

# Jonathan: Born for Greatness



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 16

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 1 Samuel 14:6–13, 24–46; 1 Samuel 18; 1 Samuel 19; 1 Samuel 31:1–7; 2 Samuel 1:5–12; 2 Kings 6:8–17.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Jonathan spoke to the young man who was carrying his armor. He said, ‘Come on. Let’s [Let us] go over to the camp of those fellows who aren’t [are not] circumcised.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the Lord will help us. If he does, it won’t [will not] matter how many or how few of us there are. That won’t [will not] keep the Lord from saving us’ ” (1 Samuel 14:6, NIV).

**JONATHAN<sup>2</sup> COULD HAVE BEEN A SPOILED, GREEDY, AND SELFISH YOUNG MAN.** He could have believed that everything was owed to him. And why not? He was the oldest son of the first king of Israel. He was popular and well-loved by his people. He was a very good public speaker and a top soldier and leader in the army. According to the world, Jonathan had it all. He was born for “greatness.”

But Heaven uses a different measure for what is great. Jonathan was a rare person who was willing to turn his back on what the world considers great. Instead, he wanted a different kind of “greatness”—God’s kind.

From the life of Jonathan, we learn to judge our lives according to Heaven’s standard. What makes a life great? What makes it worthwhile? Which things are the important in this world, and which things are not?

Jonathan’s story helps us to answer these questions. It also tells us that, if we choose, any of us can be great in the eyes of God. It does not matter where we were born, who our parents are, or how much wealth and talent we have.

1. circumcised—when the foreskin of a male’s penis is cut off and removed; not being circumcised also was a sign in Bible times that a person had not separated from sin to serve God.

2. Jonathan—the first son of King Saul, who was the first king of Israel.

**SUNDAY—OCTOBER 17****THE HIGH CALLING OF  
FRIENDSHIP (1 Samuel 18:1)**

Friendship is different from most other relationships. Many kinds of relationships are legally controlled. In many cultures,<sup>3</sup> parents choose marriage partners for their children. And, of course, none of us gets to choose our parents, brother, sisters, and any of our other family.

However, we do choose our friends. Friendship crosses all frontiers (borders). Friendship can influence<sup>4</sup> other relationships too. Song of Solomon 5:16 shows us the part that friendship plays in a marriage.

True friendship is a relationship based on free choice. Perhaps this is why it binds (joins) us so closely together. It does not require the law to control it. Instead, it focuses on giving ourselves.



**Friendship focuses on giving ourselves  
to others.**

First Samuel 18:1 describes the friendship between Jonathan and David. It says that “Jonathan and David became close friends. Jonathan loved David just as he loved himself” (NirV). What characteristics<sup>5</sup> of friendship are shown in Exodus 33:11; Job 16:20, 21; Proverbs 17:17; Proverbs 27:9; Ecclesiastes 4:10; and John 15:13–15?

Most of us would not be surprised by a mother who was prepared to die to save her child’s life or by a man willing to give his life to protect his family. These strong relationships are ones we can admire and show God’s love for us. But this is an instinct<sup>6</sup> that we share with many kinds of animals.

Friendship is much more than instinct. True friendship needs good communication. Friends are there to help in all the challenges of life, not just to share the “fun” times. We can influence our friends’ lives through wise advice, encouragement, and prayer for them. Jonathan shows these characteristics in his friendship with David. In 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan shows that true friendship means more than just talk. A friend is ready to give useful help, even when it is risky to do so. Jonathan often acted as a middleman between his father, King Saul, and David (1 Samuel 19:4). Jonathan took the time and the trouble to find David when he was running away from King Saul and

3. cultures—the beliefs, customs, arts, and so on, of different societies, groups, places, or times.

4. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something.

5. characteristics—qualities or traits.

6. instinct—a way of behaving, thinking, or feeling that is not learned.

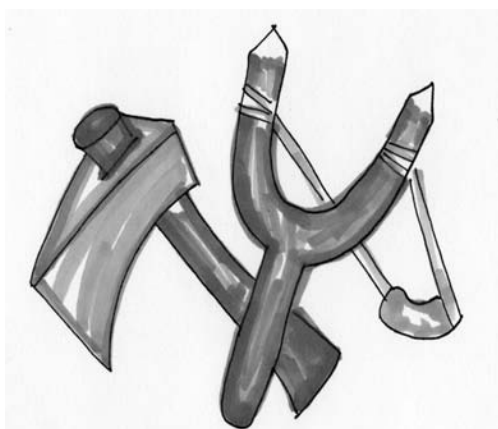
to encourage him to trust in the Lord (1 Samuel 23:16).

**Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? Have you ever betrayed a friend? What lessons have you learned? What do you need to change about yourself in order to be a better friend?**

## MONDAY—OCTOBER 18

### A GREAT VICTORY (2 Kings 6:8–17)

Israel lives in a moment of great danger. The Philistines have joined together to fight Israel. They have more chariots and soldiers than anyone has ever seen. The Israelite army has fewer men than the Philistine army. And the Israelites do not have enough weapons to fight. Only Saul and Jonathan have iron swords or spears. This happened because the



**Can you imagine the weak Israelite army with sticks, axes, and slings facing a large Philistine army with “modern” weapons?**

Philistines would not allow the Israelites to make iron tools. Even their tools had to be fixed or sharpened by Philistine blacksmiths (1 Samuel 13:19–22). Can you imagine the weak Israelite army with sticks, axes, and slings facing a large Philistine army with “modern” weapons? No wonder so many men fled King Saul’s army.

**Think about how different the balance of power is in our battles if we are surrendered to the Lord. Read the story in 2 Kings 6:8–17. What hope can we take from this story for ourselves?**

Jonathan is not afraid of what others think. He does not complain about the lack of faith and trust in Israel. Instead, Jonathan determines (decides) to do something about it. Jonathan is not trying to be a hero. But he knows that God is so much bigger than the problem Israel faces. He knows that God can save by any method (plan; way) He chooses. So, Jonathan makes himself available to God. As a result, an unbelievable victory follows.

**According to 1 Samuel 14:6–13, what steps does Jonathan take before climbing up to the enemy camp?**

Sometimes the line between faith and presumption<sup>7</sup> can seem very narrow. Jonathan does not depend on his thoughts and feelings alone. He talks with another God-fearing person

7. presumption—believing that God will protect you when you do something you know you should not do.

for advice. Jonathan also shares with him his plans and ideas. Jonathan understands that God is not limited. So, he does not try to control God. Jonathan is willing to stay or go as God shows him through the sign that he suggests. When Jonathan gets the go-ahead, he does not wait. He goes ahead to meet the challenge.

**What are your own personal battles? How can you learn to trust God when you struggle? How can you learn to trust God even when things do not work out as you had hoped or prayed?**

## TUESDAY—OCTOBER 19

### PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP (1 Samuel 19:1–7)

**Read 1 Samuel 19:1–7. How would you describe the relationship between Jonathan and Saul in these verses? What kind of challenge does Jonathan face between being loyal to his own father and being loyal to a friend?**

We do not know what kind of father Saul was when Jonathan was a child. But we do know that later in his life, Saul was not someone to look up to. He was very selfish, moody, jealous, hard to talk to, and suspicious. But Jonathan gives proof in his life and relationship to his father that he obeys the fifth commandment, which tells us to honor our parents. (Read Exodus 20:12.)

**Read 1 Samuel 14:24–46. How could Jonathan have used this event as an excuse to stop honoring his father? There must be people who have turned against their own parents for less. What does this tell us about the kind of person Jonathan was?**

Honoring our parents means a lot more than giving them an anniversary card or gift. Jonathan stands by his father in his time of trouble. Jonathan stands by him, too, despite what his father wants to do to him.

We honor our parents when we stand by them in times of trouble, such as illness or the loss of a job. The Bible tells us we must stand by our parents (read 1 Timothy 5:8). Honoring our parents does not mean that we tell them that we care for them and then do nothing to help them. Jonathan shows that supporting our parents can mean giving good and respectful advice. Honoring our parents does not mean that we do not think about their actions or that we defend the errors of our parents. It also does not mean that we follow or accept evil. But it does mean that it is our sacred (holy) responsibility (duty; work) to help them, no matter what kind of people they are.

**By following the example of Jonathan, what can you do to improve your relationship with your parents, brothers, sisters, or other family members, especially if they are not believers?**

## WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 20

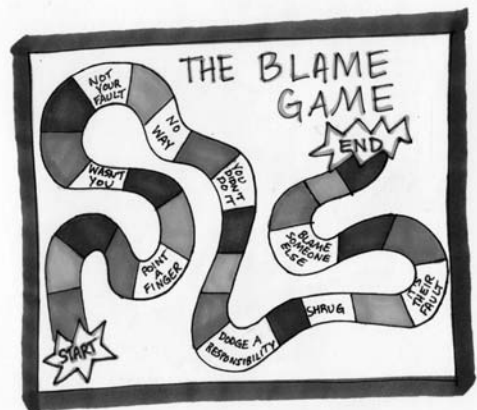
### TAKING SECOND PLACE (1 Samuel 23:17)

Many people today blame their parents for most (if not all) of their problems in life. There are surely people who suffer from a lot of emotional problems because of their parents. We cannot deny that fact.

But it seems that so many of us blame our parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, and situations so we can avoid accepting responsibility for our own problems.

All of us may be in some way victims of situations beyond our control. But Jonathan's life shows us that we can work through those situations. Jonathan would have had a right to blame his father for most of his troubles. If Saul had been faithful, then Jonathan would have been king. But Jonathan does not play the blame game. Jonathan understands his self-worth. Instead of becoming bitter, Jonathan trusts that God knows best. Jonathan decides to do what he can with what he has. It probably was not easy for Jonathan to have this faith and trust in God when he learned that God had chosen David, rather than him, to become the next king.

**What does 1 Samuel 23:17 tell us about Jonathan? Describe how Jonathan felt when he learned that David would be king instead of him. Compare<sup>8</sup> Jonathan's attitude (feeling) to those attitudes shown**



Jonathan chooses not to play the blame game.

**in Isaiah 14:13, 14; 1 Kings 1:5; and Mark 10:35–37. What is the difference?**

When we know we belong to God, we are able to face being criticized. By trusting in God's love for us, we will not be upset by not being wanted or not getting what we want. Our faith keeps us from losing our sense of self-worth. It helps us to give ourselves over to God when we have a strong personal experience and relationship with Him. Jonathan already had a strong personal experience with God in his victory over the Philistines in 1 Samuel 14.

The later part of David's story is filled with rebellions (wars) and fighting within the family. Absalom and Adonijah, both sons of David, try to take the throne from their father. They do not want to let God choose the new king. Jonathan's attitude shines like a light compared to this spirit. Jonathan is willing to take second place. He tries to inspire unity

8. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.



(oneness) and peace between his father and his friend David (1 Samuel 19:4). He stands as a true example of a servant-leader, prepared to take second, or even third, place.

**Using Jonathan as an example, what can you do when you do not get the job, position, or respect you feel that you deserve? How can you control feelings of jealousy, hate, and not being wanted or loved?**



Jonathan is willing to take second place.

#### THURSDAY—OCTOBER 21

#### WHEN LIFE IS NOT FAIR (1 Samuel 31:1–7)

**Read 1 Samuel 31:1–7 and 2 Samuel 1:5–12. What kind of end did Jonathan have? How should we understand his death?**

Most of us have been taught that good always wins in the end. Because of this, we sometimes believe that

good people should have good, long lives, and that bad people should live short, troubled lives. We know that good will win over evil in the end when Jesus comes again. But real life sometimes shows that good people do not always receive good in this life and that bad people do not always receive bad. Sometimes we find ourselves being punished for doing the right thing. God often does step in and work miracles to save and protect His children. But this does not always happen.

**According to Genesis 39:10–20; Job 1; and Job 2, who are some Bible characters<sup>9</sup> who, though faithful, did not get what they deserved?**

Jonathan was a true friend to David. He tried his best to bring peace between David and Saul. He was not proud and was willing to give up his right to the throne. He was just as willing to accept David as king as he was to be king. He was also a good son.

God had used Jonathan before to put a whole army on the run. Now the Israelite army once again faced the Philistines. Perhaps Jonathan thought that God would work another miracle to save Israel. But Jonathan would fall (die) that day on the battlefield (1 Samuel 31:2).

Like John the Baptist, Jonathan is an example of those who do not get what they seem to deserve. They

<sup>9</sup> characters—people who appear in stories.

often suffer, lose positions of honor for the sake of Christ, and sometimes they die at their post of duty. Their lives and what they give up for others may not seem important. But they are key (important) players in God's plans. They are inspired and supported by Jesus' love and presence. They are born for greatness. This is not always the kind of greatness that the world understands or honors. This is a greatness that goes far beyond our human understanding and desires.

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Romans 8:28; and Revelation 21:4. What hope do you get from these verses? By reading them, how can we better understand that we may face struggles or troubles that do not always have happy endings?**

### FRIDAY—OCTOBER 22

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** "The Bible has recorded two who humbly entered into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. One is in the Old Testament and one is in the New. They are Jonathan and John the Baptist.

"Jonathan, as son of King Saul, had the right to take over the throne. But he knew that God had appointed [chosen] David to be the future king. Yet, he remained one of David's most loving and faithful friends. He protected David's life while risking his own life. He remained at his father's side through the dark days of his declining power and fell at his father's side in

battle. For these reasons the name of Jonathan is treasured in heaven. And it stands on earth as a witness [reminder] to the power of unselfish love."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, pages 156, 157.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How do we tell the difference between faith and presumption? How and when should we ask for signs in order to know God's will for us?
- ② Some cultures believe passiveness (refusing to be aggressive or warlike) is a good quality to have, while others believe it is something negative. Jonathan was willing to take second place. Is this the same as being passive? Should a Christian be passive? If so, when? If not, why not?
- ③ How can you explain to a non-Christian friend the benefits (good points) of being a Christian if he or she knows that you too get sick, lose your job, and suffer the loss of loved ones?
- ④ Discuss the life of Jonathan based on Hebrews 11:32–40. What can you learn from these verses that might help you in situations that have sad endings?
- ⑤ What are some things that the world judges as "great" that God does not? What are some things that God judges as great that the world does not? How can we know the difference between these two ideas of "greatness"?