

# 1 SAMUEL—WEEK 10

## BRIGHT IDEAS



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)  
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

Saul makes up an “oath” for everyone to not eat until the battle is won. His starving troops later sin by eating too quickly and failing to drain the blood. Saul doesn’t show grace towards Jonathan who ate some honey in violation of his oath. He’s slipping.

Saul now lives a life of war and he “cleverly” fails to wipe out the Amalekites as the LORD commanded.

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1 1 Samuel 14:24–30

*And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, “Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.” So none of the people tasted food. Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened. Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed is the man who eats food this day.’” And the people were faint.*

*But Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?”*

Saul’s oath carries weight because he’s the king, but that’s all. It isn’t from God nor from a prophet. Saul makes this oath to curry favor with the LORD, but it’s impulsive and clumsy. It isn’t a prayer. It doesn’t involve a sacrifice (though Saul should be a bit gun shy about sacrifices after blowing the last one).

Jonathan, fresh off his heroic triumph over a fearsome enemy, doesn’t know about the oath. That’s interesting. If the oath was all that important, someone should have made a point of informing Jonathan. Instead, they only mention it after they see him eat the honey.

But we can see from their reaction that they’re treating it as just some rule the king made up.

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Saul’s slipping. Feeding troops is one of the essential tasks of a military. It is literally why canning was invented. Saul’s oath is dumb. It feels like he’s just trying to look kingly, and he’s lost the touch. But the main problem with the oath is how it was generated. It has no roots in the LORD. It has no connection to Samuel. Saul just did it on his own initiative.

Sound familiar? That’s how he got in trouble with his sacrifice in 1 Samuel 13:8–10. He thinks he’s a big shot, and he’s trying to look like a big shot, but he ends up looking like he’s wearing the wrong shoes.

Don’t laugh; we do this all the time. We think we can solve anything, especially with modern technology.

*The great danger we have, living in such an affluent society, is the evil of self-reliance. How tempted we are to think that we are in control, that we are gifted enough, hardworking enough, and rich enough to tackle any problem. But the reality is that God can frustrate the best laid plans of mice and Americans. — Kevin DeYoung*

Modern technology is great, and praise God for that, but it can’t cure sin.

2 1 Samuel 14:31–35

*Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. And the people rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood. Then they told Saul, saying, “Look, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood!”*

*So he said, “You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone to me this day.” Then Saul said, “Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, ‘Bring me here every man’s ox and every man’s sheep, 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 slaughtered it there. Then Saul built an altar to the LORD. This was the first altar that he built to the LORD.*

The people are famished due to Saul’s “oath” and so they dive into the spoils of war and feast on sheep, oxen, and calves. In their haste, they don’t drain the blood properly.

*But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. — Genesis 9:4*

*Moreover you shall not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, whether of bird or beast. — Leviticus 7:26*

*“And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people.” — Leviticus 17:10*

So, this is a major violation. Saul is shocked to hear about it, and quickly makes up a response to try to atone for their error. But he’s not a priest, and he doesn’t do this at Samuel’s command. It’s not genuine.

Saul started off strong, but now he’s just flailing around. He doesn’t know what he’s doing, but he doesn’t let that stop him from following through on whatever he dreams up. First, he prevents everyone from eating. Then he sets up an altar to atone for the mistakes made by a bunch of very hungry people, while also preventing further error.

It never even crossed his mind that this was largely his fault.

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Saul has what Garrison Keillor called “delusions of competence,” but that’s not the essence of what’s wrong. The real problem is Saul’s ego. He has lost his humility. Being king will do that to a man.

Humility would have given him pause when, in 1 Samuel 13:9, he made the burnt offering and peace offering sacrifices that Samuel was supposed to make. Humility would have kept him from inventing a silly fast on the eve of battle. Humility would have had him consulting Samuel more and being brash less.

Total dependency on the LORD is the hallmark of the Israeli crown.

Total dependency on the Lord is the hallmark of a Christian.

3 1 Samuel 14:36–46 (ESV)

*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.” 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. And Saul said, “Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today. 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. 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.” 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. Then Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.” And Jonathan was taken.*

*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.” And Saul said, “God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan.” 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. Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.*

It was just a little while ago, in 1 Samuel 11:13, that Saul showed grace towards people who he could have justly been harsh to. The mob wanted to off his detractors, but he put a stop to that.

But now he wants to show no grace towards his son Jonathan, but the mob puts a stop to that. My, how times have changed. Jonathan has grown while Saul has shrunk.

Jonathan would make a great heir apparent to the throne—if Saul hadn’t wrecked that possibility.

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History can turn on a moment, often in curious ways. Winston Churchill said, on hearing of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, “So we won after all.” He saw down the tunnel of time to what would result.

And he was right. The U.S. jumped into the war, and that made all the difference.

It is alleged that some of the Japanese high officials saw down the tunnel of time too—and were ashen-faced about it.

The application to this passage is that God knows what He’s doing. Jonathan will end up close to David, but David will be the king. The Davidic dynasty won’t be headache free either.

But the plan of salvation will advance down a glorious path no one saw coming (no human, that is).

4 1 Samuel 14:47–52

*So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them. And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them.*

*The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui, and Malchishua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. 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. Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.*

*Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself.*

Saul is now living a life of war. That stinks. Even when you win, war is still all hell—as William Tecumseh Sherman famously said. The last sentence in today's passage is describing a draft. Anyone who looks useful for the war effort is immediately conscripted by Saul. That makes the people just as miserable as Saul.

Saul didn't want this job; he even tried to hide from being selected into it. Now he's stuck.

Matthew Henry's commentary on this passage brilliantly describes how awful Saul's life must be:

*He had little reason to be proud of his royal dignity, nor had any of his neighbours cause to envy him, for he had little enjoyment of himself after he took the kingdom. He could not vex his enemies without some vexation to himself, such thorns are crowns quilted with. — Matthew Henry*

Saul is living out the tale of the sword of Damocles.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Damocles>

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Americans chase after money, fame, and power in ways that look clinically insane. People who reach solid financial security typically keep risking it all in pursuit of greater wealth. There doesn't seem to be a level where people become contented and want to just be prepared for a rainy day. Thus, bankruptcies are just as common among wealthy people as among common folk.

What are they chasing after? Why can't they ever be satisfied?

Something deep inside is empty—something they think will be filled by money, fame, or power.

But those things don't satisfy. So they pursue even more, thinking that they just haven't reached the right level.

Meanwhile, those who know God are at rest.

5 1 Samuel 15:1–9

*Samuel also said to Saul, “The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’ ”*

*So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley.*

*Then Saul said to the Kenites, “Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.*

Saul does the right thing by shoing the Kenites so that they don’t get wiped out along with the Amalekites. But then he doesn’t wipe out the Amalekites—at least not the way he was told to. *Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good.*

But Samuel specifically said, “*Do not spare them.*”

What could they possibly have been thinking?

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Someone should write a book titled, “The History of Bright Ideas.” It’d be a clinic on how things go wrong. Sometimes they go wrong in amusing ways too.

Christopher Columbus had the radius of the earth wrong and thus thought the Far East wasn’t that far west of Spain. He was wrong, but dumb luck (AKA providence) led to a wildly unexpected outcome.

The “bright idea” here was to not “waste” all the good stuff. That’s obviously nuts because God can make all the “stuff” He cares to just by speaking. They’re ignoring His command in favor of a better “idea.”

That’s not chutzpah; it’s unbelief. Their bright idea competes with what the LORD said.

This hints at why God told them to destroy everything in the first place. They need to learn that it’s all about His glory, not their happiness. The spoils of war are tempting; they often motivate war. The Israelites need to avoid that like the plague.

They’re supposed to be under God’s command with God’s agenda—for His glory.

His glory does not depend on sheep.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is your favorite high-tech thing? Why?
2. Have you seen someone lose their humility?
3. Was there a bizarre plot twist in how you became a Christian?
4. Who has been destroyed by success?
5. What's the worst "bright idea" you've seen?

*Items for prayer:*