

## 1 Samuel 14b

**What was Saul's next leadership mistake (v. 24)?** Saul declared a nationwide fast. On the surface, this sounds *so spiritual*. As if to say, *"Let's set today aside as a special day of fasting unto the Lord. We want God to do a great work, so we should fast today. And anyone who doesn't follow me will be cursed."*

To ensure speedy success, Saul had rashly forbidden his soldiers under oath to eat anything until evening, when the battle was over. He sealed his order with a curse.

**What was wrong with declaring a fast?** Hunger caused his men to become fatigued and thus put them at a military risk/disadvantage.

Saul's improper view of his role as Israel's king comes through clearly in verse 24. The Philistines were not Saul's enemies as much as they were God's enemies. This was a holy war but Saul viewed the battle too personally: as his war. Notice his focus: **before I have avenged myself on my enemies!**" He had lost perspective. His selfish desire to win for his own glory led him to issue a foolish command.<sup>1</sup> Saul showed that even in the midst of doing something spiritual like fasting, his focus was on *himself*, not the Lord.

**What temptation did the army encounter next (v. 25)?** Food! Honey just waiting for them.

Warriors in battle need nourishment. This must have been *torture* for the soldiers. And there was the honey, dripping. Right in front of their eyes! They *want* the honey. They *need* the honey. God *provided* the honey. But a foolish, legalistic command from Saul kept it from them. How this must have discouraged and embittered the soldiers!

**Did they satisfy their hunger by eating the honey (v. 26)?** No, they were afraid of the oath/curse. An oath was an extremely serious matter in the ancient Near East. One did not violate a king's oath without suffering severe consequences.

**What was Jonathan's predicament (v. 27)?** Not knowing of his father's edict, Jonathan ate some honey to regain his strength.

**When a soldier told Jonathan about the strict oath, how did Jonathan respond (vv. 29-30)?** When he was told about the curse, he mourned that Israel's triumph was to be hindered by such a stupid order.<sup>2</sup> He was angry. Jonathan saw the folly of Saul's oath clearly,

**After that day's battle how did the army respond (vv. 31-32)?** When the fighting was over, they rushed on the spoil, killed the livestock, and ate it without draining the blood, in violation of Leviticus 17:10-14 and Deuteronomy 12:23-25.

**What was Saul's response to the soldiers' actions (vv. 33-35)?** He rebuked them and set up a large stone where animals were to be brought and slain properly. He also built an altar, his first ever.

**What was Saul's next proposal (v. 36)?** Chase after the retreating Philistines during the night and kill all of them.

**Who intervened?** The priest Ahijah (v. 3) suggested that they inquire of God before proceeding.

**What did Saul do in response to the priest's suggestion (v. 37)?** He prayed and asked God for guidance.

**How did Saul respond to God's apparent silence (vv. 38-42)?** This silence from God led Saul to believe that there was sin in the camp i.e., that someone had violated the fast. As was done in such cases, the lot was brought out, and to Saul's surprise, Jonathan was shown to be the guilty one by the way the lot came out.<sup>3</sup>

**When Jonathan confessed to breaking the oath (v. 43), what happened (vv. 44-45)?** Saul, to save face, ordered him put to death. Only the intervention of Saul's men prevented Jonathan's execution.<sup>4</sup> The people showed more sense than did their king. Hadn't Jonathan worked with God to bring about this great victory? How could God be displeased with him for breaking Saul's curse, when He had used him so mightily in battle? No, Jonathan would not die. Thus the hero was spared an undeserved death. But while Saul was engaged in such unnecessary nonsense, the Philistines fled. For the second time his lack of wisdom had diminished his victory.<sup>5</sup>

Saul was willing to kill his son rather than to humbly admit that *he* was really at fault. Saul started out as a humble man (1 Samuel 10:21-23), but his once impressive humility was overtaken by pride. Pride has a way of creeping in – especially as one advances in rank, position, etc.

The soldiers who had gone along with Saul's requests thus far (vv. 36, 40) refused to follow his orders when he called for Jonathan's execution (v. 45). They recognized that Saul's rule about abstaining from eating (v. 24) was not divine law. They correctly saw that even though Jonathan had violated Saul's rule, he had obeyed God's order to drive Israel's enemies out of the land.<sup>6</sup>

**What did all the days of Saul's life entail (vv. 47-48, 52)?** He assumed rule over Israel and established his sovereignty. Saul was an active warrior; He punished the enemies of Israel (vv. 47-48), which was God's will. He fought a bitter war with the Philistines all his life. And the strength of his army grew (when Saul saw any mighty man or any brave man, he took him for himself). God told Saul that his descendants would not sit on the throne (13:14). He was a one-term king. He reigned for 42 years. The question is why did God leave Saul in power that long with David waiting in the wings? A man after God's own heart.

The reason for Saul's ultimate failure as Israel's king, and the reason for his own personal destruction was that Saul refused to put the will of God above his own personal desires. He sought to use God rather than allowing God to use him. He thought he was above the Mosaic Law rather than under it. He put himself in the position that God alone rightfully occupied.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 106.

<sup>2</sup> William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 306.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 446.

<sup>5</sup> William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 307.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 109.