

Previously I have discussed what I have considered very interesting management policies from the top – these articles were called “Pharaoh management” because they related to two incidences (good and bad) recorded in the Bible about ancient Egyptian leaders.

Another such occasion is recorded in 1 Samuel 14, and describes a very poor policy put into place by King Saul. The Philistines were oppressing the Israelites, and Saul’s army (which only had two swords – one for him and one for his son Jonathan) was slowly vanishing as his men found places to hide.

But Jonathan, empowered by the Spirit of God, had started a rout with his armor bearer that could have led to a complete and lasting victory. But then the king created a very unwise rule: he bound the people under an oath that they not eat before evening. Saul’s thinking was that they could use the time to chase and kill their enemies. But in reality, they needed food for strength to do just that, and as a result they were too exhausted to pursue.

The food was readily available (honey was “oozing” out on the ground), so it would not have taken long to grab a taste and go on. Jonathan, who had not heard the new rule, ate some of it and was strengthened. When told of Saul’s policy, Jonathan recognized immediately that this was a mistake, and that had the men been allowed to eat they would have had a much greater victory.

So when the day was over, and the ban on eating was lifted, they were too exhausted to properly prepare their food, and ate meat together with the blood. This activity broke one of God’s rules, and Saul tried to counter this by acting as priest and offering the sacrifice for this sin.

Then Saul proposed that they continue to pursue the Philistines at night and kill them all. A real priest, however, suggested that they first inquire of God. God did not answer him that day. Saul assumed that there was (some other) sin in the camp, and it was revealed (from God) that Jonathan had broken the king’s (not God’s) rule.

Now Saul makes another poor decision, stating that Jonathan must die because he ate a little honey. Fortunately, the army saves Jonathan, for they saw the folly of executing the hero of the battle (and the king’s son).

But by this time the Philistines were long gone, for they had returned to their own land. The land never had rest from this enemy during the life of Saul, and one wonders that if he hadn’t established such a bad rule, they might have totally eliminated the army that ultimately claimed the lives of both Saul and Jonathan (and many other Israelites).

Those who are in authority sometimes think that they are as wise as they are powerful. But this is obviously not always the case. Management is not just exerting power, but using wisdom to help people achieve success.