

1 Samuel Chapter 14 Continued

Verses 24-33: The army, ravenous because of Saul's foolish "oath", disobeyed the covenant laws regarding the proper preparation of meat (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 7:26; 17:10-14). Saul's impetuous behavior led the nation to sin.

1 Samuel 14:24 "And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed [be] the man that eateth [any] food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted [any] food."

"Were distressed": Saul's inept leadership failed to provide for the physical needs of his men, leaving them weak and fatigued.

"Cursed": Saul's first foolish oath pronounced a curse upon anyone tasting food until the battle was over. The scene fits chronologically after Jonathan's departure.

In the last lesson, we saw that Jonathan and his armor-bearer attacked the Philistines. Saul found out about it, after it was nearly over, and rushed out with his men to help. Now, we see that Saul had called a fast for that day. "Adjured" means he made them swear. He also said that anyone who ate before the day was over, would be cursed. He was in such a hurry, that he did not want them to stop to eat.

1 Samuel 14:25 "And all [they of] the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground."

"Honey upon the ground": This was a reference to honeycombs found in the forest (verse 27).

There seemed to be an abundance of honey running down the rocks. The men had been walking all day without food, and this was a great temptation.

1 Samuel 14:26 "And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped; but no man put his hand to his mouth: for the people feared the oath."

The honey is described as "upon the ground," "dropping" from the trees, and in honeycombs, indicating it to be bees' honey. "Bees in the East are not, as in England, kept in hives; they are all in a wild state. The forests literally flow with honey; large combs may be seen hanging on the trees as you pass along, full of honey" [Roberts].

"But no man put his hand to his mouth": That is, took not any of the honey and ate it, though it was so near at hand, and there was plenty of it.

"For the people feared the oath": Saul made them swear by, or the imprecation he made on the person that should eat any food that day.

Even though there was an abundance of honey, and they were very hungry, they did not eat. They were more afraid of the curse Saul had spoken, if they broke their oath, than they were of being hungry. They did not even taste it.

1 Samuel 14:27 "But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth 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 eyes were enlightened."

“Jonathan heard not” Jonathan apparently had departed before Saul made his oath.

Not only had Jonathan not heard what his father said, he did not take the oath either. Jonathan would not be punished, for breaking an oath he did not take. Jonathan takes a bite of the honey, because he is unaware of his father's restriction. The dimness in his eyes had been caused from his exhaustion. The sweetness of the honey brought him strength and bright eyes.

1 Samuel 14:28 "Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed [be] the man that eateth [any] food this day. And the people were faint."

Most probably, in reply to Jonathan's pointing out the plentiful supply of honey, and inviting the soldiers near him to refresh themselves with it. The words “and the people were faint,” at the close of the verse, should be rendered, and the people are faint. They were part of the speech of the soldier who was telling Jonathan of his father's rash oath.

The father was in such a hurry to get these people into the battle, that he forgot how weak they would be, if they did not eat. His causing them to swear, that they would not eat, would make them so weak, it would be about impossible to finish the battle.

1 Samuel 14:29 "Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey."

“My father hath troubled the land”: Jonathan saw the foolishness of Saul's oath and how it actually hurt Israel's cause instead of helping it.

Saul's mistake was in a hasty judgment, again. Jonathan had found strength in the taste of honey he had taken. They could all fight better, if they were not so weak from hunger.

1 Samuel 14:30 "How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?"

That is, had they been allowed to eat freely of the provisions of bread, wine, etc. that they found in the enemy's camp, they would have been much more refreshed and strengthened than it could be supposed he was with eating a little honey. If that had had such an effect upon him, of what service would a full meal have been to the people?

"For had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?" The people would have had more strength to smite them, and would have pursued them with greater zeal and swiftness, and so have made a greater slaughter among them than they had. He intimates that Saul's end would have been better answered by suffering the people to eat, than by forbidding them.

The truth is, they could have fought better, but they had taken the vow. The end result would have been better, if Saul had thought of the needs of his soldiers.

1 Samuel 14:31 "And they smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon: and the people were very faint."

"Aijalon": This area is located 15 miles west of Michmash. This would have been a normal path back to the land of the Philistines.

They pursued and killed the Philistines, but the slaughter would have been much greater, had they not been so weary.

1 Samuel 14:32 "And the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew [them] on the ground: and the people did eat [them] with the blood."

"Eat them with the blood": The people were so severely hungry because of the oath (verse 24), that they disobeyed the law by eating the meat raw and not draining the blood (Lev. 17:10-14).

Such an act was in clear violation of the Levitical prohibition against eating meat with "blood" still in it (Lev. 17:10-14; 19:26). The pressures of warfare, as well as the added restrictions of Saul's foolish oath (verses 24-30), may have contributed to the people's hunger and physical weakness, hence to the temptation to ignore the Levitical stipulations.

It seems, they kept the forced fast that Saul had caused them to swear to. The minute the fast was over, they committed a very bad sin by eating the blood with the meat. The Hebrews had a special way they were to kill animals. They were to bleed them, and cover the blood with the dirt.

Leviticus 3:17 "[It shall be] a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood."

1 Samuel 14:33 "Then they told Saul, saying, Behold, the people sin against the LORD, in that they eat with the blood. And he said, Ye have transgressed: roll a great stone unto me this day."

Some that were more conscientious and religious were more circumspect, and strictly attended to the laws forbidding the eating of blood, and were concerned at the indecent behavior of others, and therefore thought fit to acquaint Saul with it, to restrain it.

"Behold, the people sin against the Lord, in that they eat with the blood": By breaking the laws of God respecting the eating of blood (in Genesis 9:4, especially in Leviticus 19:26).

"And he said, ye have transgressed": The above laws of God; that is. Saul said to some persons who were accused of the breach of them, and were ordered to come before him, and did come.

"Roll a great stone unto me this day": Pointing perhaps, at one which lay at some distance from him, and which he ordered to be rolled to him. This was done, that the creatures might be slain on it, and their blood drawn out from them, or to offer sacrifice upon, and indeed for both.

They have not kept the covenant with God. They were to obey God's commandments. They were all aware, that they were not to eat the blood of an animal. They were to immediately bring a stone to Saul, so the animals could be cut up and drained properly.

1 Samuel 14:34 "And Saul said, Disperse yourselves among the people, and say unto them, Bring me hither every man his ox, and every man his sheep, and slay [them] here, and eat; and sin not against the LORD in eating with the blood. And all the people brought every man his ox with him that night, and slew [them] there."

In the camp, some one way, and some another, and make proclamation throughout it; this he said to some of his officers, whom he sent out as heralds, to publish his will and pleasure.

"And say unto them, bring me hither every man his ox, and every man his sheep, and slay them here": On the great stone he had ordered to roll to the place where he was.

"And eat them; in the same place, being rightly slain, and the blood let out; all this was to be done, the slaying of the beasts, and eating them, in the presence of Saul, and under his inspection, that everything might be done decently, and in order, and according to the law of God.

"And sin not against the Lord, in eating with the blood": As some of them had done (1 Sam. 14:32), and all the people brought every man his ox with him; and his sheep also, though not expressed, yet to be supplied from the preceding clause.

And these every man brought: "Every man his ox with him that night". The Jewish Rabbins are divided about these creatures slain, whether for sacrifices or common food. And those that think sacrifices are meant dispute whether it was lawful to slay them in the night, which some allow to be lawful, if on a small and private altar, but not upon a large and public one. But these were slain no doubt for common food, which all agree might be slain in the night.

"And slew them there": Before Saul, and on the great stone rolled unto him.

The animals slain on the rock would have a chance for the blood to drain thoroughly. It does not say anything about cooking the meat here, but the meat had to be cooked to fulfill the law. They were not to eat raw meat.

1 Samuel 14:35 "And Saul built an altar unto the LORD: the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD."

“The first altar”: The first and only altar built by Saul mentioned in Scripture.

This altar was in thanks for the victory they had against the Philistines. This altar to the LORD was the first Saul had built.

1 Samuel 14:36 “And Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and spoil them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee. Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto God.”

“Let us draw near hither unto God”: Ahijah the priest requested that they first seek the Lord regarding their course of action.

Saul realizes that he was really the cause, that all of the Philistines had not been killed. Now, he proposes that they go down by night and finish killing them. It appears, the army was willing to do whatever Saul wanted to do. The priest wanted to inquire of God, before they went to battle, however.

1 Samuel 14:37 "And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day."

“Saul asked counsel of God”: At the request of Ahijah, Saul inquired of the Lord regarding his battle plan.

“He answered him not” Because of the sin that Saul had caused in his army, God did not answer his inquiry. This would not be the last time that the Lord would refuse to respond to sinful Saul (28:6).

God did not answer him quickly, because he was so impatient. Saul wanted to hear what God had to say, as long as He said it immediately.

1 Samuel 14:38 "And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day."

Or, the corners of the peoples; the princes, as Jarchi interprets it: and so the Targum, the heads of the people, in allusion to the cornerstones in buildings, which are the ornament, strength, and cement of them (see Zech. 10:4). Though Abarbinel thinks the tribes themselves are meant, which lay encamped everyone in a corner by themselves, separated from one another. And these he would have brought together; not the heads only, but everyone, small and great, that it might be seen and known where the sin lay. But he should have observed that the tribes of Israel were not now present with Saul, but a small number of them.

"And know and see wherein this sin hath been this day": He concluded, from having no answer from the Lord, that sin had been committed, which was the cause of it. But never thought of his own rash oath, which was the cause of the people's sinning, and had brought his son into danger or by the sin of the people by eating the flesh that contained the blood. Nothing ran in his mind but the breach of the oath with which he had adjured the people, and this he was determined to find out, if possible.

Because God did not answer him immediately, he assumes it is because of some sin that has been committed. He never looks at himself. His fault finding is always with someone else. He wants to find who has sinned, and kill him.

1 Samuel 14:39 "For, [as] the LORD liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But [there was] not a man among all the people [that] answered him."

"As the Lord liveth": As an encore to his previous oath, Saul followed with another foolish oath, unknowingly jeopardizing his own son's life.

He had made rash decisions several times earlier. This is another rash statement, because he wants to hurry up and go to war. The people are not going to accuse Jonathan, who led them to the victory over the Philistines. We said before that Jonathan did not sin, because he had not taken the oath with the others.

1 Samuel 14:40 "Then said he unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee."

As many of them as were present. Not the principal men only, but the common people; not the officers only, but the common soldiers in the army.

"Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side": So they divided to the right and left, one went one way, and the other the other. There were two boxes or urns, as Kimchi says, in one of which were the names of Saul and Jonathan, and in the other Israel. Though Abarbinel observes, that such a partition of them on one side, and the other, is not according to the manner of lots; and he suspects that Saul knew that Jonathan had tasted of honey. Being told it by the man that saw him eat it; and who said to him then, "thy father straitly charged" (1 Sam. 14:27), but chose this way to make it manifest to the people, and to show what a strict regard he had to justice.

"And the people said unto Saul, do what seemeth good unto thee": They were very submissive to him in everything (see 1 Sam. 14:36).

He had not received an answer from God through the Urim and the Thummim of the high priest. Now, he has decided to figure out who is worthy of death by lot.

Verses 41-45: God gave two stones ("Lots"), called Urim and Thummim to the Israelites to make decisions. Kept in the high priest's possession, they were the only legitimate way to receive a positive or negative response from the Lord other than God speaking directly to someone (Exodus 28:30; Num. 27:21). The Israelites recognized the truth: Jonathan's victory was evidence of God working on their behalf; whereas Saul's oath was foolish.

Verses 41-42: The casting of lots was an accepted means of determining the Lord's will (Prov. 16:33), in ancient "Israel" (Lev. 16:7-10, 21-22; Joshua 14:2; 18:6), including the establishing of guilt (Joshua 7:14).

1 Samuel 14:41 "Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, Give a perfect [lot]. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped."

"Taken": The practice of casting lots was used to distinguish one person or group from another. Jonathan was indicated as the guilty party, though he acted innocently (verse 27).

The lot fell on Jonathan and Saul. The people were spared in this.

1 Samuel 14:42 "And Saul said, Cast [lots] between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken."

Which showed his regard strict justice, and that he had no consciousness of guilt in himself, and should not spare his own son if found guilty.

"And Jonathan was taken": The lot fell upon him, which was so directed, that his ignorance of his father's charge and oath might appear; and that the affection of the people might be discovered. And that a regard is to be had to the orders and commands of princes, and obedience to be yielded to them in all in which conscience is not concerned, though they may be grievous. And to bring Saul to a sense of rashness in making such an oath, which brought his own son into so much danger.

The lot fell on Jonathan this time.

1 Samuel 14:43 "Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that [was] in mine hand, [and], lo, I must die."

What sin he had committed, the lot having fallen on him, and found him out: and Jonathan told him; the whole of the matter, all the truth, without any reserve.

"And said, I did but take a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand": He speaks of the fact as a trivial thing, as if it was not deserving of death, though he was willing to submit to it; yet it seems strange he should say nothing of his ignorance of the charge and oath of Saul, and plead that in excuse of it.

Truly Jonathan had taken of the honey, but he had done it innocently. He had not taken the vow, nor heard the oath his father made. He bows to the judgment of God, and does not try to defend himself in this. He agrees he must die.

1 Samuel 14:44 "And Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan."

“God do so and more also”: Saul, proud and concerned with his own authority and honor, was intent on fulfilling his vow.

Saul is a man who does not stop to think, before he speaks. He takes an oath, here, to kill his own son. Jonathan had not broken the oath, because he never took it.

1 Samuel 14:45 "And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: [as] the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not."

“Wrought with God this day”: Jonathan, in stark contrast to his father the king, understood the sufficiency of God for the task and obediently relied on Him for the victory.

The people are right. There is no reason to kill Jonathan. Not only did he win the battle almost singlehandedly for them, but he is innocent. Certainly, the blessings of God had been upon him, as he fought the Philistines. The people loved Jonathan, and they would not let Saul kill him.

1 Samuel 14:46 "Then Saul went up from following the Philistines: and the Philistines went to their own place."

“The Philistines went to their own place”: The Philistines were left to continue their retreat unhindered.

Saul saw that the people were not with him, and he returns home. The Philistines, who were not killed earlier, were spared. They went to their homes, as well.

Verses 47-52: Saul was a man of war, quick to battle “wherever he turned” and quick to recruit “any strong ... or ... valiant man” who crossed his path. War was a primary way for a new king to establish his “sovereignty” in ancient times (Exodus 17:14-16; Num. 24:20).

Saul’s military accomplishments were significant and expanded Israel’s borders in all directions: to the south (Edom), east (Ammon and Moab), north (Zobah), and west (Philistia). The defeat of the Amalekites is recorded (in Chapter 15).

1 Samuel 14:47 "So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and

against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed [them]."

That is, resumed the administration of it, after he had, in a manner, lost it by the Philistines, who had almost got the entire possession of it, and enslaved Israel.

“And fought against all his enemies on every side”: He did not invade them, as may be gathered from the next verse, but repelled them, and kept them within their own limits. He gathered an army, and smote the Amalekites; which war is described at large in the next chapter.

It seemed the bravery of Jonathan, Saul's son, gave Saul the courage to lead his troops bravely. He fought with all the enemies of Israel. Paul says that Saul reigned for 40 years as king. I have no argument with that. He was an impatient military king. Notice, he did not kill them all. He vexed them. He was a constant enemy of theirs.

1 Samuel 14:48 "And he gathered a host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them."

A large army; for after the battle with the Ammonites he disbanded his army, and sent them home, retaining only 3000 men. And these deserted him to six hundred, which were all the men he had with him, when he fought last with the Philistines. But now, finding he had enemies on every side of him, he gathered a large army to defend his country against them and particularly, to attack the people next mentioned.

"And he smote the Amalekites": A people that Israel, by the law of God, was bound to destroy, and blot out their name. A particular account of his expedition against them is given in the following chapter.

"And delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them”: The nations before mentioned, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians, and Philistines.

We do not read of daring exploits like Jonathan did, from Saul. Saul took an army with him, when he fought their enemies. He fought valiantly for Israel and won. The Amalekites were just one of the lands he defeated.

Verses 49-51: Saul's children, Jonathan and Michal, would both play significant roles in the life of the next king, David. Nothing further is known of Saul's wife or other children mentioned here.

1 Samuel 14:49 "Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui, and Melchi-shua: and the names of his two daughters [were these]; the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal:"

Who seems to be his firstborn, of whom, his valor and success, we read in this and the preceding chapter.

"And Ishui": The same with Abinadab (1 Chron. 8:33), for he had two names.

"And Melchi-shua": And besides these three there was another, whose name was Ishbosheth, sometimes called Eshbaal (2 Sam. 2:8), who succeeded him in the kingdom. For which reason Abarbanel thinks he is not mentioned here, because he was a king; though it is generally supposed the reason why these only are named is, because they went out to war with him, and died with him. But this did not; he had other children by a concubine, or secondary wife, whose name was Rizpah, not mentioned here (2 Sam. 21:8).

"And the names of his two daughters were these, the name of the firstborn Merab; who was afterwards married to Adriel the Meholathite (1 Sam. 18:19), and the name of the younger Michal; who became the wife of David (1 Sam. 18:27).

Ishui and Abinadab is the same person. The fourth son of Saul is not mentioned here. His name was Ishbosheth. Generally, daughters are not mentioned, but these will play important roles in their history, so they are mentioned. "Jonathan" means whom Jehovah gave. The name "Ishui" means peaceful, or quiet. "Melchi-shua" means king of aid.

"Ishbosheth" means man of shame. Perhaps, that is why he was not named here. "Merab" means increase. "Michal" means who like God.

1 Samuel 14:50 And the name of Saul's wife [was] Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz: and the name of the captain of his host [was] Abner, the son of Ner, Saul's uncle.

"Abner": A cousin of Saul who commanded his army (1 Sam. 17:55, 59; 20:25; 26:14-15).

"Ahinoam" means brother of grace. "Ahimaaz" means brother of anger. "Abner" means father of light. Kish, Saul's father was a son of Ner. Abner was Saul's captain of hosts.

1 Samuel 14:51 "And Kish [was] the father of Saul; and Ner the father of Abner [was] the son of Abiel."

(See 1 Samuel 9:1).

"And Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel; this Abiel was the father both of Kish and Ner, and the grandfather of Saul (see 1 Sam. 9:1).

This makes Abiel the great-grandfather of Saul.

1 Samuel 14:52 "And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul: and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him."

“War ... sore”: The Philistines’ opposition to Israel was persistent and continual to the very last day of Saul’s life (1 Sam. 31:1-3).

“Strong man ... valiant man”: Saul looked for the good warriors and attached them to his personal force. David was one such man, who would also continue this practice under his rule (2 Sam. 23:8-39).

This is just saying that, a strong healthy man was enlisted in the army of Saul. Saul was a good soldier leader. He knew the Philistines were a powerful opponent. Saul kept a standing army of the finest young men in the country. The moral was high, because they were successful against their enemies.

1 Samuel Chapter 14 Continued Questions

1. What rash thing does Saul say in verse 24?
2. What does "adjured" mean?
3. Why did Saul make such a rash vow?
4. There was an abundance of _____ upon the ground.
5. Why did the soldiers not take of the honey?
6. Why did Jonathan take of the honey?
7. What happened to Jonathan's eyes, when he did this?
8. What did one of the people tell Jonathan, after he had taken of the honey?
9. Saul's mistake was in his _____ judgment.
10. If the people had eaten better, what would they, possibly, have done?
11. It seems the soldiers kept the _____ fast.
12. What did they do, the minute the fast was over?
13. Why were they to roll a great stone to Saul?
14. What would be the difference in the animals slain on the rock?
15. In verse 35, what did Saul build?
16. What did Saul want to do further to the Philistines?

17. What does the priest say to do?
18. When there is no answer from God, what does Saul propose they do?
19. What rash statement does Saul say about Jonathan?
20. Where does the lot fall?
21. Why does Saul not kill him?
22. Why is it right, that the people not let Saul kill Jonathan?
23. Did they attack the Philistines that night?
24. What exploits of Saul do we read of in verse 47?
25. How long does Paul say that Saul was king?
26. Who were the sons of Saul?
27. Who were his daughters?
28. Who is the same as Ishui?
29. What was Saul's wife named?
30. Who was the great-grandfather of Saul?