

INTRO: Faith and Freedom have been happily married in Western Christianity for a long time. Of course, agreeing on what those words mean is another matter. Faith in what? Freedom for what, from what, for who? This morning we hope to see what it looks like for God's people to have faith, not in the power of faith or in the ideal of political freedom, but rather faith as personal trust in God's freedom to save His people for his glory when and how he wants, even when the odds appear to be stacked against His people and his cause in the world. Please turn in your Bibles with me to 1Sam 13:15b-14:23. That's page 235 in your pew Bible.

13:15-18 *“And Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men. And Saul and Jonathan his son and the people who were present with them stayed in Geba of Benjamin, but he Philistines encamped in Michmash. And raiders came out of the camp of the Philistines in three companies. One company turned toward Ophrah, to the land of Shual; another company turned toward Beth-horon; and another company turned toward the border that looks down on the valley of Zeboim toward the wilderness.”* Saul has just rejected God's word. God has therefore just rejected Saul as king. And now, all Saul can think to do is count the men who are left with him....From 3,000 at the beginning of chapter 13, he's down to six hundred...against a Philistine force that looks like the sand on the beach, armed to the teeth. The enemy is aggressive, numerous, and well organized. Israel is outgunned, outmanned, and out-planned. The scholars who know the geography here tell us these raiders are cutting off any help Saul might have gotten from any of the Israelite tribes who would have used roads coming in from the north. They're also taking the high ground, which is a tactical advantage. As if that were not enough, the Israelites had an even greater disadvantage.

13:19-23 *“Now there was no blacksmith to be found throughout all the land of Israel, for the Philistines said, ‘Lest the Hebrews make themselves swords or spears.’ But everyone of the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen his plowshare, his mattock, his axe, or his sickle, and the charge was two-thirds of a shekel for the plowshares and for the mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and for setting the goads. So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them. And the garrison of the Philistines went out to the pass of Michmash.”*

The Philistines were not originally from the Middle East. They had migrated from a coastal region of Greece named Pylos, on the Aegean Sea, across from Turkey. Two of their cities in Greece were known for metalworks, and they sent armed envoys to Canaan in order to control trade routes between Egypt and their native Pylos in Greece.¹ To do that, they monopolized not only the production but also the maintenance of anything iron in Canaan. If you were an Israelite dreaming of a career in metallurgy, tough. You had to be a Philistine to get into that trade school. Israel actually had to pay their enemies just to sharpen their axes and plow blades; and the Philistines weren't interested in making it cheap. You can imagine the price-gouging; the Philistines weren't stupid—they made sure a middle-class Canaanite could never afford to buy a sword or get access to a spear or a dagger. Only a king like Saul could afford swords for the family. The Philistines aren't really interested in the second amendment for anybody but themselves. No ammo for Israelites. If you dare rise up against Philistia, they make you bring a knife to a gun fight—wooden clubs and slingshots, versus swords and spears and arrows and chariots.² You really gonna bring a wooden sword into an iron battle? But all this is a set-up. The Philistines have troops, technology, and tactics on their side. What's Israel got? Let's see.

¹ D. Tsumura, *NICOT* 34-36, following Margolith, “Where Did the Philistines Come From?” *ZAW* 107, 1995.

² *Cf.* 17:50 “...there was no sword in the hand of David.”

14:1-7 *“One day Jonathan the son of Saul said to the young man who carried his armor, ‘Come, let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side.’ But he did not tell his father. Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah in the pomegranate cave at Migron. The people with him were about six hundred men, including Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod’s brother, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the Lord in Shiloh, wearing an ephod. And the people did not know that Jonathan had gone. Within the passes, by which Jonathan sought to go over to the Philistine garrison, there was a rocky crag on the one side and a rocky crag on the other side. The name of the one was Bozez, and the name of the other Seneh. The one crag rose on the north in front of Michmash, and the other on the south in front of Geba. Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, ‘Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by the many or by the few.’ And his armor-bearer said to him, ‘Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul.”* Jonathan is ready to see some real battle action, so he sneaks out without telling anyone... And while Jonathan is busy going, Saul is content staying. But Saul isn’t keeping very good company. Dale Davis pointed out that Saul here is a rejected king relying on a rejected priesthood. He’s with Ahijah, Ichabod’s nephew. And remember what Ichabod means—the glory is gone. But now that Samuel has withdrawn his support for Saul, where else was Saul going to turn? He still intends to be religious, devout; but all he can do is turns back to a disqualified priesthood. Not a lot of help.

Meanwhile, Jonathan is getting bolder. The Philistine army is perched at the top of a cleft, and Jonathan and his top lieutenant are at the base of the split hoping to do more than just recon. Jonathan says “let’s go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised.” That’s what we call sanctified moxie. That is the audacity of faith. The Philistines viewed the Israelites as uncivilized for not knowing how to weaponize iron. The Israelites viewed Philistines as uncouth because they were ignorant of God’s covenant with Abraham. No matter how big their army, it’s a godless, God-defying army, and that’s all that matters to Jonathan. So he’s ready to risk it in reliance on God, regardless of the odds.

“It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by the many or by the few.” That is faith in divine sovereignty, motivating human initiative and risk. Hey bro, let’s do it. We’ll never know what God can do for us and through us, unless we try. The Lord isn’t limited. That is obedient, faith-filled initiative, and Jonathan’s main man is all about it. “I’m with you, heart and soul. I gotchu. Let’s do it.” Contrast that with Saul’s disobedient faithless initiative when he failed to wait for Samuel in 13:9; and with Saul’s indecision as he sits there waiting around for a disqualified priest to make a safe bet for him at the beginning of chapter 14. Jonathan operates based on faith in God’s revealed character and will. Saul operates based on his own fears, and intuitions. We need more Jonathan’s, and we need more men like the one who was with him. So what does faith do here?

14:8-12. *“Then Jonathan said, ‘Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say to us, “Wait until we come to you,” then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. But if they say, “Come up to us,” then we will go up, for the Lord has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us.’ So both of them showed themselves to the garrison of the Philistines. And the Philistines said, ‘Look, Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they have hidden themselves’ And the men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armor-bearer and said, ‘Come up to us, and we will show you a thing.’ And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, ‘Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel.’”*

Jonathan’s not stupid. He wants to see some confirmation, a sign. But the sign is not in the direction we’d think. When we set up a sign, we’re like, “OK if God makes the first part easy, I’ll do it, but if he makes it

hard, I'm out." Jonathan does the opposite. Think about the ergonomics here. He's gonna give up the element of surprise on an enemy that has the tactical high ground over him. Then, if they come down to him, the mission is off. Abort. But that seems like it would be the easy way, right? If they give up their tactical advantage, it'd be easier. But that's not what Jonathan wants. The sign to Jonathan will be "If they invite us to climb up to the camp." Jonathan doesn't want ease. He wants access behind enemy lines, whatever that takes. And sure enough, they invite him up. And they're arrogant about it. They call them Hebrews, which Philistines viewed as derogatory. They make fun of them. "Look at that, some mice are coming out of their holes." And they add a little intimidation to it. "Come up here, and we'll show you a thing." Come and get some. Come on up here and we'll show you what weaponized iron can do." Now, you might think that last part would have given Jonathan pause; but as soon as Jonathan heard "Come up to us," He's like, "You had me at 'come up to us.'" Maybe he looked at his buddy and said, "You heard that, right? Green light. Lord is with us. Time to climb."

[**Caveat**]. If this is starting to sound like I'm going to suggest more of what happened at the Capitol a couple weeks ago, you are mistaken. So if you lean left, we want you to hear that Christians should **NOT** apply OT war texts like this as a literal calls to arms against a non-Christian government. It is a category mistake for Christians to associate Jesus' name with that kind of public behavior. And if you lean right, keep the safety on, and put it back in the safe. Nobody should be storming the capitol as a literal application of Jonathan in 1Sam 14. That is NOT where this is going. The NT spiritualizes and internalizes OT warfare themes, so stick with me.

14:13-15 *"Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer after him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him. And that first strike, which Jonathan and his armor-bearer made, killed about twenty men within as it were half a furrow's length in an acre of land. And there was a panic in the camp, in the field, and among all the people. The garrison and even the raiders trembled, the earth quaked, and it became a very great panic."* Two against twenty, overcoming the tactical disadvantage of having the low ground, and the two win. Unlikely at best, considering the odds. But those numbers begin to remind you of the promises for covenant obedience in Lev 26:8 *"Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword."* Victory in battle, when the odds are stacked against you, is a blessing of obedient faith in the one true God (Lev 26:1-3, first four commands). What's more, God Himself shows up, throws the whole garrison into a panic, and even causes an earthquake to make the panic all the worse. Even the most daring and overconfident raiders are now shaking in their boots. In fact, the panic is so great that you could see the chaos from across the ravine where Saul was still crunching numbers in v.16.

14:16-22 *"And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked, and behold, the multitude was dispersing here and there. The 'watchmen of Saul' are really just watching to see which way the wind blows, which way the battle goes, in order to decide whether they want to fight or not. Only when they see the enemy army dispersing do they do anything. That's a far cry from Jonathan's faith and courage to take the initiative against the odds. Then Saul said to the people who were with him, 'Count and see who has gone from us.' And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not there. So Saul said to Ahijah, 'Bring the ark of God here.' For the ark of God went at that time with the people of Israel. Now while Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the camp of the Philistines increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, 'Withdraw your hand.'*

For all Saul's concern to make sacrifices, he sure treats the priests in a gruff way. He barks at them. First it's "Bring the ark," probably to seek God's will for whether to go to battle or not (Num 27:21). Then, as

soon as he sees the battle going his way, it's "Withdraw your hand." Still walking by his own sight and strength, and still practicing a faithless kind of religious formalism. Yet he isn't even faithful to stick with that. When he hears the sound of the confusion in the enemy camp, he tells the priest in v.19 to quit with the formalities. Saul again makes the decision not based on what God says, but on what he sees. He's perfectly empirical and experiential. If Saul can't see or feel his way through, he won't do anything. And this is in contrast with what Jonathan's bold initiative and faith in v.8-12. Jonathan waits for the sign from God, gets it, and immediately proceeds. At the beginning of chapter 14, Saul is staying when he should go. Now here, he's going when should wait for God's word. Jonathan moves forward against the odds, Saul only moves forward when he can see himself with a tactical advantage.

Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. If the Philistines won't let Israel have swords, then God will turn the Philistines own swords back on themselves. Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle. In chapter 13, it was the Israelite troops scattering, and here we find that some of those Hebrews had defected to the Philistines. Now it's the Philistine multitude dispersing, and the Hebrews who had defected to Philistia now defect back to Israel's side. And everyone who hiding in the hills now wants to be a winner. And look at the kind of fruit Saul's so-called leadership is bearing. He makes decisions by sight, so everyone else does too. Everyone but Jonathan, that is.

14:23 "So the Lord saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven." The Lord saved Israel in spite of Saul, not because of him. Yet the Lord saved Israel at least partly in response to Jonathan's courage and initiative based on faith in God's goodness, power, and sovereignty. And in the wider context of Israel rejecting God by asking for a king like Saul, the Lord saved Israel in spite of Israel herself.

POINT: God is gracious to save His faltering people against all odds. The odds were against Israel spiritually. After all of Israel's unbelief and rebellion in asking for a king, in rejecting God as their king, the odds don't look good that God would still save them in response to one person's faith in Him. But God does save them, because that's how gracious, powerful, and faithful He is for his faltering people. The odds were against Israel strategically—the Philistines were holding all the cards with the high ground, the huge army, plus an ace up their sleeve in the monopoly on weaponized iron. The odds were against Jonathan and his buddy tactically. It's literally an uphill battle, 2 on 20. Yet against all odds, Jonathan and Israel prevail. Maybe then, the question is not, "what are the odds," but "what are your gods?" Who do you trust and worship? Who is your God? Do you make decisions based on what you hear fear God's word, or based on what you fear from God's enemies, or based on your own perceived strengths, advantages, and your ability to just intimidate people into submission, like a Philistine?

God is sovereign to save. God is totally free from the constraint of odds and appearances, regardless of the size, strength, aggression, and organization of the enemy (13:15-18). No swords. No army. No ark. He is totally free to save, whenever and however he wants, regardless of the means available. He saves by his power, not ours. There was no blacksmith, no sword or spear except Saul and Jonathan. That's the set up, and it gives God glory over against all ways and means. "Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few." **The odds don't matter to God** (13:15b "Saul numbered the people who were present with him, about six hundred men"). Big numbers are not necessary (cf. Judges 7:2, 4 and Gideon's 300 "the people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over

me...”). Modern weapons, methods, technology are not necessary. Lots of money is not necessary. Human power, political position, social influence, and ascendancy are not necessary (Israel *depended* on the enemy Philistia just to sharpen their plows!). Religious superstition is not necessary (the ark in 14:18-20 stays in the camp, out of the battle), whether that’s in the form of dreams, or intuitions, or feelings.

Getting your guy in the White House or your majority in the Senate is not necessary. A booming economy is not necessary. Even freedom of speech and religion—defensible as they are—are not necessary. If the church in America were to lose freedom of speech and freedom of religion, we might think of that as comparable to having our blacksmiths and swords taken away from us. Isn’t this arguably the church’s greatest fear? “What then”, we ask. What then? Jesus will save us without it, that’s what. We will preach the gospel still. We will still live and serve and preach and love by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and it will be all the more to God’s glory alone. Faith—faith alone—is the one thing needful, because salvation is God’s work, not man’s. There are no odds that matter to God. “*Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by the many or by the few.*” Underline that. Memorize that. BANK on THAT.

Jonathan’s sovereign God has now given all authority in heaven and on earth to Jesus. And Jesus uses that authority to send us out, not to make a Christian nation, but to make disciples of Jesus from among all the nations, baptizing them in God’s triune name and teaching them to observe all he commanded us. He is building his church, not our state, and He is sovereign, therefore we go boldly. We take initiative. We risk. We proclaim and plan. We err on the side of bold faith, not timid fear. He has said we will be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. And that is why we testify to the truth of the gospel everywhere we go. Who cares that we’re outgunned, outflanked, and outmanned by the world? We have the God-Man Christ Jesus! And He is not constrained to save by the many or by the few.

Church, this should encourage us. It’s ok that we don’t have a huge building and a new parking lot and a smoke machine and cool music with a cool pastor who has cool hair and cool tatoos. God doesn’t need us to make the service feel like a top 40 concert followed by a ted talk or a pep talk. He doesn’t need us to be edgy in how we talk about sexual identity, or have a bunch of cool young hipsters to attract more cool young hipsters. God is God. He can use us, such as we are, to do his great and awesome work of saving sinners and encouraging his people. He can thunder down his law and trumpet out his love even though we feel like we’re fighting a 21st century battle with wooden swords. God’s word is not a wooden club. It is a sharp, gleaming, double-edged sword that pierces to the division of soul and spirit and judges the thoughts and intentions of every person’s heart. Let’s trust in that. God has promised to bless the proclamation of his word, and that is why we can take initiative in ministry and evangelism and service with a confident hope that “*the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder God from saving by many or by few.*” And that’s us! We are few—and nothing can hinder our God from saving others through our evangelism and preaching, few and feeble though we are.

Friend, this should encourage your own heart individually. Your worst enemies today are not other people—either in their power, their politics, or even their sins. Your worst enemies are your own sins, which come out of your own heart. You may feel outgunned, outwitted, outflanked, outdone, but God can thunder against the sins that wage war in your own soul. He can confuse and disperse them like he did the Philistine army. This is not mere spiritualizing or internalizing of the text. Paul says in 2Cor 10 we tear down arguments and every lofty speculation that raises itself up against the knowledge of God, and he says in Eph 6 that we put on the full armor of God to fight our sins. He says in Romans we don’t kill people, but we kill or mortify our own sins and the sinful nature in us that produces those sins. So get to it. By faith in God’s grace, you can kill your strongest sins like Jonathan took down 20 Philistines even

though they had higher ground, better technology, more troops, and better tactics. **Odds don't matter to God.** Yes, Satan is smarter than you. He has more minions, better tech, more experience, and your sinful appetites are strong. AND your God is stronger, wiser, and more faithful. His word is more powerful. He hears your prayers. He is in control. You can trust him. And He loves it when his trusting children initiate attacks to kill their own sins based on faith in His sovereign control and care.

God is gracious to save. God saves by his grace, not our merit. Israel had just sinned—a BIG one!—by asking for a king like the nations, instead of being God's special people different from the nations. Yet here God is, saving them anyway. The kneejerk mentality of the sin-bitten soul is to assume that since you rebelled recently, God is now unwilling to save you. If 1Sam 14 has anything to say about it, then nothing could be further from the truth. God is gracious to save, even right after you have rebelled. He is more faithful to you than you are to him. And he is more faithful to you than you would be if you were God. Christian, God is more committed to your salvation and sanctification than you are. Believe it, and act on it. I know you sinned this week. So did I. But my sin doesn't change God's love. It may draw down his discipline, but even that discipline is a discipline borne of fatherly love for me as one who trusts in His Son Christ Jesus to atone for my sins and reconcile me to Him. Our faith is not in the quality of our repentance. Our faith is in the truth and power of Jesus as the one who represents God's unchanging faithfulness to His own promises in the gospel we have trusted. God is gracious to save. So go to Him in Christ again, even after you've sinned—especially because you've sinned.

And Christian, if God is this gracious to save you, then don't you think he's gracious enough to save that non-Christian friend of yours that you think is beyond the pale? "*The Lord saved Israel that day.*" He conquered the Philistines by the sword, and by his gracious saving word he can conquer the sins of your foul-mouthed, drunken, immoral co-worker or neighbor or family member and save that soul from the Hell it deserves. He can! With man, these things are impossible; but with God, all things are possible, even the saving of a rich person who can't imagine anything he needs to be saved from. And you know what that means for you? It means you should go on a little evangelistic mission to see what's what just over that rocky crag of a relationship you have with him or her. Who knows? "*It may be that the Lord will work for you, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving*" either by a pastor or by a Christian with a day job. Churches need more of that kind of Jonathan logic, gospel logic, gospel courage, fortitude, faith, initiative, that maybe-God-will-use-me-since-He's-sovereign-and-all-powerful kind of logic. Don't be an evangelistic Saul, always sticking your finger in the air wondering which way the wind's blowing while you keep religion in your back pocket and call it faith. Be an evangelistic Jonathan and see if God's grace might conquer a sinful soul to save it for His glory.

"The Lord saved Israel that day." Not Jonathan, not Saul, the Lord. So when someone asks you how you became a Christian, don't tell them what you did. Tell them what God did in you and for you. Make God in Christ the subject of your testimony and the hero who subdued your sinful heart. Say what he did in your life, not what you did. He convicted you. He gave you understanding. He broke your heart. He brought you to an end of yourself. He broke the power of your sins and gave you repentance. He converted you. He is still conforming you. He put people in your life. He encouraged you, gave you hope and joy, changed your heart, took away your sins. You didn't convert to Christianity like people convert to Islam or Buddhism. God converted you. God saved you on that day. So tell it like it is.

God's sovereign goodness should motivate our initiative, not dampen it. "*Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel*" (14:12). Taking initiative in reliance on God's revealed promises and character pleases God (14:6). **Faith initiates with courageous hope in God's faithfulness**

and power (14:6; contra 14:16-20). We should never use a biblical doctrine in a way the Bible doesn't use it. And therefore, we should never use God's sovereignty to negate human responsibility or blunt human initiative. Why did God tell Paul to stay on in Corinth? Precisely because "*I have many people in this city.*" God's sovereign election to save does not obviate Paul's preaching. It motivates Paul's preaching. We do not do evangelism even though God is sovereign. We do it because God is sovereign.

God rewards faith-filled initiative (Jonathan), not faithless formalism (Saul). Jonathan moves forward in faith—not reckless, but risk-taking, hope-filled, obedient, expectant faith—and God blesses it. This little episode reminds you of 2Chron 16:9 "*The eyes of the Lord run to and for throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.*" Jonathan was still a sinner. But his heart was blameless because he trusted in the presence, power, purposes, and promises of God. What gets God's attention is not self-esteem, or virtue-signaling, or ultra-conservatism, or being a big giver, or being good at public speaking. What gets God's attention is faith that acts on His word. Isn't that what got Jesus attention while he was on the earth? In fact, the only time he marveled was when he saw more faith in the Roman centurion than he had seen in all Israel. And Jesus rewards faith just like His Father does. Heb 11:6 "*Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*" The point here is not that "fate favors the bold." It is that the God of the Bible personally favors those who take Him at His word and act on it, even when all appearances and trends are to the contrary. Christian faith finds its boldness in the faithfulness of God as we see it in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is what God rewards, not believing in myself, but believing in the person, presence, power, purposes, and promises of the Risen Christ.

A negative way to say this is that religious superstition cannot replace God's saving favor. That is what Saul was trying to do when he told the priest in 1Sam 14:18 "*Bring the ark of God here.*" Saul is a faithless formalist. He is superstitious about religious objects because he thinks they have power to manipulate God into doing for Saul what Saul wants God to do for Saul, on Saul's timetable. But God will not be manipulated, even by the symbols that he himself ordained.

Guidance for Christian decision-making comes from God's word, not circumstantial tests (14:8-12).³ Many Christians make decisions like Jonathan did here. If X happens, then I'll know it's God's will is for me to do Y; but if A happens, that will be the sign that God wants me to do B. And many Christians would cite this passage, along with Gideon's fleece in Judges 7, as biblical precedents for seeking signs and anticipating God's providence in our lives. In fact, many Christians will also cite times where that sign-seeking way of decision-making has actually worked. Still, Jonathan's sign and Gideon's fleece are different from each other, and different from how Christians should normally make decisions today.

Gideon's fleece is actually a miracle—the suspension of the ordinary laws of nature. Dew on the fleece, not on the ground; then dew on the ground, not on the fleece. So when Christians today they're laying out a fleece for God, they usually don't mean that they're seeking a miracle like the suspension of gravity. What they often mean is actually no more than what Jonathan did, seeking a sign to confirm which path to take. Not a suspension of ordinary laws of nature, just a circumstantial indication. But Gideon himself also describes his fleece as a test of God—"let me test just once more with the fleece" (Jdgs 6:39). Testing God is explicitly forbidden in Deuteronomy 6:16, "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.*" Gideon should know better. Further, Gideon already had God's personal word of command, presence, and

³ See Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God: A Biblical Alternative to the Traditional View* (Portland: Multnomah, 1980), esp. p.226-227 n.3 on 1S 14:6-15; for Friesen's broader biblical approach, see pp.151-282.
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promise through the angel of the Lord, who had already appeared to him earlier in the chapter and even consumed the sacrifices he set out by fire. He already had a miracle! So Gideon's fleece is not a sign of faith in God, but rather of doubting the clear word and even the visible sign that God had already given Gideon. Gideon's fleece, then, was a faithless and forbidden test of God that we should not imitate, even though God was patient with it.

But can't we at least do what Jonathan did here? "If X happens, then God wants me to do Y; but if A happens, God wants me to do B." What's wrong with that? First of all, it's not as bad as what Gideon did. Gideon was testing God because he still doubted God's command, presence, promise, and his previous sign. Not Jonathan. Secondly, this is a holy war situation, and Num 27:21 said that Israel's leader "*shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the people of Israel with him, the whole congregation.*" So Israel was always supposed to consult God before engaging in battle. The problem here is, Saul is dilly-dallying. So Jonathan goes out not in the cowardice of Gideon, but in the courage of faith, seeking what God might do through his initiative. And in the absence of the corporate decision making mechanism—the priests' Urim and Thummim—Jonathan does the next best thing. "If they say this, we do that," and that will be like submitting to the result of Urim and Thummim, similar to casting lots.

We should also note how Jonathan structured the request. We'd have chosen the easy way, "if they come down, we attack." Not Jonathan. This sign will be contrary to conventional warfare. Jonathan wants an invitation to scale the face of the rock and take out more than just the guys he's talking to. That's harder from a human perspective, maybe impossible. It takes more energy, and more faith. But that way, it'd be clear that the Lord was the one to give the victory, and so the Lord would get the glory. How else would you explain 2 guys taking out 20 after a rock climbing expedition when the enemy already has the high ground? It'd be like that scene in *The Princess Bride* when Wesley scales the rock face to duel with Enigo Mantoya, except it'd be Enigo plus 19 other guys, after scaling the face of a cliff. This sign Jonathan seeks is not "make it easy and I'll do it," or "make it reasonable and I'll do it." Rather, he's saying, "make it indisputable that God is the one who will give the victory and get the glory." Jonathan is not demanding proof. He's submitting to God's sovereignty.

More broadly, we should also note the idea of the relative immaturity of God's corporate people in the Old Covenant compared with the maturity in Christ that we have in the New Covenant. They were under a tutor, like a child. We have the whole word of God, testifying to the whole Christ, and we have the Spirit of God poured out into our hearts to enable us to understand and apply the Scripture that that same Spirit breathed out. Scripture is sufficient for all our decisions. It's enough. "*All Scripture is breathed out by God, profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, training in righteousness, that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for EVERY GOOD WORK*" (2T 3:16-17). So God, as Father, kept his Old Covenant people in a state of minority or childhood. That meant he gave them more specific laws—clean and unclean, sacrifices, ceremonies—like we would keep our own younger children under specific dos and don'ts. But when God's people reached maturity in Christ—when Christ came—those ceremonial and sacrificial laws went away, and God gave us freedom to make decisions ourselves based on Jesus, the Spirit, and all Scripture. What that means is that fleeces, tests, and signs are not for the mature. They're for the immature. God now relates to us in Christ as full-grown sons and daughters, heirs of eternal life, full brothers and sisters of Jesus. That's Gal 4:1-7. You're not a slave or even a little kid anymore spiritually. You're a full-grown adopted son or daughter of God. And therefore he expects you to make decisions based on a wise interpretation and application of his clear word to us, not tests and signs.

So what does all this mean for how we make decisions as Christians today? First, we submit to God's sovereign will over all creation and history. He is king, not us. Second, we obey God's clearly revealed moral will in Scripture, summarized in the ten commandments, the commands to love God and neighbor, and the priority of living the Christian life together in the fellowship of the local church. Then, when we come upon decisions like which house or car to buy, or which job to take, or who to marry, or where we should live, or which vocation to pursue, we decide based on what Garry Friesen calls spiritual expediency. In other words, which decision will best facilitate my obedience to God's clearly revealed moral will, and his sovereign will over creation and history? Which decision will be the most obedient and effective means to the godly and biblical purpose or end I have in view? J.I. Packer says wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it."⁴ That kind of wisdom comes from reading, hearing, praying, and understanding Scripture. What is God's character? What are his priorities and expectations? What pleases and displeases him? That's how people in the Bible make decisions. You never see people in the Bible saying "I'm going to do this or that because I think that's God's will for my individual life." You see them saying things like, "It seemed best to us, in view of who God is and what he prioritizes based on Scripture, to make this decision in this situation as a plan to promote those purposes and priorities."⁵ Now, that's not to say that sometimes people seek a sign and it works out well. But we might say that in those instances, what's really going on is not a suspension of ordinary laws of nature, but rather the exercise of biblical wisdom to see the best goal to aim at, and to see the best way to achieve it. If you want to read more about that, pick up Garry Friesen's book *Decision Making & the Will of God*.

CONCLUSION

But this passage is not ultimately about decision-making. It's ultimately about Jesus. Jesus has already disarmed the powers of evil by His cross and resurrection (Col 2:13). Much like here in 1Sam 13-14, Jesus' enemies surrounded Him, threatened him, attacked him... and he defeated them not by avoiding His own death but by enduring it, conquering it, and rising from it for our justification. The courage and faithfulness and obedience of the One man—the God-Man Christ Jesus—saved all of God's trusting people. And because of Jesus' cross and resurrection, **nothing can hinder God from saving people in Christ**. And that is why we can and should do personal evangelism with confidence. It doesn't matter that you're just you. Jonathan was just Jonathan. But you serve Jonathan's God. Your God can put your sins and fears to flight by the power of the gospel. He can make his strength perfect in your weakness and smallness. And he can use you, such as you are, to speak the gospel to others in a way God uses to conquer their sin and unbelief, forgive their guilt, and incorporate them into Christ's body. Christian, do you believe this? Or do you still think the odds are against you?

Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. Rom 8:32-39....Nothing can separate us from God's love.
Jesus will one day defeat all God's enemies for us (Rev 20).

⁴ *Knowing God*, 80; quoted in Friesen, *Decision Making*, 188.

⁵ From Friesen's helpful little taxonomy of decisioning, p.237.
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