

## Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 14:24-52

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### 1 Samuel 14:24-52

(See 1 Samuel 13-14:23. Jonathan provoked the Philistines. The Philistines assembled a huge army to retaliate. Israel was vastly outmatched in men and weapons. Saul had called out the men of Israel, but they were deserting the king. Things looked desperate. The Philistines were raiding the towns of Israel and Israel was powerless to stop them. Jonathan and his armor-bearer secretly infiltrated the Philistine encampment and, by the power of God, sent the Philistine army into a panicked retreat.)

#### Verse 24

***<sup>24</sup> Now the Israelites were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, “Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” So none of the troops tasted food.***

- Before Saul dispatched his troops to pursue the panicked Philistine army, he required his soldiers to take a vow that they would not eat anything until the Philistines were defeated. So, his soldiers would have no nourishment or refreshment during the fight. This was a senseless requirement. As a result of it, none of Saul’s soldiers ate anything that day.

#### Verses 25-30

***<sup>25</sup> The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground. <sup>26</sup> When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out; yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath. <sup>27</sup> But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. <sup>28</sup> Then one of the soldiers told him, “Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, ‘Cursed be anyone who eats food today!’ That is why the men are faint.” <sup>29</sup> Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey. <sup>30</sup> How much better it would have***

***been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?"***

- When Saul's men entered a wooded area in pursuit of the Philistines they found honey there. But none of them ate the honey because of the vow Saul had imposed on them.
- When Jonathan saw the honeycomb oozing honey, he ate some of it and was refreshed by it. The soldiers who were there saw Jonathan eat the honey and told him of the vow Saul had imposed on the army. They explained that the army was "faint" because none of them had had anything to eat all day because of the vow.
- Jonathan criticized his father for forcing this unnecessary restriction on Israel's soldiers. He exclaimed that the defeat of the Philistines would have been more complete if Saul's troops had taken some refreshment that day.

### **Verses 31-37**

***<sup>31</sup> That day, after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Mikdash to Aijalon, they were exhausted. <sup>32</sup> They pounced on the plunder and, taking sheep, cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them, together with the blood. <sup>33</sup> Then someone said to Saul, "Look, the men are sinning against the LORD by eating meat that has blood in it."***

***"You have broken faith," he said. "Roll a large stone over here at once."<sup>34</sup> Then he said, "Go out among the men and tell them, 'Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the LORD by eating meat with blood still in it.'"***

***So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there. <sup>35</sup> Then Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first time he had done this.***

***<sup>36</sup> Saul said, "Let us go down and pursue the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn, and let us not leave one of them alive."***

***"Do whatever seems best to you," they replied.***

***But the priest said, "Let us inquire of God here."***

***<sup>37</sup> So Saul asked God, "Shall I go down and pursue the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel's hand?" But God did not answer him that day.***

- At the end of the day, Saul's men were hungry and physically exhausted. So, they took some of the animals they had captured from the Philistines, killed them and ate them. But the animals were not butchered in accord with the law of Moses. It is possible that they were not cooked at all or eaten raw which also violated the law of Moses. Saul's vow of the troops

had made them very hungry. However, that vow was now over. The Philistines had been defeated. The bad vow, however, caused the men to violate the law of Moses.

- Saul then ordered that the men bring their animals to him to be slain on an altar he had built. This would insure that the animals would be butchered according to the law. It is interesting to note that the high priest was in the camp. But Saul did not call upon the priest to act in this matter. He built the altar and he acted to resolve the problem, not the priests. The note that this was the first time Saul had done this indicates that he has now assumed responsibility for both the secular and the religious function of the government.
- After the men had been fed, Saul decided to continue the pursuit of the Philistines through the night. But the priests, perhaps alarmed that Saul had assumed their role, suggested that the king might inquire of God before laying plans to continue the fight. It seems that the priests were attempting to pull Saul in and reestablish their proper function.
- When Saul inquired of God about what he should do, God did not respond. God may answer our prayers with “Yes”, “No”, or “WAIT.” Or, he may simply say nothing. In this case, God was silent. He made no response at all.

### **Verses 38-39**

***<sup>38</sup> Saul therefore said, “Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today. <sup>39</sup> As surely as the LORD who rescues Israel lives, even if the guilt lies with my son Jonathan, he must die.” But not one of them said a word.***

- Saul concluded that God’s silence was because God was displeased with someone in Israel’s camp and that the one who had displeased God must be discovered and executed. But no one confessed or indicated that he knew who the person at fault might be.
- Again, this action was not directed by God or the priests. Saul is the person who decided what must be done because God was silent.

### **Verses 40-43**

***<sup>40</sup> Saul then said to all the Israelites, “You stand over there; I and Jonathan my son will stand over here.”***

***“Do what seems best to you,” they replied.***

***<sup>41</sup> Then Saul prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, “Why have you not answered your servant today? If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, respond with Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with Thummim.” Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared. <sup>42</sup> Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son.” And Jonathan was taken.***

***<sup>43</sup> Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.”***

***So Jonathan told him, “I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now I must die!”***

- Saul proceeded to divide up the men with him to decide who had sinned. He instructed the priest to use the Urim and Thummim, objects which the priest used to determine the will of God, in this case, who was at fault; he and Jonathan or the other leaders. The objects indicated that the fault was with Saul’s family. Saul ordered that the objects be used again to determine if the fault was with him or Jonathan. The objects indicated that the fault was with Jonathan.
- Saul demands to know what Jonathan had done and Jonathan confessed that he ate honey in violation of the vow that Saul had placed over his troops that day. Jonathan took responsibility for his action even though he was not personally present when the vow was imposed and had no knowledge of its imposition. He was willing to accept responsibility for his action.

#### **Verse 44**

***<sup>44</sup> Saul said, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan.”***

- Saul showed no mercy. He declared that Jonathan must die because he ate the honey that day.

#### **Verses 45-46**

***<sup>45</sup> But the men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the LORD lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.***

***<sup>46</sup> Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own land.***

- The army of Israel rebelled against the king’s declaration that Jonathan must die. They pointed out that Jonathan, not the king, was the one

through whom God worked to deliver Israel against impossible odds. They pointed out that Jonathan, not Saul, was the hero in this story. He was the one who stepped out in faith, not Saul. They would not allow Saul to execute Jonathan.

- Saul gave up. He dropped the entire matter and sent the men of Israel home. He did not recognize his stupidity in imposing a senseless vow on his men or of assuming the responsibility of the priests in governing the nation.

### **Verses 47-52**

***<sup>47</sup> After Saul had assumed rule over Israel, he fought against their enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment on them. <sup>48</sup> He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them.***

***<sup>49</sup> Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua. The name of his older daughter was Merab, and that of the younger was Michal. <sup>50</sup> His wife's name was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of the commander of Saul's army was Abner son of Ner, and Ner was Saul's uncle. <sup>51</sup> Saul's father Kish and Abner's father Ner were sons of Abiel.***

***<sup>52</sup> All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.***

- The reign of Saul was marked with constant war against the enemies of Israel. Though he was able to free Israel from many of her enemies, he was never able to free Israel from the Philistines.
- Saul did not look to YHWH for help. He looked to the strength of his army and the wisdom of the men he gathered around him.

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