

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 9B

FIRST SAMUEL

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION

When a man is consumed by his own glory, he does foolish things. An example is king Saul who ended up making bad decisions with very serious consequences. He was supposed to rule with justice and equity, but instead he became obsessed with protecting his own little name and dynasty.

God gave him everything that was needed to succeed as king but he failed miserably. This episode of his life in chapter 14 was reflective of the state of his heart and mind. It was self-centred and self gratifying. He cared not for his people, not even his own son. He made a mess of his life and ruined the nation of Israel. He was reduced to using humanistic methods instead of trusting in the LORD.

He made a foolish vow which, if not for the timely intervention of the people of Israel, would have led to him killing his own son. Despite Saul's foolishness, God was gracious to give him sufficient strength to stem the attacks of the Philistines. But he was not given the strength to put the Philistines down permanently. Israel would have the Philistines as a thorn on their side as long as Saul was king.

COMMENTARY

Jonathan Had Faith in God -- vv. 1-15

Jonathan who had defeated a Philistines' outpost in Geba, now

thought of another daring plan. He told his armour bearer that they should cross over to the Philistines' camp in Michmash and perhaps the LORD (YAHWEH) would work for them. Jonathan had great faith in God. He did not tell his father of his plan. Saul, on the other hand, set himself up in a corner in Gibeah under a pomegranate tree with his 600 men. Saul now looked to Ahiah (Ahijah) who wore an ephod, which was a sacred vestment worn by the high priest when he sought the counsel of God. Ahijah was the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh.

The people did not know that Jonathan had gone with his armour bearer (just the two of them) to raid the Philistines. This was indeed an act of faith in the LORD on the part of Jonathan. He had shared with his armour bearer that with the LORD, it did not matter whether they were many or just two. Jonathan was sure that what he had planned to do was in accordance to the word and will of God. Saul did not see this. Jonathan took the LORD at His Word that the LORD had made a covenant with Israel to give the land to them. The Philistines were occupying Israeli land. His armour bearer shared the same spirit and pledged his undivided loyalty and support.

They devised a plan to get a confirmation from the LORD. Their plan was to go to the Philistines' camp and be discovered by them. If the Philistines were to tell them to stay where they were and then they descended to them, they would hold their position knowing that the Philistines were taking due precautions. But if the Philistines invited them to go up to them (the Philistines were camped on a plateau), they would take it as a sign that the LORD would deliver the Philistines into their hands.

This was an act of faith on the part of Jonathan. It was bold to make such a request in the heart of enemy territory and from the lips of the enemies. 1 Samuel 14:9-10, *“If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them. **But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the LORD hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us.**”* (Emphasis added) With this sign, Jonathan and his armour bearer had the courage from the LORD to attack the Philistines.

The Philistines saw Jonathan and his armour bearer and thinking that they had come out of the caves where they were hiding, the Philistine soldiers invited them up to the plateau. Jonathan and his armour bearer climbed up the steep plateau believing that the LORD had given them the victory. Once they were on top, Jonathan and his armour bearer attacked the garrison and killed 20 Philistine guards. The commotion aroused the other soldiers who were sleeping in their tents. They panicked and began to tremble in fear. God wrought a great earthquake that shook the ground beneath their feet and heightened their fear and panic.

The Rest of the Enemies Melted Away—vv. 16-23

Meanwhile the watchmen in Saul’s camp in Gibeah were also aroused by the commotion. As they looked, they saw that the Philistines’ camp was in disarray. The Philistines were killing one another. The Philistines must have thought that Saul’s entire army was upon them. In the confusion, they mistook their own men, some of whom were from different ethnic groups, as the Israelite soldiers. Meanwhile, Saul asked his men to find out who had gone to attack the Philistines. A count of his men was taken and they found that Jonathan and his armour bearer were missing. Saul then consulted Ahijah, the

priest, to bring the ark of God which was at Gilgal at that time. While waiting for the answer from the priest, Saul suddenly called off the enquiring from the LORD because the fighting was increasingly dangerous. In this sudden action, Saul showed impatience on his part. He had called to seek the counsel of the LORD and he did not wait for an answer. This action is reflective of a man who made God his servant. His request for counsel from the LORD through the high priest was merely a veneer. He did not really seek God’s will or counsel before his battle against his enemies. To Saul, consulting God was a formality to project an appearance of godliness and holiness. It was a sham. Saul was impatient and impulsive. His life was dictated by circumstances rather than by obedience to God’s will and word. The circumstances were in his favour. Sight rather than faith is might.

Saul assembled his men and led them to battle against the fleeing Philistines. In addition, the Israelites who were from the different parts of the country and who had joined the Philistines before the battle now turned against the Philistines and joined the armies of Saul and Jonathan (14:21). Similarly, the Jews who had hidden themselves in the Mount of Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines were fleeing, came out of their caves and chased the enemies. It was the LORD who saved Israel that day. This was so because of Jonathan’s faith and belief in God (14:6). God wrought the earthquake which added to the confusion in the Philistine camp. Of course, the Israelites had to play their part in attacking the enemies. Nevertheless God gave Israel a resounding victory despite what Saul had done. The victory was a result of Jonathan’s faith.

Saul's Impulsive & Foolish Ban—vv. 24-35

One would expect the Israelites to celebrate their victory and enjoy the spoils that day. But alas, they were distressed because Saul had given an order to his soldiers to take an oath that no one should eat any food until the sun set (14:24). So, out of fear of being cursed, not one of the soldiers consumed any food. In those ancient days, the soldiers were compensated or rewarded with the spoils of the war. We can understand why they were distressed by Saul's command. In this action, Saul was insensitive to the well-being and needs of his soldiers. Saul could only see his own personal gain that "I may be avenged on mine enemies" (14:24b). Observe his use of the personal pronouns "I" and "mine enemies". He was motivated by personal gain and vengeance. He was abusing his power. He was no longer prompted by the Spirit of God. He ignored the fact that his soldiers were tired, exhausted and hungry.

What would possess a king to make such a foolish vow as to stop his own men from eating and refreshing themselves in the midst of battle? They were not shirking from their fight. They were tired and needed food to keep on fighting. Yet king Saul made a foolish vow as recorded in 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."*

As the soldiers passed through the forest, they came upon honey. It was so abundant that it flowed onto the ground but no one scooped it up to eat. Jonathan was with them. He was not present when his father charged them against eating anything before sunset. Seeing the honey, Jonathan dipped into it with a rod which he was holding and ate the honey. The effect was

wonderful. Even with that small amount of honey, Jonathan's strength was quickly restored and renewed. But one of the soldiers who saw Jonathan eat the honey told him that his father had strictly made the people swear and say, "Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day" (14:28). Jonathan could see that the people were fainting and exhausted. When Jonathan heard this, he openly expressed his criticism: *"My father hath troubled the land"* (14:29a). The word "troubled" (Hebrew, *'akar*) carries the idea of stirring up trouble or disturbances. In other words, Jonathan was saying that his father was not wise. He was creating unnecessary problems for the people. Jonathan asked the people to see how his energy had been renewed because of the little honey that he had consumed. Jonathan further commented how profitable it would have been if the people had eaten the honey freely; a greater victory over the Philistines could have been achieved.

Jonathan also commented that his father had made a bad vow in preventing Israel from eating while they were fighting. 1 Samuel 14:27-30, *"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 an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. 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. 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. How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?"* (Emphasis added) It was a foolish vow

made by a king who was so full of himself and worldly wisdom.

The people fought on and smote the Philistines from Michmash to Aijalon but they were very exhausted and they could not carry on and overtake the Philistines. Literally it means the people were ready to “fly away.” As a result, the enemy’s power remained unbroken. The consequence of this inability to completely defeat the Philistines would be felt at a later date. Saul did it his own way and it fell short of the mark but if he had done it God’s way and waited on God’s will to be revealed to him, the conclusion might have been very different.

Meanwhile the famished soldiers seeing the spoils, eagerly slaughtered the sheep, oxen and even calves to satisfy their hunger and appetites. They ate the meat with the blood in it. They were so exhausted that they did not wait for the blood to be drained completely before consuming them. This was forbidden by the Law (Leviticus 3:17; 17:10; Deuteronomy 12:15, 16).¹ Some of the soldiers, who knew the Law, informed Saul that the people had sinned against the LORD by eating blood. Saul acknowledged that the people had transgressed the Law. But what he did not do was to admit his own culpability for making a foolish vow binding the hands and feet of the soldiers and asking them to fight at the same time. He deserved to bear the bulk of the blame. He had caused the

¹ Leviticus 3:17 *It shall be* a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood.

Deuteronomy 12:15 Notwithstanding thou mayest kill and eat flesh in all thy gates, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee: the unclean and the clean may eat thereof, as of the roebuck, and as of the hart. 16 Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water.

people to break God’s law by eating blood because they attempted to keep his foolish law. If he had not made the foolish vow, the people would not have been guilty of breaking any law. He had foolishly banned them earlier from eating in spite of the fact that they were exhausted and hungry.

He commanded a big stone to be rolled before him and instructed that every soldier should slaughter his animal there on the rock so that the blood would flow out onto the ground. He was now trying to cover their first sin by compensating the LORD with this “fresh” blood being poured into the ground. God might be pleased with this act of compensation. The LORD is never pleased with the covering up of one sin with some form of sacrifice. What is required from the sinner is genuine repentance rather than sacrifice. Saul built an altar unto the LORD. He was trying in his own way to please and placate God by building an altar unto the LORD. Again he thought that by building these external things, God would be appeased.

Looking for a scapegoat

--vv. 36-46

After that, Saul said to the people that they should go after the Philistines that night and completely destroy the enemies until the morning. The people just answered him, “Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee” (14:36). It appeared that the soldiers were dispirited and greatly disappointed with him. Saul had an enthusiastic and cooperative army of soldiers before but because he had placed his own personal gain above their urgent needs, he had lost much of their support. Ahijah sensing that the soldiers were not behind Saul, interjected, “Let us draw near hither unto God.” Ahijah tried to show that he was a man of faith. But God’s will in this case was very clear. The Philistines were the enemies of God. They had invaded the land of His

people. No more guidance in this respect was required. Attacking the Philistines, as suggested by Saul, was already confirmed when the LORD gave Jonathan the victory over the Philistines. Saul now sought the counsel of God. He wanted to know whether it was God's will that he should continue this offensive against the Philistines and that the LORD would give them the victory (14:37). God did not answer him because His will was already crystal clear. If you are truly seeking God's will, it is proper to draw near and pray to Him for guidance but this time it was wrong. God's will was already known to Saul and such hypocrisy was not only unnecessary but a mockery to God's revealed will. It was time for sensible action in obedience to God and not to delay by a false request to want to know His will! Saul failed miserably. God ignored his request.

Instead of a self examination, Saul looked for a scapegoat in this refusal from the LORD. Thinking that the present situation was caused by a violation of the ban which he had issued, Saul now turned to find the culprit (14:38). He called all the chiefs together and declared that even if it was his son who had violated the ban, he would surely have to die. Saul was trying to impress that he had no favoritism. He did not know or suspect that Jonathan had broken the ban. The people kept silent and did not answer him. They could have responded and told him that it was Jonathan but they did not. They displayed a "we-do-not-care" attitude towards him.

For the method of finding out the culprit, Saul suggested that he and his son stood on one side and all of the others on the other side. Again the people took a do-what-seems-good-to-you attitude. Saul called on the LORD to give a perfect lot. The lot was cast, and Saul and Jonathan were taken. Then Saul requested the lot be cast between him and his son. And Jonathan was

taken. Then Saul asked Jonathan to tell him what he had done. Saul seemed to show no emotion at all that his son was going to be penalized with death. He cared more for himself. In contrast, Jonathan simply admitted that he had tasted a little honey. He accepted his death sentence. This tells us that Jonathan was an honest and brave person who did not blame others nor give excuses, and willingly accepted his punishment. Saul invoked the name of God and declared that Jonathan must surely die. Once again, we see that Saul was unduly zealous to pass the death penalty on Jonathan. Was he trying to put all the blame on Jonathan, and hide his own culpability and insensitivity to the people's needs through his own foolish ban?

It was too much for the people to endure. They had remained silent and submitted to Saul's tyrannical behaviour. The people raised their objection with one voice. They said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?" They testified that it was Jonathan who had fought with them and led them. They attributed their victory to him and not to Saul. They said that God forbid that Jonathan should die because he had fought with God on his side. So the people saved Jonathan from death. Saul was humiliated. He could do nothing against all the people who spoke with one voice. He left the place. They did not continue to attack the Philistines. Although the Philistines were defeated, they were not completely destroyed. At a later time, they would re-emerge and challenge Israel again.

Saul's Reign As king of Israel —vv. 47-52

Saul's reign over Israel was briefly summarized as a successful one in terms of his military skill and capabilities. He fought against the enemies of Israel on every side – against the Moabites, the Ammonites, Edomites, against the king of Zobah and

the Philistines, and the Amalekites. The names of Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishul, Melchi-shua; and the names of his daughters were Merah the firstborn, and the younger Michal. Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz. Saul's Chief-of-Army was Abner, the son of Ner, who was Saul's uncle. Saul's father was Kish. Ner, who was the father of Abner, was the son of Biel.

The Philistines remained a thorn in the side of Saul. They were not completely defeated. They were a constant threat and trouble to Israel during the reign of Saul. Saul, on the other hand, kept on recruiting and strengthening his army. Saul drafted all who were strong and brave, into his army.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Jonathan showed courage and great faith in God. He attacked the Philistines in Geba. He showed his trust in God and his knowledge of God when he led his armour bearer to raid the Philistine camp in Michmash (14:6-12). He was also intelligent and wise. He was sensitive to the needs of the people. He criticized his father's decision for prohibiting the soldiers from eating food which they urgently needed to renew their strength to fight. Saul was more interested in his own gain and vengeance against the enemies. Jonathan showed more sense and wisdom.

Saul's military victories could have been the cause of his change in character. He was no more the humble and meek person he used to be before he was crowned king. He did well in the first battle against Nahash the Ammonite. He gave God the glory. In this chapter, we see that he was consumed with pride to the extent that he was prepared to lie. He also showed that he was not a man of integrity. He blamed others for his sin of

disobedience instead of humbly confessing his sin and taking the blame. He continued to take matters into his own hand. His religious piety was only an outward symbolic show and not from the heart (14:18, 19, 39-44).

The summary at the end of chapter 14 commented that Saul had won many battles against the enemy and delivered Israel. But that does not mean that God favoured him. God used him as His instrument to unite and save His people. God would continue to favour him if he had remained faithful and obedient but he failed to be so. He became proud, selfish, self-assertive, insensitive and unwise. The final note in chapter 14 stated that he recruited all strong and brave men into his army. This might seem a wise thing to do but it indicated that he trusted in man rather than in God.

AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 14:1-15.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 14:16-23.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 14:24-52.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 14:1-52; Proverbs 3:5-7.

Friday: 1 Samuel 14:1-52; Romans 12:16-17.

Analysis:

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 14:1-15	
1 Samuel 14:16-35	
1 Samuel 14:36-52	

Discussion Questions

1. How can a believer prevent himself from ending up like king Saul and become a man after his own heart?

2. Why did God not answer the prayer of Saul when he finally decided to seek God's will in his battle against the Philistines?

3. Jonathan asked for a sign from God to find out if it was God's will to fight. Should we do the same, that is, ask for a sign when we seek God's will for our lives?

4. From where did Jonathan get his great courage (14:4-10)?

5. Are people, in general, still fond of looking for scapegoats today? What about Christians in particular?
