

## Jonathan—the faithful disciple (2)

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*In the previous article we sought to show that Jonathan was a type of the disciple of Christ. Further, he was submissive to God's judgement that the kingdom would be transferred away from the house of Saul his father, and he continued to display faith and courage in the war against the flesh (represented by the Philistines) as he waited for the promised seed to be revealed.*

**I**T WAS DAVID who slew Goliath in the valley of Elah, as recorded in 1 Samuel 17, but it is interesting to speculate why it was not Jonathan who went forth against the Philistine.<sup>1</sup> Certainly Jonathan had shown very great faith and valour in previously fighting against the Philistines, but perhaps Saul refused to risk his valiant son in a fight with Goliath, knowing that his other sons were less suitable heirs to the throne. Indeed, Saul's fourth son, who did reign for two years, was called Ish-bosheth, which means 'man of shame'.<sup>2</sup>

### Jonathan meets David

Jonathan was nevertheless in attendance in the valley of Elah and saw how Israel was delivered from Philistine dominion by the hand of the beloved David. He would have heard David's words to Goliath: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the LORD [Yahweh] of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, Whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD [Yahweh] deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD [Yahweh] saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S [Yahweh's], and He will give you into our hands" (vv. 45-47).

These words reveal David's faithful mind; and Jonathan, who had spoken similarly (14:6,12), would have recognised in David the mind of the Spirit. In the context of Saul and Abner debating the issue of sonship concerning David (that is to

say, the question, Is this young man the promised seed?) it is recorded: "And it came to pass, when he [David] 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" (18:1). There was an immediate sweet fellowship between the two men. Previously Jonathan may have been quite a lonely man in the royal court, for no one else there is recorded as being so spiritually minded. The present writer suspects that in the evenings Jonathan would sit alone with his faithful armour-bearer, discussing the Scriptures.

What powerful exhortations there are in these things! We too, as faithful disciples, must have the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:16). We must learn to think like Jesus by absorbing the words of his Father. As the soul of Jonathan was knit to that of David, as Jacob's was to Benjamin (Gen. 44:30), so also our souls should be knit with that of our Lord (1 Pet. 1:8) and we should love him as our own soul (Lk. 10:27).

The Scriptures record that at various times Saul, Michal, Israel and Judah all loved David, yet without exception they all only loved David with a transitory love; but five times it is recorded that Jonathan loved David, and he did so until the day of his death (1 Sam. 18:1,3; 20:17 [twice]; 2 Sam. 1:26). Perhaps Jonathan realised that he had failed, whereas David had overcome the man of flesh. Likewise, we ourselves must be humble, yet thankful that the Lord destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

### The first covenant

Jonathan then enters into the first of three covenants with David. This first covenant was a loving response, founded upon the bruising of the head of the serpent Goliath (1 Sam. 17:49; Gen. 3:15) and perhaps the bruising of David's heels (1 Sam. 17:51). 1 Samuel 18 reports: "Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because

1. Comments and suggestions from readers on this point would be welcome.
2. A look at the meanings of the names of Saul's sons in 1 Chronicles 8:33 indicates Saul's spiritual decline over the period his sons were born.

he loved him as his own soul" (v. 3). The parallels for ourselves are all too obvious, for, after we have mentally assimilated the Truth, our faith must be motivated by love in the new covenant (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 5:1,2).

1 Samuel 18 continues: "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" (v. 4). It would not have been possible for Jonathan to have shown more emphatically and publicly that he believed the younger man David to be the future king of Israel, and that he was therefore prepared to submit to him. Everybody would have seen Jonathan's royal robe upon David. Jonathan's sword, formerly one of the only two in Israel (13:22), was now temporarily in the hand of David. As a soldier Jonathan was defenceless and humbled by his own action.

As Jesus taught, in the context of a king seeing a greater king approaching: "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). Again, in the context of the Israelitish throne, he said: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Mt. 19:29,30). Sometimes we do need to be prepared to make real sacrifices in our lives for the sake of the Truth.

### The second covenant

As David waxes greater in the Samuel record, so Jonathan wanes. The second covenant is recorded in 1 Samuel 20:16, and in it Jonathan identifies himself with David the fugitive whose death was demanded by Saul, whose bitter words were as arrows against David (Ps. 11:2; 64:3,4). We must identify ourselves with the crucified Christ (2 Cor. 5:14,15), as it is written: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mt. 16:24).

When Jonathan returned to the feast, he wonderfully exhibited key aspects of discipleship in the face of Saul's wrath and a javelin being thrown at him (1 Sam. 20:30-34). Christ's teaching is that "a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt. 10:36,37); and: "If any man come to me,

and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:26).

Although Jonathan had entered a covenant based upon his first love for the future anointed king, yet he always honoured his father, was always respectful and courteous to him, and loyally followed him into battle against Israel's enemy. He never plotted against Saul, and, when it was appropriate, he sought to turn Saul into the way of truth. Jonathan's example is a very helpful exposition of how those of us who have unbelieving close relatives should maintain our first loyalty and love to Christ but nevertheless continue to behave correctly towards those relatives.

Saul in blazing anger insulted his own wife, Jonathan and David with the words: "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman,<sup>3</sup> 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? 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" (1 Sam. 20:30,31). Jonathan replied concerning the anointed's righteousness: "Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?" (v. 32). The carnal mind does sometimes go completely out of control when faced with Scriptural, reasoned logic, and Saul launched a javelin at his own loyal, faithful and valiant son.

One can imagine the embarrassed, fearful hush which would have enveloped the assembly at these proceedings, and Jonathan, who had tried to think the best of his father, now realised that Saul was beyond remedy. As he departed from the feast he was angry, not because both his mother and himself had been insulted in public, but because "he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame" (v. 34). Jesus teaches us: "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels" (Lk. 9:26). Jonathan is a wonderful example to us in these matters, and Jesus will not be ashamed of him on that day.

*(To be concluded)*

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3. Saul's comment about Ahinoam (the name means 'pleasant brother') may indicate that she may have been responsible for nourishing Jonathan in the words of faith and good doctrine.