

I Samuel

Lesson 22 - Chapter 14 and 15

As we move forward with 1st Samuel chapter 14 today, we are in the midst of King Sha'ul of Israel's first war with the Philistines. This war was fought at Mikhmas pass, essentially over a ravine (that was a wadi, a dry river bed) that provided a good roadway for commerce from the Jordan River Valley westward (through another interconnecting roadway) to the Mediterranean Sea coast. This strategic trade highway was important for the Philistines because they were in the shipping business. They controlled a long but narrow section of land (today known as the Gaza Strip) that provided good water access; but you won't last long in the shipping business if you don't have a sufficient supply of goods to ship, and you don't have a market to sell the products you import. Therefore they needed to have open caravan routes from their sea ports to the Asian Continent north and east of them; it was simply a matter of economics.

This is a good time to remind you that the main reason for the Philistine aggression at this time indeed revolved around money and trade, not so much a desire to expand the Philistine national territory per se. It's not that they would have rejected such an opportunity, but they were just as satisfied to have military dominance over the region and thus control the people sufficiently enough to freely carry out their business of ocean based commerce.

Just as it is today that the USA finds itself enmeshed in the turmoil of the Middle East mainly due to our need for oil, and that we truly have no desire to colonize these Arabian nations but we necessarily do need to maintain military forces there to keep those channels of commerce open, that was the case with the Philistines. It just so happened that the Land of Canaan was the crossroads of commerce for the region and so Israel bore the brunt of the Philistines' decision to use force if need be to keep the flow of goods coming and going from their seaside nation to the other nations that surrounded and were beyond Israel; nations with which they wanted to establish vigorous trade.

And just as in the Middle East today whereby those Arab businessmen and political leaders who benefit from their economic relationship with the West are amenable to having American forces stationed on their soil (within certain limits), there are those who do NOT reap those same personal benefits and so view our American presence in their homeland as heavy handed, an affront on their sovereignty, and in some cases a threat to their dignity and way of life. So in Canaan there were some Israelite clans and tribes that cut deals with the Philistines (when they saw benefit in doing so), but others of the Israelites (the bulk of them) that viewed the Philistine presence in their tribal territories as a danger and an attempt to lord over them and they resisted it at all costs.

Sha'ul, now the undisputed king over these Israelite territories in Canaan, wouldn't reign over anything he could legitimately call a Kingdom if these Philistines could move around freely and set up military outposts on land that was supposed to be his territory. The Philistines weren't about to easily give up their economic lifeline, and King Saul wasn't about to give up any of his

newly found personal authority and sovereignty to these long time foreign foes. So this war we are reading about in chapter 14 was inevitable, and the elders of Israel knew this well before the first arrow was shot in anger, and that is why they wanted to make a fundamental change in the government of Israel; they wanted a warrior king to rule over them (and to protect their interests) instead of a Judge.

When we left off last time, Jonathan the brave son of Saul instigated a confrontation with the large garrison of Philistine soldiers encamped at Mikhmas, located in King Saul's home tribal territory of Benjamin. That of itself is of no particular merit; that Y'honatan did it with the aid of only his armor bearer reflects greatly on his nature of being a worshipper of Yehoveh who courageously put his life on the line as evidence of his faithfulness.

Y'honatan and his anonymous servant first merely traded insults and challenges with the enemy across the ravine, then upon hearing words from an enemy soldier ("**come up to us**") that confirmed for him that God was in this venture they crawled up the steep rocky walls above the wadi and attacked. The commotion of the fight stirred the entire Philistine camp into a panicked reaction such that King Saul's lookouts saw the confusion and chaos and reported it to Saul. First indecisively and then impulsively Saul joined the fight with his 600 soldiers accompanied by Hebrews in the area who had been in hiding, and some other Hebrews who were at peace with the Philistines (and even camping alongside them at Mikhmas); they reversed their new loyalties and rejoined their Israelite brethren in killing the Philistine soldiers.

Saul was so excited at how well the battle was going that he ordered his men to take an oath that they wouldn't eat or rest that day until they had thoroughly vanquished the enemy. But battles in that era being lengthy, physically draining affairs meant that soon the Israelites were famished, dehydrated and nearly unable to continue to prosecute the war. After taking some domestic animals as spoils of war from the Philistines the exhausted Hebrews began hurriedly slaughtering the animals on the ground whereby the meat wouldn't properly drain of its blood, thus committing a great sin. Saul saw this, put it to a stop, and had a large stone rolled over to him for the animals to be slaughtered upon thus allowing the meat to drain properly.

In but hours after his army was somewhat refreshed and restored, Saul determined it might be best to continue their pursuit of the remnant of the Philistine soldiers in a night operation; but the priest thought it best to first consult God by means of Urim and Thummim to see if that strategy agreed with the Lord's will. To Saul's surprise he received no answer to his inquiry and so rightfully determined that the Lord's silence and withdrawal from Israel had to be because of the commission of some serious sin. The next step was to determine what the sin was and who committed it.

Let's re-read the ending passages of 1st Samuel chapter 14 and we'll see the results.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL 14: 36 – end

Verse 38 makes it clear that it was the heads, the chiefs, the military leaders of Israel who were called to come and stand before King Saul to confess who among them had sinned and thus caused the God of Israel to withdraw from His people. This was, in Saul's eyes, to be a

divine trial and the words of this story and the outcome make it apparent that indeed the Lord was orchestrating it.

The ever impulsive and grandstanding Saul now makes another rash vow. He was currently in the throws of dealing with the messy aftermath of having made his army vow not to eat (an amazingly stupid and foolish thing to do), only to do it again. But this time it was Saul who made the vow personally and so he would bear any divine consequences for breaking its terms. When in verse 39 Saul says, “**For as Adonai (YHWH) Israel’s deliverer lives**”, he is invoking the traditional Middle Eastern vow formula; Saul is essentially swearing to God that what he next pronounces he will follow through with. And what he says is that he vows that, “**even if it proves to be Jonathan my son, he must be put to death**”. In other words whoever it is that has committed such a serious sin as to cause God to react by withholding His oracle through the Urim and Thummim of the High Priest, that person must die and no one is exempted including his own favored son, Y’honatan (naturally, it goes without saying that Saul is excluding himself from any possibility of being the one who has sinned).

No one stepped forward to confess any sin (let’s face it, whoever did would have been signing their own death warrant). So that meant that another means of discovering the offender was needed and Saul decided to employ lots. So in verse 40 the narrator states that Saul said to “all Israel” to stand in one area and Saul and his son Jonathan would stand in another; then the lot would determine whether the fault lay with the general assembly of Israel, or with its two leaders King Saul and his son.

Contained in these words is an example of what it means (and doesn’t mean) when we say we need to “take the Bible literally”. Because here it is said that Saul told “all Israel” to stand in one area for lots to be cast. In this case “all Israel” was referring to the chiefs (the military leaders who were present who represented all the tribes). That is, for Saul in this context he was not exempting any clan or tribe from being involved in the divine trial by lots. There have been centuries of needless theological arguments over the terms “infallible” and “literal” when referring to the nature of the Bible and how we ought to read and perceive its contents. We certainly aren’t going to fully enter that debate today. But as to the word “literal”: in our current age “literal” has meant that we are to take the Holy Scriptures word for word and further that those words are so mysterious in their nature that they transcend time and culture. That what those words mean to the minds of readers from any era, any place, or any culture can be different but they are all valid. I am here to tell you that this is nonsense and such a definition has been scribed by various Christian denominational leaders as a means for them to twist and turn the Bible’s meaning into anything that supports their doctrines and agendas.

What literal OUGHT to mean (and what I mean by literal) is to take the words for exactly (as best as we can discern) what they meant to the minds of the people who wrote them. We must always remember that unless we are scholars who read the Bible in its original language and from the oldest manuscripts, we are reading translations of translations and invariably when we read our Bibles in English in our 21st century Western culture the word pictures that pop into our minds are in the context of our current society and current vocabulary.

Thus, despite the generally incorrect (or more generously, overly simplistic) modern theological

definition of the term “literal”, there is no contradiction between verse 38 when it says that Saul called ONLY the army **chiefs** to stand before him but in a couple more verses says that **all of Israel** is to stand to one side while he and Y’honatan stand to other. By a much more intellectually and factually honest definition of “literal”, “all of Israel” is merely the ancient way of Saul saying that every tribe and clan must be represented (not that every citizen of Israel must be present).

The result of the first round of lots is stated in verse 41; the lots say that “all Israel” is innocent and the trouble lies with either Y’honatan or Saul or both. So now that the matter has been narrowed down to two people, the next round of lots will be to determine whether it’s the king or his son that will be identified as the offender. Jonathan was fingered and has father confronts him by saying, “Tell me what you did”, and he answers that he did indeed eat of the forbidden food (in this case the honey that was on the forest floor).

Thus we find out something that hasn’t been obvious up to now; that all along the sin that Saul has been trying to discover is: who it is that has broken the oath not to eat before the day ended. But taking it to the next level we see that what the lots really discovered was who it was that ate anything on that day, not so much as to who it was who violated an oath to God (thus sinning) because Jonathan had not even been aware that such a vow had been demanded by Saul.

So after admitting that he ate honey, Jonathan responds to his father’s vow that the perpetrator must die. And the response varies a bit in the English from bible version to bible version. Our CJB’s have one of the poorer translations in my estimate. In Hebrew Jonathan says, “**hinneh amuth**”, which most literally means, “behold (or see) I must die”. Jewish scholars generally say that this response was more in the form of a rhetorical question: “behold, I must *die*?” Or possibly it was a somewhat sarcastic protest: “behold, I *must* die”. By no means is the meaning as in our CJB, “I am ready to die” thus implying that he admits he was wrong and understands he must accept his fate (for indeed he has done nothing wrong before the Lord, for he took no vow to abstain from food).

King Saul in all of his twisted self-righteousness (that reminds us a bit of the Inquisition) says to his son, “May God do the same to me and more also if you are not put to death, Y’honatan!” What Saul has done is to make yet ANOTHER rash vow before the Lord

(the 3rd one contained in this short episode); he has vowed that either he puts Jonathan to death or if he doesn’t then the Lord should see to it that Saul is killed and even worse. This brings to mind the terrible vow that the Judge Jephthah made that if the Lord granted him victory on the battlefield he would offer for sacrifice the first thing that came through his door to greet him when he arrived home. That “thing” turned out to be his daughter. At least Jephthah had the excuse that he never intended that **any** human being (let alone his innocent child) be that sacrificial victim. But on the other hand he blithely offered up a vow to God whereby he didn’t consider the possibility of unintended consequences. Saul on the other hand made a vow that necessarily involved the death of a human being, and now even of his own son, for something as silly as having eaten food after a long day of battling the enemy. But in many ways Saul has just sealed his own fate; for he has vowed that if Jonathan isn’t killed, he must

be.

You know, we need to back off a bit and view Saul not as a depraved and intentionally wicked man, but rather as a fragile, insecure, ego-driven man who often succumbed to the same evil inclination that is the ruin of us all. The poor judgment that this first King of Israel constantly displayed was a result of these flaws, not of an inherent predisposition to be a rebel. So we can (in some ways) look upon King Saul with sympathy rather than condemnation, just as Yeshua looked in sympathy at those two men hanging on their crosses on either side of him (well aware that they were being punished for crimes that they had knowingly and willingly committed).

This man, Sha'ul, who turned out to be a type of Anti-King was not born with a soul or spirit any different than the rest of us. And I suspect we need to call that to mind when we think of the nature of the future Anti-King (who is better known as the Anti-Christ) who will be born as an innocent baby to a human mother and father, but will at some point in his life completely turn himself over to the Evil One. The coming Anti-Christ will not be of supernatural origin any more than was King Saul; he will simply be a man who turns himself over to (and thus be possessed by) an evil supernatural control to a greater degree than any man before or after he arises.

The army of Israel fully understands that what Saul has done in condemning Jonathan is wrong and unjust on any level. They knew that Jonathan wasn't with them when Saul ordered that they take the vow against eating, and therefore when Jonathan did eat some honey that it was NOT a sin and so whatever the Lord was reacting to by His silence it could NOT have been Y'honatan tasting a little honey. Further, they knew that Jonathan was a brave and selfless leader who genuinely strove to be faithful to God (unlike his despot father, Saul). Thus Saul announcing that Jonathan would die drove them to rebel against Saul; they told the King that they will not allow him to kill his son. They even credited the great deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Philistines to Jonathan (not Saul). Further that it was because Jonathan had co-operated with God that this victory occurred.

In the end Saul did not execute Jonathan, and he ordered the night operation to pursue the Philistines canceled. Saul was thoroughly exposed and thoroughly humiliated; he returned home to Gibeah, and the remnant of the Mikhmas garrison of Philistines limped back to their home territory along the sea coast.

From verse 47 to the end is a brief summary to explain what went on for a time after the battle of Mikhmas Pass, and the political position Saul maintained. Notice that his kingship continued on and that he presided over a series of victories upon his familiar enemies Moab, Edom, Ammon, and the Philistines. In time he attacked Amalek and in the coming chapter we're going to read specifically about his war with Amalek.

Saul's sons are listed 5 times in the Old Testament but among them only Y'honatan and Ishbosheth play a role in any of the stories recorded about Saul and his offspring. Next his two daughters Merav and Mikhal are named, and only after that his wife Achino'am. This kind of genealogy was always an important footnote to ancient writings so as to provide evidence of

exactly who was being spoken of.

We're also informed that the top commander of Saul's army was Avner, son of Ner; and Ner was Sha'ul's uncle. Note that Avner means "my father is Ner". Also note that, as was usual, close family members were given the choicest offices under the King because they were sure to be the most loyal (or at least they would help to try and keep the accumulated wealth and power in the clan).

The final verse of this chapter reminds the reader that the defeat of the Philistine garrison at Mikhmas in no way equated to the subduing of the Philistines in general. Despite the several military activities and victories of King Saul, the Philistines remained intact and a constant source of trouble for Israel. I can do no better than to quote Dr. David Tsumura about where things stood with Saul as we transition from 1st Samuel chapter 14 to chapter 15:

“Humanly speaking Saul continued to make progress in strengthening Israel’s military power and administration. His drastic failure will come not from his mishandling of the people or his enemies, but from his neglect and disobedience to God’s Word”.

It was this neglect and disobedience to Israel's God by Israel's king that not only eventually proved to be fatal for King Saul and his sons, but also allowed Israel's enemies to survive and fight another day as a never ending source of oppression and trouble for God's people.

It is a lesson that while preached on, recorded and commented on in history books, and lamented especially by the elderly of every generation the lesson goes on ignored.

It is a lesson that modern day Israel refuses to acknowledge and so makes the same mistakes as did their ancestors. The Lord says not to tolerate shrines to pagan gods in their midst, and Israel is full of them. The Lord says to drive out God's enemies from the land, and instead Israel tries to make peace with them. The Lord says never to give away any piece of the Kingdom of God, and Israel only negotiates how little or much they must give away to attain respect and friendship with the world.

It is a lesson that our precious Church, itself a gift left by our Messiah, fails to grasp. A lesson that says that obedience IS the only acceptable demonstration of love to God that humans have been given. And yet false doctrines have arisen that irrationally proclaim that Christian obedience to God's Word is legalism and therefore obedience is not only a thing of the past but something to be shunned. Rather, since Messiah's advent we are to primarily demonstrate love of God in the form of affection and feelings of warmth towards Him and our fellow man.

Our Christian leadership often has no fear of creating self-serving doctrines and then attaching the Lord's name to them. On the other hand the modern Christian congregation feels no obligation to seriously examine God's Word and compare it to our leaders' proclamations; rather we assume that if a man of the cloth says it, we have no obligation to do anything but to believe it and accept it as truth. That if we are given false information and we decide to live by it, that it is HIS sin and not ours. HE will bear the consequences, not US.

It is a lesson that says that while we might wish we could separate ourselves and our fate from our leadership, things just don't (and never have) worked that way. The Lord indeed bestows His redemption upon us, individual by individual, as He deems it appropriate. But almost all else in this world is interconnected. The most despotic tyrants this earth has ever known, even those loathed by his own people, will in time drag his nation down with him. It is the fear of that leader that usually keeps the people from taking courageous action, preferring instead to hope that "something" will happen that will remove him and save them. But in the end it's the people who are held accountable before God for their inaction in the same way that the leader is held accountable before God for his actions.

I wonder out loud today, how much more will a free nation of citizens who are given the privilege of selecting our leaders peacefully, and removing them peacefully if need be, are held accountable by our Lord for our apathy, inaction, and poor judgment. I think we tend to look at a godless nation like Russia and wonder how great God's wrath will be upon them; but in fact they don't actually have the freedom to choose at all and are persecuted mercilessly if they look to God for wisdom. Yet we in the West turn around and, like King Saul, first of all absolve ourselves from the terrible and godless decisions of our leaders who we chose and are not obligated to keep. We who have full liberty to discover the principles of the Word of God and to live in harmony with those principles usually prefer to just put on some blinders, live our private lives, gripe a little bit, wring our hands, and compromise. I believe that our sin is greater and our consequences will be greater, and I think our present circumstances are but the harbinger of God's disgust with us. It's a familiar picture; one we've been reading about for months and months.

Let's get a bit of start, now, on 1st Samuel chapter 15. We'll read it all so that the context is not lost or distorted.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 15 all

Now just as I said at the outset of the previous chapter that I'd like for us to view Saul's reign as that of an Anti-King, I have a somewhat connected mold that I'd like for us to view the War with Amalek of chapter 15 because I think it will have more meaning for us. I'd like for us to think of it as a type or a shadow of Armageddon. I don't say that lightly. And I tell you honestly that because it is a shadow not every last detail of Armageddon will perfectly dovetail with Saul's War with Amalek; but the parallels are striking and unavoidable.

There is a fine line between allegorizing, illustration, and holding up one thing as a type or shadow of another; and I don't want to ever cross over to allegorizing. It also might be too strong to label this War with Amalek as a prophetic shadow of the War of Armageddon. So perhaps the best characterization I can come up with is that it sets down a pattern. I think that what we see here is God-pattern developed and thus I prefer to view the parallel between the two events of Saul's War with Amalek setting down a pattern for Messiah's War at Armageddon with one notable exception. And the exception is that while Saul refused to prosecute the Holy conflict with Amalek as God ordained it, Christ will perfectly prosecute the War at Armageddon.

Chapter 14 ends the account of the rise of a monarchy to rule over Israel, and by enumerating the many failures of Saul, the first Israelite monarch. Chapter 15 now begins to lead us into a demonstration of what will inevitably happen to one who determines himself to rule God's Kingdom, but not according to God's Word. This inevitably leads us to the next major event which is the replacement of Saul and his dynasty by a man of a totally different nature; a nature that is much closer to Jonathan's than to his father's. So after we finish chapter 15, chapter 16 introduces us the **nagid**, the king in waiting, who is none other than David. Of course the only person who knows that David is the anointed nagid is the Lord. Back in 1st Samuel chapter 13 we read this:

CJB 1 Samuel 13:14 But as it is, your kingship (Saul's kingship) will not be established. ADONAI has sought for himself a man after his own heart, and ADONAI has appointed him to be prince over his people, because you did not observe what ADONAI ordered you to do."

Note that the Lord has ALREADY made His choice of the next king even though as of yet is has not been revealed.

Let's stop here for today and good a fresh start for King Saul's War with Amalek. There is a feast available for us in this chapter and I don't want us to miss a morsel.