



11: Follow the Leader?

(1 Sam 14:24-52)

In childhood games we are to follow what the leader does or says, but how should we respond to the real-life leader who does or says things that don't honor God? Discover how faith like Jonathan's can guide us in the face of flawed leadership.

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teachingnotes

* All Scripture is from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) unless otherwise noted.

1 Samuel 14:23-26

So **the LORD saved Israel that day**. The battle extended beyond Beth-aven, and the men of Israel were worn out that day, for Saul had placed the troops under an oath: "The man who eats food before evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies is cursed." So none of the troops tasted any food. Everyone went into the forest, and there was **honey on the ground**. When the troops entered the forest, they saw the flow of honey, but none of them ate any of it because they feared the oath.

Remember that we saw Jonathan's faith in Yahweh as he faced insurmountable odds yet said...

1 Samuel 14:6-7

Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his weapons, "Come on, let's cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will help us. **Nothing can keep the LORD from saving**, whether by many or by few." His armor-bearer responded, "Do what is in your heart. Go ahead! I'm completely with you."

- ✓ Jonathan leans on Yahweh and trusts Yahweh to use him to do what men can't do alone.
- ✗ Saul, on the other hand, makes no mention of confidence in Yahweh, prays no prayer to Yahweh, and is so focused on avenging himself that he places his troops in a difficult situation.

1 Samuel 14:27-30

However, Jonathan had not heard his father make the troops swear the oath. He reached out with the end of the staff he was carrying and dipped it into the honeycomb. **When he ate the honey, he had renewed energy**. Then one of the troops said, "Your father made the troops solemnly swear, 'The man who eats food today is cursed,' and the troops are exhausted." Jonathan replied, "My father has brought trouble to the land. Just look at how I have renewed energy because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the troops had eaten freely today from the plunder they took from their enemies! Then the slaughter of the Philistines would have been much greater."

The massive amount of honey wasn't a *TEMPTATION*, but a *PROVISION*. God had provided for their needs, yet Saul's prideful oath - **brought trouble** to his troops.

- ✗ Saul's oath to HIMSELF - which NO ONE is to break - is more important than his previous oaths to Yahweh & Samuel - which he had broken.
- ✓ Jonathan is more concerned about the troops and openly states that his father has made a foolish oath.

1 Samuel 14:31-33a

The Israelites struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash all the way to Aijalon. Since **the Israelites were completely exhausted**, they rushed to the plunder, took sheep, goats, cattle, and calves, slaughtered them on the ground, and ate meat with the blood still in it. Some reported to Saul, "Look, the troops are sinning against the LORD by eating meat with the blood still in it."

The men are so hungry, they don't take the time to hang the carcasses and allow the blood to drain from the animals before they eat them, and eating meat with blood still in it is a *VIOLATION* of God's law (Gn 9:4; Lv 17:10-14).

Leviticus 17:13-14 Any Israelite or alien residing among them, who hunts down a wild animal or bird that may be eaten **must drain its blood** and cover it with dirt. Since the life of every creature is its blood, I have told the Israelites: You are not to eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; **whoever eats it must be cut off.**

What a mess this has become! The troops were starving because of Saul's prideful oath. They ate the meat with the blood still in it because they didn't have a place to drain the blood completely & they were exhausted & famished!

1 Samuel 14:33b-35

Saul said, "You have been unfaithful. Roll a large stone over here at once." He then said, "Go among the troops and say to them, 'Let each man bring me his ox or his sheep. Do the slaughtering here and then you can eat. Don't sin against the LORD by eating meat with the blood in it.' " So every one of the troops brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there. Then Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first time he had built an altar to the LORD.

The **large stone** was for slaughtering the animals and letting the blood drain out.

Saul says "**You have been unfaithful.**" It's interesting that the guy who God had rejected as king for his disobedience, the guy who had NOT led his people to trust Yahweh against the Philistines, and the guy who made an oath without considering how it impacted his troops - now confronts them for the mess HE had put them in - EXHAUSTED & HUNGRY.

✗ This is a classic case of NOT removing the log in your own eye while pointing to the speck in another's eye.

It's easy to condemn others without mercy when we refuse to see that WE need mercy too.

Saul built an altar to Yahweh, but not out of devotion or thanksgiving - this is damage control.

Why is this **the first time** he has built **an altar to Yahweh**?"

1 Samuel 14:36-37

Saul said, "Let's go down after the Philistines tonight and plunder them until morning. Don't let even one remain!" "Do whatever you want," the troops replied. But the priest said, "**Let's approach God here.**" So Saul inquired of God, "Should I go after the Philistines? Will You hand them over to Israel?" But God did not answer him that day.

✗ The troops don't seem very enthusiastic in their response, "**Do whatever YOU want**" - and this is the issue with Saul's leadership - he was doing what HE wanted, but had not yet asked what God wanted.

✓ Consider how Jonathan's armor bearer responded to Jonathan's plan to attack, while leaning on Yahweh.

"Do what is in your heart. Go ahead! I'm completely with you."

If Saul had his way, they would have immediately launched the night attack - no time to ask God about it. Thankfully, the priest pulled back the reins and encouraged Saul to ask God what should be done.

Should they go after the Philistines? Is God in this - is He with them? **But God did not answer him that day.** Why NOT?

1 Samuel 14:38-41a

Saul said, "All you leaders of the troops, come here. Let's investigate how **this sin** has occurred today. As surely **as the LORD lives** who saves Israel, even if it is because of my son Jonathan, he must die!" Not one of the troops answered him. So he said to all Israel, "You will be on one side, and I and my son Jonathan will be on the other side." And the troops replied, "Do whatever you want." So Saul said to the LORD, "God of Israel, why have You not answered your servant today? If the unrighteousness is in me or in my son Jonathan, LORD God of Israel, give **Urim**; but if the fault is in your people Israel, give **Thummim.**"

There it is again, the troops are not on board and again respond with, "**Do whatever you want.**"

Saul wants to get to the bottom of this - WHY hasn't God answered? How has **this SIN occurred**?

The **Urim & Thummim** are thought to be 2 stones or sticks held in a pocket in the priest's breastplate. When tossed they likely revealed a "yes" or "no" kind of answer from Yahweh. (Num 27:21, 1 Sam 28:6) Ironically, this is the same process that was used to demonstrate that Yahweh had chosen Saul as the first king of Israel.

1 Samuel 14:41b-44

Jonathan and Saul were selected, and the troops were cleared of the charge. Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan," and Jonathan was selected. Saul commanded him, "Tell me what you did." Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the end of the staff I was carrying. I am ready to die!" Saul declared to him, "May God punish me and do so severely if you do not die, Jonathan!"

Saul is going to hold his own son accountable for Saul's prideful vow that Jonathan was not even aware of at the time.

Jonathan, honest about his dastardly deed of innocently tasting a little honey, is **ready to die**. Whether responding in sarcasm or seriousness, the king's command of death is just SILLY.

But Saul again makes a prideful oath, "**May God punish me severely if my son doesn't die.**"

But this time the troops DON'T respond with "Do whatever you want."

1 Samuel 14:45-46

But the people said to Saul, "Must Jonathan die? He accomplished such a great deliverance for Israel? No, as the LORD lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for **he worked with God's help today.**" So the people redeemed Jonathan, and he did not die. Then Saul gave up the pursuit of the Philistines, and the Philistines returned to their own territory.

The troops recognized that Jonathan **worked with God's help** that day, and they would not allow Saul to kill his son when God had blessed him and them.

1 Samuel 14:47-48

When Saul assumed the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies in every direction: against Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he caused havoc. He fought bravely, defeated the Amalekites, and rescued Israel from those who plundered them.

Saul DID lead the people to protect themselves from their enemies over the years. He was a military leader, but he wasn't a godly leader.

1 Samuel 14:49-52

Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchishua. The names of his two daughters were Merab, his firstborn, and Michal, the younger. The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of the commander of his army was Abner son of Saul's uncle Ner. Saul's father was Kish. Abner's father was Ner son of Abiel. The conflict with the Philistines was fierce all of Saul's days, so whenever Saul noticed any strong or valiant man, he enlisted him.

- We will see some of these names come back up in future studies.
- The conflict with the **Philistines** would continue **all Saul's days** - we will see more of that in studies to come.

In this last phrase we see the fulfillment of the warning that Samuel had given the people years before as they demanded a human king. Samuel had told them, "He will take your sons" for military use (1 Sam 8:9-12). And sure enough..."**whenever Saul noticed any strong or valiant man, he enlisted him.**"



▶ **Jesus modeled obedience to God the Father and stood up to other leaders who didn't.** What about YOU?

▶ **Jesus prayed persistently.** *Jesus didn't tear off on ministry without bathing his thoughts in prayer.* What about YOU?

▶ **Jesus cared about others consistently.** *Jesus cared about the scholars & the drop-outs.* What about YOU?

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Have questions and need some help? ...real soon...how about now? Please **call** or **text** us soon!

- * Contact **Jackie** (850-673-1582), **Christy** (850-673-9764), **Caleb** (864-315-8015), **Gary** (850-673-2507), **Betty** (850-973-3266), or another follower of Jesus soon!
- * Or call our **deacons & wives: Alan & Christy Androski** (850-464-1428), **Steve & Debbie Bass** (850-673-7952), **Noel & Patricia Barnes** (813-767-2881), **Derek & Emily Beaty** (813-763-4421), or **Tim & Joni Hughey** (850-464-1156).

discussion questions

These open-ended questions are designed to help you LIVE what you LEARN with your Family, Friends, or Small Group.

1. Saul's rash oath hurt his own men (vv. 24–30). Can you think of modern examples of how rash leadership decisions in families, churches, or workplaces hurt those under authority?
2. What does Jonathan's response to the honey (v. 29) teach us about God's provision versus human rules?
3. Saul accused others of unfaithfulness while ignoring his own (vv. 33–35). Why is it easier to spot sin in others than in ourselves? How do we guard against this in daily life?
4. Saul nearly executed his own son out of rigid legalism (vv. 39–44). How can we guard against confusing human traditions with God's commands?
5. In v. 45, the people stood up to Saul and rescued Jonathan. When is it right—and even necessary—for God's people to refuse to follow a leader? How do we do this in a way that honors God?
6. Saul was a strong military leader but a poor spiritual leader (vv. 47–52). What qualities matter most in godly leadership today—in the home, church, and community?
7. How does this passage encourage you to trust God's purposes even when human leadership is flawed?
8. Take time to talk about how Jesus modeled obedience to the Father and stood up to those who didn't. What are some ways you have done this or need to?
9. Give examples of how Jesus prayed persistently. How is YOUR prayer life & how can we pray for one another today?
10. Discuss how Jesus cared so consistently for others (give some examples). What are some practical ways we can show real care to others in our community?