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Jonathan Attacks the Philistines

First Samuel 14: 1-14

Jonathan attacks the Philistines DIG: What attitude did the Philistine taunt reveal? What did the sign from God reveal? How did Jonathan contrast with his father Sha'ul? What enabled Jonathan and his armor-bearer to launch the incredible attack on the Philistines? Why did Jonathan feel so confident in God's blessing? How does the author of the books of Samuel use comparisons?

REFLECT: What "cliffs" do you think ADONAI would have you climb? How do you typically deal with failure or the risk of failure? Do you think that victory in our endeavors is always a sign of God's favor? Explain. How does your response to life's obstacles compare with Jonathan's? What rocky cliff are you willing to climb over to get there? How swiftly do you follow other godly leaders?

Jonathan realized that victory is not determined by humans, but by divine grace and power alone.

The focus in this chapter is on **Jonathan, Sha'ul's oldest son**, who had won the first major battle against **the Philistines**, but **his father** had taken credit (**13:1-4b**). It's a remarkable blessing of the grace of **God** that a fickle and wicked man like **Sha'ul** should have such a faithful and godly **son** as **Jonathan**. **He** was a courageous warrior (**Second Samuel 1:22**), a born leader, and a man of faith who sought to do the will of **ADONAI**. As the narrative progresses, it becomes obvious that **Sha'ul** is jealous of **Jonathan** and **his** popularity; and that jealousy only increased when **Jonathan** and **David** become devoted friends (see the commentary on **the Life of David, to see link click An - David and Jonathan's Friendship**).²⁹⁵

Contrasting faith (14:2-3): As Richard Phillips makes clear in his commentary on **1 Samuel**, the writer of the books of **Samuel** frequently makes **his** points through the use of contrasts: **Hannah** and **'Eli**, **Samuel** and **'Eli**, **Sha'ul** and **David**, **David**

and **Absalom**, and **Hushai** and **Ahithophel**. This provides parallel details that make clear the issues of faith and unbelief, and virtue and sin. In this chapter the two contrasting figures are **Jonathan** and **King Sha'ul**. Having attempted to lead **the people on the LORD's** behalf, **Sha'ul** had failed miserably. **His** first strike against **the Philistines** had provoked **their** massive retaliation, and **his** failure to obey **God's Word** had led to **his** rejection by **Ha'Shem (13:13-14)**. **His** present condition reflected both of those sad realities. Surrounded by an enemy vastly superior in both numbers and armament, **Sha'ul** was cornered on the outskirts of **his** capital with a mere **six hundred soldiers** who lacked the basic weapons of war (**13:22**). Accordingly, **Sha'ul** took no military initiative; however, **Jonathan's** ability to slip away from **his** camp unobserved suggests that **Sha'ul's soldiers** were so demoralized that **no one was aware that Jonathan had left (14:3b)**. On the spiritual plane, **Sha'ul's** situation was even worse. **Sha'ul** had set up **his** court and **was sitting at the far edge of Gibeah** (where **he** had been since leaving **Geva** back in **13:15**) **under the pomegranate tree in Migron; the force with him numbered about 600 men (14:2)**.

Sha'ul called for **the high priest, wearing his ephod** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fz - Make the Ephod of Gold, Blue and Purple Yarn**) with **the Urim and Thummim** (see **Exodus Gb - The Urim and Thummim: The Means of Making Decisions**) inside **the fold of the breastpiece**. So far so good – until we learn the identity of **the high priest: Ahijah**, the grandson **of the wicked Phinehas**, of the rejected and cursed house of **'Eli** (see **Au - God's Rejection of 'Eli's House**). **Ahijah** was the nephew of **Ichabod**, or **"the glory has departed" (14:3a)**. These words are not randomly inserted into the Biblical text. Rather they tell us something about **Sha'ul**. With **his** own royal **"glory gone"** (see **Cc - Samuel Rebukes Sha'ul**), where else would we expect **Sha'ul** to be than with a relative of **"glory gone"** (see **Bd - The Birth of Ichabod**). **Sha'ul**, who was no leader (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Ch - The Completion of the Walls Despite Opposition: ten fatal flaws that derail those who think they are in charge**), replaced the wise counsel of **Samuel** with the disgraced counsel of **Ahijah**, had lost **his** way and was able to do little else than to grasp the tattered shreds of **his** lost credibility.

In contrast, is **Sha'ul's son Jonathan**, a leader (see **Ezra-Nehemiah Bt - The Third Return: A Manual for Leaders**), who did not surround **himself** with royal hangers-on, but went only in the company of **his armor-bearer**. The picture of **Sha'ul** sitting under **the pomegranate tree** contrasts **his** timidity, and relative

ease with **Jonathan's** willingness to risk **his** very life for **Isra'el**. **He** was **the one man** other than **Sha'ul** in **Isra'el's army** to possess **a sword**, and **he** used **it** not in safety, but by wielding it against **the enemy**. While **Sha'ul** sat, **Jonathan** acted. While **Sha'ul's** pious inactivity inspired no help from **ADONAI**, **Jonathan's faith** received **God's** aid. Whereas **Sha'ul**, the commander, publicly dishonored **the LORD** through **his** fearful disobedience; **Jonathan**, the warrior, would bring honor to **Ha'Shem** through the fearlessness of **his** faith.

This comparison suggests that one way for us to strengthen our faith is to consider how our situation mirrors that of others in the Bible, and to remember how **YHVH** delivered **His people** of old. **Moses** and **the Israelites** had **their** backs to **the Sea of Reeds** with **the army** of **Pharaoh** bearing down, and **the LORD** parted the water to pass **His people** through, then to crash down on **their** pursuing **enemies** (see [Exodus Ci - The Waters Were Divided and the Jews Went Through the Sea](#)). Likewise, **God** will often provide an unforeseen way of escape for **His** struggling people today. **Sennacherib's army** surrounded **Jerusalem**, but when **Hezekiah** took **their** taunts before **Ha'Shem** in prayer, **an angel of ADONAI** came and struck **them** all down (see the commentary on [Isaiah Gw - Then the Angel of the LORD Put to Death a Hundred and Eighty-Five Thousand Men in the Assyrian Camp](#)). Earlier still, when **Joseph** refused to offend **the LORD** by sinning with **his master's wife**, for which **he** was thrown into **Pharaoh's** dungeon unjustly, but **God** not only arranged for **his** release, but used **a pagan king** to elevate **Joseph** to second only to **Pharaoh** in **Egypt** (see the commentary on [Genesis Jv - Joseph as Prime Minister](#)). Likewise, we should trust **God** to use our afflictions to reveal **His** grace and power. These and many other biblical examples have parallels in our lives today, great and small, and should fuel the fires of a bold and daring faith.²⁹⁶

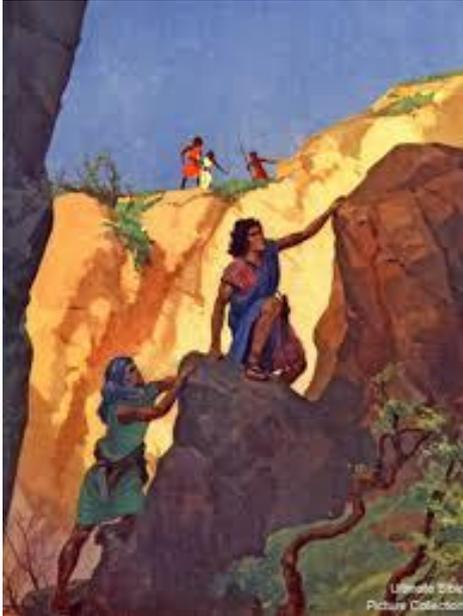
Daring faith (14:1 and 4-5): The strain of **Sha'ul's** indecision was more than **his son** could bear. Therefore, **one day, Jonathan, the son of Sha'ul, said to the young man carrying his armor, "Come, let's go across to the garrison of the Philistines on the other side."** **Jonathan** had no definite plan. Rather, wearied by the inactivity, **he** simply went out to look for the opportunity to do something for the sake of **the LORD** and **his people**. **But he didn't tell his father (14:1)**. But why didn't **Jonathan** tell **his father** that **he** had a plan to route **the enemy**? Because **Sha'ul** wouldn't have believed in such a daring venture of faith, and **Jonathan** wanted to get the battle settled, as **he** had already done before with **the Philistine outpost at Geva (13:3)**.

The opposing **armies** were situated across a valley several miles north of **Jerusalem** at a place where the ascent on both sides was especially demanding. **Between the passes by which Jonathan was trying to cross to the garrison of the Philistines, there was a rocky cliff on one side and another rocky cliff on the other; the name of the one was Bozez** (meaning *shining* because it was in the full sun), **and of the other, Senneh** (meaning *thorny* because it is almost always in the shade). **Boaz rose up on the north side of the ravine toward Micmash, and Senneh rose up on the south side toward Geba (14:4-5)**. It was probably because of this difficult terrain that **Sha'ul** caused **his army** to retreat to **Gibeah**, and why **the Philistines** had contented **themselves** with besieging rather than assaulting **the Israelites**.

Strategic faith (14:6-14): Both sides viewed a frontal attack impossible. But **Jonathan** thought differently. Thus, **he said to his armor-bearer, "Come on, let's go across to the garrison of these uncircumcised people. Maybe ADONAI will do something for us.** In other words, **Jonathan** realized that victory is not determined by humans, but by divine grace and power alone. If **the LORD** wanted to use **Jonathan** to gain the victory for **Isra'el**, then it didn't matter what forces were against **him** or how difficult the terrain. **He** probably learned this from the record of **God's** dealings with **His people** over the years, the most famous was **ADONAI's** deliverance of **Isra'el** from **the Midianites** through **Gideon** (see the commentary on [Judges Bb - Gideon's Victory Over the Midianites](#)). There are so many parallels in this chapter to **Gideon's** victory over **the Midianites** that perhaps **Jonathan** referred to, and concluded examples that **nothing can hinder ADONAI from saving, whether by many or by few (14:6).**²⁹⁷

Such faith will often attract worthy followers, and **Jonathan's armor-bearer** was eager to accompany **him**, saying: **Do everything that is in your heart; I'm with you, whatever you decide (14:7)**. The ravine that **Jonathan** and **his companion** had to negotiate was steep and involved skillful rock climbing. As **the two men** approached **the Philistine** side of the ravine, **Jonathan** proposed a solution. **He said, "Here, we'll cross over to those men and let them know we're there. If they say, 'Wait till we come to you,' we'll stand still where we are and not go up to them. But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we'll go on up; and that will be the sign that ADONAI has given us victory over them" (14:8-10)**. It is likely that **Jonathan** combined **his** request for a sign with some military savvy. This was the last route anyone in **their** right mind would choose to

take; hence, **Jonathan** managed to surprise **his enemy**.²⁹⁸ Expecting **God's** help, **he** was ready to act boldly when it came.



With **their** false sense of security, **the Philistine** troops at the new outpost wouldn't be afraid of a couple of **Jews** who managed to cross the ravine and climb **the cliffs**. Maybe **the guards** would see **them** as two **Jewish men** who wanted to desert **Sha'ul's army** and find refuge with **the enemy**. No matter what, **Jonathan** wasn't going to let **the enemy** attack first. **So both of them let their presence be known to the garrison of the Philistines; and they said, "Look, some Hebrews, a derogatory term, coming out of the holes they've been hiding in" (14:11)!** When **the two-man** assault team disclosed **themselves to the enemy, the Philistines** only laughed and mocked **them**. Sure enough, **the men of the garrison said to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us, and we'll teach you a lesson."** That was the kind of arrogant self-confidence that **Jonathan** wanted to see, because this gave **him** and **his armor-bearer an opportunity** to get close to **the guards** before attacking. Who would fear one **soldier** and **his armor-bearer**?²⁹⁹ **Goliath** would learn the foolishness of saying, **"Come here" (17:44), to a mere boy** who seemed to pose no threat.

Jonathan told his armor-bearer, "Come on up after me, for ADONAI has handed them over to Isra'el." Meanwhile, **the Philistines** had returned to **their** duties, not worrying about the threat of two **men** climbing this unlikely steep ravine. Wasting no time, **Jonathan climbed up** over the top of **the cliff** named

Boaz, using his hands as well as his feet. And before **the Philistines** knew what hit **them**, **Jonathan** attacked **them** with **his sword**. One by one, **the Israelite** hero destroyed **his enemies**, with **his armor-bearer** coming **behind** to **finish them off**. Before long, there were **about twenty men** who would never teach **another Hebrew lesson!**³⁰⁰ All this **was accomplished by Jonathan and his armor bearer in a space only half as long as one side of the area a pair of oxen could plow in a day [about 200 yards],** or an acre of land **(14:12-14).**