

1st Samuel Chapters 14 – John Karmelich

1. There's a Christian topic that needs to be discussed relating to this lesson:
 - a) It has to do with "boldness" versus "cowardliness".
 - b) I'm going to argue that "boldness" is something all Christians need to strive for.
 - i) Paul said, "Pray for me, too, and ask God to give me the right words as I boldly tell others about the Lord and as I explain to them that his salvation is for the Gentiles too." (Ephesians 6:19 The Living Bible)
 - ii) The disciples prayed, "Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness." (Acts 4:29 NKJV)
 - iii) One more: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." (Acts 14:13 NKJV)
 - c) Let's contrast boldness with "cowardliness". A synonym is "fear".
 - i) Among those condemned to hell are cowardly people: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." (Revelation 21:8 NIV).
 - a) Notice the "cowardly" are listed first before lots of other sinful practices.
 - b) In direct context, this verse is about those who refuse to believe the Gospel message and are too afraid to take a stand for Christ. If you believe in Jesus but are too afraid to speak out, this verse is not about you. It is about those who are too afraid to believe the Gospel in first place.
 - ii) One of the most common expressions in the bible is "do not fear" or "do not be afraid". One can count between 50-100 times either of those expressions is used.
 - iii) In fact one of the saddest expressions in the bible was "I was afraid".
 - a) After Adam ate the "apple" and he realized he was naked, his first words to God were "I was afraid" (Genesis 3:10).
 - b) Jesus taught a parable about three men who were entrusted with 10 talents (a weight of money), 5 talents and 1 talent respectively. The 2 men given the 10 and 5 talents doubled their money and were given the exact same reward. This teaches how God rewards us based on the ability he gave us. The other man given the one talent hid it in the ground. Jesus condemned him to hell for "no return on investment. His excuse was "I was afraid" (Matthew 25:25).
 - iv) There is one more example of this, and it happens to be in 1st Samuel:
 - a) In the next chapter (15), we are going to read of King Saul's failure before God. That failure cost Saul his kingship. When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul about his mistake, Saul's words were "I was afraid" (1st Samuel 15:24).
 - d) My point of this bible exercise is to teach is that God wants us to be bold in our witness for Him. We need to pray for boldness as taught in Acts. Further, we need to be bold for Jesus as opposed to bold-in-general. I once heard a pastor discuss how most Americans are more bold and yell louder for their favorite sports team than they do for Jesus.
 - i) Part of the reason we do this has to do with peer pressure. When we cheer for our favorite sports team, it is considered "normal" and nobody condemns us (other than fans of the other team.) ☺ Taking a bold stand for Jesus will cause unpopularity. It is a promise made by Jesus.

- a) Jesus said, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." (John 15:18-19, NIV)
 - b) Getting back to Saul's statement about being afraid, let me complete the sentence that he made in 1st Samuel 15:24 (second sentence):
 - (1) "I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them." (NIV)
 - c) The danger to any believer in God is to give into peer pressure as opposed to trusting in what God wants for our lives. Saul lost his position as king because he disobeyed God out of fear of the people.
2. Gee John that's neat. You're telling us stuff about boldness and things that happen to Saul in Chapter 15. According to the title of this lesson, this is Chapter 14. Why mention this now?
- a) First of all, thank you for asking that question! ☺
 - b) Chapter 14 is all about "fear" and boldness for God.
 - c) The chapter focuses on the events of two main characters at this point:
 - i) One is King Saul and the other is his son Jonathan.
 - ii) Jonathan, in this chapter is an example of boldness. He takes a risk for God, not knowing what the results would be. Without telling his father, he attacks some Philistines just to see if God was willing to use him.
 - iii) Saul, on the other hand, didn't do much in this chapter. ☺ The main point of this chapter is to contrast the actions of Jonathan versus the lack of actions by Saul.
 - iv) It is a contrast of "fear" versus "boldness".
 - v) In the New Testament, one of the main reasons the church grew in the early days was that the disciples spoke boldly for Jesus despite the fear of jail or death.
 - a) In 1st Samuel, we read of Jonathan boldly taking a chance for Israel despite the possibly retribution by his father at the least and death at the worse.
 - b) In both cases, we are reading of people "stepping out in faith", not knowing what the results would be.
 - c) Throughout history, God has been, still is, and will be looking for people who are willing to take a chance in boldness for God.
 - d) Some of the greatest bible stories are about people who did tremendous things all because they were willing to take a stand for God.
 - e) The secret of these people is that they were relying upon God's strength and not their own. It was their faith that God would work it out and not their own skills that gave them the victories.
 - d) Now that you have the general idea of the chapter, let's begin. We have 52 verses to cover today. I won't even think about trying to do two chapters. ☺
3. Chapter 14, Verse 1: One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man bearing his armor, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side." But he did not tell his father.
- a) Chapter 13 ended with the Philistines defeating the Israelites in battle.
 - i) The chapter didn't describe the battle itself, but focused on the results. The last paragraph of Chapter 13 discusses how the Philistines would not allow the Israelites to have any type of weapons. The Philistines were in charge of sharpening the Israelites farm instruments so they could monitor them.
 - ii) The end of that chapter implies that the only people who still had swords were King Saul and his son Jonathan. (Chapter 13, Verse 22).
 - iii) A point of that chapter is God gave both Saul and Jonathan each an opportunity to be used by God. We'll read how Saul dealt with fear while Jonathan had boldness.

- b) Now as Chapter 14 opens, we read of Jonathan’s boldness. He was traveling with his armor bearer. An armor bearer is a soldier’s right-hand man. It is a personal assistant that carries his weaponry.
 - i) Let me paraphrase Jonathan, “You know my buddy armor-bearer, ☺ I’m sick and tired of these Philistines controlling the Promised Land. I’m tired of my father sitting around not doing anything. Look, there’s a Philistine outpost. Let’s go attack it and see what happens”.
 - ii) This is the attitude God is looking for in Christians. I’m not talking about physically attacking nonbelievers, but taking a chance for God and seeing if God wants to use you today. (By the way, God never wants us to convert a person by force or coercion. Christianity is about changing people’s hearts, one at a time.)
 - a) Ever wonder if it is “God’s will” for you to do a specific task? Sometimes the best answer is to just do it and see if “God is part of the results”. That is what we are seeing with Jonathan here in these opening verses.
 - c) The last sentence of Verse 1 says, “But he did not tell his father.”
 - i) That is a statement all unto itself. It implies that Jonathan knew his father’s nature.
 - ii) There are times as a Christian when we have to do God’s will over and above our family’s will. First of all, this only applies to grown-Christians and not children.
 - a) Jesus once said, ““If anyone comes to me (Jesus) and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26 NIV)
 - b) Jesus is not talking about hating your family. His statement is that Jesus himself must be a priority over your own family.
 - c) Let me give you a practical example. Let’s say you are 18 and finished school. You are strongly convinced that God is calling you into the mission fields. Let’s say your parents don’t care for all of this “religious stuff” and wish you would just get a job. ☺ There is an example of choosing God over and above one’s own father.
4. Verse 2: Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. With him were about six hundred men,³ among whom was Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left.
- a) Verses 2 and 3 contrast what Jonathan was doing with what King Saul was doing.
 - i) While Jonathan was taking a risk, dad was kicking back under a tree. ☺
 - b) King Saul had 600 men with him. What did he do for God? Nothing.
 - c) King Saul had the High Priest (Phinehas) with him. Did Saul consult God? No.
 - d) King Saul had other members of the priests’ family with him. Did this group make any effort to consult God and pray for guidance? No.
 - e) What is to be noticed here was the lack of effort. As I stated in the introduction, this is leading up to Chapter 15 where Saul states his fear. His fear leads to a lack of action.
5. Verse 4: On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez, and the other Seneh.⁵ One cliff stood to the north toward Micmash, the other to the south toward Geba.
- a) Meanwhile, our hero Jonathan was out taking chances! ☺
 - b) The spot that Jonathan picked to attack the garrison was up a cliff between two rocks. This was a good strategic place, as the narrow entrance meant that the Philistines could only fight Jonathan on a one-on-one basis. It made the odds “even” to begin with.

- c) The two rocks had names. (Who names these rocks anyways? ☺) The names of the rocks are “puns”. This is a long lesson, so I’m not going to spend a lot of times on the meaning of names. The bible is full of names of people and places are often “puns”. The meanings of those names are often similar to the events themselves. It helps the reader remember the names as the meaning of their names often tie to the event itself.
 - d) This is the start of “watching God work”. Jonathan wanted to take a chance on attacking the Philistines. By “coincidence” the spot that Jonathan picked to attack is a good strategic spot for a soldier as it is a narrow pass where no more than one person could confront him.
 - e) These verses show a good balance of “skills” and “trusting God”. I find that God uses whatever skills and education we have for His glory if we let Him. Jonathan was willing to take a chance for God. At the same time, he had the military knowledge to know that this spot “he just found” is a good spot to attack.
6. Verse 6: Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few."
- a) Here is your memorization verse of the week. ☺ This verse summarizes the attitude of boldness that I wrote about in the introduction.
 - b) Jonathan expresses the attitude that God is looking for in believers. It is one who trusts in God’s word, one who believes in God and acts on that knowledge.
 - i) Notice there was no burning bush or a bright light from heaven shining on Jonathan saying, “Thou shall go forth and smite the Philistines!” ☺
 - a) Why do people always that if God wants to speak to them, God will speak in “King James English”? ☺
 - ii) My point is the way God most often wants us to be bold is not to wait for some specific sign from heaven, but often just to go out a take a chance for God.
 - c) Some have suggested that Jonathan was counting on a promise made in the bible:
 - i) “You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.” (Leviticus 26:7 NIV)
 - ii) This verse promises that if one of the Israelites were pursuing an enemy, they would win despite the odds.
 - iii) The “problem” is that we have read of defeats by the Israelites throughout the bible. So how do you explain this verse in Leviticus in comparison with history?
 - a) The key is understanding God’s will. God promised the Land belonged to the Israelites and that the Israelites would drive them out. That fact had to be balanced with the understanding that God wanted the Israelites to be dependent upon Him and obedient to Him. God allows defeats as to bring the Israelites back to Him.
 - b) My point is there is a balance of “God wants the best for us” and at the same time, God allows bad things to happen to us, often for our learning. God wants us to trust in those promises and boldly take actions based on those promises. That is what Jonathan is counting upon in his attack.
7. Verse 7: "Do all that you have in mind," his armor-bearer said. "Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul."
- a) We never get the name of this guy, other than his “armor-bearer”.
 - b) Every now and then the bible gives an “unnamed servant” credit for assistance. I think of Abraham sending an unnamed servant to go find a wife for his son Isaac. Chapter 24 of Genesis tells that story. Yet you never get that servant’s name.

- c) There are some who suggest this armor bearer and other “unnamed servants” are a word picture of the Spirit of God (i.e., Holy Spirit) “working in the background”. Part of the role of the Holy Spirit is to encourage us to have boldness us toward God.
8. Verse 8: Jonathan said, "Come, then; we will cross over toward the men and let them see us.⁹ If they say to us, 'Wait there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are and not go up to them.¹⁰ But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands."
- a) In these verses, Jonathan is asking for a sign from God. To paraphrase, he is saying, “OK, armor-bearer pal of mine, here is the plan. If the Philistines spot us climbing up the hill and they say they’re coming down to us, we stay put. If the Philistines say to climb up to us, then we know it is a sign from God that we will win this battle.”
- b) Some people question at this point whether or not Jonathan “put God in a box”. These verses indicate that if the Philistines came down to them, they doubted God was with them. If the Philistines said “come on up”, then, and only then could Jonathan be victorious in battle.
- c) This leads to the question of whether or not it is ok to ask God for a “sign”.
- i) First of all, notice Jonathan was willing to step out in faith prior to asking God for a sign of validation of his plan. I believe God answers that prayer far more often because God loves that attitude of His people.
- ii) Second, we have every right to ask for a sign, but God is in no way obligated to give us such a sign. Remember we serve Him, not vice-versa. Often God does give us validation, as He does want us to step out in faith, but I tend to find as one matures as a believer we have to look at the results of our actions as a “sign” of whether or not God was there.
- a) Let me give you a practical example. Let’s say you want to start some sort of missionary effort that leads people to Christ. Let’s further assume the primary purpose of that ministry is to lead nonbelievers to God. If, say, after six months, you haven’t converted anybody, that may be a sign that God wasn’t “in” that plan. It is not to say it was a total waste of time. Part of learning God’s will is often trial and error.
- b) I tend to find doing God’s will is a combination of a desire to do something (i.e., “you can’t stand not doing it”, like me and writing!), combined with some God-given talent for this action. Then you watch and see the results.
- iii) Earlier I mentioned Jesus and the “ten, five and one talents”. Remember that Jesus is looking for some return on investment. The lesson is not that we have to “double our money”, but Jesus does expect us to be witnesses for him in a way that gets a “return on investment”, which is an increase either in the number of believers or even better, to help others mature in their relationship with God.
- d) Meanwhile, back at the rocks. ☺
9. Verse 11: So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. "Look!" said the Philistines. "The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in."¹² The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson." So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel."
- a) Jonathan asked God for a sign, and God gave him that sign. The sign was if the Philistines said, “come on up”, then Jonathan knew he was going to be victorious.
- b) Notice Jonathan is trusting in the promises of God in the bible as well as the “signs”.
- i) Jonathan had no “burning bush” to validate his test. All he had was his trust in God and the promise of God’s word that the Israelites would be victorious.

10. Verse 13: Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him.¹⁴ In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.¹⁵ Then panic struck the whole army--those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties--and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.
- a) It is a miracle unto itself that Jonathan even got to the first man. You visualize Jonathan and his armor bearer climbing hand and foot, carrying weapons up a steep hill.
 - b) Let's face it, a Philistine soldier could have chopped down Jonathan when he first placed his hands at the top of the hill. My personal view on this is that the first Philistine soldier had a big ego and wanted to fight Jonathan "one and one" and gave Jonathan the chance to stand up at the top of the hill.
 - c) The text says Jonathan killed about 20 men in an area of a half an acre. (I tell people that a football field is close to an acre in size. So this area is about half of that size. I'm guessing either the soldiers were spread out so they could only attack him one or two at a time or Jonathan stayed near the two rocks as a defense spot.
 - d) The text then mentions an earthquake (Verse 15). The Philistines were scared and ran.
 - i) The text specifically mentioned that the panic was sent by God.
 - ii) This teaches that God can cause our enemies to be afraid. There are other places in the bible that teach that fact as well. It teaches that God can control our emotions.
 - iii) I like to teach the cliché that in life, "people are the pawns and the prizes". This means that we are pawns in that we are used and at times, controlled by God. We are also the prizes in that God desires out of our free will to choose God to live with him forever. In that aspect, we are the prizes.
11. Verse 16: Saul's lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions.¹⁷ Then Saul said to the men who were with him, "Muster the forces and see who has left us." When they did, it was Jonathan and his armor-bearer who were not there.
- a) Saul had lookouts who could see the Philistines running.
 - b) Notice Saul's first words were not "OK, guys, for whatever reason, the Philistines are on the run. Let's go kick some Philistines' butt!" ☺
 - c) Instead, Saul's first concern, was "Who's missing? Who's responsible for this?" You can sense Saul's fear even at a time of victory.
 - d) The last part mentions the fact that Saul was now aware that Jonathan and his armor bearer were "missing" from his ban of 600 soldiers.
12. Verse 18: Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God." (At that time it was with the Israelites.)¹⁹ While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."
- a) There is a debate among bible scholars as to whether or not King Saul asked to bring the "ark of God" or an "ephod", which is a clothing item the high priest used when he wanted to intercede (pray) between God and the Israelites. There, now you know that controversy exists, I can move on. ☺
 - b) The lesson we are going to see here is that Saul should have taken action, but instead he is consulting the high priest for help.
 - i) Over the next bunch of verses, we are going to get into the issue of God and "timing". This verse is appropriate here:
 - a) "(There is) a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace". (Ecclesiastes 3:8 NIV).
 - ii) My point is Saul, as a leader should have seen the Philistines on the run, taken charge and lead the attack. Instead, he's sitting on his rear end talking to the high priest wondering "Gee, what do I do know?" ☺

- c) Again, I see this is a sign of fear. Saul was afraid to attack and in my view, is stalling.
- i) Verse 19 said, "The tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more".
 - ii) The Philistines were on the run, and Saul was wondering what to do.
13. Verse 20: Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords. ²¹ Those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to their camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. ²² When all the Israelites who had hidden in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were on the run, they joined the battle in hot pursuit. ²³ So the LORD rescued Israel that day, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.
- a) Now that Saul finally got into the act, there was a change of pace.
 - i) Saul led the 600 men he had into battle.
 - ii) The text says the army deserters rejoined Saul and help fight.
 - iii) The Israelites who were hiding in fear joined the army.
 - iv) The Israelites started to win.
 - b) OK John, now I'm confused. You built up this big argument how Saul is a "scaredy-cat" and now I'm reading that Saul led a big victory. What's going on here? ☺
 - i) First of all, remember that God wanted to lead the Israelites to victory. He wanted the Israelites to conquer the enemies.
 - ii) What we are reading is Saul's failure to be the hero. Instead of Saul taking the initiative to conquer, he was following the lead of his son Jonathan. After Jonathan got the Israelites on the run, everyone else, including Saul followed.
 - iii) It takes less faith to attack an enemy when he's on the run. It takes more faith to attack when you don't know the results.
 - iv) Let's give Saul some credit. On a report card, I'll give him a "C-". ☺ At least Saul did take the initiative at this point and lead the troops to victory.
14. Verse 24: Now the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, "Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!" So none of the troops tasted food.
- a) To me, this is where Saul really messes up. This verse is saying that Saul made a public vow on behalf of all of Israel that no one is to eat any food until evening. Saul declared a public fast in order to get a victory. The problem is that it was unnecessary.
 - b) Saul "got all religious" when it wasn't necessary. God did not call for a fast here. There is no place in the bible where God says, "In the middle of a battle, you must stop and fast".
 - c) There is an important lesson to learn here. (Pay attention! ☺). One of the great dangers in doing God's will is not to stop and "add stuff" that God never intended.
 - i) I have personally watched churches "ruin" what God wants for that church because that church wanted to do it their way and not God's way.
 - ii) Our job as Christians is to try to figure out what God wants and follow. The late Ray Steadman once quipped (paraphrasing) that the Christian church likes to build flood control channels and then asks the Holy Spirit to flow through those channels". The problem with that philosophy is that you're asking God to do things "your way" versus "His way". By "your way", God doesn't get the credit.
 - iii) If you look at every great Christian growth-movement in history, it has never occurred in an existing denomination. That is because denominations get caught up in their rules and regulations and it then becomes difficult for any significant "movement" by God to happen. With that said, I'm not anti-denomination. I have watched many a healthy Christian mature out of traditional churches. My point is that I've yet to see a great Christian "movement" where lots of new people get saved come from a long-established denominational church.

- a) Even when an exception occurs, it is usually because that group is not working within the “traditional framework” of their denomination.
 - d) Getting back to King Saul, that is what I am seeing here.
 - i) The Philistines are on the run. This is a time to attack. It is not a time to starve the troops and weaken them. Saul “got all religious” when he should be fighting.
- 15. Verse 25: The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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.²⁸ Then one of the soldiers told him, "Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, `Cursed be any man who eats food today!' That is why the men are faint."
 - a) Now the plot thickens. Jonathan was in the woods and found some honey. He got some on a stick and tasted it. The text says that when Jonathan first took the honey, he didn't know about the oath. Afterwards one of Saul's soldiers told Jonathan about the oath.
 - b) Notice the last line of, “That is why the men are faint”.
 - i) You have to imagine the adrenaline of men in battle. They are fighting hand-to-hand combat and running. Their emotional levels are peaking. To go without food for a while is causing their sugar levels to be low and they feel faint.
- 16. Verse 29: Jonathan said, "My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey.³⁰ 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?"
 - a) Remember that one of the purposes of this chapter is to contrast the bold leadership of Jonathan with the lack of leadership of Saul.
 - b) These two verses are Jonathan complaining about his father's vow.
 - c) Notice what Jonathan did not say: “Well, my father is king and all. Maybe he knows best. Plus he's my father and the bible says to honor my mother and father, so maybe I should just shut up and submit to my father's will”. ☺
 - i) First of all, Jonathan did “honor his father” by agreeing to the vow at that point.
 - ii) The point of this verse is to show the contrast in leadership between Saul and Jonathan. Jonathan was trying to show how this fast was unnecessary and God could have accomplished far greater things if it was not taken.
 - iii) This leads back to my mini-sermon on the last page about how Christian churches often place roadblocks to movements by God. It frustrates those who are trying to follow God and not worry about rules.
- 17. Verse 31: That day, after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Micmash to Aijalon, they were exhausted.³² They pounced on the plunder and, taking sheep, cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them, together with the blood.³³ Then someone said to Saul, "Look, the men are sinning against the LORD by eating meat that has blood in it."
 - a) The text is saying that the soldiers couldn't stand the hunger anymore, and took some of the captured animals and ate them quickly, blood and all. Visualize a big burly soldier saying, “Argh, I've been fighting all day. I'm starved. Pass that sheep over there”. ☺
 - b) As I stated earlier, these men had their adrenaline going strong and their emotions were running high. One of the Jewish laws has to do with how Jewish people were supposed to eat. One of the rules is that all blood must be drained from animals before they are cooked. (Ref., Leviticus 17:12-14, et.al.)
 - c) This gets back to the danger of foolish religious vows. It cannot only hinder how God wants to work, but also cause further sin among the people.

18. Verse 33, second sentence: "'You have broken faith," he (Saul) said. "Roll a large stone over here at once."³⁴ 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.³⁵ Then Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first time he had done this.
- a) Here is the one time where Saul gets an "A" on his report card. ☺ Saul knew it was wrong to eat raw meat. So he organized a proper slaughter and he built an altar to God. The text makes a point of stating in Verse 35 that this is the first time Saul ever built an altar. That last sentence speaks volumes about Saul. The fact this is his first altar.
 - i) When he was made king, he never built an altar to God.
 - ii) When any of his children were born, he never built an altar to God.
 - iii) In any of his previous accomplishments, he never built an altar to God.
 - iv) It shows a lack of gratitude for what God has done for Him. It took a great sin among the people for Saul to take the effort to build such an altar. Again, this sin wouldn't have happened in the first place if it weren't for Saul's fast requirement.
 - b) We don't read in the text of any punishment of the Israelites by God for committing this sin. This shows that the confession of the sin and the desire to change for the better "covered" the sin of eating the blood.
19. Verse 36: Saul said, "Let us go down after 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."
- a) Now King Saul is saying in effect, "Let's go wipe out the Philistines".
 - i) I'll give Saul a little credit here. He knew about the sin of eating raw animals and he took the proper steps. Next he wanted to go on the attack.
 - b) The priest who was with Saul, said, "Whoa, hang on a second Saul, let's check in with God first before we attack. After all, we just did this big sin thing, maybe we should check with the big guy upstairs before we go forward". ☺ (Ok, I exaggerated a little. ☺)
20. Verse 37: So Saul asked God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel's hand?" But God did not answer him that day.³⁸ Saul therefore said, "Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today."³⁹ As surely as the LORD who rescues Israel lives, even if it lies with my son Jonathan, he must die." But not one of the men said a word.⁴⁰ 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," the men replied.⁴¹ Then Saul prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, "Give me the right answer." And Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared.⁴² Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son." And Jonathan was taken.
- a) Let me recap what is happening:
 - i) Saul prayed to God as to whether or not the army should go fight. No answer.
 - ii) Saul speculated that there is some sin problem. The text "hints" at the fact Saul was wondering whether or not somebody ate food and Saul wanted to find out who it is. You even suspect (look at Verse 39) that Saul suspected his son Jonathan of eating and said Jonathan must die if he ate the food.
 - iii) In order to determine "God's will", they cast lots. This is like playing "spin the bottle" and asking God to stop the bottle at the guilty party.
 - iv) After separating different groups, it came down to casting lots between Saul and Jonathan and the lot fell upon Jonathan.
 - b) As I stated in the previous lesson, it is "biblical" to cast lots to determine God's will. I don't think it is necessary today. For more details on this topic, please see the last lesson.

21. Verse 43: Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." So Jonathan told him, "I merely tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now must I die?" ⁴⁴ Saul said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan."
- a) Boy, I'm glad I didn't have Saul as a father. ☺ Notice his lack of compassion.
 - b) Saul is saying that because Jonathan tasted honey, and didn't follow his father's orders, he must now die for that, even though he didn't know it at that time.
 - c) Let's talk about this verse from Saul's perspective.
 - i) Saul probably thought his leadership skills were on the line. If he excused his son, no one would take him seriously. Therefore Saul wanted to enforce the law.
 - ii) Saul was a man of fear. He was afraid showing compassion would be a sign of weakness on his part.
 - d) Let's talk about this verse from Jonathan's perspective.
 - i) The NIV translation puts a question mark after Jonathan's statement. Other translations (King James, others) put a period or an exclamation point. In the King James (et.al.) the text gives the impression Jonathon is boldly proclaiming what he did and he's not afraid to die for it. I personally lean toward that view.
 - ii) It is as if Jonathan was saying, "I'm the guilty one and I'm ready to accept my punishment". Personally I but I prefer the bolder-attitude of Jonathan saying "I'm ready to die for what I did". That fits in better with Jonathan's personality.
 - iii) Jonathan was the kind of guy willing to take a chance. He took a chance when he attacked the Philistines in the first place. You even suspect he heard about the honey vow and knowing it was wrong. My point here is that Jonathan was willing to be killed by his father. He was willing to submit to his father's will, even to the point of death.
 - iv) Again, the main thing we are seeing is a contrast in the boldness of Jonathan versus the fear of Saul. Jonathan had the boldness to submit to his father's will.
22. Verse 45: 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.
- a) The people rescued Jonathan. The people knew Jonathan was the true leader and was responsible for the victory and refused to let Saul kill him.
 - b) Again, notice the lack of leadership by Saul. Saul could have said, "Hey, who's the king here anyway? ☺ If I say Jonathan has to die, then my word is law".
 - i) Instead, Saul feared the people and gave in to their request. As I stated in the introduction, Saul will lose his kingship due to his fear of the people.
 - a) That alone is a good lesson on leadership. Leaders "lead" and don't worry about what others think about their actions.
 - ii) I don't know if this was a "full mutiny" in that the king's guards also sided with Jonathan or if it was Saul just giving in to what the people wanted. Either way, "justice got done" and Jonathan didn't have to die.
23. Verse 46: Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own land.
- a) The Philistines "own land" was still in Israel. While the Israelites won a victory, they still failed to completely drive them out. This will come back to haunt the Israelites.
 - b) The big-picture to see here is how God wanted to work through the Israelites. God found a man willing to step out in faith and that was Jonathan. Through him a great movement was started to drive out the Philistines. King Saul's vow sidetracked the Israelites. After stopping to worry about who broke the vow and dealing with that issue, the battle was over and everybody went home.

- c) One thing that interested me was, “Why didn’t God “comment” on the violation of the eating of the blood problem but at the same time, refused to help the Israelites because Jonathan had violated the no eating vow?
 - i) Here was this “serious” violation of God’s law of eating blood, and at the same time Jonathan, unknowingly broke Saul’s (not God’s) vow to not eat all day. Yet, God was silent on the blood-thing and wouldn’t help the Israelites over the vow.
 - ii) I believe the main lesson has to do with not hindering God’s work.
 - a) God’s will, was to “wipe out” the Philistines. That work was hindered because of Saul’s stupid vow. It is as if God is saying, “You want to hinder My will with your religious vows? OK, fine with me, but you won’t get the privilege of seeing me work all the great things I desire for You.”
 - b) “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” (Isaiah 42:8 NIV)
 - iii) As to eating the blood, the main thing is that the Israelites repented of that sin. Because they confessed and stopped, God forgave them.
 - iv) You have to remember that God cares about His reputation.
 - a) Further, God expects us to honor the laws of our government leaders whether or not we agree with those laws or not. This is not about whether those laws are right, this is about being a good witness for God.
 - b) If we are not trustworthy in keeping the civil laws, how are people ever going to trust us when we tell them we are keeping God’s laws?
 - c) Therefore, God made a “big deal” about Jonathan breaking the no-eating rule. Not that the rule was good, but it was about showing respect to the one’s in charge, whether they are right or now.
 - d) The “balance” is that God protected Jonathan as to show Saul this vow was wrong. God prevented the Israelites from attacking due to Jonathan eating the honey, but at the same time God spared Jonathan’s life as the vow was unnecessary.

24. Verse 47: 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. ⁴⁸ He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them.
- a) From Verse 47 to Verse 52 is a summary of Saul’s life. In Verses 47-48, we read of Saul having victories over the surrounding enemies.
 - b) The bible usually gives a “report card” of Israel’s kings. It states the good things they did as well as the bad things. A point from these verses is to show that Saul did do some valiant things as kings despite his faults.
 - c) OK, on to the big question: Through this chapter and the previous lessons, we read of Saul’s faults and his lack of leadership. So why would God “bless him” with victories over the surrounding enemies. After all, God didn’t want the Israelites to have a king, why would God allow this king to win over other people?
 - i) The lesson to learn is that God still cares about “His people”. Despite their faults, God still wants to show them His love for them. Therefore He gives victories despite our faults for His sake, not ours.
 - ii) Further, God needs to show the surrounding nations that the God of Israel is the true God, versus the false-gods all around them. God “needed” for the Israelites to win victories for the God of Israel to be a witness to the world around them.

- iii) These victories teach us the importance of trusting God for “His sake and not ours”. God gives us victories because He made us unconditional promises. It is not about how good we are, but how good God is.
- 25. Verse 49: Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua. The name of his older daughter was Merab, and that of the younger was Michal. ⁵⁰ 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. ⁵¹ Saul's father Kish and Abner's father Ner were sons of Abiel.
 - a) First of all, thank God that He picked Jonathan to be a leader and not his two brothers Ishvi and Malki-Shua. John the Baptist was probably named after this guy. My first name John is a long-running biblical name. Somehow “Ishvi the Baptist” doesn’t work and/or I wouldn’t want to go through life with the name Malki-Shua”. ☺
 - b) These verses focus list Saul’s children and other family members.
 - i) As I stated, whenever kings are listed in the bible, they usually have a “report card”. Part of that report card is to list family members and key relatives.
 - ii) Children are mostly listed for reference sake because the children of kings are next in line to become the kings.
 - iii) Often the parents and siblings of kings are listed. That is a case here. One has to remember that a person’s personality and lifestyle is shaped by these people. Therefore, they often get credit (or blame) for how a king acts.
 - c) Sometimes we forget that names are often listed simply for cross-reference. One of Saul’s daughters (Michal) becomes one of David’s wives.
- 26. Verse 52: 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.
 - a) This verse is a good summary of the life of Saul. He states that all the days of which Saul was a king, he was at war.
 - b) When a man has a lot of fears, he will have “battles” all of his life. The text states Saul was at war all of his days.
 - c) Leadership and boldness-in-faith causes one to have victories over battles.
 - d) Jonathan was a man of boldness. He wasn’t afraid of Israel’s enemies and you get hints he wasn’t afraid of his father’s vow. He was willing to be bold for what is right.
 - e) Saul was a man of fear. As opposed to Jonathan who was willing to take on the Philistines all by himself, this verse states that whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, Saul drafted him into service.
 - f) The main point I’m driving home about this lesson is to see the contrast between a “Saul” and a “Jonathan”. God is always looking for people who are willing to step out in faith in trust God and go forth boldly. God is always looking for Jonathan’s who God can use as true leaders to help His people.
 - g) Remember that God did not want the Israelites to have Saul as a king, but gave in as that is what the people wanted. The other lesson to learn here is that just because the Israelites rejected God, God did not reject the Israelites. He still found “a man after his own heart” who was willing to take a chance and let God use him for victory.
- 27. Let’s pray: Heavenly Father, we ask for boldness in our lives. Our fears can overwhelm us at times to a point where we cannot be used by You. Help us to remember that You are always working in our lives and You always want the best for us. Help us to remember that it is Your reputation and Your promises that are at stake, and not our goodness. Help us to be willing to be used by you in ways greater than we can possibly imagine. Help us to be like Jonathan’s and be willing to take a chance and see if “God is with us today”. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.