

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

An Overcast Victory

I Samuel 14:16-52

Intro: Last time, we left off right at the pivotal point of the battle. Jonathan & his armor bearer have stepped out in faith, fully following **YHWH**'s leading, completely trusting **YHWH**'s willingness to give victory. There's no hesitancy on their part; as soon as they hear the "Go" sign, they move forward decisively & take out the enemy (20). That might not seem like much compared to an innumerable army but, the battle wasn't Jonathan's – the battle was the Lord's! As soon as Jonathan started dropping Philistines, the Lord plagued the whole army w/ great **terror** & **confusion**. This wasn't caused by Jonathan – it was caused by the Lord responding to Jonathan's great faith. You see, the problem is **never** that Israel's enemy is **too big**; the problem is **always** that Israel's faith is **too small**. Let's return to the action...

16- melting- all this time that Jonathan has been taking the battle to the Philistines, Saul's been sitting under a tree in Gibeah. At least while Saul was relaxing, the watchmen were still keeping an eye on the enemy & they began to notice something very strange happening in the enemies camp. That awe-inspiring, innumerable army began melting away before their very eyes. It wasn't just that the Philistines were slinking away, they were actually killing each other trying to get away. The Hebrew text says they were literally beating down one another as they fled! Now that's what a little divine terror & confusion can do to our enemies if we are willing to step out in faith & take God at His Word.

17-19- roll- Why did that matter now? The enemy is fleeing = it's time to attack, but Saul wants to call roll. He's probably worried about who was leading the fight & who would get credit for this amazing upset. **Ronald Reagan** said, "It's amazing what people can accomplish when nobody cares who gets the credit." We've already seen Saul take credit for Jonathan's earlier attack at Geba, now he seems to be more worried about how this looks than how it will end.

ark- Why now? Is Saul just trying to look spiritual here? What did he need to seek **YHWH** about? The enemy's already on the run. Don't get me wrong, there's a time to go aside & pray but there's also a time to draw your sword & join the battle. The time to pray is before the battle starts. Saul should have been praying instead of relaxing under that tree. The real problem is: **Saul didn't know what time it was!** It's strange that at this time, Saul didn't know what to do. His insecurity, fear & self-focus has paralyzed him. But even in this ineffective state, **YHWH** still gets Saul's attention.

noise- eventually, the noise of **YHWH** & Jonathan fighting the enemy became so loud that Saul knows he has to fight. But note: Saul's joining the battle w/o knowing **YHWH**'s will or receiving **YHWH**'s blessing. Yes, it's time to fight but it's also ill-advised to enter the fray w/o being completely prepared. Saul joins the fight not to honor **YHWH** but to fulfill his own personal agenda. Once again, his self-confidence & impatience will get the better of him (& Israel).

20-22- joined- People love to join the battle **after** the battle has been won! Here we have the **hold-outs** (20), the **sell outs** (21) & the **hide outs** (22). Sure, they only join the battle when it starts to look like a **sure thing**, but **YHWH** will still use them & it's good they joined but how much more could've been done if they'd had a bold faith like Jonathan?

23- saved- **YHWH** used Jonathan to accomplish this great victory but the victory wasn't Jonathan's, it was the Lord's! Jonathan was right: "**Nothing can keep YHWH from saving by many or by few.**" But this salvation wasn't won by royal determination, it was won by imaginative faith, faith that was willing to say, "**Perhaps YHWH will act for us.**" But, there is a dreary cloud over this victory. Israel wins the battle but doesn't really get to celebrate...

24- distressed- the author concludes his account of this battle w/ vs23, "**So the Lord saved Israel that day.**" Now he follows that up w/ his best Paul Harvey impersonation & gives us **the rest of the story**. But, we know it's going to be bad by how he directly & deliberately **contrasts** the opening line of this section w/ the concluding line of the previous. Lord **saved** Israel – Israel was **distressed!** This is the same word we saw in 13:6 but there, Israel was distressed because the Philistines were invading their land w/ an innumerable army. Why are they distressed here? Because of their king!

No sensible commander would deprive his soldiers of food & energy while they were fighting the enemy! Saul puts his men under oath to fast until evening. Why? Apparently, this was all about Saul! He wanted to make sure nobody was sitting around eating until he had been avenged of his enemies. But, this wasn't Saul's battle, these weren't Saul's enemies & it wasn't Saul's honor that had been impugned & needed to be avenged – it was the Lord's. So why make such a **selfish vow**? He wanted to make the people look to him, to **see** him as taking spiritual leadership. This is nothing more than a confused faith in superstition. He thought that a good fast along w/ having the ark would impress **YHWH** & convince Him to give them the victory. This was utter nonsense of course, because Jonathan & his armor-bearer were already enjoying victory **w/o** either the ark or the fast. But Saul's vow wasn't just **selfish** – it was **stupid!**

Saul's vow lays an extra burden on God's people. He's encumbering the good work of **YHWH** w/ this bad oath! Through church history, man has continually encumbered God's good work w/ their rules, methods & religious traditions – so foolish. This was a day of victory but it is being hampered by royal jealousy & foolishness. This should've been one of the greatest days in Israel's history but it wasn't. Saul shows a strange ability to turn **deliverance** into **distress**.

25-27- honey- There's never honey on the ground until the day you're not allowed to have honey! Here it is, just dripping on the ground & nobody even snuck a taste. They were as superstitious as Saul. But Jonathan didn't know

about the oath. He has other things on his mind. God had promised 2 give Israel a land flowing w/ milk & honey & Jonathan was seeing God's promises fulfilled that day. 2 of them had put a vast army 2 flight & now, here's flowing honey! He tried some & was immediately refreshed & encouraged & why not? When you're walking in faith, trusting wholly on the Lord, shouldn't there at least be some minor expectation of seeing divine provision? Bible teaches that! But Saul's foolish oath prevented God's people from receiving what God had put right in front of them. Note the contrast: **faith challenges, encourages & provides** 4 God's people while **selfishness burdens, robs & distresses** them.

28-30- troubled- exactly right! **J** understands the magnitude of his father's foolish oath: "**how much better**" indeed!

31-35- rushed- Saul's foolish vow not only physically weakened the soldiers, hindering their ability 2 pursue the enemy; it also weakened them spiritually, causing an abnormal craving 4 food. God had commanded Israel 2 always properly drain blood from an animal b/4 they butchered it but the men were so hungry here, they failed 2 do it! Their obedience 2 Saul's foolish command led them 2 disobey 1 of God's clearly declared demands! This is the natural result of all legalism. The traditions of men always run contrary 2 God's Word & 2 choose 1 = rejecting the other! That was Jesus' beef w/ the Pharisees. Legalistic rules don't keep people from sin, they actually encourage it!

True 2 form, Saul blames the people 4 what was really his own fault. They never would have done this if he hadn't bound them by this foolish, selfish vow. He sets up a stone 4 draining the blood & also builds an altar (the 1st 4 him)!

36-39- sin- After their late-night BBQ feast, Saul's ready 2 get back 2 work. Ahijah suggests maybe they should pray about it, "You know, seek the Lord's direction." But, when they make the all important phone call – nobody answers! Even tho Saul's vow was selfish & stupid, he invoked **YHWH's** name in it, thus; God would dishonor His name if He overlooked the violation. Also, God often takes our stupidities as seriously as we intend them. Since **YHWH** didn't respond, Saul immediately assumes his oath had been broken & add 2 his previous stupid vow by making another vow of capital punishment 4 the perpetrator. Note: he fails 2 own up 2 or even recognize his own sin in all this!

40-45- taken- Why does **YHWH** allow this? Not 2 humiliate Jonathan & expose his violation of Saul's oath but 2 bring the whole affair out in the open & humiliate King Saul, whose foolish pride had cause the problem 2 begin w/! He lifts up Jonathan b/4 the people as the hero of the day, a man of faith & reveals Saul as the hindrance 2 complete victory.

We can see Saul's blindness 2 the work of God thru Jonathan by his query, "**What did you do?**" He could have said, "**I trusted the Lord, attacked the garrison, caused the route, etc.**" but he knew Saul wasn't interested in any of that. But in light of all Jonathan accomplished on that day, his crime of eating a little honey seems mighty ridiculous. But Saul doesn't see it; in fact, he doubles down on his vow 2 execute Jonathan. He's the president of "**Stupid Vows R Us.**" Keep in mind, it was only Saul's word that had been violated, not **YHWH's**. God hadn't made the demand 2 fast.

We also see the weakness of Saul's character – saving face is more important than being honest, just or successful! His pride prevents victory. He can't bring himself 2 say, "**I have sinned, I've done wrong.**" It's a great tragedy in any setting when a person feels they must save face above all else. It will only lead 2 your own inevitable destruction.

In the end, the people weren't blind or weak. They know what **YHWH** has accomplished thru Jonathan's faith & they insist that he be spared. In fact, they make their own vow 2 the Lord 2 ensure Jonathan's release from punishment.

46- returned- after all that was settled, it was 2 late 2 catch up 2 the fleeing Philistines. So, they all went home.

47-52- Saul- this is not the end of his story (see him later) but is the wrap-up of his reign. What surprising is it's so positive! We've just seen Saul in very **negative terms**, now we see a **positive assessment**. Which should we believe? Both. Vs47-48 constitute the **judgment of history** – how people assess a person's achievements, contributions & success (or lack). It's the external human calculation of a person's life & work – what folks can observe. By that standard, Saul made his mark & made it well! No matter which direction he turned, he succeeded in battle, he defeated his enemies & he delivered Israel.

However, tho History can deliver a verdict, it's not the most important. A truly vital assessment cannot come from the applause of men **w/in** history; it can only come from the God who reigns **over** history. In the end, what matters is not success (financial, political, military) but covenant. **YHWH** wasn't looking 4 winners, He was looking 4 disciples. That's why ch13-14 show Saul in such a negative light. He's failing in regards 2 the covenant b/c he refuses 2 submit 2 the covenant God. As far as Scripture is concerned, covenant obedience counts above all other achievements.

So, 02 estimate of Saul: historical & covenantal. Both are true. Saul was from all appearances a courageous & militarily successful king. No need 2 deny that; no reason 2 hide it – the Bible doesn't. 2 assessments, both are true. But **only 1 matters**. You see, you can be a **historical success** & a **covenantal failure** at the same time. Which is more important 2 you? We already know which is more important 2 the Lord

Chicago - Does anyone really know what time it is? **Rom 13:11** "**knowing the time, that now it is high time 2 awake out of sleep: 4 now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.**" It's time 4 God's people 2 step out in faith 4 who knows what the Lord may do thru us. He took the 120 in the upper room & turned the world upside down. They're the reason we're here today. What could be accomplished, what enemies could be set fleeing if only we let God use us?

Faith can never reach its full potential / reward if it is stymied by unbelief, self seeking &/or arrogance. Don't allow pride 2 hold you back & rob you of complete victory in Christ!

