it will help in the battles he is expecting. Ahijah starts to get the ark<sup>a</sup> ready for carrying into battle but Saul soon discovers that the Philistines are not about to attack him and are in evident panic and alarm. The ark is no longer needed<sup>□3</sup>. Seeing an obvious opportunity, Saul joins the battle, supporters flock to join in the fray, and a great victory is achieved<sup>□4</sup>. The Philistines had been put down by these two men; Jonathan who had an intuition of faith, and a faithful supporter.

Saul does not appear well in this account.

1. **A leader out of touch with God will be confused and indecisive in implementing God's will.** Saul is clearly vacillating and out of touch with what God is doing. He now appears as a man who has lost the guidance of God.

2. **A leader out of touch with God has to resort to artificial methods of gaining authority.** Saul puts his men under an oath in which they are forced to promise not to eat until the day is over and the battle won<sup>□1</sup>. There is abundant provision for hungry men but they cannot make use of it<sup>□2</sup>. It is a foolish thing to deprive men of food at a time of intense physical conflict, but it is Saul's way of trying to impose authority. Actually **it undermines Saul's authority** because when Jonathan, knowing nothing of the oath, is visibly strengthened by eating, it leads to criticism of Saul<sup>□3</sup>. The oath is exposed as totally inappropriate and foolish. So hungry are the men that, although they do not help themselves to the honey, when the day is over (at dusk) they break the Mosaic law by eating meat with blood in it. Saul then feels he has to offer a sacrifice for their sin. He is trying to put right a wrong that he had led the troops into in the first place. The whole picture is one of a confused man, who is trying to do right, but is making a worse disorder of it, and then making a bigger mess when trying to put right what was wrong in the first place<sup>□4</sup>! He sees their sin ('You have acted treacherously ... Do not sin against the Lord'<sup>□5</sup>) but sees no mistakes in his own actions.

Then Saul wants to plunder and slaughter the Philistines<sup>□1</sup>; it is the very thing he fails to do with the Amalekites in the next chapter! Ahijah the priest suggests they consult God and they soon discover God is not pleased with what is happening and is expressing his displeasure by refusing to answer their questions<sup>□2</sup>. Further investigation reveals that Jonathan has broken the vow he did not know about<sup>□3</sup>.

3. **A leader out of touch with God can be strangely 'religious'.** We shall find again and again that Saul can use very pious language, and can be very strict about religious observance. We have seen that he wants the ark with him, and is concerned about the breaking of ritual regulations. He feels he has to offer a sacrifice to repair the 'sin' of eating meat with blood in it. Now he 'religiously' wants to execute his son<sup>□1</sup>! Only weird sanctimonious legalism

□1 14:16  
□2 14:17

□3 14:18-19  
□4 14:20-23

□1 14:24  
□2 14:25-26

□3 14:27-30

□4 14:31-35  
□5 14:33-34

□1 14:36

□2 14:36b-37  
□3 14:38-42

• *Saul's deterioration*

leads to such folly - like the Pharisees who while they were engineering the crucifixion of Jesus were frightened of being legally unable to eat the passover<sup>1</sup>! Fortunately less 'religious' people have more common sense and Saul's soldiers have enough sanity to see that ritual laws sometimes have to be broken<sup>2</sup>. Saul has changed since the days when he displayed great magnanimity in connection with his enemies and said '*Not a man shall he put to death ... the LORD has accomplished deliverance...*'<sup>3</sup>. When people are slipping away from fellowship with the Lord they are able to do and say things that in previous days they never would have dreamed of doing. Saul's folly is seen even more when we realise that he was so distracted trying to execute his son, that he lost the chance to pursue the Philistines further<sup>4</sup>. Yet despite the very great deterioration in Saul, there still was a possibility of his recovery. He was being quite successful. He fought enemies on every side and defeated them<sup>5</sup>. We are told of his family<sup>6</sup>, including Abner whom we shall hear about later. As Samuel had predicted<sup>7</sup>, Saul was conscripting useful men into his army<sup>8</sup>. Three indications let us know that God was still working in his life and he still could have pulled back into spiritual recovery

- 1 14:43-44
- 2 John 18:28
- 3 14:45
- 4 11:13
- 5 14:46
- 6 14:47-48
- 7 14:49-51
- 8 8:11
- 9 14:52

**Spiritual recovery is still possible**

1. *God is still leaving a doorway open to recovery for anyone he is speaking to*

**1. God is still leaving a doorway open to recovery for anyone he is speaking to.** God was still speaking to Saul via Samuel. '*Today if you hear his voice...*' is a phrase in Hebrews 3:7. A person is able to be renewed unto repentance while God is able to speak to him. Samuel comes to Saul with a message to him from God. It is a good sign that God has not totally abandoned him.

2. *God is still leaving a doorway to recovery if you still have your anointing*

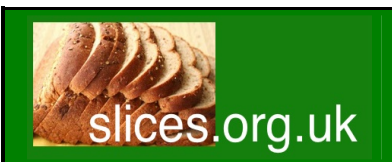
**2. God is still leaving a doorway to recovery if you still have your anointing.** Samuel can say to Saul, '*Don't you remember how I anointed you, and the Spirit of God came upon you?*' It is still working in you, says Samuel. Now go and deal with the Amalekites...

3. *God is still leaving a doorway to recovery while you are being called to serve God by God himself*

**3. God is still leaving a doorway to recovery while you are being called to serve God by God himself.** God comes to Saul and says '*Go strike Amalek...*' While God is still sending us out on his business, he has not abandoned us. The doorway to recovery is still open.

**Note**

a Some translations have 'ephod' but the Hebrew says 'ark' and should be followed (see R.P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel*, pp. 137-138, 343).



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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