

# *Jonathan . . . and David*

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

2<sup>nd</sup> in an eight-week series

July 2, 2017

©2017 Scott L. Engle

### *1 Samuel 18:1-5 (CEB)*

As soon as David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan's life became bound up with David's life, and Jonathan loved David as much as himself. <sup>2</sup>From that point forward, Saul kept David in his service and wouldn't allow him to return to his father's household. <sup>3</sup>And Jonathan and David made a covenant together because Jonathan loved David as much as himself. <sup>4</sup>Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his armor, as well as his sword, his bow, and his belt. <sup>5</sup>David went out and was successful in every mission Saul sent him to do. So Saul placed him in charge of the soldiers, and this pleased all the troops as well as Saul's servants.

### *1 Samuel 19:1-7 (CEB)*

Saul ordered his son Jonathan and all his servants to kill David, but Jonathan, Saul's son, liked David very much. <sup>2</sup>So Jonathan warned David, "My father Saul is trying to kill you. Be on guard tomorrow morning. Stay somewhere safe and hide. <sup>3</sup>I'll go out and stand by my father in the field where you'll be. I'll talk to my father about you, and I'll tell you whatever I find out."

<sup>4</sup>So Jonathan spoke highly about David to his father Saul, telling him, "The king shouldn't do anything wrong to his servant David, because he hasn't wronged you. In fact, his actions have helped you greatly. <sup>5</sup>He risked his own life when he killed that Philistine, and the LORD won a great victory for all Israel. You saw it and were happy about it. Why then would you do something wrong to an innocent person by killing David for no reason?"

<sup>6</sup>Saul listened to Jonathan and then swore, "As surely as the LORD lives, David won't be executed." <sup>7</sup>So Jonathan summoned David and told him everything they had talked about. Then Jonathan brought David back to Saul, and David served Saul as he had previously.

*Have you ever been the better friend?*

I suppose we could all recount some stories of times in our lives when we felt part of a pretty one-sided friendship. Perhaps it was a difficult season in your friend's life when you were called to be simply loyal, looking past the moment, willing to be the "supporting actor."

Last month, we spent some time learning about the important Hebrew word, *hesed*. Here's a bit from that study:

This sort of love is faithful, unwavering, and sure. It is a love that seeks the well-being of others. It is active, in that *hesed* is not an attitude to be held, but an action to be performed. *Hesed* is a social word, lived out in relationship in community. *Hesed* is a love that endures; it is loyal. It is a covenantal love. Used 245 times in the Old Testament, *hesed* is most often used to speak of God's love for humanity

A covenantal love. A faithful love. A loyal love. That is *hesed*, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a truer example than Jonathan's love for David. Jonathan, seemingly no more than a supporting actor in David's story, actually shows more of God's heart than David often did. But first, some of their back story.

*Like father, like son?*

During the time that the Israelites settled in Canaan, they had no earthly king. The LORD God was their king. But as time wore on, the people, wanting to be like their neighbors, pushed harder and harder for a human king. In the end, God gave them what they wanted. God's prophet Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of the united

tribes of Israel. Saul quickly proved to be a disappointment. He was disobedient to God<sup>1</sup> and given to making rash decisions.

Once, Saul was even ready to kill his own son, Jonathan, for breaking one of Saul's battle orders. Only the intervention of the people saved Jonathan's life. After Saul disobeyed God a second time, we are told that "The LORD was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:35). God told his prophet Samuel to anoint a young shepherd named David as the next king of Israel. Not knowing that God had chosen

### Reading Bible Stories

It can be hard to know what to make of some Old Testament stories. Here are a few tips:

1. The stories tell us what happened, not what ought to have happened. There is not a clear moral to every story.
2. What people do in these narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Sometimes it is just the opposite!
3. All the stories are selectively told. Every writer has to pick and choose what details to include, even how the story will be told. This is true of the Bible too.
4. The stories are not written to answer all our theological questions. They may raise as many questions for you as they answer.
5. Do your best to close some of the historical and cultural distance between our world and ancient Israel. A few basic reference tools, like a Bible dictionary, will be helpful in this.

Here are two simple questions to keep in mind when you read Old Testament stories. First, what does the passage tell us about God's character, his activities, or his will? Second, what does the passage tell us about the story of Israel (the people of God)?

For more on this, see Fee and Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. It is written for laypeople and is excellent.

David to be his successor, Saul welcomed David into the royal court as a musician. But after David defeated the Philistine giant, Goliath, the mentally and spiritually deteriorating Saul began to suspect that David might be the one to whom God had given Saul's kingdom. And Saul's heart turned against David.

### *Jonathan*

Jonathan, Saul's son, first met David soon after his victory over Goliath and the Philistines. Like so many others during David's long life, Jonathan must have been drawn to the charismatic young man. We are told that Jonathan's soul was bound to David's. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. Jonathan made a covenant with David, even handing over his royal robe and sword. It is important for us to see that Jonathan offered all this to David without even a hint of reciprocity or reward.

Jonathan's covenantal friendship, his loyal love/*hesed*, was a gift freely given. Indeed, this pretty much characterized their relationship. Twice more, Jonathan would make a covenant with David and only on the third occasion are we explicitly told that the covenant was made mutually. In Jonathan's gift of friendship there is no *quid pro quo*; there is no transaction. Such is grace. And in his grace-filled love of David, Jonathan reflects the faithful love/*hesed* that God holds for his people. Both Jonathan and God stand ready to act, for action is what true *hesed* demands.

### *Supporting David*

Reflecting a friendship based upon the bonding of souls, Jonathan must always walk a tightrope between his loyalty to his father Saul and his loyalty to David. In today's second

passage from 1 Samuel, Jonathan persuades his father to spare David's life and restore him to the royal court. Later, Jonathan and David would conspire in an attempt to discern Saul's true intentions toward David (see chapter 20). Even then, all that Jonathan asks of David is that, no matter what happens, David would always be faithful

---

<sup>1</sup> Recall the story from just a few weeks, ago, June 18. Saul did not walk humbly with God but went his own way, thinking he knew better.

to Jonathan's own family. At their last meeting (chapter 23), Jonathan eagerly abdicates to David his own right to be Saul's successor. Not long after, Jonathan is killed in battle. It would be many years before David would act upon his promise to be faithful to Jonathan's descendants.

### *The Death of Jonathan*

Jonathan never really broke with his father, even as he worked to ensure David's escape from Saul. After a long time on the run from Saul, David and his men seek refuge with Achish, the king of Gath, one of the Philistine city-states. David seems prepared to do battle alongside the Philistines and against Saul. However, the Philistine lords reject David's help, fearing that he is still loyal to the Israelites, Saul or no Saul.

#### 1 and 2 Samuel

1 and 2 Samuel are actually one long literary work. Ancient Hebrew scrolls couldn't hold the entire book of Samuel, so the book was copied onto two scrolls. This is true of the Book of Kings and the book of Chronicles as well. However, it is not true of New Testament books such as 1 and 2 Corinthians, which are two different letters written by Paul.

The book of Samuel tells the story of Israel's transition from the rule of judges to a kingdom, roughly 1,000 years before Jesus. Not only do kings emerge (Saul the first, David the second, Solomon the third) but also prophets. Israel's kings would not have the absolute freedom typical of kings in the ancient near east. Instead, the kings of Israel were subject to God and to the covenant. Israel's prophets would hold the kings (and the people!) to account. The prophet Samuel brought God's word to King Saul. Nathan did the same for David.

The Philistines and the Israelites go on to fight a great battle at Mt. Gilboa, which is southeast of Nazareth. The Philistines rout the Israelites, killing Saul and three sons, including Jonathan, who fought alongside his father.

When David learns that Saul and Jonathan were killed, his mourning is profound for the loss of both father and son. 2 Samuel 1:17-27 records David's song of lamentation which closes with:

"O my dear brother Jonathan, I'm crushed by your death. Your friendship was a miracle-wonder, love far exceeding anything I've known – or hope to know."

from *The Message*

#### *Loyalty and friendship*

Though soul mates, the relationship of Jonathan and David is pretty one-sided; Jonathan gives far more than he ever gets. If anyone ever had a true blue supporter, it was David. Reflecting on Jonathan's love for David, Patricia Tull writes, "Friendship often begins with the unmotivated kindness of one person toward another, a generous, uncalculated action offered simply from the joy of companionship. Jonathan's spontaneous love initiated the friendship and over the course of

several episodes he continues to nourish it. He asks nothing of David in the present; all he asks for the future is to be remembered for the sake of his descendents. . . Jonathan stands in good company with the God whose love for humankind precedes and exceeds all possible returns . . . [Jonathan] is the friend few of us deserve but most of us would dearly love to have."<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan could have acted like his father, working always to protect his own interests. Instead, Jonathan chose the path of friendship, covenant, and trust. He pledged himself to work sacrificially for David's goodwill.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. Borrowing a vivid image from the story of Absalom's death (one of David's sons) in 2 Samuel, Professor Tull writes that friendships and marriages "hang between heaven and earth." They carry our loftiest ambitions in life, but also all our human limitations.

---

<sup>2</sup>from Patricia Tull's essay, "Jonathan's Gift of Friendship," in the April 2004 issue of *Interpretation*. She is professor of Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Indeed, the phrase ‘soul mates’ is probably most often used in the context of marriage. How are marriages and deep friendships similar? How do they differ? Look back over your life and reflect on the truly deep, close soul-bonding friendships you’ve had . . . if you’ve had any. Do you feel like you chose that person or did it ‘just happen’? Did you offer your friendship freely or in the hope of some immediate gain? How can we better recognize and reciprocate the gifts of friendship that are offered to us?

2. In his book, *The Dignity of Difference*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote, “For life to have personal meaning, there must be people who matter to us, and for whom we matter, unconditionally and nonsubstitutably. Ask someone what his or her greatest source of happiness is, and they are unlikely to mention their latest car, their last holiday, their new designer jeans. They are, or were, more likely to say: my marriage partner, my children, my reputation, my friends. Lose these and we lose the very concept of happiness, of a life well lived, of dedication to something larger than ourselves.” Do you agree with the rabbi? How would you go about talking to one of our youth about the importance of true friends? How would you describe a true friend? What advice would you give regarding the nurturing of true friendship? What would you say if a youth asks you why so many people have so few deep, true friends . . . soul mates?

## Daily Bible Readings

*This week: The stories of Jonathan*

**Monday, 1 Samuel 14:1-46** Jonathan leads the Israelites to victory but is condemned by his father.

**Tuesday, 1 Samuel 16** David is anointed by Samuel and goes to the royal court.

**Wednesday, 1 Samuel 20** Jonathan and David hatch a plot.

**Thursday, 1 Samuel 23:15-19** David and Jonathan make a covenant.

**Friday, 1 Samuel 31** The deaths of Saul and Jonathan.

**Saturday, 2 Samuel 9** Many years later, David shows kindness to Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth.

## Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Exodus.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying Paul’s letter to the Colossians.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

This week: “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”

Our next series, starting July 9: *The Truth About Angels*

## Coming in October 2018: A cruise to Israel with Scott & Patti

For more information go to [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org)