

A CHARACTER STUDY OF  
JONATHAN, SON OF KING SAUL

Lesson 1

*JONATHAN THE HERO OF  
ISRAEL*

I Samuel 14:1-23

*“And Jonathan said to the young man that  
bare his armor, Come, and let us go over  
unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it  
may be that the LORD will work for us: for  
there is no restraint to the LORD to  
save by many or by few.”*

I Samuel 14:6

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# JONATHAN THE HERO OF ISRAEL

I Samuel 14:1

When Saul became king and began his reign, Israel was under the domination of the Philistines. Life was hard for the Children of Israel. There was a large army of Philistines that had invaded the land, and there were garrisons of Philistines throughout the country side. There were “spoilers”, “that is [Philistine] bands that went out to ravage the country” (Wycliffe. P. 284) They scourged the farms and homes of the Jews. Saul was newly chosen as king and was trying to organize the Jews under his rule. He called the people to him and formed an army of three thousand men. King Saul took two thousand of these men to be with him in a village called Michmash. He gave one thousand of the men to his son, Jonathan. They were located in a place called Gibeah of Benjamin. Jonathan was a strong leader of men and when he saw the terrible things being done to the people of God by the invaders he was angered. First Samuel 13 tells the story of how he began a rebellion

that would drive the enemy from the homes of Israel.

I Chronicles 8:33 states that Jonathan was the son of Saul. Inclusion in this part of the genealogy places them among the chief men of the tribe of Benjamin. I Chronicles 9:39 list them among the sons of Levi. We are not given any other information about Jonathan in the Scripture until Saul becomes king. At that point the character of Jonathan becomes clear to the reader. When Saul became king, Jonathan also assumed the responsibility of leadership under him. The Hebrew name "Jonathan" means "Jehovah has given". (Wycliffe. P.283) Certainly, Jonathan was a wonderful gift to the people of God. He becomes a true hero as he fought for Israel. The story of Jonathan as a Hero begins in chapter 13. There he discovers a Garrison of Philistines close to his location. *"And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it."* (I Sam. 13:3) When he attacked the "garrison of Philistines at Gaba" he was assassinating the 'resident' or the 'political officer' of the Philistines. "The assassination of this representative of

Philistine rule was the signal for revolt.” (IBID.) Jonathan’s attack caused Saul to alert the people of Israel that the rebellion had begun. In answer to this the Philistines amassed a huge army to put this rebellion down. This terrified God’s people. *“When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.”* (Vs.6) It was in this context that Jonathan and his armour bearer challenged a garrison of Philistines. With a desire to avenge his people and drive out the invaders, Jonathan trusted the Lord to give them victory. To get to the enemy position, they had to pass between two sharp outcroppings of rock. The two rock had names. One was called “Bozez” which means ‘white, shining, glorious’. The other rock was named “Seneh”. This means ‘prickly, bramble, thorns. Maybe he felt that the battle would be glorious (Bozez) but certainly he would need to pass through the hard times as well. (Seneh) As servants of Christ the ministry seems often to be glorious. The thrill of seeing the power of God bless His Word as it

is preached is exciting and glorious. However, the enemy will make sure that there are plenty of prickly difficulties for the servants of God to endure. The ministers of God must be strong in faith and equipped with the armor of God. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

When they passed between the two sharp rocks, Jonathan and his armourbearer approached an encampment of Philistines. Outnumbered, Jonathan devised a plan that was rooted in his faith in God. He would let the enemy discover that they were there just outside the encampment. If the soldiers instructed them to remain there while they came out to the two, Jonathan said that they should evade the enemy. However, if the Philistines invited them to come up to the camp Jonathan knew that *“the LORD hath delivered them into our hand: and this shall be a sign unto us.”* (Vs. 14:10b) This “would be a sign to Jonathan of the cowardice of the Philistines, since it would betray their lack of courage to leave their positions to attack the Hebrews.” (Wycliffe. P. 284) Jonathan was confident in the leadership of God. *“it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or*

*by few.” (Vs 14:6b) God honored the courage of these two men. They stepped out in faith and attacked the strong hold of the enemy and God blessed their courage. They began to rout the enemy. Even today, God is looking for a servant who will with courage and faith step out for the Lord into the battle and strive against the enemy. What battle has the Lord brought you to Child of God? Step out and remember, “there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.” That day, one good man put an army to flight. Their boldness put great fear in the enemy. “There was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling.” (Vs. 14:15) The bravery of the two warriors inspired a nation of people to emerge from their cowardice and join the fight. “Likewise, all the men of Israel which had hid themselves in mount Ephraim, when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also followed hard after them in the battle. So the LORD saved Israel that day” (Vs. 22)*

In this battle, Jonathan showed the character of a real hero. Some of the characteristics he displayed that day were;

Courage – He attacked the enemy

Leadership – He led his armourbearer

Wisdom – set the plan of battle

Faith – He knew God would deliver

Strength of heart – He fought the battle till he had victory

Inspiration to others – The Hebrew rose to fight (Vs. 22)

Submission to authority – obeyed his father, King Saul (Vs. 45)

Jonathan started a revolt that day that drove the Philistines away for a time. His attack caused a trembling in their ranks that day. *“And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling.”* (Vs. 15) It was a “supernatural terror miraculously infused by

God unto the Philistines.” (K&D. Vol. 2. P140)  
A few good men stepped out in faith and put a large army to flight. The courage caused the enemy to melt away and begin to destroy themselves. (Vs. 16)

When King Saul realized that the enemy was running away, he ordered the Hebrews to attack. He did not want to let the enemy escape. In his zeal, he orders his people to attack and to not let up. They were not to stop; not even to eat. This caused the people distress. (Vs. 24) Jonathan was so busy in the battle he did not hear the order to not eat, and when he found wild honey, he stopped and ate some. He was refreshed. When the people told him of the prohibition he said, *“My father hath troubled the land.”* (Vs. 29a) When King Saul heard that his order had been violated, he searched until he found the guilty person. He was shocked that it was his son, Jonathan. Caught in his own foolish words, he sought to carry out his death sentence. When the people heard what his intentions were, they rebuked him. On two different occasions they had been subservient to his will. (Vss. 36, 40) Now they withstood him to his face. *“And the people*

*said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not.” (Vs. 45)*

This verse uses a phrase that captures the imagination. *“for he hath wrought with God this day.* They recognized that Jonathan had been used of God that day. He had been a tool in the hand of God to accomplish a great deed. What a wonderful privilege the Father offers His children, to be used as an instrument in the hand of God! To be used to point another soul to the Savior. To be used to establish a ministry or testimony for God in a place where there was none before. The life lived in service to God is thrilling. God gives a privilege that even the angels in heaven cannot know. That is, to be used of God. To be a tool in the hand of the Almighty! The Father seeks those who are willing to step out for Him and let Him use them in His service. How different would our churches be if more of God’s children attempted great things for God? Why do we hold back? Is Satan such an intimidating

enemy? Jonathan saw the enemy but he also saw the ability of God to win the victory. (Eph. 6:12-13)

K&D = Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes.  
C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. Vol. III. William B. Eerdmans  
Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1982.

Wycliffe = The Wycliffe Bible Commentary. By Charles F.  
Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison. Moody Press, Chicago, Il.  
1962

## Notes

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**“Fear not, daughter of Sion; behold, thy  
King cometh.”  
John 12:15**

Suggested Scripture readings – Matthew 12:12-19; Zechariah 9:9

March of 1942, was a dark time in the Philippines. It was especially dark for over 140,000 foreigners who were living there at the time as Teachers, businessmen and missionaries. One of those missionaries was a lady named **Mona Kimmery**. General Douglas MacArthur, after struggling unsuccessfully to fend off the Japanese invasion, left the islands with the promise, **“I shall return”**. He repeated that promise over and over again for the next two- and one-half years. Miss Kimmery suffered many things in the internment camps. But, the promise of General MacArthur gave her and the many others who were held captive there courage and hope.

The prophet Zechariah preached to his people hundreds of years before the day of the Lord Jesus. His message was that one-day God would send His King to them to rule and release them from their sin. In Jesus’ day Israel was dominated by Rome. As Jesus came into Jerusalem one day riding on a donkey, the people cried out **“Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel.”** The word **“hosanna”** means **“save us”** or **“deliver us”**. Matthew, rightly recognized this as the fulfillment of Zechariah’s

prophecy. **“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”** (Zechariah 9:9)

The people were hoping that Jesus would raise an army and throw off the yoke of Rome. It was not time for that. First, Jesus would die for our sins. There is coming a day however, when He will return, receive us to Himself and in His time set up his kingdom. As believers, we sometimes, become overtaken with the burdens of this life. We must remember that Jesus is coming again and will establish his rule over this world. As the internees in the Philippians looked for MacArthur to keep his promise. We wait for the coming of our King Jesus. Earthly promises are imperfect. Many people died before the General could deliver them. When Jesus comes in the sky to claim his children, His coming will be timed perfectly and we will be with Him forever. **Child of God, take courage . . . .**

**Fear not, behold thy King cometh.**

John 14:3

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”