

1 Samuel 14:1-23

Jonathan's Bold Attack

Jonathan is shown to be as great a warrior as his father Saul, but he also possessed a great faith to go along with his military skills. Saul lacked faith, and this was his downfall. It adds to the tragedy that Jonathan would never become king because of Saul's disobedience.

Saul had just been told by Samuel that his kingdom would not continue. Disheartened by this, he was waiting with only 600 men for the army to re-gather before taking action against the Philistines. Jonathan however - believing God's promise that "that one should chase a thousand" (**Deuteronomy 32:30, Joshua 23:10**) - was zealous to respond to the enemy, but knew his father would not approve, so he left without telling anyone. The outcome shows that Jonathan's impulse was from God.

1 Samuel 14:1 - "Now it came to pass upon a day, that Jonathan the son of Saul said unto the young man that bare his armor, Come, and let us go over to the Philistines' garrison, that is on the other side. But he told not his father."

An armor-bearer was not a servant but more like a young apprentice. (David was later Saul's armor bearer).

1 Samuel 14:2-3 - "And Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron: and the people that were with him were about six hundred men; And Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD'S priest in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people knew not that Jonathan was gone."

Apparently, Saul had called for the High Priest and the ark to be brought, hoping to have the High Priest inquire through the Urim and Thummim whether or how Israel should go into battle. Possibly he was hoping this would atone for his disobedience and mollify Samuel's displeasure. Without Samuel's blessing, he turned to the descendants of the disgraced sons of Eli. Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, is never mentioned again.

The Pomegranate Tree

Not every detail in scripture is a type. But mention of the pomegranate tree here stands out as unusual. (Who cares what kind of tree Saul was under?)

The pomegranate was one rabbinical candidate for the original fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Genesis. The rabbis noted it contains 613 seeds, representing the 613 commandments of the Law. It figured in the Feast of Tabernacles ceremony combined with the lulav.

By mentioning the pomegranate tree, the scripture could be inferring that Saul's disobedience and lack of faith was similar to Adam and Eve's disobedience in the

Garden - A foreshadowing of Saul's "fall" from kingship.

1 Samuel 14:4 - "And between the passages, by which Jonathan sought to go over unto the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp rock on the one side, and a sharp rock on the other side: and the name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh."

In a similar way, the mention of the names of these two craggy rocks show a contrast - Bozez means "white and glistening" while Seneth means "thorny, like an acacia."

The Targum says that the one signifies "lubrication" being smooth and slippery, and the other "treading" being more trodden and beaten.

It is unclear how these peaks figure in the story or where the Philistines and Jonathan stood, or if the names offer some spiritual type. But they remind me of Jesus' saying: "...wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (**Matthew 7:13-14**)

1 Samuel 14:6 - "And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armor, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few."

Mention of circumcision is meant to contrast the idolators from Israelites, who carry the sign of the covenant with all the promises Gd gave to Abraham. (which are in Christ now "yea and amen.") (**2 Corinthians 1:20**)

Jonathan's risk and faith displayed here are remarkable.

1 Samuel 14:7 - "And his armorbearer said unto him, Do all that is in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I am with thee according to thy heart."

i.e. he saw that Jonathan had envisioned in his heart a miraculous victory, and he trusted Jonathan's vision.

Jonathan encourages his armorbearer, then his armorbearer encourages him. Until this verse, Jonathan's attendant is referred to only as a "young man." Now, having displayed faith and courage, he is called the armorbearer. His identity had merged with his ministry.

This is the perfect display of encouragement, trust and aid by Jonathan's companion. Maybe that's the spiritual ministry or gift of an armorbearer - like Barnabas (Son of Encouragement), Paul's companion.

Jonathan Proposes a Sign

1 Samuel 14:8-10 - "Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto these men,

and we will discover ourselves unto them. If they say thus unto us, Tarry until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them. But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the LORD hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us."

In place of the Urim and Thummim of the High Priest - who was with Saul and they had no access to - Jonathan substitutes a sign to determine whether God would approve their action.

1 Samuel 14:11 - "And both of them discovered themselves unto the garrison of the Philistines: and the Philistines said, Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of the holes where they had hid themselves."

Spiritually, the contrast shown here is between either giving into fear from attacks of the enemy, hoping to avoid a confrontation and trusting in defenses or in hiding places other than God - or in faith preemptively confronting the danger head-on, trusting in God's promises. The lesson is similar to the spies' reaction to seeing the giants in the promised land - faith says "they shall be food for us."

The Philistines take the bait, and challenge them: "Come up to us, and we will shew you a thing."

Rashi - A fear inspired by the Holy One, Blessed be He, is in their heart, and they are afraid to move from their place.

1 Samuel 14:13-14 - "And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armorbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armorbearer slew after him. And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armorbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow."

This was a sizable detachment of the Philistine garrison, confronted by only two men. Their victory was obviously a miracle.

The metaphor of a plowed field suggests Jonathan and his companion reaped them, like a harvest, cutting them down as a scythe would cut down stalks of grain.

A Trembling in the Host

1 Samuel 14:15 - "And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling."

Jonathan's victory reverberated through the whole Philistine host. God even caused the earth to quake, as well as causing the hearts of the Philistines to tremble, and made them fight blindly among themselves. Saul heard the tumult and led his troops into the battle. And Israelites still in hiding heard of it and joined in. Even Israelites who had joined with the Philistines, either out of fear or prudence, turned on them to join their

countrymen in the fight.

1 Samuel 14:19 - "And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on and increased: and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand."

Saul decided to forego consulting the holy oracle because the battle was already engaged. Again, he was overcome by the urgency of the moment. The Midrash lists this as one of the five errors that cost Saul his kingdom. The rabbis see a reference to this in **1 Chronicles 10:14** - "... he did not seek [the counsel] of the Lord, and He killed him."

1 Samuel 14:23 - "So the LORD saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Bethaven."

The Lord saved Israel - not Saul or Jonathan.

The lesson here is that, like Jonathan's actions, our response of faith in a situation, which may seem like a small thing, can have huge repercussions. It can encourage our brethren, and with God's help bring others out of their hiding places, turn the tide of the war and even disrupt "beth-aven," the house of "self-exertion."

- **Zechariah 4:10** - "For who hath despised the day of small things?"

The rest of the chapter shows how Saul could throw a wet blanket on even this victory by making a foolish and rash vow.