

Jonathan

The Point: Don't let cultural expectations define your role.

Session Passages: 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-4; 23:15-18

1 Samuel 18:1-4

Connection to The Point. The prevailing culture would've expected Jonathan to be king after his father. However, Jonathan's act of giving the clothes and armaments reserved for the heir to the throne made a significant statement of how Jonathan saw his role and relationship to David.

Background information. Scripture introduces Jonathan suddenly as one of King Saul's commanders (1 Sam. 13:1-4). The writer did not reveal Jonathan's relationship to Saul until later (v. 16). Jonathan's battlefield observations during the earlier conflicts between Israel and the Philistines (chs. 13–15) followed by watching Saul and the rest of the army quiver in fear during the forty days of Goliath's morning and evening challenges to Israel (ch. 17) perhaps degraded his opinion of Saul's leadership. David had done what Israel's king should have done; he led the fight against Israel's enemy. Therefore when David killed the giant and the army chased the Philistine army to a humiliating defeat, Jonathan riveted his devotion on the new champion of Israel.

When David had finished speaking with Saul **After David had finished talking with Saul** **When he [David] had made an end of speaking unto Saul** (v. 1). David's post-killing-Goliath interview with the king (17:55-58) had concluded. His fame in Israel would soon soar rapidly.

Jonathan was bound to David **Jonathan became one in spirit with David** **Jonathan was knit with the soul of David** (v. 1). Although already known by the royal family because of his soothing music (16:14-23), Jonathan now found in David a soul mate. *Bound* *Became one* *Knit* literally means to bind, tie, or confine, here as in a deep family relationship. Rather than becoming potential rivals, they became like brothers. Though they differed in many ways—Jonathan the firstborn son of a king and David the last born son of a shepherd—they became one in spirit. Jonathan, already a commander in Israel's army, had to be at least twenty years old but perhaps could have been much older than David. Yet they also had much in common. Both demonstrated courage in fighting the enemy and both possessed profound faith in the Lord.

Loved him as much as he loved himself **Loved him as his own soul** (v. 1). The writer wasted no time in describing Jonathan's love for David. Jonathan previously had shown little interest in David, the harpist who had soothed his father's tormented soul. However, his recent heroism had kindled within Jonathan's heart a deep love for David.

While some rush to form an unsound opinion concerning the nature of their relationship, no possible scriptural basis exists to describe their relationship as going beyond that of two friends. The Hebrew word used in this verse also described Saul's fondness for David (16:21). If the writer intended to mean their relationship included homosexual activity or desire, another Hebrew word meaning "to know" would have been used. That word is never used to describe the relationship between Jonathan and David. Nor would this gel with David's commitment to God's word, as seen in Psalm 119, which clearly prohibits homosexual activity.

Saul kept David with him **Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more** (v. 2). The prophet Samuel had warned Israel that the kings they desired would take their sons and daughters, their servants, and their livestock (8:11-17). When David served only as a musician, he stayed at the king's residence only when Saul's melancholy disposition required it (17:15). But having killed the giant and brought about a great victory over the Philistines, Saul gladly honored this promising young soldier by bringing him to live permanently in the royal residence.

Jonathan and David made a covenant with David (v. 3). *Made a covenant* reflects a technical phrase meaning "to cut a covenant" that referred to the ritual practice of sacrificing an animal and cutting it in two. The covenanting parties would walk

through the pieces of the animal, each vowing not to break the covenant on the pain of death. In a covenant, one party would solemnly pledge to bless or to serve the other in a specific way. Although the son of the king and heir apparent to the throne, the language suggests that Jonathan took the initiative to make an unusual covenant with David. Without stating it in definite terms, at the very least they pledged their friendship and loyalty to one another.

Jonathan removedtook off the robe he was wearing and gave it to DavidJonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David (v. 4). The royal robe identified Jonathan's status as the king's son. His act of stripping off his robe and giving it to David might indicate he had at least some knowledge of Samuel's secret anointing of David as the future king of Israel. Later it would become clear to him (20:14-15,31-32; 23:17). By giving his robe to David, Jonathan acknowledged that he believed David would one day succeed Saul as king of Israel.

Along with his military tunic, his sword, his bow, and his beltAlong with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his beltAnd his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle (v. 4). During this covenant moment Jonathan yielded all the symbols of his royalty, his daily warrior's garment and belt along with his weapons to David. These gifts represented his willingness to surrender his right to the throne and to transfer it to Israel's new champion. By doing so, Jonathan expressed his loyalty to David and his acceptance of God's will for Israel and David.

1 Samuel 19:1-4

Connection to The Point. It might be assumed that Jonathan would support his own father's actions and opinions, but instead Jonathan spoke up against Saul's erroneous beliefs about David.

The setting. Saul's festering jealousy over David's successes led Saul to make several attempts to kill him. First, Saul tried to kill David by spearing him, failing twice (18:10-11). Then he assigned David to a command that took him into conflict with the Philistines, where Saul hoped his commander would become a casualty of the fighting (vv. 12-19). Saul crafted another plan involving his servants and a daughter; however, that plan did not succeed either (vv. 20-29). Driven by paranoid jealousy and what he perceived as a serious threat to his throne and dynasty, Saul ramped up attacks on his rival.

Saul ordered his son Jonathan and all his servants to kill DavidSaul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill DavidSaul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David (v. 1). Saul's murderous impulse had boiled up in intensity. When the Philistines failed to kill David, Saul resorted to plotting yet another sinister effort to eliminate him. Up to this point, apparently few knew about Saul's attempts to kill his young rival. As every attempt failed, his fear of David's threat to the throne increasingly consumed Saul. The king no longer disguised his thoughts and talked openly with his son and officers regarding his intent. He likely spoke of David's death as a necessary evil so he explicitly ordered his son and attendants to assassinate David. By telling Jonathan, Saul unwittingly provided a way for David to learn about the escalation of the conflict.

Jonathan liked David very muchJonathan had taken a great liking to DavidJonathan Saul's son delighted much in David (v. 12). *LikedLikingDelight* means "to take pleasure in." Ironically, the king had earlier sent his servants to David with the message, "the king is pleased with you" (18:22), using the same Hebrew word. But unlike his father, Jonathan spoke truthfully. He loved David as his own soul and had made a permanent covenant with him (vv. 1-4). Hearing Saul's order to kill David brought about an internal crisis for Jonathan. How could he please his father while remaining faithful to his commitment to David? Jonathan seemingly said nothing to anyone but would tell David in secret. He acted on the covenant of friendship they had previously made when they pledged mutual loyalty. They had promised to meet each other's needs and look after each other's welfare.

So he told him, "My father, Saul, intends to kill you" And warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you" Saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee (v. 2). Note the repetition of the father-son relationship between Saul and Jonathan in the first couple of verses. His loyalty to his father would have been expected by everyone. However, that relationship caused Jonathan great angst because his father had resolved to kill the one with whom Jonathan had formed a covenant relationship. Jonathan refused to help in Saul's insane attempt to kill David; however, he did not remain neutral and

simply watch for God to work things out. Not bound by misplaced loyalty to his father, Jonathan secretly brought David up to speed of Saul's intention to kill him.

“Be on your guard in the tomorrow morning” Take heed to thyself until the morning (v. 2). Jonathan expected Saul to act quickly. His warning also included the actual time of the assassination attempt. Perhaps he feared some in the king's court were all too ready to commit the crime for Saul.

“Hide in a secret place Go into hiding” Abide in a secret place (v. 2). Jonathan took the initiative and proposed a plan for David to hide. Concealing himself in an open field or some garden where Saul may have often walked to consult with his friends and counselors would keep Jonathan from having to go far away from his father and raise suspicions when he went to brief David. It may also have given David an opportunity to observe the meeting and to draw his own conclusions.

“I'll go out and stand beside my father I will go out and stand with my father” I will go out and stand beside my father (v. 3). By taking a stand beside his father, Jonathan put himself as a go-between on David's behalf. He would join Saul and talk with him about his intentions and plead with him not to do away with David.

“When I see what he says, I'll tell you'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out” I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee (v. 3). Jonathan's goal was twofold—investigating and attempting to dissuade Saul's intentions and reporting the outcome to David.

Jonathan spoke wellspake good of David (v. 4). The one who had the most to lose by David's growing popularity defended Saul's young soldier with great intensity. He did more than secretly help David with information. He argued on David's behalf before the king. Knowing Saul's temperament, he could not have done so without possible hazard to himself.

“The king should not sin against his servant David Let not the king do wrong to his servant David” Let not the king sin against his servant, against David (v. 4). In statesmanlike fashion, Jonathan addressed his father formally as *the king*. Speaking with boldness, he called Saul's plan to assassinate David *sinwrong*, urging his father to mull over possible consequences of such an action. Shedding innocent blood would have led to bloodguilt according to the law (Deut. 19:10).

“He hasn't sinned against you He has not wronged you” He hath not sinned against thee (v. 4). Saul seemingly believed David had sinned against him in some manner and had convinced himself he was acting righteously. However, Jonathan delivered a needed word. He did not form his argument on his feelings about David. Rather, he reasoned that David had done nothing wrong so Saul had no need to retaliate.

“His actions have been a great advantage to you What he has done has benefited you greatly” His works have been to thee-ward very good (v. 4). David had risked his life when he killed the dreaded giant. Furthermore, he had defeated the Philistines on several occasions. Jonathan reasoned David's actions had provided the king with political and military advantages that Jonathan wanted to make sure his father understood. In fact, David had provided invaluable services for both the king and Israel.

1 Samuel 23:15-18

Connection to The Point. Jonathan recognized that God was at work in David's life and willingly accepted the role God had given him in that relationship.

Recap of events through 1 Samuel 23:14. Jonathan's intervention resulted in David returning to Saul's house. However, the king could not control his anger and once again attempted to kill David with his spear (19:9-10). David took refuge with the prophet Samuel at Ramah (v. 18). He met with Jonathan and appealed for his help. Jonathan acknowledged that the Lord had chosen David to succeed Saul, and the two affirmed their covenant with each other (20:1-23). David determined Saul would not stop pursuing him until he had been killed. Saul even tried to kill his own son, but Jonathan escaped to warn David (1 Sam. 20:24-42). Fearing for his life, David decided to take matters into his own hands and took refuge in the Philistine city of Gath (ch. 21). His actions cost many innocent lives (ch. 22). From this tragedy David learned again to depend on the Lord to

escape Saul. When Saul heard that David had fled to the Philistine town of Keilah, Saul searched for him with fierce determination. Although David and his men had previously rescued the Philistine town of Keilah, he feared the townspeople might turn against them when Saul came. David followed God's guidance to move from Keilah and stayed in the hill country (23:1-14).

The Wilderness Desert of Ziph (v. 15). With Saul on his heels, David and his men hunkered down near Horesh, a town about twenty miles southeast of Keilah. **in a wood**. This dry and destitute mountainous wilderness area would have tested David's faith and courage greatly. God guided and protected David here but hardly with the comforts of life. He had previously learned to become a man after God's heart as a shepherd, but here in the wilderness God would shape him as a king.

Horesh (v. 15). The writer further described David's hiding place with a word that meant a wooded area or one with heavy thickets.

He saw learned that Saul had was come out to take his life (v. 15). Without including any new information, the writer's nuance with *saw learned* may suggest fear on David's part and may indicate a spiritual low in his life. Perhaps weary both bodily and spiritually, David may have been discouraged to learn Saul remained resolved on taking his life. So obsessed with killing David, Saul focused everything he had on this single pursuit even to the neglect of his main responsibilities as king of Israel.

Jonathan came to David in Horesh went to David at Horesh. . . went to David into the wood (v. 16). While Saul looked for David, Jonathan found him. Not traveling with a large armed force like the king, the noble-minded prince Jonathan easily made his way to David before his father. He could not have come at a more opportune moment.

Encouraged him in his faith in God Helped him find strength in God Strengthened his hand in God (v. 16). David's self-denying friend brought comfort to him. Jonathan could not stay with his friend, but he could give him this precious gift of encouragement. Jonathan reminded David of God's faithful promises made to him and that God would never leave him.

"Don't be afraid" Fear not (v. 17). Everything continued mounting up against David. With Saul's power and determination to retaliate against anyone who got in his way—the death toll in the town of Nob testified to this (22:11-19)—Jonathan began his speech with a word of assurance. He attempted to quash David's fear by outlining several reasons not to be afraid.

"Saul will never not lay a hand on you" The hand of Saul my father shall not find thee (v. 17). Jonathan assured David Saul would not find him despite his persistent and deadly search. He told David to reject any fear he may have had because God would ultimately protect him from Saul.

"You yourself will Thou shalt be king over Israel" (v. 17). Another reason Jonathan gave David came from confidence God's promise would come to pass. If God had purposed that David would become the next king, then no one, including Saul, could prevent it from happening. Jonathan seemed to take pleasure in the prospect of David's advancement to the throne.

"I'll be your second-in-command I will be second to you" I shall be next unto thee (v. 17). Finally, Jonathan told David he could reject his fear because he had a loyal friend who would willingly serve him. Sadly, Jonathan never got to reign with David because he died in battle with his father (chap. 31).

"Even my father Saul knows it is true this" That also Saul my father knoweth (v. 17). Jonathan had not kept his loyalty to David a secret from his father, and this may have encouraged others in the kingdom to throw their support to David. Saul likely had come to believe David would succeed him as king. Although Saul knew it would happen (13:13-14), he fought against the will of God with everything he had.

They two of them made a covenant in the LORD'S presence before the LORD (v. 18). Jonathan and David had already made a covenant (18:3; 20:16) but now renewed their friendship and covenant in the presence of the Lord, meaning they fully trusted in God's promises. Renewing or reconfirming their covenant strengthened their commitment to one another. It also meant Jonathan acknowledged David's right to the throne of Israel.

David remained in Horesh, while Jonathan went homeJonathan went home, but David remained at HoreshDavid abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house (v. 18). The threat from Saul meant they could not remain together. While Jonathan went home to Gibeah, where Saul was (v. 19), he had accomplished his mission. Ironically, David and Jonathan never saw each other again on earth.