

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Chapter 14

### *Jonathan Defeats the Philistines*

One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armor, “Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side.” But he did not tell his father. 2 Saul was staying in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men, 3 including Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod's brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the LORD in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. 4 Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. 5 The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba. 6 Jonathan said to the young man who carried 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 can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.” 7 And his armor-bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul.” 8 Then Jonathan said, “Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. 9 If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you,’ then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. 10 But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us.” 11 So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, “Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.” 12 And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer and said, “Come up to us, and we will show you a thing.” And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.” 13 Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. 14 And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow's length in an acre of land. 15 And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic. 16 And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing here and there. 17 Then Saul said to the people who were with him, “Count and see who has gone from us.” And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. 18 So Saul said to Ahijah, “Bring the ark of God here.” For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel. 19 Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, “Withdraw your hand.” 20 Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. 21 Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. 22 Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle. 23 So the LORD saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven.

**14:1** Given the rising tension, Jonathan wanted to survey the enemy forces, but without his father's knowledge because Saul might squelch his initiative. Jonathan's actions were probably more spontaneous than considered, because he was so motivated to defend the safety and honor of God's people. (TLSB)

*armor.* Jonathan was fully equipped for battle. (TLSB)

*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)

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

Location unknown. Imposing pomegranate trees are still seen in Israel. six hundred men. Emphasizes smallness of Israelite forces. (TLSB)

**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)

High priest and great-grandson of Eli, he apparently also served as court chaplain. Linking Saul with the failed house of Eli foreshadows the downfall of his dynasty. (TLSB)

*wearing an ephod.* Garment generally worn by high priest (Samuel also wore one, 2:18). Used in consulting the Lord. (TLSB)

**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)

Equivalent to "these unbelievers." As people whose unbelief put them outside God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gn 17:10), the Philistines did not share the promises of the Israelites. (TLSB)

*nothing can hinder the LORD.* Jonathan's bold confession acknowledged that success lay in God's hands. (TLSB)

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

**14:7** The armor-bearer supported Jonathan physically and spiritually. (TLSB)

**14:8** Jonathan's faith-based boldness is evident in his readiness to come out in the open against a numerically superior enemy. (TLSB)

**14:9–10** *If they say.* Jonathan trusted that God would bring success whatever the circumstances. (TLSB)

*the LORD has given them into our hand.* Wordplay on Jonathan's name, "the Lord gave." When the enemy dared him to take the more dangerous alternative (climbing the stony crags), he took that as a sign from God. (TLSB)

**14:11–12** *out of the holes.* Philistines derisively compare Israelites to animals. (TLSB)

*show you a thing.* Teach you a lesson; punish you. (TLSB)

**14:13–14** *killed about twenty men.* The narrow passage at the top made it easy for a few men to engage many. God gave the strength and victory to Jonathan and his armor-bearer. (TLSB)

*half a furrow's length.* Lit, “half a yoke,” half the area that a yoke of oxen could plow in one day. (TLSB)

**14:15** *garrison ... raiders.* Different type of soldiers; some specialized in standing guard, others in going out on raiding parties. (TLSB)

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

God intervened in nature, causing panic among the arrogant Philistines. (TLSB)

**14:16** Defeat of Philistines is reminiscent of how Israelites under Gideon had defeated the numerically superior army of Midian, whose “army fled” (Jgs 7:22). (TLSB)

**14:17** A capable general, Saul saw the action in the distance and wanted to know which of his troops were involved. (TLSB)

**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 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. 3. The command to the priest to withdraw his hand (v. 19) is more appropriate with the ephod than with the ark. (CSB)

Previously, the ark had been brought into battle against the Philistines—with disastrous consequences (4:11) (TLSB)

**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)

Saul felt that waiting for the Lord’s directive might jeopardize his chance for victory. Such interruption of a priestly activity was unprecedented and unthinkable. (TLSB)

**14:20** *against his fellow.* In the general confusion, Philistines were turning on one another. (TLSB)

**14:21** Israelite mercenaries turned against Philistines now that Israelites were winning. (TLSB)

**14:22** Success breeds success, and the Israelites who previously hid for their own safety now joined the victorious Israelites. (TLSB)

**14:23** *So the LORD saved 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)

**14:1–23** Against great odds, the Lord gives Israel a victory over the Philistines through Jonathan, whose name means “the Lord gave.” Too often, fear keeps us from venturing out for the Lord. Though we should not dare God to give us signs, we can learn from Jonathan’s story to attempt great things for God and expect great things from Him. Though we may fail from the world’s perspective, God gives us ultimate spiritual victory and all things in Christ. • Heavenly Father, forgive us for our timidity and failure

to step out in faith. Inspire us through Jonathan's example to confront the forces of sin and Satan. Amen. (TLSB)

*Saul's Rash Vow*

**24** And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food. **25** Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. **26** And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath. **27** But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright. **28** Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food this day.'" And the people were faint. **29** Then Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. **30** How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great." **31** They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint. **32** The people pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground. And the people ate them with the blood. **33** Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here." **34** And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there. **35** And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD. **36** Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." **37** And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day. **38** And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today. **39** For as the LORD lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But there was not a man among all the people who answered him. **40** Then he said to all Israel, "You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." **41** Therefore Saul said, "O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim." And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. **42** Then Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan." And Jonathan was taken. **43** Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die." **44** And Saul said, "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan." **45** Then the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. **46** Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

**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 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** *hard pressed*. 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*. While Saul perceived his conflict with the enemy as a personal vendetta, Jonathan saw it as carrying out God's plan. Saul's growing egocentrism becomes evident. (TLSB)

**14:25–26** Although enticed by food that could restore their strength, the people took the oath of v 24 seriously. (TLSB)

**14:27–28** *his eyes became bright*. He was refreshed, his strength renewed. (TLSB)

*the people were faint*. Contrast between Jonathan's renewed strength and the weakness of the rest of the army is striking and shows the foolishness of Saul's oath. (TLSB)

**14:29** Jonathan was as honest and forthright as he was brave, even to the point of openly criticizing his father. (TLSB)

**14:30** Jonathan immediately recognized the sad results of the oath his father had made, limiting the fighting capacity of his own army and its ability to gain the full victory that was in its grasp. (TLSB)

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

West of and closer to Philistine territory than Michmash, c 14 mi NW of Jerusalem. Famous for Joshua's battle, when the sun stood still (Jsh 10:12). (TLSB)

*very faint*. Repetition intensifies the words of v 28, adding "very." (TLSB)

**14:32–34** *spoil*. Booty of the battle included the livestock of the Philistines. *ate them with the blood*. Unclean behavior. Mosaic Law forbade this (Lv 17:11–12; 19:26; Dt 12:16). (TLSB)

*roll a great stone ... slaughter them here*. When the people slaughtered the animals on the stone, blood drained out to the ground, making the meat acceptable for eating. (TLSB)

**14:33** *eating with the blood in it*. The Israelites were not permitted to eat blood. (CSB)

*dealt treacherously*. 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** *built an altar to the LORD*. It seems Saul used the "great stone" as an altar, thus consecrating the slaughtered animals to the Lord. (TLSB)

*first altar*. Indicates Saul's lifelong lack of interest in spiritual matters. (TLSB)

*first altar that he had built to the Lord.* Another indication of Saul's personal lack of interest in religious matters. (CSB)

**14:36** *by night.* Saul wanted to overtake the enemy under cover of darkness. (TLSB)

*priest.* Ahijah. (CSB)

*draw near to God here.* It is the priest, not Saul, who suggests taking the matter to God. In addition to the construction of the altar, apparently Ahijah the priest was thinking of using the Urim and Thummim (cf v 41). (CSB)

**14:37** *Saul inquired of God.* The means of ascertaining God's will appears to have been the ephod with its Urim and Thummim. (CSB)

In addition to the Israelites' failure to attain a complete victory, Saul's rash vow resulted in God not answering his inquiry. "Saul was a great king, chosen by God, and a godly man. But when he was established on his throne, he let his heart wander from God and put his trust in his crown and power [1 Samuel 9–13]. Then he had to perish with all he had, so that not even his children remained [1 Samuel 31]." (TLSB)

After the priest suggested it, Saul turned to God. (TLSB)

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

*see how this sin has arisen.* Saul wanted the leaders of Israel to see the resolution of this situation. (TLSB)

**14:39–42** Almost all we know about how the sacred lot operated comes from this and the following verses. It seems that the technique used in determining God's will involved questions that could be answered by yes or no. Answers were given by means of the Urim and Thummim, which may have been sticks, some kind of dice, or black and white stones. (TLSB)

**14:39** *As surely as the LORD... lives.* An oath formula. (CSB)

Saul names his own son to emphasize the zeal of his oath. (CSB)

*he shall surely die.* Saul failed to see that it was his own ill-considered vow that had caused the problem. (CSB)

**14:40–42** *on one side ... on the other side.* These words offer some insight into the working of the Urim and Thummim, which in some way would indicate a choice between the two. (TLSB)

*Jonathan was taken.* Final casting of the lot pointed to Jonathan as the one who was at the center of the impasse (cf Jsh 7:18). In reality, Jonathan was not guilty before God; nevertheless, the Lord used this means to get to the heart of the issue. (TLSB)

**14:43–44** *Tell me what you have done.* Saul had the culprit, or so he thought. (TLSB)

*I will die.* Jonathan's bravery is evident once more, as he was willing even to die if that would serve the cause of God's people. Throughout chs 13–15, faithful and noble Jonathan shines in bright contrast to his self-serving and unbelieving father. (TLSB)

*God do so to me and more also.* Another curse formula. (TLSB)

*you shall surely die, Jonathan.* Saul was ready to sacrifice his own son for the foolish vow. (TLSB)

**14:44** *As the LORD lives.* People answer Saul's vow with one of their own, namely, that Jonathan would not die. (TLSB)

*worked with God this day.* People saw that taking Jonathan's life would be wrong. (TLSB)

*ransomed.* Noble Jonathan had the backing of the people and of God. (TLSB)

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

**14:24–46** Saul's foolish oath threatens Jonathan's life, but the people rightly intervene. At times, all of us have acted rashly rather than seeking God's guidance, sometimes with long-lasting (perhaps lifelong) repercussions. Thankfully, as the Israelites "ransomed" Jonathan from Saul's rash oath, Christ ransomed us from our own sinful folly and grants us new opportunities. • Almighty God, forgive us when we act rashly. Give us the wisdom to seek out Your way in the pages of Holy Scripture. In the Savior's name. Amen. (TLSB)

*Saul Fights Israel's Enemies*

**47 When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned he routed them. 48 And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. 49 Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn was Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. 50 And the name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. 51 Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. 52 There was hard fighting against the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man, or any valiant man, he attached him to himself.**

**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** *Moab.* Southeast of the Salt Sea; played a frequent role in Israelite history, including the story of Ruth. (TLSB)

*Ammonites.* Ammon was northeast of the Salt Sea, with the capital of Rabbath-ammon (modern day Amman, capital of Jordan); see note, Jgs 3:13. There was much interchange between Ammon and Israel, including David's flight there (2Sm 17:27–29) and Solomon's marriage with Ammonite women (1Ki 11:1). (TLSB)

*Edom.* South of Moab; Israel under Moses passed through it on its way to the Promised Land. (TLSB)

*Zobah*. Northeast of Israel; controlled eastern Syria. (TLSB)

*Philistines*. From whom the name “Palestine” is derived; perennial enemies of Israel. Eventually, Saul met his end in a battle against them (ch 31), located on the coast of the Great Sea. See map, p 451. *he routed them*. Despite Saul’s spiritual failings, God used him to defeat the enemies of His chosen nation. (TLSB)

**14:48** *he did valiantly*. Saul’s skill and bravery as a military commander is acknowledged. (TLSB)

*Amalekites*. Nomadic raiders descended from Esau (Gn 36:12, 16), living south of Israel. The two nations had clashed when Moses led the Israelites through that region (Dt 25:17). (TLSB)

**14:49–51** Simplicity of Saul’s family life contrasts sharply with that of King David and even more so with that of King Solomon. (TLSB)

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

Only mention of a wife of Saul; his concubine Rizpah is referred to in 2Sm 3:7; 21:8–12.

*Abner*. Saul’s cousin; common in the ancient Near East to appoint family members to important government positions. (TLSB)

**14:52** *hard fighting against the Philistines*. No other foe so dominated the attention of Saul as did the Philistines, as the mention here attests. (TLSB)

*All the days of Saul*. Closes the main account of Saul’s reign. (TLSB)

*strong man*. Though a king, Saul’s main role was that of military commander; because of constant threats from Israel’s neighbors, he was always looking for men who could serve in the army. Among them was David, who would become Saul’s successor. (TLSB)

*attached him to himself*. 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)

**14:47–52** As king, Saul serves primarily as a military leader. Today, believers continue to face enemies, both spiritual and physical. Through God’s weapons, in particular “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17), God grants us victory and strength to serve Him boldly. • Lord of hosts, be with us in our daily struggle against all enemies that seek to destroy us now and eternally. Strengthen and uphold us until we pass from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant. In Jesus’ name. Amen. (TLSB)