

Two Men Go to War

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One of my favorite stories from the Old Testament is about King Saul's son, Prince Jonathan. By this time Jonathan was getting impatient with his father's disobedience to God, especially when it came to freeing Israel from the Philistines, and this time he decided to take matters into his own hands.

The original story is recorded in 1 Samuel 14:1-23.

The Philistines had overrun Israel
and eliminated all their blacksmiths,
so none of the Israelites had even a sharp farm tool
that might be used as a weapon.

Not one of them had a spear or a sword,
save King Saul and Prince Jonathan,
and most of the army had run away to hide themselves
in caves and cisterns and old tombs,
and some even joined the Philistines.

Saul and Jonathan gathered the 600 warriors who were left
and they camped on the outskirts of Gibeah,
around the pomegranate tree at Migron,
while the Philistine army camped
on the high ground above the valley at Micmash.

The Israelites needed to do something, *anything*,
but King Saul refused to do anything but sit and wait.

At last Jonathan, known as a great warrior himself, grew tired of waiting.

He called his armor bearer,
a brave young man totally devoted to serving him,
and said,

“Come on, let's go scout out the Philistine camp.”

But they didn't tell his father.

*In fact, they snuck out of the camp
without telling ANYONE what they planned!*

Jonathan and his armor bearer had to go down
between the steep cliffs at Micmash
to reach the Philistine camp.

“Let’s go across to those pagans,” Jonathan said,
“and see what the Lord might lead us to do.
He doesn’t need a huge army to fight a battle!”

“I’m with you, heart and soul,” his young armor bearer replied.
“We’ll do whatever you think is right.”

“Then here’s our plan,” Jonathan said.
“We’ll go out in the open, where they can see us.
If they say, ‘Stay there and we’ll kill you,’
then we’ll stop and won’t go up.
But if they say, ‘Come up and fight,’
then we’ll know the Lord is with us
and we’ll climb up and beat them!”

As soon as the Philistine sentry saw them, he hollered,
“Look, the Israelites have crawled out of their holes!
Come on up and fight—we’ll teach you a lesson!”

Then Jonathan turned to his armor bearer and smiled.
“That’s our sign—the Lord will give us victory.
Let’s climb up and beat them. Follow me!”

So they climbed up, hand over hand,
and when they reached the top they began to fight—
Jonathan using his sword,
his armor bearer using his shield.

And the Philistines began to fall back
as Jonathan and his armor bearer
seemed to kill with every blow.

About twenty Philistines died as the battle raged,
Jonathan and his young friend running and fighting
all over the camp, nearly half an acre in size.

The Lord sent a panic attack on the Philistines,
not just there but on the troops elsewhere in Israel,
and then the camp was rocked by an earthquake.
The Philistines were terrified!

Meanwhile, back at King Saul's camp,
the lookout was shocked to see Philistine raiding parties
running away in every direction.

But when he told Saul, the king simply said,
"Find out who isn't here."

(I think he had his suspicions!)

When his men came back

and told him Jonathan and his armor bearer were gone,
Saul called for the priest to ask God what he should do.

But even as he talked to the priest
the noise from the Philistine camp at Micmash
kept on getting louder and louder.

Finally Saul said, "Forget it. Just organize the troops and let's go."

When Saul and his 600 men reached the Philistine camp
they found the Philistines so confused
that they were killing each other!

The Israelites who had defected to the Philistines
saw Saul's army and rejoined them,
and when the warriors in hiding heard the noise of battle
they came back and rejoined the army too.

Then the Israelite army, led by Jonathan and his armor bearer,
dealt the Philistines their worst defeat ever—
all because Jonathan and his armor bearer
chose to trust in God rather than an army.