FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 14

*Jonathan Attacks the Philistines*

**1 One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man bearing his armor, “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. 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 Micmash, 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 fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.” 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, then; we will cross over toward the men 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.” 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.**

**14:1** *on the other side.* The Philistines were encamped to the north of the pass and the Israelites to the south. (CSB)

**14:2** *Gibeah.* Saul had retreated farther south from Geba (13:3) to Gibeah. (CSB)

*under a pomegranate tree.* It appears to have been customary for leaders in early Israel to hold court under well-known trees (see 22:6; Jdg 4:5).

**14:3** *Ahijah.* Either the brother and predecessor of Ahimelech son of Ahitub (referred to in 21:1; 22:9, 11) or an alternate name for Ahimelech. (CSB)

*wearing an ephod.* See note on 2:28. (CSB)

*Ichabod’s brother.* See 4:21. (CSB)

**14:6** *uncircumcised fellows.* A term of contempt (see 17:26, 36; 31:4; 2Sa 1:20; Jdg 14:3; 15:18; 1Ch 10:4), which draws attention to Israel’s covenant relationship to the Lord (see note on Ge 17:10) and, by implication, to the illegitimacy of the Philistine presence in the land. (CSB)

*by many or by few.* See note on 17:47. Jonathan’s bold plan is undertaken as an act of faith (cf. Heb 11:33–34) founded on God’s promise (9:16). (CSB)

**14:10** *our sign.* See Jdg 6:36–40; Isa 7:11. (CSB)

**14:11** *Hebrews.* See 4:6; 13:3, 7 and note on Ge 14:13. (CSB)

*Israel Routs the Philistines*

**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.16 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.” 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 the Lord rescued Israel that day, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.**

**14:15** *ground shook.* See 7:10; Jos 10:11–14; Ps 77:18 for other instances of divine intervention in nature to bring deliverance to Israel. (CSB)

**14:18** *Bring the ark of God.* Saul decides to seek God’s will before entering into battle with the Philistines (see Nu 27:21; Dt 20:2). Here the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) may preserve the original text (see NIV text note) for the following reasons: 1. In 7:1 the ark was located at Kiriath Jearim, where it remained until David brought it to Jerusalem (2Sa 6), but the ephod was present in Saul’s camp at Gibeah (see v. 3). 2. Nowhere else in the OT is the ark used to determine God’s will, but the ephod (with the Urim and Thummim) was given for this purpose (see 23:9; 30:7 and notes on 2:18, 28). 3. The command to the priest to withdraw his hand (v. 19) is more appropriate with the ephod than with the ark. (CSB)

**14:19** *Withdraw your hand.* Due to the urgency of the moment, Saul decides that to wait for the word of the Lord might jeopardize his military advantage. As in 13:8–12, his decision rests on his own insight rather than on dependence upon the Lord and a commitment to obey him. (CSB)

**14:23** *So the Lord rescued Israel that day.* The writer attributes the victory to the Lord, not to either Saul or Jonathan (see vv. 6, 10, 15; 11:13). (CSB)

*Jonathan Eats Honey*

**24 Now the men of Israel were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, “Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” So none of the troops tasted food. 25 The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground. 26 When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out, yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath. 27 But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. 28 Then one of the soldiers told him, “Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, ‘Cursed be any man who eats food today!’ That is why the men are faint.” 29 Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey. 30 How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?” 31 That day, after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Micmash to Aijalon, they were exhausted. 32 They pounced on the plunder and, taking sheep, cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them, together with the blood. 33 Then someone said to Saul, “Look, the men are sinning against the Lord by eating meat that has blood in it.” “You have broken faith,” he said. “Roll a large stone over here at once.” 34 Then he said, “Go out among the men and tell them, ‘Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with blood still in it.’ ” So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there. 35 Then Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first time he had done this. 36 Saul said, “Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn, and let us not leave one of them alive.” “Do whatever seems best to you,” they replied. But the priest said, “Let us inquire of God here.” 37 So Saul asked God, “Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into Israel’s hand?” But God did not answer him that day. 38 Saul therefore said, “Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today. 39 As surely as the Lord who rescues Israel lives, even if it lies with my son Jonathan, he must die.” But not one of the men said a word. 40 Saul then said to all the Israelites, “You stand over there; I and Jonathan my son will stand over here.” “Do what seems best to you,” the men replied. 41 Then Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, “Give me the right answer.” And Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared. 42 Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son.” And Jonathan was taken. 43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” So Jonathan told him, “I merely tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now must I die?” 44 Saul said, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan.” 45 But the men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God’s help.” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death. 46 Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own land. 47 After Saul had assumed rule over Israel, he fought against their enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment on them. 48 He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them.**

**14:24–46** Following the account of the great victory the Lord had given, the author relates Saul’s actions that strikingly illustrated his lack of fitness to be king. This foolish curse before the battle (see note on v. 24) brought “distress” to the army and, as Jonathan tellingly observed, “made trouble for the country” (v. 29) rather than contributing to the victory. And later, when hindered from taking advantage of the battle’s outcome by the Lord’s refusal to answer (v. 37), Saul was ready to execute Jonathan as the cause, though Jonathan had contributed most to the victory, as everyone else recognized (v. 45). Saul’s growing egocentrism was turning into an all-consuming passion that threatened the very welfare of the nation. Rather than serving the cause of the Lord and his people, he was in fact becoming a king “such as all the other nations have” (8:5). (CSB)

**14:24** *in distress.* Saul’s rash action in requiring his troops to fast placed them at an unnecessary disadvantage in the battle (see vv. 29–30). (CSB)

*Cursed.* Thus Saul as king “bound the army under a strict oath” (v. 28), a most serious matter because an oath directly invoked God’s involvement, whether it concerned giving testimony (Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12), making commitments (Ge 21:23–24; 24:3–4) or prohibiting action (here; Jos 6:24). It appealed to God as the supreme enforcement power and the all-knowing Judge of human actions. (CSB)

*I have avenged myself on my enemies.* Saul perceives the conflict with the Philistines more as a personal vendetta (see note on 15:12) than as a battle for the honor of the Lord and the security of the Lord’s people (note the contrast between his attitude and that of Jonathan in vv. 6, 10, 12). (CSB)

**14:31** *Aijalon.* Located to the west near the Philistines’ own territory (see Jos 10:12).

(CSB)

**14:33** *eating meat that has blood in it.* The Israelites were not permitted to eat blood (see Ge 9:4; Lev 17:11; 19:26; Dt 12:16; Eze 33:25; Ac 15:20 and notes). (CSB)

*broken faith.* See Mal 2:10–11. The same Hebrew term is translated “faithless” (Ps 78:57; Jer 3:8–11) and “treacherous” (Isa 48:8). (CSB)

**14:35** *first time he had done this.* Another indication of Saul’s personal lack of interest in religious matters (see notes on 9:6; 10:11). (CSB)

**14:36** *priest.* Ahijah (see v. 3). (CSB)

**14:37** *Saul asked God.* The means of ascertaining God’s will appears to have been the ephod with its Urim and Thummim (see v. 3 and note on v. 18). (CSB)

*God did not answer.* Because an oath had been broken in the battle, God refused to answer Saul’s inquiry concerning further military action. (CSB)

**14:39** *As surely as the Lord… lives.* An oath formula (see note on v. 24; see also 19:6; Jer 4:2; Hos 4:15). (CSB)

**14:41** *taken by lot.* See 10:20–21; Jos 7:14–18; Pr 16:33. (CSB)

**14:44** A curse formula (see note on v. 24; see also 3:17 and note). (CSB)

**14:45** *he did this today with God’s help.* The men of Saul’s army recognize the inappropriateness of taking the life of the one through whom God has delivered his people. (CSB)

**14:47–48** A summary of Saul’s military victories to the east (Moab and the Ammonites), south (Edom), west (Philistines) and north (Zobah). (CSB)

**14:47** *Ammonites.* See Dt 2:19–21, 37. (CSB)

**14:48** *Amalekites.* See note on 15:2. (CSB)

*Saul’s Family*

**49 Saul’s sons were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua. The name of his older daughter was Merab, and that of the younger was Michal. 50 His wife’s name was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of the commander of Saul’s army was Abner son of Ner, and Ner was Saul’s uncle. 51 Saul’s father Kish and Abner’s father Ner were sons of Abiel. 52 All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.**

**14:49** *Saul’s sons.* See 2Sa 2:8, 10; 1Ch 9:39; 10:2. (CSB)

*Merab … Michal.* See 18:17, 20, 27; 19:11–17; 25:44; 2Sa 6:16–23. (CSB)

**14:50** *Ahinoam.* The only reference to a wife of Saul. His concubine Rizpah is mentioned in 2Sa 3:7; 21:8–11. (CSB)

**14:52** *All the days of Saul.* Closes the main account of Saul’s reign. *he took him into his service.* Saul developed a special cadre of professional soldiers bound to himself, much as David was to do later (see 22:2; 23:13; 25:13; 27:2–3; 29:2; 30:1, 9; 2Sa 2:3; 5:6; 8:18; 15:18; 23:8–39). (CSB)