

## BE A JONATHAN–NOT A SAUL

By Lori Shuck

Last night, I woke up around midnight. I've been feeling like partially congealed jello lately and my life has not allowed for much of a routine, which I prefer. I was thinking on this as I lay in the stuffy darkness and began to talk to God about it. I asked Him for input and confirmation that I'm doing okay and will once again gain the order and routine I desire, without slipping into some kind of legalistic straight jacket. I heard the words, *1 Samuel 14:18-24*, in my mind. This often happens when I wake in the middle of the night. I picked up my phone and opened my blueletterbible app to the reference. It's part of a story about King Saul's son, Jonathan, deciding to go out on his own (with his armor-bearer) to scout out a garrison of the Philistine army. Jonathan and his armor-bearer slaughtered twenty men on this expedition. This caused a panic in the Philistine's camp, quickly followed by an earthquake that "became a terror from God," ( v. 15).

While all this was happening, Saul and his men were sitting around under a tree and noticed that the Philistines had started to "melt away and went hither and thither," (v. 16). Saul finally got up and sent his men out to fight and God turned the battle in their favor. Verses 18-24 show the juxtaposition of God turning this great battle in favor of the Hebrews and the fact that Saul had randomly decreed, "Cursed be the man who eats any food before evening and until I have taken vengeance on my enemies," (v. 24). This may be why everyone but Jonathan and his armor-bearer, neither of whom had heard this ludicrous curse, was lying around under the pomegranate tree, "exhausted and faint," (v. 28). Jonathan had found and eaten some honey before he got back to the Hebrew camp. When he found out about his father's curse, he said, "My father has troubled the land," (v. 29).

Right before all this, in chapter thirteen, Saul had been impatient while waiting for Samuel to arrive for the sacrifice and had taken it upon himself to do the sacrifice without Samuel. When Samuel arrived, he admonished Saul and told him he'd done foolishly and God would eventually establish another man as king. (That man, of course, was David.) Saul was spiritually clueless. He kept on being an impatient blockhead until the day he died. I think God turned the battle against the Philistines in favor of Israel that day in spite of Saul. His son, Jonathan,

was the “king type.” But Saul’s foolishness insured that neither Jonathan, nor anyone else in Saul’s lineage, would ever be king—though it didn’t stop Jonathan from being a God-follower.

Why did God point me toward this story last night? Perhaps because I was being more like Saul than Jonathan. I was fretting over being behind, unorganized, unproductive, and unimpressive. I was mulling over what might happen if I don’t catch up or get things done on time and in the right way. This was the line of reasoning that screwed up Saul’s life. The underlying seed for this type of thing is **fear**. Saul was afraid. In chapter ten of 1 Samuel, he was hiding behind the luggage when it was time for Samuel to anoint him as king. Samuel told him he would be changed into another man, or given another heart and that God was with him. (See 1 Samuel 10:6-7, 9.) He made it two years as king before he ruined everything by disobeying Samuel and not waiting for him to arrive for that sacrifice in 1 Samuel 13. Why did he do it? *He was afraid*. He said to Samuel, “I thought, *The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord.*” 1 Samuel 13:12, *The Amplified Bible*. What good was it doing him to disobey Samuel so that he could “make supplication to the Lord” who had been the very one to tell Samuel to tell Saul explicitly to wait until he came to make the sacrifice? He let fear cause him to be a fool over and over.

So, I think God was pointing out to me that panicking is never helpful and is based in fear. Sometimes we are just not able to keep up our routines and have to “float” for a while. I’ve had to do that for the past three months because of upheavals in my life. But it’s important to stay on the path, even if we don’t progress like we hoped we would. There is great value in *little by little*, even when we feel like we’re running late or getting old. Sometimes, the greatest thing we can do is ask God to keep us on the good path while we keep trekking in faith. This is how Jonathan lived his short life and he was a godly hero.

In light of all this, I find 1 Samuel 13:22 fascinating: “So it came about on the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people who were with Saul and Jonathan. But they were found with Saul and Jonathan his son.” At this time, Saul and Jonathan were the only two men in Israel who had a sharp sword and spear. Saul kept his girded most of the time and used it only as a last resort in battle, or a first resort later, when his jealousy of David bore down on him. On the other hand, Jonathan’s offered his to the Lord to do with as He planned.

Ultimately, he gave David not only his sword, but his armor, when he had to flee for his life from Saul. So, God saved Israel through Jonathan and his armor-bearer. Then he saved David, the greatest king Israel ever had, through Jonathan, the greatest king Israel never had. I want to be a Jonathan, not a Saul.

**Some notes from David Guzik's great commentary on 1 Samuel 14: Jonathan's adventure in faith.**

“God is ever on the outlook for believing souls, who will receive his power and grace on the one hand and transmit them on the other. He chooses them, that by them he should make his mighty power known.” (Meyer)

In v. 2, “**Saul was sitting**: This was a big contrast to Jonathan. The bold, brave king was simply **sitting** while his son boldly went over to the Philistine garrison. Saul and the priest with the ephod sat back while Jonathan bravely trusted God.

The people did not know that Jonathan was gone: This indicates that Jonathan did not go over to the Philistine garrison out of a desire for personal glory.

**Jonathan's bold proposal.** “Then Jonathan said to the young man who bore his armor, “Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us. For nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few.” So his armor bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart.” (1 Samuel 14:6-7)

**It may be that the Lord will work for us:** For Jonathan, this was more than a reconnaissance expedition. He wanted to see what God might do through two men who trusted Him and stepped out boldly.

**Jonathan knew God wanted to work with someone.** Jonathan could have just *prayed* that God would rain down fire from heaven on the Philistines. But Jonathan knew that God uses the bold action and fighting spirit of His people. “It was not Jonathan that was to work with some help from God; it was the Lord that was to work by

Jonathan.” (Blaikie)

**God’s *power* is never restrained but His *will* may be restrained by our unbelief.** He may choose not to act until we partner with Him in trust. God had a trusting partner in Jonathan.

**Jonathan had little faith in himself but great faith in God.** It wasn’t “I can win a great victory with God’s help.” It was “God can win a great victory through even me.”

**“Go then; here I am with you”:** These words from Jonathan’s armor bearer must have cheered Jonathan greatly. When we step out in faith, encouragement can make all the difference for good and discouragement can make all the difference for evil.

**God was going to use Jonathan, but He wasn’t going to use Jonathan *alone*.** When God uses a man He almost always calls others around the man to support and help him. They are just as important in getting God’s work done as the man God uses.

**Jonathan was prompted by *faith*.** Significantly, he did not demand to know the whole battle plan from God in advance. He was willing to take it one step at a time, and let God plan it out. Faith is willing to let God know the whole plan and to know our part one step at a time.

**If we only want victory or only want to be used by God when it is *easy*, we won’t see much victory and we won’t be used much.**

Jonathan used his heart and sword but God did what Jonathan could not do—send a great earthquake to terrify the Philistines. **Often we wait around for God to do what we can do. But God will often do miracles—what He alone can do—if we will do what we can do.**

### **Saul's inferior behavior.**

**Call the roll:** This was useless at the moment. Saul should go and fight the Philistines at this strategic moment. Instead, he was probably worried about who was leading the battle and who would get

the credit.

**Bring the ark of God here:** This was useless at the moment. Saul is probably trying to look spiritual here, but there was nothing to seek God about. There is a time to go aside and pray, and there is a time to get your sword out and fight. Saul didn't know what time this was.

Eventually, the noise of God and Jonathan fighting against the Philistines became so loud that Saul knew he had to also fight.

Speaking on the result of Saul's foolish curse on anyone who ate before he'd had his vengeance on his enemies, Guzik says: We often think that legalistic rules will keep people from sin. Actually the opposite is true. Legalistic rules lead us into sin because they either provoke our rebellion or they lead us into legalistic pride.

Saul was very good at making religious oaths and promises. But that didn't mean very much because he was not good at having a heart after God and he was not good at keeping the oaths he made.

"Strange perverseness! He who was so indulgent as to spare wicked Agag, chapter 15, is now so severe as to destroy his own worthy son." (Poole). Saul was willing to kill his son rather than to humbly admit that *he* was really at fault. Saul started out as a humble man (1 Samuel 10:21), but his once impressive humility was overtaken by pride.

Saul's strength was broad but shallow. Because Saul was not a man after God's own heart and because his own relationship with God was more about image than substance, his kingdom cannot last.

**References:** 1. [https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik\\_david/StudyGuide2017-1Sa/1Sa-14.cfm?a=250001](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-1Sa/1Sa-14.cfm?a=250001). Web. 30 Nov. 2018.