

# A FRIEND IN DEED

THE LIFE OF JONATHAN part 2    MAY 19, 2021

The media loves to report on the falling out of famous friends. It's rarer for famous friends to stay in support of one another through controversy, especially when popular opinion has turned. In 2006, after a video went viral of comedian Michael Richards yelling slurs at his audience, his longtime friend Jerry Seinfeld used an appearance on David Letterman's show as an opportunity to give Michael a chance to publicly apologize. The executive producer of the show said the segment was all Jerry's idea. While many were ready to cancel Michael Richards, Jerry hung in there. His publicist's comment at the time was, "Jerry is just an extremely loyal person."<sup>1</sup>

Jonathan's friendship with David is the most defining element of his story. We can't think about Noah without the ark, Jonah without the great fish, or Daniel without the lion's den. In the same way, we can't think about Jonathan's life without thinking about the relationship he had with David.

There are four passages that focus in on their remarkable friendship. In them we see something more than camaraderie or a good rapport. We see what happens when God is the foundation upon which a relationship is built. When the Lord is the centerpiece, He is able to produce profound unity, undying love, inexhaustible hope, and steadfast support even in dire circumstances.

Matthew Henry wrote,

*"Where God unites hearts carnal matters are too weak to separate them."*<sup>2</sup>

We begin our examination of this friendship in 1 Samuel, chapter 18.

**1 Samuel 18:1 - When David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan was bound to David in close friendship, and loved him as much as he loved himself.**

It's sad that we have to address this issue, but it comes up when you read about these guys. There are people who say that Jonathan and David were in a homosexual relationship with one another because of their affection and friendship and because David would later sing (in his funeral lament):

**2 Samuel 1:26 - I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother. You were such a friend to me. Your love for me was more wondrous than the love of women**

What are we to make of these statements? First of all, two men who were as devoted to the Lord as David and Jonathan would never have been involved in that kind of sexual sin. Homosexuality was unheard of in Israel. God, who judged men like Saul and Eli and others for *their* sin, would not have overlooked such a blatant transgression of the law.

Second, we can evaluate the language used in these passages. Listen to this source:

*"The Hebrew word used [here] for love involves a personal commitment of self in the purest and noblest intentions of trust and obedience toward God. It is not used to express homosexual desire or*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.recordonline.com/article/20061121/entertain/61121017>

<sup>2</sup> *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary On The Bible*

*activity. The Hebrew word used in the sense of ‘having sex with’ in Genesis 19 is never used in [the] Jonathan-David relationship.”<sup>3</sup>*

What *does* it mean that their love exceeded the “love of women” then? Well, Jonathan was not only his friend, he also became David’s brother-in-law. Yet, David’s relationship with Michal fell apart while his relationship with Jonathan persisted. In that way, Jonathan’s love exceeded the love of (one of) David’s wives’. On top of that, David’s declaration confirms that their friendship wasn’t about physical attraction or romantic love. It was a unity far beyond temporal fondness. Instead we’re told three times that Jonathan loved David as much as he loved himself - that he had *bound* himself to David. We’ll see that he did so in tender and costly ways.

Look at verse 3 of 1 Samuel 18.

**1 Samuel 18:3-4 - <sup>3</sup>Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as much as himself. <sup>4</sup>Then Jonathan removed the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his military tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt.**

This scene takes place after David slew Goliath. We’re not given all the detail we’d like, so it’s hard to say how different in ages David and Jonathan were. Some suggest they were about the same age, others go as far as saying Jonathan was maybe 10 years older than David.

David had come from tending sheep, to bring supplies to his brothers on the front lines. David killed the giant and now was brought into the palace to serve the king. Being a country boy, he wouldn’t have the kind of clothes that would be required for court. So here we see Jonathan very graciously providing proper apparel for his new friend.

But, he’s doing much more than a kind favor to David. Jonathan was the prince of Israel, Saul’s oldest son. *He* was heir to the throne. What he’s doing here is profound: He is stripping himself of his royalty and giving it to David. He willfully transferred his office and his claim to the throne to this young man who God had chosen to be king. Did Jonathan know that David had been anointed in place of his father back in chapter 16? It’s possible. It had been several years since that happened.<sup>4</sup> At any rate, Jonathan understood that God had a specific plan for David, and he was on board with it all the way from the beginning.

In their friendship, Jonathan was not focused on what he would get out of it. Not primarily. There will be a time when he says, “If I don’t survive, take care of my family.” But we see here that Jonathan’s goal was to support and love David, no matter what it cost. Pastor David Guzik points out that Jonathan had the *most* to fear from David, from the human way of thinking. It was *his* throne David would be ‘taking.’<sup>5</sup> But no one loved David *more* than Jonathan, and he showed it, sacrificially.

Their friendship begins in chapter 19 where they had made a covenant. Now it’s put to the test.

**1 Samuel 19:1a - Saul ordered his son Jonathan and all his servants to kill David.**

That escalated quickly! By now, David is not only a hero in Israel, he’s also Saul’s son-in-law. But madness and jealousy are consuming the king.

<sup>3</sup> *The Complete Biblical Library*

<sup>4</sup> *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

<sup>5</sup> <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-samuel-18/>

**1 Samuel 19:1b-3 - But Saul's son Jonathan liked David very much, <sup>2</sup>so he told him, "My father, Saul, intends to kill you. Be on your guard in the morning and hide in a secret place and stay there. <sup>3</sup>I'll go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are and talk to him about you. When I see what he says, I'll tell you."**

It seems there's a new scandal among prominent people making the news every day. Whether it was Harvey Weinstein or Jeffrey Epstein, people around them always claim they didn't know anything about their wicked behavior. Jonathan had no guile and no blind eyes. Despite his *loyalty* to the throne, he knew that his father was doing wrong. He didn't pretend it wasn't happening or try to save face or anything like that. He says to David, "My father wants to kill you," and gives David counsel.

From *this* moment, Jonathan spends the rest of his life in a very difficult position. He has his love for David and his zeal to honor God's will, and at the same time he has a duty to the *current* king, his father. In that tension, he's always careful to watch out for David, but for a long time, Jonathan also holds out hope that he will be able to convince Saul to do the right thing. In that way he's an example to us of 1 Corinthians 13:7 - "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

In the next verses we see that Jonathan wasn't just a friend in word, but a friend in deed.

**1 Samuel 19:4-7 - <sup>4</sup>Jonathan spoke well of David to his father, Saul. He said to him, "The king should not sin against his servant David. He hasn't sinned against you; in fact, his actions have been a great advantage to you. <sup>5</sup>He took his life in his hands when he struck down the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced, so why would you sin against innocent blood by killing David for no reason?" <sup>6</sup>Saul listened to Jonathan's advice and swore an oath: "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be killed." <sup>7</sup>So Jonathan summoned David and told him all these words. Then Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he served him as he did before.**

We're having to move quickly through all of these stories, but it's important to remember that Saul had already *tried* to kill David more than once. For Jonathan to stand up to the king and rebuke his sin took courage. He was taking his life in his hands. But, as Jonathan walked this tightrope of faithfulness, he knew this was the right thing to do.

It would've been easier to either just side with his dad or just abandon his dad. But instead he chose the more excellent way - God's way. And because of it he was able to do accomplish this incredibly difficult thing. He turned the heart of Saul back from sin and restored David to service in the palace.

Sadly, Saul's promise didn't last long. By chapter 20, Saul is back on the war path against David, and it's here that we read the most famous story concerning Jonathan and David's friendship.

**1 Samuel 20:1-2 - David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What did I do wrong? How have I sinned against your father so that he wants to take my life?" <sup>2</sup>Jonathan said to him, "No, you won't die. Listen, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without telling me. So why would he hide this matter from me? This can't be true."**

Jonathan wasn't stupid, but it does seem as though he's not quite aware of what's really going on here. Maybe he had been left out of the loop. It's possible he didn't know about the most recent attempts Saul made on David's life. But we also know Jonathan had a resolute faith that God *would* do for David what He had promised.

Charles Ellicott writes:

*"Jonathan...possessed...an intense, unswerving belief in the power of Jehovah of Israel to keep and to save all who trusted in Him."*<sup>6</sup>

**1 Samuel 20:3-4 - <sup>3</sup> But David said, "Your father certainly knows that I have found favor with you. He has said, 'Jonathan must not know of this, or else he will be grieved.' " David also swore, "As surely as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, there is but a step between me and death." <sup>4</sup> Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."**

They hatch a plan to determine how serious Saul is about killing David. We'll look a little more at what happens next time, but while Jonathan is at the feast, David is out in the field, waiting. Once everything goes down, we have that scene where Jonathan takes a young page out to the field and fires the arrows as a signal to David.

**1 Samuel 20:41-42 - <sup>41</sup> When the servant had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone Ezel, fell facedown to the ground, and paid homage three times. Then he and Jonathan kissed each other and wept with each other, though David wept more.**

**<sup>42</sup> Jonathan then said to David, "Go in the assurance the two of us pledged in the name of the Lord when we said, 'The Lord will be a witness between you and me and between my offspring and your offspring forever.' " Then David left, and Jonathan went into the city.**

There's a significant difference between Jonathan and David in this passage. David is saying, "There's only a step between me and death." Jonathan is saying, "The Lord is going to do what He promised." In the passages we're given, Jonathan never waivers in his belief that God would, truly, do what He had promised for David. And here, as he provides for David to escape, Jonathan encourages him with the fact that God sees, God knows, and God is working on behalf of His people to accomplish His will. Jonathan did not give up hope when times were tough and there seemed to be no way forward. Instead, he pressed in to the promises of God, preached them to others, and continued executing his calling and commission as faithfully as ever.

We see one more instance of Jonathan and David's friendship in 1 Samuel 23.

**1 Samuel 23:15-18 - <sup>15</sup> David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in Horesh when he saw that Saul had come out to take his life. <sup>16</sup> Then Saul's son Jonathan came to David in Horesh and encouraged him in his faith in God, <sup>17</sup> saying, "Don't be afraid, for my father Saul will never lay a hand on you. You yourself will be king over Israel, and I'll be your second-in-command. Even my father Saul knows it is true." <sup>18</sup> Then the two of them made a covenant in the Lord's presence. Afterward, David remained in Horesh, while Jonathan went home.**

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<sup>6</sup> Charles John Ellicott *Ellicott's Commentary For English Readers*

We used to show *I Am Second* videos from time to time here on Wednesday nights. I think Jonathan was, maybe, the first *I Am Second* believer. He tells David, "I'll be your second-in-command." Don't forget, it was *his* throne, at least from the human perspective. But he recognized that the Lord had a different plan. And he was not only ok with that, he was *excited* to be a part of it!

Now, though this seems like just another renewal of covenant, it's important that we realize what the context is. David had fled to the land of the Philistines in chapter 21. At this point he's living as a fugitive exile in the wilderness. This is *not* a good period in David's life or in his walk with the Lord. These were the years where David almost murdered Nabal and all his men for not showing him enough respect. These were the years when David complains when the Philistines won't let him go to war with them *against the Israelites*. He was convinced that Saul was going to succeed in his effort to assassinate him.

What does Jonathan do? He encourages him, not to "feel better," but *in his faith in God*. He doesn't give him empty promises or cliché words. He speaks the truth of what God has revealed. Jonathan believe the word of God, even when it seemed like it couldn't happen.

God used this man's friendship to assist, support and sustain David through some of the most trying years of his life. What did Jonathan get in return? Nothing! Not on the earthly level, at least. Sure, they were friends, but Jonathan gave up a lot more than he got back on this side of eternity. He forfeited the crown. He forfeited praise from the people. He forfeited his father's good graces. Why? Because his affection for David wasn't selfish. It wasn't worldly. He understood he was a part of God's unfolding work - a work that would last forever. And all the pressure and all the burden and all the sacrifice was worth it to him to go God's way.

### **John 15:13 - <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.**

I often think of that as a person taking a bullet for another person. They lay down their lives to save a friend in a moment of crisis. But Jonathan shows us how a person, full of the Spirit of God, can lay down their lives *every day* for their friends. That's the Christian's calling, right? To take up our cross and die daily? In *friendship* that looks like Jonathan. Staying faithful, staying truthful, staying sacrificial, loving others as much as we love ourselves.

But, not only is he an example to us, he's also a foreshadow of Christ. In each of these looks at Jonathan's life as a warrior, a friend, and a son, we'll be able to catch precious glimpses of our Savior. The Savior Who calls us His *friends*.<sup>7</sup> He laid down His life for us. There *is* no greater love.

Here are some of those types: First, we see multiple times that Jonathan told David all his father said. Of course, I am not comparing Saul to God the Father, but it reminds us of how Jesus said, "I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father." He does not withhold, He reveals.

Like Jonathan, Jesus is bound to us with cords of love.<sup>8</sup> Seeking our good and our elevation.

Like Jonathan, Jesus supplies us a robe that we might enter into the court of the king. His robe of righteousness, given freely as an act of selfless love.

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<sup>7</sup> John 15:15

<sup>8</sup> Hosea 11:4

Like Jonathan, Jesus shares His throne. Like Jonathan, Jesus was willing to endure very difficult circumstances to help and protect His friends. Like Jonathan, Jesus made an undying and unbreakable covenant with His friends. One that He upholds and affirms again and again. Like Jonathan, Jesus lives a life of unwavering loyalty.

Like Jonathan, Jesus interceded for the accused and advocated for them, restoring them into fellowship and service. Like Jonathan, Jesus remains faithful even when we are faithless. He encourages us in our faith, speaks the truth of God's word to us, and supplies our needs. And, like Jonathan, Jesus has gone into the city before us. We've still got some time to wander in our pilgrimage, but the city is waiting. Jesus is there, and He will ever be our Friend. The greatest of Friends, who loves us more than we even love ourselves. A Friend Whose love surpasses all others, no matter the circumstances, no matter the struggles, no matter our failures. He is our Friend forever, fastened tight, always ready to embrace us and remind us and clear the way forward.