



JONATHAN: THE WARRIOR SERVANT LEADER

1 Samuel 14:1-23

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ABSTRACT

Through one day in the life of Jonathan, we learn why God chose and prepared him to be the future loyal and trusted friend to David. 1 Samuel 14:1-23 shows Jonathan to be the conquering hero, warrior, and revolutionist. The exegesis of this pericope of scripture using social and cultural texture as described by Vernon Robbins (1996) highlights the effectiveness of Jonathan's humble leadership and faith against tremendous odds. He stands in sharp contrast to the cowering King Saul, his father, who stood physically tall, but chose to hide in a cave. Jonathan proves to be an effective servant leader who learns to lead through his interactions with his faithful and willing follower, his armor bearer. Jonathan's organization of two is extremely effective in routing the dominant culture of the time, the Philistines, and inspiring the entire nation of Israel to fight in a single day.

Keywords: Faith, Servant Leadership, Friendship, David, Saul, Armor Bearer, Israel, Philistines

INTRODUCTION

Jonathan “lived in the shadow” of Samuel, Saul and David (Bakon, 1995, p. 143). However, unlike his father Saul, Jonathan was a man of action. “While Saul waged a ‘sit and wait’ campaign, Jonathan took the initiative” (Bakon, p. 143). Using social and cultural texture, the worldview of Jonathan, Saul, the armor bearer and the Philistines are revealed and explains why they act the way they do. Servant leadership is on display in both Jonathan and the armor bearer. He was not your stereotypical servant leader, but one who was a warrior who dealt decisively when facing a challenge. “The story of Jonathan’s heroic deed appears now in a form which not only exalts Jonathan, but also humiliates Saul” (Jobling, 1976, p. 373). At the time, Jonathan faced a crisis where the dominant culture of the Philistines threatened Israel’s very existence. He chose to fight and honor God. The tale of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14:1-23 is one of a servant leader choosing to serve God against terrible odds. In contrast, Saul, his father and king, chose to hide. Through one day in the life of Jonathan, we learn why God chose him to fight for His glory against the Philistines and why he was prepared to become the loyal friend to David.

EXEGESIS OF 1 SAMUEL 14:1-23

Jonathan lived in a different world than we find ourselves today. Being the son of the first Hebrew king made him unique, a target for criticism, and a person who could have sat back and enjoyed a relative life of ease with no responsibility until he became King himself. However, an analysis of 1 Samuel 14:1-23 reveals that Jonathan was not your typical spoiled heir that we might find today, but a radical and revolutionary leader. Robbins (1996) introduces socio-rhetorical interpretation and its five textures (inner, intertexture, social and cultural, ideological and sacred) (p. 3). This provides a robust “critical interpretation” or exegesis of a text (Nohrnberg, 2012, p. 1). By studying these textures, a greater understanding of this pericope of scripture can be achieved. While the first two textures examine aspects of the text itself, social and cultural texture seeks to discover “what kind of a social and cultural person would anyone be who lives in the ‘world’ of a particular text” (Robbins, p.71).

Social and cultural texture is organized into three “topics” which are specific, common and final (Robbins, 1996, p. 71). Specific topics are often found in texts that have a “substantive religious texture” (Robbins, p. 72). The analysis asks questions such as “do the narrator and characters in the story assert or imply that the world is evil?” or “do they indicate how the world could be changed?” (Robbins, p. 71). The analysis may yield results such as something major is not correct, wrong, or an injustice is occurring, and thus needs to be solved. Most importantly, the author or characters in the text have an idea of how to do it.

“Common social and cultural topics are the overall environment” that provide the background of the set that the author and characters use to address the specific topics (Robbins, 1996, p. 75). They deal with relationships between people such as honor which “stands for a person’s rightful place in society” (Robbins p. 76). Final cultural topics are “those topics that most decisively identify one’s cultural location” and “separate people in terms of dominant culture, subculture, counterculture, contraculture and liminal culture” (Robbins, p. 86). Each aspect of social and cultural texture will be reviewed in this exegetical analysis.

There are three primary narrational sections in 1 Samuel 14:1-23:

- 1 Samuel 14: 1-3 The Sad State of Affairs is Set
- 1 Samuel: 14:4-14 Leadership on Display
- 1 Samuel 14:15-23 Leadership Creates Both Direct and Consequential Results

As the story of Jonathan unfolds, we see a progression from Saul and the rest of the Hebrews hiding in their caves, Jonathan rallying his armor bearer and attacking the Philistines, to the Hebrews, in mass (with Saul jumping in), attacking the Philistines because of Jonathan’s actions. The following details a social and cultural texture analysis organized by these narrational sections.

1 Samuel 14: 1-3 The Sad State of Affairs is Set

In 1 Samuel 14:2, King Saul is said to be hiding in the “outskirts of Gibeah” in a “pomegranate cave.” Hiding was nothing new for Saul as he was found “hiding himself among the baggage” when he was chosen as King (1 Samuel 10:17-25). Saul’s withdrawal from the world marked him as a clear “introversionist” (Robbins, 1996, p. 73). Saul viewed the evil around him as too much for him to handle.

In 1 Samuel 9, Saul is more concerned about being a burden to his father than fulfilling a mission given to him. In this passage, Saul’s father tasked him with finding some lost donkeys. After looking for a while, Saul told his servant that they should give up so as to not to cause his father to worry about them. His servant then had to talk him into keeping up the search. His servant was more ambitious than he was in fulfilling the mission. Later in Samuel, he was either a coward, lacked faith or both as evidenced by not being the one to face Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 (Dabney, 2001, p. 116).

At that time, kings were not supposed to withdraw from the world, not finish missions, be cowards or lack faith. Kings of the “near east” were either considered “gods” or “priests” and Saul was neither (Kim, 2011, p. 6). The Philistines were a ruthless “sea of people” that were led by fierce warrior kings who engaged the world and lived to fight (Novak, 2015, p. 176). They fought the Egyptians and Hebrews alike. Robbins (1996) states that a “dominant culture” are those in power who seek “to impose its goal on people in a significantly broad territorial region” (p. 86). This was the Philistines. Their sole goal was to utterly destroy their “arch enemy...the Jewish people” (Novak, p.183). Saul was afraid of the dominant culture of the Philistines (Galpaz-Feller, 2006, p. 321). He sought to avoid conflict with them at all costs. Saul was stressed out and suffered from depression from the constant state of war against the Philistines with impossible odds (Huisman, 2007, p. 890). He was definitely not a willing king who desired to conquer by the sword. He was not the conquering king the Hebrews desperately wanted when they implored Samuel to give them a king (1 Samuel 8). He did have some early success in battles, but it was quickly fleeting when God turned away from him as “humility gave place to pride” (Halley, 1965, p. 181). Without a clear solution to solving his or the Hebrew’s plight

against the Philistines, he displays aspects of “contraculture” as defined by Robbins by being very reactive in his environment and negative; thus, he hides in the cave and waits for something to happen (p. 87).

Jonathan is socially and culturally the opposite of Saul and acts more like the king that the Hebrews desperately desire to lead them as described in 1 Samuel 8. In Samuel 14:1, two clear separations are displayed between himself and Saul. First, despite his young age, he was a man of action and second, he did not let fear separate himself from his challenge. While Saul was very concerned with what his father, Kish, thought of him (1 Samuel 9), Jonathan did not appear concerned and would rather not tell his father what he was doing. Later in 1 Samuel 19, Jonathan is even emboldened enough as a leader to stand up to Saul and “intercede” on David’s behalf when Saul wanted to kill him (Fleming, 2016, p. 28). For Jonathan to willfully keep something from his father either showed a lack of respect or, more appropriately, Jonathan knew his father would not allow him to confront the Philistines, so he just did not tell him.

Jonathan knew exactly what he was doing when he told his armor bearer to “come let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side” (1 Samuel 14:1). He already knew that he could defeat the Philistines after previously defeating them in Geba (1 Samuel 13:3). He was a “revolutionist.” Robbins (1996) states that a “revolutionist” seeks “the destruction of the natural world, but also, more specifically the social order” (p. 72). Jonathan wanted to destroy the Philistines. He did not want to transform them or convert them, he simply wanted to kill them and remove their “dominant culture” from the region. Saul probably wanted the same thing, but lacked the will to do it.

Having armor and an armor bearer was essential and marked the importance of the individual. Saul’s armor is a “royal costume” equipped for a king and made him look like the conquering hero he desperately wanted to be (Dabney, 2001, p. 116). In 1 Samuel 17, Goliath’s armor was heavy, fierce, and ornate looking – fit for a king (Yadin, 2004, p. 394). Although it was not explicitly described in 1 Samuel, Jonathan’s armor was substantial enough to warrant an armor bearer.

Jonathan trusted his armor bearer with his exploits and plans. Jonathan would never think to be threatened by his armor bearer. Unlike his father, Saul, who was seemingly uneasy and threatened by everything even by his own armor bearer – David, the former shepherd boy (Chandler, 2011, p.101). Jonathan was well served by his armor bearer previously in battle and had the confidence to trust him with his plans to attack the Philistines (1 Samuel 13-14:1). Jonathan had a true servant in his armor bearer who was able and willing to follow his leadership.

1 Samuel: 14:4-14 Leadership on Display

In 1 Samuel 14:4-5, as if facing off against the Philistines was not enough, additional challenges faced Jonathan and his armor bearer. The terrain of the land was very unforgiving, but Jonathan did not let that slow him down. Similarly, the terrain was a challenge when David faced off with Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. However, the warrior nature that both Jonathan and David shared never swayed them from their respective missions and they both quickly overcame these obstacles.

The most striking dialogue between Jonathan and his armor bearer occurs in 1 Samuel 14:6-7 as shown below.

Jonathan said to the young man who carried his armor, ‘Come, let us go to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the Lord will work for us, for nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few.’ And his armor-bearer said to him, ‘Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul.’

Jonathan and his armor bearer are shown here as acting as one. From this relationship, Jonathan will learn how to be a true and loyal friend to David when he needed him to be (Keren, 2012, p. 5). Jonathan was being prepared by God to become David’s loyal servant, his armor bearer. Even though he was the heir, “Jonathan willingly extended to David his full support” (Morgenstern, 1959, p. 325).

In addition, Jonathan rightly frames the challenge before them and builds courage in both himself and his armor bearer by defining the Philistines as nothing more than the

“uncircumcised.” Many cultures of the time practiced circumcision as the Israelites did, but the Philistines did not (Faust, 2015, p. 273). Cultures that did not practice it were considered inferior (Faust, p. 273).

The armor bearer’s response to the well framed challenge by Jonathan proves his loyalty, admiration, and willingness to do anything for Jonathan. His armor bearer’s service was such a great example to Jonathan and prepared him for his relationship with David. Jonathan did not just have a servant in his armor bearer, but a true friend – as he served willingly and steadfastly. The friendship that Jonathan would later have with David is described by Stansell (2011) as “the most notable example of friendship in the Hebrew Bible” (p. 116). Later on, in 2 Samuel 1 when Jonathan dies in battle, David through a “lament,” mourns the loss of his deepest friend (Linafelt, 2008, p. 526). Jonathan’s armor bearer taught him how to be a friend to David. The challenges that Jonathan and David faced together were extreme crisis and there “never was a time of joy” much as the same as for Jonathan and his armor bearer (Tull, 2004, p. 131). The challenge stated by Jonathan and the response of the armor bearer proved a common social and cultural topic of “challenge-response within the context of honor” in that when challenged you stayed and aggressively fought together (Robbins, 1996, p. 80).

Jonathan’s faith is on display in 1 Samuel 14:10 when he describes to his armor bearer what they will do and how they will know that the “Lord has given them into our hand.” When they showed themselves to the Philistines and the Philistines yelled to them to come on up to fight, Jonathan wasted no time and charged ahead of his armor bearer up the hill towards the Philistines yelling to him “Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into the hands of Israel” (1 Samuel 14:12). This is another example of the challenge-response as described by Robbins (1996) only this time it is how Jonathan and his armor bearer rise to the challenge to “claim to enter the social space of another” (p. 80). “Saul is afraid to fall in the hands of the Philistines” in 1 Samuel 31 (Galpaz-Feller, 2006 p. 321). Whereas Jonathan, rushes head on to face the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:13).

Armor bearer’s provided safety to their warrior. Both Saul and Goliath had armor bearers that went before them – that was the social and cultural normative of the day. Jonathan broke this

when he charged first ahead of his armor bearer. Jonathan was more like David, a shepherd leader, rather than a prince, and acted first and without precaution when facing a challenge. He killed the Philistines by charging up the hill (1 Samuel 14:13) and David killed Goliath by slaying the giant (1 Samuel 17). Goliath taunted the Israelites and David met the challenge (Kuruvilla, 2015, p. p 493). Jonathan was taunted for being a Hebrew and believer of God and he killed the Philistines. Both were “revolutionists” who challenged the “dominant culture.”

1 Samuel 14:15-23 Leadership Creates Both Direct and Consequential Results

Jonathan, as the “revolutionist,” through his slaughter of the Philistines, caused “a great panic” (1 Samuel 14:15). This panic became “a very great panic” when God caused the “earth to quake” (1 Samuel 14:15). Jonathan’s faith and actions moved God himself to act on behalf of the Hebrews and shake the ground.

When Saul observes what is happening, he asks who is missing that may have gone over to the Philistines to cause this panic and he is informed that it is Jonathan and his armor bearer (1 Samuel 14:17). Saul immediately springs to action as a good follower (and not an initiating king) and calls for the “ark of God” to be brought forward so that he could rally the people for battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:18-20). Saul is looking for victory and getting in on the action. Saul does not appear concerned about Jonathan’s safety as he does not ask if his son is still alive. “This absence of dialogue subtly conveys Saul’s lack of feeling for Jonathan” (Lawton, 1993, p. 38). He also knows Jonathan’s potential from previous battles. He is looking to jump into the fight before Jonathan carries the day without him. Even the Hebrew traitors who were with the Philistines were quick to jump on the winning side and join the rest of the Hebrews coming out of hiding to slaughter and pursue the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:21-22).

Jonathan and his armor bearer aggressively acted “so the Lord saved Israel that day” (1 Samuel 14:23). Saul, the “introversionist,” did not prompt God to act. Jonathan, the “revolutionist” won the day and proved that action for the Lord’s glory and honor could decisively defeat the

Philistines. Saul failed as a king because he failed to serve God (Sellars, 2011, p. 318). Jonathan, the proven warrior served God and was a success.

Discovered Leadership Principles

1 Samuel 14:1-23 highlights many leadership principles. Both Jonathan and his armor bearer prove to be capable servants and followers of God. Jonathan shows his leadership skills through both his dialogue with his armor bearer and his decisive actions against the Philistines. In Table 1 below, identified leadership principles by verse are listed.

Table 1

Leadership Principles from the Social and Cultural Texture Exegesis (1 Samuel 14:1-23)

Leadership Principles	1 Samuel 14 [Verse]
Leaders easily identify primary challenges	1
Leaders take up a challenge directly and go first	
Leaders are discerning of who can receive information	
Poor or fearful leaders avoid challenges	2
Even poor leaders have followers	
Leaders surround themselves with other leaders	3
Strong leaders do not draw attention to themselves	
Leaders know that they may encounter multiple challenges	4, 5
Strong leaders have a strong faith in God	6
Leaders take up a challenge directly and go first	
Strong leaders inspire followers	

Motivated followers stand with their leaders	7
A follower's faith is strengthened by their leader	
Leaders give a clear and detailed plan for action	8
Leaders are tactical not just strategic in their plans	9
Leaders communicate clearly to their followers	
Leader's wait for God's timing	10
Strong leaders and motivated followers act in unison	11
Crowds can provide a false sense of safety	12
Leaders often face open verbal attacks	
Leaders act decisively	13
Leaders go first	
Motivated followers are quick to follow strong leaders	
Leaders and followers acting together are effective	14
In a crisis, leaders fight side by side with their followers	
Problems left unresolved can develop into larger ones	15
Leaders delegate tasks to followers	16
Leaders gather information before acting	17
Poor leaders will follow when the outcome is favorable/known	18
Leaders know timing is important	19

Leaders “rally” followers especially when victory is certain	20
When leadership does not exist, organizations crumble	
People will choose a winning side over a losing one when given the choice	21, 22
Leaders need followers to help win the battle	23

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Throughout the life of Jonathan, evidence of him as a servant leader is rampant. In a time when leaders practiced their authority through power and battle, Jonathan showed that he could separate himself and successfully practice as a servant leader. The following defines servant leadership and provides a common language for the next section’s discussion of Jonathan as both a warrior and servant leader.

Servant leadership is about “putting other first” (Northouse, 2016, p. 234). “Servant leadership is a paradox – an approach to leadership that runs counter to common sense” (Northouse, p. 225). “One of the key differences between standard autocratic leadership and servant leadership is that the later is a bottom-up approach, whereas the former is more top-down” (Savel & Munro, 2017, p. 97). Servant leaders use “actions and words that clearly demonstrate to followers that their concerns are a priority” (Northouse, p. 234). Jesus was a servant leader as evidenced throughout the gospels and in his interactions with his disciples. Jesus stated in Mark 10:42-44:

You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be a servant...for even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...

As Jesus shows throughout his life, servant leadership leads willing followers through example and humility. Jesus, as a servant leader, was not weak, but a strong and effective leader. Servant leaders turn the focus from themselves to their followers. Servant leadership “rejects the notion that leaders are inherently superior to other organizational members” (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012, p. 556). Servant leaders are chosen, called and “honored by God” (Choi, 2014, p.14). Servant leadership is not referring to a Christian’s service to God (even though they do serve God), but rather servant leaders “serve those they lead” (Atkinson, 2014, p. 147).

Servant leadership emphasizes the importance of inclusion and seeks help from followers to “discern and test different ideas” (Dyck & Wong, 2010, p. 18). Thus, servant leaders do not act in a vacuum. They are verbal with their ideas and open to discussion and dissent. They realize that the success of their particular mission and the organization is highly dependent on their follower’s performance.

The behavior of the leader is extremely important in determining the effectiveness of a servant leader (Northouse, 2016, p. 236). Followers are often dependent on their leaders for success and servant leadership stresses the importance of servant leaders truly serving their followers for the overall success of a team or organization. Effective servant leadership impacts those outside the organization as well. “Organizations that adopt a servant leadership culture are committed to helping those in need who operate outside of the organization” (Northouse, p. 239).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Jonathan, as shown through the exegesis, was a true warrior and servant leader: a “warrior servant leader.” The servant leader characteristics of Jonathan show themselves immediately in the narrative through the interaction of Jonathan with his armor bearer. Prior to beginning his mission, he rallies the troops – all one of them – and makes a simple, but clearly understood statement to his armor bearer. He treated his armor bearer as an equal by saying “let us” as opposed to follow me (1 Samuel 14:1). This was a very deliberate choice of words and one that he knew his armor bearer would favorably, and with excitement, respond. He addressed his

armor bearer not as a slave, but as an equal fellow warrior. It was an enthusiastic call that is reinforced along the way with additional rallying information for his follower by declaring in 1 Samuel 14: 6 “come, let us go over to the garrison of the these uncircumcised.” If the motivation was not enough for the armor bearer up this point in their mission, it was now. “Servant leaders encourage others to visualize the followers’ future and are persuasive by offering compelling reasons to motivate others to carry out tasks” (Anderson, 2018, p. 763).

“As enthusiasm is catching, the opposite is also true. Where a leader lacks self-confidence, this tends to be infectious as well. It pervades his every effort” (Engstrom, 1976, p. 84). Saul lacked self-confidence as evidenced throughout his life. He was not the one to attack, but rather he chose to stay hidden in the caves (1 Samuel 14:2). Servant leaders who are not enthusiastic are doomed to failure as they are completely dependent on their followers willingly agreeing to the mission of the organization. Saul was justified by his position as king while Jonathan led by inspiring through service. “Leadership encourages and inspires followership. Authority demands obedience” (Segler, 1987, p. 6). Saul had authority and chose to use it by hiding from the Philistines. Worse he practiced an autocratic style of leadership that required all of the rest of Israel in hiding as well. “Autocratic leadership is when one person makes all the decisions for everybody” (Phillips, 2016, p. 17). Jonathan grabbed the initiative and chose to aggressively attack the Philistines. Saul the “introversionist king” measured success by living for another day in a cave. Jonathan, the “revolutionist,” desired for and acted on the total destruction of the Philistines.

The loyalty of the armor bearer towards Jonathan as shown in verses 1 Samuel 14:7-9, showed a true transparency in the relationship between them. “Transparency means being ourselves around other people. The humility of the leader is something followers yearn to see” (Lundy, 2002, p. 103). Both the armor bearer and Jonathan appear to have a very open relationship. This relationship prepared Jonathan for his later friendship with David. The same messaging that the armor bearer expresses here is similar to what Jonathan would use with David in 1 Samuel 20:4 when he says, “whatever you say, I will do.” Jonathan would learn how to be a servant leader through his armor bearer.

Jonathan claims the rightful position of leadership in 1 Samuel 14: 12 when he addresses his armor bearer by stating “Come up after me, for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel” as they started their attack on the Philistines. Servant leaders lead from the front and show their followers the way. He also exhibited a healthy and humble ego in his actions by putting the focus on the Lord and not himself. “Humility can be defined as neither overestimating one’s merit nor overvaluing oneself” (Savel & Munro, 2017, p. 98). He knew what he could do and accomplish through God’s strength and not his own. His confidence was because of God and his follower (the armor bearer) knew it.

Servant leaders acting in unison with their followers and for the right reasons are extremely effective. Once Jonathan and his armor bearer slaughtered about twenty men, they started a panic with the rest of the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:14-15). Saul finally steps into the action starting in verse 16 and realizes that something major is happening. He decides to jump in after getting initial reports that Jonathan and his armor bearer are missing and may have caused the disruption. “Saul nearly misses the battle altogether” (Jobling, 1976, p. 368). Although, he was not a very effective leader, Saul acted and rallied Israel to action against the Philistines. Leaders must be able to make decisions on partial information (Flaniken, 2006, p. 37). The day was won not because of Saul’s late actions, but because, despite his father’s example, Jonathan chose to lead as a servant leader with his armor bearer by his side and fight.

Jonathan and his armor bearer were resolute in their actions. “Perseverance is a critical character quality” for leaders (Flaniken, 2006, p. 38). If Saul had not stepped in, Jonathan and his armor bearer would have still probably pressed the attack as there was no indication that they would stop until the Philistines were completely destroyed. Jonathan also exhibited the common social and cultural trait of “honor and shame” as described by Robbins (1996, p. 76). His mission was to destroy the “dominant culture” of the Philistines for the Glory of God since God’s honor was as stake. He served God through his actions. Saul failed as a king because he failed to serve God (Sellars, 2011, p. 318). Later in 1 Samuel 31, Jonathan died the same day as Saul, but is regarded by Samuel as a success and one who was loved by King David.

God has seen now multiple example of Jonathan being able to step up, effectively lead, and succeed as both a warrior and servant leader (1 Samuel 13 and 14). He has given Jonathan a capable armor bearer to show him how one effectively serves. He knows that he is not afraid to act independent of his father's desires. Jonathan was now prepared to serve God in a higher capacity through his future friendship and service to David.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

1 Samuel 14:1-23 shows Jonathan as a prime example that God uses to show us faith in action. He is both a servant leader and a warrior. Jonathan chose to fight the dominant and terrible Philistine civilization for the Lord and His people. He sought their total destruction not for his own glory, but for the sake of the Lord. Saul first chose to hide and fear the Philistines. Jonathan knew he would succeed ahead of the fight as God directed him and his faithful armor bearer. He had the faith to take a risk and humbly lead a very violent action against the dominant culture of the time. As Murry (2016) describes, today we also face terrible odds against a dominant world culture set against the vulnerable (p. 126). Will we choose to stand up for our beliefs and for God's glory with humility against the oppression of the weak and Church today or will we retreat and hide and extinguish our light? Are we a Jonathan or a Saul?

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