

The Cloud of Witnesses

Jonathan

Lesson 1: Jonathan – Commanding Officer Of 1000 Men

Reading

1 Samuel 13:1-7, 16-22.

Commanding Officer Of 1000 Men

Jonathan was the eldest of King Saul's five sons. We are introduced to him when Saul became King. Saul commanded 2000 men and Jonathan looked after 1000 in Gibeah, Saul's hometown.

From the ensuing evidence it is most likely that Saul appointed Jonathan to lead the troops because he saw in Jonathan the qualities required of a leader rather than because of any nepotism.

Saul would not have entrusted a third of his elite soldiers to anyone who had not proven himself suitable – both in military strategy and in loyalty to the King.

Jonathan chose to be a soldier. He wanted to ensure that his homeland was protected from the enemy and the marauding bandits who attacked indiscriminately. It demanded ruthless determination, outstanding courage and clinical precision. He would need to be single-focused and able to take orders as well as give them.

However, he would have to use his initiative when in combat to achieve victory in a frequently changing environment. He would need an intimate knowledge of the terrain and be able to survive in any given situation. Not only personally, but he was additionally responsible for the survival of all the troops under his direct command.

At this time, Israel had a potpourri of enemies, ranging from the local Philistines, with whom Israel had an ongoing smoldering sufferance relationship, to the menacing Ammonites and the opportunistic Amalekites who were an ever present and vitriolic enemy.

You could be forgiven for thinking nothing much has changed in the last 5000 years. Israel is still surrounded by those who are determined to cause her pain and strife – largely for no other reason than for being who they are – the easily recognised children of Abraham and the Apple of God's eye. Yahweh's chosen race.

The people of God – Jew or Christian – need to remember that there is a battle going on. It is a spiritual battle between the Enemy, Satan, and the God of Israel. The Enemy will do all he can to destroy the people of God. Whilst on the surface the war is often over physical territory, the real

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Lesson 1 continued: Jonathan – Commanding Officer Of 1000 Men

objective is more sinister – it's over the eternal souls of mankind.

Jonathan gives us a good example of someone who knew who the enemy was and did something about it. Because he knew if he didn't the enemy would become increasingly arrogant and a constant thorn in his side.

Unfortunately, his father was more concerned with attacking those who were actually his loyal supporters. We all need to watch who and what we're fighting; we would not want to be found fighting smokescreens, fantasies or friends.

We need to know what God wants us to do. We can then expend all our energy on reaching the goal. The enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. But Jesus came to give us life to the full. We need to resist the enemy, help release his captives and secure the future of the people for whom we are responsible.

Jonathan would say to us today...

You need to know what God's plan is for your life; then live it to the full.

Prayer

Father, please help me be the best at what You want me to be. Help me not to compare myself with anyone else. Help me to be focused on the goal before me and to allow You to shine through me. For Your glory, Amen.

Additional readings

Judges 6; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Proverbs 3:1-10.

Questions

What should be the role of the armed forces in the world today?

Should a Christian join the armed forces?

What are the real battles we face as Christians?

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Lesson 2: Jonathan – Trusted In God

Reading

1 Samuel 14:1-23.

Trusted In God

I love this episode in Jonathan's life, don't you? We see a side to him that is often neglected. Not only was he a mighty warrior, he was also a deeply spiritual person.

He not only acknowledged the God of Israel as the God of the nation; he also knew God personally. He had heard of the power of God and the fact that He was Israel's Defender, Deliverer and Protector. He had been told that God had parted the Red Sea as the Israelites left Egypt, that God had stopped the flow of the Jordan river as the people entered Canaan. He would have remembered that God had destroyed the walls of Jericho so that the people could capture the city and so begin the adoption of their Promised Land.

Since then, however, there had been a series of setbacks as the leaders and people turned their backs on God. Consequently, their enemies began to harass them and cause them to suffer the strife they were experiencing at the time.

Jonathan nevertheless followed the Lord, the God of Israel. He believed that his God had not become impotent. To Jonathan his God was the same God who had delivered Israel in the past, and so He could do it again.

Not only could God ensure that the Israelites won the battles against their enemies, but Jonathan believed that God didn't actually need the people to do anything to win – God was fully capable of winning the battles all on His own.

The Philistines were oppressing the Israelites but Jonathan was determined to break free from their yoke. Whilst most of the Israelites were afraid of them and were in hiding, Jonathan decided to reverse their fortunes. He would take the battle to the Philistines.

However, before he began he would make sure that it was what God had wanted him to do. He wanted to be certain that his strategy was right. He therefore discussed the situation with his armour-bearer. Jonathan reminded his armour-bearer that although the odds were heavily stacked against them, they could easily win if it was what God had wanted them to do.

His armour-bearer confirmed that he would be with Jonathan all the way and so Jonathan explained the strategy. As the Philistines were in what they thought was an impregnable fortress, Jonathan would expose his position, thus allowing the Philistines to strike him at will. However, if they taunted Jonathan to fight them on their terms in their secure hideaway, then he and his armour-bearer would be happy to do so.

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Lesson 2 continued: Jonathan – Trusted In God

Jonathan pre-determined that such a challenge would be God's way of confirming that He had ordained that Jonathan would win the fight. So when the challenge came, Jonathan was ready for it. He and his armour-bearer scaled the steep ravine and arrived at the top, much to the Philistines' chagrin.

However, that was only the beginning. God enabled Jonathan and his armour-bearer to kill 20 men in a very small area and then went into battle Himself. God caused an earthquake and total confusion to reign so much so that the Philistines ended up fighting and killing each other.

When Saul and the rest of the people saw what God was doing they joined in and experienced an overwhelming victory.

It's so easy to read an account like this, and get excited and think – *oh that was nice for then but I don't see God doing much like that these days*. Jonathan could have said the same. The interesting thing is that those who take God at His word, those who are fully devoted to Jesus Christ still see amazing things happening today. All it takes is to trust God rather than ourselves and the circumstances – seek His will, carry it out and leave the rest to Him.

It's worth a try, isn't it?

Jonathan would say to us today...

God is looking for people who are wholeheartedly following Him. When you do, you will experience the most risky and fulfilling life you can imagine.

Prayer

Father, please keep me living life on the edge. Preserve me from complacency and from seeking my own comfort rather than Your Will for me. Amen.

Additional readings

Joshua 6; John 6:1-13; 1 John 4:4.

Questions

What is the difference between risk and foolhardiness?

What risks have you taken for God?

What risks have you avoided taking for God and why?

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Lesson 3: Jonathan – Friend Of David

Reading

1 Samuel 18:1-4 & 19:1-7.

Friend Of David

In a fast-paced self-centred world where we are all just trying to survive, relationships seem to become the last thing on our minds. There is enough pressure trying to hold down a job, cover the mortgage and credit card payments without trying to meet other people's needs or seek their friendship.

Who was responsible for promoting the concept that the leader, employer, supervisor or even pastor should make sure they don't get too friendly with their peers, subordinates or congregation – *you should develop an air of independence and aloofness so as to maintain your position*. That is totally erroneous and just reveals a lack of wholesome self-esteem.

The reality is we were created for relationship. The Bible tells us that God created Eve to satisfy Adam's loneliness.

We all need relationships – first with our Creator God and then with other humans. Our spouse should be our best friend after Jesus. We also need friends of our own gender.

Jonathan was a very interesting person. The firstborn son of Saul and thus the heir to the throne. He was the Prince of Israel. Through his military exploits and unmistakable valour he had become the obvious successor to King Saul. He had everything that was going for him.

Then suddenly, out of the blue, a young shepherd boy arrives on the scene and steals all the limelight. Yet, instead of becoming jealous and vindictive like his father, Jonathan befriends the youngster.

David had been catapulted onto centre stage through the arrogance and mocking of the Philistine champion – Goliath – who had taunted Israel everyday for six weeks. Saul and his entire army shivered in fear and hid in their tents.

When David arrived with provisions for his brothers and heard the taunts of Goliath, he evidently heard something most of the others missed. David recognised the mocking of the God of Israel and instinctively knew that Goliath was as good as dead – and the rest, as they say, is history.

However, upon his success David came to the notice of both Saul and Jonathan. Saul was jealous, whereas Jonathan recognised David as a man of God, someone with whom he had a kindred spirit. He saw in David that wonderful trait – someone who knows and loves God and is obedient to Him regardless of the cost to himself.

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Lesson 3 continued: Jonathan – Friend Of David

Jonathan's heart must have leapt for joy. Here was someone, at last, who would understand how he felt about God and with whom he could have an exciting relationship. A fellow soldier and spiritual equal. Someone who knew what it was to trust God wholeheartedly and who would risk his life for the sake of God's Kingdom. There were not many others like that around.

It is a wonderful privilege to find someone else who shares your faith and who has had similar experiences of God – someone with the same level of faith or more. No wonder Jonathan leapt at the opportunity of getting to know David better. He was so serious about the friendship that he entered a covenant of life with David.

However, it wasn't long before that covenant was tested when Saul issued orders for David to be killed. But Jonathan, true to his word, reasoned with Saul on David's behalf, and saw David restored to the royal household.

How strong is the covenant you have made? To God? To your spouse?

Jonathan would say to us today...

Find a true friend – your life will be enriched, and so much more invigorating when you do.

Prayer

Thank You Father for all those who have made a positive input into my life and especially those I can count as friends. Please help me to be a good friend to them. Help me, too, to be a good friend to others I am in contact with. Amen.

Additional readings

Proverbs 27:1-17; Acts 11:19-30; John 12:1-8.

Questions

Who is your best friend?

Why are they a good friend?

Who would call you their best friend?

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Lesson 4: Jonathan – Showed Concern For Others

Reading

1 Samuel 20:1-17.

Showed Concern For Others

Jonathan reminds me of John the Baptist.

John had a great following; he was the centre of popular interest and intrigue until Jesus came on the scene. However, instead of becoming jealous John realised that the One in front of him was far greater than him – this was the King of kings and Lord of lords. So when some of John's disciples warned him that his followers were forsaking him and following Jesus, John replied, *He (Jesus) must become greater, I must become less.*

Jonathan recognised David as the successor to Saul's throne. That meant that he, Jonathan, would never ascend the Throne of Israel – the greatest honour and privilege in the world. Jonathan never showed any jealousy or enmity towards David; on the contrary, he freely admitted that David would be king and did all he could to protect him from Saul, and promote David's good.

However, because Jonathan felt he knew and understood David's heart he was able to express his own desires – not for power or position but for the health and well-being of his relatives.

Jonathan was a man of peace but saw in his father the traits of an envious and destructive character. He witnessed first-hand the results of deceitful scheming – when Saul, in trying to have David killed, issued David with both a carrot and a potential death sentence. *“You can have Michal, my daughter, the Princess's hand in marriage and become my son-in-law provided you first ‘kill’ 100 Philistines.”*

David, the young giant-killer, thought nothing of the danger but accomplished the task, and so became Jonathan's brother-in-law.

Although David may have been a valiant warrior, giant slayer, and passionate husband, Jonathan also realised that David was human and vulnerable, and likely to be pressured by many once he became king.

Who knew what would happen? David was already experiencing Saul's wrath and had to escape from his totally unjustified murderous intents. It would have been only natural for David to feel aggrieved and revengeful at the treatment he was receiving from the royal household – he may well have been planning a suitable retaliation once he became king. After all, kings can do what they like, can't they?

When Jonathan met David, he re-iterated his longing for all David's enemies to be totally

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Lesson 4 continued: Jonathan – Showed Concern For Others

eliminated and for David's kingdom to be established. However, no doubt, even as he spoke out so vehemently, he began to realise that many of David's enemies then were, in fact, members of the royal household. No wonder he quickly inserted the family protection clause.

Whilst David appeared to have harboured no bitterness towards Saul or the royal family, nevertheless Jonathan wanted to ensure that David maintained that stance after he was dead. He thus asked David to promise to look after the rest of the family once he came to power.

David readily agreed – as far as he was concerned it was only Saul who was out to get him and that was because he was plagued by a demon.

How very hard and embarrassing it must have been for Jonathan. Not only to have Saul as his incompetent and misguided father but, on top of that, to then have to grovel before the anointed future king to protect his relatives, knowing that none of them were saints. It was just another demonstration of Jonathan's humility and love.

Jonathan would say to us today...

We are all part of a bigger family. We all have whanau to care and provide for. Make sure you don't neglect them through selfishness, bitterness, complacency or procrastination.

Prayer

Thank You Father for placing me in my family. Please help us to maintain loyalty and respect and to genuinely love and care for one another even when it costs us time, money, rescheduling our diaries and effort. Amen.

Additional readings

Genesis 45:1-11; 1 Timothy 5:1-10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

Questions

Why is there so much conflict within families?

How do you show concern for your immediate family?

How do you show concern for your extended family?

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Lesson 5: Jonathan – Loyal To David Until The End

Reading

1 Samuel 20:18-42.

Loyal To David Until The End

Nowhere in Scripture do we read that Jonathan condoned or took part in Saul's treachery to seek and destroy David.

In fact, as we have already seen, Jonathan stood up for David soon after his marriage to Michal, and persuaded Saul to welcome David back into the royal household.

When David fled from Naioth to Ramah to meet with Jonathan, Jonathan said he knew nothing of Saul's determination to hunt him down and protested that Saul would have told him if that were so. Evidently, Saul had kept that piece of information close to his chest; only his top military commanders knew about it.

What an emotional meeting that must have been. David on the run in despair of his life and met by his greatest friend. Both were able to spend just a few moments of joy amidst the terror of being discovered, captured and put to death.

Jonathan reaffirmed his total enduring loyalty to David his friend. He was determined to get to the bottom of the rumours and speculation. He just couldn't bring himself to believe that his father would want to destroy his very best friend, the future king of Israel. Jonathan nevertheless promised to return to the 'lion's den' and discover the truth.

They discussed how the result could be conveyed to David – if in fact it turned out to be bad news. They then went their separate ways; David into the fields and Jonathan to the royal court.

Jonathan found out the hard way how vehemently jealous Saul was over David. Not only did Saul curse Jonathan and his mother (incidentally Saul's only wife), but he actually hurled his spear at Jonathan with the intent of killing him – because Jonathan dared to speak up on David's behalf, and for reason and righteousness.

When Jonathan saw first hand the extent of Saul's suppressed rage towards David, he made arrangements to let David know without exposing him – Jonathan went to where David was hiding in the field and made the appropriate sign with the arrows.

Once the coast was clear, David emerged to a very emotional meeting with Jonathan. Jonathan expressed sheer horror at Saul's disposition and his disappointment and frustration that nothing he could have said would have been able to appease his father or dissuade him from his murderous intent. They clung to each other and wept bitterly. (The Bible says that David wept the most, but

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Lesson 5 continued: Jonathan – Loyal To David Until The End

was that because it was he who re-told the story?)

The tragedy is that we don't read of David and Jonathan meeting each other again after that fateful day. Their ways and lives diverged for a few years. David went at first to Ahimelech and then joined the Philistines in Gath (of all places). We read he encountered Saul on various subsequent occasions and spared Saul's life each time.

How would Jonathan have felt? He had lost his most wonderful friend and trusted ally. He had to walk away and leave David to the Lord.

Have you been in the same place? Have you ever had to choose between friends or between a friend and a family member?

How would you respond? In anger, frustration or fear? Would you try and hide, and hope the situation will go away or resolve itself? Or would you be a peacemaker by trying reason and establishing righteousness. It was the way of Jonathan.

Jonathan would say to us today...

Loyalty means putting the other person's good before your own. We all want others to be loyal to us but it begins when we show loyalty to others.

Prayer

Father, in a world that is so self-centred it is easy to get sucked into that way of life. Please help me to stand out from the rest and remain loyal to my friends, neighbours, colleagues and family. Amen.

Additional readings

John 15:1-17; 1 John 4:7-21; Colossians 4:7-18.

Questions

What does it mean to be loyal to someone?

Why does loyalty carry such a high value?

How does loyalty extract such a high price?

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Lesson 6: Jonathan – Loyal To King Saul Even In Death

Reading

1 Samuel 31:1-13.

Loyal To King Saul Even In Death

No one is perfect. Unfortunately, no father is perfect. And yes, some fathers are regrettably less honourable than others.

Because that is true it is good for us to consider Jonathan and his relationship with Saul. We don't think about that often, do we? We know that Jonathan and David's friendship is legendary but what about Jonathan's relationship with Saul?

Let's consider the facts for a minute. Jonathan was appointed commander of 1,000 men. He attacked the Philistines at Geba and obviously won the battle. That stirred up a virtual hornet's nest, as shown by the Philistines going into a total offensive mode. Saul and Jonathan were in Gibeah whilst the Philistines had the high ground around Micmash. That was when Jonathan and his armour-bearer went and killed the sentries and officers in the high fort and God instigated a major victory.

However, Saul was already beginning to lose the plot. For some inexplicable reason known only to him, he commanded that no one should eat anything until the end of the day – presumably in the hope that all his soldiers would be single-focused until victory was secure.

However, anyone in their right mind would know, as Napoleon is reported to have stated later – *“an army marches on its stomach.”* In other words, if your soldiers are not well fed you will not win the battle.

Just consider the conditions in the Middle East, with the sun blazing down on you all day. Evidently, the whole army was exhausted and just about spent. Jonathan, on the other hand, not having heard his father's command, ate some honey and regained his strength.

When Saul was told of the disobedience he summoned the troops to a court marshal. Jonathan's indiscretion was exposed and Saul commanded that he be put to death. Only the potential mutiny of the soldiers saved his life.

That started a downward spiral in their relationship. Saul would not have endeared Jonathan to him because of his own disobedience to Samuel's instructions to annihilate the Amalekites and the Lord's subsequent rejection of Saul as king.

When David was anointed king he tried to sooth Saul's spirit by playing the harp for Saul; later he succeeded in killing Goliath. However, because of this Saul became irrational and was obsessively

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Lesson 6 continued: Jonathan – Loyal To King Saul Even In Death

jealous of David.

Many were the times Jonathan stood up for David but eventually even he was subject to Saul's fierce anger and had to duck from being impaled on Saul's spear.

Jonathan had done all he could to help Saul see sense and reason and to live righteously with David but Saul was so eaten up with jealousy that he rejected Jonathan's counsel.

Nevertheless, Jonathan remained loyal to Saul. We never read of his insurrection. He never once tried to assassinate the king; the last we read of Jonathan was that he was supporting Saul in the battle against the Philistines at Mt Gilboa.

Jonathan had the ability to discern between good and evil, between honour and obedience. He was able to support the King in his fight against his enemies whilst withdrawing his support from Saul's irrational decisions.

Jonathan was able to love his father even when he was intent on evil. He didn't condone his father's behaviour but supported him in the real battles of life. Jonathan was able to distinguish between the real enemy and the perceived threat to the throne.

We need to be able to do the same, then maybe our epitaph will be as wonderful as Jonathan's.

Jonathan would say to us today...

You need to be faithful and loving to your family and iwi. You may not agree with all they do and you don't have to support them when they are dishonest or deceitful; however, you must never forget they are the ones God has placed beside you, so you must love them until the end.

Prayer

Father, please help me to love my family members for who they are rather than for what they do or don't do. Please help me to remember that we are all imperfect human beings and need one another and the best way of bringing out the best in them is by being there for them through the good, the bad and the ugly. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Additional readings

2 Samuel 1:5-27; Genesis 50:15-26; Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:1-9.

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Lesson 6 continued: Jonathan – Loyal To King Saul Even In Death

Questions

When should we stand up against our family?

How can we love those who hurt us?

How do we show love to those that let down the family name or values?