

## BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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### **1 SAMUEL 14-16 SAUL'S FURTHER MISTAKES; DAVID ANOINTED**



We now continue the biblical account of Saul's further mistakes as king. He had made his first serious one when he offered the sacrifice instead of waiting for Samuel the priest to do it. Halley mentions, "His successes rapidly went to his head. Humility gave place to pride. He offered a sacrifice, which was the exclusive function of priests. This was the first sign of Saul's *presumptive self-importance*" (*Halley's Bible Handbook*, p. 181).

While he did this, Israel faced a huge contingency of Philistines, and by now, Saul's army had dwindled to 600 men. But as he did before (13:3), Jonathan takes the initiative while his father dithers.

"Now it happened one day," the Bible says, "that Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who bore his armor, 'Come let us go over to the Philistines's garrison that is on the other side.' But he did not tell his father. And Saul was sitting in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree" (1 Samuel 14:1-2). This implies Saul was delaying any attacks and meanwhile, eating this delicious fruit.

Jonathan, full of faith, knew he had to bail his father out of this predicament—for soon there would be no army left. So he conceived a bold plan which included asking God's favor. He would go up to a garrison of the Philistines and if they invited him up, thinking he and his armor-bearer had deserted, it would be a sign from God of divine approval. But if they only threatened him, it would mean God wasn't behind the scheme. He mentions a powerful biblical principle of faith: "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us. *For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few*" (1 Sam. 14:5-6). God never needs large numbers to gain victory.

What happened? "So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, 'Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden.' Then the men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armorbearer, and said, 'Come up to us, and we will show you something.' Jonathan said to his armorbearer, 'Come up after me, for the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel.' And Jonathan climbed up on his hands and knees with his armorbearer after him; and they fell before Jonathan. And as he came after him, his armorbearer killed them. That first slaughter which Jonathan and his

armorbearer made was about twenty men within about half an acre of land. And there was trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and the raiders also trembled; and the earth quaked, so that it was a very great trembling. Now the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and there was the multitude, melting away, and they went here and there" (1 Sam. 14:11-16).

Incredibly, in WWI, a British commander defeated a Turkish garrison at Michmash by reading this account in the Bible and finding the same path and two rocks as Jonathan! (Keller, *The Bible as History*, p. 187).

So Jonathan did his part, and acted on God's sign of approval. Then God did the other part and caused a great earthquake in the Philistine area which caused panic among them. Saul wondered what was going on, and doing a roll call, realized Jonathan and his armorbearer were missing. The panic in the Philistine camp increased and Saul decided to attack. He was joined by some Hebrew mercenaries that turned on the Philistines, and they drove the Philistines from the area. Unfortunately, in his misguided zeal, Saul foolishly told his soldiers to fast until nightfall and needlessly weakened them during the battle. They almost fainted at the end of the day, and after sunset, they slaughtered the Philistine livestock and didn't even wait to properly drain the blood before roasting the meat and eating it.

"Then they told Saul, saying, 'Look, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood!' (1 Sam. 14:33). Saul had them place a large rock where they could properly drain the animals of the blood. Notice *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* admits this is a food law observed both in the Old and New Testaments, "Since eating meat with the blood still in it was forbidden to the people of God throughout their history (Lev 17:10-14; 19:26; Deut 12:16, 23-24; Ezek 33:25; Acts 15:20), it is not surprising that Saul, on hearing of his men's sinful deed, would immediately act to absolve them of guilt." It is a food law we keep today, as in the NT.

When Saul consulted God through the Urim and the Thummin about continuing to attack the Philistines, nothing happened. He realized someone had broken the oath not to eat. By casting lots, Jonathan was signaled as the guilty one. Saul was ready to have him executed, but his army refused to

accept the verdict. Saul reluctantly yielded and Jonathan was spared. Halley explains, "Saul's Second Mistake: His silly order for the army to abstain from food, and his senseless death sentence for Jonathan showed the people what a fool they had for a king."

Saul continued his wars against Israel's enemies, and was successful. Then, God sent Saul a message through Samuel. It was time for Saul to wipe out the treacherous Amalekites, a command given by God in Deut 25:19. As *Expositor's* explains, "The Amalekites, in their persistent refusal to fear God, sowed the seeds of their own destruction. God is patient and slow to anger, 'abounding in love and faithfulness' (Ex. 34:6); he nevertheless 'does not leave the guilty unpunished' (v. 7)."

They were descendants of Esau, who was a profane man (Heb. 12:16) and bore constant animosity toward Jacob his brother. The Amalekites had continually attacked the Israelites without reason throughout their history. It seems like it was in their genes, and they became willing instruments of Satan against God's people. Just as God had committed Jericho to *herem*, the separation by God for complete destruction, so it was done with the Amalekites.

"The significance and uniqueness of the divine command to annihilate the Amalekites" says *Expositor's*, "is underscored by the *herem* 'the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the LORD, often by totally destroying them.'...The agent of divine judgment can be impersonal (the Flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah) or personal (as here), and in his sovereign purpose God often permits entire families or nations to be destroyed if their corporate representatives are willfully and incorrigibly wicked (Josh 7:1, 10-13, 24-26)."

Saul received his orders from God, but before attacking the Amalekites, he wisely sent a message to the Kenites, descendants of Jethro, Moses' father in law, who showed kindness to Israel, and were innocent of the crimes of the Amalekites. They quickly separated themselves from the Amalekites and were spared. Saul's army successfully defeats the Amalekites, but he then commits another grave mistake—he saves the best of the flocks, leaves Agag, their king, alive, and sets up a monument to himself—and not to God, at nearby Carmel. God says to Samuel, "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and

has not performed My commandments.' And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the Lord all night" (1 Sam. 15:11). Clearly, God was not only judging Saul's actions but his *heart—the inner motives for doing something*. That was the most serious problem. As God explains to Samuel in the next chapter, "For the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). The term "regret" here means "suffering emotional pain"—God does grieve and is hurt when things turn harmful and sinful—as they did before the Flood.

So when Samuel comes to him, Saul thinks he has fully obeyed God's commands. But Samuel asks him, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed.' Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Be quiet! And I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night.' And he said to him, 'Speak on.' So Samuel said, 'When you were *little in your own eyes*, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'God, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the Lord?' And Saul said to Samuel, 'But I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But *the people* took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.' So Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, *as in obeying the voice of the Lord?* Behold, *to obey is better than sacrifice*, and to heed than the fat of rams. For *rebellion* is as the sin of witchcraft, and *stubbornness* is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, *He also has rejected you* from being king.' Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words because *I feared the people and obeyed their voice*. Now please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord. But Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not

return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel” (1 Sam. 15:14-26). This was Saul’s third mistake. Halley adds, “Deliberated disobedience to God. For this he heard Samuel’s ominous pronouncement. ‘Because you have rejected God, God has rejected you from being king’” (p. 181). Samuel, showing God’s wrath, then and there kills Agag, the Amalekite king.

Saul, conscious of Samuel’s rejection, thinks only of his image before the people, and grabs Samuel’s robe as he leaves, pleading to have him come out with him. As the robe tears, Samuel says to him, so has the kingdom been rent from him. Yet, Samuel is heartbroken by all of this. He had such great hopes for Saul and shows that classic meekness of the men of God of not worrying or being envious that Saul had replaced him at the helm.

The Bible continues, “And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless, Samuel *mourned* for Saul, and the Lord regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel. Now the Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons. And Samuel said, ‘How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.’ But the Lord said, ‘Take a heifer with you, and say, I have come to sacrifice to the Lord’” (1 Sam. 15:35-16:3).

Samuel obeys God and arrives at Jesse’s house. He has Jesse’s seven older sons parade before him, but God rejects each one. Puzzled, Samuel asks if there are any more sons left. Jesse replies there is one left—the youngest tending sheep.

“So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with bright eyes, and good-looking. And the Lord said, ‘Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!’ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him” (1 Sam. 16:12-14). *Expositor’s* explains, “Although monarchy in the person of Saul had long since arrived in Israel by the time of the events recorded in chapter 16, only with the anointing and rapid rise of David can it be said to have been truly established. Unlike Saul’s abortive rule, a complex admixture resulting from popular demand

and divine choice, David’s reign was sovereignly instituted by God alone.”

Out of the 86 chapters left in Israelite history until the Babylonian exile, almost half, (40) would deal with David as king. “Literally the David stories are right at the center of the history,” *Expositor’s* says. “Despite his obvious faults, he is the man after God’s own heart, the key figure in the story, the ideal king against whom the characters and careers of his royal descendants on the throne are constantly measured.” His name means “beloved [of God].”

*The K & D Commentary* mentions about David’s appearance, “It denotes the reddish color of the hair, which was regarded as a mark of beauty in southern lands, where the hair is generally black...so far as his looks and figure were concerned, well fitted, notwithstanding his youth, for the office to which the Lord had chosen him, since corporeal beauty was one of the outward distinctions of a king.” *Expositor’s* comments, “That God is not man is emphasized here, as it was in 15:29. ‘Man looks at the outward appearance’--an insight appreciated even by the notorious Machiavelli (‘Men in general judge more from appearances than from reality’).”

King Saul, because of his rebellious, disobedient and prideful attitude, is now beset with dark moods and God allows an evil spirit to torment him. Ironically, a servant knows David is an excellent musician, and recommends Saul to bring him to the palace. David is brought in and plays the harp, which alleviates Saul’s melancholy. The Bible says, “Then one of the servants said, ‘Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person, and the Lord is with him...So David came to Saul and stood before him. And he loved him greatly, and he became his armorbearer. Then Saul sent to Jesse, saying, ‘Please let David stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight. And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him’” (1 Sam. 16:22-23).