

SAUL AND JONATHAN

I Samuel 14:1-46

Stress the fact that the people liked Saul because of his appearance, but that physical strength and prowess do not imply wisdom. Draw the distinction between Saul and Jonathan, which will form part of the background in a future lesson.

Doctrinal Points

It is God's intent for us to enjoy the good things of this world; it is shortsighted automatically to see evil in such enjoyment.
If we will trust in the Lord's power, attacking our evils with the strength we have, the Lord will help give us the victory.
A king represents the principle that we should obey the Lord's truth.
Even our first idea of truth—imperfect as it is—will produce some good.

Notes for Parents

Jonathan's fine character makes him one of the favorite Bible heroes. His father Saul, the first king of Israel, was a brave man, but he was hasty and self-confident, not willing to wait for Samuel, the Lord's prophet, to give him the word to attack and not careful to obey fully the commands the Lord gave him through Samuel. So the Lord could not always give him the victory.

Jonathan was equally brave but he did not rely on his own judgment and strength. He trusted in the Lord. When the rest of the Israelites were deserting Saul and hiding themselves for fear of the Philistines, Jonathan, with only his armorbearer to support him, went boldly forward and attacked the enemy—waiting only for a favorable sign from the Lord—relying upon the proved fact that “there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.” And his small initial victory was enough to throw the host of the

Philistines into confusion and enable Saul's army to drive them back into their own territory. So our temptations often seem too great for us to hope to conquer, but if we will only trust in the Lord's power and attack them boldly as soon as we are tempted, we shall find our enemy is not invincible, as it seemed.

The rest of our chapter has something to teach us, too. Saul's foolish command to his men not to taste food until they had completed the conquest reminds us of the way some good people afflict themselves and others, imagining that it is impossible to enjoy life and be good at the same time. But the Lord created all the good things of this world for our use and enjoyment, only telling us not to misuse them. Jonathan found the honey on his way and when he had tasted it, "his eyes were enlightened." We remember how the Lord gave the Israelites the quail in the wilderness and how He provided the manna every morning, the manna which tasted "like wafers made with honey." The Lord is a God of love and mercy—not a hard taskmaster.

Primary

A simple lesson which can be drawn from this story is that it is not size or physical strength that counts and that the Lord always helps those who try to learn what is right and do it. The teacher, in pointing out the difference between Saul and Jonathan, should use as an illustration the story of the rest of the chapter. The people's support of Jonathan against Saul prepares the way for the fact of their later admiration of David.

We find that the Philistines, after they had returned the ark, went right on trying to conquer the Israelites. Samuel, you remember, was recognized as Judge by all the people, but Samuel had been brought up in the tabernacle and he was not a fighting man. So the people had asked him to give them a king who could lead them in battle against their enemies, and the Lord told Samuel to grant their request. The Lord also showed Samuel whom to anoint as the first king, the powerful young man named Saul, who stood head and shoulders taller than all the other men. The people thought he would make them a fine leader; so they accepted him

as their first king.

But you know we cannot always judge things or people by their appearance. Saul was brave, but he was not wise.

He very soon won a victory over the Ammonites, and this made him self-confident.

He did not fully trust the Lord; so the Lord could not always be with him.

But he had a son named Jonathan who did trust the Lord.

First Jonathan and part of the army captured a city from the Philistines.

But Jonathan was not depending upon the army.

What did he tell his armorbearer about the Lord?

What did the Lord enable the two young men to do?

The rest of the chapter tells us how Jonathan's victory threw the army of the Philistines into confusion so that they attacked each other.

Then Saul and his army overcame them.

Junior

The Juniors are old enough to understand something of the meaning of the change from the Judges to the kings and also of the difference between Saul and Jonathan and of the effect of Jonathan's victory on the host of the Philistines.

Who was the last of the Judges?

Samuel was a different kind of Judge. He was brought up in the tabernacle and was not a fighting man. But he had a greater power than physical strength. He was a prophet as well as a Judge. The Lord spoke through him and all the people recognized that he had been appointed by the Lord to tell them what they ought to do. He had a regular circuit, as some of our judges do today, going around each year to certain appointed towns to judge all the cases that were brought before him (I Samuel 7:15-17). He called the people to repent and promised them that if they would obey the Lord, the Lord would save them from their enemies.

The enemies were still there, however, and the people could not get over their fear or quite trust the Lord. They wanted to fight their enemies and they wanted someone to lead them in battle. They saw that every other nation had a king and asked Samuel to give them one. Samuel was very much disappointed by their

lack of trust, but the Lord told him to let them have a king and showed him what king to choose. The Lord always does the best He can for us. When we make mistakes and refuse to obey Him fully, He finds some other way to teach us—some way which we will understand. The king He told Samuel to anoint was Saul, a young man who stood head and shoulders taller than all the others. As this was just the kind of man the people thought they wanted, they willingly accepted Saul as their king.

Saul was a brave and bold young man, and he very soon won a victory over the Ammonites—the same enemy whom Jephthah had overcome, you remember. But Saul, like most people who depend on physical strength, was inclined to be self-confident and hasty. He knew that Samuel was appointed by the Lord to be his advisor, but he was not always willing to wait for Samuel’s advice or to follow it exactly. So the Lord could not continue to be with him, any more than He could be with the Israelites when they brought the ark out of the tabernacle without asking Him.

But Saul had a son who was of a different character.

Who was this son?

What enemy was attacking again?

What did Jonathan decide to do?

Who went with him?

What did Jonathan say to his armorbearer about the Lord?

What sign did he ask of the Lord?

William Worcester tells us in *The Sower* some interesting things about the place where Jonathan won his victory. The two great rocks are still there, one on either side of a narrow gorge with a brook at the bottom. The gorge runs east and west. The rock on the north side is always in full sunlight, and was called *Bozez*, which means “shining.” *Seneh* is the name of a thorny shrub which probably grew on the other rock. It is the same word that is used of the burning bush from which the Lord spoke to Moses.

How many men did Jonathan and his armorbearer kill?

What was the effect on the rest of the army?

There are several instances in the Bible in which a small victory

causes the enemy's army to start fighting each other, making them easy to overcome. I wonder if you can see what this means. You know that you have little temptations every day. If you trust the Lord and have the courage to do right in these small battles, you will be surprised at how much weaker the big temptations will seem afterward. Saul and his army were able to attack the Philistines, who had seemed so strong before, and to drive them back into their own part of the country. But Saul never really overcame the Philistines, as the last verse of chapter 14 tells us.

Saul showed his lack of wisdom in another way in our lesson.

What order did Saul give to his men when they started to pursue the Philistines?

Who disobeyed through ignorance?

What did Jonathan eat?

What did he say about Saul's order when he heard of it?

What did he try to do to Jonathan?

Who saved Jonathan?

Intermediate

The general correspondence of the story is the lesson for this class. They can see its application to their own problems and temptations even though at their age these are external rather than spiritual.

When Samuel grew old and his sons, as the sons of Eli had done, did not uphold the high standards of their father, the people began again to be afraid of the Philistines and wanted a strong man to lead them against their enemies. So they asked Samuel to give them a king. We are often weak in this way. We know with our minds that the Lord will be with us if we do right, but we allow ourselves to get to worrying and we feel the need of some special practical teaching to help us in our problems, something which comes right down to the plane on which we are living.

A king always represents a ruling principle. Samuel as leader represents a simple, childlike trust in the Lord. This is an ideal state to which, if we are regenerating, we may come back in our old age. Samuel himself was very much disappointed that the

people were not satisfied with just his leadership, but the Lord told him to give them a king. The Lord, as we have seen before, knows our weaknesses and leads us by whatever means He sees will best reach us. The first king—pointed out to Samuel by the Lord—was not an ideal king, but was the only kind the people were prepared to accept at that time. He was Saul, a powerful and brave young man who stood head and shoulders above all those around him.

The three kings who ruled over Israel while it was a united country all represent the principle that we should obey the Lord's truth, but our idea of that truth changes as we grow in experience. Saul, the first of the three, is the first idea we have of it, when we judge things by their appearance and jump to conclusions on the basis of only partial understanding. Saul was hasty and self-confident. He won a victory almost immediately over the Ammonites, the same external temptations we considered in the story of Jephthah. But the real enemy whom the people feared was the Philistines, the temptation to think we are good just because we know what is right, without always trying to do right. This is an inner temptation, and the self-confident kind of thinking which Saul represents cannot meet it.

In our lesson today Saul and his army are camped at Gibeah opposite the encampment of the Philistines, but they are not sure how to proceed and many of the people are deserting Saul and trying to save themselves by hiding. But in the reign of Saul there is one element that makes for real spiritual progress. Our first or natural reasoning, with all its shortcomings, is able to acknowledge the lessons learned from experience. Saul's son Jonathan represents this kind of knowledge of the truth. Jonathan was familiar with the history of his people. He knew how often in the past the Lord had helped them and that even a small number who obeyed the Lord completely had been able to conquer an enemy of apparently overwhelming might. He said to his armorbearer, "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." So, once he had received the sign he had asked of the Lord, he did not hesitate to

attack, even though the way was hard. They had to go down one steep rock and up another to make the attack, which is a good picture of coming down from our self-satisfaction and climbing up in the way pointed out by the Lord.

Jonathan's victory was the opening wedge which enabled Saul and his army to put the enemy to rout. But Saul's victory was due chiefly to the "trembling" which the Lord sent upon the Philistines, which caused them in their confusion to fall upon each other. This was a kind of help the Lord gave several times in the course of the history of the Israelites. It pictures the fact that when we trust the Lord and in obedience to Him attack our weaknesses bravely right where we find them, we very soon discover that our temptation is not so strong as we thought it and that the arguments which supported it are conflicting—they really don't make sense.

Then Saul made another hasty and foolish decision. He told his army not to taste food until they had finished the pursuit. So they became weary and finally were driven to eating to excess and without preparing their food properly. We have seen before that the Lord never drives us in this way. He gives us our spiritual food a little at a time and gives us our times of enjoyment and personal satisfaction to help us continue. This is what is represented by the honey which Jonathan stopped to eat. Jonathan was wiser than his father, but his father would have killed him for his disobedience if the people had not prevented it. We often see illustrations of the meaning of this story. People who think they are serving the Lord sometimes drive themselves and others beyond endurance because they think they must always be fighting and never stop to rest and enjoy the good gifts the Lord gives us all along the way. Sometimes for this mistaken idea they would destroy the best qualities they have.

Saul never wholly conquered the Philistines because he trusted in himself more than in the Lord.

Basic Correspondences

a king = a ruling principle

Jonathan = knowledge gained from experience
honey = enjoyment

Senior

The Seniors have not yet reached the period pictured by the kings, but their thinking is already similar to that of Saul in that their decisions as to what is right are apt to be hasty and based on a superficial understanding of the truth. So this lesson can easily be made practical and helpful to them.

The period of the Judges, when the people were being brought to realize that there is nothing in which lurk so many dangers as in self-confidence and self-satisfaction, was followed by the period of the three great kings, Saul, David, and Solomon. In the Word a king always represents a ruling principle: the good kings truth ruling, and the evils kings falsity ruling. We need to be able to work out our problems on the basis of some overall accepted standard. Samuel was angry when the people asked him to give them a king, feeling that they should have been satisfied with his direction, since he had never done them anything but good. But the Lord told Samuel to grant the people's request, only making sure that they understood that life under a king would require of them many sacrifices. Samuel's rule represents a state of simple, child-like trust and obedience. We are actually safer and less troubled in such a state, but it does not satisfy our natural desire to think and decide for ourselves, and we have seen that the Lord always permits us to exercise our freedom and rationality even though it is certain that we shall make mistakes and often have to learn the hard way.

The first king—pointed out to Samuel by the Lord Himself and afterward chosen by lot in the sight of all the people—was Saul. He was the only kind of king the people would have accepted at that stage, an active young man of impressive appearance. He represents the truth of the Lord as it first appears to us when we wish to be governed by it, something to obey and follow in an aggressive approach to the problems of life. Saul accepted his appointment

with sincere humility and with the intention of being directed by the Lord through the mouth of Samuel. In just the same way, at the start we mean to be humble and to look to the Lord for guidance. Saul immediately won a victory over the Ammonites, who as we remember from the story of Jephthah represent external rather than internal temptations. But his self-confidence was aroused by his victory and in his next conflict he went ahead on his own instead of waiting for Samuel as he had been told to do, and this broke his connection with the Lord and made it impossible for him ever again to be completely victorious.

This shows us the nature of our first idea of the Divine. We mean well, but we feel so sure of our own judgment that we go ahead without waiting to make sure we are right. Our lesson for today contains a very clear example of this in Saul's foolish command to his men not to eat anything until they had completed their pursuit of the enemy. We cannot go all the way to spiritual victory in one burst of speed. As we learned in the lesson on the quail and manna, the Lord gives us nourishment day by day, with natural pleasures also when we need them, and regular sabbaths of rest. The way to heaven is a lifelong road to be followed under the Lord's constant direction.

But our first idea of the rule of truth—which is based on what in the story of Ishmael we learned to call our natural reason—does produce some genuine good. It teaches us by experience something which has before been mere memory-knowledge with us, the fact that the Lord really can give us power to overcome in temptation. This conviction is pictured by Saul's son Jonathan. He also was brave and eager, but he did not depend on himself. His character is summed up in his words to his armorbearer: "It may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." And he also left to the Lord the decision as to whether or not the time was ripe for attack.

The result of Jonathan's small victory was the opening of the way for the dispersion of the Philistine army, which was seized with a "trembling" and began to beat down one another. This

seems a strange thing in the letter, but there are other stories in the Word in which a similar thing happens. It pictures a very familiar phenomenon. When we are beset by the temptation to do as the world does, the arguments in favor of the world's ways seem very strong; but if we have the courage to defy the world in some instance, the whole structure of worldly argument totters and confusion and conflict arise among its defenders. Try it sometime. When you know you are right about something in which everybody is against you, a simple, well-chosen verse from the Word thrown unexpectedly into the discussion will upset their whole position. This is a very practical reason for reading the Word constantly and memorizing passages from it. Remember how often the Lord answered His opponents by simply quoting the Scriptures. Jonathan represents this confidence in the Lord's power.

Jonathan's eating of the honey is an interesting story in itself. He had not heard his father's order and so he disobeyed innocently; as soon as he tasted the honey "his eyes were enlightened." So when he was told of his father's command, he could see that it had been a foolish one. Honey represents enjoyment or pleasure, usually of a natural kind. It is mentioned often in the Word. The honey that Jonathan tasted represents a sense of satisfaction in his own accomplishment. Such a feeling, since it has self in it, is contrary to some of the commands of the letter of the Word, but a clearer sight shows us that such a literal interpretation cannot be the true one, for the Lord Himself provides us such moments of satisfaction because they are needed by us in our imperfect states. People in their first zeal often make the way of righteousness unnecessarily hard, as Saul did in this case. The people, however, recognized, as most people usually do, that the ones who really do good are not the ones who are hard on other people; so they refused to allow Saul to destroy Jonathan. In a later lesson we shall see the part which Jonathan played in the transfer of the kingship from Saul to David.



Adult

Important thoughts for the Adults are the nature of Saul's rule and the meaning of Jonathan and his small victory. Another very helpful topic of discussion is the shortsightedness of seeing evil in the enjoyment of any of the good things of the world which have been provided for our use and refreshment. The Lord's example and not any assumptions and prejudices of men should be our guide here. The Lord Himself supplies us with a warning and direction in this matter in Matthew 11:17-19.

In I Samuel 7:13 we read: "So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." Yet in our chapter for today, with Samuel still Judge and recognized as the Lord's spokesman, we find that the Philistines are again gathered in great strength to attack Israel and that many of the Israelites are in hiding for fear of them, and in chapter 13 we learn that the Philistines have so extensive a control in the land that the Israelites have no smiths and their armies no weapons of war. In the letter this would seem to be contradictory, but it is not so in the internal sense. The "days of Samuel" are our states of childlike trust and obedience, as we saw in our last lesson. But by the time of today's lesson, although the people still in a measure acknowledge Samuel as their head, they have another leader whom they really prefer to Samuel.

You will recall that when Samuel was old and had made his unworthy sons judges, the people had asked for a king to lead them against their enemies. When, as adults, we have suffered the decline of our early religious zeal, as Israel declined in the time of the Judges, and then have come to the realization that we are in real spiritual danger and must return to the guidance and protection of the Lord, our first state is one of sincere humiliation and simple obedience, which Samuel represents. But very few adults can "hold" this state. The world looms very large and we become fearful of losing spiritual ground. We want something more specific than a general assurance to lead us—some system of truth furnished with arguments with which to meet our temptations. We want a

warlike king instead of a peaceful prophet, although we still recognize the prophet as our judge.

The three kings represent successively higher concepts of the Lord's truth. Saul, we remember, was accepted by the people because of his appearance. The Lord chose him as the first king because he was the only kind of leader the people would have respected at that time. We know that the Lord always accommodates His revelation of Himself to our states. He permits us to see only so much of His truth as we are capable of applying to life. Saul was a brave and sincere man and in the beginning humble. When we first turn from childlike trust, we do not mean to become self-confident—we have had our bitter experience with trying to lead ourselves. But we have not yet become wise, and our self-will is stronger than we think. Saul won his first victory, a victory over the Ammonites, the same external enemy whom Jephthah had conquered. Then he felt that he was established and sure of victory, and he began to make his own decisions instead of waiting to be directed by Samuel—so the Philistines were in the saddle again. Thus the new attack by the Philistines is really in the days of Saul and not in the days of Samuel.

Our first concept of the truth is, like Saul, superficial and hasty. It is based on our natural reason which judges by appearances and is stubborn and headstrong. But it wins some victories and it also has other good results. It gives us fresh experience of the power of the Lord which confirms what we were taught in our earlier years. This development is represented by Saul's son Jonathan, who was not dismayed by the apparent power of the enemy because he knew that "there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."

The stories of Jonathan in the Word have great appeal. Among the Bible characters he is a general favorite, and to many Bible readers the question of why Jonathan had to be killed with his father is a real problem. Again the internal sense gives us a clear answer. Saul's line had to perish because a natural understanding of truth, however excellent, must give place to a spiritual under-

standing if we are to become spiritual men and women.

Yet Jonathan played a very important role in this transition. He was the only one really responsible for such victories as his father won over the Philistines, because it was his fearless trust in the Lord which showed the Israelites the actual weakness of their enemy. In chapter 13 we learn that when Jonathan was in command of a third of his father's small army, he boldly attacked and overcame one of the Philistine garrisons; and in our chapter today he attacks the main body of the Philistines with no one but his armorbearer to help him. The setting of this story reminds us forcibly of the words of Abraham in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed." It is the same gulf which Jonathan and his armorbearer crossed when they climbed down one rock and up another—down the rock of self-confidence and up the rock of reliance upon the Lord. The parable, however, treats of the condition in the other life when the gulf has become "fixed" by our refusal to cross it in this world.

The initial slaughter by Jonathan and his armorbearer resulted immediately in a great trembling in the army of the Philistines. They were thrown into confusion and began to fall upon each other. A similar phenomenon occurred in the story of Gideon. It is an accurate picture of what happens to the Philistine attitude in us when we make even a small attack upon it in the Lord's name. The arguments which have supported our pride in our own intelligence are immediately discovered to be really weak and conflicting, and they melt away.

The incident of Jonathan's eating the honey is very interesting. Honey represents enjoyment of a natural kind. Many of the literal commands of the Word would seem, like Saul, to forbid such enjoyment, and many Christian groups through the centuries have based their claim to salvation on the renunciation of all natural pleasures. While Saul, symbolizing the natural understanding of the meaning of the Word, is on the throne, we feel with Jonathan that any indulgence may have been a sin. But Jonathan was given to see that his father's command had been unwise and the people

supported Jonathan because his victories had proved to them that the Lord was with him rather than with his father. The ascetic life is not the life the Lord wishes us to live. The good things of this world are created by Him for our enjoyment and are means by which we are enabled to serve Him and our neighbor.

Isaiah 7:14-15 tells us: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.” Jonathan’s eyes were enlightened when he had tasted the honey.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 619⁸: “There was also much honey in the land of Canaan at that time, because at that time the church of the Lord was there, as can be seen from the first book of Samuel, where it is said that they came into a forest, where there was honey upon the face of the ground, and there was a stream of honey, and Jonathan’s eyes were opened by tasting the honey (14:25-27, 29). ‘Jonathan’s eyes were opened by tasting the honey’ because ‘honey’ corresponds to natural good and its delight, and this good gives intelligence and enlightens, from which Jonathan knew that he had done evil; as we read in Isaiah, ‘He shall eat butter and honey, that he may know to reject the evil and to choose the good.’ For at that time correspondences exhibited their effects outwardly, since all things of the Israelitish Church consisted of correspondences, which represented and signified things celestial and spiritual.”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. Who was the first king? *Saul*
- P. Why did the people like him? *tall, strong*
- J. What enemy did he first conquer? *Ammonites*
- J. What weaknesses did Saul have? *impatient, disobedient, lacked faith*
- J. With what enemy did he have trouble? *Philistines*
- P. Who was Saul’s son? *Jonathan*
- P. How was he different from his father? *trusted the Lord*
- J. What did Jonathan and his armorbearer decide to do? *attack Philistine camp*
- P. Why did Jonathan think two men could win a victory over so many? *faith*

- J. In what kind of place did they face the enemy? *rocky*
- J. What sign did Jonathan ask of the Lord? *If they say, "Come . . ."*
- P. What happened in the Philistine army after Jonathan's victory? *panic*
- J. What order did Saul give to his men when they started after the Philistines?
no food
- J. What did Jonathan do? *ate some honey*
- J. What did Saul try to do to him? *kill him*
- J. Who saved Jonathan? *people*
- I. What does a king represent? *ruling principle*
- S. What does Saul represent? *superficial idea of truth*
- S. What does Jonathan represent? *knowledge from experience*
- S. What is pictured by the Philistines' being thrown into confusion?
arguments which support self-pride conflict with themselves