

Message #30

I Samuel 14:16-23

Many years ago a man came to our church that had at one time been a part of Covey Hill Baptist Church out in the Gobles area. In the course of our conversation, it became apparent to me that he had actually been in the church when Dr. Leon Wood was there. So I mentioned the fact that what a privilege it would have been to sit under his ministry. The person said he was a real scholar. Frankly, he was a great Biblical scholar.

Dr. Leon Wood actually traveled to Israel and eventually wrote a book on Israel. He went to be with the Lord in 1977. Dr. Leon Wood once said, "When man has faith to move ahead, though the odds seem impossible, God is ready to step in and finish the task."

God does not need big numbers to accomplish big things. He looks for people who will trust Him and obey Him. What God is looking for is a couple of faithful people who are willing to tackle things for Him. If they will step out in faith and move forward for God, God will bless them and give them victory.

Now Jonathan and his armor bearer stepped out by faith and took on the Philistines. They had one sword, but they also had God. I want to point out something that Jonathan did. He came up with a plan that he would climb up and hide in a cave and then shout out to the Philistines. If they said, "Come up to us," then he would know the Lord had given them victory for that would be a sign (14:10).

Now what is the difference between this "sign" and Gideon's fleece? Gideon was given a direct order from God to go and deliver Israel and he kept putting out fleeces after God had told him to do it (Judges 6:14). Jonathan has not been given a direct order from God and he doesn't know for sure what the outcome is going to be. He simply laid out what they would look for to determine the will of God.

That is clear from this text:

WHEN A BELIEVER IS SURROUNDED BY IMPOSSIBLE ODDS AND INSURMOUNTABLE NUMBERS, IF HE REMAINS FAITHFUL IN THE WARFARE HE WILL SEE GOD GIVE GREAT VICTORY.

God does not need impressive numbers to win and give great victory. What God looks for are a few faithful people who are willing to believe Him and trust in Him. When God sees His faithful people outnumbered and outgunned in warfare, that is the kind of setting in which He works. He loves to give great victory to His people in contexts that are just like that.

This is one fascinating text. There are three historical observations we may make:

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #1 – Saul’s watchmen see confused movement in the enemy camp. **14:16**

The scene now switches from Jonathan, who is on the front lines of Israel, to Saul, who is back across the valley sitting under a tree.

Saul and the Israelite army were much smaller than the big numbers of the Philistines—30,000 chariots; 6,000 horsemen and an innumerable number of foot soldiers (13:5). In fact, when Saul originally began to reign, he had about 2,000 men with him (I Sam. 13:2), but when the threat of the Philistines came, he was down to 600 men (13:15).

Jonathan and his armor bearer climbed up the rocky mountain and attacked the Philistines and as they were doing that, God sent an earthquake to the Philistine camp (14:15). As a result, there was chaos within the camp. The Philistines were trembling.

According to **verse 16**, Saul’s spies, called watchmen, were monitoring the Philistines and they spotted a lot of movement. The Hebrew says they were “melting.” What that means is that these Philistines had been turned into water and were running every which way.

That earthquake not only moved the earth, it got the entire Philistine army moving (**v. 15**). There was mass confusion in the Philistine camp and the watchmen could see something was very different. This is something that God specifically had promised He would do. God said He would cause great confusion within the enemies of Israel (Deut. 7:20-23).

When the watchmen spies looked at the Philistines, they saw that they were moving here and there and huge numbers were leaving.

When God starts moving to defeat an enemy, there will be a lot of movement and confusion within the enemy. They will not be able to unify themselves in order to overthrow God’s true people and God will let His people see their confusion and instability. They will do things and say things and move various directions that are completely unstable and God’s faithful people will be able to watch it and recognize it.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #2 – Saul analyzes the situation and prepares to fight. **14:17-19**

Saul had a sense that God was at work and he realized something major was taking place. The confusion of the Philistine camp gave him hope.

There are two specific actions Saul took:

Action #1 - Saul numbered his troops. **14:17**

The first thing Saul did was to get a number count to determine who had left. More than likely Saul thought a bunch of his guys must be fighting the Philistines to put them on the run, but the truth was it was only two. The two who were missing were Jonathan his son and his armor bearer.

Action #2 - Saul asked the priest to bring him the ark. **14:18-19**

According to **verse 18**, Saul asked the priest Ahijah, who is related to Ichabod, to bring him “the ark of God.”

Now earlier in the book the Israelites had taken the ark out to fight the Philistines and it ended in complete disaster (I Sam. 4:3, 10, 11). There is a debate on whether Saul wanted to do the same kind of thing or whether he was just looking to God and the ark for guidance.

Saul was probably thinking having the ark and consulting the priest would guarantee victory. But he was about to learn that victory belongs to the Lord.

Whatever the motive, according to **verse 19**, it was revealed that he did not need to take the ark with him. While Saul was talking to the priest, there was such a commotion in the camp of the Philistines and such confusion that Saul said to the priest “withdraw your hand.” In other words, you don’t need to worry about bringing the ark, God is giving you victory.

Now this shows in some respects how fickle Saul actually is. He is like a yo-yo. On the one hand, he wants the priest and the ark there and on the other hand he says, “Never mind,” “I’ve changed my mind.” God was giving victory so we don’t need you. Saul makes rash decisions. He is all over the map. He reacts in foolish ways.

This is important to see. Victory is not guaranteed to people just because they own Bibles. Victory is guaranteed to those who trust in God and actually do the will of God. Notice, Saul is basically doing nothing here to get this victory. God is just giving victory because of the faithfulness of his son.

Sometimes for victory, you just need someone to get into the war. Sometimes you need to stop planning and praying and get fighting.

HISTORICAL OBSERVATION #3 – Saul and the Israelites rally to defeat the Philistines.
14:20-23

There are three groups who rallied and fought the Philistines:

Group #1 - Saul and all who were with him rallied. **14:20**

Saul and those with him charged into battle. What they discovered as they did this is that one Philistine was killing another Philistine with their own swords. They were fighting themselves.

God caused such confusion that one Philistine was devouring another. When God is judging someone, He will cause people to destroy themselves.

Group #2 - The captured Israelites rallied. **14:21**

More than likely the Israelites who were with the Philistines were those blacksmiths and metal workers who had been taken captive and forced to work for the Philistines (13:17-21). They were joining in the fight against the Philistines.

This is amazing sovereignty. God had allowed these people to be taken captive so they could become part of a revolt on the inside at this moment.

Group #3 - The hidden Israelites rallied. **14:22**

Many of the Israelites were hidden in caves and they came out of their hiding places and started chasing the Philistines. What a turn around.

Verse 23 says, “the LORD delivered Israel that day.”

For a distance of 15-20 miles, the Philistines were routed from Michmash to Beth-aven. The Philistines made a “mad dash” for Beth-aven, thinking they could escape. But they did not escape. When God gives victory, it is thorough and complete.

All of this happened because two men decided to move forward for God.

Now this would have been a very great and successful way to end this story. But as you will see next time, the story doesn't quite end here.

PRACTICAL THOUGHTS:

- 1) Enemies may be intimidating but they cannot ever topple those who are right with God.**
- 2) Victory in any situation belongs to the sovereignty of God and we need to believe that.**

We need to understand this and believe this. We need to believe God's word.

Genesis 18:14 - “Is anything too hard for the LORD”

Job 42:2 - “I know that you can do all things.”

Jeremiah 32:17 - “Nothing is too hard for you.”

Luke 1:37 - “Nothing will be impossible with God.”

Matthew 19:26 - “With God all things are possible.”

Mark 14:36 - “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.”

It is one thing to know these verses; it is another to believe them.

- 3) In order for victory to occur, someone needs to step out by faith and go to war.**

Victory does not occur by osmosis. God's people need to know His word, believe it and obey it.