

1st Samuel

Lesson 24

We do not think about the importance of blacksmiths anymore in America. However, until the industrialization of America, blacksmiths were the backbone of every community. It was where the tools of the trades were crafted and maintained. This included plows, the pitchforks, the axes, the hammers, the hardware for the yokes for the oxen, and much more. The Philistines had relegated all of that work to the Philistines who lived in the Philistine districts. A charge of two-thirds of a shekel to sharpen each tool was exorbitant. It was virtually out of the financial means of most families at that time. Yet, a dull tool was almost worthless. Tools provided the produce for the family farm to provide for the family. Therefore, if money was spent at the blacksmith, it was, no doubt, spent on the tool instead of other items.

(2) No Weapons in Israel (13:22-23)

What was the result of the Philistine plan that rid the Promised Land of all blacksmiths? The need for tools overrode the need for weapons. There were no weapons in Israel. Verse 22.

“So it came about on the day of battle that neither sword nor spear was found in the hands of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan, but they were found with Saul and his son Jonathan.²³ And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.” (13:22-23)

If the people of Israel did not have weapons, where did the six-hundred men with Saul at Gilgal and the one-thousand men with Jonathan get their weapons? More than likely, they were gathered and secured from the dead Ammonites at the battle that had occurred shortly before this time in the storyline at Jabesh-gilead. They were spoils of war. It was probably an unexpected windfall for Israel that the Philistines had not foreseen.

The “pass of Michmash” is also mentioned in Isaiah 10:29, where Sennacherib’s march on Jerusalem is mentioned. That event occurs about 722 BC. Our story is situated in 1047 BC, about three-hundred and twenty-five years before the Sennacherib story. Nevertheless, from the Isaiah passage, we know that “the pass of Michmash” was the deep ravine now identified as the Wady es-Suweinit. Somewhere along with the deep ravine, a safe place to cross existed. The Philistines probably used the crossing as a way for the three companies to march to their assigned locations mentioned in 13:17-18.



Wady es-Suweinit the pass of Michmash

Chapter 14

5. The Story of the Secret Plan of Saul’s Son Jonathan

a) The Plan of Jonathan

(1) The Secret

(a) Hidden from the King (14:1)

As the writer takes us into chapter 14, the scene is set. Let us review the scene. Saul had traveled from Gilgal to the outskirts of Gibeah with his army of about six hundred men. The writer has not told us this detail yet, but he will in verse 2. Jonathan and the army of about one thousand men

with him were at Geba. The Philistines had assigned three companies of men and dispatched them in three locations. One company was sent west to a station on the way toward the village of Bethheron, which sat in the land of Ephraim. The writer told us about the village of Bethheron simply to provide us with the direction the company of men traveled from Michmash. The company did not leave the tribal area of Benjamin. One company was sent north toward Ophrah and stationed in the land of Shual. The company did not go to Ophrah. It, too, was simply mentioned here to tell us the direction the company traveled. The third company was sent east toward the border of Benjamin, which looked over the valley of Zeboim. Finally, the rest of the Philistine army moved from Michmash to the pass of Michmash, which was a crossing place in the deep ravine. In essence, the whole of Benjamin's tribal area was invaded by the Philistines. It was the smallest of the tribal areas of Israel, and the sheer presence of this large Philistine army camped in four positions threatened all life and worked in the land of Benjamin. Why was this concentration of Philistines in the little tribal area of Benjamin? It was because the capital of the nation of Israel was in Saul's home village of Gibeah in that tribal area. If the Philistines continued to secure their dominance in and over the Promised Land, King Saul had to be defeated. To do that, the Philistines had to defeat him where he was located. Our writer now tells us the story of the secret plan of Saul's son Jonathan and how Jonathan kept the secret hidden from the king. Chapter 14, verse 1.

"Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side." But he did not tell his father." (14:1)

It seems that Jonathan knew that his nation needed vital information about the location of the Philistines. To gather that information, Jonathan wanted to take a look for himself, and he wanted his servant, his armor bearer, with him as he went to spy on the Philistines. The higher up in the ranks of an army, the more privileges were afforded to the higher up person. In Jonathan's case, he was probably considered a higher-up because he was the king's son. Therefore, he was afforded a servant who carried his heavy armor as they traveled. For the regular warrior, each would be required to carry his armor if he had any armor at all. We need to insert a few facts at this point. For the regular warrior of this him, the warrior's armor was simply his weapons, be it a sword, bow and arrow, spear or javelin, ax, and maybe a shield of some sort. But for the higher-ups, their armor would include a helmet of some kind, some sort of breast protection, and possibly leather protection for the forearms, elbows, and knees. This extra equipment was carried by an armor bearer who not only carried the equipment for his master but also acted in some capacity as a butler, dresser, and bodyguard to the master. As such, the armor-bearer was, in almost all cases, the most trusted ally of the master and possibly the master's closest friend. As such, the armor bearer was afforded many of the same benefits as the master for himself and his family. As such, the armor-bearer could also be in the same peril as his master if things did not go well. In this passage, Jonathan had a plan, and he wanted his closest friend and war companion to be with him. He said to his armor bearer companion, "*Come and let us cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side.' But he did not tell his father."* It was his secret plan. It may have been a dangerous plan.

(b) Hidden from the People (14:2-5)

Not only was Jonathan's plan hidden from his father, the king, but it was also hidden from the people of the warriors with Jonathan. Verse 2.

"Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron. And the people who were with him were about six hundred men,³ and Abijah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the priest of the LORD at Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.⁴ Between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp crag on the one side and a sharp crag on the other side, and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh.⁵ The one crag rose on the north opposite Michmash, and the other on the south opposite Geba." (14:2-5)

We have much to discover in this passage. First, even though Saul was near his hometown and capital city, he was not at home. He and his warrior men were camped outside the city. Saul's tent was set under the "*pomegranate tree which is in Migron.*" We do not know the location of this fruit tree or the location of Migron beyond this mention in this verse. Nevertheless, at the time of the writing of this passage, it must have been well known by the people of the nation of Israel, or it would not have been included in this record of the acts of the king.

Second, the writer confirms that at this time, Saul had not recouped the warriors that abandoned him at Gilgal, but his company included only the six-hundred men who did not run when the others left Saul at Gilgal. They had moved with him to the outskirts of Gibeah. But the writer tells us a little more about who was with him. Saul had a possible future High Priest with him by the name of Ahijah. He was not yet a priest. He was still just a young man. He was the great-grandson of Eli, the High Priest at the time who was still wearing the ephod at the Tabernacle. Even though we have already been told the story of the death of Eli and Phinehas, Eli and Phinehas were not dead yet at this point in this circle through the timeline. Eli and Phinehas would not die for another twenty-six years. Eli was still the High Priest; he was about seventy-two years old; Phinehas (about fifty-six years old) was still his worthless son whom Eli had not corrected and would thus be punished by the LORD with death and the loss of his line being the line of the High Priest of Israel forever. But this passage also tells us that Phinehas had a son named Abitub. Abitub could have been as old as forty years of age. His son, Ahijah, could be as old as twenty-two – not old enough to enter the priestly training but old enough to go with the men to war as a warrior. Ahijah will be the brother of Ichabod; however, Ichabod will not be born for another twenty-six years. Ichabod would be born on the day Eli and Phinehas die, as well as the day his mother dies, giving birth. The purpose of the writer mentioning Ichabod was simply to establish the relationship for all of Israel to remember Ahijah as the grandson of Phinehas and the great-grandson of Eli. In summary, at this point in this passage in the timeline, Eli was still the High Priest, Phinehas was still a priest and doing his sinful things with offerings and the women at the Tabernacle complex, and Phinehas' son, Abitube, was a priest. His son Ahijah was not old enough to start the priestly training but was old enough to join the warriors in Saul's army. Again, for clarity, it is not telling us that Ahijah was old enough to enter the priesthood training at age twenty-five or become a full-fledged priest at the age of thirty.

Before moving on in the details of this passage, let us address the work of the ephod worn by Eli, the High Priest at the Tabernacle. We must remember from our past studies that the ephod was the official robe used by the priest at the tabernacle complex when officiating with the duties of the offerings. Simply wearing the robe did not mean that the man in the robe was the High Priest. The ephod belonged to the High Priest and was his official garment, but it would be worn by others too. Let us explain. A priest was on duty at the Tabernacle twenty-four hours a day. A priest was always awake and on duty every moment of every day. When the High Priest was on duty, he wore his ephod robe. But when he was off duty, one of the descendants, who was at least thirty years of age and fully trained, would put on the High Priest's ephod and act as a substitute High Priest. To say that another way, the High Priest was not always on duty at the Tabernacle, but his ephod robe was never off duty. Every moment of every day since the ephod was dedicated during the erection of the Tabernacle complex under the direction of Moses and recorded in the book of Leviticus; the ephod was never out of the service to the LORD. Someone was wearing it before the LORD. This priest, who was over thirty years of age and wore the ephod, would have been in the line of Eli going back to Aaron. Because Ahijah was old enough to be with warriors accompanying Saul, his father, Ahitub, was no doubt over thirty years of age and serving with his father Phinehas and his grandfather, Eli. Ahitub would, during his time on duty, which would include from time to time being the substitute High Priest when his grandfather, Eli, and his father, Phinehas, and his uncle, Hophni, were off duty, would wear the ephod. At this point in the story, Ahijah is not old enough to wear the ephod.

Twenty-six years later, when Ahijah was at least forty-six years of age, his uncle by the name of Ichabod would be born on the day of his grandfather, grandmother, grand uncle, and great grandfather's death. We are not told that Ahitub continued as a priest, but surely he did because he was old enough. No doubt, Samuel, who had been told of the deaths of Eli's sons when he was just a boy, twenty-six years from this point in the story, will be at least sixty years of age. They will anoint Zadok as the new High Priest, thus eliminating forever Ahijah's ability ever to become the High Priest of Israel, which fulfilled the promise of the LORD to Eli concerning the end of his family being the High Priestly line.

Third, when the writer says, "*And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone...*" he was indicating that Jonathan was acting completely on his own except for the company of his lone armor-bearer. Jonathan was truly stepping out on his own, without the approval of the king, his father, or any other Israelite in the nation.