

JONATHAN: WARRIOR PRINCE

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Have you heard of Audie Murphy? After Pearl Harbor, at 17 years old, he lied about his age so he could join the army. He first saw action in 1943. By the end of the war, Audie received every combat award for valor the U.S. had to offer. He won French and Belgian awards for heroism as well.¹ He became the most decorated soldier for combat action in U.S. military history.²

It's easier to remember some of the bigger names from World War II, like Patton, Eisenhower, or MacArthur. But Audie's heroics are the stuff of legend. He fought in France, in Sicily, and the liberation of Rome. During one battle, he ordered his men to fall back from an onslaught of tanks and infantrymen. Alone, he mounted an abandoned, burning tank destroyer and, with a single machine gun, contested the enemy's advance. Wounded in the leg during the heavy fire, Murphy remained there for nearly an hour, repelling the attack of German soldiers on three sides.³

In 1955, Audie played himself in the hit film *To Hell And Back*, which was based on his actions during the war. The movie held the record as Universal Studio's highest-grossing film for 20 years.⁴

1 Samuel is full of unforgettable characters. But perhaps the most inspiring is Saul's son Jonathan. It can be easy to overlook his life or at least find it overshadowed by some of the other personalities in the book. He lived during an incredible period of change and transition in the history of Israel, and his story is surrounded by two of the most dramatic characters in all the Old Testament: David and Saul. David, of course, is the poet-king, the giant slayer, the sweet psalmist of Israel, the ancestor of the Messiah. He has *his own* covenant with God! Obviously, he's a big deal. And then we have Saul, Israel's first king, who starts with such power and promise but takes a path of pride, selfishness, and paranoia. We watch in horror as his heart-breaking story turns tragic.

In the midst of all of that, we have this *other* character - Jonathan. He's truly remarkable. He's part judge, part prophet, part prince. He's a bold warrior and a loving family man. He's deeply devoted to God and to the people of God, and he does not flinch, even in the hardest of circumstances.

Charles Ellicott wrote this:

"The character of the princely son of Saul is one of the most beautiful in the Old Testament story. He was the type of a true warrior of those wild, half-barbarous times—among brave men seemingly the bravest—a perfect soldier, whether fighting as a simple man-at-arms or as the general of an army—chivalrous and generous—utterly free from jealousy—a fervid believer in the God of Israel—a devoted and loyal son—a true patriot in the highest sense of the word, who sealed a devoted life by a noble death, dying as he did fighting for his king and his people. The long and steady friendship of Jonathan no doubt had a powerful and enduring influence on the after life of the greatest of the Hebrew sovereigns. The words, the unselfish, beautiful love, and, above all, the splendid example of the ill-fated son of Saul, have no doubt given their colouring to many of the noblest utterances in David's Psalms and to not a few of the most heroic deeds in David's life."⁵

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Audie_Murphy

² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWt3_E1ouMI <https://www.biography.com/military-figure/audie-murphy>

³ <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Explore/Notable-Graves/Medal-of-Honor-Recipients/World-War-II-MoH-recipients/Audie-Murphy>

⁴ <https://www.biography.com/military-figure/audie-murphy>

⁵ Charles John Ellicott *Ellicott's Commentary For English Readers*

I want us to look at Jonathan's life from 3 perspectives: Jonathan the warrior, Jonathan the friend, and Jonathan the son. We're given more than one story from each angle. In each, we'll see how brightly he shines and serves for us as both instruction and inspiration.

Tonight, we want to learn from Jonathan as a *warrior*. The account of his life falls between 1 Samuel 13 and 31, beginning and ending on the battlefield.

Some context might help. Jonathan lived about 1,000 or 1,100 years before Christ's birth. The nation of Israel was coming out of the time of the Judges, which was about 300 years of "political, moral, and spiritual anarchy and deterioration."⁶ During this time, the Philistines are the main antagonists of God's people. They had a lot of power and technology and determination. They had huge armed forces, not only in numbers but also in *stature*. We remember that giants like Goliath lived with and fought for the Philistines. We're don't know for certain, but using our best estimates, it seems that Jonathan is in his late teens or early twenties when he's introduced to us in 1 Samuel 13.

1 Samuel 13:2 - ²[Saul] chose three thousand men from Israel for himself: two thousand were with Saul at Michmash and in Bethel's hill country, and one thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. He sent the rest of the troops away, each to his own tent.

The people of Israel had demanded a king, and God allowed it. After a great victory against the Ammonites, Saul retains a relatively small force, two-thirds with him, one-third with his son about four and a half miles apart in these two places.⁷ In-between was Geba, where the Philistines had established a garrison.

1 Samuel 13:3-4 - ³Jonathan attacked the Philistine garrison in [Geba], and the Philistines heard about it. So Saul blew the ram's horn throughout the land saying, "Let the Hebrews hear!", ⁴And all Israel heard the news, "Saul has attacked the Philistine garrison, and Israel is now repulsive to the Philistines." Then the troops were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

What we find throughout Jonathan's story is that he was a man of selfless courage who consistently sought out ways to glorify God and His anointed one. He did so at great personal expense, great peril, and sometimes he had to do it *alone*, but he did not falter in his faithfulness or his daring or his expectation that God was going to do things on behalf of His people.

Some commentators suggest that Jonathan simply tore down a Philistine pillar or flagstaff.⁸ Others suggest that he only assassinated one official in Gibeah,⁹ but it seems clear that the plain meaning is what happened. Jonathan took his 1,000 soldiers and destroyed this military outpost.¹⁰

This action kicked off a major fight between Israel and the Philistines. But the little footnote we see there is that *Saul* was taking credit for the win at Gibeah.

Two things are important to note: First, as readers who love Jonathan and (rightly) disapprove of Saul, we think, "Hey, that's not *your* victory!" But, the truth is, Jonathan wasn't fighting for his own glory. He was fighting in the service of the king. His accomplishments *did* belong to the crown. And

⁶ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

⁷ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

⁸ *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*

⁹ *Gill's Exposition Of The Entire Bible*

¹⁰ *Lange's Commentary On The Holy Scriptures*

that leads us to our second important note: Jonathan does not complain. Later in the book, we see Saul complaining, right? He gets mad when he hears the song that “Saul has slain his thousands but David his *ten* thousands.” But Jonathan doesn’t complain or demand recognition. His heart is empty of selfish ambition. Even though he didn’t get his well-earned accolades *that* day, look what God did. Because Jonathan honored the Lord, the Lord ultimately honored him and made him shine like a star in the heavens. The truth is recorded and has been proclaimed for 3,000 years.

There’s another devotional application for us here - sometimes serving God will make us “repulsive” to the unbelieving world. Of course, these were *real* battles, with real lives lost. Naturally, the Philistines weren’t happy about being attacked, but going God’s way will sometimes lead to a backlash from the world. If that happens, don’t compromise. Rally to the Lord, rally to His people, and be strong and courageous.

In response to Jonathan’s attack, the Philistines amassed a vast army. Thousands of chariots. Troops as numerous as the sand on the seashore. The Israelites were terrified, and they fled to caves and thickets, anywhere they could go to escape the danger. It is *then* that Saul offered his unlawful sacrifice, and the Lord sent Samuel to say, “I’m giving the kingdom to David.”

That’s the context of what we read in verse 23:

1 Samuel 13:23 - ²³ Now a Philistine garrison took control of the pass at Michmash.

Michmash is where *Saul* had stationed himself with 2,000 troops in verse 1. Not long before that, in 1 Samuel 11, three hundred and thirty thousand soldiers had rallied to Saul to help deliver Jabesh-Gilead. But, by this point in 1 Samuel 13, Saul had sent 99% of them away. And now, after a stunning victory by Jonathan, Saul has *lost* his own position and had to fall back.

1 Samuel 14:1 - That same day Saul’s son Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his weapons, “Come on, let’s cross over to the Philistine garrison on the other side.” However, he did not tell his father.

From the human perspective, their circumstances were terrible. Yet, Jonathan was hopeful and wanted to go out and glorify God. Make no mistake about it - they were in *real* trouble here. Because, not only had they lost 2,400 of their 3,000 troops, but a few verses earlier, you read that in this whole group, there were only two swords - one for Jonathan, one for Saul.

After taking stock of these circumstances, Jonathan thinks, “That’s plenty! Let’s see what we can do!” This is a great mentality for ministry. We’re not just supposed to do things for the sake of doing them, as we’ll see that’s not what Jonathan is doing here, but you don’t have to wait for a ton of resources to do God’s work. More resources *can* be helpful and can, sometimes, increase the scope or the reach of your efforts, but all of us can go out and do what we’ve been called to do *right now*. After all, Jesus sent the 12 out with nothing but a walking stick. No bread, no extra shirt, no money in their belts.¹¹ God can do a lot through a little. Five loaves and two fish. One smooth stone in a sling. A widow’s two mites.

We see, too, that Jonathan was not impulsive. He’s thoughtful. He chooses not to notify his father of what he was doing, undoubtedly because Saul would’ve forbidden him from doing it. The king was

¹¹ Mark 6:8-9

sitting around under a tree, not doing what needed to be done, so Jonathan did not feel the need to be held back by him. Saul sits while Jonathan seeks.

1 Samuel 14:4-7 - ⁴There were sharp columns of rock on both sides of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine garrison. One was named Bozez and the other Seneh; ⁵one stood to the north in front of Michmash and the other to the south in front of Geba. ⁶Jonathan said to the attendant who carried his weapons, “Come on, let’s cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised men. Perhaps the Lord will help us. Nothing can keep the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.” ⁷His armor-bearer responded, “Do what is in your heart. Go ahead! I’m completely with you.”

Jonathan’s perspective here is a great one. “We need help. God will help us. And He will help us through *our* effort and obedience.” But he makes no demands of God. He said, “*Perhaps* the Lord will help us.” He was courageous and daring, but he’s submitted to God’s will.

We also see that Jonathan had no interest in living at peace with the Philistines. Saul is waiting around, hoping the battle won’t come. He does the same thing during the Goliath incident. Not Jonathan. He knows what God has provided and called them to do, and his fervent faith inspired those around him to join in the Lord’s work, which was hard, dangerous work.

This pass that they had to cross would’ve been covered in thorn bushes, very difficult to navigate.¹² It would leave them exposed to the enemy - no surprise attack. But Jonathan did not shrink.

1 Samuel 14:8-14 - ⁸“All right,” Jonathan replied, “we’ll cross over to the men and then let them see us. ⁹If they say, ‘Wait until we reach you,’ then we will stay where we are and not go up to them. ¹⁰But if they say, ‘Come on up,’ then we’ll go up, because the Lord has handed them over to us—that will be our sign.” ¹¹They let themselves be seen by the Philistine garrison, and the Philistines said, “Look, the Hebrews are coming out of the holes where they’ve been hiding!” ¹²The men of the garrison called to Jonathan and his armor-bearer. “Come on up, and we’ll teach you a lesson!” they said. “Follow me,” Jonathan told his armor-bearer, “for the Lord has handed them over to Israel.” ¹³Jonathan climbed up using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer behind him. Jonathan cut them down, and his armor-bearer followed and finished them off. ¹⁴In that first assault Jonathan and his armor-bearer struck down about twenty men in a half-acre field.

While so many other Israeli soldiers were hiding in fear or had even *defected*, Jonathan willingly showed himself to his enemies, knowing that if God was for him, none could be against him. As we read the account, it is, again, clear that Jonathan wasn’t acting for personal glory. His plan was bold, but he waited for identifiable leading before he proceeded.

Crawling up on his hands and feet would mean that he had no weapon at the ready. His faith is breath-taking. And, even in victory, we see his heart. He said in verse 12, “the Lord has handed them over to *Israel*.” Not “to me,” but to Israel.¹³ God’s glory and God’s people were his focus.

As a result of this attack, the Philistines fell into confusion, and the army started melting away. Rather than take advantage of this miracle God was working on their behalf, Saul uses his time to

¹² *Layman’s Bible Book Commentary*

¹³ Joseph Benson *Commentary Of The Old And New Testaments*

find out, “Who left the camp without my permission?” Finally, he realizes what an incredible opportunity he’s about to waste and he finally joins the fight.

1 Samuel 14:21-23 - ²¹ There were Hebrews from the area who had gone earlier into the camp to join the Philistines, but even they joined the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. ²² When all the Israelite men who had been hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they also joined Saul and Jonathan in the battle. ²³ So the Lord saved Israel that day.

When God moves, it’s not just about adding numbers to our side. Look at the *transformation* happening here: Men who were too scared to come out into the light of day - men who had turned *traitor* and had *defected* to the enemy were now coming back into the fold and were received into the ranks. All because Jonathan walked by faith. Jonathan was the instrument God used to set off this rescue of Israel that day. The Lord saved them from their enemies and, in the case of these defectors, God saved them *from themselves*. What great grace!

This moment of reconciliation helps us notice something else that’s so wonderful about Jonathan’s life: In many ways, he prefigures the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. In fact, the name “Jonathan” means “the gift of Jehovah,”¹⁴ reminding us of the ultimate gift God would give through Jesus.

In our passages tonight, what comparisons might we make?

First, Jonathan did not seek his own glory. His thoughts were always about God and God’s anointed and God’s people. Jesus said in John 8, verse 50, “I do not seek My own glory.” And, throughout His life, we see that Jesus took the form of a Servant, the ultimate Servant, in His mission to do God’s will. Jonathan, too, lived as a servant. He didn’t have to. He had brothers who were princes with him. His own father often refused to serve or humble himself. But not Jonathan. We’ll see an even greater depth of his servant’s heart when it comes to his relationship with Saul and with David.

Jonathan also prefigures Christ in the way he fought the enemy, head on. With his own hands, his own efforts, his own strength he fought the most important battles when everyone else was powerless to defend themselves. And, on top of that, he brought others with him into victory. Whether it was 1,000 men or just one armor-bearer, he was always inviting people to join him. It’s clear from the story in chapter 14 that Jonathan did not *need* of his armor-bearer, but he brought him along anyway and included him on that incredible adventure. Saul constantly sent people away, drove people away, isolated himself. Jonathan made it his business to seek out others and encourage them, fight alongside them, and build them up.

In that scene with the garrison and the armor-bearer, only Jonathan had a sword. It reminds us that, as we follow the Prince of Peace, He’s the only One with a sword. We don’t fight with our own weapons, but the one He supplies.

Like Jesus, Jonathan was willing to receive traitors back into the fold. Not all the Israelites simply ran away when the Philistines came against them. Many *joined* their enemies as defectors. And there’s Jonathan, ready to welcome them home. They didn’t deserve it - they deserved death - but his heart was full of compassion and grace toward people.

¹⁴ *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*

Jonathan's story has been preserved to inspire us and instruct us - to show us an example of serving God passionately and faithfully and without fear. But it also gives us a passing glimpse of the Savior. What Jonathan was in his greatest, Jesus is in His smallest. He, too, is a victorious warrior, who didn't conquer a Philistine stronghold or two, He defeated death and the grave and sin and the Devil. Prince Jonathan's brightness is nothing in comparison to the unmatched splendor of the Prince of Peace. As we look at the son of Saul, it should excite our hearts to love and honor and follow the Son of God.