David and Jonathan

Bible Stories Anthology — 1 Samuel 18–20

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

The Prince Who Gave Away His Crown

He was the king's eldest son, a proven warrior, the heir to the throne of Israel. The other young man was a shepherd from Bethlehem who had just walked in from the valley of Elah carrying a giant's head.

On that day the prince did something no heir to a throne would ever do. He took off his royal robe and put it on the shepherd. He gave him his sword, his bow and his belt. And he made a covenant with him — a solemn, binding promise before God — because he loved him as his own soul.

Over the years that followed, the king — the prince's own father — tried again and again to kill the shepherd. And the prince stood between them, warned his friend, pleaded for him, and once had a spear thrown at his own head for defending him. He knew, and said out loud, that the shepherd would take the throne that should have been his. He was glad of it. *Thou shalt be king over Israel*, he told him, *and I shall be next unto thee.*

He never lived to see it. But the promise he and David made outlived them both.

This is the story of Jonathan and David — the greatest friendship in the Bible.

The Setting

When. The reign of Saul, Israel's first king, about 1050–1010 B.C. by the reckoning most often used. Paul says Saul reigned **"by the space of forty years"** (Acts 13:21). David was a young man; Jonathan, a seasoned commander, was probably some years older.

The king who was set aside. Saul had begun well, but he disobeyed God twice in ways that mattered (1 Samuel 13; 15). The second time, as Samuel turned to leave, Saul grabbed the hem of Samuel's robe and

it tore, and Samuel said, **"The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou"** (1 Samuel 15:28). God then sent Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint the youngest son of Jesse, and **"the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward ... But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul"** (1 Samuel 16:13-14). Saul was still on the throne. But God had already chosen his successor, and it was not his son.

Jonathan. Saul's eldest son was no weakling in his father's shadow. Years earlier, with only his armour-bearer beside him, he had climbed a cliff at Michmash and attacked a Philistine garrison, saying, **"there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few"** (1 Samuel 14:6). God gave Israel a great victory that day. Jonathan had the same kind of faith David showed against Goliath. Perhaps that is why his soul was knit to David's the moment he heard him speak.

Where. Saul's court at **Gibeah**, his home town in the tribe of Benjamin, a few miles north of Jerusalem (which was not yet an Israelite city). David's home was **Bethlehem**, a few miles to the south.

The administration. The **Mosaic Law**.

The Story, Told Faithfully

Knit Together

The story begins the moment the story of Goliath ends. Saul had just asked the young champion whose son he was, and David had answered, **"I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Beth-lehemite"** (1 Samuel 17:58).

> **1 Samuel 18:1** *And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:2** *And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.*

"When he had made an end of speaking." Jonathan had been standing there, listening to David talk to his father. Something in what David said — the faith that had faced the giant — reached him.

"The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David." The Hebrew verb is *qashar*, to bind or tie together, as with a cord. The same expression is used of Jacob's love for Benjamin: **"his life is bound up in the lad's life"** (Genesis 44:30). It describes a bond so close that two lives are tied into one.

"Jonathan loved him as his own soul." "Soul" here, *nephesh*, means *self*, *life*. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. It is the language of God's own law: **"thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"** (Leviticus 19:18). The word for love, *ahab*, is the ordinary Hebrew word for love of every kind. In these very chapters it is used of all Israel's love for David (18:16) and of Saul's servants' (18:22), and later of a king's political friendship: **"Hiram was ever a lover of David"** (1 Kings 5:1).

> **1 Samuel 18:3** *Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:4** *And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.*

“Made a covenant.” Literally, *cut a covenant* (*karath berith*), the same expression used of God’s covenant with Abraham, where animals were cut in two (Genesis 15). A covenant was the most solemn and binding agreement in the ancient world, sworn before God, with a curse on the one who broke it.

“Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him.” This is the most remarkable detail in the story. The **robe** (*me’il*) was the long outer garment of a person of rank. It is the same word used of the robe Samuel wore — the very robe Saul tore when Samuel told him the kingdom had been torn from him (15:27-28). Now Saul’s son, the crown prince, *took off* his royal robe and *gave* it to David. What Saul lost by grabbing, Jonathan gave away freely.

“Even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.” In a covenant, exchanging garments and weapons meant exchanging identities: *what is mine is yours; my enemies are your enemies; I stand in your place and you in mine.* And there is a detail from earlier in Saul’s reign that makes the gift even greater. The Philistines had kept iron-working out of Israel, and at one battle **“there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found”** (13:22). Jonathan’s sword may have been one of the only swords in Israel. He gave it to David.

As this series understands it, Jonathan was doing more than giving a gift. He was acknowledging, in the language every onlooker would understand, that David was worthy to wear the prince’s robe — and perhaps that God had chosen him. Jonathan later says so plainly (23:17).

“Saul Hath Slain His Thousands”

> **1 Samuel 18:5** *And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul’s servants.*

“Behaved himself wisely.” The Hebrew *sakal* means to act prudently and also to succeed. It appears four times in this chapter (18:5, 14, 15, 30). David did everything well.

> **1 Samuel 18:6** *And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:7** *And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:8** *And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:9** *And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.*

“The women answered one another.” Women greeting a victorious army with song and dance was an old custom in Israel (Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34). They sang in two answering groups.

“Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” In Hebrew poetry “thousands … ten thousands” is a common pairing meaning simply *a great many* (compare Psalm 91:7). The women may have meant only praise for both men. But Saul heard it as a comparison, and he heard David coming out ahead.

“What can he have more but the kingdom?” Saul knew. Samuel had told him the kingdom would go to a better man.

“Saul eyed David.” The Hebrew means to look at with suspicion — a jealous eye. From that day Saul watched David as a rival. **Envy** had entered Saul’s heart, and it would rule the rest of his life.

The Javelin

> **1 Samuel 18:10** *And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul’s hand.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:11** *And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:12** *And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul.*

“The evil spirit from God came upon Saul.” As this series understands it, and as the library’s study *God: Deliverer, Not Destroyer* sets out for this very phrase, this is the Hebrew idiom that speaks of God *doing* what He *permits*. When **“the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul”** (16:14), Saul, having rejected God, was left open to an evil spirit that God did not prevent. The judgment was the withdrawal of God’s presence, and the evil rushed into the space Saul had emptied.

“He prophesied.” Here the word means he *raved* — a frenzied, uncontrolled speaking, the counterfeit of true prophecy.

“David played with his hand.” David had first come to court as the musician whose harp brought Saul relief (16:23).

“Saul cast the javelin.” The spear that should have been aimed at the Philistines was aimed at the man who had saved Israel from them. **“David avoided out of his presence twice.”** Twice David dodged.

“Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul.” Here is the root of it. Saul was not really afraid of David. He was afraid because he could see that God was with David and no longer with him.

> **1 Samuel 18:14** *And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:16** *But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.*

“Went out and came in before them.” An **idiom** for leading the people in their daily life and in war. David lived and fought among them.

Two Daughters and a Deadly Dowry

Saul tried a new tactic: marriage. He had promised his daughter to the man who killed Goliath (17:25). Now he offered David his elder daughter Merab, on condition that David keep fighting the Philistines. **“For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him”** (18:17). Then he gave Merab to another man.

> **1 Samuel 18:20** *And Michal Saul’s daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.*

> **1 Samuel 18:21** *And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.*

"Michal Saul's daughter loved David." This is the only place in the Old Testament narratives where a woman is said to love a man.

"That she may be a snare to him." Saul would use his own daughter as bait.

> **1 Samuel 18:23** *And Saul's servants spake those words in the ears of David. And David said, Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:25** *And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.*

"I am a poor man." A bridegroom paid a *mohar*, a bride-price, to the bride's father. For a king's daughter it would be enormous. David had nothing.

"An hundred foreskins of the Philistines." Saul named a price in Philistine lives. The Philistines were the one neighbouring people who did not practise circumcision, so the foreskins were proof that the dead were Philistines. Saul expected David to die in the attempt.

> **1 Samuel 18:27** *Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:28** *And Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal Saul's daughter loved him.*
>
> **1 Samuel 18:29** *And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David's enemy continually.*

"Two hundred." David paid double.

"Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal … loved him." God was with David, the people loved David, his own son loved David, and now his own daughter loved David. Everything Saul did to destroy David only made David greater.

"Saul became David's enemy continually." The word "continually" is literally *all the days*. For the rest of his life.

Jonathan Pleads for His Friend

> **1 Samuel 19:1** *And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.*
>
> **1 Samuel 19:2** *But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself:*

Saul's jealousy was now open. He ordered his own son to kill David.

"But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David." Notice how the narrator names him: *Saul's son*. The tension is in the title. His father's son, his friend's friend.

> **1 Samuel 19:4** *And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good:*
>
> **1 Samuel 19:5** *For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?*
>
> **1 Samuel 19:6** *And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.*

"Let not the king sin against his servant." Jonathan did not flatter or threaten. He reasoned with his father, respectfully and truthfully, and he called it what it was: sin.

"He did put his life in his hand." An **idiom**: he risked his life.

"The LORD wrought a great salvation." Jonathan gave God the credit. *You saw it, and you rejoiced. Why would you shed innocent blood?*

"Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain." For a moment, Jonathan's words won. It did not last.

Escape by the Window

> **1 Samuel 19:9** *And the evil spirit from the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand.*
>
> **1 Samuel 19:10** *And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.*

Once again the javelin flew. This time it went into the wall. Saul's oath was broken, and David fled.

That night Saul sent men to watch David's house and kill him in the morning. Michal warned him and let him down through a window, as Rahab had let down the spies in Jericho. Then she put a household idol (*teraphim*) in the bed with goats' hair at its head and covered it, and told the soldiers David was sick (19:11-17). That there was a *teraphim* in David's house at all shows how much of the old idolatry still lingered in Israel, even in the king's family.

David fled to Samuel at Ramah. Saul sent three groups of soldiers to take him, and each time, when they came near the company of prophets, **"the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied."** Finally Saul went himself, and the same thing happened to him: he stripped off his royal garments and lay on the ground all day and night (19:18-24). God protected David without David lifting a hand. And as this series understands it, the king who had taken the robe of rank for granted lay stripped before the prophet who had told him the kingdom was torn away.

"There Is But a Step Between Me and Death"

> **1 Samuel 20:1** *And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?*

> **1 Samuel 20:2** *And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so.*

"What have I done?" Three questions, the same question three ways. David had done nothing but serve.

"It is not so." Jonathan could not believe his father still meant to kill David. He believed the best of his father. It is to his credit, and it shows how honest Jonathan was: he assumed others were as honest as he was.

> **1 Samuel 20:3** *And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:4** *Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.*

"There is but a step between me and death." A vivid **metaphor**: death was one step away.

"Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee." A blank cheque. That is covenant love.

The Plan

> **1 Samuel 20:5** *And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:6** *If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.*

"To morrow is the new moon." The first day of each month in Israel's lunar calendar was a festival, marked by special sacrifices and trumpets (Numbers 10:10; 28:11-15), and at Saul's court by a royal feast. As the king's son-in-law and commander, David was expected at the king's table.

"A yearly sacrifice there for all the family." A family clan gathering for sacrifice, like Elkanah's yearly journey in Hannah's story.

> **1 Samuel 20:8** *Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father?*

"Deal kindly." The word is *chesed*: covenant faithfulness, loyal love, the love that keeps its promises. It is the key word of this chapter and of the whole friendship.

"A covenant of the LORD." Not just a covenant between two men — a covenant with God as witness and guarantor.

"If there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself." David offered his life into Jonathan's hands. *If I have done wrong, kill me yourself.*

A Covenant With the House of David

> **1 Samuel 20:12** *And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee;*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:13** *The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father.*

"The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan." An **oath formula**: *may God punish me severely if I fail you.*

"And the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father." Jonathan was saying something extraordinary: *may God be with you as He once was with my father* — as king.

> **1 Samuel 20:14** *And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not:*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:15** *But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:16** *So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:17** *And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.*

Here Jonathan looked into the future and saw it clearly. **"When the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one."** He knew David would be king. He knew what new kings in the ancient world did to the families of the kings before them: they wiped them out, to remove every rival. And he knew that his own family would be *the* rival family.

"The kindness of the LORD." *Chesed YHWH* — the LORD's own kind of loyal love. Jonathan asked David to treat his family not merely with human kindness but with the faithfulness God shows.

"Thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever." Notice the wordplay: *cut* a covenant, *cut off* kindness, *cut off* enemies. Jonathan was asking David to swear that the covenant they *cut* would never be *cut off*.

"Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David." The covenant now reached beyond the two men to their families after them.

"Because he loved him." For the third time, the reason is the same.

Three Arrows

> **1 Samuel 20:18** *Then Jonathan said to David, To morrow is the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:20** *And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:21** *And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for there is peace to thee, and no hurt; as the LORD liveth.*

> **1 Samuel 20:22** *But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee; go thy way: for the LORD hath sent thee away.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:23** *And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, the LORD be between thee and me for ever.*

The signal. David would hide by a landmark stone. Jonathan would come out as though for archery practice and shoot three arrows. If he shouted to his servant boy that the arrows were *on this side*, David was safe. If he shouted *the arrows are beyond thee*, David must flee. No one watching would suspect a thing, and the boy would not know he was carrying a message.

"The LORD be between thee and me for ever." God Himself stood between them as the witness of their covenant.

The Empty Seat

> **1 Samuel 20:24** *So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:25** *And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:26** *Nevertheless Saul spake not any thing that day: for he thought, Something hath befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean.*

"A seat by the wall." Saul sat with his back to the wall, a king who trusted no one. **Abner**, his cousin and army commander, sat beside him.

"David's place was empty." The empty seat is the centre of the scene.

"He is not clean." Under the Law, a man who was ceremonially unclean — through contact with a dead body, for instance — could not eat a sacrificial meal (Leviticus 7:20-21). On the first day, Saul assumed that was the reason.

> **1 Samuel 20:27** *And it came to pass on the morrow, which was the second day of the month, that David's place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to day?*

"The son of Jesse." Saul would not say David's name. Calling a man only "the son of so-and-so" was a way of belittling him.

> **1 Samuel 20:30** *Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:31** *For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die.*

"Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman." A coarse insult. In Hebrew idiom it attacks the son, not really the mother: *you rebellious good-for-nothing*. **"To the confusion of thy mother's nakedness"** means *to your shame and your mother's disgrace*. Saul was calling his son a traitor.

“As long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom.” Saul said out loud what he believed: this was about the throne. He thought he was fighting for his son. His son did not want what he was fighting for.

> **1 Samuel 20:32** *And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:33** *And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:34** *So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.*

“What hath he done?” The same question David had asked (20:1). Jonathan asked it of his father’s face.

“Saul cast a javelin at him.” The same javelin Saul had thrown at David, now thrown at his own son. Envy had turned Saul against his own flesh.

“He was grieved for David.” Notice where Jonathan’s grief went. His father had just tried to kill him. He grieved for David, **“because his father had done him shame”** — because his father had publicly disgraced his friend.

The Farewell

> **1 Samuel 20:35** *And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad with him.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:36** *And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:37** *And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, Is not the arrow beyond thee?*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:38** *And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan’s lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:39** *But the lad knew not any thing: only Jonathan and David knew the matter.*

“Is not the arrow beyond thee?” The signal of danger. **“Make speed, haste, stay not.”** The words were shouted to the boy, but they were meant for David, hidden nearby. Three commands in a row, each more urgent — *hurry, quick, don’t stop.*

> **1 Samuel 20:40** *And Jonathan gave his artillery unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:41** *And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:42** *And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.*

“His artillery.” In 1611 *artillery* meant any missile weapons — here, the bow and arrows.

“Fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times.” David bowed to Jonathan as to the king’s son — the man who by birth should have been his king.

“They kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.” In the ancient Near East, men greeted and parted with a kiss, as they still do in many parts of the world: Moses kissed his father-in-law (Exodus 18:7), and Samuel kissed Saul when he anointed him (1 Samuel 10:1). Two friends who expected never to see each other again wept together, **“until David exceeded”** — until David wept the most.

“The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever.” Jonathan’s last words to David in this parting were the covenant again — reaching to their children.

After the Parting

David fled, and for years Saul hunted him through the wilderness. Jonathan saw David only once more that we know of:

> **1 Samuel 23:16** *And Jonathan Saul’s son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.*
>
> **1 Samuel 23:17** *And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth.*
>
> **1 Samuel 23:18** *And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.*

“Strengthened his hand in God.” Jonathan did not strengthen David in himself, or in Jonathan. He strengthened him *in God* — reminded him of God’s promise. That is what a true friend does.

“Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee.” The heir to the throne said to the man who would take it: *you will be king, and I will be your second*. There is no bitterness, no jealousy. Jonathan’s father was consumed by envy of David. Jonathan rejoiced in God’s choice of David. **“And that also Saul my father knoweth.”** Saul knew it too, and fought against it anyway.

Jonathan never became David’s second. He died beside his father fighting the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:2). When David heard, he wrote a lament:

> **2 Samuel 1:23** *Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.*
>
> **2 Samuel 1:25** *How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.*
>
> **2 Samuel 1:26** *I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.*

“In their death they were not divided.” Jonathan stayed loyal to his friend and to his father. He never took up arms against Saul, and he died at his side.

“How are the mighty fallen.” The refrain appears three times in the lament.

“Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.” In recent years some have claimed that this line, together with the kiss and the phrase “loved him as his own soul,” shows that David and Jonathan had a sexual or romantic relationship. Adults reading this story will hear that claim, so it deserves a plain answer.

- **The language is covenant language.** “Loved him as his own soul” echoes Leviticus 19:18. The same word *ahab* is used of the whole nation’s love for David (18:16), of Saul’s servants (18:22), and of King Hiram’s political friendship (1 Kings 5:1). “Soul knit with soul” is used of a father and son (Genesis 44:30).
- **The kiss was the ordinary greeting and farewell between men** in that culture (Exodus 18:7; 1 Samuel 10:1).
- **Both men were married and had children.** Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth is the subject of the next story in this series.
- **The Law under which both men lived forbade such relationships outright** (Leviticus 18:22), and David’s sins, when he committed them, are recorded and condemned without hesitation (2 Samuel 11–12). Nothing is said against David and Jonathan’s friendship; it is held up as honourable throughout.
- **“Passing the love of women” is a lament’s comparison.** David was saying that Jonathan’s loyal, self-giving love — a love that cost Jonathan his throne and risked his life — went beyond even the devotion of a wife. It is the language of grief at its highest pitch, and a figure of comparison, not a description of desire.

As this series understands it, the story shows something our own age has almost forgotten: that two men can love each other deeply, faithfully and self-sacrificially as friends and brothers, and that such friendship is one of God’s great gifts.

“For Jonathan’s sake.” Years later, when David was king, he asked, **“Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”** (2 Samuel 9:1). He found Jonathan’s lame son and brought him to eat at the king’s table for the rest of his life. When, later still, David had to hand over men of Saul’s family, **“the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD’s oath that was between them”** (2 Samuel 21:7). The covenant two young men cut in Gibeah was kept to the next generation. That story is told in full in *David and Mephibosheth*, the next story in this series.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

The heir who stepped aside. Jonathan was the natural heir to the throne, and he gladly gave way to the one God had anointed. Centuries later another man stood at the head of a great following, and when his disciples worried that people were leaving him for Jesus, John the Baptist answered as Jonathan might have: **“He must increase, but I must decrease”** (John 3:30). As this series understands it, both men show the same heart: joy that God’s chosen King should have the throne.

The son of David. The man Jonathan clothed with his royal robe became Israel’s greatest king, and God promised him a descendant who would reign forever. That descendant is Jesus Christ, **“the son of David”** (Matthew 1:1). Like David, He was anointed long before He was crowned. Like David, He was hunted by the ruler of His day and rejected by those who feared losing their power.

A friend who laid down his life. Jonathan risked his life for his friend. Jesus Christ went further. **“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants … but I have called you friends”** (John

15:13-15). He laid down His life, was raised from the dead, and ascended to God's right hand — and He calls those who believe *friends*. **"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"** (Proverbs 18:24).

A robe given. Jonathan took off his robe and put it on David. As this series understands it, the picture fits what God does for believers in Christ: **"he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness"** (Isaiah 61:10). **"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"** (Galatians 3:27).

A covenant kept to the children. David's kindness to Mephibosheth *for Jonathan's sake* is one of scripture's clearest pictures of grace — kindness shown to one who has done nothing to earn it, for the sake of another. So God shows kindness to us for Christ's sake (Ephesians 4:32).

To the Grace Administration

Friendship in the body of Christ. Believers are members of one body (1 Corinthians 12:27), and God means them to love one another the way Jonathan loved David: **"Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another"** (Romans 12:10).

No envy. Saul's envy destroyed him. Jonathan had every human reason to envy David, and did not. **"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves"** (Philippians 2:3). **"For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work"** (James 3:16).

Strengthen one another in God. Jonathan went to David in the wilderness and **"strengthened his hand in God."** Believers are told the same: **"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do"** (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Love in deed, not only in word. Jonathan's love cost him his throne and nearly his life. **"We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren ... let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth"** (1 John 3:16, 18).

Speaking truth to power. Jonathan told his own father, the king, that he was about to sin. Faithful friends tell the truth: **"Faithful are the wounds of a friend"** (Proverbs 27:6).

Promises kept. God keeps His covenant to believers for ever. Believers are to be people whose word is kept, even to the next generation.

To the Topic of Friendship and Loyalty

- **True friendship is rooted in God** — "the LORD be between me and thee."
- **A true friend strengthens you in God,** not in himself.
- **Covenant love keeps its promises,** even when it costs.
- **Envy destroys the envious** — and those around him.
- **Loyalty can be tested between two people you love;** Jonathan stayed true to both his father and his friend, without betraying either.
- **A friend tells the truth,** even to a king.
- **God's choices call for joy, not jealousy.**

The Main Takeaway

The moment David finished speaking to Saul after Goliath, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David," and Jonathan, the king's heir, made a covenant with him, gave him his own royal robe, sword, bow and belt, and loved him as his own soul; while Saul, consumed by envy because "the LORD was with" David, tried again and again to kill him — even throwing a javelin at Jonathan for defending him — Jonathan warned David, pleaded for him, and sent him away with the signal of the arrows, binding him to show "the kindness of the LORD" to his house for ever; he told David, "thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee," and David kept the covenant after Jonathan's death by showing kindness to his son — a picture of the friendship God gives, of the heir who gladly gives way to God's anointed King, and of the Friend who laid down His life for His friends.

- **Covenant friendship is rooted in God** and kept for ever.
- **Jonathan gave away what was his by birth,** because God had chosen David.
- **Envy made Saul an enemy "continually."**
- **A true friend strengthens you in God.**
- **Love shows itself in deeds, at cost.**
- **Kindness shown "for another's sake"** pictures God's grace in Christ.

For Our Learning — The People

- **Jonathan.** Saul's eldest son and heir; a warrior of faith (Michmash); David's covenant friend; died with his father on Mount Gilboa.
- **David.** Son of Jesse of Bethlehem, anointed by Samuel, the slayer of Goliath; Saul's commander and son-in-law; hunted by Saul; later king.
- **Saul.** Israel's first king, rejected by God for disobedience; consumed by envy of David; tried repeatedly to kill him.
- **Michal.** Saul's younger daughter, who loved David, married him, and helped him escape.
- **Merab.** Saul's elder daughter, promised to David and given to another man.
- **Abner.** Saul's cousin and army commander, who sat beside him at the new moon feast.
- **Samuel.** The prophet at Ramah, with whom David took refuge.
- **The lad.** Jonathan's servant boy, who fetched the arrows and knew nothing.
- **Mephibosheth.** Jonathan's son, to whom David later showed kindness for Jonathan's sake.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Cutting a covenant** before the LORD, with oaths and curses.
- **Exchanging garments and weapons** in covenant: sharing identity and cause.
- **The robe (*me'il*)** as a garment of rank.
- **Women's victory songs** with tambourines and dancing, sung in answering groups.
- **The king's musician** playing the harp in the court.
- **Bride-price (*mohar*)** paid to the bride's father; a king setting the price.
- **Household idols (*teraphim*)** lingering in Israelite homes.

- **Letting a man down through a window** in a city wall.
- **The new moon festival** and the king's feast; seats in order of rank.
- **Ceremonial uncleanness** barring a man from a sacrificial meal.
- **Calling a man "the son of Jesse"** to belittle him.
- **Archery signals** and a servant who did not know the message.
- **Bowing to the ground three times** before a superior.
- **Men kissing in greeting and farewell.**
- **Laments for fallen heroes,** written and taught to the people.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Metaphor** — "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David" (18:1); "there is but a step between me and death" (20:3).
- **Idiom** — "went out and came in before them" (18:16), led them; "he did put his life in his hand" (19:5), risked his life; "strengthened his hand in God" (23:16), encouraged him; "son of the perverse rebellious woman" (20:30), an insult aimed at the son.
- **Idiom of permission** — "the evil spirit from God came upon Saul" (18:10).
- **Parallelism / hyperbole** — "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (18:7).
- **Erotesis (rhetorical question)** — "What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin?" (20:1); "what can he have more but the kingdom?" (18:8).
- **Oath formula** — "The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan" (20:13).
- **Paronomasia** — *cut* a covenant, *cut off* kindness, *cut off* enemies (20:15-16).
- **Asyndeton** — "Make speed, haste, stay not" (20:38), urgent commands without connectives.
- **Epistrophe / refrain** — "How are the mighty fallen" (2 Samuel 1:19, 25, 27).
- **Simile** — "swifter than eagles … stronger than lions" (2 Samuel 1:23).

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Jonathan's soul was knit with David's the day David spoke with Saul after Goliath.**
- **Jonathan gave David his robe, garments, sword, bow and girdle,** and cut a covenant with him.
- **Saul's hatred came from envy and from fear, "because the LORD was with him."**
- **Saul threw his javelin at David (18:11; 19:10) — and at his own son Jonathan (20:33).**
- **Jonathan pleaded for David and called his father's plan sin.**
- **The covenant reached to "the house of David" and Jonathan's descendants for ever.**
- **The arrows were a pre-arranged signal;** the lad knew nothing.
- **Jonathan told David, "thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee."**
- **Jonathan "strengthened his hand in God."**
- **Jonathan died with Saul at Gilboa;** David lamented him.

- **David kept the covenant by showing kindness to Mephibosheth “for Jonathan’s sake.”**

God’s Will and Intent

- **God gives faithful friends,** and means friendship to be rooted in Him.
- **God keeps covenant,** and wants His people to keep their word.
- **God chooses His king,** and blesses those who accept His choice with joy.
- **God protects His anointed** from those who seek his life.
- **God judges envy and self-will,** which consumed Saul.
- **God shows kindness for another’s sake** — for Christ’s sake — to those who have no claim of their own.
- **God was preparing the Son of David,** Jesus Christ — crucified, raised, and ascended — the Friend who laid down His life for His friends.