

CHAPTER 14

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 14

This chapter gives an account of an adventure of Jonathan and his armourbearer smiting a garrison of the Philistines, (^{<0940>}1 Samuel 14:1-14), which with other circumstances struck terror into the whole army; which being observed by Saul's spies, he and his men went out against them, and being joined by others, pursued them, and obtained a complete victory, (^{<0945>}1 Samuel 14:15-23), but what sullied the glory of the day was a rash oath of Saul's, adjuring the people not to eat any food till evening which Jonathan not hearing of ignorantly broke, (^{<0942>}1 Samuel 14:24-31) and which long fasting made the people so ravenous, that they slew their cattle, and ate them with the blood, contrary to the law of God, for which they were reprov'd by Saul, (^{<0943>}1 Samuel 14:32-34), upon which he built an altar, and inquired of the Lord whether he should pursue the Philistines all that night till morning, but had no answer; which made him conclude sin was committed, and which he inquired after, declaring that if it was his own son Jonathan that had committed it he should surely die, (^{<0945>}1 Samuel 14:35-39), the people being silent, he cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonathan; who had it not been for the resolution of the people that rescued him out of his hands, because of the great salvation he had wrought, must have died, (^{<0944>}1 Samuel 14:40-46) and the chapter is cited with an account of Saul's battles with the neighbouring nations in general, and of his family, (^{<0947>}1 Samuel 14:47-52).

Ver. 1. *Now it came to pass upon a day*, etc.] At a certain time, a little after the garrison of the Philistines had made the movement, (^{<0933>}1 Samuel 13:23) and it is not to be taken strictly for the day time; for it is probable it was in the night that the following proposal was made, and began to be carried into execution; for Josephus ^{f259} says it was day light when Jonathan and his armourbearer came to the camp of the Philistines; he had formed his scheme perhaps the night before, and he and his man set out in the night time, and by break of day came up to the garrison, as after related:

that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armour; as was usual in those times for generals of armies to have such,

and so in later times; such were Automedon to Achilles, and Achates to Aeneas, as Grotius observes:

come and let us go over to the Philistine garrison that is on the other side; that is, go over the valley which lay between Michmash and Gibeah, to the Philistines, that lay on the other side the valley beyond it; and so was not in it, but at a pass on the hills, at the bottom of which this valley lay, and could be seen at a distance, and pointed at with the finger, as Jarchi notes:

but he told not his father; lest he should disapprove of his project, and hinder him from pursuing it; and had not his spirit been stirred up to this by the Lord, of which he was fully persuaded, he would have acted not only a rash part, but contrary to military discipline, in engaging in an enterprise without the knowledge and direction of his general; unless we can suppose he had all unlimited commission from his father to attack the enemy, at discretion, at any time, and any where.

Ver. 2. *And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah,* etc.] Not daring to go out against the Philistines, but remained in the furthest part of Gibeah, at the greatest distance from the camp of the Philistines, in the strongest part of the city, or deeply entrenched in the outer, part of it in the field:

under a pomegranate tree; where were his headquarters; his tent or pavilion was erected under a large spreading pomegranate, which protected him from the heat of the sun: or

under Rimmon; the rock Rimmon; under the shelter of that, and in the caverns of it; where a like number of Benjaminites he now had with him formerly hid themselves, (~~1724E~~ Judges 20:47)

which is in Migron; a part of Gibeah, or rather of the field of Gibeah, so called; for near it it certainly was; and is also mentioned along with Michmash, and as lying in the way of the march of Sennacherib king of Assyria, to Jerusalem, (~~2308B~~ Isaiah 10:28)

and the people that were with him were about six hundred men; which is observed to show that no addition was made to his little army; it was the same it was when he came thither, the people did not flock to his assistance, being in fear of the army of the Philistines, which was so powerful; (see ~~0915~~ 1 Samuel 13:15).

Ver. 3. *And Ahiah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother,* etc.] Ichabod was the child that Phinehas's wife bore prematurely on hearing the news of the ark being taken and of the death of her husband and father-in-law, which name she gave him on that account, and died; (see ^{<0019>}1 Samuel 4:19-22), he, it seems, had an elder brother, called Ahitub, who died young, and this Ahiah was the son of him; for not he, but Ahitub, was Ichabod's brother:

the son of Phinehas; so Ichabod was:

the son of Eli; so Phinehas was:

the Lord's priest in Shiloh; this refers not to Ahiah for he was not now priest in Shiloh, which was destroyed: and besides, he was now in the camp of Saul; but to Eli, who when living exercised the priest's office in Shiloh:

wearing an ephod; as Ahiah now did; not such as common priests wore, but the ephod the high priest wore, which had the breastplate of judgment, the Urim and Thummim, in it, by which inquiry was made, (^{<0147>}1 Samuel 14:37). The meaning of all this is, that the high priest is now with Saul, and the ark also, which and the high priest might be sent for on this occasion, (^{<0148>}1 Samuel 14:18)

and the people knew not that Jonathan was gone; or they would have gone with him, namely, the military men that were particularly with him; he and Saul were in two different parts of Gibeah, with distinct bodies of men; whether the thousand that Jonathan first had with him all continued is not certain; it seems probable they did not; it can hardly be thought he should have more with him than were with Saul; (see ^{<0142>}1 Samuel 14:2), though from (^{<0147>}1 Samuel 14:17) they seem now to have been together.

Ver. 4. *And between the passages by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines' garrison,* etc.] One of which is called the passage of Michmash, (^{<0123>}1 Samuel 13:23) and was that by which they went from Gibeah to Michmash; the other, which might be called the passage of Gibeah, was that by which they went from Michmash to Gibeah, and in effect was but one; and this was seized by the garrison of the Philistines, on that part of it which was towards Michmash; so that there was no way of access to the camp of the Philistines, which Jonathan therefore proposed to go over to and destroy, but his difficulties were very great:

there was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side; not that there was on each side of the passage or passages to the right and

left a cragged rock, between which men passed as they went from place to place; for the position of them in the next verse shows the contrary; but there was “the tooth of a rock”^{f260}, as it is in the original text; or a promontory or prominence on the one side towards Michmash, which stood out like a tooth; and another promontory or prominence on that towards Gibeah; so that both must be gone over to get to the camp, the only passage being guarded by the garrison; and indeed it seems to me there was but one rock, and two precipices at the opposite parts of it, and which stood between the passages, which precipices must be climbed over:

and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh; which, according to the Targum, the one signifies “lubrication”, being smooth and slippery, and the other “treading”, being more trodden and beaten: but Hillerus^{f261} derives both from clay, which seems not so agreeable to a rock; though in another place^{f262} he makes the former to have its name from whiteness, which is the colour of some rocks and cliffs; and one should think the latter rather has its name from bushes, brambles, and thorns, that might grow upon it.

Ver. 5. *The forefront of the one was situate northward, over against Michmash,* etc.] The northern precipice of this rock was towards Michmash, where the Philistines lay encamped, and where was the passage of Michmash the garrison went into and possessed:

and the other southward, over against Gibeah; the southern precipice faced Gibeah, and both precipices were to be got over before he could get to the garrison, these lying between the two passages; the one at one end, called the passage of Michmash, the other at the other, which might be called the passage of Gibeah.

Ver. 6. *And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour,* etc.] A second time, as Abarbinel thinks; the young man giving no answer to him the first time, perhaps through fear, he repeats it, and enlarges upon it for his encouragement:

come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; as these Philistines were, whereas several of the other nations, though Heathen, were circumcised; as the Edomites, Arabians, and others; and this Jonathan observes to the young man, in hope that they being such the Lord would deliver them into their hand:

it may be that the Lord will work for us; a sign, as the Targum, a miracle, as indeed he did; and of which Jonathan was persuaded in his own mind, though he did not choose to express himself in a confident way; not knowing in what manner, and whether at this time the Lord would appear, and work salvation and deliverance; and yet had a strong impulse upon his mind it would be wrought, and therefore was encouraged to try this expedient:

for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few; he is not limited to numbers, and can easily work salvation by a few as by many. It is no difficult thing to him to save by few, nor can anything hinder him, let the difficulties be what they will, when he has determined to deliver his people.

Ver. 7. *And his armourbearer said unto him*, etc.] Very readily and cheerfully:

do all that is in thine heart; whatever is thy pleasure, that thou hast a mind to do, that is upon thy heart, and thou art desirous of, and strongly inclined and affected to:

turn thee; which way thou wilt, towards the garrison of the Philistines, or elsewhere:

behold, I am with thee, according to thy heart; I will go with thee wherever thou goest, and do whatsoever thou wouldest have me to do; I am at thy command, and according to thy wish and desire, and in all things subject to thy will; I am as thine own heart.

Ver. 8. *Then said Jonathan, behold, we will pass over to these men*, etc.] Over the precipices to them, as steep and as cragged as they are:

and we will discover ourselves to them; present themselves to them at daylight, and let them know plainly who they were, that they were Hebrews.

Ver. 9. *If they say thus unto us*, etc.] By this and what follows he gives his man a sign by which both might know how they should conduct themselves in this expedition, and what would be the issue, whether they should succeed or not: should they say,

tarry until we come to you; this, as it would express boldness in the men of the garrison, and show that they were ready to come out and fight, would portend evil, and then what they had to do was to be upon the defensive:

then we will stand still in our place; wait till they came to them, and make the best defence of themselves as they could, showing as little fear as possible, and not attempting to retreat and flee:

and will not go up unto them; neither go backwards nor forwards; not backward, which would show fear; nor forward, to expose themselves to too much danger from the garrison, they appearing to be bold and intrepid.

Ver. 10. *But if they say unto us, come up unto us*, etc.] Which however spoken in contempt of them, yet would discover some fear, that they did not care to come out of their hold to them, and expose themselves to any danger; and besides being bid to come up, though it might be in a sneering ironical way, as supposing it impracticable for them; yet this would lead them on to make the attempt; and while the men were careless and secure, they might obtain their point:

then we will go up: the precipice, which was supposed impassable:

for the Lord hath delivered them into our hands: they being afraid to come out, and scornful and self-confident in their garrison: and this shall be a sign unto us; a direction how to behave, what steps to take, and a confirming sign assuring of success. Bishop Patrick and others observe, from Herodotus^{f263}, something similar to this, of the Paeonians, who went to war with the Perinthians, directed by the oracle; and were ordered that if the Perinthians provoked them to fight, calling them by name, then they should invade them; but, if not, should abstain; and so they did, and overcame; for when they met, there were three single combats; in the two first the Perinthians were conquerors, and began to triumph and insult; upon which the Paeonians said to one another, now is the oracle fulfilled, now is our business, and so fell upon them, and left few of them.

Ver. 11. *And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines*, etc.] They passed over the valley that lay between Michmash and Gibeah, and presented themselves at the bottom of the hill or rock on which the garrison was, to the open view of it; and who might easily discern who they were, that they were Hebrews, as they did, as follows:

and the Philistines said, behold, the Hebrews came forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves, being in want of provisions, and almost starved, and so obliged to come out to seek for sustenance; (see ¹⁹⁴⁵1 Samuel 14:6).

Ver. 12. *And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armourbearer,* etc.] The guards that were set to watch the garrison, who descrying them, called to them, and said:

come up to us, and we will show you a thing; we have something to say to you, a pretty thing to show you, when you shall pay dear for your boldness and impudence, in daring to come so near; not imagining that they could come, or would dare to attempt to come any further:

and Jonathan said unto his armourbearer, come up after me; follow me, and never fear but we will find a way to come up to them, however difficult it may be:

for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel; he knew by their language that God had given them a spirit of fear, that they durst not come out of their hold, and come down to them; and that he had cast them into a spirit of security and vain confidence, that they could never come at them, and give them any trouble; and from thence he concluded deliverance was at hand for the people of Israel, he seeking not his own private interest and glory, but the public good; and which he was ready to ascribe not to his own valour and courage, but to the power, kindness, and goodness of God.

Ver. 13. *And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet,* etc.] He did not attempt to go up the way or pass the Philistines kept, but turned aside and climbed up a precipice thought inaccessible, and came upon them unseen, and at unawares; for had he attempted to come up in any part where he was seen, they could easily have beat him down, and prevented his ascent; but though the place he climbed was so very steep and cragged, yet going on all four, as we say, he surmounted the difficulty; for he took this method of going on his hands and feet, not so much that he might not be seen; but because otherwise he could not have got up, not being able to stand on his feet; some think it was the precipice called Bozez he climbed, which, according to the Targum, had its name from its being lubricous and slippery:

and his armourbearer after him; who clambered up in the same manner, in imitation of his master, and as taught and directed by him:

and they fell before Jonathan, and his armourbearer slew after him; Jonathan, coming upon them at an unawares, knocked them down; or falling upon them, and laying about him with great dispatch, wounded them, and laid them prostrate to the ground; and his armourbearer

following them, put them to death, dispatched them at once; and so between them both made quick riddance of them.

Ver. 14. *And the first slaughter which Jonathan and his armourbearer made was about twenty men*, etc.] Or the first blow they struck, as the Targum, they killed about twenty men; that is, they did not stop smiting, but followed their blows so quickly, that in a very little time, as well as in a very small space of ground, so many were killed:

even within as it were an half acre of land, which a “yoke” of oxen might plough; that is, in one day; the word is used for a furrow, (^{<40308>}Psalm 129:3) and is supposed by some ^{f264} to be the length of one furrow; but if so, it must be a circular furrow; so much ground was given to Horatius Cocles as could be ploughed round about in one day, for his brave opposition to Porsena, king of the Etruscans, when he endeavoured to restore the family of the Tarquins ^{f265}. This was a space of ground which the Romans call “actus”, a measure of land one hundred and twenty feet square, which being doubled made an acre, called by them “jugerum”, being as much as a yoke of oxen could plough in one day, as Pliny says ^{f266}; so that an acre was two hundred and forty feet long, and one hundred and twenty broad, and contained an area of 28,800 four square Roman feet; and this space here mentioned, which was half an acre, contained 14,400 Roman feet ^{f267}; and within this space of ground, without going any further, twenty men were killed, which struck a panic into the whole garrison and host, supposing there was a large army of men behind them coming on, as follows. The Septuagint version renders these words as representing the slaughter made “with darts, and the casts of stones, and flints of the field” ^{f268}.

Ver. 15. *And there was trembling in the host in the field*, etc.] Belonging to Michmash, where the army lay encamped:

and among all the people; the inhabitants of Michmash, or that attended the army, and furnished them with provisions, trafficking with them; the common people, as distinguished from the soldiers:

the garrison; those that were in it, who did not sally out, but perceiving a great slaughter made of their outer scouts, were seized with a panic:

and the spoilers they also trembled; who had been about the country, ravaging and plundering it, and were returned with their booty; (see ^{<49317>}1 Samuel 13:17)

and the earth quaked; the inhabitants of it thereabout, or the earth itself literally; a real earthquake was caused at the same time, which increased the terror:

so that it was a very great trembling; both with respect to the numbers that were affected with it throughout the camp and garrison, and the causes of it; the terrible apprehension they had of a large army just ready to rush upon them; the earth quaking and opening in various places, threatening to swallow them up; and perhaps suspicions of treachery among themselves, they consisting of various nations, and some among them Hebrews; hence they fell upon and slew one another, (^{<094D>}1 Samuel 14:20,21), or “a trembling of God”^{f269}; either in the same sense to which we translate it, as cedars of God, flame of God, etc. that is, large and great ones; or which came from God; it was he that sent this trembling among them, struck their minds with fear and dread, so that they were in the utmost consternation, and knew not what to do, nor which way to take, and had no heart to oppose the enemy, and defend themselves.

Ver. 16. *And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked*, etc.] The city of Gibeah was built on an hill, from where it had its name; and these watchmen or sentinels of Saul were set by him no doubt in the highest part of it, whereby they could overlook the army of the Philistines as they lay encamped, and could observe their motions, and give notice accordingly; and it being now broad day light, could see the condition they were in:

and, behold, the multitude melted away; like snow gradually, and yet apace; they could discern their numbers lessening more and more, through the slaughter of many made among them by one another, and the flight of others; and they went on beating down one another; they could perceive they fled with great precipitation, throwing one another down in running, tumbling over one another, and trampling on each other which were in their way.

Ver. 17. *Then said Saul unto the people that were with him*, etc.] To some of the officers, particularly the muster master;

number now, and see who is gone from us: for he concluded that this agitation and confusion in the host of the Philistines were occasioned by an enterprise of some of his men, who by some stratagem or another had thrown them into this disorder:

and when they had numbered: which was soon done, being but six hundred men in all:

behold, Jonathan and his armourbearer were not there; from whence it might be inferred, that this commotion the Philistines were in was occasioned by an onset of theirs on the outer guards or sentinels of their garrison or army, which had alarmed them.

Ver. 18. *And Saul said unto Ahiah, bring hither the ark of the Lord,* etc.] That he, the high priest, might put on the ephod, with the Urim and Thummim, and inquire by them of the Lord before it, concerning the affair of Jonathan, what he had done, and the agitation that was in the host of the Philistines; so the Septuagint version, “bring the ephod”, of which, with the Urim and Thummim, Kimchi interprets it; and ask, whether it was right for him to go out unto them, or continue where he was:

for the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel; and so it always was, except a few months it was in the hands of the Philistines; so it was at Kirjathjearim, where it was last. Jarchi thinks a word is wanting, and to be supplied thus,

“the ark of God was [there] at that time with the children of Israel,”

at Gibeah; perhaps it might be removed first to Gilgal, when Saul and Samuel were there, and when they came to Gibeah it was brought along with them; but the last words may be considered as a distinct clause, and, literally tendered, are, “and the children of Israel”: which Abarbinel accounts for thus, and Saul said this,

bring hither the ark of the Lord; and the children of Israel said so likewise, joined with him in it: though the ark had been with Saul, and the people, some time, and also the high priest, yet we do not find that Saul in all his straits and difficulties consulted the Lord before; but perceiving something extraordinary was doing, and might turn to his advantage, he begins to inquire.

Ver. 19. *And it came to pass, while Saul talked with the priest,* etc.] With Ahiah about bringing the ark, and inquiring before it:

that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on, and increased; the shrieks and cries of those that were beat down and trampled upon, and were bruised and wounded; and indeed the cry of the whole

host, being alarmed with the enemy being upon them, or among them; and it seems that not only their motions could be seen, but the noise of them heard at this distance:

and Saul said unto the priest, withdraw thine hand; from putting on the ephod, or opening the breastplate of Urim and Thummim, or placing the ark in a proper position, to inquire before it, or from lifting up both hands in prayer for direction. Saul by the noise he heard concluded the army of the Philistines was routed, and therefore there was no need to consult the Lord, and he had no leisure for it; no time was to be lost, the advantage was to be taken directly, and the enemy pursued, to complete the victory. The Jews look upon this as a piece of profaneness in Saul, as no doubt it was, and reckon it one of the sins for which his kingdom was not prolonged ^{f270}.

Ver. 20. *And Saul, and all the people that were with him, assembled themselves,* etc.] The six hundred men that were with him, unless we can suppose the 1000 that had been with Jonathan in Gibeah were here still, (see ^{493E}1 Samuel 13:2)

and they came to the battle; to the field of battle, the place where the army of the Philistines had lain encamped:

and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow; taking one another for Hebrews, or treacherous and disaffected persons; so that, though the Israelites had neither swords nor spears, they needed none, for the Philistines destroyed one another with their own swords; and there was a *very great discomfiture;* noise, tumult, confusion, slaughter, and destruction.

Ver. 21. *Moreover, the Hebrews that were with the Philistines before that time,* etc.] Who either were their servants and bondsmen they brought along with them, or such in whose cities they dwelt, or had taken as they came along, and forced into their army; or it may be some of them were renegades from the Israelites, deserters, who for safety and subsistence betook themselves to them as the stronger party. The Greek version reads,

“the servants that were with the Philistines:”

which went up with them into the camp [from the country] round about; either willingly or by force; the words, “from the country”, are not in the

text, wherefore some observe, as Kimchi and Abarbinel, that this respects their being round about the camp, and that they were not within it, but without it, that if possible they might escape fighting against the Israelites:

even they also turned to be with the Israelites that were with Saul and Jonathan; who were now joined; when they saw the dread and confusion in the camp of the Philistines, and them destroying one another, and the Israelites prevailing over them, victorious and pursuing, they took part with them, and assisted them in completing the victory.

Ver. 22. *Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in Mount Ephraim*, etc.] In the caves and rocks, thickets and pits there, (see ^{<0936>}1 Samuel 13:6) when

they heard that the Philistines fled; now being delivered from their fears, and thinking themselves safe, ventured out of their lurking places:

even they also followed hard after them in the battle; they joined the pursuers who came their way, and stuck to them, and closely pursued the flying army of the Philistines. According to Josephus ^{f271}, the army of Saul was now increased to 10,000.

Ver. 23. *So the Lord saved Israel that day*, etc] And a wonderful salvation it was, that two men should throw such a vast army into confusion, which issued in the utter rout and destruction of them; this only could be of the Lord, to whom it is justly ascribed, and was the effect of his sovereign good will and pleasure, and of his unmerited goodness; a free favour bestowed on an undeserving prince, who had behaved ill to his prophet at Gilgal, and now to him and his high priest at Gibeah:

and the battle passed over unto Bethaven; the men of battle or war; those that made war, as the Targum, these pursued and went as far as Bethaven, or rather “passed Bethaven” ^{f272}; they not only, went as far as that, but “from” it, as Ben Gersom and Abarbinel interpret it; they passed that place, and went on from thence in pursuit of the Philistines; for their camp at Michmash was eastward from this place, and had it on the east, (^{<0935>}1 Samuel 13:5).

Ver. 24. *And the men of Israel were distressed that day*, etc.] By reason of the following order Saul gave with an oath, forbidding any to taste meat till evening, when the people were faint and weary, which is the common sense of interpreters; but Jarchi interprets it, the men of Israel were ready,

forward, and hasty, and drew nigh to fight with the Philistines, and so refers it to the persons before mentioned, who came out of their lurking places; and this sense is approved of by Abarbanel: “for”, or “and Saul had adjured”, or “did adjure the people”; or willed them, signified to them his will and pleasure, which would not have been so much amiss, had he not annexed a curse to it, as follows:

saying, cursed be the man that eateth any food until the evening: or “bread”, which comprehends all food, and among the rest honey; the design of which was, that no time might be lost, and that he might make the victory over the Philistines, and their destruction, as complete as possible; though it may seem a little too hard and severe upon the people, and too imperious in him, as well as imprudent; since a little refreshment would have animated and enabled them to have pursued their enemies with more ardour and rigour; and yet by the lot afterwards made, it seems to have been countenanced by the Lord:

that I may be avenged on mine enemies; who long tyrannised over the people of Israel, more or less for many years, and lately had sadly spoiled and plundered them:

so none of the people tasted any food; so observant were they of, and so obedient to the order of their king, and so much awed by the oath or imprecation annexed to it; though they were faint and hungry, and had an opportunity of refreshing themselves as follows, which was no small temptation to disobedience.

Ver. 25. *And all they of the land came to a wood,* etc.] Which lay between Bethaven and Aijalon; by whom are meant not all the inhabitants of the land of Israel, but all that came with Saul and Jonathan, and that joined them in the pursuit:

and there was honey upon the ground; which dropped upon it, as in the following verse, or where it was produced by bees; for Aristotle^{f273} reports, that bees in some places make their combs upon the ground; this was wild honey, which Diodorus Siculus^{f274} speaks of as common in Arabia, and which perhaps John the Baptist ate of, (~~418B~~ Matthew 3:4). Jarchi says, this was the honey of canes, or sugar canes, which grew in the land of Israel; and affirms from Nathan an Ishmaelite, that in the Ishmaelitish or Arabic language they call honey, sugar; but neither of these can be proved.

Ver. 26. *And when the people came into the wood, behold, the honey dropped*, etc.] Either from trees, which produced it; so Diodorus Siculus ^{f275} speaks of trees in some countries which produce honey; or from the sugar canes, as Jarchi; or rather from the honeycombs which were framed in trees by bees; so Hesiod ^{f276} speaks of bees making their nests or combs in trees. Ben Gersom thinks that bee hives were placed here in rows by the wayside, from whence the honey flowed; or “went” ^{f277}, or there was a going of it; perhaps the combs being pressed by the Philistines as they fled: the land of Canaan was a land flowing with milk and honey:

but no man put his hand to his mouth; that is, took not any of the honey and ate it, though it was so near at hand, and there was plenty of it:

for the people feared the oath: Saul adjured them by, or the imprecation he made on the person that should eat any food that day.

Ver. 27. *But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath*, etc.] Which charge was given, either before he came from Gibeah, before he came to Jonathan, or while pursuing, when Jonathan was with another party either fighting or pursuing:

wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand: the staff with which he walked, or rather the spear which he carried in his hand, and fought his enemies with:

and dipped it in an honeycomb; or sugar cane, as Jarchi; or in wood honey, as the margin of our Bibles; but best, in the honeycomb, as the word is rendered, (^{צֶמֶרֶת} Song of Solomon 5:1) and so the Targum, into the nest of honey ^{f278}:

and he put his hand to his mouth; first he took the honey off of the top of his rod, and then put it to his mouth and ate it;

and his eyes were enlightened: which before were dim and dull through want of food, which is a common case; but became brisk and lively on eating the honey, nourishment being presently communicated, and he refreshed with it, and his spirits revived; and which quickly appeared in the briskness and sparkling of his eyes: honey being of a subtle nature, gives immediate refreshment and rigour; hence this phrase is frequently used by Jewish writers ^{f279} for refreshment, after hunger, fatigue, and weariness; and which virtue is ascribed by them to fine bread, wine, oil, and particularly to honey.

Ver. 28. *Then answered one of the people, and said,* etc.] To Jonathan, who might direct and encourage the people to do as he had done, at least so he did by his example, if not by words; the latter is not improbable: and therefore one of the men that came along with Saul, and had now joined Jonathan, and who heard what Saul had said, replied,

thy father straitly charged the people with an oath; gave them a strict charge, with an oath or imprecation annexed to it:

saying, cursed be the man that eateth any food this day; that is, until the evening, as in (⁰⁹⁴²1 Samuel 14:24)

and the people were faint; which is either the observation of the writer of the book; or it may be the words of the man, imputing the faintness of the people to this adjuration of Saul restraining them from food; or as taking notice how strictly the people observed it, though they were hungry, faint, and weary.

Ver. 29. *Then said Jonathan, my father hath troubled the land,* etc.] The people of the land, as the Targum, the soldiers in his army; afflicted and distressed them, and made them uneasy in their minds, like troubled waters; the Arabic version is,

“my father hath sinned against the people;”

hath done them injury by forbidding them to eat. This was not wisely said by Jonathan; how much soever his father was to be blamed, it did not become him as a son thus to reflect upon him, and it might have tended to mutiny and sedition:

see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey; the benefit he received by it was very visible; it might easily be discerned that he was greatly refreshed with it, and his spirits invigorated by it; it was to be seen in the cheerfulness of his countenance, and the briskness of his eyes: and he suggests it would have had the same effect upon the people, had they eaten of it, as he had done.

Ver. 30. *How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found?* etc.] That is, had they been, allowed eat freely of the provisions, of bread, wine, etc. they found in the enemy's camp, they would have been much more refreshed and strengthened than it could be supposed he was with eating a little honey; if

that had had such an effect upon him, of what service would a full meal have been to the people?

for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines? the people would have had more strength to smite them, and would have pursued them with greater ardour and swiftness, and so have made a greater slaughter among them than they had; he intimates that Saul's end would have been better answered by suffering the people to eat, than by forbidding them.

Ver. 31. *And they smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon*, etc.] Michmash was the place where the camp of the Philistines was when Jonathan first attacked them, and from whence they fled, and they were pursued by the Israelites that day as far as Aijalon. There was a city of this name in the tribe of Dan, famous for the moon standing still in a valley adjoining to it, in the time of Joshua, (^{<06012>}Joshua 10:12 19:42) and another in the tribe of Zebulun, (^{<0712>}Judges 12:12), but they both seem to be at too great a distance to be the place here meant, which rather seems to be Aijalon in the tribe of Judah, (^{<4110>}2 Chronicles 11:10) according to Bunting^{f280}, it was twelve miles from Michmash:

and the people were very faint; as they might well be, with pursuing the enemy so many miles, and doing so much execution among them, without eating any food.

Ver. 32. *And the people flew upon the spoil*, etc.] Like a swift and ravenous bird, as the eagle, and which seems to have its name in Greek from this word, (see ^{<2361E>}Isaiah 46:11). When the evening was come, and they were free from the oath of Saul, and being extremely hungry, faint, and weary, they were even ravenous for food and with the greatest haste and eagerness laid hold on what came first to hand:

and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew [them] on the ground; and there they lay in their blood, which in such a position would not run out freely as when slain and hang up:

and the people did eat them with the blood; they were so hungry they could not stay the dressing of them, but ate them raw with the blood in them, not being squeezed or drained out, at least not half boiled or roasted. Some of the Jewish Rabbins^{f281} are of opinion

Ver. 33. *Then they told Saul*, etc.] Some that were more conscientious and religious, were more circumspect, and strictly attended to the laws forbidding the eating of blood, and were concerned at the indecent behaviour of others, and therefore thought fit to acquaint Saul with it, to restrain it:

behold, the people sin against the Lord, in that they eat with the blood; by breaking the laws of God respecting the eating of blood in (^{<0004>}Genesis 9:4 ^{<0007>}Leviticus 3:17 7:26,27 17:10,11), especially in (^{<0005>}Leviticus 19:26)

and he said, ye have transgressed; the above laws of God; that is, Saul said to some persons who were accused of the breach of them, and were ordered to come before him, and did come:

roll a great stone unto me this day; pointing, perhaps, at one which lay at some distance from him, and which he ordered to be rolled to him; this was done, that the creatures might be slain on it, and their blood drawn out from them, or to offer sacrifice upon, and indeed for both.

Ver. 34. *And Saul said, disperse yourselves among the people*, etc.] In the camp, some one way, and some another, and make proclamation throughout it; this he said to some of his officers, whom he sent out as heralds, to publish his will and pleasure:

and say unto them, bring me hither every man his ox, and every man his sheep, and slay them here; on the great stone he had ordered to roll to the place where he was:

and eat them; in the same place, being rightly slain, and the blood let out; all this was to be done, the slaying of the beasts, and eating them, in the presence of Saul, and under his inspection, that every thing might be done decently, and in order, and according to the law of God:

and sin not against the Lord, in eating with the blood; as some of them had done, (^{<0042>}1 Samuel 14:32) and all the people brought every man his ox with him; and his sheep also, though not expressed, yet to be supplied from the preceding clause: and these every man brought “with him that night”; the Jewish Rabbins ^{f282} are divided about these creatures slain, whether for sacrifices or common food; and those that think sacrifices are meant dispute whether it was lawful to slay them in the night, which some allow to be lawful, if on a small and private altar, but not upon a large and public

one; but these were slain no doubt for common food, which all agree might be slain in the night:

and slew them there; before Saul, and on the great stone rolled unto him.

Ver. 35. *And Saul built an altar unto the Lord*, etc.] To offer peace offerings upon, in thankfulness for the victory obtained over his enemies, or sin offerings to make atonement for the sin of the people, perhaps both, however the former:

the same was the first altar that he built unto the Lord; for though he had offered sacrifice at Gilgal, there was an altar ready built for him: or “he began to build”; he laid the first stone of it, and the builders built upon it; so some others say, that he was the first of the kings that built an altar to the Lord ^{f283}; others, the first of the judges that built one; though Gideon built one, it was for his own private use, not for all Israel, as this, so R. Isaiah; but Ben Gersom, and so Abarbinel, refer this to the great stone Saul ordered to be rolled to him, and take the sense to be, that that began to be built an altar to the Lord; that was the beginning of one; for he did not now stay to finish it, being eager on his pursuit of the Philistines, as follows.

Ver. 36. *And Saul said*, etc.] To his son Jonathan, or to some of the principal officers of his army:

let us go down after the Philistines by night; or tonight, that same night; which is another hardship he laid his troops under; as he had restrained them from eating all that day until evening, now he proposed they shall take no sleep that night, but proceed on in their pursuit of the Philistines, having eaten, and drank, and refreshed themselves. The Arabic version is, “let us go down to the Philistines”; and so Noldius ^{f284} chooses to render the words; which I pretty much wonder at, and especially at what he observes in favour of it, and against the common rendering; that at this time the Philistines had not turned their backs, so that the Israelites could not be said to go after them, but were in a camp opposite to them; but that they had fled, and were pursued, is most certain from (^{<0142>}1 Samuel 14:22,23,31),

and spoil them until the morning light; or kill of them, as the Targum, and so the Arabic version; for spoiling must be meant of killing; for as for the spoil of their provisions, riches, etc. that had already fallen into their hands, (^{<0143>}1 Samuel 14:30), and this is confirmed by what follows:

and let us not leave a man of them; great numbers had been slain already, partly by their falling upon one another, and partly by the swords of Jonathan and his armourbearer at the first onset, and by Saul and his men in the pursuit of them; and so intent was Saul in the utter destruction of them, that he was for following and cutting them off, that none of their prodigious army might return home:

and they said, do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; they had religiously observed his oath, in refraining from food all the day, and now they were as willing to be obedient to his command in denying themselves refreshing rest in sleep:

then said the priest, let us draw near hither unto God; Ahiah the priest, Josephus^{f285} calls him Ahitob, who was present with the ark, agreed to the proposal of Saul, only moved, that before they set forward they would seek the Lord; perhaps reflecting upon the abrupt manner in which Saul departed from Gibeah, just as he was consulting the Lord, and not staying for an answer from him; which the priest might fear would be resented by him, and therefore proposes first to draw nigh to God; not to the altar Saul had built, or had just begun to build, but to the ark, with which the high priest was, and was a symbol of the divine Presence: the Targum is,

“let us draw near hither, and inquire by the word of the Lord.”

Ver. 37. *And Saul asked counsel of God*, etc.] He agreed to the motion of the high priest, and asked counsel by Urim and Thummim; the Targum is, as before,

“inquired by the Word of the Lord:”

shall I go down after the Philistines? pursue after them in their flight to their own country, which, lying to the sea, was a descent:

wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? what remain of them, otherwise a victory over them was obtained:

but he answered him not that day; no answer was returned by Urim and Thummim, so that he was left in suspense whether he should pursue or no; the Targum is,

“he received not his prayer that day;”

this was treating him in a righteous manner; since he would not stay for an answer from the Lord, (~~1~~ 1 Samuel 14:19), the Lord now will not give him any; though the principal view was, that he might take the step he did.

Ver. 38. *And Saul said, draw ye near hither all the chief of the people,* etc.] Or, the corners of the peoples ^{f286}; the princes, as Jarchi interprets it: and so the Targum, the heads of the people, in allusion to the cornerstones in buildings, which are the ornament, strength, and cement of them, (see ~~3104~~ Zechariah 10:4), though Abarbinel thinks the tribes themselves are meant, which lay encamped everyone in a corner by themselves, separated from one another; and these he would have brought together; not the heads only, but everyone, small and great, that it might be seen and known where the sin lay; but he should have observed, that the tribes of Israel were not now present with Saul, but a small number of them:

and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day; he concluded, from having no answer from the Lord, that sin had been committed, which was the cause of it; but never thought of his own rash oath, which was the cause of the people's sinning, and had brought his son into danger; nor the sin of the people in eating the flesh with the blood; nothing ran in his mind but the breach of the oath with which he had adjured the people, and this he was determined to find out, if possible.

Ver. 39. *For as the Lord liveth, which saveth Israel,* etc.] And had saved them that day with a great salvation and had wrought a great deliverance for them in freeing them from the Philistines, who had threatened the ruin of the whole nation. This is the form of an oath:

though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die; that is, though the sin should be found in him, or he should be found guilty of the breach of what he had charged them with an oath to observe, namely, to eat no food that day till evening:

but there was not a man among all the people that answered him; who knew that Jonathan had tasted of honey, but they would not acquaint him with it; partly because they knew he did it ignorantly, having no knowledge of his father's charge and oath, and partly because of their great affection to him, who had been the instrument of their deliverance and salvation that day.

Ver. 40. *Then said he unto all Israel*, etc.] As many of them as were present; not the principal men only, but the common people; not the officers only, but the common soldiers in the army:

be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side: so they divided to the right and left, one went one way, and the other the other; there were two boxes or urns, as Kimchi says, in one of which were the names of Saul and Jonathan, and in the other Israel; though Abarbinel observes, that such a partition of them on one side, and the other, is not according to the manner of lots; and he suspects that Saul knew that Jonathan had tasted of honey, being told it by the man that saw him eat it; and who said to him then, “thy father straitly charged”, etc. (^{<0147>}1 Samuel 14:27) but chose this way to make it manifest to the people, and to show what a strict regard he had to justice:

and the people said unto Saul, do what seemeth good unto thee; they were very obsequious to him in everything, (see ^{<0146>}1 Samuel 14:36).

Ver. 41. *Therefore Saul said to the Lord God of Israel*, etc.] After the division was made between him and his son on one side, and the people of Israel on the other, and everything was ready for the drawing of the lot; Saul put up to God the following petition, as knowing that though the lot is cast into the lap, the disposing of it is of the Lord:

give a perfect lot; or man, let it fall upon the guilty person, and let the innocent go free; the Targum is,

“cause it to come in truth;”

let truth and righteousness take place; let the right man be found out, and taken; the petition seems to be too arrogant and presumptuous, and insinuates as if the Lord did not always dispose the lot aright:

and Saul and Jonathan were taken; the lot being cast, it fell upon them:

but the people escaped; from the lot, and appeared to be innocent, clear of any blame; so that it was not the sin they had been guilty of, in eating flesh with the blood, which was the cause that no answer was returned.

Ver. 42. *And Saul said, cast [lots] between me and Jonathan my son*, etc.]. Which showed his regard strict justice, and that he had no consciousness of guilt in himself, and should not spare his own son if found guilty:

and Jonathan was taken: the lot fell upon him, which was so directed, that his ignorance of his father's charge and oath might appear; and that the affection of the people might be discovered; and that a regard is to be had to the orders and commands of princes, and obedience to be yielded to them in all in which conscience is not concerned, though they may be grievous; and to bring Saul to a sense of rashness in making such an oath, which brought his own son into so much danger.

Ver. 43. *Then Saul said to Jonathan, tell me what thou hast done*, etc.] What sin he had committed, the lot having fallen on him, and found him out:

and Jonathan told him; the whole of the matter, all the truth, without any reserve:

and said, I did but take a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand; he speaks of the fact as a trivial thing, as if it was not deserving of death, though he was willing to submit to it; yet it seems strange he should say nothing of his ignorance of the charge and oath of Saul, and plead that in excuse of it; though Josephus^{f287} makes him to take notice of it: and, "lo, I must die"; am condemned to die, as the Targum; for which he was prepared and ready, being willing to testify an entire subjection to his father's authority and will. Josephus^{f288} represents him speaking with a generosity and greatness of soul, after this manner,

"death is most sweet to me, which is for the sake of maintaining thy piety and religion; and after so glorious a victory, it is the greatest consolation to me to leave the Hebrews conquerors of the Philistines."

Ver. 44. *And Saul answered, God do so and more also*, etc.] A form of an oath imprecating evils upon him more and greater than he chose to mention, see the like form in (⁴⁰¹⁷Ruth 1:17), though Abarbinel thinks this is not the form of an oath, but an asseveration of a curse that would befall him; as that God would not answer him when he inquired of him, and that he would add to do so again and again, if he died not:

for thou shall surely die, Jonathan; such words from a father must be very striking to a son, and argue a want of paternal affection in Saul, that could call his son by his name, and deliver such a speech unto him in so strong a manner.

Ver. 45. *And the people said unto Saul*, etc.] Hearing such words, and filled with grief, pity, and sympathy for Jonathan, as Josephus^{f289} observes:

shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? no, he shall not; what, such a man as he die, who, under God, has been the instrument of so great deliverance, who first began it himself with one man only with him, and has proceeded in it to the finishing of it?

God forbid: this shall not be so; they speak of it with the utmost abhorrence and detestation, as a shocking piece of cruelty and ingratitude, unheard of, and not to be paralleled:

as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; as Saul swore he should die, they also swear he should not, expressing their firm resolution to stand by him, and preserve his life; and so far should it be from him to have his life taken away, that an hair of his head should not be touched, or the least injury done to his person; for though they had yielded a ready obedience to all the orders and commands of Saul, which were distressing to themselves, they were determined to oppose him in this case of his son:

for he hath wrought with God this day; God has been with him, assisted him to do great things for Israel, and therefore should not die for a thing so trivial; and it being not done in disobedience to his father, nor in contempt of him, but through pure ignorance, as some of them well knew; so the Targum,

“for it is known before the Lord, that in ignorance he did it this day:”

so the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not; not by force, but by their resolution and importunity; or “redeemed” him^{f290}, by exposing their own lives to danger in opposing their king, and by their petitions to him for him; and, as Josephus says^{f291}, by their prayers to God for him, that his fault might be forgiven.

Ver. 46. *Then Saul went up from following the Philistines*, etc.] Returned home to his own city, finding that he could get no answer from the Lord, whether he should pursue further or not, and losing the time and opportunity of doing it, by examining into the affair of his son, and casting lots to find it out:

and the Philistines went to their own place; their country and cities, such of them as remained, who were not cut off by their own and the sword of the Israelites. Josephus ^{f292} says, Saul killed about 60,000 of them. It seems to be the will of God that they should not now be utterly destroyed, that they might be a rod of correction in his hand, to chastise the people of Israel hereafter.

Ver. 47. *So Saul took the kingdom over Israel*, etc.] Which seemed to be almost taken from him when he was shut up in Gibeah, and the Philistines ravaged his country at pleasure; but now, having obtained a victory over them, he recovered his kingdom, and reassumed his power and authority; or he was now strengthened in it, as Kimchi interprets it; the people seeing that he succeeded in his wars with their enemies, they readily submitted to his government without any hesitation, and obeyed his commands; so the Targum,

“Saul prospered in the kingdom over Israel;”

and, according to Abarbanel, these words will admit of another sense, that whereas, after he was anointed and made king, he followed the herd, and attended rustic affairs; but now, after this victory over the Philistines, he took upon him the state and majesty of a king, and no more concerned himself with his farm and cattle, but betook himself wholly to regal and military affairs, as follows:

and fought against all his enemies on every side; who invaded his kingdom from different quarters; he defended himself against them, and preserved his kingdom:

against Moab, and against the children of Ammon; who lay to the east of him:

and against Edom; which was on the southern border of his land:

and against the king of Zobah; a part of Syria, which was to the north of the land of Israel, and was near Damascus, (see ^{<1018B>}2 Samuel 8:3,5), and, according to Benjamin of Tudela ^{f293}, the same with Haleb, or Aleppo, There never were but two kings of it, Rehob and Hadadezer, who lived in the reigns of Saul and David, (^{<1018B>}2 Samuel 8:3)

and against the Philistines; who were on the western border of the land of Canaan:

and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them; disturbed and disquieted them, and made them very uneasy; he terrified and distressed them; the Targum is, he “condemned” them, he treated them as wicked and ungodly persons, and punished them as such.

Ver. 48. *And he gathered an host*, etc.] A large army; for after the battle with the Ammonites he disbanded his army, and sent them home, retaining only 3000 men, and these deserted him to six hundred, which were all the men he had with him, when he fought last with the Philistines; but now, finding he had enemies on every side of him, he gathered a numerous host to defend his country against them, and particularly to attack the people next mentioned:

and he smote the Amalekites; a people that Israel, by the law of God, were bound to destroy, and blot out their name; a particular account of his expedition against them is given in the following chapter:

and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them; the nations before mentioned, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians, and Philistines.

Ver. 49. *And the sons of Saul were Jonathan*, etc.] Who seems to be his firstborn, of whom, his valour and success, we read in this and the preceding chapter:

and Ishui; the same with Abinadab, (^{
}1 Chronicles 8:33 9:39) for he had two names:

and Melchishua; and besides these three there was another, whose name was Ishbosheth, sometimes called Eshbaal, (^{
}2 Samuel 2:8 ^{
}1 Chronicles 8:33) who succeeded him in the kingdom; for which reason Abarbinel thinks he is not mentioned here, because he was a king; though it is generally supposed the reason why these only are named is, because they went out to war with him, and died with him, but this did not; he had other children by a concubine, or secondary wife, whose name was Rizpah, not mentioned here, (^{
}2 Samuel 21:8),

and the names of his two daughters were these, the name of the firstborn Merab; who was afterwards married to Adriel the Meholathite, (^{
}1 Samuel 18:19) and the name of the younger Michal; who became the wife of David, (^{
}1 Samuel 18:27).

Ver. 50. *And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz,* etc.] Who very probably was the mother of all the above children, and therefore taken notice of; and Abarbinel conjectures that Ishbosheth was not a son of her's, but the son of Saul by another wife, and which he takes to be another reason why he is not mentioned here; but though Saul had a concubine, we nowhere read of his having another wife:

and the name of the captain of his host was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle; not Abner, but Ner, was Saul's uncle; for Kish the father of Saul, and Ner, were brothers, as Josephus^{f294} says, and as appears from the next verse; and Abner was first cousin to Saul, whom he raised and advanced to be captain of his army, and a very valiant man he was: we hear of him again in this history, and in the beginning of David's reign.

Ver. 51. *And Kish was the father of Saul,* etc.] (see ~~1~~1 Samuel 9:1)

and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel; this Abiel was the father both of Kish and Ner, and the grandfather of Saul, (see ~~1~~1 Samuel 9:1).

Ver. 52. *And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul,* etc.] For notwithstanding the late victory over them, and slaughter made among them, they recovered themselves, and came out again to battle, and gave Saul a great deal of trouble, and he at last died in battle with them:

and when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he took him unto him; to be his bodyguard, as Josephus^{f295} says; or for soldiers and officers in his army, even such, as the same writer observes, that exceeded others in comeliness of person, and in largeness and height; such as were in some measure like himself, that were strong, able bodied men, and of courage, and valour, and fortitude of mind.