

“Saul’s Changes of Mind”

Saul had already started to go downhill, by being hasty. Now we find him doing the same things, by uttering declarations he could not, or would not, keep. These are not signs of a man whose actions are wholly of God. The man who is sure of his spiritual ground will not move an inch to alter his ways. Saul, though mighty in battle, and though knowing God’s hand to be with him, was again hasty, and this led on to mistakes of both judgement and execution. In many ways Saul was a good man, but human goodness can never be a measure for our lives – only the goodness of God can be our yardstick.

In the previous chapter we saw how the first wave of Philistines - the ‘spoilers’ or destroyers – were sent to bring havoc to the few Hebrews still left standing with Saul. The job of these murderous soldiers was very simple – to utterly crush initial opposition and to destroy everything and everyone in their path. Then would come the main army to finish the task.

The Hebrews waited for their fate. Saul had led them to victory before, but this seemed to be different, for only Saul and his son, Jonathan, had weapons! Most of the Hebrews fled and hid. A small handful of men stayed with Saul in the city of Gibeah as the massed army of the Philistines encamped near Michmash.

Awaiting their apparent fate, Saul and his few men did not know what Jonathan was planning. If nothing else, this young prince had courage!

Verse 1

1.

“Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines’ garrison, that (is) on the other side. But he told not his father.”

We can write with some confidence about what scriptural texts say, but we can only make assumptions when it comes to motives. Why did Jonathan do such a foolhardy thing? Just two young men against a whole contingent of Philistines? Did he want to show his father his

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prowess as a soldier? Did he want to prove to himself how brave he was? Did he want to impress the Hebrews? Did he have a word from the Lord that gave him a brave heart? Or, was he plain stupid? We cannot tell from the account before us.

In those days, things were more civilised in the run-up to battle. The two sides camped opposite each other and did not strike until the stated time. After fighting they usually went back to their tents until the next day. So, if they kept their heads down, these two men could get away with their plan.

Not telling his father, Jonathan took his armour-bearer and made his way toward the nearest group of Philistine soldiers, who were camped in a field opposite Gibeah. It was broad daylight, so it is odd that they could sneak out when everyone was supposedly on full alert.

Verses 2&3

1.

“And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which (is) in Migron: and the people that (were) with him (were) about six hundred men;

2.

And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD'S priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone.”

Whilst Jonathan and his armour bearer were making their way to the enemy position, Saul was waiting (or, sitting down, as the Hebrew word suggests) under a pomegranate tree on the outskirts of Gibeah. The tree was in 'Migron'. This was outside the city itself, a steep outcrop of rock just north of both Gibeah and Michmash. No doubt he could see the troop movements from there. There are many who would spiritualise the fact that he sat under a pomegranate tree, so that it held some kind of spiritual significance. But, it does not. This is a straightforward historical account of where Saul was, nothing more.

Just six hundred staunch men were in Gibeah at that time. Hardly a match for thousands of angry Philistines, who all had weapons. Yet, they stayed. There are many occasions when

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Christians are afraid. Do they run or do they stay and fight? You might expect me to say, stay and fight, but this would be simplistic. Remember when Joseph fled with Mary and baby Jesus? Or, when Paul escaped death by going over a city wall at night?

There are some zealous but foolish Christians who think it fitting to always stay and fight, but sometimes we must leave an ominous or lost position, so that we can fight another day. Only when we live moment by moment with God, walking with Him as a matter of course, will we know which path to take at any given time. In the text, the men decided to stay and fight, knowing it probably meant their death. As one who is quite familiar with spiritual and physical, 'battlefields', I know how they must have felt. Have you been in a situation that appears to be hopeless, yet you know you must make a stand for God, your faith, or for simple truth or honour? Your legs quake, and your belly turns to jelly, yet you know you have no option but to stand your ground. That is when God gives victory!

With Saul was a descendant of Eli; it is not clear whether Ahiah was himself the priest wearing the ephod (for 'ephod' see earlier study in this series), or whether the reference is to Eli, who was the high priest until his death. Ahiah ('brother of Jehovah/Yahu') was Eli's great-grandson. He was the son of Ahitub ('my brother is good'), the brother of Ichabod, mentioned already in an earlier study. Ahitub and Ichabod were sons of the ill-fated Phineas, son of Eli. It is possible Ahiah was a priest, but not the high priest, for Samuel still held that office. The main point being made is that no-one knew Jonathan and his armour-bearer were gone until a count was made of the men a little later.

Verses 4&5

1.

"And between the passages, by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines' garrison, (there was) a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side: and the name of the one (was) Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.

2.

The forefront of the one (was) situate northward over against Michmash, And the other southward over against Gibeah."

Jonathan and his companion made their way down the ford or valley and hid between two rising

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sharp-pointed rocks, named Bozez and Seneh. The meaning of Bozez is not sure, but it comes from a word similar in meaning to white linen, or bleached, so perhaps the rock was bleached white by the sun. Seneh means 'thorny'. This rock rose up in crags, and was 6.5 miles north of Jerusalem.

One rock faced Michmash and the other faced Gibeah. So, with their backs to Gibeah, the two men hid on the hillside above a company of enemy soldiers, watching and hatching their plans.

Verses 6-10

1.

“And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for (there is) no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.

2.

And his armour bearer said unto him, Do all that (is) in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I (am) with thee according to thy heart.

3.

Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto (these) men, and we will discover ourselves unto them.

4.

If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand in our place, and will not go up unto them.

5.

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.”

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The two could not have been far away from the enemy, for Jonathan's plan was to call out to them. He gave two options to his armour bearer – one meant fighting, and the other meant staying put and probably returning to Gibeah.

Jonathan clearly thought of the Philistines as being ungodly, for he refers to them as '**arel**, or 'these uncircumcised'. This was meant in a derogatory way. His words seem to suggest he had a fiery anger against them that over-ruled any fear. His plan was indeed courageous. He relied solely on God, Who, he thought,

might

come to his side and give him victory. Jonathan argued that God can bring such victory through a small number as well as through whole armies.

His faith in this situation is most remarkable, and is rarely found today. He, with only one other, was hidden behind two large rocky outcrops, but he did not go there to remain hidden. It was his intention to do something about his nation's problem. The rocks merely hid him from view whilst he explained his plan to his armour bearer. His plan was breathtaking in its audacity – but Jonathan here exemplifies what Christian faith is all about: God can do His mighty works whether the matter is big or small!

God, said Jonathan, can work if He wishes to. It is obvious that Jonathan's faith was no sham, for he was about to put it to the ultimate test. If it backfired, he could lose his life. This kind of faith is thrilling to watch and to experience, for it is dynamic, full of fire and courage. And his own faith seemed to give courage to the person with him, too... something for preachers and teachers to remember.

It is very easy for preachers, pastors and teachers, to make brave sounds from a pulpit, but it is quite another to live it out. If our pastors and preachers lived out what they taught, they would see a very different congregation before them! When a congregation can see the courage of others, especially of those who are pastors etc., they are more than willing to put themselves to the test, also. Likewise, if all Jesus did was to make encouraging noises, He would have been remembered for a few years after His death, but no longer. But, because He actually died for us, His words meant something. If He did not die, then all His words would have been empty.

Jonathan put his faith on the line, knowing that any mistaken zeal would possibly end in his swift death. Have you ever put your faith to the test? I do not mean in silly little situations – I mean in those life and death situations, or those really serious ones where there can be only two

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answers – success or failure. Most Christians talk about their ‘faith’ but very few live it out. They are forever on the sidelines, or, to use Old Testament terms, they hide amongst the baggage (well behind the battle area). Brave talk but no brave hearts.

I can ask these questions because I have personally had my faith tested in these ways. Not just in a spiritual sense, but also in life and death situations, both when my own life has been in imminent danger, and also when the lives of others were involved. It is very easy to talk about having faith when there is no test to measure it by! So many Christians live out their lives vicariously, through the brave acts of others. They extol the bravery of the Reformers who died at the stake. They extol the love of Jesus Christ for dying for us on the cross. They think highly of missionaries who died by the hands of pagan tribes. They *talk* well about faith – but do they live it out to the final degree? Hardly. Are they willing to pay the price? No.

The excitement of putting your faith on the line cannot be described! It must be experienced. People talk of the ‘adrenaline rush’ when they partake in some dangerous sport, or by speeding in a car, etc. There is a similar feeling when you make a stand as a Christian. This is because you are not only putting your own faith to the test, but you know that others are watching; if you make a blunder of judgement or discernment, then your failure will be held up for everyone to see.

I refer to serious situations. Like being faced with sudden death at the hands of someone out to kill you. Like praying publicly for the miraculous healing of a person with a terminal ailment. Like making a life change that everyone can see and attributing it to God. I have done these things and have known mighty experiences as a result. (I have also blundered, and know where I went wrong).

Jonathan was in one of those rare moments. He was about to test not only his faith, but also God. It was a time for real commitment to what is true and real. There would be no turning back or making excuses if it was not meant to be. Have you reached that point in your life? Are you willing to trust the Lord implicitly with your life? Truly? Then you will know the excitement I speak of, as genuine spiritual life surges through your soul showing you the reality of walking and talking with God. The reason why most Christians never test their faith is that they are afraid to be proved wrong. If they put their faith to the test publicly and it all fails miserably, then they will not only lose face, but they will also lose their pretence of faith. Is your faith real or pretend? *Prove* it, friends.

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Christians are so miserable today. Underneath their smiles and church attendance is a secret and never expressed doubt that God is able to deliver. Indeed, there is the more fundamental fear that their faith is just a crutch after all, and God does not really exist. Which is it with you? Many who appear to 'backslide' do so because either they were not saved in the first place, or, because they do not have the courage of a Jonathan to put their faith to the test. There is no shame in being wrong. A Christian who makes a mistake must repent of any wrong thoughts, pick himself up, dust himself down, and start again.

It is very sad to see Christians 'give up' their Christian faith because they have come across personal disasters that appear to destroy their 'faith'. Often, they have placed their trust in men or themselves and when these have failed, their failure has had a knock-on effect. This particularly occurs when a pastor falls. A pastor is just a man, like any other. But, when we put him on a pedestal, we are in error. To put our trust in men is folly. Men fail constantly! You, me, everyone. Pastors too. To trust in men is, really, to sin. We must only trust God. If Christians fall, we must not fall with them, but must carry on with a sigh. We must repent of sinfully putting them on a pedestal, if that is what we have done. Jonathan trusted only in God. He was willing to face a heathen army on his own as a test of his faith. Now *that* is a true hero! Why not follow the example?

Such was his faith, the armour bearer automatically followed his prince. He could have expressed doubt, but he did not. Jonathan's death-defying trust in God caused him to trust in Jonathan. Does this not contradict what I said above? No – it is quite consistent with scripture. As Paul said to the churches – they were to follow him only insofar as he himself taught what God said. In the same way I, as a pastor and teacher, tell others likewise. Jonathan's trust in God was wholehearted and consistent with God's own requirement. God says that when we trust in Him truly, He will give us our heart's desire. (Note: this 'desire' is what he puts into our heart in the first place). So, for his armour bearer to trust in Jonathan was acceptable.

The plan was audacious – they would 'pass over to', or march up to, the enemy soldiers and just stand there to see what would happen. Jonathan was given assurance by God (as the results show) that events would occur as planned. If after shouting to attract their attention, the Philistines told them to stay where they were whilst they went to capture them, then God would not be with them (!). But, if the Philistines invited them to enter their camp if they dared, then that was the sign that God was with Jonathan. No margin of error in the plan – it either worked or it did not! Either total success or total failure. No in-between ground.

Furthermore, Jonathan's plan went much farther than just waiting for a signal from God: if the sign was right, then Jonathan would slaughter his enemies, though they were vastly

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outnumbered. His faith went from strength to strength! Can you rely on God's help even before it is given? Are you bold enough in your trust to know *in advance* that you will be successful, even though the odds appear to be devastating and ominous?

Remember – it takes but a split second strike of lightning to light up the most darkened sky. I have known momentary 'strikes' of God to suddenly and gloriously change my life. Have you? Some Christians see 'signs' (the word refers to miraculous actions) of God but attribute them to some human agency. What short-sightedness and what sin!

Jonathan, after relating his God-given plan, then put his faith in to actual action. It was now proving-time. This was no idle chat about what God can do in theory. This was for real.

Verse 11-14

1.

"And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves.

2.

And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armour-bearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will shew you a thing.

3.

And Jonathan said unto his armourbearer, Come up after me: for the LORD hath delivered them into the hand of Israel. And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armourbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armourbearer slew after him.

4.

And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armourbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, (which) a yoke (of oxen might plow)."

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The account is very clear in its teaching – we must listen to God and then we must act out what He says, no matter how absurd or impossible it might seem. Most Christians are good at listening. They will listen all their lives to what God says. But, they are not so good at taking that vital step to active faith – *doing* what God says: putting God's word into action.

The two men, hidden because they crouched down, made their presence known, possibly by shouting to the enemy soldiers. The soldiers responded with jeers. *"Look! The Hebrews are coming out of the holes they were hiding in!"*

Then they 'invited' the two men to enter their camp to be shown what would be done to them. Jonathan showed no fear for the sign was now given – God was to be with them! Jonathan told his armour-bearer to follow him because God *"hath delivered them into the hand of Israel."*

The spiritual implications in this portion are tremendous... can you see them?

Verses 15-18

1.

And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling.

2.

And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another.

3.

Then said Saul unto the people that were with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armourbearer were not there.

4.

And Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel.

God now shows His hand to the Philistines by producing an earthquake. The day before this

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study was given, my city and others up to England, experienced an earthquake, sufficient to rattle tables and windows, shake walls and emit a loud bang. It caused alarm everywhere. But, what God produced the day of the coming battle was enough to scare the hardened soldiers enough to send them running away.

The entire army was in a state of panic. We are told that even the spoilers *“also trembled”*. The spoilers, or shachath, were the destroyers. These were the roughest of the rough, willing to lay waste to everyone and anything. It seems the garrison was farther out in the field than the main camp; they ran from where they were to join their fellows. The earthquake came suddenly and was big in effect, producing a *“very great trembling”*.

It seems to me that Jonathan, a godly young man, trusted God and took the view that God would answer him – to enter the fray or to retire. Once the answer came, Jonathan fearlessly ran forward and slew the outer guard. Then, as if to underpin his trust, God brought a further calamity upon the enemy... but first came trust and a willingness to run fast knowing God was in control.

Watchmen, probably soldiers, could see the commotion in the Philistine camp, and told Saul the enemy was running away. Not only that, but as they ran they killed their own soldiers who got in their way!

Saul must have wondered if any of his own men had begun the stampede to escape, so he called on captains to take a role-call... was anyone missing? Only Jonathan and his armour-bearer were missing.

Verses 19-23

1.

And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on and increased: and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand.

2.

And Saul and all the people that were with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle: and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was a very great

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discomfiture.

3.

Moreover the Hebrews that were with the Philistines before that time, which went up with them into the camp from the country round about, even they also turned to be with the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan.

4.

Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle.

5.

So the LORD saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Bethaven.

Now feeling triumphant Saul called for the Ark to be brought to the battle field. While Saul was still discussing this with the priest, the commotion from the Philistines became louder and more prominent. Thus, Saul told the priest: *"Withdraw thine hand"*. He was referring to a Moses-like holding up of the hand against the enemy (representing the force of God) and for the intervention of God. Saul appears to not need the intervention, thinking the enemy were now beaten by God anyway... so the priest could take his hand down. To me this was a presupposition.

When the soldiers heard of the Philistine disarray they gathered strength and courage and gathered ready to finish them off. They ran down the mountain side and across the valley to engage the soldiers, who were already killing their own fellows in an effort to get away. As courage gained momentum even Hebrews living with the Philistines joined the battle against their oppressors.

Along with these came the cowardly Israelites who had hidden themselves in mountains, rocks and forests. All of them joined the attack on the fleeing Philistines, who they chased with vigour to Bethaven. *"the Lord saved Israel that day"*! It began with just one man, the brave and faithful Jonathan, who hated the fact that ungodly men dared to oppose God's people. He was then

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joined by his armour-bearer. Between them they killed twenty men. God followed this up with an earthquake, scattering the enemy who then started to slaughter their own kind. This led to Saul and his 600 joining the battle, and then those amongst the enemy fought their oppressors. And all these were followed by cowards who were in hiding.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS TELL YOU ABOUT GOD AND OUR SITUATIONS TODAY? It takes just one man to make a stand. God provides the rest! And when one man makes a stand, others will follow. And even if they did not, that one man will be victorious. It is about time God's people understood and made a stand!

Verses 24-31

1.

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.

2.

And all they of the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground.

3.

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.

4.

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.

5.

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.

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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.

7.

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?

8.

And they smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon: and the people were very faint.

After the great battle the men of Israel were “distressed” because their new king made them promise not to eat until the night. The word ‘distressed’, **nagas**, is quite strong because it implies an action by a tyrant or oppressor. It was unfair of Saul to make such a demand, especially when the soldiers were exhausted and hungry. Yet, he told them they would be “*cursed*”

if they did not obey. Note that we have no indication the command came from God; it was something required by the king so he could exact revenge on the Philistines... probably by continuing the chase after stragglers until all were dead.

As the soldiers walked on they came into a forest and saw honey on the ground, dropped from trees above. Afraid of their promise the men did not eat the honey. Then along came Jonathan, who was out of the camp when Saul gave his command. He dipped the end of his staff into the honey and eat the freely-found food. The text then says his “*eyes were enlightened*”. This has no spiritual meaning – it simply means he had a surge of energy after the fighting. In my own life if I become too hungry I feel nauseous and weak, and must eat something, or I cannot really function. As soon as I eat even a small morsel, my mind ‘comes alive’ again! This is what is meant by the text.

Only after he had eaten the honey did a soldier warn him of his father’s command, even though the “*people were faint*” or weary. Jonathan openly commented that he thought Saul had uttered a poor command, for just by eating a small amount of honey he had been refreshed and strengthened. How much more could the Israelites have accomplished if they had eaten? Surely, they could have killed even more of the Philistines! Instead, the Israelites had to battle

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both the Philistines and their own hunger and thirst.

The idea seems to have been to keep on going so as to vanquish the whole army of the enemy. But, hunger diminishes strength and ability. Saul appears to have made a mistake in making the soldiers agree to an oath.

Verses 32-35

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

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.

4.

And Saul built an altar unto the LORD: the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD.

After Jonathan's words, the soldiers ravenously killed cattle and sheep they had captured. They were so hungry they ate the meat raw. So, Saul made a mistake by forcing his soldiers to fight though famished, and the soldiers then made a mistake by eating meat with blood in. This is what happens when a 'leader' makes an initial error – more errors follow unless the matter is rectified.

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Even Saul recognised the error of eating meat with blood in it. He rightly said the people had sinned. What did he mean when he said *“roll a great stone unto me this day”*? His idea was to set up a great flat stone on which the seized animals could be killed and cooked properly, and which acted as an altar to God. It often happens that even the best of Christians are confused by their own thoughts and emotions, which they mix freely with the things of God. Thus, they can become more confused and do what is wrong, sometimes unintentionally. The aim should then be to stop everything and start again, after repenting and setting one’s thoughts straight.

Maybe Saul realised his demand not to eat was harsh and unrealistic. He called upon the people to bring their animals for slaughter and cooking, so they did not sin by eating raw meat. After all, it would not take too long to wait another hour or so. And so Saul built his first altar to God.

Verses 36-42

1.

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.

2.

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.

3.

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

4.

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.

5.

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.

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6.

Therefore Saul said unto the LORD God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped.

7.

And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken.

After they had eaten and were stronger, Saul gave an instruction, to chase again after the remaining Philistines throughout the night, thus robbing them of rest and ability to fight back; it is doubtful they had time to kill and cook their own meat. The people agreed, and the priest advised they seek God on the matter.

However, this is exactly what usually happens amongst modern believers – they devise a plan and THEN decide to ‘ask God’ to agree to it! Perhaps this is why God did not answer the priest’s prayer and Saul’s request: *“shall I go down after the Philistines?”* Saul wanted to be sure of victory, but God did not answer at that time. Instead of telling God what we wish to do, we should instead ask Him to show us His way, no matter what it is.

Because God did not reply, Saul gathered the elders and chiefs together to find out what their sin was. He would, in fact. Put his own son to death for defying his command not to eat. But, none of the leaders agreed. This was a conundrum Saul himself had created! He acted first and then sought God’s approval. He told the people not to eat but to fight on, though they were famished. I see no command from God to do this. The leaders simply could not agree to Jonathan’s death. Facing their silence, Saul asked God to throw a ‘perfect lot’... and He did. The king and his son were chosen by lot.

Verses 43-46

1.

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.

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2.

And Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan.

3.

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.

4.

Then Saul went up from following the Philistines: and the Philistines went to their own place.

Saul then asked Jonathan what he had done. He told Saul and accepted he had to die, though he was ignorant of the curse. Saul felt forced to agree to his death (even though, to my mind, his demand on the people was not godly). The leaders were alarmed: 'Jonathan gave us a great victory – why will you kill him?' They said "*God forbid!*" They told Saul that Jonathan would not be harmed in any way, for it was he who brought God's favour upon them. So, Saul did not put his son to death. That was when Saul decided to stop chasing the stragglers Philistines, who returned home, just as the Israelites returned.

Verses 47&48

1.

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.

2.

And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them.

1 Samuel 14

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 27 February 2018 21:45

Thus Saul finally established himself as king of Israel and bravely fought all enemies on every side. It was his prime activity – to bring trouble to those who troubled Israel. He then gathered together a massive army to fight the Amalekites (descendants of Esau, to the east of the Dead Sea) who were constantly attacking them. (Note: Zobah was then a separate part of Syria, northeast of Damascus).

Verses 49-52

1.

Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui, and Melchishua: and the names of his two daughters were these; the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal:

2.

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.

3.

And Kish was the father of Saul; and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel.

4.

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.

We now have pertinent family and other details: Jonathan ('Jehovah has given') had two brothers, Ishui/Jesui ('he resembles me') and Melchishua ('my king is wealth'). He also had two sisters, Merab ('increase') the eldest, and Michal ('who is like God'). Merab was originally promised to David, but Saul reneged on the promise and David married Michal instead... the marriage price demanded by Saul was 100 Philistine foreskins (in other words, taken from dead enemy). Though married to David Saul gave her away again to another man!

We are also given the name of Saul's wife, Ahinoam ('my brother is delight'), whose father was Ahimaaz. The general of the Israelite army was Abner, son of Saul's uncle, Ner. That is, he was Saul's cousin, who was later assassinated by Joab.

1 Samuel 14

Written by K B Napier

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Saul's father's name was Kish, of the family Matri, of the tribe of Benjamin. Abner's father (Ner) was son of Abiel (grandfather of Saul). However, in 1 Chronicles, Ner is said to be Saul's grandfather. But, in 2 Samuel this is put as Saul's paternal uncle. Thus, Saul is traced back to Kish, who traces back to Abiel. Abner traces back to Ner, and then Abiel.

During Saul's kingship Israel was continually at war with the Philistines and, during his reign, whenever Saul saw a strong and valiant soldier, he hired him for his army.

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