

King Saul Makes Two Foolish Vows

1 Samuel 14:24-52

1 Samuel 14:24-52 - *"And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.' So none of the people tasted food. ²⁵ Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. ²⁶ And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. ²⁷ But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened. ²⁸ Then one of the people said, 'Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint. ²⁹ But Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰ How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?"*

³¹ Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. ³² And the people rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood. ³³ Then they told Saul, saying, "Look, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood!"

So he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone to me this day." ³⁴ Then Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, 'Bring me here every man's ox and every man's sheep, slaughter them here, and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night, and slaughtered it there. ³⁵ Then Saul built an altar to the LORD. This was the first altar that he built to the LORD.

³⁶ Now Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." Then the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." ³⁷ So Saul asked counsel of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him that day. ³⁸ And Saul said, "Come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and know and see what this sin was today. ³⁹ For as the LORD lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not a man among all the people answered him. ⁴⁰ Then he said to all Israel, "You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." ⁴¹ Therefore Saul said to the LORD God of Israel, "Give a perfect lot." So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. ⁴² And Saul said, "Cast lots between my son Jonathan and me." So Jonathan was taken. ⁴³ Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done."

And Jonathan told him, and said, "I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. So now I must die!" ⁴⁴ Saul answered, "God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." ⁴⁵ But the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair

of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.” So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die. ⁴⁶ Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

⁴⁷ So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them. ⁴⁸ And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them.

⁴⁹ The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui,^[a] and Malchishua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. ⁵⁰ The name of Saul’s wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul’s uncle. ⁵¹ Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. ⁵² Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself.”

Background Notes

1 Samuel 14 could be entitled, “Faith in Contrast to Folly.” In the first half of the chapter, Jonathan’s faith is presented. Against great odds, Jonathan and his armor bearer stepped out in faith and defeated a large number of Philistines, and this led to a major victory for Israel over the Philistines. In contrast to Jonathan’s faith, the second half of the chapter presents Saul’s folly. King Saul made two foolish decisions and they resulted in sad consequences.

At the end of the chapter there is some background material that should be mentioned. A summary of Saul’s military victories and some details about his family are given. In 1 Samuel 18 we’ll learn that Michal, Saul’s youngest daughter (v49), became David’s first wife. As far as Saul’s military ability goes, these verses leave no doubt that overall Saul was a successful commander-in-chief. But King Saul had a problem with pride and jealousy, and he made foolish, emotional decisions that got him into trouble. Let’s look at Saul’s foolish decisions and their disastrous consequences in our Doctrinal Points.

Doctrinal Points

1. Foolish decisions result in needless hardships.

Because of the faith and the victory of Jonathan and his armor bearer, the Philistines were routed and on the run. At this point, Saul made a foolish vow: “*Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies*” (v24). That was certainly a foolish decision! If ever people needed food, it was when they were fighting!

As a result of Saul’s foolish vow, there were needless hardships. Verse 28 says that the people were weary, and verse 31 says that they were very faint. Why? Because of Saul’s foolish decision! Food was available. There was a flow of honey in the forest where they were traveling, but the people could not touch it because of Saul’s foolish vow. A further hardship was put upon Jonathan because he didn’t hear Saul’s foolish decision until after he had eaten some of the

honey. And verse 30 says that the victory over the Philistines could have been much greater if the people had been allowed to eat! Saul's people suffered needless hardships, and all of this was the result of Saul's foolish decision.

Foolish decisions resulted in needless hardships then, and this is still true today. Think of the needless hardships that many families have faced because of foolish decisions: foolish decisions in reference to job changes and or change of location; foolish decisions in reference to money and material possessions; foolish decisions in reference to the marriage itself. Foolish decisions result in needless hardships.

2. Foolish decisions result in tragic situations.

Foolish decisions not only result in needless hardships, but they result in tragic situations as well. Because of Saul's foolish decision about fasting until evening during the battle, when evening finally came the people rushed on the spoil and took sheep, oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground, and began to eat them without draining the blood. This was against the Mosaic Law; this law is covered in both Leviticus 17 and Deuteronomy 12. The blood was always to be drained from freshly killed animals. Why did this tragic situation of the people breaking God's Law arise? Answer: Saul's foolish decision.

At least Saul did the right thing at this point, and had the people stop and drain the blood from the animals before they ate. Verse 35 says, *"Then Saul built an altar to the LORD. This was the first altar that he built to the LORD."* Too bad that this altar didn't come earlier in Saul's life! This is a good example of "too little, too late."

Verse 39 tells us that Saul made another foolish decision. Because God would not answer Saul as to whether he should pursue the Philistines further, Saul wrongly assumed that someone had sinned by breaking his foolish fasting vow. Jonathan had eaten some honey, but he hadn't sinned in doing so because he didn't know about Saul's foolish decision and curse. Now Saul made another foolish decision, and said that whoever had broken the fast would surely die – even if the guilty man should be his own son! Then God allowed the lot to fall on Jonathan (v41-42) to point out Saul's foolish decision. Saul almost put his own son to death in order to save face after his foolish vow. What a tragic situation! The good news here is that God made sure that the people rescued Jonathan from this tragic situation, and protected him from Saul's foolish decision.

Tragic situations still result from foolish decisions. Churches split and close down because of narrow minded, legalistic, foolish decisions about things like the order of services, or the finances, or the music, or the color of the carpeting, or some other area. And families break up because of foolish decisions – such as decisions involving location or lifestyle, as we mentioned before. Don't let it happen in your church or your family! Foolish decisions result in tragic decisions.

Practical Application

Don't make decisions in the emotion of the moment.

Both of Saul's foolish decisions were made in the emotion of the moment. Saul didn't think through the possible consequences of these "spur of the moment" decisions.

What about us? Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, *"Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few."*

Even well-meant decisions or promises that a believer might make in the emotion of the moment can have sad consequences. Example: "I will give all my money to the worthy cause that I just heard about." Sounds good, right? But it may be a foolish decision. What about your financial responsibilities to your family? What about your giving to other worthy causes that may need support? Here's another example: "I will never eat breakfast before I have my devotions – no Bible, no breakfast!" That person may mean well, but it may be a foolish decision because there may be times when it's better to have some breakfast first. And another: "There will never be a TV in this house!" Now this sounds like a good decision - but it may be foolish to be so dogmatic! Television, when it is properly regulated, can be used for good purposes.

So - don't make decisions or promises in the emotion of the moment!