

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 14:1-23

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1 Samuel 14:1-23

(See 1 Samuel 13. After Jonathan provoked the Philistines, the Philistines assembled a huge army to retaliate. Israel was vastly outmatched in men and weapons. Saul had called out the men of Israel, but they were deserting the king. Things looked desperate. The Philistines were raiding the towns of Israel and Israel was powerless to stop them.)

Verse 1-3

¹ One day Jonathan son of Saul said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side.” But he did not tell his father.

² Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. With him were about six hundred men, ³ among whom was Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod’s brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD’s priest in Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left.

- Saul, with his dwindling army, was helpless and unable to defend Israel from the Philistine raiding parties that were attacking Israel. He sat in his camp afraid to move.
- Jonathan, Saul’s son, was of a different spirit than his father. Remember that it was Jonathan who had provoked the trouble with the Philistines in the first place (see 1 Samuel 13:3-7). On this day, Jonathan decided to take matters into his own hands once again. Without telling his father, or anyone else, Jonathan decided to enter the Philistine camp.
- Meanwhile, Ahijah, Israel’s high priest was with Saul. Ahijah was wearing the garments of the high priest’s office. This means that he was in the camp out of his office. He was there as high priest.

Verses 4-6

⁴ On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez and the other Seneh. ⁵ One cliff stood to the north toward Mikdash, the other to the south toward Geba.

⁶ Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few."

- Jonathan's plan was to enter the Philistine camp secretly. Only he and his armor-bearer, would do; two men against the entire Philistine army. He hoped that YHWH would act through them and save Israel. He stepped out in faith with no assurance. He hoped God would act. But he did not have any word from God as to what would happen. He believed that God could deliver Israel from her enemies "by many or by few." He believed that the battle belonged to the Lord.

Verses 7-12a

⁷ "Do all that you have in mind," his armor-bearer said. "Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul."

⁸ Jonathan said, "Come on, then; we will cross over toward them and let them see us. ⁹ If they say to us, 'Wait there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are and not go up to them. ¹⁰ But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands."

¹¹ So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. "Look!" said the Philistines. "The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in." ¹² The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson."

- The armor-bearer agreed.
- He and Jonathan stood in full view of the Philistines. If the Philistines called them into their camp, Jonathan and his servant would go into the Philistine camp. This would be God's sign to them that He was going to move to deliver Israel through them.
- After insulting them, the Philistines invited them to come into their camp.

Verses 12b-15

So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel."

13 Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. 14 In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.

15 Then panic struck the whole army—those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties—and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.

- Defenseless, crawling on their hands and knees, Jonathan and his servant entered the Philistine camp. They were totally vulnerable to the Philistines as they entered the camp.
- Once inside the Philistine outpost, the two men aggressively fought the Philistines. They killed 20 Philistine soldiers in a ½ acre of ground. But the rest of the Philistine army thought a major attack was underway. They panicked. There was an earthquake at that very moment. All of this was sent by God and panicked the entire Philistine army.

Verses 16-19

6 Saul's lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions. 17 Then Saul said to the men who were with him, "Muster the forces and see who has left us." When they did, it was Jonathan and his armor-bearer who were not there.

18 Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God." (At that time it was with the Israelites.) 19 While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."

- Saul's men reported back to him that the Philistine camp was fleeing. Saul then took roll and discovered that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were missing. He summoned the priest to bring the ark so that he could find out what was happening. Saul had no clue. His lack of faith stands in opposition to his son's faith. They are opposite sides of the coin.
- Saul tells the priest that there is no time to consult God.

Verses 20-23

20 Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords. 21 Those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to their camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and

Jonathan. ²² When all the Israelites who had hidden in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were on the run, they joined the battle in hot pursuit. ²³ So on that day the LORD saved Israel, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.

- At last, Saul led his troops into battle. The Philistine army was in confusion. The Philistines were killing each other. The part of Saul's army that had deserted returned and joined the battle.
- That day, YHWH intervened to save Israel. It was God's doing. The battle belonged to the Lord!

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