

Jonathan

Jonathan was the oldest son of King Saul, making him a prince and the next in line to be king. He served in the military beside his father so he would have to be at least 20 years old to join. When we first learned of Jonathan in I Samuel 13, there were 3,000 men in the army of Israel. These hand-picked men were a bodyguard who were kept on constant duty, while the rest of the people were dismissed until needed. Saul stationed 2,000 soldiers with him in Micmash and the other 1,000 were placed under the command of Jonathan at Gibeon. At some point, Jonathan and his men attacked and took over the Philistine outpost at Geba. Jonathan did all the work and who took credit? Saul blew the trumpet and took credit for the victory himself. He also took over the priestly job of offering the sacrifice before Samuel got there, thus being told God would choose a new king.

The Philistines, when they heard the news, mobilized a massive army to march against Israel: 3,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and legions of soldiers. Terror swept through the Israelite camp followed by mass desertion and defection. Thousands of troops hid in caves, pits, cisterns, and among the rocks. They really scattered and Saul found himself with only 600 troops left. Plus, he and Jonathan had the only two swords in the entire army while the Philistines were fully armed. This brings us to I Samuel 14: 1-14.

We find Saul sitting under a pomegranate tree, in no hurry to engage with the Philistines. He was helpless and hopeless, expecting to be attacked, captured, and killed by the Philistines. His faith was weak at best. In contrast, we find Jonathan full of faith, boldness, and courageous initiative. He proposed a daring mission to his armor-bearer: "Let's go over to the Philistine garrison and see what we find." Jonathan truly believed the Lord could and would save His people. His armor-bearer declared his loyalty and agreed to go. Jonathan found a strategic position - a narrow path through a pass with large, sharp rocks on either side about three miles long.

Jonathan trusted the Lord to give him a sign if it was God's will for him to engage with the Philistines:

- if the Philistines told them to remain there and they would come down, they were not to attack
- if the Philistines told them to come on up the cliffs, the Lord would give them victory

Against all odds, Jonathan and his armor-bearer scaled the jagged cliffs and in hand-to-hand combat killed 20 soldiers. Jonathan stepped out in faith, knowing nothing can restrain God. He had a Romans 8:31 heart: *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

Our next passage, I Samuel 18:1-4, takes place right after David's victory over Goliath when he is welcomed at the palace and forms a friendship with Jonathan. They had many things in common. They both were bold and brave, both were men of great trust in God, and both were

men of action. Most of all, both had a real relationship with God. At the same time, Jonathan and David were different. David was a young boy between 16 & 18 and Jonathan was a seasoned soldier. Commentators vary on Jonathan's age at the time but he was older than David; the difference in age ranges from 5 years older all the way to 25. Jonathan was the first-born son of a king and David was the last born son of a farmer. Jonathan was a crown prince, who everyone expected would be the next king of Israel. Jonathan could have easily felt threatened by David's successes but their common bond in the Lord was much greater than anything else.

Have you ever met someone that you felt an instant connection to? It's like you've known them all your life and there is an immediate bonding. And when you both have the Lord in common the ties are even stronger. This is the kind of relationship David and Jonathan had.

We don't know the details of the covenant they made but at the very least they would have pledged their friendship and loyalty one to another. Their covenant would prove stronger than jealousy, than envy, than ambition. Jonathan seemed to be acknowledging that David was to be the future king by giving him his own royal clothing and weapons. The royal robe and weapons were to be used only by the future heir to the throne. In effect, Jonathan was transferring his right to the throne over to David. Obviously, Jonathan accepted that God had chosen David, not him, as the next king. In Jonathan we see a humble heart that wants God's will.

By the time we get to I Samuel 19:1-7, Saul has unsuccessfully tried to have David killed four times. It appears his attempts were secretive and not widely known. Saul now publicly orders David's killing, enlisting the help of Jonathan and his servants to assassinate David. Jonathan had a choice to make: to obey his father or to obey God. His father wanted him to murder an innocent man, which went against what God's Word said. Here we see the heart of the apostles in Jonathan: "*We ought to obey God rather than man.*" (Acts 5) The apostles were willing to suffer for what was right before God, rejoicing they were counted worthy to suffer for His name. Jonathan was willing to take his lumps for obeying God and he didn't whine about it. In loyalty to David, Jonathan revealed the plans to David so he could escape and assured David he would intervene on David's behalf before Saul.

Courageously, Jonathan let his father know that he did not share his opinion about David. He was bold enough to tell Saul that his anger and jealousy against David was a sin and that "*he has not sinned against you.*" Saul had deluded himself into thinking David had killed Goliath to become famous and take away his throne and therefore he was justified in killing David. With the Lord's help, Jonathan brought Saul back to the reality that David was truly innocent. Saul swore, "*As the Lord lives, he shall not be killed.*" At least for the moment, the Lord genuinely touched Saul's heart through Jonathan's intervention on David's behalf and there was reconciliation between Saul and David.

Jonathan was convinced that Saul no longer harbored any ill feeling towards David and thought all was well. After a time however, Saul was back to his old tricks, trying to kill David six more times in just two days. The last attempt almost succeeded and David barely escaped. In Chapter 20, we see the biggest test of their friendship. David is confused. He doesn't know why Saul is trying to kill him again. What had he done? And why didn't Jonathan warn him like

he did before when his life was in danger? He even considers the possibility that Jonathan would be loyal to Saul and not him. After all, with David out of the way Jonathan would inherit the throne. In times of distress, our minds often wander all over the place. In desperation, David asks Jonathan to come and help him.

We see that Jonathan quickly responded to his friend but was confused himself at David's questions. He couldn't believe what David was saying. After all, Saul always confided in him before he did anything. Surely David must be mistaken. David insists on the seriousness of the situation: "*There is but a step between me and death.*" Jonathan reassured David that he was his loyal friend and offered to help. David suggested a plan that would prove what he said about Saul was true.

David's plan was that he would not attend a formal dinner engagement with Saul the next day. When Saul noticed his absence and questioned Jonathan about it, he would tell his father that David had requested to attend a family affair. Then Jonathan would take note of his father's response.

- If Saul responded favorably, it would mean that he was at peace with David and David was safe
- If Saul responded in an outburst of anger, this would mean Saul was as determined as ever to kill David and if this was true, Jonathan knew David would have to leave

They devised a way to get the news to David without putting him in danger. Then Jonathan pronounced a blessing on David, "*The Lord be with you as He has been with my father,*" acknowledging David as the future king. He then made a request. Knowing David would rule over Israel, he asked David to promise that his descendants would not be killed or mistreated when David became king. So Jonathan and David agreed to care for one another. Jonathan promised to care for David in the face of Saul's threat and David promised to care for Jonathan and his family in the future.

As the plan was carried out, we know that Saul erupted in anger and even tried to kill Jonathan when he dared ask his father what crimes David was guilty of. Loyal to David, Jonathan sent word that it was not safe for David to return. So began David's life on the run from Saul. We see that Jonathan had the faithful heart of a friend. Unlike his father, he was able to conquer jealousy and envy through the power of God. What a contrast between their lives!

In I Samuel 23:14-18, we find that Saul sought David every day to kill him. There was nothing Jonathan could do to rescue David but we find him seeking out David, his friend, one more time to encourage him in the Lord. He reminded David of God's promise that he would someday be king so there was no reason to fear Saul. They even made plans for Jonathan to be second in command to King David and pledged their loyalty once again. Unfortunately, this time of prayer and fellowship between friends would be their last on this earth. Jonathan would die before David was made king.

In David's funeral song, II Samuel 1:17-27, he showed his love for Saul as well as Jonathan. In spite of everything Saul had done against him, he honored the great things Saul had done. David lived out I Peter 4:8, "*And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.*"

"How the mighty have fallen..." referred to both Saul and Jonathan. Saul had fallen a long time before his actual death; he fell when he hardened his heart against God. Jonathan stood faithful to the end with a heart after God just like his dearest friend, David. To quote from "Friends" by Michael W. Smith: "And friends are friends forever, if the Lord's the Lord of them." "*Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*" (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

There are "friends" who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother.
Proverbs 18:24 (NLT)