

1 Samuel 18: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 July 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] 1 Samuel chapter 18 As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword, and his bow, and his belt.

And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.

And the women sang to one another as they celebrated. Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him.

[1 : 03] He said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands. And what more can he have but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day on.

The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand, and Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, I will pin David to the wall.

But David evaded him twice. Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him, but had departed from Saul. So Saul removed him from his presence, and made him a commander of a thousand.

And he went out and came in before the people. And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him. And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him.

But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them. Then Saul said to David, Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife.

[2 : 05] Only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles. For Saul thought, Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him. And David said to Saul, Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?

But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel, the Mehlothite, for a wife. Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David, and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him.

Saul thought, Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him. Therefore Saul said to David a second time, You shall now be my son-in-law.

And Saul commanded his servants, Speak to David in private, and say, Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then, become the king's son-in-law.

And Saul's servants spoke these words in the ears of David. And David said, Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?

[3 : 08] And the servants of Saul told him, Thus and so did David speak. Then Saul said, Thus shall you say to David, The king desires no bride price, except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.

Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, It pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, David arose and went along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines.

And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michael for a wife. But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michael, Saul's daughter, loved him, Saul was even more afraid of David.

So Saul was David's enemy continually. Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out, David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

At the start of 1 Samuel chapter 18, David is taken into the house of Saul, where he prospers. There is a sort of adoption taking place here. Saul takes him into his own household completely, and doesn't allow him to return to his father's house anymore.

[4 : 24] Jonathan also makes a sort of covenant of brotherhood with David. When later David receives the kingdom, he receives it to someone who was a member of Saul's own household. We should also consider the grace that God is showing to Saul here, and the way that Saul is his own worst enemy.

Saul was prepared to kill his own son Jonathan in chapter 14, cutting off the crown prince until the people stopped him. The Lord brought Saul's fate upon him largely by his own hand.

God gives Saul his successor as a member of his own house. Had Saul been righteous, he would have recognised God's remarkable grace in this. If Saul had supported David, he would have had his divinely blessed successor as his adopted son and later son-in-law, and would experience blessing on account of him.

David was well inclined towards Saul and his household, so Saul would have fared very well had he repented and discovered the grace in the Lord's judgment. David, whose name means beloved, was a man after God's own heart, and a man who won over the hearts of almost everyone who met him, soon causing Saul to fear his power to alienate the affections of his people, and even his own household.

While it might appear that David was just a member of Saul's household, matters soon start to take a surprising turn. Because of the love that he had for the young man, Jonathan made a covenant with David.

[5 : 45] He took off his robe and armour and gave them to David. The significance of this act really needs to be noted. Jonathan was the crown prince and the heir to the throne. His robes and armour were marks of his office, and by taking these off and giving these to David, he is symbolically, even if not intentionally and explicitly, abdicating his position and giving it to David.

David's later rise to rule was not a rebellious or revolutionary act, but was just and righteous. Jonathan progressively relinquished his own position to him. Why did Jonathan so love David?

If we look back through the story, the answer shouldn't be hard to discover. David is just like Jonathan. If two men were ever kindred spirits, these two were. Both of them single-handedly fought the Philistines in daring feats of bravery, when everyone else was fearful.

They trusted in the Lord to enable them, over numbers or weapons. Jonathan was the son of Saul. David was Saul's son-in-law. Both led Israel to victory. The exhilarating courage and faith of Jonathan stands out against the bleak background of Saul's fear in chapters 13 and 14.

When David comes on his horizon, Jonathan finally finds a man after his own heart. I imagine that it was fairly discouraging for him being surrounded by the fear, paranoia, and unbelief of Saul's court.

[7 : 02] David brought a remarkable shift in the spirit of the place. David prospered in Saul's service. However, as Saul heard the women praising David for killing his tens of thousands, but only praising him for killing thousands, he became very angry and jealous, and cast a spear at David while he was playing music for him.

The women's song is reminiscent of the song of Miriam and the women after the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. The thousands, tens of thousands pairing is unlikely to be an actual suggestion that David has killed more than Saul.

It's simply using the standard parallelism of Hebrew poetry for an intensifying effect. The lines are synonymous, but intensifying. We see a similar paralleling of 10,000 and 1,000 in Psalm 91 verse 7.

A thousand may fall at your side, 10,000 at your right hand, but it will not come near you. Saul chooses then to take the song of the women in the worst of possible ways.

The actual purpose of the song was to celebrate the power of the Lord to deliver his people, through Saul and David, not to pit Israel's champions against each other. The spirit had now departed from Saul, the giant of Israel, and it was apparent to Saul that the spirit was now with his servant David.

[8 : 17] Saul was possessed by a distressing spirit, and David's music brought him relief. However, twice Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his spear in verses 10 to 12.

In the previous chapter, David encountered a giant with a spear, Goliath, and from chapter 18 onwards, David is threatened by the spear-wielding giant of Saul. Saul takes on characteristics of Goliath, and the spear of Saul becomes his identifying instrument in the following chapters.

David is raised up and prospers in all that he does. He acts wisely. He is a new Joseph. He is made a commander of 1,000, and David is probably not even 20 yet, so this might be an honorific role for a member of the king's household at this point, rather than an actual assignment.

However, honorific or not, he soon proves skilled in the role. Israel and Judah, the two halves of the nation, both love David. Israel is united in and by their love for this young man.

Saul had promised David his daughter Merab in marriage, but he ended up giving Merab to another man instead. As Peter Lightheart points out, David's experience in Saul's house echoes that of Jacob in the house of Laban.

[9 : 26] David experienced hostility from his brothers. He left his father's house. He prospers. He starts to be feared or resented. A daughter is offered to him as a wife and then withdrawn, and then he becomes a son-in-law.

Saul's daughter Michael loved David, and so Saul offered her as a wife to David, hoping that she would be a snare to him, taking his side against David. But Michael loved David, the only woman in the Old Testament narratives who is described as loving a man.

