

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 458

1 Samuel 13-14

January 7, 2023

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### Episode Summary

In 1 Samuel 13-14, Saul throws away the Lord's dynastic blessing by usurping priestly duties (that is, performing an unlawful sacrifice). Saul's leadership become more erratic as God's rejection of Saul has begun, this time putting the life of his own son, Jonathan, in jeopardy.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 458: 1 Samuel 13-14. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! How you doing?

**MH:** Oh, not too bad today. Today is a little bit better than the week has been.

**TS:** That's good, that's good. This is the first week of January, so we want to wish everybody a happy new year and hope that 2023 is much better than last year.

**MH:** Oh yeah, definitely. [laughs]

**TS:** Mike, I've really got nothing...

**MH:** Anything new on your end?

**TS:** No, not really, other than today is my birthday.

**MH:** Oh! See, there you go. That is new.

**TS:** Yeah. I haven't gotten my presents yet, so I don't know what I'm going to get. My kids feel bad for me because my birthday is December 30 and it's close to Christmas. So they're like, splitting up my presents, blah, blah, blah. I've been playing up the sympathy for that. Like, "Yeah, it was rough growing up. I didn't get a lot of presents." [MH laughs] So maybe they'll feel bad for me and give me something good, but I don't know.

**MH:** Probably not. [laughter]

**TS:** Probably not, nope. That's about right.

**MH:** They'll probably tell you to suck it up.

**TS:** Yep. All right, Mike, well we're hitting two chapters today, huh?

**MH:** Yep, yep. We have a few things to see in each chapter so we might as well jump into it here. Chapters 13 and 14 kind of go together, so I figured we would just take them both at the same time. I'm going to start off by reading a little bit of chapter 13—the first 15 verses. I'm reading again in ESV. It says:

**Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel, <sup>2</sup> Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent. <sup>3</sup> Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear." <sup>4</sup> And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.**

**<sup>5</sup> And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. <sup>6</sup> When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, <sup>7</sup> and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling.**

**<sup>8</sup> He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. <sup>9</sup> So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. <sup>10</sup> As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. <sup>11</sup> Samuel said,**

**“What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, <sup>12</sup> I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” <sup>13</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. <sup>14</sup> But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.” <sup>15</sup> And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin.**

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So that's the first 15 verses. There's a lot in there. Saul screws up offering the sacrifice. And very obviously, he has people scattering from him, so he's down to 600 men. There's a lot going on here that isn't good for Saul. We've sort of come to expect this. As far as what the chapters are about, it's just this—it's about Saul's loss of the kingdom. He essentially throws away the Lord's dynastic blessing by usurping priestly duties. He offers an unlawful sacrifice in 1 Samuel 13:13. Samuel is very clear:

**<sup>13</sup> And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.**

We've heard this talk before about how God would have fulfilled the promise to Saul, but Saul blows it here.

The second thing it's about is Saul's son, Jonathan, obtains a victory over the Philistines—at least a partial fulfillment of 1 Samuel 9:16. But Saul manages to fail spiritually once more via his rash vow, even after Jonathan has success—one that nearly cost Jonathan his life, right after his unlawful sacrifice. We've got the first 15 verses and that sets the stage for chapter 14. [audio breaks up] So again, it's not a good day to be Saul. He loses the kingship, puts his son in jeopardy, and is just making terrible decisions. Again, we've come to expect this from chapter 12.

As far as the wider picture, positively, there was a recent victory over the Ammonites empowered by the Holy Spirit, so we can't conclude that God wouldn't have been with Saul and Jonathan, his son. Jonathan does have success here, even though it sort of sets off the Philistines and riles them up so that Israel is in trouble. But it's still a victory, and it's still a victory that comes by the power of the Holy Spirit. So they could have expected God to be with them.

Again on the positive note, there's a covenant or kingdom renewal at Gilgal. It's a good start to the fulfillment of 1 Samuel 9:16, which said:

**16 "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me."**

God had foretold that Saul would be a deliverer against the Philistines, so this is a good start to it. But again, he screws up by usurping the priestly duties of sacrifice.

Negatively... That's the negative part—Saul's failure here. And because of Saul's earlier decisions, he finds himself in a difficult situation. We have belligerent Philistines now provoked by Jonathan's attack. We have an absent Samuel, and Samuel just more or less says, "Well, you screwed up," and he leaves. What's Saul going to do from this point on? Will Saul follow Yahweh's law about sacrifice? Well, he doesn't and it just compounds things and makes them worse. So he fails there and he pays the price. Chisholm, in his short little commentary on this, has this to say about chapter 13:

In chapter 13 the scenario envisioned by Samuel back in chapter 10 begins to unfold. Saul's son Jonathan attacks the Philistine outpost, prompting Saul to gather his troops at Gilgal while the Philistines prepare to launch an attack against Israel. Suddenly Saul finds himself in the situation foreseen by Samuel, waiting for the prophet to come to Gilgal. Samuel's command has been clear: Saul is to wait seven days for Samuel to arrive, when the prophet will offer the appropriate sacrifices and give the king further instructions (10:8). Though some time may have passed, Saul realizes he is in the very situation foretold by Samuel (13:8, 11). But when Samuel delays his coming [MH: for whatever reason; we're not told why], Saul goes ahead and offers the sacrifice, bringing divine judgment upon himself. This account ends with the prophet's announcing the termination of Saul's dynasty and the Lord's choice of a new leader. For the first time, the

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narrator reveals his pro-David agenda in a direct manner, though the name of Saul's successor is withheld for the present [MH: he doesn't specifically mention David here]... the rejection of Saul's dynasty has been foreshadowed in the story of the fall of Eli's house (2:12-36). The rejection of Eli's priestly dynasty in favor of a new one established a pattern that is repeated with Saul. Just as God withdrew his promise of dynastic succession from Eli and gave it to another (2:30-36), so he will do with Saul (13:13-14). The house of Saul will not be able to appeal to God's election as unconditional, for Eli's experience has demonstrated that disobedience can result in forfeiture of the divine promise. The Lord has the sovereign right to reject rebels and to accomplish his purposes through other and more-worthy instruments.

That last note is kind of important. It highlights what I... I know I've said it a few times here on the podcast and in other contexts, but the fundamental misunderstanding of election... We tend to think (and Reformed circles tend to teach) that the whole idea of election guarantees something unconditionally. But it doesn't, and here we have another example of it. Saul was certainly elect, but it doesn't matter because if he disobeys—if he rejects the Lord's instructions—he's going to be set aside. And that's what happens.

Now, there are a few nuggets from chapter 13 to look at before moving on to 1 Samuel 14 for a few other things. Let me just read 1 Samuel 13:1. The ESV has:

**Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel...**

So the verse has Saul living for one year and becoming king. And when he had reigned for two years over Israel, then he chooses 3,000 men and so on and so forth. There's a note in the ESV here—a little sidebar note—that says:

Hebrew Saul was one year old when he became king, and he reigned two years over Israel;

Now obviously that makes no sense, but that's actually what the Hebrew text has.

...some Greek manuscripts [MH: Septuagint material] give Saul's age when he began to reign as thirty years.

These Greek MSS are the entire basis for the reconstruction of v. 1. Why am I mentioning it? Because this is a rare instance in the Hebrew Bible. There are no

manuscripts for 1 Samuel 13:1 as the ESV has it. There is literally no textual data. So ESV has depended on the Septuagint, and all the Septuagint says is that Saul was 30 years old when he began to reign. So out of that we get:

**Saul lived for one year and then became king, and when he had reigned for two years over Israel...**

That doesn't even sound like the Septuagint, but we have to have Saul as being an adult male, and so the translation in ESV presupposes what's in the Septuagint—that Saul is, indeed, an adult male. He's not one year old. Then it literally just fills it in. It makes up a verse here.

So 1 Samuel 13:1 is one of these rare instances (and it's well-known to Old Testament scholars and textual critics) where the translator more or less has to fill in the blank. And that's what happens here in 1 Samuel 13:1. So all translations of 1 Samuel 13:1, regardless of what English Bible you're using, are a guess based on the Septuagint's comment that Saul was 30 years old. And there you have it. So again, this is a rare instance of the text of the Old Testament not being preserved in any certain form in a particular verse. This is really unusual. I'm personally not aware of any other instance where this happens, but this one is famous enough that even though I'm not a textual critic, I'm aware of it. You would be aware of it, too, if you read the footnote in the ESV. But this is just a textual situation. We don't get any help, either, from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls have not preserved verse 1 of chapter 13. There is literally no textual material for this. The translators have to make something up that sounds like it makes sense, and it does make sense as worded, but we don't really know for sure that this is what the text said.

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Second observation. Baldwin points out in her commentary (I'm not going to quote her, but just generally give her credit) that Saul's first act as king is to set up a standing army made up of picked troops on whose professional confidence he hopes to rely. So Saul himself commands two divisions (two "thousands") and Jonathan gets one. Jonathan has the authority to take action and Saul identifies with him. Why mention this? This is what you have: as soon as Saul becomes king and is acknowledged as king, what does he do? Well, he does exactly what Samuel said he would do: he creates a standing army, which means he conscripts people. He drafts people. Whether people wanted to be in the army or not, Saul picks them out to be his foot soldiers. Again, he is trusting in their competence to be good soldiers. But he literally changes their lives with this and

starts creating a standing army because that's what kings do. So it changes the lives of these men and, obviously, in many cases not for the better because people are going to lose their lives. But this is what kings do! This is what Samuel foretold he would do, so here we go. It's a direct fulfillment of what Samuel had said.

Thirdly, Jonathan's provocation results in a crisis. Jonathan scores a victory here over the Philistines, but when the Philistines hear about it, they get angry and they assemble for battle. And Israel is quite a bit outnumbered and is inferior in terms of weaponry. So when the Philistines hear it, they become... what's the wording here in verse 4?

**<sup>4</sup> And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal.**

And they start running; they start defecting. So Saul's standing army starts to get smaller and smaller and smaller in the wake of the Philistine threat. Because the Philistines have a lot of men. Verse 5:

**<sup>5</sup> And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots [MH: that's just the chariots] and six thousand horsemen and troops...**

So they have superior technology, too, and they have charioteers. There's no indication that Israel has that or that Israel is fighting on horses. The indication we get is that Israel is using foot soldiers. So here, again, right out of a victory, we get a crisis emerge—out of what Jonathan does. So Saul's troops are so intimidated that they run. They look for places to hide—in caves and other holes in the rocks and cisterns and so on and so forth. But this is the situation that Saul finds himself in and he has to somehow lead. He has to somehow get the people out of this situation.

The question at this point when the troops start defecting is, what is Saul going to do? Is he going to wait for Samuel? Saul is in a situation where he must either trust the Lord... Think about this. The instructions are to wait seven days for Samuel to arrive and offer a proper sacrifice and get further instruction. So is that what happens? Is Saul going to actually wait? Is he going to do this? Well, he waits seven days and Samuel hasn't shown up, so then he makes the disastrous decision to play priest. He's not a priest. He's not supposed to be doing this. What he should be doing is he should be doing the kind of thing that God's king

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would do, and that is trust God, trust Samuel's leadership. He should essentially do nothing and wait for Samuel to show up and offer sacrifice and do things in proper form. But that isn't what he does. Baldwin writes of this incident. She says:

Saul knows he must soon make a move if the whole army is not to desert [MH: it's flying away pretty fast], and he is on edge as he impatiently waits for Samuel to offer the sacrifices that preceded battle, and demonstrated Israel's dependence on the Lord.

This is why you're supposed to offer sacrifice. It's a gesture of dependence on the Lord. And again, Saul is not trusting God. He's not leaving things be. He's not waiting for Samuel very long. Even though Samuel didn't show up and you could say, "Well, Saul waited the seven days he was supposed to." That's true, but he's not a priest and he's not supposed to be doing this. It's almost as if this is a test. Now, the text doesn't say that, but it's almost as if Saul is being tested here by Samuel or by God (or by both) to see what he's going to do. Is he going to trust God? Is he going to stay put and be king and refuse to be a priest because he's not a priest? Instead, he blows it. Back to Baldwin here:

Saul knows he must soon make a move if the whole army is not to desert, and he is on edge as he impatiently waits for Samuel to offer the sacrifices that preceded battle, and demonstrated Israel's dependence on the Lord. It was a test case. When Samuel did not appear, Saul took matters into his own hands and offered the burnt offering.

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That's the way it reads, and I'm in agreement with Baldwin. Even though the text doesn't specifically say it's a test, that's the way it reads. She's reading it the same way.

When Samuel did not appear, Saul took matters into his own hands and offered the burnt offering. No sooner had he done so than Samuel arrived...

So it just has this feel of... I hate to use the word "entrapment," but it's a test case. He's being tested and he fails.

No sooner had he done so than Samuel arrived, only to be greeted by Saul as if nothing had happened. Either Saul was insensitive on spiritual issues, or he was bold-faced [MH: he just did it deliberately], for, by his disobedience, he was challenging Samuel's spiritual authority and therefore that of the Lord, whose prophet Samuel was.



So as Baldwin says, he is either spiritually inept (you could vote for that) or this is sort of a high-handed act, where he's just going to take matters into his own hands. And by doing so, it puts Samuel's reputation and office in question, which you don't want to do because it's clear to everybody that Samuel is God's prophet. So again, Saul blows it.

Fourthly, Saul's response reveals something of an over-concern for religious form and ritual. Baldwin comments on this. She says:

Saul condemns himself in his answer to Samuel's question [MH: "what have you done?"]. True, he was in a dilemma from which he could see no escape, so he took matters into his own hands and, ironically, says he had not entreated the favour of the Lord; he could have done so privately...

He could have prayed; he could have asked God for help. But instead what he does is he offers sacrifice and usurps Samuel's position as prophet.

... he could have done so privately of course, as Hannah did, without intruding into the prerogatives of Samuel. Doubtless he would then have found relief from his anxiety and renewal for his faith...

If he had trusted God, God would have rewarded him. We read that in these very chapters. God was ready to certify his dynasty, but instead he acts as priest and blows it. As Baldwin says, doubtless he would have found relief had he waited, had he trusted God, but he doesn't do that. Instead, he's fixated on the ritual itself. He's not fixated on trusting God. He's not fixated on doing things in the proper order. He's instead focused on this ritual act, and so he takes matters into his own hands and pays the consequence for it. Chisholm, in this regard, adds a thought. He says:

The longer Saul waits, the more men are deserting (vv. 8, 11). The Philistine troops are massed for battle and can attack at any moment. If that happens, Saul does not want to be in a position where he has not "sought the LORD's favor" (the Hebrew word may carry the idea of "appease" here; see HALOT, 317). On closer inspection, Saul's viewpoint is flawed in at least three important ways: (1) His concern about his dwindling forces reveals a belief that human armies, not the Lord, will decide the battle (in this regard recall Judg. 7).

This is precisely what the king is not supposed to do. If you recall, the bad part about asking for a king was rejecting God as the warrior—rejecting God as the one who fights for Israel. So here we have proof that this is what's in Saul's head.

Instead of trusting God, he is assuming that the only reason they're going to get victory is his human armies. That's not Israel's history. Israel's past (their history) has come because God fights for Israel. So he does exactly what he shouldn't do.

(2) His concern with offering a sacrifice reveals a faulty theology that elevates ritual above obedience (see 15:22–23) and tends to think that ritual can in some way guarantee divine favor.

So he says, "I'm going to go do the sacrifice whether Samuel is here or not because the ritual is important." And that isn't what God wants. What God wants is obedience.

(3) Saul oversteps his bounds. He is the king, but he is under the authority of the prophet-priest Samuel, who is the intercessor for the nation (cf. 7:7–11; 12:18–19, 23) [MH: we've seen this repeatedly, where Samuel plays this role as intercessor for the whole nation]. In Deuteronomy 17–18 [MH: and this is kind of interesting], where the regulations of Israelite kingship are given (17:14–20; cf. 1 Sam. 10:25), the king's role is clearly distinguished from that of the priests (Deut. 18:1–13) and the prophets (18:14–22).

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So priests are discussed in Deuteronomy 18:1-13 and prophets are discussed in Deuteronomy 18:14-22. So right before both of those sections of Deuteronomy, you have the rules for kingship. So again, Saul is supposed to be paying attention to the Torah. He's supposed to have a copy of his own. He's supposed to be a student of the Torah. He's supposed to be obedient to Torah. And so he should know what the duties of the kings are, what the duties of the priests are, what the duties of the prophets are because they're all laid out right next to each other in Deuteronomy—right in the same section. But instead, again, he does his own thing. He's more concerned with the ritual act of the sacrifice than he is with obeying the word of God. That's Saul's great failure here.

Now let's go to 1 Samuel 14. We notice that there's a contrast that's sort of set out between Jonathan and Saul. I'm going to read a little bit of chapter 14. I'll read the first 15 verses again.

**One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side." But he did not tell his father. <sup>2</sup> Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men, <sup>3</sup> including Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of**

**Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. <sup>4</sup> Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. <sup>5</sup> The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba.**

**<sup>6</sup> Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised [MH: the Philistines]. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few."**

So Jonathan's heart is in the right place. He believes that God is going to be with him and he's going to pay the Philistine garrison a visit.

**<sup>7</sup> And his armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul."**

Jonathan's armor-bearer has more faith than Saul does. I mean, Jonathan is the one who is spiritually on the ball here (and his armor-bearer is as well), but Saul was holed up in this place that was just described.

**<sup>7</sup> And his armor-bearer said to him, "Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul." <sup>8</sup> Then Jonathan said, "Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. <sup>9</sup> If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you,' then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. <sup>10</sup> But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us." <sup>11</sup> So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, "Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves." <sup>12</sup> And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer and said, "Come up to us, and we will show you a thing." And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel." <sup>13</sup> Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. <sup>14</sup> And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow's length in an acre of land. <sup>15</sup> And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic.**

30:00 So Jonathan and his armor-bearer have success because they trust the Lord. Jonathan contrives this sign (what would be a sign to him and his armor-bearer) that they should go on the offensive or not. And that's the way things work out. So he trusts God and God gives him the victory—deliverance. So both he and his armor-bearer have the spiritual sense to trust in the Lord in this circumstance, whereas Saul is still hiding. So there's a deliberate contrast set up here between Jonathan and Saul that we're supposed to observe because Jonathan is going to become automatically the one who is more heroic. He's just going to get the better press in 1 Samuel 14 and following. He's going to get more loyalty on the part of his men. He's going to appear more heroic. He's just going to appear better than Saul. It's part of the literary effort to portray Saul as just not being good king material. He's not. He just seems to be choking on every hand, and now his son, Jonathan, is providing the contrast, whereas earlier Samuel did.

So a few observations here just in general in chapter 14. In verse 18 (let me just read that for you)... We'll go back to verse 16 and pick up where we left off.

**16 And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing here and there. 17 Then Saul said to the people who were with him [MH: he has 600 with him], "Count and see who has gone from us." And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. 18 So Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here." For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel.**

So Saul somehow has access to the ark of the covenant. And it seems kind of odd, given where we last saw the ark (at Kiriath-jearim and Baale-judah). What's going on here?

Textually, the Septuagint here has Saul asking not for the ark of the covenant, but he says, "Bring the ephod." And the ephod is like this breastpiece that the high priest wears. It has gems on it and the Urim and Thummim in a little pouch and so on and so forth. So the Septuagint doesn't say, "Bring the ark." It says, "Bring the ephod." So we have a clear textual difference here. The relevant verses, unfortunately, are absent in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls don't have verses 18 and 19, either, so most scholars go with the Septuagint here, due to the presence of the priest. Ahijah the priest is there and he would be wearing the ephod, so it makes sense to go with the Septuagint reading and not have Saul request the ark of the covenant, but instead have him request the ephod because he wants to ask God some questions. He's going to use the Urim

and the Thummim. And he does later in the chapter. So it seems like the Septuagint has the better rendering here.

In the end, though, we have to realize that the ark could be in view, as the textual situation isn't clarified by the Dead Sea Scrolls. So the Hebrew text says "ark" and the Septuagint says "ephod." The ephod probably makes more sense, but we can't be dogmatic about it. We have textual witnesses both to the ark and the ephod, is the point. Now Hoffner, in his commentary, is one who is not troubled by the unexpected reference to the ark. He writes:

The ark is already back in Israelite territory in 1 Sam 6, having been taken first to Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:13–18), and afterwards to Kiriath-Jearim (1 Sam 6:19–7:2). When David retrieves the ark, it is no longer in Kiriath-Jearim, where it had been in 1 Sam 7:2, but in Baale-judah (2 Sam 6:2). In the meantime, Saul had temporarily taken it into battle. Such a scenario is certainly not improbable.

Again, scholars disagree on this point because of what the Septuagint has, but Hoffner technically is correct. The ark does move around before it's brought up and deposited in the Temple (when they finally get a Temple). It does move from Kirath-Jearim to Baale-judah, where it's retrieved to go into the Temple. So this is possible. He could have had access to the ark. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't. It's hard to know for sure what exactly is going on here and what exactly is being asked for. It's kind of interesting, though. It would be ironic if it really is the ark because you have the irony of Saul imitating the disastrous decision that Eli and his household did to bring the ark into the field of battle against the Philistines way back in 1 Samuel 4 and 5. That was a disaster. It was something he should not have done. So here we have Saul doing the same thing. The ark isn't captured like it was before, but it again provides a parallel with Eli's screw-up (and his sons, of course, are terrible). And here we have Saul possibly perhaps imitating their actions in bringing the ark on the field of battle. Again, not a good idea.

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The second thing to observe here that Saul also has access to a priest. We just read it in verses 18-19.

**18 So Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God here"... 19 Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more.**

So that begs the question: why did Saul appeal to Ahijah the priest to offer the sacrifices when Samuel didn't show up after seven days? I mean, there's no reason for Saul to have offered these sacrifices if he has access to a priest. Again, the priest seems to embolden Saul's men at least, in verse 19. It seems to indicate that the priest had the power of God with him. I'll go back to verse 19 and read the whole thing this time.

**19 Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."**

So the Philistines are starting to panic. Apparently, the priest is doing something, maybe offering a prayer. This whole thing about stretching out the hand as a gesture of prayer is familiar Old Testament territory. So the priest is actually functioning as an intermediary here and it's creating some panic on the Philistine part, and it throws them into chaos. Verse 20:

**20 Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion.**

Whatever the priest is doing actually emboldens the men that Saul has with him. Again, the question is, why didn't he make use of this priest before? Who knows? But the fact that he *doesn't* gets him into trouble and it results in him forfeiting his dynasty. It results in Samuel rejecting him as king and God rejecting him as king. So it's just an odd set of circumstances that gets revealed as we keep reading. Saul didn't have to do what he did. Again, apparently he could have appealed to the priest. At the very least, you'd have the right person. It wouldn't be Samuel, so maybe it would still be a usurpation or something negative. But at least it wouldn't have Saul usurping the office of a priest. But that's what he goes and does, and again, it costs him dearly.

Baldwin has a few things to say here about this. She writes:

At this crisis Saul refers to his new adviser, Ahijah, who has brought the *ark of God* into battle...

(So Baldwin accepts that the Masoretic Text is correct here and we have the ark.)

At this crisis Saul refers to his new adviser, Ahijah, who has brought the *ark of God* into battle (cf. 1 Sam. 4:3, and its disastrous sequel). It seems that Saul was still expecting explicit divine orders to be given, but in the event he did not wait for them, even if they would have been forthcoming, because the escalating noise from the Philistine camp demanded his attention. Saul had been sitting waiting for a lead when he should have been on the attack, and now he was on the attack when he needed to listen to the advice he had presumably requested.

Again, Saul is tactically inept here. Why isn't he waiting when he should be? Why isn't he attacking when he should be? He seems to keep doing the reverse of what he's supposed to be doing. And again, the way this plays out in the narrative is it's showing that Saul is just not fit to be king. Hoffner adds on this point:

Saul used the oracular ephod to obtain information from God as to what steps he should now take against the confused and helpless enemy.

So even though Hoffner is in agreement that we could very well have the ark of God brought into battle, he also says that Saul (very obviously) is using the ephod. It becomes obvious... Let me go back here to the actual passage. We haven't gotten to that point yet, but down in verse 41, there's this line:

**O Lord, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim."**

So Saul has access to the Urim and the Thummim here. And this is what Hoffner means by Saul using the "oracular ephod" to obtain information from God as to what steps he should now take against the Philistines and confuse a helpless enemy. Hoffner continues and says:

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Although consulting God is usually a good sign in the Bible, Saul's hesitancy here—contrasted with his later rash haste and prohibiting his soldiers to take refreshment during the battle—shows his confusion. He is almost as panicky as the Philistines. He begins an oracular inquiry with the ark and ephod, but then, when the disorder and confusion in the enemy camp grows, he fears that he may be losing his opportunity for a stunning victory. So he aborts the inquiry, saying to the priest, "Withdraw your hand!"

So whatever the priest is doing—offering a prayer, maybe using the Urim and Thummim before they're actually mentioned down in verse 42... Who knows? We're not really specifically told what the priest is doing. But whatever he's doing, Saul asked him to do, and it has a positive effect on his own men. It emboldens them and creates panic in the Philistine camp. And then Saul just turns off the spigot. Saul says, "Stop!" The implication Hoffner is getting at here is when he aborts the inquiry (whatever is going on here), he seems to be thinking that he needs to act and that it's through his actions that Israel is going to be delivered. Again, it's the very opposite of what he should be thinking. What he should be thinking is, "God is going to do something in response here to save us—to deliver us. The priest is here, the ephod is here, and the ark is here. Something is going to happen here that we're going to get deliverance." But instead, he puts a stop to it and takes matters into his own hands as though deliverance depends on him as king—as though deliverance depends on his human army. Again, this is exactly the opposite of what God wanted in a king. What God wants in a king is a Torah-follower and someone who will trust God to fight for Israel. That is not what we get with Saul. Hoffner writes:

He appears to have thought, "We don't need to know God's will anymore!" Such erratic behavior befits this tragic figure, whose behavior increasingly reflects an unbalanced mind as well as a spirit of rebellion toward God.

Again, Saul seems to take every opportunity to make the wrong decision, and he does here. So by the time we hit 1 Samuel 14:24 (let me just read that verse to you)... This is Saul's rash vow.

**24 And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food.**

Saul is refusing to allow them to have provisions—to eat. Again, tactically very bad. But if you think that you are the answer (if you think that you can just sort of will victory into existence because you're the king), this is the kind of thing you do. It shows that Saul is just not thinking clearly.

So by the time we hit 1 Samuel 14:24, Saul seems unbalanced and erratic. He has lost Samuel's support, so he finds another priest. But then he interrupts that priest in verse 19, but God still delivers Israel that day. God is still fighting for Israel. He is still trying to intervene, despite what Saul is doing. At every turn, his behavior is erratic. And so now it gets worse when he utters this foolish vow. And



the vow is really the rest of the chapter—1 Samuel 14:24-26. I'm going to read verses 24-30 to get a little taste of what's going on here. So back in verse 24:

**24 And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies."**

So again, it's all about Saul.

**So none of the people had tasted food. 25 Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. 26 And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, 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 [MH: remember Jonathan had been gone], so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright [MH: in other words, it refreshed him]. 28 Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food this day.' " And the people were faint. 29 Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright 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 that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great."**

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In other words, "We would have done even better in battle had my father let the soldiers eat!" So Jonathan is not on board with this, even though he hadn't heard it. So Chisholm writes in this regard:

The preceding account ended with the Lord's giving Israel a great victory, despite Saul's hesitant actions. In this next story we see Saul continue to retard the action rather than advance it. This account highlights one of Saul's major weaknesses and leadership flaws—one that has already emerged in earlier accounts and will prove fatal in the next chapter. Saul is preoccupied, perhaps even obsessed, with religious formalism. Certainly ritual and formalism have their place, and perhaps we can view Saul as simply naive. However, the narrator seems to view this tendency in a more negative light... this account is literarily linked to 10:7–8. Saul now has the opportunity to carry out Samuel's earlier orders (10:7–8). In fact, his son Jonathan has set in motion the attack envisioned by Samuel. While ordinarily it is proper to consult the Lord, it is unnecessary to do so in this case: Saul already has his marching orders [MH: he doesn't need further advice or instruction from the Lord]. To make matters even worse, the turmoil within the Israelite army

allows the Philistines to escape and prevents Israel from winning a total victory (14:6).

Again, we have leadership ineptitude on Saul's part. Things just get worse.

A few observations in regard to the vow and really the rest of the chapter... If you actually look at verse 24:

**24 And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies."**

The wording suggests that Saul has made things personal. Saul is allowing personal revenge to cloud his thinking. He puts his own people at risk for a personal vendetta. That's just not good leadership.

Secondly, the reference to honey on the ground should probably not be taken as a reference to manna. Don't think of the manna on the ground tasting like honey way back in Exodus 16. It's probably not a reference to something like that happening again. Other translations render the relevant term as "beehives." This may be too far afield as well. Hoffner writes of this. He looks at the NJPS (New Jewish Publication Society) English translation of the Hebrew Bible. He writes:

The NJPS translates 1 Sam 14:25 as "Everybody came to a stack of beehives [ יַעַר (*ya'ar*)] where some honey had spilled on the ground." Still, some scholars believe that much of the honey referred to in the Bible was not bee honey at all, but a sweet syrup produced artificially from grapes, from the fruit of the carob tree, or from dates. All three kinds are still made in the East and are called honey (دبس, *dibs*) by the Arabs. Such was also the case in Mesopotamia until the beginning of the second millennium BC, when wild bees were exploited to extract real bee honey.

So basically, there are a number of sweet substances that could account for this episode and this language. Maybe it's bee honey, maybe it's not. Maybe it's dates, maybe it's something else. But whatever it is, it's edible and would have been refreshing. We know this because Jonathan tastes some. He wasn't aware of the vow. And it did the trick in terms of having [audio breaks up]...

Jonathan's assessment of his father's vow is interesting in verse 29. It's pretty plain:

**29 Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land.**

What's interesting about this is observed by Chisholm in a wider literary connection:

The Hebrew word translated "made trouble" (*'akar*) is used to describe the effect of disobedient Achan's sin on Israel (Josh. 7:25; cf. 6:18). Jephthah also uses it in accusing his daughter of bringing trouble upon him when she greets him after his victory (Judg. 11:35).

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Jephthah, if you recall, ushered a terribly rash vow that put the life of his own daughter in jeopardy. The same wording that is found here about troubling the land is used in the Jephthah episode. Back to Chisholm:

Both Jephthah and Saul make rash formal statements of personal obligation that affect their children. In Jephthah's case, he accuses his daughter of troubling him and then offers her up as a whole burnt offering in fulfillment of his vow (v. 39; cf. vv. 30–31). In Saul's case, the situation is similar but plays out differently.

Again, because the people that [audio breaks up]... saved Jonathan's life.

Another thing to observe here in chapter 14 is more spiritual ineptitude from Saul. So upon hearing the people were sinning by not properly draining the blood from captured livestock that they were slaughtering for food (this is part of the narrative we didn't read; we didn't read all of the chapter)... But the people do this, too, when they finally break down and they have something to eat. They're not letting the blood drain properly, and so that's a problem. So upon hearing this, Saul has the right instinct. He commands a stone for sacrifice to be brought, but then again goes one step too far. He commands the stone to be brought. "Slaughter the cattle (or whatever you're going to slaughter here) on this stone and let the blood drain off into the ground, and we can take care of this problem about having the blood drain." But then he goes another step further and shows his spiritual ineptitude. Baldwin writes as follows:

The Israelites pursued [the Philistines] as far as *Aijalon*, on the border of the Philistine plain, within six miles from Gezer, capturing spoil which they proceeded to eat *with the blood*. Concerned to fulfil the ritual requirements, Saul made use of a rock, so that when the animals were killed their blood was drained and

poured into the soil (cf. Gen. 9:4; Deut. 12:23–24), and so kept separate from profane use [MH: to keep sacred ground separate from normal ground]. And Saul built an altar to the Lord, still trying in his own way to gain the Lord's favour once more.

So Saul says, "Hey, bring out a stone. We're going to use this stone to offer these animals for food." Because it's the spoils of victory and people are hungry. "Go ahead and do this." But then on the spot, Saul decides to build an altar. This is a religious object—a religious artifact. Saul decides to build an altar to the Lord. Why? Who authorized him to do this? Nobody. Why would the king have the authority to decide where an altar of God is supposed to be built and religious ritual things done with that altar? The answer is nobody. Nobody authorized Saul to do this. So he goes one step further. It's another act of usurpation of priestly duty. Here we go again. I mean, Saul is doing the very same thing.

The whole point of all of this (all these little episodes and mini episodes in Saul's life) is to show that he's just not kingly material. He's not a Torah-follower. He takes matters into his own hands when he feels like it or when the wind hits him, and he acts as a priest. He's not supposed to do that. Deuteronomy is clear, and he's supposed to know Deuteronomy. Again, there are rules for kings, followed by rules for priests, followed by rules for prophets. If you're reading Torah, if you're observing Torah, you know this to be true. So either Saul is neglecting Torah (he's neglecting to be informed on what he should and should not be doing) or he doesn't care. He usurps the office of the priesthood.

So here again, incredibly, he does the wrong thing again. He has no authorization from either scripture or Samuel, or Ahijah for that matter (the other priest) to be building altars, but he does it anyway.

Third, Saul adds a death penalty addition to the vow. Notice in the original vow in verse 24:

**24 And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies."**

So there's a curse given, but there's nothing said about a death penalty if you do this. Saul adds this in verses 39-46. On a whim, when he finds out that his vow had been violated, he introduces the death penalty. So by the time we hit verse 39, this element is included. Is this part of Saul's irrationality? At this point, who

can figure him out? Why is he doing this? Because the effect of it is going to be to put Jonathan, his own son, right in the crosshairs to the death penalty. Chisholm writes about what happens in verses 39-46, and I'll just summarize it: Jonathan is in big trouble, but Jonathan has the loyalty of his men. And his men make a counter-vow to save Jonathan's life. They refuse to let Saul's vow stand. They refuse to let Jonathan lose his life over this matter. It points to a deterioration in Saul's leadership skills. He's lost the confidence of Jonathan's men now. It's clear where their loyalties are at, and it's not with the king. Again, this costs Saul in terms of his leadership even more.

Fourth and final observation... the Urim and the Thummim. In verses 39-46 (toward the end of the chapter), we see the Urim and the Thummim coming into view. We'll assume the ark is there. For sure the ephod is there, let's put it that way. Because we have in these verses an appeal to Urim and Thummim, and you need the ephod for that because that's where the Urim and the Thummim were kept. Again, this was a little pouch on the breastplate of the priest, inside which there were two stones.

And so what we have here is we have a series of sort of casting-lots decisions that the Urim and the Thummim are going to be involved in to create the process of elimination. Saul wants to know who violated the vow, and then of course he's going to throw the death penalty thing in there to make matters worse. But we're only given a few scant details about it. And the Urim and the Thummim, if you go back to Exodus 28 when we have the ephod made... Again, there are two stones in a pouch on the high priest's ephod back in Exodus 28:30. They are apparently used for "yes" and "no" decisions. I'll quote a little bit from *Harper's Bible Dictionary*.

Apparently, the use of the Urim and Thummim is sometimes indicated by the term ephod (1 Sam. 23:9–12; 30:7–8), by reference to the Ark of the Covenant (Judg. 20:27; 1 Sam. 14:18), and by the phrase 'ask of God' (1 Sam. 23:2, 4).

So calling for the ark may have been a way of calling for the Urim and Thummim. We just don't know for sure. But apparently... At the very least (let's put it that way) what's going on is Saul is going to appeal to the Urim and the Thummim. I keep saying the word "apparently" because it actually isn't clear what the Urim and the Thummim were. Are they two stones, one marked with "yes" and the other one marked with "no?" Or are they like dice, where they have symbols and markings on them that can be assigned meanings? In other words, are the Urim and Thummim two objects where I could summon the priest and I could say,

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"Okay, take out the Urim and the Thummim. And if you pull out Urim first, it means this. If you pull out Thummim first, it means that." In other words, perhaps I as the requester (again, *maybe*) could sort of set what each stone meant, rather than just a simple yes or no decision. So that part of the Urim and the Thummim is just not clear to scholars. Scholars debated a lot whether you had a yes or no marking on it or whether you had some other kinds of markings that could be assigned meaning by whoever was asking.

So you have two options there. Again, it's actually not clear. Let me read a little bit from the *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, the Pentateuch volume, on Exodus 28, where you have the Urim and the Thummim first come into view, again noting the absence of instructions for making or constructing the Urim and the Thummim. Apparently, they're just two stones, but there's something on them. So the *Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Pentateuch) says this, commenting on Exodus 28:

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It is striking that in a chapter of instructions for making clothes, the manufacture of the Urim and Thummim is not commanded (cf. Ex 28:30)... The Urim and Thummim belonged to God (Deut 33:8), and this revelatory means was to be used for matters of national importance (such as waging war) about which Yahweh had not yet made his will clearly known (cf. Num 27:21; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Num 27:21; 31:6). Although the current scholarly consensus appears to identify the Urim and Thummim with a lot oracle [MH: a casting lots decision], significant arguments can be raised against this identity (Van Dam, 194–221; for a survey of how this oracular instrument has been understood, see Van Dam, 9–38). [MH: There's actually a book on this—the best survey on that topic.] The available evidence suggests the hypothesis that the Urim and Thummim were used by God to give a miraculous light as a sign authenticating the message given by prophetic inspiration to the high priest (Van Dam, 221–26). As mediator between God and Israel, the high priest could inquire of God by the Urim and Thummim and so maintain Israel's rights and privileges with God (Van Dam, 161–63, 269–71).

You may recall that when we did our Exodus series, we obviously ran into the Urim and the Thummim. I mentioned what has sort of affectionately been called the "blinking light theory"—that along with the Urim and the Thummim, you have the gemstones on the breastplate/ephod that could light up and give you longer answers to questions because there were letters written on the gemstones and you could spell out messages. Again, that's just a theory. Don't quote me on it; I'm not married to it. But it's an idea that scholars have had.

So what Van Dam is doing here is he's throwing the Urim and Thummim into that mix. Van Dam is suggesting that it wasn't just a yes or no, like there's "Y" for yes and "N" for no on the Urim and the Thummim, but he's suggesting as well that there could have been more text on the Urim and the Thummim and that it would light up like the gemstones on the ephod supposedly did.

The honest answer, folks, is that nobody knows how the Urim and the Thummim worked. Nobody knows how the ephod worked—if there was some mechanical procedure. You just get these little hints of how they were used in the kinds of questions that are asked. Because the kinds of questions that are asked aren't always just yes and no. In most cases they are, but not always. Again, that gives rise to these theories. So we don't ultimately know what's going on with the Urim and the Thummim, we just know that in this chapter, it's part of the picture of what Saul is trying to do. He's trying to get God to talk to him. And God is silent. God has rejected Saul.

And so all of this (the whole chapter—both of these chapters) is headed downhill. In chapters 15 and 16, where we're going to be next time, is the final rejection of Saul and his replacement by David. So next time on the podcast, we're going to get into at least chapter 15. We may hit chapter 16, I'm not sure. But again, all of this is trending in one direction and it's not good. Saul has been rejected, and the final rejection is going to take a more dramatic form in chapter 15. But we'll look at that next time.

**TS:** All right, Mike. That was a good one. So for Saul, getting rejected, I can only imagine how bad it was.

**MH:** Yeah, in such a short amount of time, too, and so publicly.

**TS:** We'll be looking forward to the next chapters next week. And with that, Mike, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.