

October 24

Scriptures: Read 1 Samuel 13 & 14

Key Verse: “For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few.”
(1 Samuel 14:6)

Overview

Before going into battle with the Philistines, Samuel had instructed Saul to wait seven days until he arrived to perform the sacrifices. When Samuel was late in arriving, Saul began to panic, for he saw the Philistine army increasing in number. His own men were deserting him and hiding out of fear. Samuel’s words, however, were to be respected and obeyed, for they had come from God. With lack of trust in God and disregard for His command, Saul went ahead and disobediently offered the sacrifices before Samuel arrived.

The seriousness of Saul’s transgression is evident by Samuel’s strong rebuke and the far-reaching consequences. Saul’s rebellious attitude and act of self-will cost him the loss of the royal succession in his family and the blessings of God. His heart, that had once desired the things of God and to walk in His ways (10:9), had become hardened and selfish, desiring only that which pleased himself. Therefore, God had already chosen another, “a man after His own heart” to command His people (13:14; cf. Acts 13:22).

It wasn’t just because of that one mistake that God rejected Saul. It was the attitude of his heart which did not honour God. This was so unlike David, who humbly prayed (as we must continually pray as well), “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:10-11; cf. Ezekiel 18:31-32).

Despite Saul’s unfaithfulness, God granted Israel a great victory because of the faith of his son Jonathan. The victory was truly a miracle for after Jonathan and his armour-bearer fearlessly attacked the leading garrison, God struck the enemy with fear and sent them into confusion (14:15, 20). Jonathan strongly believed that God was able to deliver them into their hands, no matter how few they may be (14:6). We, like Jonathan, should never limit the power of God and must also have the same faith that God is able to deliver us unto salvation (Hebrews 11:6).

Another factor which attests God’s divine intervention in delivering Israel from the Philistines was that the Israelite army was at a great disadvantage, for none of the soldiers had swords or spears, except for Saul and Jonathan. The Philistines, on the other hand, were heavily armed with the best weapons of their day, since they had the monopoly on iron and blacksmiths (13:19-22). This important Israelite victory, however, turned the tide in breaking that monopoly and thereby secured more victories yet to come for Israel. It is true that when the Lord is on our side, nothing can stand against us.

Once again, despite Saul’s rash oath forbidding any one to eat anything that day, and despite the weakness and tiredness of the soldiers, God still gave them victory. Jonathan expressed the foolishness of his father’s oath saying “He has troubled the land” (14:29). The Hebrew

word used is stronger, implying: “to destroy the happiness of” (the same word was used of Achan in Joshua 7:25). Saul’s rash and foolish vow, once expired, led the famished men to sin in not properly slaughtering the animals according to the Mosaic law (14:31-32; cf. Leviticus 17:10-14). It also led to the near death of his own son Jonathan who, unaware of the oath, had eaten some honey. Saul would have killed his own son, had Jonathan not been “rescued” (14:45; the Hebrew word used means “redeemed” or “ransomed”, possibly implying that an animal was sacrificed in his place or that money was paid on his behalf).

Prayer

Lord we praise You for Your gracious interventions in the family of mankind to bring about Your purposes. Please give us the grace to obey You in all things. We pray this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your obedient Servant and our Saviour. Amen.