

Title: The One Less Traveled By  
Text: 1 Samuel 13:15b-14:23  
Theme: A life of faith  
Series: 1 Samuel  
Prop Stmt: A life of faith may seem like a life of risk, when in reality, the real danger is in unbelief.

I am addressing the last half of chapter 13 and the first half of chapter 14. I need to give you fair warning. This text may become one of your all-time favorites. It is fascinating!

Read Text: 1 Samuel 14.6-7

Edmund Allenby was a Field Marshall in the British Army. He fought in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Boer War and in World War I in the Sinai and Palestine Campaign against the Ottoman Empire. As part of that campaign, he faced a Turkish army at Michmash. (Map pic) It's pretty amazing, but I guess not so surprising that despite being separated by 3,000 years that wars were still being fought on this same terrain. The Turks, like the Philistines, occupied Michmash. Michmash sits on the top of a cliff and has a commanding position over a very important pass. This area is rocky and has many canyons that are called wadis. Almost all of the canyons run east to west, which is fine if you want to go east or west. But there is one canyon (the Wadi Suwenit) which goes north and south. And this canyon has generally steep walls except for an area of sloping ground called the pass, which is what Michmash oversees. Michmash occupies the high ground and a strategic position over this strategically important north-south route. That means, that when we read in chapter 13 (v.16) "the Philistines encamped in Michmash" that instead of going, "oh, ok" we go, "oh no" that is really bad.

In chapter 13, Israel's first king, Saul is in bad place. He is in a number of bad places all at the same time. The Philistines are coming for him. His people are running away from him. The prophet has just rebuked him by telling him that the LORD has already sought out someone to replace him. It's awful! Saul's son, Jonathan poked the bear of the Philistines, by attacking and defeating one of their garrisons which woke the bear up and ticked him off. Now, the massive army of the Philistines has come after Saul and Saul is clearly not up for this fight. He calls for the army to gather, and they do, sort of, but when they see the Philistine army and smell the garlic on their breath, the Israelites start bailing out. It is so bad, some of them actually join the Philistines. They aren't the only ones who panic. Saul panics and foolishly offers a sacrifice against explicit directions from Samuel, only to be told that his disobedience means that the line of kings will not come from him and the LORD has sought out a man to be king who is after the heart of God, because Saul is not. Our text last week ended with Samuel leaving Saul. The drumbeat of war is getting louder and closer. What is Saul to do? He has to be in a fog.

I call this the death spiral of fear. (chart) Instead of looking to God and listening to God, Saul looks at his circumstances and listens to his own voice. **FEAR** He does not see the opportunity for God to show his glory and keep his promises. He sees the circumstances and his fearful heart becomes the occasion for **unbelief** and disobedience. As we looked at last week, his

**disobedience** is catastrophic because he is the king. His failure has **consequences** for his people, just as his faith would have had tremendous benefits for his people. God is not going to have that for his people and Samuel has to deliver the hard news. *“Your kingdom shall not continue.”*

The DIA has a fabulous collection of religious art. If there was a painting of this scene, where Samuel is delivering this message, I do not think that Samuel would be angry, but would be pained, deeply pained. Samuel rose to great prominence and he knows the agony of not being able to pass his authority on to his sons. That is a really big deal to men in power. Who is going to carry on what you have done? (I wonder how much that plays into Putin’s thinking.) Samuel knows the hurt of his leadership being rejected so that someone younger and stronger could replace him. The difference is, the people rejected Samuel, not the Lord. Now, ironically, the one who was chosen to replace Samuel is now himself rejected, but is rejected by the Lord. And we begin to see what is happening. The people demanded a king like the other nations and they got one. They got a king who was after his own heart and looked out for his own self, rather than after the heart of God. Now, the one chosen to replace Samuel, is rejected, but not by the people, but by God. Samuel knows some of his pain, but what Saul experiences is worse. He is disapproved by God. What do you do, when you know that you have sinned against God? What do you do when you reject God’s Word and make up an excuse that is not accepted? What you should do, is confess and repent and seek the forgiveness of God. We don’t see that in Saul. We see a death spiral. Fear produces unbelief which produces failure which produces more fear and more unbelief and more failure. This will be what marks Saul’s life and kingship til the end. From this point on, it is like watching a train wreck in slow motion.

#### 1. **Fear sees the impossible.** (13.15-14.5)

You’ve heard the line, “cheer up, things could be worse”, so I cheered up and things got worse. Well, things are really bad. I titled this section “fear sees the impossible” because this story has two polar opposites in it. The one, Saul, only sees his circumstances and is immobilized by fear which only creates more problems. The other, as we will see sees God in the midst of the circumstances and the difference is enormous. But this is bleak. The only thing that is darker than the circumstances is the dread and overwhelming depression of Saul’s soul. He has to feel like a robot going through the motions, not a champion on a mission.

Saul numbers the people who are with him. At the beginning of chapter 13, Jonathan had 1,000 soldiers with him and Saul had 2,000 soldiers with him. THEN, Saul called the rest of the soldiers to come, which they did, only to run and hide. Now, Saul has 600 left, including Jonathan (13.15). He is out-manned. The Philistines are encamped in Michmash, which means he is out-positioned. They are sending out raiding parties, so that Saul is out-maneuvered. One goes to the north, one to the west and one to south east. The stories of raping, pillaging, plundering have to be coming back to Saul. Saul! What are you going to do? What’s the plan? And if all of that was not bad enough, there are no blacksmiths in Israel (13.19). Israel has been under the boot of the Philistines for so long, that the Philistines made sure that Israel would find it almost impossible to arm herself, therefore she would always be dependent on the Philistines and they would always have the upper hand. In order to raise their crops, which would get stolen by the

Philistines, the Israelite farmers had to have tools that could only be serviced by the blacksmiths at an exorbitant price. Israel was functionally back in slavery and there did not appear to have a way out and their king, Saul, while he was head and shoulders above everyone else, was obviously in over his head.

Apparently, someone forgot to tell Jonathan that there was no hope because this is the exact moment, when Jonathan and his armor-bearer slip out, unnoticed from the rest and decide to take on the Philistines. This is the opening line of chapter 14. (Read v.1)

The fact that he did not tell his father helps us understand what happened back in chapter 13. Jonathan knew his father would disapprove and Jonathan disapproved of his father's fear. At this point, nothing else is said, which leaves the reader in a panic. Jonathan, are you out of your mind?! What are you thinking? Don't miss this. Saul was full of fear. The people were full of fear. Those 600 who were still around, were following, but were terrified, except Jonathan. And just in case you don't realize how pathetic Saul is, the author says something that, if possible helps us see how hopeless this appears to be. Look at verse 3. Who is with Saul? (Eli chart) Ahijah. Ahijah is the son of Ahitub who was the son of Phineas who was the son of Eli. But the author slips something else in there, doesn't he? Ahijah is the son of Ahitub (Ichabod's brother), and son of Phineas, and son of Eli. What was the message that God gave to Samuel in the opening of this book? Because of Eli's failures, his line of priests would be rejected. His priestly line was doomed. Now, here in the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave is the doomed king with the doomed priest. The priest has the ephod which is supposed to be the means by which they discern what they are supposed to do, but they are so deep in the dark, the king doesn't even know that his own son is gone. That is what fear does. If you see your circumstances without God, you will not see clearly. It doesn't have to be this way as Jonathan shows us. The text breaks down very clearly. There are 2 men, 2 views, 2 beliefs, 2 postures and 2 outcomes. The one is ruled by fear, the second is ruled by faith. The walk of faith is clearly the road less traveled by, but it is the one that makes all the difference.

14.6 picks up where verse 1 left off. What was Jonathan thinking that made him think that there was something remotely rational about taking on the garrison of the Philistines just outside of Michmash? Look at the end of v.6. What does it say? *"It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few."* There you have it.

## 2. **Faith sees God.** (14.6-23)

Jonathan is in the same circumstance as his dad, Saul but Jonathan has a completely different outlook. For Saul, the circumstances hide God. For Jonathan, he sees the circumstances through God. For Saul, the circumstances are bigger than God. For Jonathan, God is way bigger than the circumstances.

### A. **Faith hopes in God.** (6-7)

What Jonathan does is astounding. He does not presume on God. There is a measure of restraint when he says, "It may be that the LORD will work for us." Just because the Lord can, does not mean that he will. The Lord has his ways and purposes and we need to always bow to them. We cannot dictate them. Nevertheless, Jonathan is very willing to trust in God and he does and he acts on that hope.

#### **B. Faith acts on that hope. (8-11a)**

As the book of James makes clear, faith without works is not really faith. Faith is demonstrated in action. Here is a faith-driven act on the part of Jonathan and his armor bearer. Instead of walking down the chasm in full view of the Philistine army, they climb a rocky crag on the east and somewhat north side of the valley where they are spotted by a small garrison that is stationed in that area, just in case something like this happens. Jonathan is acting on faith in God. This is beautiful. If God wants me to go to them and fight them where they are, then they will invite me over. If God wants me to fight them here, where I am, then they will come to me. Either way, Jonathan is acting in a way that demonstrates that he is completely relying upon God to help him and his not presuming that this is going to be easy or automatic.

#### **C. God rewards faith. (11b-15)**

Jonathan and his armor bearer are spotted and the Philistines are clearly not frightened. In fact, they laugh about the fact that at least a couple of the enemy have come out of the holes and caves where they have hidden themselves. (Saul v.2) Then they invite them to come up to them where they will show them a thing. I am not positive what the Philistine soldiers mean. They could be mocking them and taunting them to come and fight and the Philistines will teach them a lesson by killing them, or they may be thinking that these two are coming over to join them, like other Israelites have and they will show them a thing meaning they will show them what a real army and real soldiers are like. I am inclined to think it is more of the first, but either way, their response is all that Jonathan needed. He took this as a sign from God that the LORD wanted him to go on the attack. This sounds so much like David and Goliath, and while David gets so much attention, I have no doubt that God used this story of Jonathan to bolster the faith of David a little while later.

If the Philistines were laughing at the foolishness of Jonathan and his armor-bearer climbing up the rocky crag in order to fight with a 10-1 disadvantage, they did not laugh for long. By God's grace, Jonathan acted in faith and the Lord helped him do what he could do. Then, the Lord did what Jonathan could not do. He caused the Philistines to panic. Then God made the earth quake. Have you ever been in an earthquake? Have you ever felt the ground beneath you shake? I was in a little one about 38 years ago and it was a little one, but it was still freaky. There is something very unsettling about the ground shaking beneath your feet. The panic at the beginning of verse 15 became a very great panic by the end of verse 15 and the army of the Philistines is starting to run for their lives. We have seen a lot of signs that say faith over fear. There is truth to that, but it is not a generic faith or a sentimental positive attitude that seeks to deny reality. Jonathan did not deny reality. Jonathan had faith in God. Faith in God is over fear.

In fact, I will argue later on, that it is our love for God that drives our faith in God that drives our acts of obedience to God. But, here we are at the end of v.15. Jonathan and his armor bearer are standing on the top of the other side with 20 dead Philistines around them while the dust and thunder of chariots crashing into each other, the neighing of horses, the cries of panic and the clash of metal as thousands of Philistine soldiers run for their lives and fight one another in the process. Did they look at each other and laugh in amazement? Did they shout with excitement?

**D. Faith is compelling** (fear isn't – really). (7, 17-18)

Being an armor bearer is like being a member of the not so secret, secret service. Your job is to carry the weapons for your boss and if need be, stay with him to death. Jonathan's armor bearer loved him. He was with him heart and soul. When Jonathan suggested that they climb the crag and take on the Philistines, the armor bearer was all in. Jonathan's faith captured the heart of another and then as we will see, it captured the heart of Israel. The faith of one young man, changed the entire story.

The scene jumps back to Saul who has no idea what is happening. He hastily tells the priest to inquire of God as to what he ought to do, then tells him not to bother when it becomes apparent that the Philistines were running and if Saul didn't run after them, he would be left in the dust. Even the Israelites who had joined the Philistines switched sides again. There you have it. Jonathan (faith) attracts while Saul (fear) repels.

I've described Saul as being in a death spiral of fear. In contrast to that is Jonathan. If we were to chart Jonathan, we might be tempted to call it the life cycle of faith, but I think we need to dig a little deeper. Where did Jonathan's faith come from? I am convinced that Jonathan's faith in God is the fruit of Jonathan's love for God. Therefore, (chart) Jonathan's life reflects a life cycle of love. Jonathan **loves** God and loves the glory and fame of God and wants to see the name of God honored particularly in the face of the enemies of God. That is obvious from Jonathan calling the Philistines, the uncircumcised (6). Jonathan's love of God drives his **faith** in God. He really believes that God can save "by many or by few." Jonathan's actions are the evidence of his faith. His actions are faith-driven **obedience** which the Lord leverages for amazing **results**.

God does not need an army. He will use one. It is rarely considered cool to be all-in for God. Even in a homeschool group, Christian school, or a youth group, a kid who is all in for God, can appear to be out of place. They stand out, but what do they stand out from? They stand out from the group that is held together by the fear of what others think. Everybody in the "group" is held hostage by the few. But the kid who is all in for God is not owned by the fear of others because he/she is owned by God and that exposes the limited influence of peer pressure. Jonathan's faith and made his dad look even sadder. Being all in for God has never been the majority position, but that's okay. Will you be one? Will you love God so much that you believe him, no matter what? God does not need an army. He will use one and he will use one to do the impossible.

Related to that is this: You do not have to be like your dad (or mom). Some of you have parents whose lives are defined by fear. You don't have to live like that. The posture of a parent does not determine the direction of your life. You can choose the spiral of fear or the cycle of love. Some of your parents only want about \$3 worth of God. They want enough to have a good job, nice house and a secure retirement, but they are afraid that if they went all in, then you might do some crazy thing like be a missionary or be a pastor or an elder. They think being all in for God is risky, when not being all in for God is the most dangerous place to be. Perfect love drives out fear. God is so good and so glorious that he is worth your love and your love-fueled trust. After all...

#### **E. God saves, through faith. (23)**

One guy took the initiative to stand between the enemy and the people of God. He loved God that much and he loved the people of God that much, that he was willing to do that and God saved Israel that day through him. 1,000 years later, Jesus, the Son of God, loved the Father so much and trusted the Father so much and loved the people of God so much that he was willing to go into battle on our behalf. It was in his dying that our enemy (the punishment of our sin) was defeated and in his resurrection the proof of his victory was displayed. What Christ accomplished on our behalf must be received by you, by faith alone in Christ alone. God did not save by many, but by one – only one, because Christ is the only means by which you can be saved.

By the way, Field Marshall Edmund Allenby had a major in his army who remembered that Michmash was in the Bible and found this account. They realized that Jonathan did not take the valley road, but by climbing the crag, found an alternate, almost secret route, certainly the one less traveled by. Allenby directed his forces to do the same and when they did, they found it lightly guarded which enabled them to take the town, and win another battle and eventually, the war. The road of faith is not where the crowd is and is not where the applause is. It is the path less traveled by, but it clearly makes all the difference.