

JONATHAN AND THE PHILISTINES

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In 1 Samuel chapter 14, we have the privilege of learning about one of the great examples of faith that God has given us, that of Jonathan the son of Saul. Without telling his father the king or any other man (1 Sam 14:1-3), Jonathan took only his armorbearer, and assaulted an entire garrison of the Philistines (1 Sam 14:4-12). “And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and upon his feet, and his armorbearer after him: and they fell before Jonathan; and his armorbearer slew after him. And that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his armorbearer made, was about twenty men, within as it were an half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plow” (1 Sam 14:13-14). Two men killed about 20, and this led to a total victory by Israel that day over the Philistines (1 Sam 14:15-23).

Jonathan’s faith

What Jonathan did was by his faith in God. Jonathan is certainly one of the ones “who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness” (Heb 11:33), and “quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Heb 11:34). This is exactly what Jonathan did *by faith* to the Philistines here in 1 Samuel 14:4-14. “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* (1 Sam 14:6). Jonathan understood that God was the one in control of this situation (as He is of all things, Eph 1:11; Rom 8:28). God was the one who would give Israel the victory. God had promised to defeat Israel’s enemies if Israel obeyed God (Deut 7:16-24; 28:1-2,7,15,25). God had always kept this promise (Josh 6; 10-11; 23:10; 24:31; Judg 2:7; 3-4; 7-8; 11; 1 Sam 7; 11), and Jonathan did not doubt God one bit. And he knew that God’s ability to keep His word did not depend on the number of men, horses, or weapons available (see Psa 20:7-9; 33:16-22; 147:10-11; Prov 21:31; Isa 30:1-7,15-16; 31:1-3). God is able to save by few or many (see also Judges 7:2ff, and 1 Samuel 17:45-47). Jonathan also demonstrated his faith in God by the way in which he decided to attack the Philistines’ garrison. Jonathan said to his armorbearer, “Behold, we will pass over unto these men, and we will discover ourselves unto them. If they say thus unto us, Tarry

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until we come to you; then we will stand still in our place, and will not go up unto them. But if they say thus, Come up unto us; then we will go up: for the Lord has delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us. 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. And the men of the garrison answered Jonathan and his armorbearer, and said, Come up to us, and we will show you a thing. And Jonathan said unto his armorbearer, Come up after me: for the Lord has delivered them into the hand of Israel” (1 Sam 14:8-12). God works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11), and for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28). Jonathan believed that, and God did work in this situation to bring about the victory for Jonathan and then Israel (1 Sam 14:23).

Jonathan’s example for Christians

Jonathan serves as the very epitome of a living faith (Jas 2:14-26). Jonathan’s display of faith, faithfulness, courage, and endurance is a great example for Christians today. Speaking of these great examples of faith, obedience and endurance found in Hebrews chapter 11, Hebrews 12:1-4 says, *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”* We have the race set before us of becoming perfect (complete) like Christ (1 Cor 9:24-27; Php 3:11-15; 2 Tim 4:7-8). We are striving to resist and overcome all sin (Eph 6:16; Jas 3:2; 1 John 2:1; 5:4). In running this race, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, including Jonathan. We need to take these witnesses as good examples to encourage to lay aside every weight and sin, and run our race with the endurance and faith that we see in Jonathan and these others.