

Jonathan 2

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[0 : 00] Now we began last time, it was a fortnight ago, to look at a study in Jonathan, the son of Saul, who was a prince of Israel, obviously a royal prince, and the one who under normal circumstances might have been expected to inherit the crown, to inherit the kingship.

Obviously in the Lord's providence that was not going to be, but we do see many fine qualities in Jonathan, we began to see these last time in chapter 13 here, and we see something of them again here in chapter 14.

Chapter 14 is a very long chapter, we're just going to deal with the first part of it tonight, and we see again here Jonathan putting himself forward to, if you like, take the initiative against the Lord's enemies, against the invading Philistines, those who are inhabiting the land.

And we saw in chapter 13, verse 3, he smothered the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, let the Hebrews hear.

And all Israel heard, saying that Saul had smothered the garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was having an abomination with the Philistines. So some, we might say, critical scholars might say that, well what you've got in chapter 14 is just the sort of telling of the story of what's told in chapter 13, because it's really just a reference to that verse 3 there, where Jonathan smothered the garrison of the Philistines.

[1 : 36] Because we read at verse 14 of chapter 14, that first slaughter, which Jonathan and his aunt O'Berah made, was about 20 men. If that's the first slaughter, then what is this reference to the previous garrison?

It must be the same account. No, it's not the same account. And one reason we can say it's not the same account, because in response to the first smiting of the garrison in chapter 13, The Philistines then gathered themselves together to fight with Israel.

They came in vast numbers, in verse 5 onwards, 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude.

You might say this is overreaction. You might say it is disproportion. But the purpose of such a massive invasion from the Philistine lands is to squash out this first flame of resistance before it can properly begin.

And it has the desired effect, as we saw in chapter 13. Because when they gathered themselves together, when the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, where the people were distressed, the people did hide themselves in caves and in thickets and in rocks and in high places and in pits.

[2 : 51] And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. And we read in verse 15 in chapter 13 there that Saul numbered the people.

There are about 600 of them. Now, at the beginning of chapter 13, he got 3,000. So he's only got a fifth, 20% of what he had before. And he himself is gathered in Gibeah, sort of entrenching himself in what was no doubt a stronghold.

And the Philistines are all gathered round about. They're sending out their spoiler companies to just sort of ransack and loot the land, as we see from verse 17.

And we have reference to these spoilers here in chapter 14. Because when the Lord causes the land to tremble, then it causes all the different companies of the Philistines.

And the trembling was in the host, in the field, verse 15, among all the people, the garrison and the spoilers. They also trembled and the earth quaked. So it was a very great trembling. There's also reference in chapter 14 to those who had hidden themselves away.

[4 : 00] The Philistines in this garrison say, oh, look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes of the rock where they hid. It is clearly an event subsequent to the first smiting of the original garrison.

But again, it is Jonathan who is taking the initiative here. We might think, well, why doesn't Saul take the initiative? Why isn't Saul the one doing the attacking here?

Why does it have to be Jonathan? And why does he have to do it without his father's knowledge or permission? The implication would suggest that Saul, perhaps conscious of his kingship and conscious of all that there is to lose, and perhaps considering that maybe Jonathan's rash behavior in the first instance brought this massive vision of the Philistines now, Saul is certainly acting with caution, perhaps over much caution.

There is a standoff, if you can call it that, between the massive army of the Philistines, which are plundering wherever they want, right, left and center, south and west and east and so on.

And you've got Saul with his terrified 600 men gathering in Gibeah. And so far, the one, they're just looking at the other from a distance. No doubt a battle would follow in due course, but the numbers are so completely disproportionate.

[5 : 23] 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen and people as the sand is the seashore on the Philistine side. And what have the Hebrews got? 600 men. 600 men.

And also, most of them don't have any weapons. We saw that at the end of chapter 13 there. So it's not exactly an even contest. So this will be one reason, perhaps, why Jonathan, with the Lord's courage being given to him, is not content simply to sit on his hands and wait for the inevitable battle between a vastly outnumbered and under-armed Israelite host against the huge numbers of Philistines.

It's going to be a slaughter. It's going to be a complete and total wipeout of these wives. He can't afford just to sit and wait and hope for the best.

He can't afford to be cautious. There's nothing to be gained now by caution. The only little victory they had, they had because he took the initiative and smothered the garrison of the Philistines.

So what we see here at the beginning of chapter 14, you could say that it's almost a kind of suicidal kind, well, what have we got to lose? There is that element to it. But there is also a sense in which Jonathan, with the courage that the Lord gives him, would rather die free than live as a slave.

[6 : 46] He is not going to be overrun by the heathen Philistines. He is determined that at least they are going to fight in order to be free. And so he takes the initiative, but he told not his father.

You can see there's a certain wisdom in this as well. If he'd asked permission and his father had said no, well, then he'd be disobeyed if he goes and does it. And if he tells his father and his father says, okay, yes, you can go, then maybe Saul looks bad for the fact that he's not the one going.

So there is a certain amount of wisdom in the fact that Jonathan allows discretion perhaps to enter in here. Let us go over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side.

But he told not his father. Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree, which is in Migron. And Migron is several miles from Gibeah as such. So when it says the uttermost part, it almost means the furthest reach of the city of Gibeah's influence.

He's at the sort of extremity of his own territory here. The people that were with him were about 600 men. And he's got the grandson of Eli here.

[7 : 56] Phinehas' grandson, I beg your pardon. Ahia, the son of Ahitub, the son of Phinehas. The great-grandson of Eli. In other words, the Lord's priest in Shiloh wearing an ephod.

He's also got, as we find out a little later on, he's also got the Ark of the Covenant there with him. And because we're told that the Ark was with the people in those states.

None were now the people. While Saul talked to the priest, the Ark of the God was at that time with the children of Israel. Almost certainly for safety. 600 men may not be a huge protection against the vast numbers of the Philistines, but at least there is some protection.

If they are raiding through all the country, there's nothing to stop them carting off the Ark of the Covenant again, just like they did years before, and the shame that fell on Israel when that happened.

So they are keeping it in the midst of the army. But perhaps it is something of a superstitious talisman for Saul, rather than a symbol of the faith of the living God.

[9 : 00] However, they attack the garrison of the Philistines, and they attack in this particular place, where there's a sharp rock on the one side and a sharp rock on the other side.

The name of the one was Bozes. Now the name Bozes means shining. And the name of the other, Sene, which means the thorn. So obviously one rock was particularly sharp and pointed in shape to depict a thorn.

The other, perhaps because of the direction it was facing, or the kind of manuels that might have been through the rock, obviously reflected the sun at particular times, and was described as shining.

So Bozes and Sene. And Jonathan said to the young man that bear his armour, come and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised. In other words, we'll let them see us.

We'll say, come on, here we are, come and fight with us. And if they say, right, okay, we're coming down, then at least they are vacating their outpost, their garrison position, and then the battle could be anyone's.

[10 : 02] But if they say, yeah, you come up through us, and we'll fight you here in our outpost, in our little redoubt here. And then we'll know, Jonathan says, that this is a sign from the Lord.

Because, verse 6, there is no restraint to the Lord, who's saved by many or by few. And the armour bearer, not particularly devout or religious, perhaps, just says, well, do everything that's in your heart, I'll be going with you according to your heart.

He's loyal, but he may not be the most devout, perhaps. But Jonathan has the Lord in his heart. It may be that the Lord will work for us. There is no restraint to the Lord, to save by many or by few.

If they say, come up unto us, then we will go up, for the Lord hath delivered them into our hand, and we shall be a sign unto us. And, truly, that's what they say. And Jonathan said, come up, come up after me, for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel.

Notice how, three times already, in this opening part of the chapter, Jonathan is ascribing any potential victory to the Lord, the Lord, the Lord.

[11 : 10] Even so, when he sees the beginnings of a victory, he simply says, you know, bring the ark, and let's inquire. I number now, Jonathan, his armour bearer, we're not here, not there.

Bring hither the ark of God. And, yes, okay, that's to consult with the Lord, but you see the sort of remove at which Saul's relationship with the Lord is.

Now, he is the Lord's anointed, the Lord's choice, there's no question about that, but it's his relationship with the Lord all that perhaps it should be. And so we have Jonathan with the Lord in his heart, and ready to give the Lord the credit.

Jonathan, who is a brave man, not saying that Saul isn't, but Jonathan is taking the initiative, taking a fight to the enemy, but recognising he might die, or he might win, but if he wins, it will only be because of the Lord.

Come up after me, verse 12, for the Lord hath delivered them into the hand of Israel. And Jonathan climbed up upon his hands and his feet and his armour bearer after him, and they fell before Jonathan, and his armour bearer slew after him.

[12 : 20] Now, it says that first slaughter was about 20 men, within, as it were, a half acre of land. Jonathan's armour bearer, he's not carting his armour with him at the time, obviously Jonathan's wearing his armour at this point, but this is a sort of man's servant, his body's servant, the one who is particularly attached to him and his task and his profession and his duty.

He's going to be there with him wherever he goes. He is his loyal lieutenant in that sense. So he follows wherever Jonathan goes, but remember what it says at the end of chapter 13.

Saul and Jonathan, there were swords with them, but nobody else had. But with Saul and Jonathan, there were swords found, verse 22 of chapter 13, but nobody else had a weapon to speak of.

If they wanted their pitchforks or their files, if they wanted them sharpened, they took them down to the Philistines who sharpened them for them and no doubt charged them for agricultural implements being sharpened in this way.

But they didn't have proper weapons, so when Jonathan attacks the Philistines, only he has got a sword in his hand. What is his armour bearer using? Perhaps, I don't know, a lump of wood, a club or something like that.

[13 : 35] We don't know. But from the first Philistine who dies, there's a weapon for the armour bearer to pick up. There's a spear, there's a sword, there's a shield, whatever. By the time 20 men have been killed, that's 20 swords, 20 spears, 20 shields they didn't have before.

Even this little victory, if that was all there was, Israel is already 10 times better off than it was in terms of its arsenal of weapons than it was at the outset.

Even this little victory, the Lord gives. His armour bearer slew after him and that first slaughter, which Jonathan, his armour bearer made, was about 20 men, whether it were a half acre of land, which a yoke of oxen might plough.

And then it says there was a trembling in the host. Now the host is not directly attached to this little outpost. This would be a sort of sentry post. Yes, it would be a well-staffed miniature fort, probably, out of garrison.

An outpost. It's not the main Philistine army. But when it says there was a trembling in the host, it's not because they all thought, oh look, one of our garrisons has been overwhelmed by two men.

[14 : 48] Oh how terrible, we're all terrified. But rather, because the Lord has worked this initial victory, then the Lord begins this supernatural trembling in the vast host of the Philistines.

A trembling in the host, a mighty trembling, in the original Hebrew it suggests, a trembling of God. Such is the mighty power of the trembling.

A very great trembling, it says at the end of verse 15. And a very great trembling, it's in the original, it's a trembling of God. Because he's the one that sends it.

This is not, oh suddenly there was an earthquake, so that made them afraid. Yes, there is a kind of quaking of the earth. But this is God causing the Philistines to become, for no apparent reason, terrified.

Jonathan has overwhelmed an outpost, a little garrison of their sentries, and some of them are slaughtered that way, but this is what's really setting the fear amongst them.

[15 : 52] And this which they believed to be, a work of the God of Israel. And the watchman of Saul and Gibeah, his lookouts and so on, looked and behold the multitude, that is the multitude of the Philistines, melted away.

It's not the Israelite multitude, they've already deserted in their droves. If you look back to chapter 13, if you see a verse eight, it says the people were scattered from Saul.

They had deserted. They'd hidden in the rocks and in the caves, they'd crossed the Jordan for their own safety. They are gone. This is the Philistine multitude, which Saul is seeing, melting away.

And they went on beating down one another. Now that doesn't necessarily mean they were fighting with each other. It means they were stampeding. It means they were treading on each other, trying to get away.

A panic has begun. He doesn't initially know why. So he's beginning to get the Ark of the Lord to inquire of. But then while he talked with the priest, verse 19, the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on an increase.

[16 : 58] It gets louder and louder and louder. And it's, well, we don't need to ask more about this. We know what we have to do now. We have to capitalize on this. The people assembled themselves. They came to the battle.

And behold, every man's sword, again, it must mean every Philistine's sword, was against his fellow. And there was a very great discomfiture. It cannot mean the Israelites, because if it's a victory, the Lord saved Israel that day, then you can't turn the swords of a mere 600 men against each other.

This is the swords of the thousands of it, of Philistines, of being turned against each other. And now, if we were being cynical, we might say, oh, all the Hebrews that were with the Philistines, that had been sort of turned throats and worked for them beforehand, suddenly thought, oh, well, they're losing.

Now, let's turn on them. Let's suddenly get brave. Turned to be with the Israelites, they were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise, all the men of Israel, which had hit themselves in Mount Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle.

And it is difficult, if not perhaps at the human level, impossible, not to have a certain sneer at such individuals, say, oh, yes, you're very brave now.

[18 : 15] You're very brave now when the enemy's on the run. Where were you before? When Saul needed you, when they only had 600 men left, and you were hiding in the caves and the holes in the rock.

Where were you then? But now the Philistines are on the run. Oh, you're very brave now. You're all coming out in your droves. And whilst that might be a little uncharitable, it is not altogether untrue.

However, we would also need to recognize what causes people to turn from cowardice to courage is not simply the knowledge of a potential victory.

Because if you think back to the days of the judges, think back to Gideon, for example, where he was pursuing the Midianites. And I can't remember the exact number of the names of the cities.

I think one of them was Peniel. He came to Peniel and he said, you know, well, give us bread and water because we're pursuing the Midianites. And obviously they were winning. If they were chasing them and they won a victory, then you would think, you'd say, yeah, yeah, we'll come with you.

[19 : 19] Don't bother. But they said, well, you know, have you already won? Have you got their heads in your hands? Have you actually secured your victory? No, yeah, we give you bread and water today.

The Midianites will come back and slaughter us tomorrow. I said, no, we're not doing a thing to help you. You fight it yourselves. And of course he said, right, well, when I come back in victory, I'll beat down the tower of your city.

And to another city he said, when I come back, I'll torture you all with thorns and briars, which of course he did because his men had been in need. But the two cities that he came to, just because they saw there seemed to be the scent of victory, they didn't get all brave suddenly.

They didn't suddenly turn out in their droves and say, yes, we'll follow you with them. We'll chase them as well. We'll get some of the spoil. So it doesn't happen automatically. It is rather the Lord who is able to change the hearts of men, both individually and collectively.

Whilst we might sneer a little and say, oh yeah, look at these cowards, they're very brave now. It is the Lord who changes their hearts. It is the Lord who causes them to think, yes, this is where we should be.

[20 : 31] We ought to have been on the side of the Israelites all along. Perhaps they're a little bit late in turning their allegiance back to where it should be. But there is no question that the fact of their having done so added to the complete rout of the Philistines that day.

The change in heart from cowardice to courage amongst those who had previously fled and melted away and deserted. The fact that they came now pouring, as it were, out of the hills, out of the caves, out of every nook and cranny.

When the Philistines had thought they were. Suddenly, everywhere they looked. He has an Israelite vengeful coming out of wherever he had hidden. It is this change of spirit, which is as much a work of God's grace, as is the quaking of the earth and the trembling in the heart of the Philistines.

The fear that he puts in the one, the courage that he puts in the heart of the others. This is a work of God. It is a miracle of God's grace.

And you will notice that just as Jonathan had previously given all the potential glory to God, he said, The Lord may deliver us out of their hands. The Lord may give us the victory.

[21 : 49] The Lord may fight for us. Because there is no strength to the Lord to save one of my many or my few. So we get verse 23. So the Lord saved Israel that day.

And the battle passed over unto Bethhaven. In other words, they kept pursuing the enemy all the way to Bethhaven. It's the same as Bethel. So they're heading off in a north-westerly direction from where they were.

It's not Jonathan that saved Israel that day. It is the Lord that saved Israel that day. It is the Lord who changed the hearts of the host, who put all the trembling in this massive host.

It is the Lord who gave courage to the Israelite deserters. But notice the timing of when he does it. It would have been far more convenient, far more easy for Jonathan and for Saul if they just said, Oh Lord, you know, a victory would be really nice if you just make all the Philistines terrified and give all our boys courage.

That would be great. And then you'll go up and we'll smite the garrison of the Philistines. But no, God doesn't do that. He doesn't do it that way around. When Jonathan and his armour bearer make themselves known to the Philistines, the Philistine host is still as brave as brave can be.

[23 : 04] They're not trembling. They're not quaking. They're not running, stampeding in fear. They are still at their full strength. The Philistines are so cocky and sure that they will dispose of these two measly Hebrews.

They say, come on up. Come up to where we are. And they don't shoot arrows at them while they're trying to climb up. They don't try and cut their fingers off when they're grabbing onto the rocks. They want them to come up. They want them to come up so that they can have their sport with them.

So that they can fight against them and slowly all attack them and put them to death and enjoy doing it. They want their fun and they think they're going to get it. Come up and we will show you a thing or two.

So they let them climb. They don't interfere with them while they're doing it. They let them arrive. And it's the worst thing they could possibly have done because it is God who gives the victory against them.

It is God who slaughters that outpost of the Philistines. It is God who puts the fear and tremble into the Philistine host. But before he does it, Jonathan and his armor bearer have to act in faith and have to act in bare courage because they declare themselves to the Philistines when there is still a whole army against them.

[24 : 21] When they have no promise of what the Philistines might do, they might have said, stay down there and we'll come down and we'll fight with you. And it was the other that was to be their sign from the Lord.

They didn't know whether the Philistines would say, yes, we're coming down and we're going to slaughter you or whether they'd say, come on up, which would be the sign from the Lord that they were going to have the victory.

They didn't know which it was going to be. They were prepared to hazard their lives. They were prepared to give their all in order for the possibility of a victory at God's hands.

This is the kind of man, the kind of prince that Jonathan is. He is a man of faith. The Lord is in his lips.

The Lord is in his heart. The Lord is his backbone and his strength. He is a man of faith. He is a man of trust. It's trust because he has to say, oh, well, but supposing we do, oh, God might let them smite us.

[25 : 21] Okay, if God lets them smite us, you die. If the Philistines overrun your camp, you're going to die anyway. If it comes to a battle between 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, unnumbered amounts of infantry on the one hand and 600 Hebrews on the other side, well, you know how it's going to go.

So you've got nothing to lose. You're going to lose your life today. You're going to lose it anyway tomorrow. So the Lord gives him courage. The Lord enables him to trust.

He's a man of faith. He's a man of trust, a man of courage, and a man of dating. Now, he doesn't just, all of that is not just sort of instantly in that generation. Clearly, his father Saul is a courageous warrior king as well, but he's not so great on the initiative.

He's not so great on the faith and the trust, and his courage always tends to, seems to be tinged with caution. Jonathan is the one reaching out, if you like, taking the risk, stepping out in faith, taking the initiative, and putting that faith to the test.

And if that should mean the loss of his life, well, so be it. And the armor bearer too, he's prepared to trust. Where Jonathan goes, he will go. If Jonathan trusts, if Jonathan has faith, that's good enough for him.

[26 : 40] And there is a sense in which such loyalty is likewise commendable. It is the Lord, however, who gives the victory. But for God to act, nine times out of ten, he does not choose to act without means, or without people.

Nine times out of ten, the Lord chooses to act with an individual, by means of instrumentality. He takes someone as his instrument, as his tool.

In this case, it is Jonathan. Yes, he does a miraculous thing with the trembling of the host afterwards, but only after Jonathan has stepped out in faith.

Only after that risk, that stepping out into the unknown, that courage has been taken in both hands. Now, if there is a lesson here for us in this day and age, then surely it is this.

We are overrun by the forces of the world and the darkness and unbelief. Go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised.

[27 : 47] It may be that the Lord will work for us. It may be. It may be not. But that is our condition. We are overrun. Many have melted away from the Lord's cause.

Many have hidden themselves. Many have crossed the Jordan and sought to flee. And they have lost their catch. They have lost their commitment to the Lord's cause.

Many. And there are some who remain faithful, but even those who remain faithful, remember we saw in chapter 13 and verse 7, all the people follow him and his soul trembling.

They also are afraid. And in this country, as we look around us, we might have reason to be afraid. Not only are storm clouds gathering, they are well and truly gathered. The discrimination and attacks against the gospel and against the Lord's people are unrelenting in the public sphere.

Christians are treated in a way that knows that other religions would never be. It is a difficult time to be a Christian. It is a difficult time to be part of what we might say the Lord's army in that sense.

[28 : 51] An army that seems to be ever shrinking. But here is Jonathan. Jonathan who will not just sit and wait to be overrun. Not just wait for the Philistines to overwhelm them.

Not just sit and say, well as long as we stay here and they stay there then we can have our little siege mentality and at least it's a standoff. A standoff is not a victory. God doesn't just want a draw.

He doesn't want the devil to make out that he's as good as God. He doesn't want a share of his spoils. He wants a complete outright victory. And that is what he intends to have.

And to do that he raises up individuals now and then in particular generations perhaps in every generation particular individuals who will go forward in faith.

Who will take a risk and who will step out. And in doing so the power of the Lord follows behind that. The power of the Lord which gives them not only this victory over the garrison but gives the victory over the whole host.

[29 : 55] and changes around the hearts of those who were cowardly to give them courage again and to see yes the Lord can do anything.

The Lord is in charge and it follows like a flood and it flows like a mighty river in spate. When the Lord brings times of revival or refreshing what does the word revive mean?

it means to bring alive again. And as somebody has pointed out revival is not something that happens to the unbelieving world in general because it's already sort of spiritually dead to begin with but rather reviving is a re-kingling of the flame a re-birthing of the strength of those who are meant to be God's people in the first place.

Now to do that somebody must first ask. Somebody must first go forward. Somebody must first step out in faith. Such a man is Jonathan.

He is doing it in a military capacity but in his military capacity he is acting likewise in faith in trust in courage and in daring and he is giving God the glory.

[31 : 16] Nobody at the end of this section verse 23 is saying wow what a brilliant guy Jonathan is. Rather what we are told is the Lord saved Israel that day and the battle passed over and to Beth ate him.

If we would see the Lord save his people in our day then we too must ask seek knock and be prepared to step out in faith and to risk all that we might gain everything.

Good.