

THE GOOD SON

THE LIFE OF JONATHAN part 3 JUNE 2, 2021

Traditionally, the President's kids are somewhat off-limits to the press. That is until they come of age. The adult children of Presidents are often covered with little mercy from the media. In recent years, the Presidential kids have inflamed a lot of emotion. Whether it was Don Jr. or Eric or Ivanka or Hunter, many people loved to hate one or the other.

Not so with Jonathan. We've been looking at his remarkable life. He was full of courage and Godly devotion. He was so gracious and so faithful that sometimes we think he's making a terrible mistake. His character comes out most strikingly in his relationship with his father, King Saul. We've seen Jonathan the warrior and Jonathan the friend. Tonight we examine Jonathan the son, who stood beside Saul, stood up to him, and stood between him and his enemies. As before, we're given three snapshots in First Samuel that show us Jonathan, the son. The first is in chapter 14.

In our study on Jonathan the warrior, we went through the famous story of how he and his armor-bearer attacked a Philistine garrison and how that became a catalyst for a miraculous victory for Israel. We pick up that story now in the second part of verse 23.

1 Samuel 14:23b-24 - The battle extended beyond Beth-aven, ²⁴and the men of Israel were worn out that day, for Saul had placed the troops under an oath: "The man who eats food before evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies is cursed." So none of the troops tasted any food.

Jonathan is always a stark contrast to his father. Remember back to what Jonathan had been doing. First, he led his thousand troops into victory. Then, he invited his armor-bearer on this magnificent venture of faith. He had an unwavering trust in God's plan for Israel, and he wasn't interested in getting glory for himself. He wanted glory for God, deliverance for God's people, and the exaltation of Israel's king. He inspired the people and his fellow troops.

Meanwhile, Saul was doing the opposite. While Jonathan was walking by faith, Saul was sitting around, hoping the fight wouldn't come to him. Then, when they saw the vast Philistine army melting away in chaos and confusion, Saul takes the time to call the roll so he could figure out who *dared* to leave the camp without his approval.

Though Saul did, eventually, join the fight, here we see him disrupting the course of the battle to make his "rash oath." It seems that he took the time to spread the word through the ranks. In a moment, we'll see Jonathan hadn't gotten the memo, but most everyone else had.

Saul overlooks the fatigue of the men who had been fighting so hard all day. Instead, he suggests they still haven't done enough. After all, he needed to "take vengeance" on his enemies. And yet, it wasn't *Saul* who had stepped out in faith against the Philistines. He practically missed the battle because of fear and ego. Now, instead of helping his men, he hamstrung them.

1 Samuel 14:25-26 - ²⁵Everyone went into the forest, and there was honey on the ground. ²⁶When the troops entered the forest, they saw the flow of honey, but none of them ate any of it because they feared the oath.

The interwebs taught me that a healthy beehive, with just the right conditions, could make 10 pounds of honey a day.¹ Even still, it's hard to imagine that this wasn't a generous act of God's providence. After all, He set off the chain of events that brought this victory out of nowhere. It's surprising that a school like Baylor would defeat the undefeated Gonzaga Bulldogs for the NCAA title this year, but that's nothing compared to the Israelites versus the Philistines. They started this battle with only *two* swords. And now, the strongest, most technologically advanced army in the region was being routed before God's people.

Along the way, God supplied some battle manna for them. What a fitting snack on the road, honey. A tender reminder of the promises God had made so long ago that He would bring them to a land "flowing with milk and honey." A reminder that, despite their wanderings during the time of the Judges, He still *loved* them, He was still *for* them, and this was still *their* land. But, their king's selfish, brutish command kept them from enjoying what God had so richly given.

1 Samuel 14:27-28 - ²⁷ However, Jonathan had not heard his father make the troops swear the oath. He reached out with the end of the staff he was carrying and dipped it into the honeycomb. When he ate the honey, he had renewed energy. ²⁸ Then one of the troops said, "Your father made the troops solemnly swear, 'The man who eats food today is cursed,' and the troops are exhausted."

The men, it's clear, are in a state of anxiety and fear. We're told they were afraid in verse 26. Here we see it coming out again. No one thinks to warn Jonathan *before* he takes a taste. But then, once it's done, someone musters enough courage to not only explain the situation to Jonathan but also voice their frustration and concern. "The troops are exhausted."

So, we see the way these men felt about Jonathan. They're worried about their captain because they know how severe Saul can be. They also know he can be approached and entrusted with their struggles and frustrations.

1 Samuel 14:29-30 - ²⁹ Jonathan replied, "My father has brought trouble to the land. Just look at how I have renewed energy because I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰ How much better if the troops had eaten freely today from the plunder they took from their enemies! Then the slaughter of the Philistines would have been much greater."

God wanted to give the people deliverance. Instead, Saul gave them trouble. Meanwhile, we see Jonathan not only had a thoughtful heart towards the soldiers around him, but he also had a bigger scale mindset than his father did. He was doing the math in his head. "We could've had a *much* greater victory if it hadn't been for this short-sighted command."

At this point, many of the Israelites give in to their hunger and start slaughtering animals to eat them without properly draining the blood out. Saul sees what's going on and tells them they're all traitors. But, it was *his* action that led to this result. Before they move on with the battle, Saul attempts to inquire of the Lord, but the Lord won't answer. So, Saul assumes someone *other than him* has done something to anger the Lord, and lots are cast.

1 Samuel 14:38-40 - ³⁸ Saul said, "All you leaders of the troops, come here. Let's investigate how this sin has occurred today. ³⁹ As surely as the Lord lives who saves Israel, even if it is

¹ <https://wildflowermeadows.com/2019/04/how-much-honey-can-a-beehive-produce/>

because of my son Jonathan, he must die!” Not one of the troops answered him. ⁴⁰ So he said to all Israel, “You will be on one side, and I and my son Jonathan will be on the other side.” And the troops replied, “Do whatever you want.”

We note that Saul has a completely adversarial attitude toward his men. What should’ve been a day of amazing triumph and celebration has been absolutely ruined because of Saul’s anger and selfishness. Look how the men, at first, won’t answer him and how, when they *do*, they simply say, “Do whatever you want.”

1 Samuel 14:42-46 - ⁴² Then Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan,” and Jonathan was selected. ⁴³ Saul commanded him, “Tell me what you did.” Jonathan told him, “I tasted a little honey with the end of the staff I was carrying. I am ready to die!” ⁴⁴ Saul declared to him, “May God punish me and do so severely if you do not die, Jonathan!” ⁴⁵ But the people said to Saul, “Must Jonathan die? He accomplished such a great deliverance for Israel? No, as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he worked with God’s help today.” So the people redeemed Jonathan, and he did not die. ⁴⁶ Then Saul gave up the pursuit of the Philistines, and the Philistines returned to their own territory.

Look at Jonathan in this harrowing scene. Make no mistake about it, this would’ve been a tense situation. Imagine you’re a soldier. You’re fighting this crazy battle. You’re about to fall over from hunger. You’re so hungry you maybe defiled yourself, eating meat with blood. Your king is raving how you’re a traitor. Then God stops speaking. Now the king is enraged and talking about executing people on the spot, even if it’s his own son, a man who is revered in your eyes. Amidst all this stress, the lot falls to Jonathan. And what does he say? “I tasted a little honey...I am ready to die.”

I was surprised to learn that aircraft hijacking is a capital offense in China, India, Georgia & Missouri.²

Jonathan *knows* Saul is wrong to have made this decree. And yet, he is *this* dedicated to the king of Israel. We *never* see Jonathan trying to save his own life or make it secure. Instead, he acts as a living sacrifice. And he does so with fearless honesty. He was honest to the troops back in the forest, and he’s honest with his dad here. Because of his sterling courage and uprightness, the troops rally to him and save him from being murdered by Saul that day.

If only that were the *last* time Jonathan’s dad almost killed him. Turn to First Samuel, chapter 20. We saw the first part of this section when we examined Jonathan’s friendship with David. It’s when David hid in the field, and Jonathan promised to go and find out whether Saul really did intend to kill David. We skipped the middle part, so let’s pick that up now.

1 Samuel 20:24b-29 - At the New Moon, the king sat down to eat the meal. ²⁵ He sat at his usual place on the seat by the wall. Jonathan sat facing him and Abner took his place beside Saul, but David’s place was empty. ²⁶ Saul did not say anything that day because he thought, “Something unexpected has happened; he must be ceremonially unclean—yes, that’s it, he is unclean.” ²⁷ However, the day after the New Moon, the second day, David’s place was still empty, and Saul asked his son Jonathan, “Why didn’t Jesse’s son come to the meal either yesterday or today?” ²⁸ Jonathan answered, “David asked for my permission to go to Bethlehem. ²⁹ He said, ‘Please let me go because our clan is holding a sacrifice in the town,

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aircraft_hijacking

and my brother has told me to be there. So now, if I have found favor with you, let me go so I can see my brothers.’ That’s why he didn’t come to the king’s table.”

Theologians argue whether these moments of deception that we sometimes see in the Old Testament are morally acceptable or not. Without going down that rabbit trail, I will say this in Jonathan’s defense: It was David who thought up the fake story about Bethlehem. And, at this point, Jonathan was living under the (true) assumption that David was God’s anointed one. He had pledged himself accordingly. That’s not necessarily an excuse, but it is the context. So, having executed the plan, how did Saul respond?

1 Samuel 20:30-33 - ³⁰ Then Saul became angry with Jonathan and shouted, “You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don’t I know that you are siding with Jesse’s son to your own shame and to the disgrace of your mother? ³¹ Every day Jesse’s son lives on earth you and your kingship are not secure. Now send for him and bring him to me—he must die!”

³² Jonathan answered his father back, “Why is he to be killed? What has he done?” ³³ Then Saul threw his spear at Jonathan to kill him, so he knew that his father was determined to kill David.

Maybe you’ve had a lousy family thanksgiving. Most families have a story or two about that *one* Christmas dinner, right? This was beyond uncomfortable. This was a disaster. Saul’s words were harsh and vulgar. We see just how unhinged he’s become. He says some vile things about Jonathan’s mother, then says Jonathan shouldn’t be disgracing her. He claims his great concern is for Jonathan’s dynasty, then immediately tries to murder him.

Jonathan, for his part, was willing to face this monster down. It wasn’t the first time he had stood up to his dad and rebuked him for his sinful conspiracy against David. But, even more than that, the writer gives us a window into his heart during this scene.

1 Samuel 14:34 - ³⁴ He got up from the table fiercely angry and did not eat any food that second day of the New Moon, for he was grieved because of his father’s shameful behavior toward David.

So, his dad tried to murder him, and he was grieved because of Saul’s shameful behavior...*toward David?!?* Jonathan is completely surrendered to God’s will. He was so ready to honor God that he could hand over his throne and even lay down his life for the sake of someone else. His devotion filled his heart. So when he was *personally* insulted and wronged by his father, *that’s* not what bothered him. It was Saul’s rejection of David, *and therefore God’s will*, that bothered him.

But, it goes even further than that. After all Saul said and did, after his friend is driven out, spears go flying, all this stuff, here’s what we read in verse 42: “David left, and Jonathan went into the city.” Meaning he went *back* to his job supporting the king. That is courageous patience. That is sacrificial grace. This is a man faithful to the end. And he proves it in chapter 31, the last time we see him.

1 Samuel 31:1-2 - The Philistines fought against Israel, and Israel’s men fled from them and were killed on Mount Gilboa. ² The Philistines pursued Saul and his sons and killed his sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua.

In David's funeral lament, we're told that Jonathan never retreated. He fought valiantly till the end. After the battle, his body was taken by the Philistines, along with those of his dad and his brothers. They were probably mutilated (at least Saul's was) and then hung on display in Beth-shan. After this, brave men from Jabesh-Gilead took courage and rescued the remains of Saul and his sons, giving them as proper a burial as they could.

Few characters in the Old Testament were as true and noble and righteous as Jonathan. And few sacrificed so much in obedience to God. We read his story and we can't help but wonder, "Why not let *this* guy be the king?" Wasn't he, too, a man after God's heart?

We don't know why God chose David and not Jonathan, but we're encouraged by the fact that Jonathan was fine with it. The next question that comes to mind is, "Ok, but why did he have to *die*? Wouldn't he have been a much better help to David than, say, Joab?" Maybe. But, in many ways, it was a gracious thing that God allowed Jonathan to die when he did.

For one thing, it would be important that the people knew that God, and God alone, gave David the throne, not Jonathan.³ For another, we see the division that happened in Israel when Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, was installed as king in his father's place. There was struggle and bloodshed. Think of how much worse it would've been if a valiant, beloved hero like Jonathan had been left alive.⁴ Jonathan's death also spared him the trial of fighting against his own family, specifically Ish-bosheth or other members, when David did come to the throne.⁵

Jonathan's story was full of difficulty and ended in a tragedy of someone else's making, but he was a man faithful to the end, full of Godliness, grace, and spiritual power.

I've been closing these studies by highlighting ways that Jonathan's story prefigured the Person and work of Jesus Christ. We see many in our passages this evening.

Like Jonathan, Jesus Christ saw the vain traditions of men as being burdensome to people. When Jonathan heard about Saul's oath, he said, "My father has *troubled* the people." Like Jonathan, Jesus was willing to submit to the will of the Father, even if that meant death. Like Jonathan, Jesus spoke with courageous honesty to those around Him, whether they were friendly to Him or antagonistic to Him. Of course, like Jonathan, Jesus Christ laid down His life for unworthy people. If we were Jonathan's advisors, we would've told him to abandon his father. And yet, Jonathan stayed the course, counting the cost, willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of another. While we were yet sinners, though we were at war with God, Christ died for us.

There's one more glimmer in this type. Jonathan, whose name means "the gift of Jehovah."⁶ died on Mount Gilboa. Many resources point out that the name means that Gilboa was a place of "bubbling water."⁷ Where the prince laid down his life, a fountain flowed. This great son of the king lived a life of sacrifice so that another could be glorified.

The Prince of Peace laid down His life for us so that we can follow Him into fullness of victory. Let's do so with grace, devotion, honesty and integrity and so follow Jonathan in our walk with the Lord.

³ Joseph Benson *Commentary Of The Old And New Testaments*

⁴ Matthew Poole *Commentary On The Holy Bible*

⁵ David Guzik *Enduring Word Commentary*

⁶ *Smith's Bible Dictionary*

⁷ See *Strongs, Easton's & Holman Bible Dictionaries*