

“What is True Success?” (1 Samuel 13:23–14:52)

How do you define success? Do you immediately think of power, position, popularity, or possessions? What makes someone truly successful? Is it going to the best university, getting the best job upon graduation, marrying the right spouse, having 2.5 kids, earning the most money, climbing the occupational ladder, and retiring early? Is this true success? What is true success? In 1 Sam 14 our author reveals true success, or lack thereof, by contrasting the lives of a father and son. By observing Saul and Jonathan we’ll see how the Bible defines true success.

1. Jonathan attacks the Philistine garrison (13:23–14:15).¹ Our first scene is a riveting account that should be rated R for suspense and violence. The story begins with these words: **“And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash. Now the day came that Jonathan, the son of Saul, said to the young man who was carrying his armor,² ‘Come and let us cross over to the Philistines’ garrison that is on the other side.’ But he did not tell his father”** (13:23–14:1). Whoever remained from the Philistines’ garrison from Jonathan’s initial attack (cf. 13:3) licked their wounds and moved to Michmash. However, it appears that Jonathan isn’t through with them just yet.³ He and his armor bearer decide to go on a secret mission without telling Saul. As you know, whenever a teenager does something without telling his father, it’s usually because he doesn’t want his request to be declined. Such is certainly the case here. From the very beginning there is an insinuation that things aren’t quite right between Jonathan and Saul—a theme that will be apparent throughout the narrative.

The author quickly shifts scenes in 14:2–3 to inform us that: **“Saul was staying [“sitting”] in the outskirts of Gibeah under the pomegranate tree which is in Migron [“fear”]. And the people who were with him were about six hundred men, and Ahijah,⁴ 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.”** While Jonathan (the son) is on the move for the Lord, Saul (the dad) is sitting on his tail in fear. The reference in 14:3 to the rejected priestly house of Eli stresses the rejection of Saul’s royal house. Moreover, it reveals something of Saul’s inner life, who has apparently lost Samuel as his spiritual advisor. Since Samuel announced the end of Saul’s royal dynasty (13:13–14), the prophet has apparently been replaced by a member of the rejected family of Eli. Clearly, Saul has lost his way. He has turned from the legitimate counsel of Samuel to the discredited priestly line of Eli.⁵ Like Saul, when we’re beginning to slip spiritually, we often disregard godly counsel and seek counsel that will tell us what we want to hear. The note at the end of 14:3 reveals that Saul and Israel are oblivious to where the godliest man in their midst had gone. They are a selfish and self-consumed people who are not being influenced by their godly leaders.

In 14:4–5 our narrator shifts scenes once again: **“Between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines’ garrison, there was a sharp crag [“teeth of rock”] on the one side and a sharp crag on the other side, and the name of the one was Bozez [“slippery”], and the name of the other Seneh [“thorny”]. The one crag rose on the north opposite Michmash, and the other on the south opposite Geba.”** This is a dangerous, death-defying mission! However, Jonathan wasn’t the kind to say, “Well, it would be nice to do this. But the rocks are steep and there are a lot of Philistines up there. Let’s just pray instead.” No, he got down on his hands and knees and climbed! Like Jonathan, if we’re not willing to work hard and experience risk, we won’t see much victory. Is God calling you to a difficult task today? Is He calling you to an uphill, exhausting marriage restoration? Is He calling you to get out of debt, simplify your lifestyle, and prioritize Him with your finances? Is He calling you to break out of an addiction and finally be set free? Then put your hand to the plow and do it! God doesn’t always miraculously drop blessings into our laps. Often He calls us to pursue Him, depend upon Him, and work through a biblical process. As we exercise self-discipline and patient perseverance, the Lord will bless us, either in this life or in the life to come.

In 14:6 Jonathan exhibits the kind of courage that we need. He says to his armor bearer: **“Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work⁶ for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few.”**⁷ Jonathan prefaces his words with “perhaps,” being careful not to presume upon the freedom of Yahweh.⁸ “Perhaps” isn’t a sign of Jonathan’s doubt in God’s ability, but rather a confession that God is not *required* to act for them. We must always remember that God isn’t required to do anything for us—anything that He chooses to do is by His grace. Jonathan repeats the name of Yahweh twice (cf. 14:10, 12). This hints at his intimate relationship with the Lord and his trust in Him.⁹ Jonathan simply believed that the Lord would give Israel victory, and that numbers weren’t important. He didn’t care that the army which had originally consisted of three thousand now numbered only six hundred. He believed that God was able to save with six hundred men, or with six, or with only two. Jonathan, not Saul, was the true leader in Israel. The contrast between the two is striking: Saul was sitting while Jonathan was attacking. Saul trusted his growing army while Jonathan trusted God and didn’t depend on numbers. Saul watched things happen, but Jonathan made things happen.¹⁰

The account intensifies in 14:7–10. Jonathan’s armor bearer says to him: **“Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, and here I am with you according to your desire”** (14:7). Jonathan had an armor bearer who was also a great man of faith and courage. If you’re going to accomplish great exploits for the Lord you need an armor bearer who believes that God’s power *will* work in and through you. One element of true success is surrounding yourself with godly, kingdom-minded people. With brimming confidence Jonathan shows great spiritual wisdom. While he is willing to walk into the Philistine camp in faith, he also wants to make sure that when he does so, God is indeed with him. Rather than presume upon God, he suggests to his armor-bearer a sign by which they could be sure that God would be with them in this action. **“Then Jonathan said, ‘Behold, we will cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them. If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you’; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them. But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hands; and this shall be the sign to us’”** (14:8–10). Jonathan’s tactics defied all military logic. Now I’m not a military expert. I didn’t go to West Point. I wasn’t even a Boy Scout. But I know enough to realize that this is a terrible military strategy. When you’re outmanned, outnumbered, out equipped, you don’t just come out! Instead, you sneak up in the shadows and attack with a stealth strike. Furthermore, altitude has the upper hand. Nevertheless, Jonathan gave up the element of surprise, refused to fight the Philistines if they abandoned their strategic position, and then decided on a path of attack that would require him to scale a rock wall and then hit them head-on.¹¹ That is the epitome of military insanity! Yet, Jonathan recognized that if God was going to work, a sneak attack would not be necessary.¹² The phrase “the Lord has given” (14:10) is the meaning of Jonathan’s name. Thus, it’s likely that he intended this phrase as an expression of his faith.¹³

Our first scene concludes in dramatic fashion in 14:11–15: **“When both of them revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines said, ‘Behold, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.’ So the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor bearer and said, ‘Come up to us and we will tell you something.’¹⁴ And Jonathan said to his armor bearer, ‘Come up after me, for the LORD has given¹⁵ them into the hands of Israel.’ Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some to death after him. That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land. And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling.”¹⁶** Jonathan and his armor bearer scaled the jaws of death and killed twenty Philistine soldiers.¹⁷ What a victory! When we play it safe, we squeeze God out of the formula. If we go where we know and do what we’re certain will succeed, we remove our need for God. Whenever we take on a God-sized challenge, self-sufficiency is no longer an option. You have no control over when you die or (most often) how you die, but you do have control over how you live! Jonathan wasn’t choosing to die; he was choosing how he would live.

2. Saul and the Israelites finish off the Philistines (14:16–23). Our scene shifts back to Saul, who has been sitting under a pomegranate tree. It is likely that his insecurity has made him so afraid to fail that he doesn't want to do anything. But now he prepares to go into battle because Israel's victory seems certain. "Now Saul's watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude melted away; and they went here and *there*. Saul said to the people who *were* with him, 'Number now and see who has gone from us.' And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armor bearer were not *there*. Then Saul said to Ahijah, 'Bring the ark of God¹⁸ here.' For the ark of God was at that time with the sons of Israel. While Saul talked to the priest, the commotion in the camp of the Philistines continued and increased; so Saul said to the priest, 'Withdraw your hand' Then Saul and all the people who *were* with him rallied and came to the battle; and behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, *and there was very great confusion*. Now the Hebrews *who were with the Philistines previously*, who went up with them all around in the camp, even they also *turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan*. When all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines had fled, even they also pursued them closely in the battle. So the LORD delivered Israel that day, and the battle spread beyond Beth-aven."¹⁹ With the Philistines now in a vulnerable position, Saul calls for the ark of God in order to inquire of the Lord. However, when Saul sees the Philistines fleeing he says to Ahijah the priest, "Withdraw your hand." He reasons, "We don't have time to check with God; let's take advantage of the situation." Saul's action is without precedent in the Bible. His rationale was intended to enable Israel to win an even greater victory over the Philistines. But failing to consult the Lord meant that Saul was unfit to fulfill the task of leading Israel against her enemies (cf. 8:20). A lack of concern for the Lord's direction remained an ongoing problem with Saul's leadership. Covenant leadership requires courage, but it also requires waiting on the Lord.²⁰ Are you waiting on the Lord for His direction?

In spite of Saul's faithlessness, God "delivered Israel that day" (14:23; cf. 14:6).²¹ We must always remember that we don't win victories, the Lord does! We can always take courage that the Lord will lead us out and fight for us. When the Lord works in your personal life or ministry, are you quick to glorify Him? Do you always acknowledge His great power in your deliverance?

3. Saul issues a foolish ban against eating (14:24–46). There is an obvious contrast between 14:23 and 24: Even though Yahweh saved Israel on that day, the men of Israel were hard-pressed by Saul.²² "Now the men of Israel were hard-pressed on that day, for Saul had put the people under oath,²³ saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food before evening, and until I have avenged myself on my enemies.' So none of the people tasted food. All *the people of the land* entered the forest, and there was honey on the ground. When the people entered the forest, behold, *there was a flow of honey*; but no man put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan had not heard when his father put the people under oath; therefore, he put out the end of the staff that *was* in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened.²⁴ Then one of the people said, 'Your father strictly put the people under oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food today.' And the people were weary. Then Jonathan said, 'My father has troubled²⁵ the land. See now, how my eyes have brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if only the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now the slaughter among the Philistines has not been great.' They struck among the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very weary. The people rushed greedily upon the spoil, and took sheep and oxen and calves, and slew *them* on the ground; and the people ate *them* with the blood.²⁶ Then they told Saul, saying, 'Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood.' And he said, 'You have acted treacherously; roll a great stone to me today.' Saul said, 'Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Each one of you bring me his ox or his sheep, and slaughter *it* here and eat; and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.' So all the people that night brought each one his ox with him and slaughtered *it* there. And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD"²⁷ (14:24–35).

Note the threefold use of the first person pronouns in Saul's statement: "I have avenged *myself* on *my* enemies" (14:24). The oath doesn't focus on God's honor or Israel's national security.²⁸ Instead, Saul viewed this war as a personal fight not a fight for God. Moreover, Saul showed his self-centeredness by foolishly denying his soldiers the food they would need to be strong in battle.²⁹ Saul's self-centered style of leadership lacked the compassion required of a covenant leader. The Old Testament didn't require soldiers to refrain from eating during battle; it was a command conceived by Saul in an apparent effort to gain the Lord's favor.³⁰ Yet, tragically, this unnecessary command led the Israelites into sin. In their hunger, the Israelites violated the Old Testament law by eating the meat without first draining the blood.³¹ Israel was commanded not to eat an animal's blood but to let it drain out because blood stands for life.³² Their obedience to Saul's foolish command led them to disobey God's clearly declared command. This is always the result of legalism! True obedience is careful to not go beyond what God explicitly states.

Verses 36–46 provide the play-by-play of Saul's response: **"Then Saul said, 'Let us go down after the Philistines by night and take spoil among them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them.'** [The general who gave no food now gives no rest at night.] **And they said, 'Do whatever seems good to you.'** So the priest said, **'Let us draw near to God here.'** Saul inquired³³ of God, **'Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into the hand of Israel?'** But He did not answer him on that day. Saul said, **'Draw near here, all you chiefs of the people, and investigate and see how this sin has happened today. For as the LORD lives, who delivers Israel, though it is in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die.'** But not one of all the people answered him. 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.'** Therefore, Saul said to the LORD, the God of Israel, **'Give a perfect lot.'** And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. Saul said, **'Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son.'** And Jonathan was taken.³⁴ 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!'**³⁵ Saul said, **'May God do this to me and more also, for you shall surely die, Jonathan.'** But the people said to Saul, **'Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance³⁶ 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. Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place." Saul demonstrates remarkable spiritual perception at times. Here, he recognizes that there is sin in the camp. But he assumes that it is Jonathan's sin, not his own. But earlier at Michmash, Saul silenced the Lord; thus, in response, the Lord became silent. God was displeased with Saul, so He would not answer him.³⁷ He was at fault, not Jonathan. A person who is successful takes responsibility for his own sins. He sees his own sin as the glaring problem, not someone else's sin.

One sign of Saul's growing sense of importance was the question he posed to Jonathan: "What have you done?" (14:43). This was Samuel's question to Saul when he sacrificed without waiting for Samuel (13:11). At Michmash, Saul was acting like a prophet, challenging Jonathan who had broken his word. Saul was no longer submitting himself to the word of the prophet but trying to replace the prophet. Saul failed to see the answer to his question, though it was lying in front of him: Jonathan "did" this great deliverance and he "did" it with God that day (14:45).³⁸ This episode demonstrates the radical change that has overtaken Saul. Earlier, Saul was opposed by the sons of Belial, but he refused to put them to death (11:12–13). At Michmash, he was ready to put his own son to death, though Jonathan was no son of Belial. He was becoming a king like the nations. He was becoming as blind as Eli.³⁹

Jonathan whose name means, "the Lord has given" or "the given man," will never be king because of his dad. What may appear to be a tragic life isn't so tragic if it's lived with fidelity to what Christ asked in the circumstances He gives.⁴⁰ God honors Jonathan because Jonathan honored God. Did he experience all the success that he could have? No! But he succeeds where it matters most.

4. Saul is a victorious warrior (14:47–52). These verses summarize the story of Saul’s victories and his family.⁴¹ They balance the picture that the main story has been developing. Despite his sins, the narrator lists Saul’s successful wars (14:47–48),⁴² his family (14:49–51), and his habit of recruiting soldiers (14:52).⁴³ Read the following account: **“Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment.”**⁴⁴ **He acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them. Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan and Ishvi and Malchi-shua; and the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab and the name of the younger Michal. The name of Saul’s wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the captain of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul’s uncle. Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he attached him to his staff.”** Despite Saul’s military conquests, he quickly turned to disobedience as chapter 15 will reveal. From the narrator’s perspective Saul was no longer Israel’s true king, though he would function as head of state for years to come.⁴⁵ Saul may have been a successful military leader, but he was a failure as a covenant leader. By putting the summary of Saul’s reign here, the narrator is saying, “Saul is done!” Saul didn’t fulfill God’s mission for his life. Thus, the message of this text is: *True success is obedience nothing less.*

These verses serve as what we may call “the judgment of history.” By the judgment of history I mean the way people have of assessing a man’s achievements, contributions, and relative success (or lack of it). History’s judgment is that external, human calculation of a person’s life and work. It’s what folks can observe. By such a standard, Saul made his mark and made it well. But Judge History does not have the decisive verdict. The vital assessment cannot come from the applause of men within history but only from the God who reigns over history. What matters, then, is not success (whether political or military) but covenant. Yahweh is not looking for winners but for disciples. Saul had begun to fail at the point of the covenant and he did not submit to the covenant God. And, for the Bible covenant and obedience matters far more than vocational achievement.⁴⁶ Remember *true success is obedience nothing less.*

If you’re in the midst of a horrific marriage because your spouse has been unfaithful or neglectful, God’s primary concern is not your happiness or even the success of your marriage, it is your obedience. *True success is obedience nothing less.* If you’re struggling to pay your mortgage and your bills are piling up, God’s primary concern is not your financial security and success, it is your obedience. *True success is obedience nothing less.* God is seeking obedience in the moment. This is how He defines success, and in the end, God’s opinion is all that really matters.

Scripture References

1 Samuel 13:23–14:52

Luke 18:27

Romans 4:18–25

Romans 11:33–36

Genesis 50:20

2 Kings 13:14–19

2 Corinthians 12:5–10

Study Questions

1. In what ways has my family of origin impacted my spirituality? When I was growing up, who played the most strategic role in my spiritual development? Who filled this role after I left home? Who is influencing me presently? Despite the failures of others in my life (e.g., parents, friends, pastors), how has God helped me in my Christian growth? In what specific ways has God been faithful to mature me in Him?
2. Do I courageously seek to fulfill the Lord's will (1 Samuel 14:1–15)? If so, when have I demonstrated courageous obedience? How has God come through for me when I have stepped out in obedient faith? Have there been times when God has not "delivered" me from adverse situations? How can I balance humility with confidence in the Lord's ability to work (14:6)?
3. How have I used religious forms to try to bail me out of difficulty instead of truly humbling myself and seeking God with my whole heart (1 Samuel 14:18–20)? Identify and reject any worship rituals that are done out of habit and not obedience. Why is obedience to God's Word more important than worship rituals? How can my worship result in God-honoring obedience? Read 1 Chronicles 21:24 and John 4:24.
4. When I experience favor in my life and ministry, do I readily recognize that it is from the Lord (1 Samuel 14:23)? How do I go about acknowledging God's hand without sounding pious and unintentionally rebuffing other's encouragement? How has witnessing God's great deliverance and power humbled me in the course of my life and ministry? What have I learned about how God works (cf. 14:6)?
5. Contrast Jonathan and Saul in a number of key areas: taking the initiative vs. passivity, boldness and faith vs. playing it safe, how they determine the Lord's will, their attitudes towards legalism, etc. (1 Samuel 14:1–46)? What can I learn from the deliberate contrasts between these two men? In what areas am I more like Saul than Jonathan and vice versa? How does this chapter implicitly define true success?

Notes

¹ Klein shows how 1 Sam 13 and 14 are linked. Ralph W. Klein, *I Samuel*. Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1983), 133–34.

² Jonathan's armor bearer is mentioned nine times in 1 Sam 14:1–17 connoting that he and Jonathan fought as a team (see also Klein, *I Samuel*, 135).

³ Vreeland aptly states: "In my opinion, Jonathan is the greatest hero in the so-called 'deuteronomistic writings.' He will prove himself to be good in a fight. An unabashed, resolute, and passionate Yahwist (1 Samuel 14:6, 10, 12), he will prove himself to be singly devoted to God. He will prove himself to be either shrewd enough to negotiate the intrigue of the palace or that he is able to rise above it. He will demonstrate his loyalty and friendship to David and to Saul in such a way that will cost him his life. Jonathan is among the greats of biblical writ." Gary D. Vreeland, *The Darker Side of Samuel, Saul, and David* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2008), 159.

⁴ Ahijah is likely Ahimelech who is mentioned in 1 Sam 22. Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 638.

⁵ Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*. New International Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 209.

⁶ See similar words by King Asa in 2 Chron 14:11. Davis observes: "It is interesting to note that Chapter 11 uses the root *yasa* (to save) three times in reference to Saul's activity (11:3, 9, 13) while chapter 14 uses the same root three times in connection with Jonathan's deeds (14:6, 23, 45; see also v. 39). Not Saul but Jonathan has, in human terms, become the savior of Israel." Dale Ralph Davis, *I Samuel*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000 [1988]), 117.

⁷ Jonathan was perhaps recalling the historical events surrounding Gideon's defeat of the Midianites (Judg 7:4 ff). See also Josh 23:10: "One of your men puts to flight a thousand, for the LORD your God is He who fights for you, just as He promised you."

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 103.

⁹ David Toshio Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 359.

¹⁰ It is often said that the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. But this was not the case with Saul's son, Jonathan. His faith was not a product of his environment. While Saul was not faithful to the covenant and disobeyed the Lord, Jonathan took courage and remained faithful. In the face of overwhelming opposition, Jonathan's fearless faith activated the Torah promise of Deut 28:7: "The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven." The Lord used the courage of one individual as a starting point to rescue His people (1 Sam 14:23).

¹¹ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*. New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 156.

¹² Vreeland, *The Darker Side of Samuel, Saul, and David*, 157.

¹³ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 156; Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 361.

¹⁴ Davis, *I Samuel*, 114 surmises that the garrison didn't see any threat: "I would suspect that the Philistines went right back to their poker and beer. There were now twenty men who would never teach a Hebrew another lesson."

¹⁵ The perfect verbal form of the word "[has] given" is used rhetorically here to express Jonathan's certitude. As far as he is concerned, the victory is as good as won and can be described as such (see NET study notes).

¹⁶ The confusion which fell upon the Philistines is described in graphic detail with the threefold use of the root word "tremble" (14:15). Leithart notes that 1 Sam 14:15 links to the thunder at the battle of Ebenezer (7:10), which, like the Lord's thunder at that battle, threw the Philistines into a panic. Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 84. Youngblood writes: "The panic, sent by God (cf. also 2 Kings 7:6-7), was of the kind promised to Israel against her enemies when the people trusted him (Deut 7:23) but also part of the covenant curse against Israel herself when she was apostate (Deut 28:20). During such times of terror, the ground may shake, as when the Lord led his people through the Sea of Reeds while at the same time overthrowing the Egyptians (Ps 77:18), or as an accompaniment to a theophany (2 Sam 22:8 = Ps 18:7), or—again—as a manifestation of God's displeasure against apostate Israel (Amos 8:8)." Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), Electronic ed.

¹⁷ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 157 states: "The massacre of twenty well-armed comrades by two Israelites surely would have been taken by the Philistines as an omen that their gods were not with them in the present campaign. The conclusion was reinforced by perfectly timed tremor that served as evidence of the Lord, the God of Israelite lands, was moving against those who had violated His space."

¹⁸ The NET study notes remark: “It seems unlikely that Saul would call for the ark, which was several miles away in Kiriath-jearim (see 7:2). The LXX and an Old Latin MS have ‘ephod’ here, a reading which harmonizes better with 14:3 and fits better with the verb ‘bring near’ (see 23:9; 30:7) and with the expression ‘withdraw your hand’ in 14:9.” However, Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 157 n. 66 argues that the MT reading is superior because the phrase “the ephod of God” is absent from the entire Hebrew Bible, whereas the phrase “ark of God” occurs thirteen times.

¹⁹ Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” Electronic ed. remarks: “The Hebrew expression translated ‘So the LORD rescued Israel that day’ (v. 23) is a verbatim quotation of Exodus 14:30 (NIV, ‘That day the LORD saved Israel’) in the narrative of the Sea of Reeds. Its deliberate use stresses the importance of Saul’s victory while also giving all the glory to God (as Saul apparently also did; cf. v. 39). The Israelite forces, however, were not satisfied with the results of their own efforts until they had driven the Philistines some distance west of Beth Aven (v. 23) toward their own homeland beyond Aijalon (v. 31).”

²⁰ Stephen J. Andrews and Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*. Holman Old Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009), Electronic ed.

²¹ Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 368: “As in the case of David’s fight with Goliath, the battle was surely the Lord’s. The Lord could use even a single person or two to do His saving work.”

²² Davis, *1 Samuel*, 116 observes: “The writer packs irony into this verb, for here in verse 24 he uses *niggas* (be hard-pressed), which also appeared in 13:6. There Israel is ‘hard-pressed’ because of massive Philistine pressure; here, the Philistines are defeated but Israel is *still* hard pressed because of Saul! Saul has a strange ability to turn deliverance into distress.”

²³ This was the first of four oaths uttered on that day (cf. 1 Sam 14:39, 44, 45).

²⁴ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 104 comments: “Everything hangs on 14:27.” The phrase “his eyes brightened” means “his strength was renewed.” Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 86 n. 27: “When Jonathan, in ignorance, tastes the honey his eyes were ‘brightened.’ The word here is a pun on the word ‘curse’ (*’or* = ‘brighten, lighten’; *’arur* = ‘curse’). Saul says that anyone who eats will be *’arur*, but Jonathan is made *’or* by eating. It is an ironic fulfillment of the curse, as Saul’s foolish curse is turned into blessing.”

²⁵ The verb translated “troubled” (*akar*) was used to describe the sinful action of Achan in contributing to Israel’s devastating loss at Ai (Josh 7:25).

²⁶ Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” Electronic ed. notes: “Echoes of vv. 32-35 reverberate throughout chapter 15: ‘pounce[d] on the plunder’ (v. 32; 15:19—the only two occurrences of the denominative verbal root *’yt* in the OT), sheep and cattle (v. 32; 15:9, 14-15, 21), cattle and sheep (v. 34; 15:3, translating a different pair of Heb. words than in the preceding set), sin(ning)/sinned (vv. 33-34; 15:24, 30), ‘bring me’ (v. 34; 15:32—identical Heb. in the two verses). Saul’s commendable attempt to engage in proper ceremonial practice in vv. 32-35 contrasts with his total failure in the same arena in chapter 15.”

²⁷ Smith notes: “This is not a negative comment on Saul’s lack of piety. The meaning is that Saul began on that occasion the custom followed later by David (2 Sam 24:25) of erecting memorial altars as the patriarchs had done in old times.” James E. Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*. College Press, NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press, 2000), 192.

²⁸ Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 190 writes: “Saul had personalized the battle. He stands in stark contrast to Joshua who called upon the Lord to stop the sun in the Valley of Aijalon ‘until the nation took vengeance on their enemies’ (Josh 10:13).”

²⁹ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 639 comments: “A general who withholds food from his army during battle isn’t quite right in the head.”

³⁰ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 158.

³¹ See Lev 17:10-14; 19:26; Deut 12:16, 23-24; Ezek 33:25; Acts 15:20.

³² John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2010), 72.

³³ It is possible that Saul used the Urim and Thummim for casting lots. This was a common practice in ancient Israel. Their exact identity is uncertain; they may have been specially marked stones drawn from a bag (see Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Deut 33:8). However, various scholars argue against the Urim and Thummim (e.g., Klein, *1 Samuel*, 140, Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 160). It’s possible that Saul and Jonathan dropped objects to the ground in such a way as to determine God’s will.

³⁴ The LXX includes the following words: “Whomever the Lord will indicate by the lot, let him die! And the people said to Saul, ‘It is not this word.’ But Saul prevailed over the people, and they cast lots between him and between Jonathan his son.”

³⁵ The NET study notes suggest: “Apparently Jonathan is acquiescing to his anticipated fate of death. However, the words may be taken as sarcastic (‘Here I am about to die!’) or as a question, ‘Must I now die?’ (cf. NAB, NIV,

NCV, NLT). Woodhouse suggests: “The sarcasm is sharp: ‘Here is the extent of my crime: I tasted a little honey on the tip of my staff! Guilty me! Clearly a hanging offense! Execute me for my dastardly deed!’” John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*. Preaching the Word series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 254.

³⁶ The term translated “rescue” (*pdh*) literally means “redeemed.” The people redeemed Jonathan.

³⁷ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 160.

³⁸ Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 86.

³⁹ Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 86. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 639 notes that “Saul’s verdict condemns him because it contradicts his earlier verdict: ‘Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished deliverance in Israel’ (11:13). If that verdict is true for those who trouble Israel, how much more is it true for a son that saves them?”

⁴⁰ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 118.

⁴¹ The records of the victories of an Israelite ruler are often immediately followed by a reference to either his building projects or the growth of his family.

⁴² Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 87 notes: “Saul defeated a number of Israel’s enemies who had plundered Israel during the times of the judges and into Saul’s reign. He had success against enemies on every side, which made him comparable to Joshua as a warrior (Josh 23:1).”

⁴³ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 133.

⁴⁴ Arnold, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 211 remarks: “It has been suggested that Saul’s summary is more notable for what it does *not* say than for what it does say. Unlike David’s summary, for example, there is no mention of Yahweh. Twice, David is said to have delivered wherever he went (2 Sam 8:6, 14), whereas Saul is simply victorious wherever he turns (1 Sam 14:47).”

⁴⁵ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 162.

⁴⁶ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 118-19.