



The Lord is Not Restrained by Many or by Few

Read 1 Samuel 14:1-6 (Especially v. 6c)

LEADER'S NOTE: To prepare for this lesson, read all of 1 Samuel 13 and 14 to become familiar with the story. King Saul was at war with the Philistines. Israel was greatly outnumbered. Under the domination of Philistia, they had not been allowed to possess weapons of war. No blacksmiths were allowed to operate in Israel. The Israelites were forced to go to Philistian sources even to sharpen their farm implements. Now they are going into battle with the dreaded Philistine army. With their rakes, hoes, picks, and other farm tools, they are no match for their enemy. They are terrified! Saul divides his army between himself and his son, Jonathan. Then Jonathan and his armor bearer sneak away from the army and go into the Philistine camp with the brave intent of attacking single-handedly. (More LEADER'S NOTES follow)

1. Do you think that verse 6c is an inspired statement? (Consider: Was Jonathan, son of King Saul, a prophet of God?)

The statement is inspired in the sense that God inspired the written account of what happened. However, since Jonathan was not a prophet of God (and he wasn't even certain what God would do - see vs. 6) this probably should not be considered to be a "thus saith the Lord" passage. This is a good point at which to explain the issue of context (who is speaking and to whom). Having pointed this out, though, we also know (as Jonathan did) that God is not limited by the odds of any opposition. That is the main point of this lesson.

2. Do you think this statement is true? (Consider Judges 7:4, 7) Is it possible that it could be an un-inspired statement, yet still true?

The statement is a true one, based upon how God had revealed Himself as all-powerful in Israel's past. The case of Gideon (and other such passages) proves it. Again, the recording of what was said by Jonathan is inspired. His statement however, was not given under inspiration. It was a *principle* that was true based on other things recorded in Scripture. It is important to point this out since even the words of the devil himself are sometimes recorded in the Bible. The recording of what Satan has said is inspired. The words of Satan, however, are not.

3. Can you state the principle Jonathan was referring to in your own words?

Have several of your students try to state the principle in their own words. It should go something like this: "*God is not limited in what he can do by the odds that seem to oppose Him.*"

4. Does this principle hold true in the New Testament? Why or why not?

Yes, it is true under the New Testament as well. See Matthew 19:26.

5. In the context, this statement had to do with physical battle (war) and had special application to the army of Israel. Do you think it has wider application than that?

Obviously, God is all powerful in everything, not just in ancient wars.

Four Contemporary Applications of this Principle

1. Someone is given a 20% chance of surviving surgery by a doctor. How disheartening should this be to a Christian? Is God restrained by *medical odds*? Does this mean that God will always spare a Christian's life who is in good standing with Him?

God is not restrained by medical odds or doctors' predictions. Doctors are not inspired to tell the future. They are sometimes wrong in their predictions. Life is ultimately in God's hands. Sometimes Christians hear such odds stated, give up hope, and act like people who don't know God. Can we act this way and not deny this principle? It is not always God's will that we be healed or spared suffering or even death, however. All of God's faithful people in the Bible ultimately die. If it were true that God always healed or spared life in every case where faith is exhibited, there would be some 500 year old Christians! Our faith is to be our confidence in His power, not our human assessment of His will or our personal desires. We must never set up expectations about the particular will of God that presume that which we do not know. See 1 John 5:14-15 for God's caution in this area. Also consider the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:17-18). They had faith that God could spare them, but even if He didn't, they would continue to trust Him and obey.

2. An obedient Christian woman wants to find a Christian mate. It seems to her that so few people her age are serious about serving God. Is God restrained by *social odds*?

There are many Christians discouraged in this area and showing lack of faith in God's providence in their lives. Such people needed to be reminded that God can help them if they strive to do their part. Yet they, too, must set the pace of their expectations according to His sovereign will, which we do not usually know ahead of time.

3. It's very easy to believe that the truth of God is overwhelmed today. So many serve only self and not Christ. Few have serious concern for their spiritual condition. Is God restrained with regard to *numbers who hold the truth*? (See Matthew 7:13-14)

The point to make here is that truth does not change based upon the number of people who do or do not adhere to it. All through the Bible it has been true that the many do not stay faithful to God for long. Faithfulness is most often seen in the few. God is not limited by what the majority holds as truth.

4. A non-Christian neighbor of yours has recently been asking you about your church. While you are happy for the interest, you know the kind of life this person has lived and is living. You wonder how he could ever make a good Christian. You're almost afraid to speak to him or invite him to church with you. Is God restrained with regard to *sins of the past*? (Consider 1 Timothy 1:12-16)

We must not allow our limited expectations to keep us from reaching out to the lost. God can do great and surprising things in the lives of people. There may well be some examples of people who were never expected to be converted even among the people you are teaching.

There are certainly other areas in which this principle is true. Ask you students to consider where else this principle applies.
