

## Introduction

- You've seen the kind of movie where the heroes suffer a series of defeats and setbacks, but at the climax of the film there is victory - a reversal of fortunes:
  - its not very common with "feel good Hollywood" but occasionally it might be more like *Cold Mountain*, where the long separation and struggle to be together ends in meeting up in the snowy forest
  - but, after all the setbacks and struggles, when you think the movie must end in "happy ever after", he gets shot and killed
- This is the flavour of 1 Samuel 14:
  - there can be shadows over victory and sadness in success

## Under the pomegranate tree

- Perhaps Saul dreamed of a reversal of fortunes as he sat under the pomegranate tree (v.2) and mulled over the loss of the kingdom under the Philistine yoke:
  - but while Saul sat, Jonathan took action again (v.1)
  - taking his armour-bearer into his confidence he said, 'Let's go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side.'
  - he didn't tell his father - perhaps because Saul would have stopped him
  - boldness was not one of Saul's strong points!
  - perhaps Jonathan thought Saul would just keep him sitting under the pomegranate tree, too?
- Note who Saul was with: Ahijah the priest (v.3)
  - Ahijah was the son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub, the son of Phinehas, that no-good son of Eli...
  - remember Ichabod (4:21) - 'No Glory' - and his meat-loving, woman-chasing priest of a father, Phinehas? (chapters 1-4)
  - this family line had been judged by God and was rejected (2:30-33)
  - so here is Saul, the rejected king, left with the rejected priest
  - Samuel left Saul without the word of God, and Saul was left with a priest who was a loser

## On the cliffs

- Jonathan and his armour-bearer made their advance
  - but look at the geography - a cliff on each side of the pass
  - one cliff was called 'Slippery' and the other was called 'Thorny' (Bozez and Seneh in the NIV)
  - not very inviting for hikers!
  - but Jonathan was not walking along the pass to the Philistines
  - he had to cross it, up and down those cliffs
- Our writer is trying to tell us that any sane person looking at the situation would conclude this is impossible to cross
  - what a hopeless situation!
  - the leaders are rejected, the way is impossible...
  - but Jonathan has a secret plan
  - This is the plan: 'Let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised fellows' - now, here's what makes the plan brilliant rather than sheer folly - 'perhaps the Lord will act for us, for nothing can keep the Lord from saving by many or by few.'
- It is faith! It is faith in the face of the odds against success
  - the basis of that faith is the Lord who is able
  - Jonathan is not trusting to his own cleverness and hoping God will bless it
  - 'Nothing can keep God from saving' produced great expectations from God...
  - 'perhaps the Lord will act for us - it doesn't matter to him whether there are many or few.'
  - the beauty of Jonathan's faith is its imagination - 'Come, let us go ...', but his

- faith is perfectly balanced - 'perhaps'
- he doesn't presume on God
- faith and arrogance are not the same thing!
- he knows God can do it, but he doesn't dictate to God, as if the Lord is his errand boy
- Who knows what God might do?
- And faith had its reward (vs.13-14 especially, and on through 15-23)
  - God delivered the Philistines into the hands of Jonathan and his armour-bearer
  - the Lord saved Israel that day - the many saved through the few
  - (a 1000 years later in human history, Christ as one man redeemed a great multitude - the parallel is clear enough!)
- But even so, there was an air of tragedy hanging over Jonathan's victory

## In the woods with the honey bees

- Verse 23 ends the narrative of the victory
  - verse 24 begins a supplementary section that tells the rest of the story and it contrasts with Jonathan's exploits
- Israel was hard pressed, the author writes:
  - Why? Because of the difficulties of the fight against the Philistines?
  - no, it's because of Saul (v.24)
- Saul decided that he could dispense with the rites of religion (vs.18-19) and instead substitute a vow of his own
  - and in that vein he put a curse on anyone who ate before evening and there was total victory for him!
  - an army has to march on its stomach, Napoleon advised...
  - and so Saul's total disregard for his men led to physical exhaustion for the army; it was a ritual transgression and nearly cost the life of the saviour (Jonathan)
  - it was utter self-centredness!
- The victory was laid on a plate for Saul:
  - his men would sweat and bleed to secure it, but Saul starved them for his own whim
  - Saul required more of his men than God did
  - this is self-worship, not God serving or honouring
  - requiring more than God does inevitably ends in calamity
  - it led to Jonathan unwittingly breaking the oath (v.27)
  - it also led him to raise his voice against the king (v.29)
  - it led to the people eating blood (forbidden in the Law, eg Leviticus 3:17, etc) in their haste (v.32)
  - it led to a smaller conquest than might otherwise have happened
  - and finally it showed up again Saul's heart
- God was angry with Israel because of Saul
  - to add to Scripture is as bad as taking away from it
  - it should be Scripture alone
  - the people refused to let Jonathan the hero die (v.45)
  - just because he was king didn't make Saul right!

## Conclusion

- What do we make of all this?
  - God can save, even in the most desperate of situations!
  - we must heed the warning that is Saul's clear in his decline - not seeking of the Lord, not following his commands...
  - (Saul still looks OK on the outside - that's the scary thing!)