

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

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

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;

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.

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.

5 The forefront of the one *was* situate northward over against Michmash, and the other southward over against Gibeah.

6 And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, 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.

7 And his armourbearer said unto him, Do all that *is* in thine heart: turn thee; behold, I *am* with thee according to thy heart.

8 Then said Jonathan, Behold, we will pass over unto *these* men, and we will discover ourselves unto them.

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.

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.

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.

12 And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armourbearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will shew you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armourbearer, Come up after me: for the LORD hath delivered them into the hand of Israel.

13 And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armourbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armourbearer slew after him.

Jonathan Attacks the Philistine Outpost

Lesson Text: I Samuel 14:1-13

Related Scriptures: I Samuel 13:15-23; 14:14-23;
Psalms 33:12-22; 135:5-7; Romans 8:31-39

TIME: 1041 B.C.

PLACES: Gibeah; pass at Michmash

GOLDEN TEXT—“And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over: . . . for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few” (I Samuel 14:6).

Lesson Exposition

A SECRET RECONNAISSANCE— I Sam. 14:1-5

As today's text opens, we find the Israelites under King Saul threatened by an overwhelming number of their Philistine enemies. This massive force had so panicked Saul that it led to his first major act of disobedience to the Lord—the decision to offer a sacrifice on his own (I Sam. 13:5-12). That lapse of faith would eventually cost him his kingdom (vss. 13-14), but for now the Philistine threat still had to be faced.

The Philistines had gathered in force at Michmash on Israel's central north-south ridge (vs. 5) and remained there after Samuel left Saul at Gilgal (vss. 15-16). Saul and his men made their way back to his hometown of Gibeah, less than five miles southwest of Michmash. Philistine raids continued (vs. 17), and the Israelite situation was especially dire with an acute shortage of weaponry (vss. 18-22). Things looked bleak for Saul and his men.

It was at this point that Saul's son

Jonathan undertook an unexpected action that would prove decisive in turning the picture from gloom to glory.

The military situation (I Sam. 14:1-3). The last verse of chapter 13 notes that the Philistines sent a small detachment to man an outpost at the pass close by Michmash. This outpost guarded a narrow approach from the east through a steep ravine. Although Saul and his men were now in Gibeah, the Philistines apparently were taking no chances at being approached by any forces, however small, still left in the Jordan Valley to the east.

But the Philistine garrison had not escaped Jonathan's notice; indeed, it aroused his curiosity. One day he suggested to his young armor-bearer that the two of them go check it out. The outpost was “on the other side,” that is, on the far side of the steep ravine.

The writer is careful to note again that Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah, camped under a pomegranate tree at Migron (14:2). Six hun-

dred men were still with him. A further comment observes that among these was Ahiah (commonly spelled Ahijah), the great-grandson of the high priest Eli, who had served at Shiloh. More significantly for events yet to come, it is stressed that no one in Saul's camp knew that Jonathan had departed.

The challenge of the terrain (I Sam. 14:4-5). The path Jonathan chose for his reconnaissance mission was not an easy one. He could have crossed a wide pass farther to the west, but he chose a more difficult route that encountered the ravine and its cliffs (each called "a sharp rock" in verse 4) to the east. To reach the Philistine outpost, Jonathan had to descend one cliff ("a sharp rock") and climb the opposite one. These cliffs were formidable enough to be given names: Bozez and Seneh.

AN AUDACIOUS PLAN— I Sam. 14:6-10

Jonathan's bold suggestion (I Sam. 14:6-7). Jonathan was not content to merely gather intelligence on the Philistine garrison. In any case, when they came within sight of the outpost he made his aim clear. Jonathan suggested to his armor-bearer that they go across and pay the uncircumcised garrison a visit. He wanted a confrontation!

Jonathan's next words in verse 6 make clear what he intended and reveal his robust faith: "It may be that the Lord will work for us." His use of "may be" does not indicate doubt in God's ability but rather shows a mature faith that avoids presumption.

Undergirding Jonathan's optimistic outlook on the situation was a bedrock conviction: "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." Numbers meant nothing to Jonathan. God's involvement was the deciding factor.

The young man who served as Jonathan's armor-bearer may not have pos-

sessed the same degree of conviction as Jonathan, but he had sufficient faith to agree to the plan without flinching. We read of no attempt to get Jonathan to rethink his idea; there is no whiff of reluctance or even hesitation.

Jonathan's tactical appraisal (I Sam. 14:8-10). Having secured his companion's commitment, Jonathan proceeded to lay out a brief plan of action. It was quite simple, really. Jonathan proposed that they cross the ravine—"we will pass over unto these men" (vs. 8)—and let the Philistines catch sight of them—"we will discover ourselves unto them." From what immediately follows, it appears that he expected to be spotted when they reached the bottom of the ravine.

When this stage was reached, the next step for the two men depended on the response of the enemy. Jonathan envisioned two possible responses, and he would use whichever one was given to gauge the Lord's will in the whole enterprise.

As Jonathan explained to his companion, if the Philistines told them to wait for their men to come down to them, they would not proceed any farther.

The alternative was simplicity personified. If the Philistines challenged the two men to come up to them, they would go up. But as simple as this option appears on the surface, there is more to it underneath. Jonathan was not really basing his course of action on what the Philistines wanted. He was trusting that their invitation was a sign from the Lord, an invitation from *Him* to go up and fight the enemy.

If the Philistines called for Jonathan and his servant to climb up to their position, it would clearly not be for a social gathering. They would have a quick death in mind for the two men.

That was how things looked on the human level, but Jonathan did not see

it that way. He looked beyond what is seen and discerned the Lord's hand in the situation. A Philistine call to come up the cliff would indeed be a death summons, but it would backfire on the challengers. The enemy would be signing their own death warrant.

That was the eye of faith that Jonathan exercised. The taunting Philistine threat would be the very sign from God that he sought.

How different this is from the ordinary human reaction! When faced with opposition and ridicule, most of us take it as our cue to retreat, to abandon any plans we may have had for advancing God's kingdom, to stay home and be silent.

A CONCLUSIVE VICTORY— I Sam. 14:11-13

The enemy challenge (I Sam. 14:11-12a). The Philistine response was exactly as Jonathan had hoped. When the two men moved out into the open and allowed themselves to be seen, the garrison erupted in derision. "Look! The Hebrews have crawled out of the holes they were hiding in" was the gist of their taunt.

The statement of scorn was immediately followed by the invitation Jonathan was waiting for: "Come up to us, and we will shew you a thing" (vs. 12).

The iron blow of faith (I Sam. 14:12b-13). The derisive challenge of the Philistines held no intimidation for Jonathan. Their words were music to his ears, the clinching sign from the Lord. He told his armor-bearer to stay right behind him as they ascended the cliff.

So Jonathan ascended the cliff with his armor-bearer right behind him. Both hands and feet were fully occupied in the effort of climbing, which ostensibly would have made them easy targets for the enemy. The natural, expected result of their operation would be a quick demise.

But that did not happen. When the

two reached the top, they immediately engaged the surprised Philistines and had a field day killing enemy soldiers right and left. The hand of God was on these two men who trusted Him in the venture. They trusted Him enough to stake their lives on it, and He honored their faith.

The verse beyond our text, I Samuel 14:14, tells us that Jonathan and his servant dispatched some twenty enemy soldiers that day. Perhaps a few escaped—just enough to spread panic in the enemy camp (vs. 15). Soon the Israelite army saw a strange sight: the vast Philistine army melting away in full retreat (vs. 16). This was all because one man had faith in God's power and acted on it.

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

QUESTIONS

1. What suggestion did Jonathan make to his armor-bearer?
2. Where was Saul at this time?
3. What is emphasized with regard to Jonathan's plan?
4. How did the terrain present a particular challenge in getting close to the Philistine outpost?
5. What was Jonathan hoping for in checking out the enemy garrison?
6. Why did Jonathan say "it may be" in looking for God's help against the enemy (I Sam. 14:6)?
7. How did the armor-bearer respond to Jonathan's suggestion?
8. How was Jonathan planning to use the enemy response?
9. What did the Philistines' derisive challenge signify to Jonathan?
10. How did two men succeed against vastly superior numbers?

—Kenneth A. Sponsler.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Acting in faith often requires a believer to leave the crowd behind (I Sam. 14:1).
2. Fear leaves us vulnerable and oblivious to God's plan (vss. 2-3).
3. God gives boldness to those who know the battle belongs to Him (vss. 4-6).
4. God gives loyal and faithful companions to walk with us on the journey of faith (vs. 7).
5. Moving forward in faith means that believers listen for God and follow His lead (vss. 8-10).
6. God brings great victory from even small steps of faith in Him (vss. 11-13).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Jonathan did not tell Saul what he was doing? What do we know about their relationship as father and son from I Samuel 13—14?
2. What lessons can believers take from I Samuel 14? What makes someone a good leader?
3. In what ways are believers today tempted to rely on worldly methods and strategies to achieve God's plans (cf. Ps. 33:9-22)?
4. How does Jonathan's victory challenge those who accept God's Word but may not rely on the Word enough to take action (cf. Ps. 135:5; Prov. 3:5-6; Rom. 8:28-39)? How can you come alongside a person to help him grow in faith?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

“And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over: . . . for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few” (I Samuel 14:6).

Jonathan's action was a sign of faith in God's promises. God had told the Israelites through Joshua, “One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you” (Josh. 23:10). Jonathan believed in this promise but knew his father would not, so he and his armor-bearer approached the Philistines alone and won.

The golden text demonstrates the boldness Jonathan had because of his confidence in his heavenly Father. Jonathan's boldness stands in contrast to the cowardice of his earthly father. Though Saul was disgraced and continued to lack faith, Jonathan actively pursued blessings from the Lord and was rewarded for it. Asking his armor-bearer to leave the camp with him was not rebellious disobedience, but an act of faith.

Victory is the Lord's, and the Israelites were God's chosen people. Although Jonathan was young and without an army, the Lord was with him as he fought. God is the same God today as He was then, bearing with believers in their pain, working through their weaknesses, and routinely accomplishing the impossible. Even when the odds of success look overwhelmingly slim, the Lord rewards those who put their trust in Him. As His children, believers can step out in faith and expect to see Him at work.

—Carissa Dobson.