

1st Samuel

Lesson 25

Fourth, we are told where Jonathan found his station to spy on the camp of the Philistines located at the “*pass of Michmash*.” He stationed himself on a crag that the Israelites would nickname *Bozez*. A *crag* is a rock protrusion that hangs out over a steep ravine or valley. It allows a person perched on the crag to see everything in the distance and directly below. The nickname *Bozez* means *shining*. The valley or pass of Michmash runs almost perfectly east to west. For Jonathan to get to the spot where he could see the camp of the Philistines in the pass, he had to traverse the mountains. The mountain had a protruding rock that he called Bozez. He most likely called it that name cause once he was stationed on that rock, he was in the shining sun during the day. Moving to a new location on the same mountain, another protruding rock allowed Jonathan to see the Philistine camp from a different viewpoint. He nicknamed that rock *Seneh*. *Seneh* means *acacia*, which is better translated as *little thorn tree*. The protruding rock must have had little thorn trees growing out of the rock. The writer tells us that one of these protruding rocks was on the north opposite Michmash and the other was on the south opposite Geba. This wording is how the Hebrews would have described the location of these crags. However, in our western minds, it would have been easier for us to understand the writer's location if he had said that one rock was south of Michmash and the other was north of Geba. The word for *opposite* means in the opposite direction. When the writer tells us that one protruding rock was *on the north opposite Michmash*, it meant Michmash was to the south of the rock – opposite the north, which would be south. The same is true with Geba. When the writer tells us that the rock was *on the south opposite Geba*, it meant that Geba was to the north – opposite the south, which would be north. From Jonathan's position on the mount where these two protruding rocks were located, Michmash was to the south, and Geba was to the north.

The passage says, “*Between the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines' garrison, there was a sharp crag....*” We have already spoken about the crags, but we need to address what the writer meant by telling us that there were “*passes by which Jonathan sought to cross over to the Philistines' garrison....*” There must have been at least two passes, and that is why the writer tells us that Jonathan examined the two passes by way of the two crags that would allow him to determine how to get close to the garrison camp. More passes may have been available and viewable from the two crags, but we are not given those details. What we are told is that there were “*the passes by which Jonathan sought to cross,*” which meant there were at least two passes, if not more.

(2) The Show

From the two crags, Jonathan was able to survey the camp of the Philistines from a distance. He knew that he needed to get closer to the camp, down where he could actually hear the voices of the Philistines. The crags allowed him to select the pass in the ravine that would be the best choice for his spying plan. It was time for the show. He had a plan, and he conversed with his armor bearer. Verse 6.

“*Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, “Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few.”*”
“*His armor bearer said to him, “Do all that is in your heart; turn yourself, and here I am with you according to your desire.”*”
“*Then Jonathan said, “Behold, we will cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them.”*” (14:6-8)

To get to the garrison from his current position, Jonathan and his armor bearer needed to “*cross over to the garrison.*” “*Cross over*” what? Read nothing extraordinaire into these words. It simply meant that Jonathan and his armor bearer had to move closer to the camp by traversing down from the

mountain into the pass of Michmash. To do that, the armor-bearer was more than willing to join in the task with his master.

Interestingly, Jonathan called the Philistines *uncircumcised*. It was a title of reproach for all Israelites. To be uncircumcised meant that an Israelite was totally out of the will of God. What Jonathan was saying in this passage was that the Philistines were totally out of the will of God as they camped in the pass at Michmash. They were in the Promised Land that did not belong to them. The land belonged to the tribes of Israel. It was promised to Israel since the days of Abraham. How dare the Philistines try to take it for their own land.

Notice, if you will, that Jonathan said, “*perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few.*” Jonathan does not know for sure if the LORD will help him and his armor bearer, but he is sure of one thing, the LORD does not need an army to rescue His people. He can use a few to do the job of an army. To that, Jonathan has spoken correctly. In my time in the ministry of almost fifty years, I have been amazed that in every Church there seems to be the elder man who holds no position on staff, no position on the committees, he is never verbose, he is never loud, he is never proud, he is never first to speak. In fact, he is always the last to speak. In addition, he is always small in stature. He waits. He ponders. He watches. He listens. Then, at just the right time, when all else has been said and done, he stands to his feet and quietly states his thoughts quickly and succinctly. In less than a moment, he has made his point. Once he spoke, it did not matter what all the rest had said and done. It did not matter the position of the pastor, the staff, a committee member, or one in the congregation. Their positions were dead in the water unless they agreed with this one man’s words. When the vote was taken, the vote always was swayed by his statement. In essence, he was the least in the congregation but the greatest among all the leaders and the people. He was a true elder in the sense of how the word is used in the complete Word of God. Never is the word *elder* used in any other connotation. A pastor cannot be an elder simply because he is voted to be the pastor. The pastor was to be selected from the men in the congregations who naturally held an elder status among the people without any forced approval by man. Neither will Paul instruct Timothy and Titus to create elders in the New Testament Church by making them leaders in the Church. Rather, Paul instructed Timothy and Titus to select the pastors and staff from those men who were already proven godly elders among the people, older men, full of wisdom, men who in their lives exhibited certain qualifications – but they were never younger men. They were always proven, men. In the same way, when Moses needed help judging the people in the wilderness journey, the LORD instructed Moses to choose the judges from the men who were already recognized as older, wiser, natural elders among the people. Being selected for a position as a judge did not give them the title of elder. If they were not already viewed by the people as natural elders, they were not to be selected as a judge. True elders do not gain authority by a vote of the people. True elders gain authority through their lifetime of integrity. If we were to read ahead into the pages of the New Testament, it would become evident that when an elder system of leadership is put in place, at first, it might work very well, but soon it will break down and begin making decisions out of the will of God. Just look at the elder system of the Sanhedrin, where elder positions were passed from father to son through inheritance or were purchased with great sums of money from a sitting elder in need of money. So, too, in every Church congregation where elders have been erroneously established to run the Church instead of with all authority in the under-shepherd, the God-ordained, God called, proven pastor the Church, through the years, the elder system becomes corrupt – destroying the lives of good men in the service of the LORD and damaging innocent family members and children. I cannot think of one elder system in one Church where decisions that forever caused the young people to love Jesus but hate the organized Church. In the Old Testament days, this, too, was the case with the young people. The LORD rarely used groups to direct His

congregations, be it in the Nation of Israel or the New Testament Church. He always used the few. For this, Jonathan's words are forever correct, true, and trustworthy.

Finally, Jonathan told his armor bearer that once they were at the edge of the Philistine camp, the two would reveal themselves to the enemy. It is a dangerous plan.

(a) The First Option – The LORD Disapproves

But Jonathan does not present his dangerous plan without some specific options. He gives the first option for if the LORD disapproves of being at the edge of the camp of the Philistines. Verse 9.

"If they say to us, 'Wait until we come to you'; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them." (14:9)

You may not readily recognize it with his first option, but Jonathan has designed a place almost exactly like the plan of Gideon and his fleece that we learned about in the book of Judges. In this first option, Jonathan and his armor bearer would reveal themselves to the Philistines and wait for their reply. Their reply would, in turn, reveal God's plan to Jonathan based on Jonathan's pre-determined response from the Philistines. The first option would tell Jonathan that God disapproved of his plan to attack the garrison with just him and his armor bearer.

(b) The Second Option – The LORD Approves

Then Jonathan presented the second option where the LORD approves of his plan. Verse 10.

"But if they say, 'Come up to us,' then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hands; and this shall be the sign to us." (14:10)

In this option, the reply of the Philistines will indicate that the LORD approves of Jonathan's plan and will bring victory over the Philistines even with only two men fighting against the many.

(i) The Choice of the Option

Jonathan and the armor bearer moved into place and revealed themselves to the Philistines. We come to the choice of the options. The Philistines will reveal God's will according to their own words as pre-planned by Jonathan. Verse 11.

"When both of them revealed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines said, 'Behold, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves.'"¹² So the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor bearer and said, "Come up to us and we will tell you something." (14:11-12a)

Jonathan's second option was inadvertently chosen by the Philistines. The fleece placed before the LORD by Jonathan was answered. But the Philistine's answer also revealed something else about their knowledge of the Israelite army. They knew that a huge portion of Saul's army had hidden in the holes when they learned of the approaching Philistine army. How did they know about that? No doubt, just as Jonathan had spied out the garrison of the Philistines, the Philistines had spied out the garrison of Saul at Gilgal and saw the men running to hide for their lives.

What is a garrison? We would like to say it was a fort or fortified stronghold of some kind where the soldiers were safe and protected from their enemies. When this word was used in the English translations, it simply meant the place where the army was camped. The sheer number of soldiers in the camp was thought to be its protection and stronghold. However, these camp locations were usually carefully selected. No enemy could attack from above, and the camp members had plenty of escape routes in case of attack by an enemy. As such, the campsite was a protected location even though it had no walls of wood or stone, gates, bars, motes, or drawbridges as we tend to think of a garrison today.

(ii) The Calamity of the Option

When Jonathan hears the confirmation of the choice of the option, we hear of Jonathan's answer and the calamity of the option. Verse 12b.

"And Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hands of Israel." (14:12b)

Jonathan's unsurety about his plan had become the surety of his plan. He did not question the answer of the Philistines. He did not second guess or doubt his plan for one moment. He heard the answer. To him, it was God's answer spoken through the lips of his enemy. To him, it was his sign to attack.

(3) The Slaughter

Thus, we come to the slaughter of the Philistines by the hands of Jonathan and his armor bearer. Verse 13.

"Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor bearer behind him; and they fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer put some to death after him. ¹⁴ That first slaughter which Jonathan and his armor bearer made was about twenty men within about half a furrow in an acre of land. ¹⁵ And there was a trembling in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. Even the garrison and the raiders trembled, and the earth quaked so that it became a great trembling." (14:13-15)

Evidently, Jonathan and his armor bearer were crouched down out of sight. But then they rose to their feet and attacked, killing "about twenty men in half a furrow in an acre of land." What does this all mean? The Hebrew does not say "in an acre of land." It says "in a yoke of land." Being a "half a furrow in a yoke of land" means the distance an ox can plow a field in half a day. A furrow is a trench created by the plow pulled by the oxen. The distance was only half the length of the full furrow in a yoke of land. A team of oxen could plow a yoke of land in the morning and a yoke of land in the evening. You might say it was about an acre, but that might not be accurate. The amount of land plowed in a morning was determined by several factors such as the kind of soil, overgrowth on the soil, rockiness of the soil, etc. Nevertheless, whatever amount the oxen could plow in a morning was called a yoke of land. It had more to do with what was accomplished that morning, not the amount that was accomplished. For Jonathan and his armor bearer, they killed about twenty men in the length of a furrow created in a normal half day's work with a team of oxen and a plow.

The sudden attack frightened the Philistines. But then, the trembling of the earth frightened them more. The trembling of the earth was not the act of Jonathan or his armor bearer; it was an act of God.