

A CHARACTER STUDY OF  
JONATHAN, SON OF KING SAUL

Lesson 3

JONATHAN THE WARRIOR

*How are the mighty fallen in the midst of  
the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in  
thine high places.*

II Samuel 1:25

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Adult Sunday school Class

## JONATHAN THE WARRIOR

It must have been a terrifying time for Jonathan. His friend, David, was running for his life from King Saul. The Philistines were amassing a great army to do battle with Israel and there was no hero or leader of the Jews to defend them. (1 Sam. 28:1) *“And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”* (28:5-6) In this, the darkest hour, Israel had only one man who was a leader. Jonathan stood loyally with his father even though the outcome of the battle seemed sure to be defeat. Ultimately, Jonathan’s leadership and loyalty proved to be insufficient. The Philistines overpowered the army of Israel at Gilboa. (31:2) King Saul died in the battle and though his sons showed great bravery and loyalty, they too were taken in the fray. The defeat came to Israel because of the Judgment of God against Saul. *“So, Saul died*

*for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.”* (1 Chron. 10:13) God had chosen David to be Saul’s successor. The Father had used Jonathan to encourage David in his darkest hours and then prepare him to assume the throne. Jonathan knew that David was to be the next king of Israel. *“And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth.”* (1 Sam 23: 16-17)

David received news of Saul and Jonathan’s death from an opportunistic man of Amalec who was returning from the battle of Gilboa. “The story reported to David differs from this Scriptural record of Saul’s death. The unscrupulous Amalekite who did the reporting seems simply to have

discovered and plundered Saul's body and then fabricated his tale of murder, hoping for reward. (Wycliffe. P. 376) David *"mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword."* (II Sam. 1:12) David executed the Amalekite because of his desecration of Saul's body. He then mourns for his fallen king and his dear friend, Jonathan. To honor the fallen, David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, composed a touching lamentation. "David's thoroughly patriotic and unselfish character is strongly marked here. He looked upon the death of Saul, and the defeat of Israel by a pagan foe, with unmixed sorrow, though it opened to him the way to the throne, and removed his mortal enemy out of the way. For Jonathan he mourned with all the tenderness of a loving friend." (biblehub.com. Comments from Barnes commentary.)

In his grief, David composed a song that became known as "The Bow." He wrote this in honor of Jonathan who was a bowman and because the men of Benjamin were

archers of great renown. (I Chron. 8:40) This poem is “an eloquent testimony to the depth and sincerity of David’s grief for the death of Saul ... and his noble son Jonathan. ... It is one of the finest odes in the Old Testament; full of lofty sentiment, and springing from deep and sanctified emotion, in which, without the slightest allusion to his own relation to the fallen king, David celebrates without envy the bravery and virtues of Saul and his son Jonathan, and bitterly laments their loss.” (K&D. The Books of Samuel. P. 288) The poem has three parts and is punctuated in each part by the phrase, “*how are the mighty fallen?*” (Vs. 19, 25, 27) A sad cry of dismay at the death of Saul and Jonathan. He speaks of the virtues of Saul and Jonathan in beautiful poetic images. He calls them the “*beautiful of Israel*” (Vs. 19) This speaks of their character and leadership. The “*mountains of Gilboa*” are to mourn by the lack of dew and rain because the shields of the great fell there. (Vs. 21) The bow of Jonathan and the sword of Saul bravely faced the overwhelming numbers of Philistines and did not turn away. The father and son were lovely and unified in their fight

and their death. They were swift like eagles and strong like lions. Saul should be mourned by the daughters of Israel. Jonathan, slain upon a high mountain is, grieved and wept over by David. The closeness of David and Jonathan was wonderful. It exceeded the capacity of women to love. *“How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”* (Vs. 27) These “are not the weapons; but the expression is a figurative one, referring to the heroes by whom war was carried on.” (K&D. P. 292)

Jonathan was a great hero in Israel. He was the dear friend of David. He was the faithful, loyal son of Saul and the nation of Israel. He is an example to us of bravery in the cause of the faith, and boldness in the attack on the “gates of Hell” (Matt. 16-18). His reliance on God to fight his battles instructs the believer today. He exhorts us not to faint in the day of adversity. His ability to discern the will of God and his faithful loyalty to his comrades in arms challenges every believer in the fight of faith.

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K&D = Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes.  
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Wycliffe = The Wycliffe Bible Commentary. By Charles F.  
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