

Jonathan—the faithful disciple (1)

Russell Ebbs

THE NAME Jonathan means ‘Yahweh has given’, and is very appropriate for one who is a type of the disciples of Christ. As it is written, “All that *the Father giveth me* shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (Jno. 6:37). The Philistines, a type of sinful flesh, had dominion over Israel (Judg. 14:4; 1 Sam. 17:9; cf. Rom. 6:14-16), yet Jonathan, a man of valour and faith, was prepared to war against the flesh (1 Sam. 13:3), even though this brought the full fury of the fleshly enemy with 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen (a total of 36,000) against Israel (the ecclesia) (v. 5). Israel was therefore in great distress (v. 6), and it is possible that some blamed Jonathan for stirring up the wrath of the Philistines.

When Saul, a type of the first Adam, sinned in personally offering the burnt offering and peace offerings, it is likely that his son Jonathan would have been present and heard Samuel’s condemnation of Saul: “But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD [Yahweh] hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the LORD [Yahweh] hath commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD [Yahweh] commanded thee” (v. 14). If Jonathan was not present, he would soon have heard of Yahweh’s judgement through the prophet (cf. 20:30,31). Whilst Jonathan was in no way complicit in, or held guilty for, his father’s sin, yet the consequences of the sentence were enormous for him personally; he would not inherit his father’s throne over the kingdom of Israel.

Submit yourselves to God

The different reactions of Saul and Jonathan to the sentence are a powerful exhortation to us. Saul fought against the Word of God to the bitter end. He refused submission to it, even to the extreme of seeking to kill the man after God’s own heart, David. However, Jonathan was submissive to the Word, and was faithfully watching for him who was to come to sit upon the throne of Yahweh over Israel.

Though Saul still had six hundred men remaining with him, twice the number by which Yahweh delivered Israel by the hand of Gideon

(Judg. 7:7), yet he retreated homewards to tarry at Gibeah of Benjamin in the face of the invading Philistines (1 Sam. 13:16). The flesh, when it rejects the Word, cannot endure trial, any more than we can withstand tribulations if we do not apply ourselves every day to digesting the Scriptures, our manna in the wilderness.

Every man’s sword against his fellow

The incident at Michmash, when Jonathan and his armourbearer slaughtered twenty Philistines, initiated action by Yahweh to save Israel on that day of battle, when “every man’s sword was against his fellow” (14:20). This was a shadow pointing forward to the time when, through Christ and the saints, “the LORD [Yahweh]” shall “go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle . . . And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the LORD [Yahweh] shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbour” (Zech. 14:3,13).¹

Jonathan and his armourbearer are one in this record (1 Sam. 14:7). It is interesting that the word “armourbearer” means ‘one who lifts the vessels’, and the same Hebrew term occurs in Isaiah 52:11: “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, *that bear the vessels of the LORD [Yahweh]*”. The Levites were given to the high priest to bear the vessels of Yahweh (Num. 3:6-9), and Jonathan and his armourbearer therefore represent spiritual Levites, who are given to, separated unto, Jesus, the High Priest (Jno. 6:37), to minister before him. Once more we have words of encouragement in this narrative in 1 Samuel 14 concerning our own discipleship.²

-
1. There are several other links between 1 Samuel 14 and Zechariah 14. For example, between Bozez and Seneh (1 Sam. 14:4) there was a great valley (cf. Zech. 14:4), and 1 Samuel 14:21 records that the Hebrews amongst the Philistines fought against the latter (cf. Zech. 14:13,14).
 2. The term ‘armourbearer’ occurs seven times in 1 Samuel 14.

Bozez and Seneh

In his eagerness to overcome that which had dominion over Israel, Jonathan sought to pass two sharp toothlike elevated rocks (1 Sam. 14:4). These were significantly named Bozez, which was toward the Philistine encampment, and Seneh, which was southward toward the Israelite encampment. These two names speak of the gospel of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, styled elsewhere 'the hope of Israel'. Bozez means 'fine linen', something which we attain through the Lord Jesus Christ, as it is written: "And to her [the bride of Christ] was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. 19:8). Seneh means 'bush', and is used six times in the Scripture to describe ethnic Israel, the burning bush of Exodus 3:2 being an example. In type, Jonathan and his armourbearer are a lesson to us to "seek . . . first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Mt. 6:33).

In order to attack the Philistines, this tiny force of two faithful men climbed up on their hands and feet (1 Sam. 14:13). This speaks to us of the Lord's command, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mt. 7:13,14). It is sometimes a difficult climb to overcome the flesh, even partially.

Then Jonathan and his armour-bearer attacked the Philistines but slew only twenty of them in a small area (1 Sam. 14:14), with Yahweh saving Israel that day by a great destruction of the enemy (vv. 20,23). So it is for ourselves; we sometimes manage to overcome the flesh in a limited way, yet it is the arm of our God that has achieved the victory, through which we have the hope (Rev. 5:5).

Jonathan knew these principles, for he said: "Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the LORD

[Yahweh] will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD [Yahweh] to save by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6). Although this lesson was lost on his father Saul (see above), Jonathan almost certainly had in mind Yahweh's words to Gideon, when Gideon's army was reduced by God to three hundred watchful men (Judg. 7:4,7). We likewise must believe in "the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11).

Jonathan redeemed

1 Samuel 14 ends with Jonathan willingly submitting to a sentence of death brought about by his father's foolish oath (v. 43), yet the sentence is reversed in one of many situations recorded in Scripture which provide mirror images of Scriptural principles. Saul, ever concerned about his status in the eyes of the people, is swayed by their words: "And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the LORD [Yahweh] liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued [Heb. 'padah', meaning 'redeemed'] Jonathan, that he died not" (v. 45). So Jonathan the son was redeemed, by the determination of the people, from death occasioned by his father's oath, whereas Jesus the Son was redeemed out of death by his Father (Heb. 5:7), after the people prevailed over Pilate's will, shouting, "Let him be crucified" (Mt. 27:22).

However, the people had said, "there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground", but it is Jesus who says to his disciples, in a context of those who might seek to kill the body but are not able to destroy the life, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Mt. 10:29-31). That indeed is a comfort for disciples, who, as the name Jonathan means, are given by Yahweh to Jesus.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

What the Word of God does

The Word of God enlightens (Ps. 119:130); converts (19:7); convinces (2 Tim. 3:16); teaches (Ps. 119:99; 2 Tim. 3:16); cleanses (Ps. 119:9; Jno. 15:3); quickens (Ps. 119:50); washes (Eph. 5:26); sanctifies (Jno. 17:17); dwells (Col. 3:16); works effectually (1 Thess. 2:13); prospers (Isa. 55:11); bears fruit (Mt. 13:23); exhorts (Heb. 13:22); builds up (Acts 20:32); guides (Ps. 119:105); strengthens against sin (v. 11); endures (1 Pet. 1:23); corrects (2 Tim. 3:16); judges (Jno. 12:48).—G.B.