

KINGS *of* the HILL

I move through the moonlit forest, as quiet as a night owl. Dad doesn't realize I'm following him. I'd like to see a battle . . . from a distance.

I hear banging drums ahead. A British regiment is marching to their stronghold in Boston. That's where my dad is headed too.

Dad stops in his tracks. "Those Redcoats make a lot of noise. Don't they, Jonas?"

I step out of the shadows. "How'd you know I was following you?"

His smile shines in the moonlight. "Because you stomp like a moose."

"Do not," I protest. "I only weigh 80 pounds."

Dad's smile fades. "This isn't a game, son. People will get hurt." He pauses a moment. "Some will die."

My dad is the strongest, bravest man alive. In the bright moonlight, he grips his musket and stands like a giant pine tree. More than anything, I wish to be like him.

"Please, let me come," I beg. "I'll stay out of danger."

Dad adjusts his tricorne hat and sighs. "You can't promise that. Still, boys younger than you have joined our fight. Stay quiet, stay hidden."

UNLIKELY ALLIES

Dad meets his militia outside Cambridge.

"Good to see you, Salem." An official-looking man greets my dad.

Together, we make the 3-mile march to the hills north of Boston. We reach Breed's Hill before midnight. Men are everywhere! Hundreds of Patriot soldiers go to work, digging massive trenches in the hillside.

"What are they doing?" I ask.

"Sending a message," Dad says. "When the Redcoats see this fort rise overnight, they'll have to attack."

I look at the harbor. It's filled with ships that fly the British flag. Our enemies outnumber us several times over. They also have better weapons and experienced generals.

Dad's right—this isn't a game.

"Salem Poor, is that you?" An elderly white man strides toward us, a musket slung over his shoulder.

Dad nods proudly. "Good health to you, Mr. Poor. Meet my son, Jonas."

Mr. Poor? I glance from Dad to the stranger. *Why do they have the same name?*

Then I realize: *This man owned my father.*

Years ago, Dad explained to me that he was born on John Poor's farm, which meant he was property of their family. Many families in Massachusetts still have slaves. Just the thought causes my hands to clench into fists.

John Poor smiles. "I knew you'd do great things."

"Is that why you kept him as a slave?" I ask. Dad squeezes my shoulder, a quiet warning to respect my elders.

John Poor shakes his head. "Your father bought his freedom, boy. He saved a whole year's wages by age 22."

"I was always free in my heart, Jonas," Dad says. "Mr. Poor signed the paperwork."

The old man chuckles. "That's the spirit! You're a true

fighter, Salem Poor." He holds his back. "Your son looks to have a strong back. What say you, boy? Will you take my place digging fortifications? These bones need rest."

I glare at the shovel, wondering how many times Mr. Poor ordered my father to dig for him. I'm too shocked to respond.

Dad grabs the tool. "He will gladly help, Mr. Poor. Jonas doesn't mind a hard night's work."

FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

We work through the warm June night. I'm strong for my age, but the shovel shreds my hands.

"What troubles you, Jonas?" Dad asks as dawn breaks.

I wipe sweat off my forehead. "Why do you fight for the Patriots? Liberty doesn't mean anything for people who look like us."

Dad pauses thoughtfully. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out his well-worn manumission. "This paper shows that I'm a free man," he says. "I had to fight hard to earn the right to be what God made me to be all along. There were times I wanted to quit."

"Why didn't you?" I ask.

His mouth twitches. "Well, you see, there was this girl. Your mama." He rustles my hair. "In this country, anything's possible if you're willing to fight for it."

"But do you have to fight beside Mr. Poor?" I ask.

Dad nods. "I do. Otherwise, how will we be any different?"

Before I respond, the high-pitched whistle of cannons splits the air.

"Take cover!" Colonel Prescott yells. He jumps off his horse seconds before an explosion rocks the hill. Men are tossed into the air like rag dolls.

Through the smoke comes the crashing sound of Redcoat drums. I watch thousands of soldiers assemble at the far shore. ▶▶▶

JONAS AND HIS FATHER TAKE A STAND FOR FREEDOM.

by JP Robinson | Art by James Bernardin

Colonel Prescott draws his saber. "Make ready, men!" Dad pulls me into a tight hug. "I didn't expect any fighting so soon. Run and hide, Jonas. Not a sound." I cling to him. "I love you, Dad. Please, j-just don't die." "I'll do my best." He pushes me away. "Now go!"

Dad unslings his musket and takes his position at the fence. Mr. Poor shuffles next to him. They raise their muskets as one.

"Save your powder, boys!" Colonel Prescott yells. "We can't afford to miss, so do not fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

The Patriots wait, explosions rattling around them. The battle looks hopeless.

Prescott's eyes gleam. "True, but it's *our* hill." I look back at the trench again, begging God to keep my dad safe. The men wait all morning, dodging cannon fire as Redcoats cross the Charles River. We have no cannons to fire back.

The British army crests the hill by mid-afternoon, marching in tight formation.

"Fire!" Prescott orders at last, slashing his saber.

The Patriots unleash a withering barrage of gunfire. *Crrackk!* I almost jump out of my skin. A column of British soldiers falls in a heap.

"It worked!" I shout in disbelief. "We beat the Redcoats."

Prescott glances down the



Please, God, I whisper as I run toward the woods, let my dad be OK. I swallow long and hard, then offer the same prayer for Mr. Poor.

LAST MAN STANDING

I only make it 50 feet before a strong arm grabs me by the collar. I turn and stare into the eyes of Colonel Prescott.

"Stand your ground, boy," he orders. "If this fort falls, Massachusetts falls shortly after."

"It's not a fort!" I shout. "It's a hole in the hill."

hill. "That was only the first charge. We've a long day ahead."

The British army rises over and over again, and our guns meet them. Smoke drifts across the hill, making my throat burn. This is a nightmare. We hold the high ground, but with each charge our ammunition runs lower.

Between skirmishes, Colonel Prescott mounts the barricade and jokes with his men. I can't find my dad. Has he fallen?

At long last, Prescott pulls me aside. "Get ready to run, boy. We're out of powder and must retreat."

SALEM'S COURAGE

Salem Poor fought at the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775, mortally wounding Lt. Col. Abercrombie. Fourteen officers cited his heroism. Salem later fought at Valley Forge, Saratoga and Monmouth.

After a nine-month siege by General Washington, the British army retreated from Boston to Halifax, Canada, in March 1776.

"But the fort—" I argue.

Prescott's eyes gleam. "We'll take it back tonight or perish in the attempt."

A gust of wind pushes through the thick haze of smoke, giving me a clear glimpse of the advancing army. Still so many! With a mighty roar, the British charge uphill. It's as though they know we have nothing left.

"Retreat!" The shout echoes up and down the line. But a voice rises above the chaos: my dad's voice.

"Hold your ground, men!" he shouts. Throwing down his musket, he draws a knife and throwing axe from his belt. "Though our guns fail, we still have our courage."

Mr. Poor whoops in approval.

Prescott directs others to retreat, while Dad's regiment provides cover to the bitter end. The men raise a roar that makes the ground shake, daring the Redcoats to face them.

I want to stay, but Prescott throws me on his horse. "We'll need brave souls like you for the counterattack," he explains.

I ride in shock, the battle thundering behind me. *All that courage, and we still lose?* I wonder. *Why fight at all?*

VICTORY in CHRIST

Strange as it sounds, the loss at Breed's Hill (known as the Battle of Bunker Hill) became a victory in the long run. Solve this puzzle to see what the Bible says about Jesus turning death to victory.

The first word in each row contains a letter that is missing in the second word. Find the missing letter, then fill in the blanks.

" _ 1 _ 2 _ 3 _ 4 _ 5 _ 6 _ 7 _ 8 _ 2 _ 3 _ 9 _ 1 _ 2 _ 7 _ 10 _ 11 _ 2 _ 7 _ 5
 ... _ 6 _ 12 _ 3 _ 13 _ 10 _ 9 _ 9 _ 1 _ 2 _ 8 _ 9 _ 14 _ 14 _ 13 _ 2 _ 12
 _ 5 _ 1 _ 6 _ 8 _ 2 ' _ 15 _ 16 _ 9 _ 7 _ 4 _ 10 _ 8 _ 13 _ 1 _ 4 _ 12 _ 17
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|----------------|--------|----------------|--------|-----------------|--------|----------------|-------|
| 1. ___ charge | grace | 6. ___ captain | catnip | 11. ___ reload | adore | 16. ___ army | ram |
| 2. ___ general | angler | 7. ___ rifle | life | 12. ___ ensign | singe | 17. ___ signal | snail |
| 3. ___ medal | lame | 8. ___ disarm | raids | 13. ___ powder | rowed | 18. ___ brave | bear |
| 4. ___ field | fled | 9. ___ battle | table | 14. ___ soldier | slider | | |
| 5. ___ horse | hero | 10. ___ scout | cost | 15. ___ blade | deal | | |