

Message #31**I Samuel 14:24-46**

On June 24, 1876, Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer led some 600 trail-worn troops of the 7th U.S. Cavalry toward the Sioux-Cheyenne camp located along the Little Bighorn River in the Montana territory. Custer's command from General Alfred Terry was to simply locate the Indians and wait for his arrival.

Custer decided to disobey the order and decided to split his regiment into three battalions to fight the Indians in a three-pronged assault. The Indians were ready and willing to fight and they quickly trapped Custer and his 267 men. On that fateful morning of June 25, 1876, General Custer and 200 of his men were killed and 60 were wounded, most of whom later died. All of this happened because of Custer's disobedience, pride and stupidity.

When you read the historical accounts of Custer's Last Stand at the Little Bighorn, you think of a tragedy that could have been avoided if it had not been for the pride and foolishness of Custer. If he would have only waited and not been so concerned about making a name for himself, he could have won that battle that took his life and the life of many of his men.

There is a leader in Israel's history that did dumber things than Custer ever thought about doing. His name was King Saul. King Saul had been sovereignly permitted by God to become the first King of Israel. It wasn't too long after he became King that he started doing a series of foolish things that will eventually cost him his reign and his life.

In this episode he does something so foolish that it almost cost him the life of his own son. Had not God intervened, it would have. But God sovereignly overruled the stupidity of Saul. What we learn here is this:

GOD IS SOVEREIGN OVER POLITICAL LEADERS WHO SAY AND DO FOOLISH THINGS AND AT TIMES HE WILL SOVEREIGNLY INTERVENE TO OVERRULE THEIR STUPIDITY.

No one will ever beat the sovereignty of God. No political leader will ever beat God. The leader could be a jealous, power-crazed, proud dud who makes bizarre decisions and he still will not beat God. Saul was an irrational and ridiculous leader and it almost cost him his son. Eventually it will cost him his reign and his life.

There are five bizarre historical facts brought out in this episode from the life of King Saul:

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Saul gave a ridiculous order to the men of Israel. 14:24

Saul was on the trail of the Philistines. He was chasing them. He does not seem to give much credit to his son, who was really the one who risked everything to fight them (14:13-16). It was so easy for Saul to jump into the war once the Philistines were on the run. In fact, now he wants to be the big leader and hero.

Frankly, this is his foolish pride and it is a misuse of political power. He interjects himself, wanting the fame for something God did.

According to **verse 24**, he decided to show how powerful he was by coming up with some scatter brained edict that was dumber than a box of rocks. His edict was that any person who ate something before all the enemies were destroyed would be cursed and ultimately executed. This was not found in the Torah. There is no place in Scripture where God's word says this. What kind of crazy military leader would even think like this?

Notice that Saul calls the enemies "my enemies." He does not call them God's enemies or Israel's enemies; he calls them "my enemies." His motive for fighting, as you will see, is not for the glory of God; it is for the glory of himself.

This is some emotional edict which goes against the Scriptures that teach we are not to be hasty in word (Ecclesiastes 5:2). If you get emotional and start shooting off your mouth, you will ruin others and yourself.

Now for Saul to make such an edict was foolish for three reasons:

Reason #1 - It hinders the strength of your own military.

Keep in mind this is hand-to-hand fighting. This was running up and down mountains. When you do that you sweat and expend a lot of energy. You lose a lot of calories. You need to replenish the energy and to do that you need food and drink. Even pro athletes who expend energy for an hour drink Gatorade. So Saul is actually hurting his own military.

There are many churches who are doing basically the same thing today. They have their people running to this and running to that but they are not feeding them solid spiritual food. Their philosophy is more activity and less feeding. Those churches are as foolish as Saul.

Reason #2 - It potentially may hurt your own son.

The true hero of this story is Jonathan, who risked his own life. By putting this edict on your people, you are potentially hurting your own son, who has already climbed down and up a mountain that none of them even dared or tried.

You would think Saul would say my son did this amazing thing, give him all the food and drink he needs.

Reason #3 - It potentially creates the potential of your people secretly disobeying.

People are to submit to authority and by telling them they don't have a right to eat you have just created something that could force them to secretly disobey.

Also they will be so hungry they will be forced to eat things with blood, which was a violation of the law of God (14:32). They don't dare take time to cook food, so you are creating a real series of problems.

This was a ridiculous edict. Rash decisions often cause great trouble and usually they are not of God. In fact, God's word teaches that it is not wise to do anything rash (Acts 19:36). The town clerk of Ephesus told the emotional crowd, "You ought to keep calm and do nothing rash." Saul never did learn this lesson.

We are called to war and there will be times when we must take a stand and wise are those believers who have been well-fed the books of the Bible and doctrine, for they will be the best soldiers.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Jonathan eats and responds to the edict of Saul. 14:25-30

According to **verses 25-26**, when the people of Israel got into the forest, there was, as the Hebrew indicates, a stream of honey flowing on the ground.

In the wilderness bees are not kept in man-made bee hives. They are natural. There are places in the Middle East where large combs may be found hanging in trees and more than likely, this was an area saturated with these hives that were dripping with honey to the extent that it was actually flowing on the ground.

We may recall that when Moses was called by God to go deliver Israel, God told him that he was to lead his people to a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8). Apparently that was literally the case. There was honey flowing in this particular spot.

Now apparently in this forest there was a stream of honey. We may assume that the bees were in the clefts of the limestone rocks and perhaps in the trees. In any case there was a stream of honey and Jonathan came to it.

Verse 26 says that when the people went into the forest and saw the flow of honey, no one dared to eat any of it because of the foolish edict of Saul.

According to **verse 27**, Jonathan had not heard of the edict and when he saw this stream of honey he took his staff and dipped it into the honey and filled his hand with it and ate it. It so revived him that "his eyes brightened." Finally he could replenish much lost energy and he had some food in his stomach.

One group sees the honey as a curse and Jonathan sees it as a provision of life. That is the same way people look at the cross of Jesus Christ. Some see Christ on that cross as a curse, but we see it as the life giving blessing of God.

Well according to **verse 28**, as soon as some of the people saw Jonathan eating the honey, they informed him about the curse his father had invented.

Jonathan had three responses to it:

Response #1 - My father's curse is troubling to these people in the land. **14:29a**

Saul was a troubled man and he was troubling to people. The word Samuel uses in Hebrew for "trouble" (akar) is one that means to stir up trouble in a cruel and bad way that brings evil upon people (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 626). Jonathan says my father is stirring up trouble in a cruel way upon his own people, Israel.

Response #2 - My father's curse is detrimental to our physical strength. **14:29b**

Jonathan says look at how I have been revived in my eyes by just eating a little honey. My strength is revived.

Response #3 - My father's curse is detrimental to our military success. **14:30**

Jonathan said if our people had only eaten, the success would have been much greater.

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – Saul's edict causes his own people to sin. **14:31-35**

The men of Israel had been battling the Philistines all day from Michmash to Aijalon, which is a stretch of about 18 miles.

When they defeated the enemy, the warriors were so hungry and fatigued that they rushed on the Philistine animals like their sheep, oxen and calves and killed them and started eating the meat without even cooking it.

This is a clear violation of Levitical Law (Lev.17:10-14). It is forbidden by God to eat meat with blood. **The reason why they are breaking God's law and doing this evil is because of Saul's law.** They did not dare eat honey God had provided in the forest because of the ridiculous edict of Saul.

According to **verses 33-35**, some reported to Saul that the warriors were eating meat with blood, so Saul immediately had an altar constructed (**v. 35**) and got a priest and had the people bring a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God (**v. 34**).

God did not come up with this edict, Saul did. Saul didn't even consult God. In fact, he actually put a stop to consulting God. This guy just gets in deeper and deeper.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – Saul makes inquiry to God about whether he should pursue the Philistines. **14:36-42**

Verse 36 says that Saul wanted to pursue the Philistines that night, but he decided first to ask God because the priest said, maybe we should consult God and not just fly by the seat of our pants here.

But verse 37 says God did not answer him that day.

What God is doing here is giving the military a rest from the stupidity of Saul. Dr. McGee said that he believed the reason why God did not answer Saul was because He was not using this man at all. I am not sure I agree with that. If nothing else, God is using him as an example of a dud.

According to **verse 38**, Saul got all of the chief religious people together to investigate why God had not answered immediately. He wanted to know who had done the wrong. There is no hint whatsoever that Saul thought he could be the problem.

He wanted to know who had disobeyed him and started all of this. Are we missing something here? Just exactly what is the issue? Israel is beating the Philistines, so I am not sure what he is even talking about. He apparently is mad because he is not getting instant answers from God and he doesn't even think he might be the problem. The only sin I see here is that Saul had come up with an issue that forced the Israelites to eat meat with blood.

According to **verses 39-40**, Saul made another ridiculous vow and that is if it were Jonathan or him, whoever was the reason for his delusional problem, would die. Well the people knew Jonathan had eaten some honey but they would not tell Saul.

So according to **verses 41-42**, Saul had lots cast between him and Jonathan. When Saul asked for a "perfect lot" he is asking for the Urim and Thummin. When the lot was cast, it fell to Jonathan, his own heroic son.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – Saul makes another ridiculous and rash decision. **14:43-46**

When the lot fell to Jonathan, Jonathan told Saul I ate some honey so I guess, according to your own stupidity, I must die (**14:43**). According to **verse 44**, Saul was prepared to kill his own son. Why? Because of a foolish edict he had invented. He did not get this from God. Saul created this entire nightmare and now he is facing the possibility of executing his own son.

But according to **verse 45** the people rallied around Jonathan and appealed to Saul not to kill his son. Jonathan was their hero. He was the one who brought this great victory over the Philistines. He was the one God used.

The people rescued Jonathan and **verse 46** says Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines and went home. Saul still does not know God's will at this point. He doesn't know whether his military should continue to pursue the Philistines. He just decides to go home.

We must be very careful about emotional decisions we make and emotional things we say because what we say may come back to haunt us. That which starts in rashness will end in grief. Just ask Custer, just ask Saul.

That word "rescue" (padah) is the word "redeemed." The basic meaning is to set free and redeem by paying a price (*Ibid.*, p. 666). The curse was leveled against Jonathan, but someone else stepped in and redeemed him from the curse. That is exactly what Jesus Christ does for sinners. Sinners are cursed and condemned by their own sin and stupidity of foolish things they have done and said, and He redeems them from the curse.