

# DAVID:

## SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### JONATHAN

(I Samuel 18:1)

“Souls that carry on a blest exchange  
Of joys they meet with in their heavenly range,  
And, with a fearless confidence, make known  
The sorrows sympathy esteems its own  
Daily derive increasing light and force  
From such communion in their pleasant course;  
Feel less the journey’s roughness and its length,  
Meet their opposers with united strength;  
And one in heart, in interest, and design,  
Gird up each other to the race divine.”

- Cowper

IN heaven’s vault there are what are known as binary stars, each probably a sun, with its attendant train of worlds, revolving around a common center, but blending their rays so that they reach the watcher’s eye as one clear beam of light. So do twin-souls find the center of their orbit in each other; and there is nothing in the annals of human affection nobler than the bond of such a love between two pure, high-minded and noble men, whose love passes that of women. Such love was celebrated in ancient classic story, and has made the names of Damon and Pythias proverbial. It has also enriched the literature of modern days in the love of a Hallam and a Tennyson. But nowhere is it more fragrant than on the pages that contain the memorials of the love of Jonathan and David.

David was in all probability profoundly influenced by the character of Jonathan, who must have been considerably older than himself. It seems to have been love at first sight.

**“When David had made an end of speaking unto Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”**

He did not, however, avow it on the spot; but that night, as the young shepherd was sitting amid a group of soldiers, recounting with them the events of the memorable day, a royal messenger may have summoned him to Jonathan’s pavilion, on entering which he was amazed to be greeted with the warm embrace of a brotherly affection, which was never to wane. He had lost Eliab in the morning; but at nightfall he had won a friend that would stick closer than a brother.

The boy-soldier must have shrunk back as unworthy; he must have ruefully looked down at his poor apparel as unbefitting a royal alliance. But all such considerations were swept away before the impetuous rush of Jonathan's affection, as he stripped himself of robe and apparel, of sword and bow and girdle, and gave them all to David. **"Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul."**

### **I. CONSIDER THE QUALITIES OF THIS FRIEND**

Whom the Lord chose for the molding of the character of his beloved; and then be prepared to surrender to his care the choice of your most intimate associates.

He knows what your temperament needs, and where to find the companion who shall strengthen you when weak, and develop latent unknown qualities.

*He was every inch a man.*

In true friendship there must be a similarity of tastes and interests. The prime condition of two men walking together is that they should be agreed. And the bond of a common manliness knit these twin souls from the first. Jonathan was every inch a man; as dexterous with the bow, as his friend with his sling. Able to flash with indignation, strong to bear without quailing the brunt of his father's wrath, fearless to espouse the cause of his friends at whatever cost he was capable of inspiring a single armour-bearer with his own ardent spirit of attacking an army; of turning the tide of invasion; and of securing the admiration and affection of the entire people who, standing between him and his father, refused to let him die. When Jonathan fell on Gilboa, it was no fulsome flattery that led his friend, in his pathetic elegy, to exclaim:

**"Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!  
How are the mighty fallen!"**

*He was withal very sensitive and tender.*

It is the fashion in some quarters to emphasize the qualities supposed to be specially characteristic of men - those of strength, courage, endurance to the undervaluing of the tenderer graces more often associated with woman. But in every true man there must be a touch of woman, as there was in the ideal Man, the Lord Jesus. In Him there is neither male nor female, because there is the symmetrical blending of both: and in us, too, there should be strength and sweetness, courage and sympathy; the oak and the vine, the rock and the moss that covers it with its soft green mantle.

*Jonathan had a marvellous power of affection.*

He loved David as himself; he was prepared to surrender without a pang his succession to his father's throne, if only he might be next to his friend; his was the love that expresses itself in tender embraces and tears, that must have response from the object of its choice.

**“I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:  
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me;  
Thy love to me was wonderful,  
Passing the love of women.”**

We judge a man by his friends, and the admiration he excites in them. Any man whom David loved must have been possessed of many of those traits so conspicuous in David himself. Much is said of the union of opposites, and it is well when one is rich where the other is poor; but the deepest love must be between those whose natures are close akin.

As we, therefore, review the love that united these two, now for ever joined in the indissoluble bonds of eternity, we must attribute to Jonathan the poetic sensitiveness, the tender emotion, the heroism of that courage, the capacity for those uprisings of the soul to all that was pure, and lovely, and noble, which were so conspicuous in David.

*He was distinctly religious.*

When first introduced to us, as, accompanied by his armour-bearer, he climbs single-handed to attack the Philistine garrison, strongly entrenched behind rocky crags, he speaks as one familiar with the ways of God, to whom there is no restraint **“to save by many or by few”**; and when the appointed sign is given, it is accepted as a presage of the victory which the Lord is about to give (I Samuel 14).

As he stands beside his father on the hillside, and sees the stripling descend to slay Goliath, and win a great victory for Israel, he discerns the hand of the Lord working a great victory for Israel, and his soul lifts itself in holy thought and thanksgiving (I Samuel 19:5).

When the two friends are about to be torn from each other, with little hope of renewing their blessed intercourse, Jonathan finds solace in the fact of the Divine appointment, and the Lord being between them. Between them, not in the sense of division, but of connection; as the ocean unites us with distant lands, whose shores she leaves, whose freights she bears to our wharves. However far we are parted from those we love, we are intimately near in God, whose presence infills and enwraps us thus streams mingle in the ocean to which they pour tributary tides.

And when, in the last interview the friends ever had, they met by some secret arrangement in a wood, **“Jonathan came to David there, and strengthened his hand in God.”**

All that those words imply it is not easy to write: our hearts interpret the words, and imagine the stream of holy encouragement that poured from that noble spirit into the heart of his friend.

He must be strong who would strengthen another; he must have God, and be in God, who would give the consolations of God to his brother; and we can easily understand how the anguish of Jonathan’s soul, torn between filial devotion to his father and his love to his friend, must have driven him back on those resources of the Divine nature, which are the only solace of men whose lives have been cast in the same fiery crucible.

## II. CONSIDER THE CONFLICT OF JONATHAN'S LIFE

He was devoted to his father. He was always found associated with that strange dark character, melancholy to madness, the prey of evil spirits, and yet so keenly susceptible to music, and so quick to respond to the appeal of chivalry, patriotism, and generous feeling; resembling some mountain lake, alternately mirroring mountains and skies, and swept by dark storms. Father and son were together in life, as they were **“in their death they were not divided.”**

When his father first ascended the throne of Israel, the Lord was with him, and Jonathan knew it (I Samuel 20:13).

It must have been an exceeding delight to him to feel that the claims of the father were identical with the claims of God, and the heart of the young man must have leapt up in a blended loyalty to both. But the fair prospect was soon overcast. The Lord departed from Saul; and immediately his power to hold the kingdom waned, the Philistines invaded his land, his weapons of defence failed him, his people followed him trembling, and Samuel told him that his kingdom could not continue. Then followed that dark day when Saul intruded on the priestly office in offering sacrifice. The ominous sentence was spoken, **“The Lord hath sought Him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath appointed him prince unto his own people.”**

From that moment Saul's course was always downward; but Jonathan clung to him as if he hoped that by his own allegiance to God he might reverse the effects of his father's failure, and still hold the kingdom for their race.

At first this was not so difficult.

There was no one to divide his heart with his father; it was not, therefore, a hardship for him to imperil his life in unequal conflict with the Philistines; and his heart must have been fired with the gladdest anticipations as, through the woods where honey dropped, he pursued the Philistines, with all Israel at his heel, smiting them from Michmash to Aijalon.

His hopes, however, were destined to disappointment; for instead of the revival which he had pictured to himself, he saw his father drifting further down the strong tide that bore him out from God. Saul's failure in the matter of the destruction of the Amalekites, the dark spirit which possessed and terrified him, the alienation of Samuel these things acted as a moral paralysis on that brave and eager heart. What could he do to reverse the decisions of that fated soul; how stem the torrent; how turn the enemy from the gate?

Surely it was this hopelessness of being able to alter any of these things that made him unable to meet Goliath. Many a time as he heard the terrible roar of the giant's challenge, he must have felt the uprisings of a noble impulse to meet him, slay him, or die. But there came over his soul the blight of despair. What could he do, when the destiny of the land he loved seemed already settled?

When he woke up to find how truly he loved David, a new difficulty entered his life. Not outwardly, because, though Saul eyed David with jealousy, there was no open rupture.

David went in and out of the palace, was in a position of trust, and was constantly at hand for the intercourse for which each yearned. But when the flames of hostility, long smouldering in Saul's heart, broke forth, the true anguish of his life began. On the one hand, his duty as son and subject held him to his father, though he knew his father was doomed, and that union with him meant disaster to himself; on the other hand, all his heart cried out for David.

His love for David made him eager to promote reconciliation between his father and his friend. It was only when repeated failure had proved the fruitlessness of his dream that he abandoned it; and then the thought must have suggested itself to him: Why not extricate yourself from this sinking ship whilst there is time? Why not join your fortunes with his whom God hath chosen? The new fair kingdom of the future is growing up around him identify yourself with it, though it be against your father.

The temptation was specious and masterful, but it fell blunt and ineffectual at his feet. Stronger than the ties of human love were those of duty, sonship, loyalty to God's anointed king; and in some supreme moment he turned his back on the appeal of his heart, and elected to stand beside his father. From that choice he never flinched. When David departed whither he would, Jonathan went back to the city. His father might sneer at his league with the son of Jesse, but he held his peace; and when finally Saul started for his last battle with the Philistines, Jonathan fought beside him, though he knew that David was somehow involved in alliance with them.

It was one of the grandest exhibitions of the triumph of principle over passion, of duty over inclination, that the annals of history record. Jonathan died as a hero; not only because of his prowess in battle with his country's foes, but because of his victory over the strongest passion of the human heart, the love of a strong man, in which were blended the strands of a common religion, a common enthusiasm for all that was good and right.

Conflicts like these await us all when the appointment of God says one thing, and the choice of the heart says another; when the wind sets in from one quarter, and the tide from the opposite one. Whenever this befalls thee, may God's grace enable thee to follow as straight a course, as true to the loftiest dictates of conscience, as Jonathan, the son of Saul!

**~ end of chapter 7 ~**

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