

1 Samuel Chapter 14

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."

“Jonathan” was the eldest son of Saul, the first king of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin. Initially, Jonathan served as Saul’s right-hand man and lieutenant (verses 11, 13-14; 13:2 where he commanded one thousand men). Later, Jonathan became such a close friend of David that he not only supported David against his father (Chapters 18-19), but relinquished his undoubted claim to become Saul’s successor in favor of David (Chapter 20). Finally, Jonathan died at Gilboa during Saul’s last campaign against the Philistines (Chapter 31). Jonathan was a man of fine character, whose moral integrity was matched by resolution and endurance. He was athletic and brave (verse 13; 2 Sam. 1:22-27). Jonathan will always be remembered for befriending David. Jonathan and David represent the highest ideal of Hebrew friendship. Jonathan’s descendants were famous soldiers who were, like their ancestors, skilled at shooting with the bow (1 Chron. 8:40).

“The other side”: Jonathan and his armor-bearer left the Israeli camp to approach the Philistine outpost.

Jonathan seemed to be much braver than Saul. We do not know specifically what day this happens. It was however, after the happenings (in chapter 13). Jonathan told no one, but his armor-bearer. It would be much easier for the two of them to slip close to the Philistines without being detected. He probably did not tell his father, because his father would have stopped him. I would believe the LORD put this idea in the heart of Jonathan.

1 Samuel 14:2 "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;"

“Pomegranate tree”: These trees are common to Israel’s landscape, normally growing as low shrubs with spreading branches. This may have been a particularly large one.

It seems that, Saul was relaxing with his men in Gibeah. More specifically, they were in Migron. It seems Saul was sitting in the shade under the pomegranate tree. 600 of the men were with Saul. They were probably near enough to help, if Jonathan needed them. Saul did not know where Jonathan was, but God knew.

1 Samuel 14:3 "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."

“Ahiah”: “Brother of the Lord.” He was the great-grandson of Eli the High-Priest, another house which had been rejected of the Lord (2:22-36).

“Wearing an ephod”: The ephod was a white garment worn by the priest that was attached to the body by a belt. A breastpiece worn over the ephod had pouches that were used by the priests to carry certain devices used in determining the will of God, i.e., the Urim and Thummim, or sacred lots (see note on Exodus 28:5-13). Apparently, Saul chose not to use it for seeking the Lord’s will.

We remember from a previous lesson that Phinehas was one of the two sons of Eli, who sinned greatly against God. We remember that, Ichabod received his name, because of the sins of his father. Ahitub had to be a younger brother. Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, had been restored to the priesthood at this time. He had on the ephod, so he must have been high priest. "Ahiah" means brother of Jehovah. Ahiah was in charge of the Ark. The Ark was kept at Shiloh. They had no idea that Jonathan had gone to the Philistines.

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."

“Bozez ... Seneh”: Hebrew terms. Bozez may mean “Slippery.” Seneh means “thorny”.

These two rocks seemed to guard the entrance to this garrison. It seemed this was a natural garrison protected by high rocks on three sides.

1 Samuel 14:5 "The forefront of the one [was] situate northward over against Michmash, and the other southward over against Gibeah."

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.

These were two lookout stations for the entire garrison.

Verse 6-17: Calling the Philistines “uncircumcised” was a term of contempt emphasizing the covenant relationship Israel enjoyed with God (Gen. 17:10-14). Jonathan trusted God, while Saul was more concerned about the number of men in his army (13:15).

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."

“Uncircumcised”: This was a derogatory term used by the Israelites to describe the Philistines.

“By many or by few”: Jonathan demonstrated the great faith that should have been demonstrated by the king (13:11).

Jonathan had great faith in the LORD. He knew that he and his armor-bearer would be a majority, if the LORD was with them. The fact that Jonathan mentioned them being uncircumcised, shows that he believes God is with him and not with the Philistines. The Israelites had a covenant agreement with the LORD. Jonathan has no fear that the LORD will be with him and his armor-bearer. Two can put ten thousand to flight, if the two are in the perfect will of God.

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

He will do 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 would 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.

Jonathan's armor-bearer had confidence that what Jonathan said was true. If Jonathan is brave enough to do this, certainly the armor-bearer will go with him and help.

Verses 8-10: Jonathan's combat strategy was formulated in terms of waiting for the proper sign of divine approval (see the note on 10:2-6).

1 Samuel 14:8 "Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto [these] men, and we will discover ourselves unto them."

They will go 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.

These two could easily go in undetected. A whole army would have been seen immediately. We see from this, that one person can sometimes restore the confidence of a whole people by the actions he takes. Even in our land today, one or two people could start a revival which would sweep across our land. We just need to have the courage to step out and do it. The men will not know they are there, until they want them to know it.

1 Samuel 14:9 "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."

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.

"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 defense 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; or forward, to expose themselves to too much danger from the garrison, they appearing to be bold and intrepid.

1 Samuel 14:10 "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."

"A sign unto us": This was an unusual manner for determining the will of the Lord, but not with similar precedent, e.g., Gideon's fleece (Judges 6:36-40). Jonathan was allowed to determine the will of God by the reaction of his enemies.

This is like laying a fleece before the LORD. What the Philistines say, when they see Jonathan and his armor-bearer, will determine whether Jonathan will stay where he is, or attack them. If they say come up to them, this is a sign from God that Jonathan is to attack.

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."

"Hebrews": The oldest term used by Gentile nations to refer to the people of Israel.

"The holes where they had hid themselves": Many of the Israelites were hiding in fear over the battle. Apparently they thought Jonathan and his armor bearer were Israelite deserters coming to the Philistine side.

This just means that Jonathan and his armor-bearer made themselves obvious to the Philistines. The Philistines think they have come to surrender. They laugh about Jonathan and his armor-bearer coming out of the holes where they had been hidden.

1 Samuel 14:12 "And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armor-bearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will show you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armor-bearer, Come up after me: for the LORD hath delivered them into the hand of Israel."

The guards that were set to watch the garrison who were crying out 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 armor-bearer, 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 dare 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 was seeking not his own private interest and glory, but the public good. To which he was ready to ascribe not to his own valor and courage, but to the power, kindness, and goodness of God.

Jonathan is a brave man, who has confidence in the LORD. What they had intended to frighten Jonathan with was, in fact, the signal from God that he would win this battle.

1 Samuel 14:13 "And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armor-bearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armor-bearer slew after him."

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 caught them 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 crawling on all four, 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 very slippery.

"And his armor-bearer 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 armor-bearer slew after him": Jonathan, coming upon them 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 armor-bearer following, also put them to death, and so between them both made quick riddance of them.

These men that were taunting Jonathan and his armor-bearer could have thrown a rock off the side of the cliff they were climbing, and killed them both, before they made it to the top. They were making sport out of this whole thing. After all, there was just Jonathan and his armor-bearer against all of these men. We see that Jonathan killed those in front of him and the armor-bearer killed those behind him.

1 Samuel 14:14 "And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were a half acre of land, [which] a yoke [of oxen might plow]."

That first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, was about twenty men, within about a half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow. This was a very ancient mode of measurement, and it still subsists in the East. The men who saw them scrambling up the rock had been surprised and killed, and the spectacle of twenty corpses would suggest to others that they were attacked by a numerous force. The success of the adventure was aided by a panic that struck the enemy, produced both by the sudden surprise and the shock of an earthquake. The feat was begun and achieved by the faith of Jonathan, and the issue was of God.

These two men (Jonathan and his armor-bearer), came in the name of the Lord. Two men killed twenty men. It seemed their bodies were scattered over a half acre.

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."

"The earth quaked": The earthquake affirms the fact that divine intervention aided Jonathan and his armor-bearer in their raid. The earthquake caused a panic among the Philistines. God would have intervened on Saul's behalf in such a manner had he chosen to be faithfully patient (13:9).

There was widespread terror in the camp when it was told what happened to the garrison. They probably thought the entire army of Israel was coming against them. They had probably forgotten about an attack from Jonathan and his men. This was totally unexpected.

1 Samuel 14:16 "And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down [one another]."

It appears, in their fright, they turned on each other. Saul's watchmen have now suddenly become aware of the tumult. It seems to them, as if Israel is winning. They have no idea who of Israel is fighting however.

1 Samuel 14:17 "Then said Saul unto the people that [were] with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer [were] not [there]."

When this panic which was taking place in the Philistine army was reported to King Saul, he naturally inquired as to what had caused it, knowing that he, as general-in-chief, had given no directions to any of his men to attack the enemy. In the little Israelites' force, when the roll was called, it was soon discovered who was missing.

"Behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer 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.

This numbering is not a count, but a calling of names, until they find who is not with them. Saul possibly thought someone had mustered a small group from his men, and gone and done this thing. To his surprise, it is Jonathan and his armor-bearer only.

1 Samuel 14:18 "And Saul said unto Ahiah, Bring hither the ark of God. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel."

“Ark of God”: The LXX (Septuagint) reads “ephod” instead of “Ark,” and this seems more likely since the Ark was at Kirjath-jearim and the language of 14:19 better fits the ephod (verse 3) than the Ark.

We remember that, the Ark of God was cared for by the priest. This is possibly speaking of the high priest coming wearing the ephod. God spoke to the people through the Urim and the Thummim of the high priest. Perhaps the Ark was brought, so the people would recognize the answer from God.

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."

“Withdraw thine hand”: Saul, in a hurry, ordered the priest to stop the inquiry into the will of the Lord.

Saul did not wait to hear what the will of God was in this, before he acted. Saul had done the wrong thing when he offered the burnt offering, not willing to wait for Samuel. Now he is making the same mistake again, by not waiting to hear from God through the priest. His impatience costs him.

1 Samuel 14:20 "And Saul and all the people that [were] with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle: and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, [and there was] a very great discomfiture."

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 1 Sam. 13:2).

"And they came to the battle": To the field of battle, the place where the army of the Philistines had 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.

"Very great discomfiture": Noise, tumult, confusion, slaughter, and destruction.

This is not speaking of the Israelites' swords, because Saul was the only one of this group that had one. This just means that the Philistines turned their swords on each other and killed their

own army. Saul's army had no swords or spears. Of course, they could have taken some from the fallen Philistines.

1 Samuel 14:21 "Moreover the Hebrews [that] were with the Philistines before that time, which went up with them into the camp [from the country] round about, even they also [turned] to be with the Israelites that [were] with Saul and Jonathan."

“Hebrews”: This is a reference to Israelite deserters or mercenaries.

Jonathan's bravery caused these frightened Israelites, who had gone with the Philistines, to return to the service of Jonathan. They had not fought with the Philistines against Israel. They had been like slaves to the Philistines.

1 Samuel 14:22 "Likewise all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, [when] they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle."

“Hid themselves in Mount Ephraim”: A large and partially wooded area north and west of Michmash.

It seems the bravery of Jonathan had encouraged the bravery of them all. Those who had hidden, so they would not have to fight, when the army of the Philistines came, are now coming out of hiding so they can share in the victory.

Verses 24-33: The army, ravenous because of Saul's foolish “oath”, disobeyed the covenant laws regarding the proper preparation of meat (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 7:26; 17:10-14). Saul's impetuous behavior led the nation to sin.

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

“So the Lord saved Israel” The writer uses similar language to that of the Exodus. In spite of their disobedient king, God was faithful to deliver Israel from her enemies.

“Beth-aven” (see note on 13:2).

The one thing we must notice above is who won the war for them. It was the LORD. The LORD saved Israel because of Jonathan's faith.

1 Samuel Chapter 14 Questions

1. Who did Jonathan tell to come with him, to the Philistine's garrison?

2. Why did Jonathan not tell Saul, where he was going?
3. Who put this thought into the mind of Jonathan?
4. Where was Saul, when this happened?
5. How many men were with Saul?
6. Who was wearing an ephod?
7. Who was Phinehas?
8. Why was his son named Ichabod?
9. What does "Ahiah" mean?
10. What does "Bozez" mean?
11. What does "Seneh" mean?
12. These two rocks guarded the entrance to the _____.
13. What did Jonathan call the Philistines in verse 6?
14. Who did Jonathan have faith in?
15. Two can put _____ to flight, if the two are in the perfect will of God.
16. Did his armor-bearer go willingly with Jonathan?
17. When would the Philistines see them?
18. How can we relate to these two today?
19. How will Jonathan know whether the LORD wants him to go against the Philistines, or not?
20. Why did the Philistines not roll a rock down the embankment, and kill them?
21. How many did Jonathan and his armor-bearer kill in the first slaughter?
22. When the Philistines heard what happened at the garrison, how did they react?
23. What did the Philistines think was happening?
24. In their fright, they turned on _____.
25. Who discovered what was going on and told Saul?
26. What did Saul do, to determine who had gone out to fight?

27. What did Saul tell Ahaiah to bring?
28. How did the LORD speak to the people?
29. Why did Saul not wait to hear the will of God?
30. Who came to help Jonathan?
31. Who returned to help?
32. The _____ saved Israel that day.