

## Misguided Zeal Clothed in Superficial Religion (1 Samuel 14:24-52)

### 1. His Edict and Unanticipated Consequence (v.25, 31-35)

Saul's Edict: As the Philistines were fleeing Michmash westward, Saul issued an edict for the Israelite soldiers who were pursuing them: no soldier was to consume any food until the evening (v.24).

- In Scripture, sexual abstinence (1 Sam. 21:5-6), refraining from sleep (Ps. 132:3-4), and vows to sacrifice (Judg. 11:30-31) are all part of a warrior's commitment. Fasting during battle was not prescribed in the Pentateuch. Why would he prohibit eating?
  - A. He did not want his men to be distracted in looting the abandoned Philistine camps. Soldiers had to provide their own food, and often times they were permitted to keep the spoil.
  - B. He may have thought that fasting was a religious and virtuous act.

\*Saul could have permitted his men to eat food without being distracted from the main mission since they were traversing the land "flowing with milk and honey."

#### The Unanticipated Consequence:

- His men become fatigued and famished (v.32) after traveling over 20 miles from Michmash to Ajalon on foot in pursuit of the fleeing Philistine army.
- At evening, when they were permitted to eat, they came across an abandoned Philistine camp and slaughtered many of their animals. In the process, they ate meat that was not drained of blood, thus ceremonially defiling themselves. This was in violation with the Noahic command (Gen. 9:4) and Mosaic legislation that prohibited them from consuming meat with blood in it (Lev. 3:17; 7:26-27; 17:11; Deut. 12:23).
- Saul wrongfully assumed that the more painful a religious exercise was, the more honorable it was before the LORD. Saul's selfishness (v.24) largely contributed to the ritual uncleanness of his men.

### 2. His Empty Religion and Hardness to Sin (v.35-45)

- Saul builds an altar for the first time as king (v.35). The slaughtered animals would be vertically suspended so that the blood could properly be drained.
- Typically, when altars are constructed, there is a repentance and a new dedication to the LORD (1 Sam. 6:15; 7:5, 11-15; 11:14-15). However, there is no indication that any sacrifice was made.
- After the men ate, Saul now commands the men to pursue and plunder the Philistines throughout the night. Before he dismisses them, Ahijah recommends that he inquires of the LORD (v.36-37). However, the LORD was silent.

#### Saul's Hardness to His Own Sin:

- Saul correctly concludes that there is unconfessed sin in the camp of the Israelites and is willing to put that offender to death, even if it is his own son Jonathan (v.39). Instead of crying out to the LORD like Joshua did after the defeat of Ai (Josh. 7: 6-11), Saul consulted the Urim and Thummim.
- The Urim and Thummim are both mentioned in the priestly legislation (Ex.28:30; Lev. 8:8). They were placed in or on the high priest's ephod breastplate of judgment.

We do not know if these were on the ephod Ahijah was wearing (v.3) or whether he brought these stones, but they were consulted.

- Saul summons his army on one side. On the other is Saul and Jonathan. Once the lot was cast, the soldiers are dismissed. Now only two remain. Which one has sinned? The lot fell on Jonathan. How?!
    - A. Jonathan did violate the edict of the king and was guilty on a technicality. The LORD would be upholding His formality of justice.
    - B. The LORD is not answering Saul because he is the one who is living in unrepentant sin, and as a result, the Urim and Thummim were empty stones which prove the vanity of religious observance apart from genuine faith.
- \*Saul relied on ritualistic superstition and magic. He relied more on external rituals and rites than genuine commitment to the LORD.
- Jonathan was the most innocent of all Saul's army. Jonathan did not know of the oath until after he ate the honey (v.27-28). He did not even eat meat with blood in it. Will Saul really kill Jonathan because of a foolish oath from a king who expects to win a protracted battle by starving his troops?

### 3. His Forfeiture of Blessing (v.44-46)

- The soldiers were not going allow Saul to kill Jonathan. The LORD was with Jonathan (v.6, 45). There is an assumption that if Saul was to lay one finger on Jonathan, they would have killed Saul.
- Jonathan was "redeemed." We do not know how they did it, or what was required, but there was some kind of agreement and transaction. They may have paid money (Ex. 21:30) or provided a substitute (Ex. 13:13, 15; 34:20).
- While Saul threatened a curse to the one who violated his edict, only the LORD has the power to enforce the curse (Gen. 12:3).
- Saul's selfish actions and superficial religion: forfeited Jonathan as the future king (1 Sam. 13:13-14), contributed to the ritual impurity of his soldiers (v.33), cut off new revelation from Samuel temporarily (13:15), prevented the complete destruction of the Philistines (v.46-52), alienated himself from Jonathan (v.43-44), and lost credibility with his soldiers (v.36, 40, 45). All of these consequences resulted from his obsession with himself (v.24). The people were hard-pressed because of him.

#### Points of Application:

- I. Recovering God's favor and blessing on this side of glory will only happen when we confess our sins and humble ourselves before the LORD.
- II. Religious exercises offer no help unless it is rooted in faith. Saul's greatest mistake was that his religious acts only hardened him further.
- III. Spiritual leaders must be motivated to do God's will apart from selfish gain. Often times, unfaithful rulers will find their strongest opposition in the most faithful servants.
- IV. When we are not guided by the Word of God, we will resort to "sign insurance" and presume upon God's extraordinary revelation.

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