

CHAPTER 14

We left the host of Israel in a very ill posture, in the close of the foregoing chapter; we saw in them no wisdom, nor strength, nor goodness, to give us ground to expect any other than that they should all be cut off by the army of the Philistines; yet here we find that infinite power which works without means, and that infinite goodness which gives without merit, glorified in a happy turn to their affairs, that still Samuel's words may be made good: "The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake," (12:22). In this chapter we have,

I. The host of the Philistines trampled upon, and triumphed over, by the faith and courage of Jonathan, who unknown to his father (v. 1-3), with his armour-bearer only, made a brave attack upon them, encouraging himself in the Lord his God (v. 4-7). He challenged them (v. 8-12), and, upon their acceptance of the challenge, charged them with such fury, or rather such faith, that he put them to flight, and set them one against another (v. 13-15), which gave opportunity to Saul and his forces, with other Israelites, to follow the blow, and gain a victory (v. 16-23).

II. The host of Israel troubled and perplexed by the rashness and folly of Saul, who adjured the people to eat no food till night, which

1. Brought Jonathan to a praemunire (v. 24-30).

2. Was a temptation to the people, when the time of their fast had expired, to eat with the blood, (v. 31-35). Jonathan's error, through ignorance, had like to have been his death, but the people rescued him (v. 36-46).

III. In the close we have a general account of Saul's exploits (v. 47, 48) and of his family (v. 49-52).

<040>1 SAMUEL 14:1-15

JONATHAN SMITES THE PHILISTINES

We must here take notice,

I. Of the goodness of God in restraining the Philistines, who had a vast army of valiant men in the field, from falling upon that little handful of timorous trembling people that Saul had with him, whom they would easily have swallowed up at once. It is an invisible power that sets bounds to the malice of the church's enemies, and suffers them not to do that which we should think there is nothing to hinder them from.

II. Of the weakness of Saul, who seems here to have been quite at a loss, and unable to help himself.

1. He pitched his tent under a tree, and had but 600 men with him, v. 2. Where were now the 3000 men he had chosen, and put such a confidence in? ^{<0132>}1 Samuel 13:2. Those whom he trusted too much to failed him when he most needed them. He durst not stay in Gibeah, but got into some obscure place, in the uttermost part of the city, under a pomegranate-tree, under *Rimmon* (so the word is), *Ha-Rimmon*, that Rimmon near Gibeah, in the caves of which those 600 Benjamites that escaped his themselves, ^{<0134>}Judges 20:47. Some think that there Saul took shelter, so mean and abject was his spirit, now that he had fallen under God's displeasure, every hour expecting the Philistines upon him, and thereby the accomplishment of Samuel's threatening, ^{<0134>}1 Samuel 13:14. Those can never think themselves safe that see themselves cast out of God's protection.

2. Now he sent for a priest, and the ark, a priest from Shiloh, and the ark from Kirjath-jearim, v. 3, 18. Saul had once offended by offering sacrifice himself, ^{<0133>}1 Samuel 13:9. Now he resolves never to fall into that error again, and therefore sends for a priest, and hopes to compromise the matter with God Almighty by a particular reformation, as many do whose hearts are unhumbed and unchanged. Samuel, the Lord's prophet, had forsaken him, but he thinks he can make up that loss by commanding Ahiah, the Lord's priest, to attend him, and *he* will not make him stay for him nor reprove him, as Samuel had done, but will do just as he bids him, v. 18, 19. Many love to have such ministers as will be what they would have them to be, and prophesy smooth things to them; and their caressing them because they are priests, they hope, will atone for their enmity to those ministers that deal faithfully and plainly with them. He will also have the ark brought, perhaps to upbraid Samuel, who in the days of his government, for aught that appears, had not made any public use of it; or in hopes that this would make up the deficiency of his forces; one would have supposed that they would never bring the ark into the camp again, since, the last time, it not

only did not save them, but did itself fall into the Philistines' hands. But it is common for those that have lost the substance of religion to be most fond of the shadows of it, as here is a deserted prince courting a deserted priest.

III. Of the bravery and piety of Jonathan, the son of Saul, who was much fitter than the father to wear the crown. “A sweet imp (says bishop Hall) out of a crab-stock.”

1. He resolved to go *incognito* — *unknown to any one*, into the camp of the Philistines; he did not acquaint his father with his design, for he knew he would forbid him; nor the people, for he knew they would all discourage him, and, because he resolved not to heed their objections, he resolved not to hear them, nor ask their advice, v. 1, 3. Nor had he so great an opinion of the priest as to consult him, but, being conscious of a divine impulse putting him upon it, he threw himself into the mouth of danger, in hope of doing service to his country. The way of access to the enemies' camp is described (v. 4, 5) as being peculiarly difficult, and their natural entrenchments impregnable, yet this does not discourage him; the strength and sharpness of the rocks do but harden and whet his resolutions. Great and generous souls are animated by opposition and take a pleasure in breaking through it.

2. He encouraged his armour-bearer, a young man that attended him, to go along with him in the daring enterprise, (v. 6): “*Come, and let us put our lives in our hands, and go over to the enemies' garrison, and try what we can do to put them into confusion.*” See whence he draws his encouragements.

(1.) “They are uncircumcised, and have not the seal of the covenant in their flesh, as we have. Fear not, we shall do well enough with them, for they are not under the protection of God's covenant as we are, cannot call him theirs as we can, by the sign of circumcision.” If such as are enemies to us are also strangers to God, we need not fear them.

(2.) “God is able to make us two victorious over their unnumbered regiments. *There is no restraint in the Lord*, no limitation to the holy One of Israel, but it is all one to him *to save by many or by few.*” This is a true easily granted in general, that it is all alike to Omnipotence what the instruments are by which it works; and yet it is not so easy to apply it to a particular case; when we are but few and feeble then to believe that God can not only save us, but save by us, this is an instance of faith, which,

wherever it is, shall obtain a good report. Let this strengthen the weak and encourage the timid: let it be pleaded with God for the enforcing of our petitions and with ourselves for the silencing of our fears: *It is nothing with God to help, whether with many or with those that have no power,* ^{<4441>}2 Chronicles 14:11.

(3.) “Who knows but he that can use us for his glory will do it? *It may be the Lord will work for us, work with us, work a sign or miracle for us.*” So the Chaldee. We may encourage ourselves with hope that God will appear for us, though we have not ground on which to build an assurance. An active faith will venture far in God's cause upon an *it may be*. Jonathan's armour-bearer, or esquire, as if he had learned to carry, not his arms only, but his heart, promised to stand by him and to follow him withersoever he went, v. 7. We have reason to think that Jonathan felt a divine impulse and impression putting him upon this bold adventure, in which he was encouraged by his servant's concurrence, otherwise the danger was so great which he ran upon that he would have tempted God rather than trusted him. And perhaps he had an actual regard to that word of Joshua (^{<4623>}Joshua 23:10), *One man of you shall chase a thousand*, borrowed from Moses, ^{<4623>}Deuteronomy 32:30.

3. How bold soever his resolution was, he resolved to follow Providence in the execution of it, which, he believed, would guide him *with its eye* (^{<4918>}Psalm 32:8), and which therefore he would carefully attend and take hints of direction from. See how he put himself upon Providence, and resolved to be determined by it. “Come” (says he to his confidant), “we will discover ourselves to the enemy, as those that are not afraid to look them in the face (v. 8), and then, if they be so cautious as to bid us stand, we will advance no further, taking it for an intimation of Providence that God would have us act defensively, and we will prepare as well as we can to give them a warm reception (v. 9); but if they be so presumptuous as to challenge us, and the first sentinel we meet with bid us march on, we will push forward, and make as brisk an onset, assuredly gathering thence that it is the will of God we should act offensively, and then not doubting but he will *stand by us,*” v. 10. And upon this issue he puts it, firmly believing, as we all should,

(1.) That God has the governing of the hearts and tongues of all men, even of those that know him not, nor have any regard to him, and serves his own purposes by them, though they mean not so, neither do their hearts

think so. Jonathan knew God could discover his mind to him if he pleased, and would do it, since he depended upon him, as surely by the mouth of a Philistine as by the mouth of a priest.

(2.) That God will, some way or other, direct the steps of those that *acknowledge him in all their ways*, and seek unto him for direction, with full purpose of heart to follow it. Sometimes we find most comfort in that which is least our own doing, and into which we have been led by the unexpected, but well observed, turns of Providence.

4. Providence gave him the sign he expected, and he answered the signal. He and his armour-bearer did not surprise the Philistines when they were asleep, but discovered themselves to them by day-light, v. 11. The guards of the Philistines,

(1.) Disdained them, upbraided them with the cowardice of many of their people, and looked upon them to be of the regiment of sneakers: *Behold, the Hebrews come forth out of their holes*. If some of Christ's soldiers play the coward, others that play the man may perhaps be upbraided with it.

(2.) They defied them (v. 12): *Come, and we will show you a thing*, as if they came like children to gaze about them; but meaning, as Goliath (~~1~~ Samuel 17:44), that they would *give them as meat to the fowls of the air*. They bantered them, not doubting but to make a prey of them. This greatly emboldened Jonathan. With it he encouraged his servant; he had spoken with uncertainty (v. 6): *It may be the Lord will work for us*; but now he speaks with assurance (v. 12): *The Lord has delivered them*, not into our hands (he sought not his own glory), but *into the hand of Israel*, for he aimed at nothing but the advantage of the public. His faith being thus strengthened, no difficulty can stand before him; he climbs up the rock upon all four (v. 13), though he has nothing to cover him, nor any but his own servant to second him, nor any human probability of any thing but death before him.

5. The wonderful success of this daring enterprise. The Philistines, instead of falling upon Jonathan, to slay him, or take him prisoner, fell before him (v. 13) unaccountably, upon the first blows he gave. They fell, that is,

(1.) They were many of them slain by him and his armour-bearer, v. 14. Twenty Philistines fell presently. It was not so much the name of Jonathan that made them yield so tamely (though some think that this had become

terrible to them, since he smote one of their garrisons, ^{<0133>}1 Samuel 13:3), but it was God's right hand and his arm that got him this victory.

(2.) The rest were put to flight, and fell foul upon one another (v. 15): *There was trembling in the host.* There was no visible cause for fear; they were so numerous, bold, and advantageously posted; the Israelites had fled before them; not an enemy made head against them, but one gentleman and his man; and yet they shook like an aspen-leaf. The consternation was general: they all trembled; even *the spoilers*, those that had been most bold and forward, shared in the common fright, the joints of their loins were loosed, and their knees smote one against another, and yet none of them could tell why or wherefore. It is called *a trembling of God* (so the original phrase is), signifying not only, as we render it, a very great trembling, which they could not resist nor reason themselves clear of, but that it was supernatural, and came immediately from the hand of God. He that made the heart knows how to make it tremble. To complete the confusion, even the earth quaked, and made them ready to fear that it would sink under them. Those that will not fear the eternal God, he can make afraid of a shadow. See ^{<0101>}Proverbs 21:1; ^{<0334>}Isaiah 33:14.

^{<0146>}1 SAMUEL 14:16-23

THE PHILISTINES DESTROYED

We have here the prosecution and improvement of the wonderful advantages which Jonathan and his armour-bearer gained against the Philistines.

I. The Philistines were, by the power of God, set against one another. They melted away like snow before the sun, and *went on beating down one another* (v. 16), for (v. 20) *every man's sword was against his fellow.* When they fled for fear, instead of turning back upon those that chased them, they reckoned those only their enemies that stood in their way, and treated them accordingly. The Philistines were very secure, because all the swords and spears were in their hands. Israel had none except what Saul and Jonathan had. But now God showed them the folly of that confidence, by making their own swords and spears the instruments of their own destruction, and more fatal in their own hands than if they had been in the hands of Israel. See the like done, ^{<0072>}Judges 7:22; ^{<0413>}2 Chronicles 20:23.

II. The Israelites were hereby animated against them.

1. Notice was soon taken of it by the watchmen of Saul, those that stood sentinel at Gibeah, v. 16. They were aware that the host of the enemy was in great confusion, and that a great slaughter was made among them, and yet, upon search, they found none of their own forces absent, but only Jonathan and his servant (v. 17), which no doubt greatly animated them, and assured them that it could be no other than the Lord's doing, when there was no more of man's doing than what those two could do against a great host.

2. Saul began to enquire of God, but soon desisted. His spirit had not come down so far as to allow him to consult Samuel, though, it is probable, he was near him; for we read (^{13:15}1 Samuel 13:15) that he had come to Gibeah of Benjamin; but he called for the ark (v. 18), desiring to know whether it would be safe for him to attack the Philistines, upon the disorder they perceived them to be in. Many will consult God about their safety that would never consult him about their duty. But, perceiving by his scouts that the noise in the enemy's camp increased, he commanded the priest that officiated to break off abruptly: "*Withdraw thy hand* (v. 19), consult no more, wait no longer for an answer." He was very unwise indeed if (as some think) he forbade him to lift up his hands in prayer; for when Joshua was actually engaged with Amalek Moses continued still to lift up his hands. It is rather a prohibition to his enquiring of the Lord, either,

(1.) Because now he thought he did not need an answer, the case was plain enough. And yet the more evident it was that God did all the more reason he had to enquire whether he would give him leave to do any thing. Or,

(2.) Because now he would not stay for it; he was in such haste to fight a falling enemy that he would not stay to make an end of his devotions, nor hear what answer God would give him. A little thing will divert a vain and carnal mind from religious exercises. He that believeth will not make haste, such haste as this, nor reckon any business so urgent as not to allow time to take God along with him.

3. He, and all the little force he had, made a vigorous attack upon the enemy; and all the people *were cried together* (so the word is, v. 20), for want of the silver trumpets wherewith God appointed them to sound an alarm in the day of battle, (^{10:9}Numbers 10:9). They summoned them together by shouting, and their number was not so great but that they

might soon be got together. And now they seem bold and brave when the work is done to their hands. Our Lord Jesus had conquered our spiritual enemies, routed and dispersed them, so that we are cowards indeed if we will not stand to our arms when it is only to pursue the victory and to divide the spoil.

4. Every Hebrew, even those from whom one would least have expected it, now turned his hand against the Philistines.

(1.) Those that had deserted and gone over to the enemy, and were among them, now fought against them, v. 21. Some think, they were such as had been taken prisoners by them, and now they were goads in their sides. It rather seems that they went in to them voluntarily, but, now that they saw them falling, recovered the hearts of Israelites, and did valiantly for their country.

(2.) Those that had fled their colours, and hid themselves in the mountains, returned to their posts, and joined in with the pursuers (v. 22), hoping by their great zeal and officiousness, now that the danger was over and the victory sure, to atone for their former cowardice. It was not much to their praise to appear now, but it would have been more their reproach if they had not appeared. Those that are remiss and faint-hearted indeed that will not act in the cause of God when they see it victorious, as well as righteous. Thus all hands were at work against the Philistines, and every Israelite slew as many as he could, without sword or spear; yet it is said (v. 23), *it was the Lord that saved Israel that day*. He did it by them, for without him they could do nothing. *Salvation is of the Lord*.

1 SAMUEL 14:24-35

SAUL'S RASH OATH

We have here an account of the distress of the children of Israel, even in the day of their triumphs. Such alloys are all present joys subject to. And such obstructions does many a good cause meet with, even when it seems most prosperous, through the mismanagement of instruments.

I. Saul forbade the people, under the penalty of a curse, to taste any food that day, v. 24. Here we will suppose,

1. That as king he had power to put his soldiers under this interdict, and to bind it on with a curse; and therefore they submitted to it, and God so far owned it as to discover, by the lot, that Jonathan was the delinquent that had meddled with the accursed thing (though ignorantly), on which account God would not be at that time enquired of by them.

2. That he did it with a good intention, lest the people, who perhaps had been kept for some time at short allowance, when they found plenty of victuals in the deserted camp of the Philistines, should fall greedily upon that, and so lose time in pursuing the enemy, and some of them, it may be, glut themselves to such a degree as not to be fit for any more service that day. To prevent this, he forbade them to taste any food, and laid himself, it is likely, under the same restraint. And yet his making this severe order was,

(1.) Impolitic and very unwise; for, if it gained time, it lost strength, for the pursuit.

(2.) It was imperious, and disobliging to the people, and worse than *muzzling the mouth of the ox when he treads out the corn*. To forbid them to feast would have been commendable, but to forbid them so much as to taste, though ever so hungry, was barbarous.

(3.) It was impious to enforce the prohibition with a curse and an oath. Had he no penalty less than an anathema wherewith to support his military discipline? Death for such a crime would have been too much, but especially death with a curse. Though superiors may chide and correct, they may not curse their inferiors; our rule is, *Bless, and curse not*. When David speaks of an enemy he had that loved cursing perhaps he meant Saul, ^{<19497>}Psalm 109:17, 18.

II. The people observed his order, but it had many inconveniences attending it.

1. The soldiers were tantalized; for, in their pursuit of the enemy, it happened that they went through a wood so full of wild honey that it dropped from the trees upon the ground, the Philistines having perhaps, in their flight, broken in upon the honeycombs, for their own refreshment, and left them running. Canaan flowed with honey, and here is an instance of it. They sucked honey out of *the rock, the flinty rock* (^{<15213>}Deuteronomy 32:13); yet, for fear of the curse, they did not so much as taste the honey,

v. 25, 26. Those are worthy of the name of Israelites that can deny themselves and their own appetites even when they are most craving, and the delights of sense most tempting, for fear of guilt and a curse, and the table becoming a snare. Let us never feed ourselves, much less feast ourselves, without fear.

2. Jonathan fell under the curse through ignorance. He heard not of the charge his father had given; for, having bravely forced the lines, he was then following the chase, and therefore might justly be looked upon as exempted from the charge and intended in it. But it seems it was taken for granted, and he himself did not object against it afterwards, that it extended to him, though absent upon so good an occasion. He, not knowing any peril in it, took up a piece of a honey-comb, upon the end of his staff, and sucked it (v. 27), and was sensibly refreshed by it: *His eyes were enlightened*, which began to grow dim through hunger and faintness; it made his countenance look pleasant and cheerful, for it was such as a stander-by might discern (v. 29): *See how my eyes have been enlightened*. He thought no harm, nor feared any, till one of the people acquainted him with the order, and then he found himself in a snare. Many a good son has been thus entangled and distressed, in more ways than one, by the rashness of an inconsiderate father. Jonathan, for his part, lost the crown he was heir to by his father's folly, which, it may be, this was an ill omen of.

3. The soldiers were faint, and grew feeble, in the pursuit of the Philistines. Jonathan foresaw this would be the effect of it; their spirits would flag, and their strength would fail, for want of sustenance. Such is the nature of our bodies that they soon grow unfit for service if they be not supplied with fresh recruits. Daily work cannot be done without daily bread, which our Father in heaven graciously gives us. It is *bread that strengthens man's heart*; therefore Jonathan reasoned very well, *If the people had eaten freely*, there would have been *a much greater slaughter* (v. 30); but, as it was, they were *very faint, too much fatigued* (so the Chaldee), and began to think more of their meat than of their work.

4. The worst effect of all was that at evening, when the restraint was taken off and they returned to their food again, they were so greedy and eager upon it that they ate the flesh with the blood, expressly contrary to the law of God, v. 32. Two hungry meals, we say, make the third a glutton; it was so here. They would not stay to have their meat either duly killed (for they slew the cattle upon the ground, and did not hang them up, as they used to

do, that the blood might all run out of them) or duly dressed, but fell greedily upon it before it was half boiled or half roasted, v. 32. Saul, being informed of it, reprov'd them for the sin (v. 33): *You have transgressed*; but did not, as he should have done, reflect upon himself as having been accessory to it, and having *made the Lord's people to transgress*. To put a stop to this irregularity, Saul ordered them to set up a great stone before him, and let all that had cattle to kill, for their present use, bring them thither, and kill them under his eye upon that stone (v. 33), and the people did so (v. 34), so easily were they restrained and reformed when their prince took care to do his part. If magistrates would but use their power as they might, people would be made better than they are with more ease than is imagined.

III. On this occasion Saul built an altar (v. 35), that he might offer sacrifice, either by way of acknowledgment of the victory they had obtained or by the way of atonement for the sin they had been guilty of. *The same was the first altar that he built*, and perhaps the rolling of the great stone to kill the beasts on reminded him of converting it into an altar, else he would not have thought of it. Saul was turning aside from God, and yet now he began to build altars, being most zealous (as many are) for the form of godliness when he was denying the power of it. See ~~<2084>~~Hosea 8:14, *Israel has forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples*. Some read it, *He began to build that altar*; he laid the first stone, but was so hasty to pursue his victory that he could not stay to finish it.

~~<0946>~~ 1 SAMUEL 14:36-46

JONATHAN CONDEMNED TO DIE

Here is,

I. Saul's boasting against the Philistines. He proposed, as soon as his soldiers had got their suppers, to pursue them all night, and *not leave a man of them*, v. 36. Here he showed much zeal, but little discretion; for his army, thus fatigued, could as ill spare a night's sleep as a meal's meat. But it is common for rash and foolish men to consider nobody but themselves, and, so that they might but have their humour, not to care what hardships they put upon those that are under them. However, the people were so

obsequious to their king that they would by no means oppose the motion, but resolved to make the best of it, and, if he will go on, they will follow him: *Do whatsoever seemeth good to thee*. Only the priest thought it convenient to go on with the devotions that were broken off abruptly (v. 19), and to consult the oracle: *Let us draw near hither unto God*. Princes and great men have need of such about them as will thus be their remembrancers, wherever they go, to take God along with them. And, when the priest proposed it, Saul could not for shame reject the proposal, but *asked counsel of God* (v. 37): “*Shall I go down after the Philistines? And shall I speed?*”

II. His falling foul on his son Jonathan: and the rest of this paragraph is wholly concerning him: for, while he is prosecuted, the Philistines make their escape. We know not what mischief may ensue upon on rash resolve.

1. God, by giving an intimation of his displeasure, put Saul upon searching for an accursed thing. When, by the priest, he consulted the oracle, God *answered him not*, v. 37. Note, When God denies our prayers it concerns us to enquire what the sin is that has provoked him to do so. *Let us see where the sin is*, v. 38. For God's ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, but it is sin that separates between us and him. If God turns away our prayer, we have reason to suspect it is for some iniquity regarding our hearts, which we are concerned to find out, that we may put it away, may mortify it, and put it to death. Saul swears by his Maker that whoever was the Achan that troubled the camp, by eating the forbidden fruit, should certainly die, though it were Jonathan himself, that is, though ever so dear to himself and the people, little thinking that Jonathan was the man (v. 39): *He shall surely die*, the curse shall be executed upon him. But none of the people answered him, that is, none of those who knew Jonathan had broken the order would inform against him.

2. Jonathan was discovered by lot to be the offender. Saul would have lots cast between himself and Jonathan on the one side, and the people on the other, perhaps because he was as confident of Jonathan's innocency in this matter as of his own, v. 40. The people, seeing him in a heat, durst not gainsay any thing he proposed, but acquiesced: *Do as seemeth good unto thee*. Before he cast lots, he prayed that *God would give a perfect lot* (v. 41), that is, make a full discovery of this matter, or, as it is in the margin, that he would show the innocent. This was with an air of impartial justice. Judges should desire that truth may come out, whoever may suffer by it.

Lots should be cast with prayer, because they are a solemn appeal to Providence, and by them we beg of God to direct and determine us (~~402~~ Acts 1:24), for which reason some have condemned games that depend purely upon lot or chance as making too bold with a sacred thing. Jonathan at length was taken (v. 42), Providence designing hereby to countenance and support a lawful authority, and to put an honour upon the administration of public justice in general, reserving another way to bring off one that had done nothing worthy of death.

3. Jonathan ingenuously confesses the fact, and Saul, with an angry curse, passes sentence upon him. Jonathan denies not the truth, nor goes about to conceal it, only he thinks it hard that he must *die for it*, v. 43. He might very fairly have pleaded his invincible ignorance of the law, or have insisted upon his merit, but he submitted to the necessity with a great and generous mind: "God's and my father's will be done:" thus he showed as much valour in receiving the messengers of death himself as in sending them among the Philistines. It is as brave to yield in some cases as it is in other cases to fight. Saul is not mollified by his filial submission nor the hardness of his case; but as one that affected to be thought firm to his word, and much more to his oath; even when it bound him hardest, with another imprecation he gives judgment upon Jonathan (v. 44): "*God do so and more also to me if I do not execute the law upon thee, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan.*"

(1.) He passed this sentence too hastily, without consulting the oracle. Jonathan had a very good plea in arrest of the judgment. What he had done was not *malum in se* — *bad in itself*; and, as for the prohibition of it, he was ignorant of that, so that he could not be charged with rebellion or disobedience.

(2.) He did it in fury. Had Jonathan been worthy to die, yet it would have become a judge, much more a father, to pass sentence with tenderness and compassion, and not with such an air of triumph, like a man perfectly divested of all humanity and natural affection. Justice is debased when it is administered with wrath and bitterness.

(3.) He backed it with a curse upon himself if he did not see the sentence executed; and this curse did return upon his own head. Jonathan escaped, but God did so to Saul, and more also; for he was rejected of God and made anathema. Let none upon any occasion dare to use such imprecations as these, lest God say Amen to them, and *make their own tongues to fall*

upon them, ¹⁶⁰⁸ Psalm 64:8. This stone will return upon him that rolleth it. Yet we have reason to think that Saul's bowels yearned toward Jonathan, so that he really punished himself, and very justly, when he seemed so severe upon Jonathan. God made him feel the smart of his own rash edict, which might make him fear being again guilty of the like. By all these vexatious accidents God did likewise correct him for his presumption in offering sacrifice without Samuel. An expedition so ill begun could not end without some rebukes.

4. The people rescued Jonathan out of his father's hands, v. 45. Hitherto they had expressed themselves very observant of Saul. What seemed good to him they acquiesced in, v. 36, 40. But, when Jonathan is in danger, Saul's word is no longer a law to them, but with the utmost zeal they oppose the execution of his sentence: "*Shall Jonathan die* — that blessing, that darling, of his country? Shall that life be sacrificed to a punctilio of law and honour which was so bravely exposed for the public service, and to which we owe our lives and triumphs? No, we will never stand by and see him thus treated whom God delights to honour." It is good to see Israelites zealous for the protection of those whom God has made instruments of public good. Saul had sworn that Jonathan should die, but they oppose their oath to his, and swear he shall not die: "*As the Lord liveth there shall not only not his head, but not a hair of his head fall to the ground;*" they did not rescue him by violence, but by reason and resolution; and Josephus says they made their prayer to God that he might be loosed from the curse. They pleaded for him that *he has wrought with God this day*; that is, "he has owned God's cause, and God has owned his endeavours, and therefore his life is too precious to be thrown away upon a nicety." We may suppose Saul had not so perfectly forgotten the relation of a father but that he was willing enough to have Jonathan rescued, and well pleased to have that done which yet he would not do himself: and he that knows the heart of a father knows not how to blame him.

5. The design against the Philistines is quashed by this incident (v. 46): *Saul went up from following them*, and so an opportunity was lost of completing the victory. When Israel's shields are clashing with one another the public safety and service suffer by it.

~~<0147>~~ 1 SAMUEL 14:47-52

SAUL'S FAMILY

Here is a general account of Saul's court and camp.

1. Of his court and family, the names of his sons and daughters (v. 49), and of his wife and his cousin-german that was general of his army, v. 50.

There is mention of another wife of Saul's (~~<0208>~~ 2 Samuel 21:8), Rizpah, a secondary wife, and of the children he had by her.

2. Of his camp and military actions.

(1.) How he levied his army: *When he saw any strong valiant man, that was remarkably fit for service, he took him unto him* (v. 52), as Samuel had told them the manner of the king would be (~~<0811>~~ 1 Samuel 8:11); and, if he must have a standing army, it was his prudence to fill it up with the ablest men he could make choice of.

(2.) How he employed his army. He guarded his country against the insults of its enemies on every side, and prevented their incursions, v. 47, 48. It is supposed that he acted only defensively against those that used to invade the borders of Israel; *and withersoever he turned himself, as there was occasion, he vexed them*, by checking and disappointing them. But the enemies he struggled most with were the Philistines, with whom he had *sore war all his days*, v. 52. He had little reason to be proud of his royal dignity, nor had any of his neighbours cause to envy him, for he had little enjoyment of himself after he took the kingdom. He could not vex his enemies without some vexation to himself, such thorns are crowns quilted with.