

## One after YHWH's Heart

When we left off for Advent, Samuel was rebuking Saul for being faithless in the midst of terrifying odds. The Philistines are in the hills, assembling a huge army to attack a small - and shrinking - force led by Saul in the valley. Samuel had told Saul to wait for seven days and then Samuel would perform the sacrifice. Saul sees the odds, waits the seven days, and Samuel does not show up, so he performs the sacrifice himself. Samuel's rebuke includes the prophetic claim that YHWH is taking the kingdom from Saul's descendants. Then Samuel leaves, and Saul is left with a very small, scared fighting force, no prophet, and very little hope. Could the kingdom be ending here and now?

*Read 1 Samuel 13:16-23.*

### **1. What are Saul's chances of winning this battle against the Philistines? How does the narrator let us know that Saul is in trouble?**

The narrator notes that Saul has 600 men, compared with the 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen that the Philistines have (these numbers do not even include the infantry). The Philistines have the better military equipment and better strategic position, high in the hills, overlooking the lower position of the Israelites. Then, the superior Philistine army sends out three companies that cut off the Israelite army from any possible reinforcements. Saul and his army are trapped and outnumbered.

In verses 19-23, the narrator goes on to paint an even bleaker picture for Israel. The Philistines have swords and spears made of iron and bronze. Israel does not have equal technology. Israel has been dependent on the Philistines for iron technology, which has been costly for Israel economically. More importantly in chapter 13, however, it means that only Saul and Jonathan have swords. The narrator is going out of his way to make the possibility for a victory look totally unrealistic.

Saul does not have the prophet, strategic position, military technology, numbers, reinforcements, or any other advantage in this battle.

*Read 1 Samuel 14:1-15.*

### **2. How does Jonathan win this minor victory? How can we compare Jonathan's character in chapter 14 with his father Saul's in chapter 13?**

Jonathan wins a small victory (that will have bigger consequences) because he courageously trusts in YHWH. Jonathan's disadvantages in this skirmish parallel Saul's disadvantages in the battle: Jonathan is outnumbered, working from a poor strategic

position below his opponent, he will have to climb on his hands and feet just to reach the Philistines, and he has given up the possibility of surprising them, which was his only strategic advantage. How can he possibly defeat a garrison of Philistines?

Jonathan's faith and trust in YHWH encourages him. He knows how YHWH works - "YHWH is not restrained to save with many or with a few" (verse 6). This statement is both a practical statement revealing Jonathan's confidence that YHWH can use him to defeat the Philistines and a profound theological statement about YHWH's saving power. First, it suggests that YHWH is a god who saves His people. Second, it shows knowledge about the ways that YHWH chooses to save - He wants His glory to be revealed, and so He often chooses to win despite impossible odds.

Jonathan sets up a simple test to see if YHWH is giving the garrison into his hand - he will reveal himself and if the Philistines call him up to them, then YHWH will give Jonathan victory. Jonathan and his armor bearer reveal themselves, the Philistines call the pair up to them, and Jonathan and his armor bearer climb up on their hands and feet and kill about 20 Philistines. The narrator does not seem to be interested in sharing the details of how Jonathan and his armor bearer defeat 20 well armed, fighting Philistines; his point is to show that Jonathan's faith in YHWH gives him courage to defeat Israel's enemies. Jonathan knows that YHWH is the true victor, and Jonathan's role is to determine where YHWH is working and then to follow Him. YHWH sends an earthquake timed to the end of the skirmish.

Jonathan works courageously from faith in YHWH; Saul seems motivated by self-confidence and then fear, and treats YHWH like a good luck charm. When Jonathan talks about YHWH, he reveals confidence in YHWH's abilities and seeks His will; Saul uses the sacrifice to try and manipulate YHWH and YHWH's people. When Saul looks at the battle, he sees the odds; when Jonathan looks at the battle, he sees the possibility for YHWH's victory.

In many ways, Jonathan is the "man after YHWH's heart" that Samuel mentioned in 13:14. We know that David will finally be that man, but Jonathan is a good picture of what that man will be.

### **3. Are there other situations in the Old Testament where YHWH works victory out of overwhelming odds?**

This is YHWH's favorite mode of operation - He loves to reveal Himself in power by coming through when things are overwhelming.

We could look at the number of barren women to whom YHWH gives children. We could mention the choosing of Israel rather than the greater nations of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. We could mention a number of songs of deliverance that point to YHWH's raising up the weak over the strong.

But, let's stick with battles. Moses leads a multitude of slaves to the Red Sea where they are about to be slaughtered by the well armed Egyptians, and then leads them through the Red Sea to safety while the Egyptians are swallowed up. Gideon has very few men to defeat the Mideonites. Samson kills thousands of Philistines singlehandedly. Esther and Mordecai, Elijah and the prophets of Baal, Daniel and the lions.

YHWH is a saving God, and loves to come through on behalf of His people when the odds are long or impossible, and when He can advance His purposes. He is not restrained to save by many or by a few.

#### **4. Where is Christ in Jonathan's victory? How does Jonathan show us what Christ is like?**

Christ is the one who dies to save. As Jonathan says that YHWH is not restrained to win with many or with a few, Christ reveals that God is not restrained to win with life or with death. God can win a victory over death by sending His Son to die.

Paul picked up on the same themes in 2 Corinthians when he repeats Christ's words to him that "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Or, in 1 Corinthians, when he says that God uses the weak things of the world to shame the strong. Characteristically, our God defies the odds and makes something beautiful out of nothing, and creates a great victory out of certain defeat. Again, the greatest example of this is at the cross.

Christ, like Jonathan, is a man after YHWH's heart. Jonathan actively seeks to fight with YHWH, seeks YHWH's will, then acts with courage and trust in the face of overwhelming odds. Christ actively seeks to spread the Gospel, only does what he sees the Father doing, then acts with courage and trust as he goes to the cross to win a devastating victory against overwhelming odds. Both point to the God who is not restrained to win with many or with a few.

#### **5. How can we in the Body of Christ reveal God's power, and participate in shaming the strong? How can we be a people who are after God's heart?**

We can reveal God's power by acting with courage and by listening to the Spirit and following Him. Jonathan and Christ both saw through their circumstances, looked at the world through the eyes of God, and acted with boldness when they saw God moving. We can shame the strong by acting like Jonathan and Christ - not worrying about circumstances or appearances, but acting with boldness on behalf of those in need. We can love the outcasts and oppressed. We can seek to serve despite our own difficulties. We can show love and grace to those who are hard to love.

We can be a people after God's heart by refusing to see our circumstances as more powerful than God. We can resist the fear that paralyzed Saul, and act with boldness when we see the Spirit moving. We can move with the Spirit, rather than trying to manipulate God and others.

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Lord, you are mighty to save and you don't look at the odds. You love to save despite the odds. We thank you for saving us, who were far from you and treated you with contempt. We thank you for sending your Son to us, to reveal what kind of God and Father you are. We thank you that you have put a new heart and new Spirit in us and that you have made us your people. Continue, by your power, to work redemption and resurrection in us, and through us, in the world. Make us men and women after your heart. We love you. In Jesus' name we pray.

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