

## ***Background Characters in the Old Testament***

### ***Jonathan: Born for Greatness***

Lesson #4 for October 23, 2010

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 13:1-4; 14:1-13,24-46; 1 Samuel 18; 19; 31:1-7; 2 Samuel 1:5-12; 2 Kings 6:8-17.

1. This lesson tells the story of two great Bible characters, Saul and David, but it focuses on the background character between them, Jonathan. Jonathan was Saul's eldest son who, after David joined the king's household, became David's best friend.
2. Each king of Israel and Judah is introduced with a standard formula, the age at which he began to reign and the number of years he reigned. When the author of 1 Samuel introduced Saul's kingship, (1 Samuel 13:1) he apparently did not know the information, or else it was lost sometime later. So, in the most reliable versions, the key information in this verse is missing! What does that tell us about inspiration? That "mistake" has been very carefully copied just like that for thousands of years. The Bible certainly was not just dictated by God. The numbers in the Bible have to be interpreted very cautiously. Also, their numbering system was very different from ours and the method of notation is vague.
3. We first hear of Jonathan in 1 Samuel 13:2,3 when Jonathan killed some of the Philistines at Geba, and this led to war between Israel and the Philistines. Jonathan caused that war.
4. It was not until the second year of Saul's reign that an attempt was made to subdue the Philistines. The first blow was struck by Jonathan, who at the command of his father attacked and overcame their garrison of Geba. The Philistines were greatly exasperated by this defeat, and they made ready for a speedy attack upon Israel. {ST, August 3, 1882 par. 5}
5. Considering his parentage, why didn't Jonathan grow up to be a spoiled, greedy, selfish, and arrogant young man? Was it because of his mother? Since David was the one chosen to take Jonathan's place as the next king, why wasn't Jonathan the one trying to kill David?
6. Read Exodus 33:11; Job 16:20,21; Proverbs 17:17; 27:9; Ecclesiastes 4:10; and John 15:13-15. What do these verses say to us about friendship? Friends feel comfortable speaking face-to-face. When someone's reputation is being challenged, a friend will speak up on his/her behalf. If a person falls, a friend will be there to help him/her up. Notice especially that Jesus said to His disciples that He wanted them to be no longer servants but friends because they understood Him correctly! Would Jesus like to say that about us today? Do we understand His mission correctly? Are we correctly bearing "the testimony of Jesus"? Are we telling the truth about God as He did? Do we really want to be friends with God?
7. One of the best things about friends is that we get to choose them. It is a completely voluntary relationship. Solomon told us that there are times when a friend will stick closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24) Was Solomon thinking of his father and Jonathan?
8. Try to imagine the Philistines with "30,000 war chariots, 6000 horsemen, and as many soldiers as there are grains of sand on the seashore" (1 Samuel 13:5) as they were faced by Saul and Jonathan leading only 3000 men. The Philistine army was basically making havoc in Judah. Philistine war parties were traveling around killing people, stealing things, and generally terrorizing the Israelites. Compare the experience of Gideon. (Judges 6:1-13)
9. So that they could not make weapons, the Philistines forbade the Israelites even to have

blacksmiths in their territory. As a result, the Israelites had to go to the Philistines to get their ploughs, hoes, axes, and sickles sharpened. (1 Samuel 13:20) So, when the Israelites stirred up war with the Philistines, only Saul and Jonathan had swords or spears.

10. As the two armies were camped near each other, Jonathan under the guidance of the Holy Spirit spoke with his armor-bearer and they decided to cross over to where there was a small group of Philistines and challenge them. (1 Samuel 13:1-15) Jonathan set up a sign to determine if God was guiding them. In answer to God's sign, Jonathan and his friend climbed on their hands and knees over the rough rocks up to the top of the pass.

11. Jonathan, the king's son, a man who feared God, was chosen as the instrument to deliver Israel. Moved by a divine impulse, he proposed to his armor-bearer that they should make a secret attack upon the enemy's camp. "It may be," he urged, "that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint to the Lord to work by many or by few. {ST, August 10, 1882 par. 12}

These two men gave evidence that they were moving under the influence and command of a more than human general. To outward appearance, their venture was rash, and contrary to all military rules. But the action of Jonathan was not done in human rashness. He depended not on what he and his armor-bearer themselves could do; he was the instrument that God used in behalf of his people Israel. They made their plans, and rested their cause in the hands of God. If the armies of the Philistines challenged them, they would advance. If they said, Come, they would go forward. This was their sign, and the angels of God prospered them. They went forward, saying, "It may be that the Lord will work for us." (YI, November 24, 1898 par. 6; 2BC 1015.4)

It would have been an easy matter for the Philistines to kill these two brave, daring men; but it did not enter into their minds that these two solitary men had come up with any hostile intent. The wondering men above looked on, too surprised to take in their possible object. They regarded these men as deserters, and permitted them to come without harm. {YI, November 24, 1898 par. 10}

12. The Philistines thought perhaps the two men were abandoning their own army to join them; they were not expecting the slaughter of the 20 men that resulted. Suddenly, there was an earthquake and great panic. The Philistines turned on each other and began killing each other thinking they were enemies. Meanwhile, Saul realized something was happening in the Philistine camp, wondered who was missing, and found out that it was Jonathan and his armor-bearer. Soon, the Israelites were pursuing the Philistines in every direction.
13. Saul—trying to make the most of a good thing—forbade his soldiers from eating anything so they could spend all their time pursuing and killing Philistines. As a result, they were very weak by the end of the day. They began to slaughter sheep and cattle, eating the meat with the blood still in it—completely against kosher law. Not knowing about the prohibition, Jonathan had eaten some honey from a honeycomb in the forest.
14. Saul sought the high priest to consult God as to whether they should continue pursuing the Philistines. But God did not answer. Saul assumed that someone had committed a sin. By drawing lots they discovered that it was Jonathan's eating of the honey. Saul was prepared to kill his firstborn son because of his oath, but the people said, "No!" Thus, a great victory was cut short because they stopped pursuing the enemy; but a great disaster, the death

of Jonathan, was averted. (1 Samuel 14:24-46) Saul could think only of himself.

15. Saul had nine named children: Jonathan, Ishvi, Malchishua, Abinadab, and Ishbaal (Ishbosheth) were his sons; Merab and Michal were his daughters. Apparently, they were all children of Ahinoam. His concubine, Rizpah, bore him two sons also. (2 Sam. 21:8)
16. If the biblical sequence is correct, David first met Jonathan when “the Lord’s Spirit left Saul, and an evil spirit sent by the Lord tormented him.” (1 Samuel 16:14-22) **Why would God send an evil spirit to harass king Saul? Remember that God had given Saul a “new heart.” (1 Samuel 10:9)** How do we explain those verses? As a result, Saul was advised by his court to employ a young musician who could play the harp. The young musician that was chosen was David. Apparently, for some time thereafter, David went back and forth between his home territory in Bethlehem and the king’s home which was most likely at Gilgal or Gibeah. Remember that the Israelites were a monotheistic people. Everything that happened which did not have an obvious explanation was credited to God. Nothing happens without God’s permission!
17. Sometime later, the Philistines came with their army into Judean territory and camped near Socoh. The Israelite army—much smaller and with virtually no weapons—lined up on a hill facing the Philistine army. The famous story of Goliath and David was the result. The king had promised his oldest daughter, Merab, in marriage to whomever killed Goliath. He also promised that the killer’s family would no longer have to pay taxes. (1 Samuel 17:25)
18. As a result of his victory, Saul wanted David to serve him at his home. He became one of the king’s most trusted soldiers and the very close friend of Jonathan. (1 Samuel 18:1-5)
19. Unfortunately, following the Goliath experience, the women of Israel began to sing that David had slain his tens of thousands but Saul had slain only thousands. Was the Devil responsible for that comparison? That infuriated Saul. Once again, “an evil spirit from God” took control of him. (1 Samuel 18:10) Twice, he tried to throw a spear at David while David was playing his harp for the king’s benefit.
20. David was very successful in virtually everything the king asked him to do. So, Saul became even more afraid of him.
21. But, Jonathan was not the only member of Saul’s family that fell in love with David. Michal, Saul’s second daughter, also fell in love with David. So, Saul invented a plan to try to destroy David through her. He asked David to bring 100 foreskins from dead Philistines as a revenge on his enemies in exchange for his second daughter. (1 Samuel 18:24) David—never to be outdone—brought 200 Philistine foreskins. Try to imagine David and the king standing there counting out foreskins! Was Michal present for the occasion? Saul became even more afraid of David, but the people loved David.
22. Jonathan then took an active part in the story. By all means possible, he tried to convince his father to leave David alone. (1 Samuel 19) Temporarily, Jonathan was apparently successful in convincing his father not to kill David. Meanwhile, war broke out again with the Philistines, and David defeated them. But, when David returned and played his harp for Saul on another occasion, once more, Saul tried to kill him with his spear. (1 Samuel 19:9,10) “An evil spirit from the Lord” was back!
23. That night, Saul sent some men to surround David’s house so they could kill him in the morning. David—now married to Saul’s daughter—followed her instruction and slipped out of a window and escaped. She placed a household idol and a goat’s hair pillow in David’s bed so that it looked like he was there and told the soldiers that David was sick. (1 Samuel 19:14-17) Why did David and Michal have an idol in their home?

24. Read 1 Samuel 19:18-24. What was happening in this passage? Why were Samuel and the prophets “dancing and shouting”? What happened to the three groups of messengers that Saul sent to cause them to dance and shout? Even Saul danced and shouted when he went to arrest and kill David. Notice that it says that the Spirit of God was responsible. Why did he take off his clothes in Samuel’s presence and lay naked all that day and all that night? Why would that lead people to ask, “Has even Saul become a prophet?” We need to recognize that the professional singers at the temple were also known as “prophets” in those days. (1Chronicles 25:1-7, KJV)
25. Eventually, David secretly found Jonathan and asked him why his father wanted to kill him. Jonathan did not want to believe that. So, a clever plan was devised to see if it was true. They conceived some lies to deceive Saul. When the truth came out, Jonathan went out to a field as had been pre-arranged and signaled David that he must escape. (1 Samuel 20)
26. For about ten years, Saul pursued David off and on. Twice, David had had the opportunity to kill Saul but spared his life. On at least one occasion, Jonathan found David in one of his hiding places, and they had a wonderful but short time together. (1 Samuel 23:14-18)
27. Try to imagine the conflicts that went through the mind of Jonathan as he watched his father’s increasing hatred for David. Did Jonathan understand that his father was mentally ill? What would you have done if you were Jonathan or Michal?
28. The next time we hear about Jonathan was at the time of another war with the Philistines. Following his father’s desperate attempt to communicate with God and Saul’s nighttime visit to the witch of Endor, Saul and three of his sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, were killed on Mount Gilboa. (1 Samuel 31:1-7) Saul, having been wounded, actually “fell on” his own sword and committed suicide so the Philistines would not be able to kill him or take him captive. Notice the very interesting comment in 1 Chronicles 10:1-7,13,14 about why Saul died. In what sense did God kill Saul? Had Saul abandoned God?
29. When David found out the news from the battle, he wept and composed a lament for the dead king and Jonathan, his best friend. (2 Samuel 1:17-27) Thus, ended one of the great friendships of the Bible.
30. Jonathan chose a life that was great in the sight of God instead of in the sight of men. Why did he do that? How can we inspire our young people today to make a similar choice?

Jonathan, by birth heir to the throne, yet knowing himself set aside by the divine decree; to his rival the most tender and faithful of friends, shielding David’s life at the peril of his own; steadfast at his father’s side through the dark days of his declining power, and at his side falling at the last—the name of Jonathan is treasured in heaven, and it stands on earth a witness to the existence and the power of unselfish love. (*Education* 157.1)

31. What should we learn from the life of this unselfish friend of God? Compare his experience to that of John the Baptist as he deferred to Jesus. In that story also, we see the power of real love. (John 3:30)

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