

Jonathan and David, Resolute Friends

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 27:6, 10–11, 17, 19

Background Scripture: 1 Samuel 19:1–7; 20:1–42; 2 Samuel 1:17–27

Today's Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1–4; 20:16–17, 32–34, 42;

2 Samuel 1:26–27; 21:7

I. Unexpected Friend

1 Samuel 18:1–4

¹ After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ² From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. ³ And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

1. This chapter begins right after David has defeated Goliath and proved himself a heroic fighter willing to defend the reputation of God. King Saul responds by inviting the young shepherd boy to meet with him.

After *David* introduces himself, this verse leaves the impression that more is said—perhaps an account of the duel with Goliath and David's victory. These words are enough to win over the heart of Jonathan who is with Saul and listening. The phrase *became one* translates a Hebrew verb describing things bound together—in this case, the joining of Jonathan's *spirit* to the spirit of David. This refers to Jonathan's love for the man, who has just taken it upon himself to fight a Philistine cham-

panion. Saul was willing to arm David and give him the traditional means to fight, but his armor and weapons proved useless. Saul showed no willingness to lead or to fight for God's people, which confirms David's superiority as the future king.

In Hebrew, the term for *love* is broad and flexible enough to apply to numerous human relationships: father and son (Genesis 22:2), mother and son (25:28), mother and daughter-in-law (Ruth 4:15), husband and wife (Hosea 3:1), and people for their leader (1 Samuel 18:16). The last example is particularly relevant in this context, as it describes the general sentiment already growing in Israel and Judah, as the people acclaim the leadership potential of David.

2. *Saul* knows his kingship is ending, as God has chosen a different person to lead Israel. On the one hand, Saul's hospitality gives the impression of graciousness—he treats David as if he is becoming one of the king's advisors by rewarding and consulting him. On the other hand, this hospitality gives Saul time to assess David's growing popularity. Keeping David close enables Saul to control him and prevent his reputation from growing.

3. The word *covenant* appears hundreds of times in the Old Testament. It refers to a formalized agreement between two parties, usually with obligations for each to fulfill. The most famous covenants of

the Bible are between God and his people (examples: Genesis 9:9–11; 15:17–19; Exodus 19:5–6; 24:7–8). Covenants can also occur between two groups of people and serve as treaties of mutual benefit. In some cases, a weaker side may be forced to promise obedience and military support in exchange for safety.

What stands out from the exchange between *Jonathan* and *David* is that Jonathan appears to be the stronger party, given that he is the heir to the throne. Typically, one would expect a king's son to demand support from others, perhaps pressuring a national hero to back his future kingship. Instead, Jonathan *loved* David *as himself*. Jonathan is the subject, and it leaves the impression that he is the one who initiates an alliance, seemingly with little concern for his own future.

The same impression—that Jonathan was the one to initiate a covenant against self-interests—emerges from later retellings of this event (1 Samuel 20:8, 16–17). Saul will eventually hear of this and grow incensed, describing it as a conspiracy against him (22:8). In fact, Jonathan's choice to support David places him in agreement with God's call (see 16:12).

4. Jonathan's gifts hold significant meaning. In ancient times, royals were identified by their fine robes, a stark contrast to David's shepherd garments. By wearing royal robes, *David* would be associated with the royal entourage, foreshadowing his later ascension.

II. Unwavering Alliance

1 Samuel 20:16–17, 32–34, 42

¹⁶ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account."

¹⁷ And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

³² "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. ³³ But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

³⁴ Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the feast he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

⁴² Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

16. Saul tries to manipulate David by inviting him to marry into the family. David is nonetheless able to escape, and he proves fearsome to Israel's enemies (1 Samuel 18:22–30). Meanwhile, Jonathan stands up for David until Saul swears an oath that he shall not harm the man (19:1–7). However, Saul breaks his oath and again tries to kill David, sending him on the run (19:9–12).

In exchange for helping David, Jonathan requests future kindness for his own family. To solidify the commitment between the two men, Jonathan expands the scope of their initial bond.

This time, the *covenant* is between Jonathan and *the house of David*. The Hebrew word translated as "house" can mean more than just the physical structure; it also refers to the people who inhabit a home—residents of the entire household, including immediate and extended family. Additionally, in the context of royal dynasties, a "house" includes future descendants and those who will rule as king. Jonathan's request acknowledges the significance of

David's lineage, as it was common practice to eliminate the family of rivals after defeating or removing them.

17. This verse concludes the narrative that began in 1 Samuel 18:1. *Jonathan* receives a commitment from *David*, and each man promises to protect the other's family. Jonathan loves David as he loves *himself*; demonstrating Jonathan's commitment to protecting this person who is favored by God, even at personal risk.

32. Saul is concerned that David is a threat to the king's throne and dynastic lineage. Jonathan's words here are a response to Saul's desperate threat: as long as David lives, *Jonathan* will not inherit the throne.

33. This attempt on Jonathan's life mirrors Saul's earlier attempt to kill David (1 Samuel 19:10). To this point, *Jonathan* was still holding out hope that *Saul* would not try to *kill David*. He did not think his father had wicked intentions. However, this attempted murder exposes Saul's anger and paranoia after Samuel had proclaimed that Saul's kingdom would be torn away (13:13; 15:26).

34. Aware that his father is capable of murder, *Jonathan* grieves instead of eating and celebrating. Saul has crossed a line of no return, bringing *shame* upon the family.

III. Unbroken Promise

2 Samuel 1:26–27, 21:7

²⁶ I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;

you were very dear to me.

Your love for me was wonderful,
more wonderful than that of
women.

²⁷ "How the mighty have fallen!
The weapons of war have
perished!"

⁷ The king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because

of the oath before the LORD between David and Jonathan son of Saul.

26. The remaining chapters of 1 Samuel record Saul's pursuit of David, David's sparing of Saul's life (twice), the death of Samuel, David's hiding among the Philistines, and the eventual death of Saul and his sons in battle—including Jonathan (1 Samuel 31:1–2). The book of 2 Samuel covers David's forty-year reign, but it begins with a time of mourning.

After Jonathan's death, David composes a lament for both the fallen prince and his father, Saul. A lament is a song that expresses pain, loss, and uncertainty.

The poetic expression of *love* in this verse can easily be misconstrued. Although this verse compares David's love for Jonathan to the love of *women*—meaning romantic love—the point is that David and Jonathan's bond is either unlike or even stronger than the bonds of a romantic relationship. The English idiom describing close friends as "thick as thieves" expresses a similar idea. It does not mean that two friends have literally become partners in thievery, but rather that their friendship is very close.

27. This concludes the lament. The phrase *weapons of war* is a reference to Saul and Jonathan, who have fallen in battle. This is an especially poignant metaphor after Saul was killed by falling upon his own sword.

21:7. After ascending to the throne, David, *the king*, honors his covenant with his now-deceased friend. Details of David's kindness to *Mephibosheth son of Jonathan* are recounted in 2 Samuel 9. This graciousness toward Jonathan's disabled son is even more remarkable given that the rest of Saul's house has been at war with David (2 Samuel 3:1). Even after Jonathan's death, David remembers and honors his commitments.

Involvement Learning

Jonathan and David, Resolute Friends

Into the Lesson

Choose one of the following sentences to complete:

1. Friendship is wonderful because . . .
2. Friendship is difficult because . . .
3. Friendship is necessary because . . .
4. Friendships may not last because . . .
5. Friendships for a lifetime are special because . . .

Today we'll study one of the most significant examples of deep friendship we see in Scripture. We'll find ideas for nurturing our friendships.

Key Text

Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

—1 Samuel 20:42

Into the Word

Read today's lesson Scripture text. Write a one-sentence summary identifying the following individuals:

Saul: _____

David: _____

Jonathan: _____

Mephibosheth: _____

Why was David and Jonathan's covenant with each other significant?

How did David show loyalty to Jonathan?

How did Jonathan show loyalty to David?

Into Life

Write down the name of a close friend. Then jot down a few sentences about how you met them and how that relationship has grown and matured over time.

Write down one way to show love and loyalty to this friend in the upcoming week.

Thought to Remember

Honor God in your friendships.