

1st Samuel

Lesson 28

About six months after this disaster occurred, one of the deacons saw me at Denny's restaurant. I was alone studying; he was alone too. He joined me for a meal. He told me that they had found a new minister to take the place of the one that left. I already knew about the new minister because he was in the music department with me at Dallas Baptist College, where he and his wife graduated with me in my class. I knew the couple well. We studied together. I watched them fall in love. I was at their wedding. I worried about their accepting the call to that Church. The deacon then filled in the story of what transpired with the hiring of the new minister and his wife. The deacons called a meeting and told the pastor that he would be attending. He made an excuse that he had tickets to a ball game, but the deacons held their ground. He would be at the meeting, or he would no longer be their pastor. At the meeting, one lone deacon spoke. None of the deacons knew exactly what the lone deacon would say. They had not discussed the purpose of the meeting save for the fact that they asked this quiet, unassuming, undemanding, most respected deacon to speak into the pastor's life on behalf of the deacon body. They all trusted him to be led by the LORD and to tell the pastor a message from the heart of God. The deacon reported to me that his words were short and to the point. He did not give an intro to his words, nor did he stutter or stammer or hem-haw around. Here is what he said.

Nine times now, we have brought good and godly young men on staff that our congregation adored. Nine times now, we have listened to you craft lies to terminate their jobs. Nine times now, we have severely wounded nine young minister families. Now the tenth has come and is on staff. He will not experience the same wrath from you that the nine have experienced. If you try to remove him from his position in the Church, you will be removed, and he will stay.

The meeting was adjourned.

Forty years later, he is still on staff. He will soon be retiring. He weathered the coming of a new pastor who wanted to clear the old staff out and bring in his own, but the deacons, including the new deacons who were not part of the original meeting with the pastor on behalf of this minister, were true to their word. He could not be fired. Neither did they allow any of the other ministers ever to be fired. Many came and went on their climb up the rungs towards larger Churches, but this one minister never budged, never sought greater aspirations. He was called to that flock by the LORD. The LORD wanted him as His minister, and the LORD also provided a flock who wanted him as its minister. The people still to this day adore him, and he adores them. Far be it for a new pastor to end the ministries of a man, placed in a flock by the LORD just because the people love him, respect him, and honor him more than the new pastor on board. Love, respect, and honor are earned over time. A new pastor can never demand those elements. He and I have had many conversations together to this day. He is a good man, and I am so proud that the deacons saw the terrible signs and stood up for him. No doubt, had they acted sooner, it might have been one of the previous nine that lasted instead. One day, when I was in Georgia attending school on my doctorate, I arrived in a hurry on the first day of class. Only one seat was available, and I took it. We had to introduce ourselves, and for the most part, all was quiet during the interaction with each student and the professor. However, when I mentioned my name, three men turned to look at me. I was

surprised. At the lunch break, all three gathered around me, and we decided to go for a sandwich. They had all heard my name from their friend, who was my friend, who was the tenth minister that I have mentioned here. Then we all found out that each of the three were part of the previous nine. It is a small world. I had helped the tenth navigate the wicked pastor many times through the years; all three had come in contact with the tenth at conventions, meetings, and conferences. All three were successful pastors by then in their own Churches, but they had heard my name so many times they wanted to meet me. They had heard my name from the tenth minister, but they had also heard my name because of the exploding and successful ministry that I was part of at the time. They wanted to pick my brain, but in the midst, they found out that they were all part of the nine at that Church too. Without exception, the damage done to their marriages, family life, and the lives and attitudes of their children was severely and forever impacted by the action of that one pastor.

As for Saul, he had called the meeting. He wanted his own successful son fired, shamed, and killed. The mere words of Saul against his son made the people speechless. *“But not one of all the people answered him.”*

(iii) The Partition

Foolishly, Saul, like many of the modern pastors wrapped up in cultish leadership models, set a trap for Jonathan and then fell into his own trap. Verse 40.

“Then he said to all Israel, “You shall be on one side and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side.” And the people said to Saul, “Do what seems good to you.” (14:40)

In about sixty years from this point in the story, David, who will take King Saul’s place, will write a song that expresses precisely what Saul has done in this verse. David was not yet born when Saul pulled this powerplay requiring absolute loyalty from the people of Israel and even his son, but once he is born, and he joins Saul during the threats hurled by Goliath, David will experience the same wrath of Saul many times just as Jonathan and the warriors were feeling it now in this story. David will see the trap of Saul many times, and he will write about it in song. Here is a portion of one of the several songs where David presents these same thoughts.

God is an honest judge. He is angry with the wicked every day. If a person does not repent, God will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He will prepare his deadly weapons and shoot his flaming arrows. The wicked conceive evil; they are pregnant with trouble and give birth to lies. They dig a deep pit to trap others, then fall into it themselves. The trouble they make for others backfires on them. The violence they plan falls on their own heads. I will thank the LORD because he is just.... (Psalm 7:11-17a New Living Translation)

The LORD God was honest with Jonathan and supported him in his efforts to defeat the Philistines. The LORD was also angry with Saul because his order and his decision to kill Jonathan was wicked. Saul needed to repent. Instead, Saul doubled down on his wickedness and made things worse for himself. He conceived evil against Jonathan, and birth lies against him. Then, in this verse in 1st Samuel, Saul decided to dig a trap for Jonathan with the help of his warriors. Inadvertently, just as the trap set by the cultish pastors of today’s godless church movements will do, Saul will fall into his own trap. His plans will backfire. His violence will fall on his own head. We, too, can be thankful for that. Our problem is that we must be willing to wait on the LORD’s timing for the wicked to fall into their own trap. He is not in a rush. He will vindicate those wronged by the wicked leader, all of heaven and earth will know of their innocence and righteousness. Never fret if you have been the one wronged. The LORD will avenge for you. In Jonathan’s case in this passage, Saul will push so hard with his trap that he will fall into it that very day.

What is the first part of Saul’s plan? He demanded that the people choose between him and his son. He and Jonathan stood together in front of the people. The people were together. The first

mistake of Saul was pushing for the death of Jonathan, the victor of Israel. The second mistake of Saul was making the people choose between him or his son. Saul should have known that this plan would not work well for him. Yet, in his arrogance, because he was the king, he must have thought the people would choose him over Jonathan. Yet, Saul is about to make his third mistake.

(a) The First Lot

In Saul's third mistake, he asked the LORD to give the first lot. Verse 41.

"Therefore, Saul said to the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Give a perfect lot.' And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped." (14:41)

Saul asked the LORD to "Give a perfect lot." Everything the LORD does is perfect. So, what was the perfect lot to be? He asked the LORD to choose him and Jonathan, as opposed to the rest of the people. In Saul's mind, someone was going to die. Would it be Saul or Jonathan, or would it be all of the people or just some of the people? We do not know why Saul asked the LORD for this, but he did. The LORD chose the father and son. The LORD found the people to be totally innocent.

(b) The Second Lot

Next, Saul moved to the second lot and his fourth mistake. Verse 42.

"Saul said, 'Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son.' And Jonathan was taken." (14:42)

Notice that Saul left the LORD completely out of this casting of lots. We have spoken about the casting of lots before in this commentary. We do not know how the process worked in this event. More than likely, Saul and Jonathan threw in an article of clothing, a shoe, a sash, or a belt, into a bag, and one was drawn out. In this case, it was Jonathan's article that was drawn out, and therefore he was the one selected in the lot.

Saul must have thought that Jonathan was the sinner, for he was the one selected. As we study on, we will see that Saul totally misread the reason Jonathan was selected. In the meantime, Jonathan will have to experience Saul's further designing of the trap and his abuse and domination from his father.

(iv) The Plea

(a) What Jonathan Said

In comes Saul with his demand for a plea. Surely, he was not expecting what Jonathan said to him. Verse 43.

"Then Saul said to Jonathan, 'Tell me what you have done.' So Jonathan told him and said, 'I indeed tasted a little honey with the end of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am, I must die!'" (14:43)

Wow! Jonathan simply said, "I ate; here I am; kill me."

(b) What Saul Said

Saul must have thought his trap had worked even with the listening people. He had a short but full confession from his son. But we come to what Saul said to his son. Verse 44.

"Saul said, 'May God do this to me and more also, for you shall surely die, Jonathan.'" (14:44)

Let us take a moment to list the true spirit of Saul's heart toward Jonathan found in these words. Oh, they are not used here, but they are revealed here. Saul lacks *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* in this action with his son. It is a clear sign that he is out of the will of God in his placing of this trap.

(c) What the People Said

Undoubtedly, Saul was not ready for what the people said to Saul after showing his true nature in his threat to Jonathan. Verse 45.

"But the people said to Saul, 'Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! 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." (14:45)

Saul's trap had failed. He had fallen into the very trap that he had set for his own son. When the LORD selected Saul and Jonathan in the perfect lot, the LORD saved all the people from Saul's ungodly decision. When the lot was cast between Saul and Jonathan, Jonathan won the lot. Saul thought it meant Jonathan was guilty, and he moved on to shame and brought Jonathan's full confession so his death would be justified in the eyes of the people. But the people read the lot of Jonathan the other way. In their minds, Jonathan won the lot because he was innocent and, Saul was guilty. Therefore, when Saul showed his true colors, the whole of the people rose to the occasion and refused to allow Saul to kill Jonathan. Saul fell into his own trap. Jonathan was the victor that day.

(6) The Parting

Defeated, not by the Philistines, but by his own people, Saul lost all desire to defeat the Philistines any longer. Verse 46.

"Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place." (14:46)

What had mattered so much to Saul that day did not matter any longer. He wanted to be known as the king who defeated the Philistines, yet, his army had lost confidence in him. When the people chose Jonathan instead, Saul lost all desire to rid the land of the Philistines. Saul probably went to his home in Gibeah. Where else did he have a place to go? The Philistines went to their own homes. We must make an important point at this place with his verse. We should not for one moment think that these Philistine warriors went to their homes him the tribal area of the Philistines in what we call the Gaza Strip today. They would not have gone there. Remember, the Philistines are still controlling much of the Promised Land. The selection of King Saul of Israel, which occurred about two years before, was simply a rebellious act in the minds of the Philistines who lorded over the Hebrews requiring taxes, produce, and loyalty. These Philistine warriors simply returned to their garrison camps throughout the Promised Land. Nothing had changed yet. It will not change until they capture the Ark, feel its power, return it to Israel, and are defeated in the battle located in the place where Samuel will place the Ebenezer stone once the Philistines are ousted from the nation permanently. Then all of the Philistines will leave the Promised Land and return to live in what we call the Gaza Strip today.