

1 Samuel 14a

As we summarize these initial verses, what was Jonathan up to (vv. 1-14)? Hunting. He was off to engage any Philistines he could find. He considered the Philistines to be an insult to his God. Armed with trust in God and courage, with his armor bearer at his side, Jonathan attacked the Philistines confident that God would be on his side even in the face of insurmountable odds. He was obedient to God's command to drive out the enemy.

Every officer in the Israelite army had an "assistant" known as an *armor bearer*. Armor bearers in ancient times were very important. They would not only carry the armor and weapons of the officer but the armor bearer would help the officer in fighting. They had to be brave and loyal, since the lives of their masters often depended on them. God would later raise up a special armor bearer for King Saul.....a young man named David.

When Jonathan took off to go hunting, no one was aware that he had left (vv. 1, 3). What does that tell us about Jonathan? He did not go over to the Philistine garrison out of a desire for personal glory. If that had been his motivation, he would have told at least a few people that he had gone over.

What was Saul up to (v. 2)? Saul remained in Gibeah, evidently on the defensive. His comfortable position under a pomegranate tree (cf. 22:6) in secure Gibeah, surrounded by his soldiers, contrasts with Jonathan's vulnerable and difficult position with only the support of his armor bearer. Jonathan was launching out in faith to obey God, but Saul was resting comfortably and failing to seek out God's will.¹

How would you characterize Jonathan's attitude (v. 6)? It did not matter that there were only two of them. Jonathan's confidence was: "*Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.*" Jonathan's faith would be rewarded.

For Jonathan, this was more than a reconnaissance expedition. He trusted/wanted to see what God could do through two men who were willing to trust him and step out boldly. He put himself in a position where he could be used by God. A position which would require him to depend solely on God for success.

By many or by few: What did it matter? Who cares about the odds or the point spread when God is on your side? The odds were already against Israel. Did it matter if it was a million-to-one or a thousand-to-one? Numbers or odds did not restrain God, but unbelief could. Jonathan never read the New Testament, but he had a Romans 8:31 heart: "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*"

How would you characterize the armor bearer's response (v. 7)? Loyal, trusting, committed, courageous.

In contrast to Saul, Jonathan had a true perception of God's role as the leader and deliverer of His people (v. 6). He viewed the Philistines as unbelievers under divine judgment, whom God wanted exterminated. He believed that God would work for His people in response to faith, as He had done repeatedly in Israel's history. He also had learned that superior numbers were not necessary for God to give victory in battle (cf. 17:47; Judges 7:4, 7).²

What was Jonathan's plan (vv. 8-10)? In his step of faith, Jonathan wanted to know if he was really being led by God. So he proposed a test: they would show themselves to the Philistine guards. If they responded one way Jonathan would know that God wanted them to fight and win the battle. If the guards responded another way Jonathan would know that God did not want them to fight this day.

When God gave Jonathan the green light to attack the Philistines, what was the outcome of the encounter (vv. 11-14)? Jonathan and his armor bearer killed some 20 of the enemy.

In the bigger picture, how did God engage at this point (v. 15) He sent a panic among the entire Philistine army and He caused an earthquake which brought about great confusion in the Philistine camp which undoubtedly exacerbated the panic.

When Saul's lookouts noticed the confusion and the enemy melting away and reported it to Saul, what did Saul do (v. 17)? Knowing that this must have come about because of some Israelite involvement, the king took attendance to determine who among his troops had undertaken this independent action. Jonathan and his armor-bearer were missing.³

What was Saul's next move (vv. 18-19)? He promptly called for Ahijah the priest to bring the ark so that he could inquire of the Lord as to his next move. But Saul quickly changed his mind when the tumultuous noise among the enemy increased; he told the priest to withdraw his hand—i.e., to stop seeking the Lord's will. He rallied his forces, evidently concluding that he did not need divine guidance to know that the Lord was delivering the Philistines into his hands.

When Saul and his men engaged in the battle, what did they find (v. 20)? The Philistines were fighting each other. No doubt because of the panic God had sent (cf. Judges 7:22).

Who joined Saul in the battle (vv. 21-22)? Those Hebrews who had previously defected also noticed that God was fighting for Israel. They turned on their Philistine masters, and even the men who had been hiding in the mountains of Ephraim found new courage to join the battle. The tide of battle had turned. Everyone wants to fight when victory is almost won, but where are the Jonathans to make the initial confrontation?⁴

Who won the battle that day (v. 23)? The Lord.....not Saul.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel, 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 102.

² Ibid., 104.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 446.

⁴ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 306.