

August 4 Lesson 10 (NIV)

A COVENANT BETWEEN FRIENDS

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 15:12–17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 18–20

1 SAMUEL 18:1–5

¹ After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ² From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. ³ And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

⁵ Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well.

1 SAMUEL 19:1–7

¹ Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David ² and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. ³ I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

⁴ Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. ⁵ He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?"

⁶ Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death."

⁷ So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

KEY VERSE

Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.—1 Samuel 18:1

COVENANT IN GOD

Unit 3: Covenant: A Personal Perspective

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Promise Keepers
- B. Lesson Context
- I. A Covenant Made (1 SAMUEL 18:1–5)
 - A. United in Friendship (v. 1)
 - BFFs*
 - B. Bound in Service (v. 2)
 - C. Formed in Love (vv. 3, 4)
 - The Meaning of Gifts*
 - D. Sent in Service (v. 5)
- II. A Covenant Observed (1 SAMUEL 19:1–7)
 - A. A Plot (v. 1a)
 - B. A Plan (vv. 1b–3)
 - C. A Defense (vv. 4, 5)
 - D. A Promise (v. 6)
 - E. A Reunion (v. 7)

Conclusion

- A. Covenant Keepers
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

AbrahamAy-bruh-ham.

BethlehemBeth-lih-hem.

DeuteronomyDue-ter-ahn-uh-me.

EcclesiastesIk-leez-ee-as-teez.

GoliathGo-lye-uth.

LeviticusLeh-vit-ih-kus.

PhilistinesFuh-liss-teenz or *Fill-us-teenz*.

Introduction

A. Promise Keepers

In the 1990s, the Promise Keepers organization took Christian men by storm in the U. S. Tens of thousands from many backgrounds—different denominations, different races and ethnicities, even non-Christians—would drive hundreds of miles to fill football stadiums to praise God together in song, prayer, and preaching. The key theme of the movement was integrity. A Christian man should be a man of his word: a promise keeper to God, family, friends, acquaintances, and everyone else.

Of course, this directive is not just for men. All God’s people need to be promise keepers. Spouses need to keep commitments to each other. Children and parents must build trust by keeping their word. Employers and employees must act in accordance with hiring agreements. We can learn from those who went before us how to keep faith in our relationships.

B. Lesson Context

In the Christian arrangement of the books of the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Samuel are included with the historical books (Joshua–Esther). They record the transition from theocracy (being governed by the Lord) to monarchy (being governed by an earthly king). The books of 1 and 2 Samuel can be divided into these sections:

- The end of the period of the judges (1 Samuel 1–8)
- The Lord’s selection and rejection of Saul, Israel’s first king (1 Samuel 9–15)
- The Lord’s selection of David and the fall of Saul (1 Samuel 16–31)
- The establishment of David’s throne (2 Samuel 1–10)
- The sin of David and consequent flight from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11–18)
- The reestablishment of David in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 19; 20)
- The legacy of David (2 Samuel 21–24)

Samuel is a pivotal figure in the history of Israel, being the last of the judges and the first of the prophets (see Acts 3:24; 13:20). The Israelites, tired of the abuses of Samuel’s sons, demanded that Samuel give them an earthly king “like all the other nations” (1 Samuel 8:20). This flew in the face of God’s desire for Israel to be a priestly, holy nation under his rule (Exodus 19:6; 1 Samuel 12:12–16).

The Lord required Samuel to proclaim the negative consequences of becoming like the nations by having an earthly king (1 Samuel 8:11–18), but God still chose to grant their request. The Lord selected Saul, but Saul did not faithfully carry out the Lord’s commands (13:7–14; 15). Thus the Lord instructed Samuel to tell Saul of his rejection and then to anoint David to be Saul’s heir even while Saul still lived (13:14; 16:1).

I. A Covenant Made (1 SAMUEL 18:1–5)

King Saul met David for the first time during a confrontation with the Philistines. Young David killed the giant Goliath, leading to a rout of Israel’s enemies (1 Samuel 17:1–54). After this great victory, Saul met with David, who formally identified himself as the son of Jesse from Bethlehem (17:55–58). Jonathan, son of Saul, also had seen David’s victory over Goliath and presumably was present when David appeared before the king.

A. United in Friendship (v. 1)

1. After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.

The word translated *spirit* is seen once here in English, but actually occurs three times in the Hebrew. Though it has a relatively wide range of meaning, here it most nearly means “self,” one’s whole being.

With so many nuances, however, there is no reason that the writer could not also intend the reader to note other meanings. For instance, *spirit* can also be used to contrast with *body* to include the will and emotions (Isaiah 10:18). This would suggest that Jonathan loves David with his innermost being. The word *spirit* can also refer to the life of a creature, suggesting that Jonathan loves David forcefully, as though his life depends on it (Deuteronomy 19:21; Isaiah 38:16). In short, Jonathan loves David as he loves *himself*.

The phrase *became one* translates the same verb that reads “closely bound up with” in Genesis 44:30, describing the relationship between Jacob and his youngest son, Benjamin. Similarly, Jonathan’s spirit, both will and emotion, is bound with David. This speaks to the commitment of one to the other. Their allegiance is not created merely out of a sense of duty but out of deep emotional and even spiritual attachment.

Together these two Hebrew concepts, *spirit* and *became one*, demonstrate the genuineness and intensity of the bond between the two men. Though this verse focuses on Jonathan’s affection for David, other texts make clear that the feeling is mutual (see 1 Samuel 20:42; 2 Samuel 1:26; 21:7).

B. Bound in Service (v. 2)

2. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family.

This verse interrupts the story of Jonathan and David to briefly resume the story of Saul’s action regarding David. The Hebrew word translated *kept* can suggest choosing or selecting—as in Isaiah 44:14, in which certain trees were selected but not removed. This is the idea here; Saul selects David for a place in his court.

The second clause elaborates on what it means for Saul to take David. The king values David’s contributions in his court and military and so requires him to remain by the king’s side. This marks the end of David’s career as a shepherd (but see 2 Samuel 24:17; Ezekiel 34:20–24 regarding David as a shepherd of God’s people).

C. Formed in Love (vv. 3, 4)

3. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

There are two types of formal covenants: those between equals and those between a superior and an inferior. The most significant covenants in the Old Testament are made between people and the Lord (examples: Genesis 9:17; 17:1–22; 2 Samuel 7:1–16). Covenants between various people also occur: states and their representatives, kings and their subjects, military leaders and their soldiers, and individuals. Within the last category we see marriage portrayed as a covenant between a husband and a wife.

The *covenant* between Jonathan and David can be argued as one of power imbalance because Jonathan is the son of the king. A strong case can also be made that this covenant is made between equals. Jonathan and David clearly share mutual love (see commentary on 1 Samuel 18:1).

4. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

Formal covenants in the ancient Near East are comprised of distinct parts. These may be enumerated as follows: (1) identification of the giver; (2) the historical prologue; (3) stipulations of the participants; (4) storing and public reading; (5) witnesses of the covenant; (6) blessings for keeping and curses for violating the covenant terms; (7) a ceremony for ratification including a verbal affirmation; and (8) sanctions pronounced on a violator of the covenant terms.

Our passage describes only one of the elements of a covenant, the ceremonial act: Jonathan's giving David garments (see a similar act in Genesis 41:41–43). These probably represent various aspects of his royal status. The Hebrew word translated *robe* is an outer garment worn by people of status. We see wearing it such people as priests (Exodus 28:4), prophets (1 Samuel 15:27), royalty (1 Samuel 24:4; 2 Samuel 13:18), the wealthy (Job 1:20), and government officials (Ezra 9:3).

The *sword* and *bow* are weapons of warfare. The *belt* is used to bind up the tunic so that one can be ready for freer movement, especially in battle (Psalm 45:3), and to carry the sheath for the sword (2 Samuel 20:8). Giving these items is more than a symbol of friendship; it is a pledge of Jonathan's military loyalty to David.

D. Sent in Service (v. 5)

5. Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well.

This verse concludes the scene between Jonathan and David and summarizes the information that follows (1 Samuel 18:6, 7, not in today's text). David's wise behavior shows that the Lord has blessed him. Wisdom is frequently contrasted with foolishness in the Bible—with the assumption that God both gives wisdom and blesses those who demonstrate it (1 Samuel 13:13; Proverbs 1:7; 3:35; Matthew 7:24–27; etc.). As long as he acts wisely, David can expect to continue to be successful in his service not only to the king but also to the Lord.

The people accept David and approve of Saul's decision to send him out to fight their battles. David's forays habitually result in success (1 Samuel 18:30; 2 Samuel 5:2). Emphasizing that everyone, even Saul and his court, accepts David foreshadows the conflict to come.

II. A Covenant Observed

(1 SAMUEL 19:1–7)

After the events in 1 Samuel 18:1–5, all seems well. The situation begins to fall apart as Saul grows jealous of David due to the adoration of the nation (1 Samuel 18:7, 8) and as an evil spirit torments Saul (18:10). The king twice attempts to kill David (18:11). But no matter how Saul schemes, the Lord is with David and keeps him safe (18:12–30).

A. A Plot (v. 1a)

1a. Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David.

We see again the nature of Saul's fear and jealousy. Notice the progression. First, Saul personally tried to end David's life (1 Samuel 18:10, 11). Then Saul tried to achieve the same result by stealth (18:17). Now things have progressed to point where the king openly tells *his son and all the attendants to kill David*.

B. A Plan (vv. 1b–3)

1b–3. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David and warned him, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.”

These verses emphasize Jonathan’s positive regard for David, in spite of all the paranoia evident in King Saul, Jonathan’s *father*. The covenant that Jonathan has made with David prevents him from obeying his father’s orders to kill David. This puts Jonathan in a difficult situation. In order to save his friend, he has to disobey his father. And the king can certainly punish his son any way he sees fit for such an act of rebellion!

Jonathan chooses to honor his covenant with David and makes a plan to protect him. David is told to *go into hiding* in a certain *field*, presumably where Saul commonly goes (see 1 Samuel 20:5, 19). Then Jonathan will do two things. First, he will *go out* there with his father, and then he will *speak to him about* David. This is to gauge Saul’s reaction to the conversation in order to report it to David (see 20:12).

C. A Defense (vv. 4, 5)

4a. Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David;

Jonathan gives his exhortation in the third person (*let not the king*), which is meant to be deferential rather than commanding. He begins by exhorting his father not to *do wrong to ... David* (see 1 Samuel 20:32). The Hebrew used makes clear that Jonathan asks Saul not to sin against David. Though sin is usually understood as an offense against God alone, those sins against God are frequently also sins against other people (Genesis 42:22; Exodus 10:16; 1 Corinthians 8:12; etc.). Sinning against David would mean bringing him to harm. Jonathan emphasizes his earnest plea using forms of the Hebrew word translated *do wrong* three times in short order while speaking to his father (see 1 Samuel 19:5).

Jonathan’s address of his father as *the king* speaks also to the honor and responsibility of that position. The king must do what is right in the eyes of the Lord (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). Jonathan fulfills the command to argue for justice that the king should fulfill (Proverbs 21:8; Jeremiah 18:20).

Referring to David as the king’s *servant* makes clear the difference in power and status between those two. But even though the king has the power to do as he pleases with and to his servant, the king must honor the Lord in all decisions. David is loyal to the king, and it would be evil to harm a loyal servant (see 1 Samuel 22:14; 25:21; Proverbs 17:13).

4b, 5a. “he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad.

Jonathan gives an insurmountable reason for not harming David: David has done no wrong to King Saul—quite the opposite, in fact! Evidence of David’s good work is recounted in that he took *his life in his hands* killing *the Philistine* giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:50, 51). The result from *the Lord* was *a great victory for all Israel* (17:52, 53). Jonathan then reminds his father, who was an eyewitness to all this, that he was *glad* when it all happened.

5b. “Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”

Jonathan concludes his argument by returning to his beginning exhortation and turning it into the rhetorical question we see here. A rhetorical question is designed to make a point rather than get an answer.

The answer itself is obvious: the king should not kill *David ... for no reason* because then the king himself would become guilty and deserving of death (Deuteronomy 19:10–13). Jonathan describes David’s life as *innocent* because David has acted faithfully as a servant in the court of Saul. David has never given Saul any reason for Saul’s anger.

D. A Promise (v. 6)

6. Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.”

Jonathan’s argument has the desired effect. *Listened to* means both to hear and to act in accordance with what is heard, as when the Lord told Abraham to “listen to whatever Sarah tells you” (Genesis 21:12). Similarly, the exodus from Egypt was initiated because God not only heard but acted on the groaning of the children of Israel (Exodus 2:24, 25).

Saul’s obedience to Jonathan’s pleading culminates in taking an *oath* in the name of *the Lord: David will not be put to death*. Taking oaths is equivalent to making a covenant and a vow (Deuteronomy 4:31). The Lord expects the king to keep his vow (Numbers 30:2; see also Matthew 5:33–37). Deuteronomy 23:21–23 declares that vows must be kept, while Ecclesiastes 5:4–6 reminds the reader that breaking a vow angers the Lord. Thus by swearing that David will live, Saul binds himself to do all in his power to protect David.

E. A Reunion (v. 7)

7. So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

David emerges from his prearranged hiding place after hearing the proper signal. Jonathan informs him of Saul’s change of heart, and as a result David is in Saul’s presence *as before*. This phrase calls back to mind how well David and Saul had worked together initially after defeating the Philistines. David’s service in Saul’s court is no less valuable than his military service (1 Samuel 16:14–23; 18:13; 19:8). At least for the time being, Saul desires that David live and thrive in the king’s court as in times past (but contrast 19:9–15; 20:31, 33).

Conclusion

A. Covenant Keepers

His covenant with David put Jonathan in a difficult situation. When he learned of the king’s unjust plot on his closest friend, he risked (at best) alienation from his father and (at worst) death. Nevertheless, Jonathan was true to his covenant with David without being disloyal to his father, reconciling Saul and David. The Lord is pleased when we are covenant-keepers. That’s true for simple promises, such as being on time for dinner, or major ones, such as honoring marriage vows.

B. Prayer

Dear Lord, help us follow Jonathan's example of keeping covenant as we are faithful to the promises we make. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Honoring covenants, commitments, and contracts honors the Lord.