

*1 & 2 Samuel***PREFACE**

The idea—even command—for children of God to love one another is not new; it harkens back, at least, to Leviticus—not part of the original Ten Commandments, but a commandment from the Lord nonetheless.

Read Leviticus 19:17-18.

When asked by one of the scribes, Jesus said that after loving God, this was the most important commandment. Then, at the last supper with His disciples, Jesus declared that He was leaving them with a “new” commandment to “love one another.”

Read John 13:34-35.

When Jesus says “new” commandment, he does not mean something brand new, something never heard of before.

new = *kainen* = of uncertain affinity; new (**especially in freshness**; while <G3501> (neos) is properly so with respect to age) :- new; “freshness as in the opposite of ‘outworn’ rather than simply ‘recent’ or ‘different’” (Merrill C. Tenney).

So this idea of loving those around you—your associates, your comrades, your family—has been built into God’s economy from the start. And we have no finer example of this than the love between Jonathan and David.

BOND AND COVENANT

Back during their days of their intense friendship, Jonathan made a covenant with David. Jonathan was about to stick his neck out for his brother and friend before his father Saul. The new moon was approaching, and David would be expected at the king’s table for the feast. Jonathan would offer a perfectly innocent excuse for David’s absence—to sacrifice with his brothers in Bethlehem, at their behest. If Saul accepted this excuse with grace, then all would be well, but if he became angered by it Jonathan would have his confirmation that Saul was determined to kill David, and he, Jonathan, would then get word to him.

Jonathan knew this would be dangerous; he was no stranger to the temper of his father. But he did not yet believe that Saul wanted to kill David. So before he returned to the palace, he wanted David to agree to do what he could for his “house”—his family and name—in the event he did not survive.

Read 1 Samuel 20:12-17.

Modern ears don’t pick it up right away, but what Jonathan was asking in vv14-15 was that once David became king, he would not kill Jonathan if he has survived until then (“...that I may not die”). It was common practice that when a new king took the throne he would kill anyone who might contest his rule. David was not a son of the current king, but Jonathan was. The true son—or any of that son’s sons—could through intrigue or assassination get rid of David. This was no small thing Jonathan was asking of his friend.

Very often what is most interesting in a narrative is not what is there, but what is missing. When one reads the story of this relationship it seems to be one-sided; repeatedly Jonathan expresses—we have his words—his love for and devotion to David. In Chapter Eighteen it says that “the soul of Jonathan was knit [\[bonded\]](#) to the soul of David.” This is something more profound than just a couple of buds who enjoy a beer together after work. But it doesn’t say that *David’s* soul was knit to the soul of Jonathan.

What is missing in the story are reciprocal words from David. The story of the affection these two men had for each other reads a little one-sided—at least while Jonathan is still alive. After he falls in battle we will see David put this covenant into action. But back to this banquet for the new moon.

To say that Saul did not accept Jonathan’s explanation with grace would be an understatement.

Read 1 Samuel 20:30-34.

Verse 30 is cleaned up a bit in most English translations. Let’s just say that the real words and references and imagery Saul uses to curse his son would be a bit coarse for this venue.

Apparently Saul’s favorite method of venting his pique was to pin someone to the wall with his spear. He tried it with David and he tried it with his own son. It is also apparent he was a poor shot; he always missed. Subsequently Jonathan reports back to David, and there is a tearful parting (they will have just one more brief meeting [\(23:16-18\)](#), their last).

Here we still do not read *words* of affection from David, but his actions and behavior speak of his love for Jonathan. And before they part, Jonathan reaffirms their covenant.

Read 1 Samuel 20:41-42.

And David is now on the run, hiding from King Saul. He also begins to gather to himself comrades and warriors. Let’s now skip forward to the second book of Samuel. Saul and Jonathan have perished in battle, and David is made king of Judah. Saul’s sole remaining son, Ish-bosheth ([eesh-bo’-sheth](#)), is crowned king of Israel. A civil war ensues, with David becoming stronger and Ish-bosheth becoming weaker. When David’s general ([and nephew](#)), Joab, murders Abner, Ish-bosheth’s general, the king of Israel loses his courage ([lit, his hands dropped](#)).

As we come into Chapter Four of 2 Samuel, there remain only two heirs-apparent of Saul; everyone is dead except Ish-bosheth and Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth ([mef-ee-bo’-sheth](#)). And we have a rerun of the scene when the young Amalekite told David he had helped kill Saul, anticipating a reward, got instead himself killed instead.

This time two commanders from Saul’s army see the handwriting on the wall and look to ingratiate themselves with David the king of Judah. They kill Ish-bosheth not on the battlefield, but assassinate him while he is resting in his tent. They proudly present the head of Ish-bosheth to David in Hebron, but, once again, do not get the sort of reception they expected.

Read 2 Samuel 4:8-12.

Inserted before this episode is a parenthetical paragraph—coming seemingly out of the blue—about a crippled son of Jonathan. But Ronald Youngblood tells us that he is introduced

to demonstrate that his youth and and physical handicap disqualify him for rule in the north (Israel) [and, possibly to show that] “...he, who was the next Avenger of Blood [for the killing of his uncle Ish-bosheth], was very young; and besides was lame and unable to pursue them” (Patrick).

For the purposes of this study, however, he is introduced to set up David’s faithfulness to his covenant with Jonathan and his descendants.

Read 2 Samuel 4:4.

Sidebar: Something else not readily apparent in the English text is how these two names—Ish-bosheth and Mephibosheth—illustrate the depths of rebellion against Yahweh in Saul’s family—even Jonathan’s. The genealogy of King Saul in 1 Chronicles 8 says this in vv33-34: “Ner begot Kish, Kish begot Saul, and Saul begot Jonathan, Malchishua, Abinadab, and **Esh-Baal**. The son of Jonathan was **Merib-Baal**, and Merib-Baal begot Micah” (emphasis added).

There are different theories for the names being changed in the other passages, such as here in Samuel; not all are in agreement. But Esh-Baal = Ish-bosheth, and Merib-Baal = Mephibosheth. “Baal” as part of the names indicates a certain level of allegiance to the heathen, pagan gods by the parents.

Now to Chapter Nine.

In a day when most kings were lord over only one walled city, David is now king over all of Israel. He is at the height of his power. The average person enjoying this level of sovereignty would *dominate*; he would exert and enforce his control over all within his sphere. Any sign of compassion or tenderness could be seen as weakness, and exploited by one’s enemies.

But David is not your average king.

Read 2 Samuel 9:1.

It is said that the true sign of our character is what we do when no one is looking. The sign of a truly righteous king—a “man after God’s own heart”—is when he does something he doesn’t have to, for someone who can bring him no advantage. David had not forgotten his covenant with Jonathan. And learning of Mephibosheth from the steward Ziba (*tsee-bah’*) much to Ziba’s chagrin David fully restores to the lame son of Jonathan all that belonged not just to Jonathan, but to his grandfather Saul.

Read 2 Samuel 9:6-13.

In this story we have witnessed the compassion and kindness of King David. He has also demonstrated by his actions, if not his earlier words, his faithfulness to a covenant made with his best friend—and that at a time when those actions would bring him no benefit.

In fact, as we will see next week, these actions will later bring only more problems to a beleaguered king driven into exile—at which time he will have to employ another of his laudable traits: wisdom.

Matthew Henry: This was a great while after his accession to the throne, for it should seem that Mephibosheth, who was but five years old when Saul died, had now a son born. David had too long forgotten his obligations to Jonathan, but now, at length, they are brought to his mind. It is good sometimes to bethink ourselves whether there be any promises or engagements that we have neglected to make good; better do it late than never.

This teaches us to be mindful of our covenant. The kindness we have promised we must conscientiously perform, though it should not be claimed. God is faithful to us; let us not be unfaithful to one another.

And let us close with one more revelation of David's character—one more instance that proves he was a man after God's own heart. I initially skipped the verse because it seemed redundant—but it really wasn't.

In v1 David says,

"Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

But in v3 he says,

"Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?"

Here is an individual who understood that he was but a channel of the grace and mercy of God. If Ziba was a faithful steward of the house of Saul, David would be a faithful steward of the house of Yahweh. If Ziba was a faithful servant of Saul, so too would David be a faithful servant of God, acting in His name.