

1 Samuel 14
September 4, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: How do you know when you're exercising **bold** faith in God? Think about circumstances that would require a high level of confidence on our part to move forward in **bold** faith. [Let people engage.]

Transition: Chapter 14 begins with Israel's army hiding among the caves of Gibeah after having been defeated in battle by the Philistines. You will recall from last week that Saul foolishly declared war against the Philistines who were "as numerous as the sand" (1 Sam. 13:5). Saul's soldiers knew they were over-matched, and they "quaked with fear" (1 Sam. 13:7). Saul's arrogance in going to battle against a superior enemy without seeking the LORD's will led to additional disobedience. Unwilling to wait for the prophet Samuel, the arrogant King Saul foolishly offered a sacrifice. In today's chapter, while Saul's army was hiding, the Philistines raided the neighboring villages confiscating all weapons. The Bible says that only two swords remained, and they were possessed by Saul and Jonathan. The rest of the army only had farm tools for weapons.

Jonathan makes a decision that has the potential to create a theological tension for us. When the chips are down, and you feel that you are in the one-down position, do we assert our faith in God or sit until our circumstances get better? What can we learn from Jonathan that we can apply in our own lives? Let's begin.

BOOK:

14 ¹ One day, Jonathan, son of Saul said to the young man bearing his armor, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side." But he did not tell his father.

² Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. With him were about six hundred men, ³ among whom was Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left.

⁴ On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez, and the other Seneh. ⁵ One cliff stood to the north toward Micmash, the other to the south toward Geba.

⁶ Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few."

⁷ "Do all that you have in mind," his armor-bearer said. "Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul."

⁸ Jonathan said, "Come, then; we will cross over toward the men and let them see us. ⁹ If they say to us, 'Wait there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are and not go up to them. ¹⁰ But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands."

¹¹ So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. “Look!” said the Philistines. “The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in.” ¹² The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, “Come up to us and we’ll teach you a lesson.”

So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.”

¹³ Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. ¹⁴ In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre. (the land plowed by a yoke of oxen in one day)

Israel Routs the Philistines

¹⁵ Then panic struck the whole army—those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties—and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God. (a terrible panic)

¹⁶ Saul’s lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions. ¹⁷ Then Saul said to the men who were with him, “Mustering the forces and see who has left us.” When they did, it was Jonathan and his armor-bearer who were not there.

¹⁸ Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ark of God.” (At that time it [ephod] was with the Israelites.) ¹⁹ While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.”

²⁰ Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords. ²¹ Those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to their camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. ²² When all the Israelites who had hidden in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were on the run, they joined the battle in hot pursuit. ²³ So the LORD rescued Israel that day, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.

Jonathan Eats Honey

²⁴ Now the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, “Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” So none of the troops tasted food.

²⁵ The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground. ²⁶ When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out, yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath. ²⁷ But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened (or his strength renewed). ²⁸ Then one of the soldiers told him, “Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, ‘Cursed be any man who eats food today!’ That is why the men are faint.”

²⁹ Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened (or his strength renewed) when I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰ How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?”

³¹ That day, after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Micmash to Aijalon, they were exhausted. ³² They pounced on the plunder and, taking sheep, cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them, together with the blood. ³³ Then someone said to Saul, “Look, the men are sinning against the LORD by eating meat that has blood in it.”

“You have broken faith,” he said. “Roll a large stone over here at once.”³⁴ Then he said, “Go out among the men and tell them, ‘Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the LORD by eating meat with blood still in it.’”

So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there.³⁵ Then Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first time he had done this.

³⁶ Saul said, “Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn and let us not leave one of them alive.”

“Do whatever seems best to you,” they replied.

But the priest said, “Let us inquire of God here.”

³⁷ So Saul asked God, “Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel’s hand?” But God did not answer him that day.

³⁸ Saul therefore said, “Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today.³⁹ As surely as the LORD who rescues Israel lives, even if it lies with my son Jonathan, he must die.” But not one of the men said a word.

⁴⁰ Saul then said to all the Israelites, “You stand over there; I and Jonathan my son will stand over here.”

“Do what seems best to you,” the men replied.

⁴¹ Then Saul prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, “Give me the right answer.” (Septuagint “Why have you not answered your servant today? If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, respond with Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with Thummim.”) And Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared.⁴² Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son.” And Jonathan was taken.

⁴³ Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.”

So Jonathan told him, “I merely tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now must I die?”

⁴⁴ Saul said, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan.”

⁴⁵ But the men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the LORD lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.

⁴⁶ Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own land.

⁴⁷ After Saul had assumed rule over Israel, he fought against their enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment on them (he was victorious).⁴⁸ He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them.

Saul’s Family

⁴⁹ Saul’s sons were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua. The name of his older daughter was Merab, and that of the younger was Michal.⁵⁰ His wife’s name was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of the commander of Saul’s army was Abner son of Ner, and Ner was Saul’s uncle.⁵¹ Saul’s father Kish and Abner’s father Ner were sons of Abiel.

⁵² All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

- He had little faith in himself, but great faith in God. It wasn't "I can win a great victory with God's help." It was "God can win a great victory through even me."

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Nothing restrains the Lord. We often believe that God is restrained one way or another. The truth is that our unbelief restrains God. Matthew 13:58 says, "Jesus did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." God's *power* is never restrained, but God's *will* may be restrained because of our unbelief. He may choose not to act until we partner with Him in trust. God had a trusting partner in Jonathan!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sa 13-15). Victor Books.

B. Pride (chap. 14).

Jonathan, Saul's son, was evidently a godly man; for the Lord gave him and his armor bearer a victory over the Philistines. Saul was only a spectator (vv. 16–18), but he then mustered his troops and shared in the victory. Unfortunately, however, Saul had uttered a foolish vow that day forbidding his soldiers to eat any food. How foolish to think that a sacrificial vow would give him victory when his heart was not right with God! He was later to learn, "To obey is better than to sacrifice." Jonathan knew nothing about this curse, so he went ahead and ate some honey and was strengthened (v. 27), and his example of practical wisdom encouraged the army to go ahead and eat after their victory (vv. 31–32). Alas, the Jews were so hungry they ate the meat with the blood (Lev. 17:10–14), which was far worse than breaking the vow. Saul tried to amend this by

offering the spoils as a sacrifice to God. When the army went to their next engagement, they sought the guidance of God but failed to get an answer. This led to Saul's discovery of Jonathan's disobedience, and the foolish king was going to kill his own son! How easy it is to be convicted about somebody else's sins! The people rescued Jonathan, but Saul's actions revealed the darkness of his heart. Trouble was soon to come. His pride would bring him low.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 1 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 446-447) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

5. JONATHAN'S PERIL (CHAP. 14)

14:1–14. With the resumption of the skirmish against the Philistines, **Saul** camped near the capital **Gibeah** (v. 2), with **about 600 men**. But **Jonathan** undertook a secret mission into the enemy camp itself near Micmash. On the way Jonathan and his **armor-bearer** passed between two cliffs named **Bozez** and **Seneh** (v. 4). As they came through the narrow crevice they were spotted by **the Philistines**, who challenged them to a contest (v. 12). Having undertaken his mission with confidence in **the LORD** (vv. 6, 10), **Jonathan** knew that he and his servant would prevail. Together they **killed some 20** of the enemy in a small field.

14:15–23. Jonathan's heroic encounter shocked and frightened the Philistines. **Saul's lookout** could see the enemy in flight. Knowing that this must have come about because of some Israelite involvement, the king checked to determine who among his troops had undertaken this independent action. **Jonathan and his armor-bearer** were missing.

Meanwhile **Ahijah** the priest (cf. v. 3) came bearing **the ark of the Lord** (vv. 18–19). **It was** still housed at Kiriath Jearim (7:1) but as a symbol of the presence of the Lord, it was summoned by Saul to the battle. When **Saul** saw that the Philistines were in total disarray, he ordered Ahijah to **withdraw his hand** (i.e., from the sacred lots, the Urim and Thummim, 14:19; cf. Ex. 28:29–30; 1 Sam. 14:40–42). The will of God was now clear so **Saul**, with Israelite defectors and refugees, achieved a great triumph (vv. 20–23).

14:24–48. Prior to this **Saul had** commanded all his men to fast until they had defeated the Philistines. As hungry as they were in the battle, they refused to eat anything, even some **honey** in the forest, for **they feared** the curse that attended their vow to fast. **Jonathan had not** known of the vow, **so** when **he** came across the honey he ate it and was immediately refreshed (**his eyes brightened**; cf. v. 29). The rest of Saul's army was so famished that after the victory they took the Philistine animals, slaughtered them, and ate them without proper draining of **the blood** (vv. 32–33; cf. Lev. 17:10–14). This so alarmed **Saul** that he hastily built **an altar** on which to offer a propitiatory sacrifice to the Lord (1 Sam. 14:35).

Saul then determined to pursue and **plunder** the **Philistines** further but could not get an **answer** from the Lord (v. 37). This meant to **Saul** that someone had violated the fast, and by means of the **lot** (i.e., the Urim and Thummim, vv. 41–42; cf. v. 19) he discovered it was his own **son Jonathan**. Only the interposition of Saul's **men** prevented Jonathan's execution (v. 45).

The major campaigns of **Saul** are listed in verses 47–48 and include victories over **Moab**, **Ammon**, **Edom ... Zobah** (the Arameans), **the Philistines**, and even **the Amalekites**, though his success over the latter was tempered by his lack of complete obedience to God (cf. 15:20–23).

14:49–52. The royal family consisted of Saul; his wife **Ahinoam**; his three **sons ... Jonathan, Ishvi** (not the same as Ish-Bosheth or Esh-Baal; cf. 1 Chron. 10:2 where Ishvi is the

same person as Abinadab), **and Malki-Shua**; his daughters **Merab** and **Michal** (David's first wife; cf. 1 Sam. 18:27); and **Abner**, who served as Saul's **commander** of the **army**.

Ishvi is probably not the same as Ish-bosheth because Ish-bosheth was apparently Saul's youngest son born after Saul began to reign. For that reason he is not listed in 1 Samuel 14:49 but is listed in the total list of Saul's sons in 1 Chronicles 8:33 (cf. comments on 2 Sam. 2:8). According to 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39 **Ner** was Saul's grandfather (Ner's son was **Kish** and Kish's **son** was **Saul**), but in 1 Samuel 14:50 Ner appears to be Saul's uncle and Abner his cousin. In 1 Chronicles Abner, though not mentioned, would be Saul's *uncle*, for Abner was Ner's son (1 Sam. 14:50). This seeming contradiction is eliminated by the Hebrew of 1 Samuel 14:50b, which says literally, "Abner son of Ner, uncle of Saul," with the understanding that the ambiguous "uncle of Saul" refers not to Ner but to Abner.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 114). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Although Israel had no weapons and were greatly outmanned, Jonathan courageously attacked the Philistines while Saul waited behind in Gibeah. The Philistines fell into disarray because of an earthquake, and Saul called for the ark to consult the Lord's guidance. Yet after he saw the Philistines panic all the more, he abandoned the inquiry and hurried to attack. In spite of Saul's impulsive actions, God gave them a great victory.

Saul's pride and hasty decision to restrict Israel from eating during the battle jeopardized his armies' strength and his son's life. Saul built an altar and inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him because of his unbelief. By casting lots, Saul discovered that Jonathan had unknowingly broken Saul's ban of eating. The men of the camp refused Saul's order to execute Jonathan, saving him from Saul's foolish oath.

Because of his disobedience, Saul never totally defeated the Philistines. In spite of his sin, God graciously gave him victories and a large family.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). *1 Samuel*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (p. 171). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Jonathan Escapes Death (1 Sam. 14:1–52)

The passage—This chapter contains an interesting story which clearly reveals the practical nature of Israelite theology. The story itself tells of an Israelite victory over the garrison at Michmash. The battle began with Jonathan's heroic attack on a small military outpost (vv. 1–20) and ended with the Philistines fleeing from the field of battle. Somehow, Saul's forces were unable to follow up their early successes as they should. Herein lay the theological problem.

Israel's triumph over the Philistines, surprising though it was, could be explained. Hebrew theologians had long pictured God going to battle for his people (Josh. 1:5; 6:1–27; etc.). If he had given the first victory, however, why didn't he continue sweeping the Philistines away? The standard answer and the most obvious one was that an Israelite had sinned and, thus, incurred the divine wrath (Josh. 7).

None of the principal characters was completely innocent. Saul had entered the battle at Michmash without awaiting divine counsel (v. 19). Also, in the course of the fighting, he impetuously invoked a curse which deprived his men of the strength they needed to pursue the enemy (vv. 24–31). Likewise, the people as a whole had incurred a ritual guilt by improperly

disposing of the blood of animals they had killed for food (vv. 32–34); see Lev. 1:5; 17:10–15). Last and not least, there was Jonathan who had inadvertently broken “his father’s” oath by eating a bit of honey (v. 27).

Now the problem. What was to be done when the sacred lot settled on the one whose offense appeared the most innocuous, indeed who up to this point had been God’s hero of the hour? Saul was prepared to execute Jonathan out of an awareness of divine obligation. The people, however, recognized that this solution would not adequately reflect the justice which is inherent in God’s nature. Unconsciously, they relied more on their own innate spiritual perception than on any external means of understanding the divine will. They refused to allow any harm to come to Jonathan and decided that he should be ransomed instead. Thus, the judgment of the sacred lot was not openly defied, and yet the cause of justice was served.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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