

The Last Two Swords

Jonathan stood gazing over the shallow, murky waters of the river Jordan. A warm breeze blew down the valley, gently swaying the heavy heads of wheat back and forth along the riverbank. The longest river in the land curled like a twisted snake along muddy banks laden with grain crops.

For nearly 360 kilometers the waters of the Jordan River tirelessly channeled its way down from Mount Hermon, only to find it self finally emptying close to 300 meters below sea level at the north end of the Dead Sea.

A bird burst into song in a nearby palm tree. The straight tall palms along the Jordan were a fitting symbol of patience, uprightness and prosperity to the people. Jonathan smiled and thanked the Lord his God once again for his narrow escape from death.

Slowly he sank to his knees asking God to strengthen him for the battles to come. His thoughts raced back as he glanced at his armour bearer sharpening their swords and spears in the cool shade of the palm tree.

It all happened soon after he and his men had killed a large group of Philistine soldiers in Geba. The Philistines were furious and came together to fight the Israelites. His father, King Saul and many Israelites were scared and worried. It did not look good.

Israeli spies, sent by the king had counted no less than 30.000 chariots, 6000 horsemen and Philistine soldiers as many as the grains of sand on the beach. No wonder his father was worried!

Many Israelites hid themselves in caves, thick shrubs, rocky outcrops and any other place which offered some kind of hide-away. Some of them even left their king and crossed over the river Jordan to hide in the land of Gad and Gilead.

Those who stayed with King Saul in Gilgal trembled with fear as they waited for the prophet Samuel to come and make a burnt offering on the altar unto God. Samuel was their last judge and first prophet and Jonathan treasured him in his heart as a great man of God.

The people had chosen Samuel to anoint Saul as their king. They were not happy to have God as King but wanted to be like the people of Ammon who had King Nahash, who they could see and touch. Samuel, the prophet warned them and pleaded with them to continue to fear the Lord and serve him. To obey His voice and not rebel against His commandments. If they did not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebelled against His commandments, then the hand of the Lord would be against them.

Samuel had shown Israel that asking for a king was wrong. He had called unto God and suddenly thunder and rain filled the blackened sky. All the people greatly feared God and Samuel. They pleaded with Samuel to pray unto the Lord to stop the thunder and rain which would surely spoil the harvest and cause a famine.

Samuel told the people not to fear and not to turn aside from following the Lord, but to serve Him with all their heart, but if they did not follow God, He would punish the people and their king.

Jonathan pondered many things in his heart but dared not speak them for fear of his life. All he wanted to do was to follow his God and trust in Him like his forefathers. He completely trusted in the Lord that day in Gibeah. The day the battle was won against the Philistines.

It was in Gibeah, Jonathan realized there was no blacksmith among the Israelites to sharpen his sword and to make him new spears. The Philistines had been very clever, making sure that all the Israelites came to them to sharpen their weapons and tools. They even relied on the Philistines for new weapons! The blacksmith trade had been lost among the Israelites and no one seemed to know how to make swords and spears anymore.

So when Jonathan looked around he discovered to his horror, that only his father and himself had a sword and a spear. They were the last two swords! It seemed that the battle was lost before it had even started.

While King Saul was resting under a pomegranate tree with only 600 soldiers, Jonathan felt utter despair grip him. His father was exhausted and so were the men. What hope would they have against 30.000 chariots, 6000 horsemen and uncountable Philistine soldiers armed with razor sharp swords and spears?

Silently Jonathan prayed for God to show a way of defeating these uncircumcised Philistines who insulted and cursed Him. Suddenly a broad grin came over his face as he jumped to his feet and called his friend who carried his sword and spear for him. After explaining God's plan to his friend they vowed to stand by each other until death.

Early the next morning they sneaked out of the camp unseen and carefully made their way toward the Philistine camp. Jonathan knew nothing is impossible for God, it would be no problem for the Almighty to defeat the enemy with either an army of 200.000 men or just two men.

Jonathan and his friend crouched between two sharp rocky outcrops. Their hearts thumped wildly with excitement. Could this be the day God would deliver the enemy into their hands or would they be killed instead.

Jonathan's friend carefully carried the heavy sword and spear, its steel glistening in the early morning sun. He admired the great faith Jonathan had in God.

He certainly trusted in God too, but not like Jonathan. He thought of his wife and three children at home. Would they be safe or had the enemy killed them? Many questions ran through his mind when without warning Jonathan came to a stop.

"Look!" he whispered, "Philistine guards, I can see about twenty. I will call out and if they tell us to come to them, it will be a sign from God that we will defeat them. If the guards tell us to stay where we are and they will come to us we know that God will not deliver them into our hands."

They grasped each other's hands as in a last farewell bid. Would this be the beginning, or the end! Jonathan reached for his sword and his friend clasped the spear in both hands. With a single nod Jonathan turned and jumped onto a rock.

"Hey, you there!" Jonathan shouted. "Would you have a drink of water for a couple of thirsty soldiers?" The Philistine guards whirled around in surprise, facing the two men standing on the rock, basking in the early morning sun.

"The Hebrews have finally come out of their holes," one guard laughed nervously. "Come here and we will give you water!"

"Let's go, my friend," said Jonathan. "Today, the Lord has delivered these Philistines into the hands of Israel."

Together they climbed up the steep rocks to the top. When they reached the top Jonathan shouted with all his might, "My Lord, my God! He is King and He shall be victorious today!"

Jonathan and his friend fought so fiercely that the Philistine guards barely had a chance to reach for their swords. They were so surprised by such an unannounced attack and by only two men too, that it caused great confusion among the Philistines.

Other soldiers who came rushing in didn't know how many Hebrews had come and where they were. All they saw were dead guards and in their confusion they started fighting each other.

They killed some of their own men and in turn other soldiers arriving at the scene started attacking their own people too. Within minutes the whole camp was in an uproar and people were fighting everywhere. Many soldiers trembled with fear as they woke from a deep sleep and didn't know what was happening.

God gave Jonathan and his friend a helping hand by sending an earthquake that shook the ground terribly. It seemed 100,000 chariots in full gallop were charging through the camp.

The Philistines were terrified. Those that were brave enough stood their ground, not realizing they were fighting their own soldiers. Others fled in panic wearing just the clothes they had on and leaving everything else behind. It was total chaos and a terrible bloodshed.

Meanwhile in the Israelites' camp some eyebrows were raised. They heard this tremendous noise. The ground trembled under their feet and when the king's guards returned to Saul, they reported seeing a great fight in the Philistine camp.

They told the king many Philistines were fleeing and never had they seen such jumbled mess in all their lives. However, they could not tell their king how, what or who was responsible.

King Saul quickly checked to see if any of his men were missing. It was soon discovered that Jonathan and his friend weren't there. The King ordered that every man should get ready to fight the Philistines and that no man was to stop and eat anything until the battle was won.

The king hurried with his soldiers to the Philistine camp. On their way they meet other Hebrews who had hid themselves before. Now that the battle seemed to be on their side, they joined their king once more to fight for Israel.

They had no problems obtaining swords or spears because many of the Philistines were dead already and their weapons lay scattered everywhere. The enemy was chased for many hours and as the day wore on Jonathan was followed by many of his people.

It seemed wise to Jonathan to give the men a rest. He could see they were exhausted and when they came to a forest he ordered them to sit and rest for awhile.

He caught sight of a beehive and its rich, golden honey flowing freely from the honeycomb onto the ground. He dipped a stick into the honey and eagerly licked it. When he summoned some men who were close by to do the same they refused.

"Why?" asked Jonathan, dipping his stick in again.

"Is this honey not good enough? Has it not given me new strength so I may continue the battle a little longer? I have not eaten anything since last night!"

One of the men plucked up enough courage to tell Jonathan why they wouldn't eat. Dropping on his knees before him he said, "Sir, your father... our king told us that if any soldier would eat anything before the enemy is completely destroyed he will be cursed."

His head hung low and his body trembled with fear and exhaustion. Jonathan plainly saw that this man and many others were very weak. They had to eat or they would not even be strong enough to fight a mouse. Their strength had left them and they simply could go on no longer.

Jonathan raised his voice. "Men, today the Lord our God has delivered the Philistines into our hands. My father has done a wrong thing by keeping food from you. Would you not have been much stronger today if you had eaten the food, which you found in the Philistine camp? Would God let you win the battle only to die afterward of hunger? I don't think so! Look at me! Have I not received new strength by eating some honey? Do I look as if God has cursed me?"

The men eagerly nodded their heads, mumbling agreeably and started dipping sticks into the honey too so they would get new energy to continue the battle. Soon they were on their way again, leaving the forest behind, chasing the Philistines all the way to Aijalon.

Later that day however, many soldiers who had not been with Jonathan were so hungry that when they saw sheep, oxen and calves they killed them and cut them into pieces and ate the meat raw. They could not wait to cook it.

The King's command of not eating any food had taken its toll on the Israelites and now they disobeyed God by eating raw meat and drinking the blood of the dead animals. When the king was told he cried bitterly and prayed he were dead. "Why do they disobey God! Let them kill and cook the meat," he groaned.

That evening sheep, oxen and calves were killed and roasted over hot campfires by extremely hungry soldiers. King Saul had to stop his pursue of the remaining Philistines until the men had eaten.

The next day he wondered who had been responsible for first disobeying his orders and he called his soldiers together. "The man responsible for disobeying my command shall die," he shouted. "I want to know who disobeyed me!" There was silence throughout the camp.

Suddenly, Jonathan stepped forward. "It was me, father. I ate honey from the honeycomb I found in the forest. It gave me new strength and I ordered my men to eat also. They too received new strength to continue the battle."

Every man in the camp was quiet as they stood and watched the king and his son. What would the king do? Jonathan had not known about the king's command until after he had eaten the honey. Surely the king would not kill his own son because of a little honey he ate!

The men started to whisper as the king picked up his sword. "Jonathan, you will die because you disobeyed my order," the king roared and he raised his sword above his head.

He would have struck Jonathan had it not been for the many soldiers who rushed in between King Saul and his son. They could not let this happen!

Jonathan had saved the day with his bravery. His trust and faith in God had made them win the battle against the Philistines and now the king was going to kill him because he had eaten some honey!

Two soldiers grabbed the sword out of King Saul's hands and pushed Jonathan away from his father. "He shall not die!" others shouted in one accord. "You will have to kill each one of us first before one hair of Jonathan's head will fall to the ground."

Jonathan was overwhelmed at the loyalty of his men. They had just challenged the king. He could have commanded them to be put to death but instead King Saul turned around and defeated he walked into his tent. Jonathan gratefully slipped away to the river Jordan with his best friend, the armour bearer, who had stood by him throughout the battle.

It was the next day Jonathan stood gazing over the murky river. Somehow this river was special to him. He longed to be closer to God. He wished God could only walk beside him on the banks of the river.

Little did Jonathan know how his hearts desire would come true many years later. How the Lord would indeed walk along the banks of this river and be baptized in these waters by John the Baptist.

Neither did he know that not very far from where he was his Lord would also be tempted for forty days and forty nights by Satan and how his Lord would come near starvation like him and his men. With a deep sigh, Jonathan closed his eyes and prayed once more for safety for him and his good friend.

Walking into the shade of the palm tree he placed his hand on his friend's shoulder and said, "Let us go and see that your wife and children are safe." His friend jumped up immediately and with fresh courage and a stronger friendship between them, they started the long journey home.

THE END

Note: This story can be found in 1Samuel chapters 12, 13 and 14.