

### I Samuel

#### Lesson 21 - Chapter 14

As we continue in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel chapter 14 today, we'll re-read a major portion of this chapter in a few minutes, since it is long and involved and we won't even finish this chapter today.

The scene that is unfolding is of King Saul's first war with the Philistines; but also we see the uneasy relationship that Saul has with his son Y'honatan and how this will play out over several years especially as the young David becomes identified as the Lord's *nagid*, prince, king in waiting to replace Sha'ul at the right moment.

At Gilgal Saul was accepted by Israel as their first king; and the very reason that the people initially wanted a king quickly became his primary vocation. Saul would immediately lead Israel in defense from an enemy from the east, the nation of Ammon, and now in chapter 14 he would lead the tribes against an old and formidable enemy from the west, the Philistines.

The Philistines had established a number of forts and encampments in Canaan, primarily in the central hill country called the Mountains of Ephraim. One such place was Saul's hometown, Gibeah (but more correctly pronounced Gee-bah) in his tribal territory of Benjamin, and another outpost was established in a more remote location called Mikhmas. An important strategic pass from the Jordan River Valley to the Mediterranean Sea coast is the focal point of the battle described in Chapter 14. Mikhmas was perched on the north side of this pass (which was essentially a ravine formed by a wadi, a dry river bed); while on the opposite side was Israelite controlled Geba (pronounced Geh-bah).

Saul had marched his 600 men from Gilgal to Geba when the story commences, and we find Saul lollygagging about near a Pomegranate tree that he made his field headquarters. I say lollygagging about because it's apparent that Saul wasn't quite sure what he planned on doing; and so we're about to see his son Y'honatan take the initiative to bring to an end this indecisiveness of his father and instead force a confrontation with the enemy. This is not the first time Y'honatan got sick and tired of waiting for his father, the king, to DO something and not just talk about it. When Saul couldn't get seem to generate enough enthusiasm to get the Israelites to join with him in sufficient force to confront the Philistine threat, Y'honatan solved the problem by assassinating a Philistine governor who was stationed in Geba. This act had its desired affect of so outraging the Philistine leadership that they stepped up their oppression of Israel to a level that even the most reluctant Israeli clan and tribal leaders couldn't find an excuse to sit it out any longer; their personal freedom was now in danger of evaporating.

An unflattering picture of Saul has been emerging and I'm sorry to say, the picture is very much like the stereotype of a modern politician. He talked a good game, but wouldn't act unless there was sufficient personal benefit that at the same time also minimized any personal risk. He purported to be the leader of Israel, but generally just observed where the parade was already headed and then grabbed a baton and jumped in front to take the credit. His courage

was measured primarily by the level of support from those who agreed with him; he melted quickly if he felt the opposition was too great. And while at times he ordered the people to scrupulously obey the Law of Moses or bear the consequences, he also played fast and loose with Yehoveh's commandments and felt he was generally above the Law. Saul's outward demeanor of bombast and bravado masked an inward insecurity, timidity, and lack of character. Everything that God demanded of a king, Saul could not deliver. But of course the Lord knew that because that was at the heart of the reason He chose Saul in the first place. Saul was not only stereotypical of modern politicians but also of the Middle Eastern kings and small-time potentates of that era. King Sha'ul was exactly what those tribal leaders of Israel had in mind as the model of a monarchy that they felt sure was the answer to all their problems.

As we pick up our story today, Jonathan knows that his father is going to do nothing until his hand is forced and so simply could no longer accept this frustrating idleness in the face of the Philistines arrogantly setting up yet another outpost on Israelite land. Without consulting his father, the brave Y'honatan took his armor bearer with him and challenged the Philistines to do battle.

Let's begin re-reading this chapter at verse 8.

### **RE-READ 1<sup>ST</sup> SAMUEL 14:8 – end**

We are reminded of David's encounter with Goliath as we read of Jonathan's faith and certainty that if the Lord wants Israel delivered it doesn't matter whether it is accomplished by means of 2 men, or 2,000. Numbers don't matter. The idea was this: Y'honatan and his servant (called here an armor bearer) would see how the Philistines responded to their provocation. If the Philistine soldiers say, "Stay there until we come down to you", then that's what they'll do. If they say, "come up towards us", then this will be a sign from God so they will believe it and go to them.

Now I have to tell you, if we were there at the time I'm not sure how many of us would regard Jonathan's plan as good and commendable faith, or a suicidal and brash attempt to test God by a couple of guys suffering from a testosterone rush. My nature is such that not only would I probably not take Y'honatan's approach, but if I was that armor bearer I'd ask for an immediate transfer. But sort of hidden here is a lesson for us all about how the Lord makes use of those who inhabit His Kingdom and trust Him in all things. In many ways Jonathan was just like his father, Saul: impetuous, kind of a show-off, hot-tempered, and rash. Yet the difference is that Jonathan was as unselfish as Saul was selfish, and as noble as Saul was base. Jonathan was as determined in his faith and belief in God's power and wisdom and ability to deliver as Saul was determined that he would manipulate the Lord for his own purposes and risk nothing.

We see how two men of essentially the same temperament and personality can at the same time be so opposite in their natures. Saul was being used by the Lord to show us everything that a leader in the Kingdom of God should NOT be; Jonathan was a demonstration of what can happen when a person focuses on God and not his circumstances. King Saul was led by

his own lusts, desires, and inner demons. Jonathan was led by the Holy Spirit. And despite the deep faults and troublesome personality traits that characterized them both, their destinies were night and day apart due to a single all-encompassing personal choice that each had made at some point in their lives: would they or would they not obey the Lord at all costs.

Y'honatan and his anonymous servant having agreed on this daring strategy: walk out into the open and make their presence known. One can only imagine the surprise of these Philistine soldiers as these two lonely Hebrews stood there shouting at them. The startled soldiers were stationed on a promontory where they could see a couple of miles in all directions, and it was obvious that these two foolish fellows were either drunk or stupid (maybe both) because indeed there were no other fellow Israelites in sight. Not quite sure of what to make of these two (and probably not just a little suspicious) they weren't about to crawl down from their rather safe perch overlooking the dry river bed, so in typical Middle Eastern fashion they began shouting back and boasting and challenging them to come up. I have no doubt that after a few minutes of heaping abuse on these Israelites that they had so little regard for, they figured they'd had their fun; it was all over and so relaxed.

But the words of those Philistines were the signal Y'honatan had hoped for. So convinced was he that the Lord was now firmly on his side and that the unction he felt to undertake this excursion was of divine origin, he and his armor bearer crawled stealthily up the north face of the ravine in a very steep part where those Philistine soldiers would not have expected them to show up. When they got to the top it turned out to be an extremely narrow area that the Bible describes as the length of a rather standard furrow that an Ox team would plow in a day, but only half as wide. This meant they were practically in a long narrow tunnel; probably only 1 Philistine soldier at a time could fight against Jonathan. So Jonathan would disable a soldier, and move on to the next while his armor bearer would finish them off in turn. Understand: Y'honatan had no idea when he hatched this brazen plot that the terrain would be so beneficial that a two man team could effectively fight off a much larger company of enemy soldiers. Not only did his faith prove completely founded, but as happens with most worshippers of God one successful step of faith leads to the next (and bolder) step.

About 20 of the enemy were killed in the fight, and the yelling and screaming and commotion awakened the rest of the camp and they were certain they were under attack. Having no idea that the attack was merely a foray of two Hebrews the substantial garrison of Philistine soldiers flew into a panic. To top it all off there was an earthquake (all the more to accentuate that the Lord's fingerprints were all over this operation).

Because the encampment of Sha'ul was only about a mile or so away, and because some Israelite watchmen were set up in outposts so they could spy on the Philistines at Mikmas, they noticed all the confusion and saw the enemy running around seemingly disoriented and reported it to Saul. Only one cause for the stirring up of this ant's nest made sense: someone from his troops was over there, unauthorized, and had aroused the Philistines. King Saul immediately ordered a roll call and sure enough, Jonathan and his armor bearer were missing. Saul being aware of his son's spirit didn't at all put it past him to attempt this sort of desperate undertaking on his own, without permission. The mystery resolved, the ever indecisive Saul called for his High Priest, Achiyah, and told him to bring the Ark of God. Now exactly where the

Ark was at this time we can't know for sure; however the last we heard of it put its long term home in Kiryat-Ye'arim in the home of a priest. However very likely it was currently traveling with this group; even the reticent Sha'ul wouldn't have waited for several days to address this emergency. It was usual that the Ark was carried to the site of the battle so it's hard to imagine that Saul would have allowed it to remain in Kiryat-Ye'arim.

With one eye on the Philistines camp that was surging and scattering, and yet with his instinct to consult God on the matter before he acted tugging on him, Saul decided he couldn't wait, loses patience, and so as the High Priest is in the process of seeking the Lord's favor Saul interrupts and tells him to "put your hand down". What's going on? The High Priest would have been using the Urim and Thummim to obtain divine answers to Saul's questions about what to do. The two stones were kept in a special pocket in the High Priest's ephod, and his hand would go inside the pocket to remove and then put back the stones as a means of inquiry. As usual, Saul liked the idea of seeking the Lord on matters but as often as not had as much or more confidence in his own decisions so he simply prematurely stopped the process of the High Priest consulting the Lord.

So King Saul quickly assembles his troops and they race over to the camp of the Philistines to take advantage of the chaotic situation. When he arrives he finds that in the midst of the confusion the Philistines are fighting and killing one another. Part of the reason that was happening was because some of the Israelite clan members who had cut their own deals with the Philistines and so were peacefully camping with them, had now turned on their new buddies and starting killing them. The Philistines didn't know who was enemy and who was friend. Not only that, but many of the Hebrews who had been in hiding saw the opportunity to decimate these Philistines and so joined with Saul and his 600 and chased down and killed many of the fleeing enemy. Thanks to Jonathan's courage to obey the Lord and go forth in faith at great personal risk, it was a rout and that area was cleared of the Philistine threat for a time.

These battles of old were long affairs; when soldiers engaged in battle it was usually until the sun set and no one (on either side) could see well enough to continue. Stamina was as important as ability. Both sides eventually were exhausted, thirsty and famished to the point of collapse. Blood sugar levels were critically low, dehydration set in and it was quite usual to have warriors faint and be killed while they lay on the ground, not injured but merely unconscious. But Saul, who undoubtedly had multiple attendants not only protecting him but supplying him with food and drink and time to rest, ordered his weary men to continue pursuing the Philistines until he was satisfied that the victory was total.

Saul was yielding to yet another of his characteristic impulses. Although what his army needed most was some food and water and bit of rest, he not only ordered them to continue without food or water but also made them take a solemn oath (a vow before the Lord) to not even taste of food until Saul allowed it. Or as the super-selfish King put it, they weren't to eat again until, "I have finished taking vengeance on **MY** enemies". Not Israel's enemies. Not God's enemies (this was, after all, Holy War), but MY enemies.

In but a couple of years on the throne Saul has quickly adopted the attitude of a despot. His

men were canon fodder, and all wars were about his personal pride and status among the nations. While it's difficult to understand any religious motive of Saul's to make the men take this oath not to eat, without doubt in Saul's mind religion played a role. Very likely he thought this was a pious act on his part that would impress God and curry favor. As stupid and rash and destructive as such a vow was, Middle Eastern resolve is such that even had he come to his senses Saul could not take it back without losing face and taking the sin of renegeing on the vow upon his own shoulders.

The people on the other hand fully understood that even though they were in a sense forced into to it, they had said "amen" to the oath and now they were bound. This was a serious matter; Saul declared an oath with a divine curse attached to it and this meant that despite the irrational and unwarranted nature of the oath, it was absolutely valid in all of it's details and terms in the Lord's eyes. A God-principle that goes back to Exodus, Leviticus, and to the book of Judges teaches us that the Lord is NOT in the business of seeking vows and oaths from His people as a sign of their piousness. The New Testament has Yeshua advising against vows and oaths not because they were tradition, or superstition or no longer in operation, but because they remained just as powerful and as much in effect as they did in the ancient days. However, if one chooses to make a personal vow or to join in to a group vow, then one is obligated to follow through with it otherwise the attached curse will be on their head.

These Hebrew soldiers were in such awe of the Lord that they risked their lives on the battlefield by continuing to fight in a weakened condition in order to obey the oath rather than risk antagonizing Yehoveh. I wonder if such fear and awe remains in us, the Church. It ought to but sadly a misguided Christian doctrine that sprang up some time during the era of the early Roman Church has endangered millions of Believers by saying that faith in Messiah means the end of our obligation to be obedient to God. And since there is no further need for obedience, any kind of breaking of the Lord's commandments is generally inconsequential. Yeshua made it clear that such a thing is patently absurd and warned that it was much safer as a worshipper of Yehoveh to simply respond "yes or no" and not add an oath or a vow to anything since the Lord will expect us to do whatever it is that we have vowed. And this is because a vow inherently attaches God's name to our promise and thus it puts His Holy Name and reputation at risk if He just turns a blind eye.

Verse 25 explains that Saul's army entered a forested region where apparently many large colonies of bees lived, and there was abundant honeycomb all over the place. Honey (**devash** in Hebrew) was prized not only for its wonderful taste but for its ability to revive a person who was in a famished or weakened condition by rapidly raising their blood sugar levels (not unlike the way chocolate was used by our military in WWII). But as terribly as they needed it, and as marvelous a gift from Heaven provided by the Father as it was, Saul's vow prohibited the people from partaking and so with great discipline they passed it by and did not so much as taste it. However, Jonathan had not heard of his father's rash command and so took advantage of the fortuitous find.

One of the soldiers saw what Y'honatan did and told him of the oath against the army eating that his father had demanded and it infuriated him. Just as Saul well knew of his son's indomitable spirit and strong faith in Yehoveh, so Jonathan well understood his father's bent

on issuing morally reprehensible orders and ill conceived commands on an impulse. So Y'honatan publically denounces his father's ridiculous attitude and says that Saul has brought trouble to the land. That in fact this oath had caused the Israelites to have much less of a victory over the Philistines than they could have had if they had been allowed to eat and regain their strength.

One comment: while the other soldiers were duty bound to this oath and would have suffered at God's hand had they transgressed it, Y'honatan was not in the same position. He had not heard of the oath and thus had not agreed to it. The Lord had providentially kept Jonathan busy elsewhere and so it had no effect upon him.

In verse 31 we get the key words, "that day". That day the people kept on fighting without ceasing and without food and so when sunset came they began to eat the captured domestic animals. Verse 24 said that the oath was, "**a curse on any man who eats any food UNTIL EVENING.....**" This is meaning the same day as the oath was taken. So the oath ended upon sunset, when the current day ended and a new day began. The narrator of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel explains that they were so hungry that they slaughtered the animals on the ground and cut them up as they lay in pools of their own blood, and then ate them. The issue is NOT that they ate the animals raw (they didn't); it's that they didn't properly drain the blood from the meat before cooking it and thus they broke the commandment to refrain from eating blood.

***CJB Leviticus 17:10 "When someone from the community of Isra'el or one of the foreigners living with you eats any kind of blood, I will set myself against that person who eats blood and cut him off from his people."***

Eating blood doesn't only mean to literally drink the blood, or to drain and store the blood and make some kind of food from it. It also means that the meat must be properly and reasonably free of blood before cooking. In fact in ancient times (especially during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple era), enormous quantities of salt was used for this purpose as salt is a good absorbent of liquid. The blood contaminated salt was then thrown out onto the roadways and pathways as it acted to poison the ground (as salt will) and kill the vegetation thus keeping pathways from becoming overgrown. We are given an example of what happens with waste salt in this well known passage from the New Testament:

***CJB Matthew 5:13 "You are salt for the Land. But if salt becomes tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except being thrown out for people to trample on."***

The reference to the salt being thrown out for people to trample on was quite literal and a common everyday occurrence that served a useful purpose for the nation's network of roads. When Saul found out about his army not properly draining the blood, he ordered that a large stone be brought to him and then each man was to slaughter his animal on the stone so that Saul could oversee it. By slaughtering an animal on a flat stone the blood would flow out of the meat to the edge of the stone and drip onto the ground; this was the standard way blood was drained away from the animal sufficiently for it to be considered ritually clean (at least in that era). The people understood the sin of what they had been doing as well as Saul did, but they

were so hungry due to their King's rash edict that they accepted the consequence of the sin as a price they were willing to pay to hurry up and eat.

What a great lesson we can take from this for a leader of any kind: from a parent, to a small business owner, to a Fortune 500 CEO, to a government official, to a Pastor or Rabbi. When we put merciless, unreasonable, uncaring demands and requirements on those in our charge and they fail, we as leaders are at least as much at fault because we put them in a position where failure was almost a certainty. Parents can be too strict, bosses too demanding, and congregation leaders too rigid and quick to evoke self-righteous and burdensome doctrines upon their people that go far beyond their Biblical intent. The Rabbis became infamous for this in the form of thousands of often burdensome (if not silly) traditions. Yeshua spoke out against these harsh doctrines, traditions, and manmade edicts and offered a return to the true intent of the Torah.

***CJB Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."***

Saul was not wrong in stopping his army from eating blood; he was wrong in that it was his own harsh act that caused the sin of it in the first place. Thus from God's viewpoint this blood-sin was as much on his head as theirs.

In verse 36, after the people were refreshed by eating and resting for awhile, as Saul was pondering that day's events he could not have helped but recall the story of Joshua and his nocturnal pursuit of Israel's enemies several centuries earlier. So his proposal that the army put aside sleep that night and go after the fleeing remnant of the Philistines was willingly accepted by the rank and file.

The priests (properly so) countered by saying that they should consult with God "here". "Here" undoubtedly is referring to the altar that Saul had built where they were currently resting. Saul naturally agreed and asked two questions of God through the High Priest: 1) Should he pursue the Philistines that night and 2) will Saul's army be victorious? But the Lord was silent and gave no reply.

We are again witnessing the use of the Urim and Thummim sacred stones by the High Priest. It is thought that the stones can essentially provide no more than a yes/no answer. Thus when the Priest put his hand into the special pocket sewn into his ephod where the stones resided, pulling out one stone meant "yes", the other "no". So questions had to be phrased in a yes/no, true/false, either/or fashion. So exactly what the indication was that God provided NO answer to the questions involves speculation. Tradition says that one stone or the other would literally glow or shine, thus indicating God's decision. Certainly it must be in the case before us that either the High Priest was somehow supernaturally aware that the Lord was withholding His oracle or that indeed the stones themselves changed in some visible and obvious way when an answer was forthcoming and this time their state remained unchanged.

When no answer was given, the only possible explanation for such divine silence was that some sin had been committed that had displeased the Lord and thus He had pulled away from Israel. The only solution was to discover the sin, punish the trespasser (using God's justice system), and then make proper atonement.

Sha'ul, naturally, didn't even think to look at himself so (in verse 38) he assumes that one of the army's leaders either personally sinned or knew of sin within their ranks, so he assembles his military officers and demands to know, "***who has committed this sin today?***" "This sin" doesn't necessarily mean that Saul specifically knew what kind of sin had been committed he only meant "this sin" (whatever it is) that has caused the Lord to withdraw. No one stepped forward to confess any sin so Saul used the other standard religious method of advancing towards the truth: casting lots.

We'll look at the results of what is essentially a trial next week.