

## Helps for the Teacher: Saul's Disobedience

My goal in this overview on the lesson "Saul's Disobedience" in I Samuel 13 is to show the key verse, the theme, and the overall structure that I would use if I were teaching it.

**Let's get started.**

**The key verse** to this whole section is summarized in the 2 phrases **"to obey is better than sacrifice... (and) Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king."** :  
**I Samuel 15:22-23**

It highlights the **underlying theme** that unfolds in the story details all the way through chapter 15:  
*Rather than obeying God from his heart, Saul was driven by trying to please the people, and was giving superficial acknowledgement to God—and that was rebellion.*

**The story unfolds with a prologue, 3 main sections, and an epilogue.**

In the prologue, Saul is anointed king by Samuel.

Section 1 is...

- **What Saul SAW**
  - A. Philistines! Thousands of them with chariots and horsemen gathered against him for war!
  - B. Army running away!
  - C. Samuel is "late"!

Section 2 is...

- **What Saul DID**

He offers the sacrifice that only Samuel is supposed to offer. He reasons that he needs God's blessing in order to move forward, but in his mind, God is running late. Notice—he is trying to be the king that leads the people into battle: appearance is Very Important to Saul.

Section 3 is...

- **What Saul SAID**

**Samuel arrives just as the sacrifice has been offered and asks Saul, "What have you done?"**

**Notice...he is pinpointing what Saul actually DID.**

And notice the subject of Saul's answer in I Samuel 13:11-12,

- A. "Because I saw that the PEOPLE were scattering...
- B. "and that YOU did not come within the appointed days...
- C. "and that the PHILISTINES were assembling at Michmash...
- D. "so I FORCED myself and offered the burnt offering."

Saul was reporting on what everyone else did and was justifying his disobedience.

In the epilogue we find that the kingdom is taken away from Saul because of his disobedience. God is seeking out a man after his own heart to lead His people.

**Here are some useful facts to have as you study the passage:**

First, Israel was established by God as a theocracy—HE was the king. When the Israelites asked for a king in I Samuel 8, God was clear that they were rejecting HIM. However, what He is establishing with King Saul, the very first king—is that the human king is still UNDER HIS AUTHORITY and SUBJECT TO HIS LAWS.

Second, Saul demonstrates that he was not a man of faith. We see him trusting in his own ability and evaluating the situation that he sees in front of him not by what God is going to do, but by what he thinks he can do. Remember—the people wanted a king to go out before them and fight their battles (I Samuel 8:19-20). Saul looked the part: he was tall and handsome, but he was under immense pressure to please the people who had demanded him because he is relying on himself. This leads him to live by sight and please people rather than living by faith and obeying God.

Third, the very first time Saul met Samuel, when he was privately anointed, the people were waiting for Samuel to offer the sacrifice.(I Samuel 9:13) Then later in 10:8 Samuel tells him “I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do.” Now it’s about two years later, when Saul offers the sacrifice without Samuel: he knew what he was doing was wrong.

Fourth, Saul’s army had dwindled from about 3,000 down to 600 over a period of 7 days. You can feel the ticking clock and Saul’s panic as he watches another volunteer slink off into hiding. However, in the not too distant past, Gideon had defeated the Midianite hoard of 135,000 with only 300 men. Just after this incident, Jonathan says to his armor bearer, “God is not constrained to save by many or by few.” This is another demonstration that Saul was looking at the situation through the lens of his own ability, or rather inability. If he had had faith in God’s ability to deliver Israel, he would have been able to obediently wait and not try to force things to happen.

Finally, this incident is not a “one strike and you are out.” In the big picture, God is establishing the whole monarchy that is going to last for hundreds of years. The consequences for the FIRST leader are going to be more significant precisely because he is the FIRST leader. Does it matter if that man looks good but does not have a heart of faith? Absolutely it matters. This incident and the one in chapter 15 are a sober warning not to turn away from God and His commands. They show the contrast to David, a man that outwardly wasn’t quite as tall and who looked very youthful, but was a “man after God’s own heart.”

As you prepare this lesson to teach, take a minute to ask yourself: Are you trying to do God’s work by your own abilities based on what you see in front of you, or by faith in what God is going to do through you? Are there people you are trying to please that drive your actions out of fear of failing? And finally, is there a sin that you have been justifying that you just need to confess to God as sin?

Many blessings as you teach God’s Word!