

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Chapter 18

### *Saul's Jealousy of David*

After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. <sup>2</sup> From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. <sup>3</sup> And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well. <sup>6</sup> When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. <sup>7</sup> As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." <sup>8</sup> Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" <sup>9</sup> And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. <sup>10</sup> The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand <sup>11</sup> and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. <sup>12</sup> Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul. <sup>13</sup> So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. <sup>14</sup> In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. <sup>15</sup> When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. <sup>16</sup> But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns. <sup>17</sup> Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the LORD." For Saul said to himself, "I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!" <sup>18</sup> But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?" <sup>19</sup> So when the time came for Merab, Saul's daughter, to be given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah. <sup>20</sup> Now Saul's daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. <sup>21</sup> "I will give her to him," he thought, "so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." So Saul said to David, "Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law." <sup>22</sup> Then Saul ordered his attendants: "Speak to David privately and say, 'Look, the king is pleased with you, and his attendants all like you; now become his son-in-law.'" <sup>23</sup> They repeated these words to David. But David said, "Do you think it is a small matter to become the king's son-in-law? I'm only a poor man and little known." <sup>24</sup> When Saul's servants told him what David had said, <sup>25</sup> Saul replied, "Say to David, 'The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.'" Saul's plan

was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.<sup>26</sup> When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king's son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed,<sup>27</sup> David and his men went out and killed two hundred Philistines. He brought their foreskins and presented the full number to the king so that he might become the king's son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.<sup>28</sup> When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David,<sup>29</sup> Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.<sup>30</sup> The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul's officers, and his name became well known.

**18:1** It appears that David spoke with Saul at length, and he may have explained his actions as an expression of his faith in the Lord, thus attracting the love and loyalty of Jonathan (see v. 3; 14:6; 19:5). Their friendship endured even when it became clear that David was to replace him as the successor to his father's throne. (CSB)

*knit.* Same Hbr verb used in Gn 44:30 to express Jacob's love for his son Benjamin. Jonathan initiates a friendship with David that blesses and hallows life. (TLSB)

*loved.* Used of a covenant relationship; possesses political overtones. Never used of homosexual desire or activity. (OT uses the verb "to know" for sexual activity. Latter verb is never used of David's relationship with Jonathan.) The fact that Saul, too, loved David (16:21) prepares us for the later political use of the verb "love." (TLSB)

**18:2** *Saul kept David with him.* See note on 17:15. (CSB)

**18:3** *Jonathan made a covenant with David.* The initiative comes from Jonathan. The terms of the agreement are not here specified (see further 19:1; 20:8, 13–16, 41–42; 23:18) but would appear to involve a pledge of mutual loyalty and friendship. At the very least, Jonathan accepts David as his equal. (CSB)

Jonathan pledges allegiance to Israel's future king in a political arrangement that involves a commitment to care for each other and promote the other's interests. Loyalty is the essence of such a covenant. (TLSB)

**18:4** *took off the robe ... and gave it to David.* Jonathan ratifies the covenant in an act that symbolizes giving himself to David. His act may even signify his recognition that David was to assume his place as successor to Saul (see 20:14–15, 31; 23:17)—a possibility that seems the more likely in that he also gave David "even his sword, his bow and his belt" (cf. 13:22). (CSB)

By giving David his robes, Jonathan renounces his right to the throne. David accepts the robes without further ado. He receives from Jonathan what he cannot receive from Saul (17:38–39). (TLSB)

**18:5** *Whatever Saul sent him to do.* During the rest of the campaign. (CSB)

*was successful.* Hbr denotes skill as well as success. Because God's Spirit was with David, he was successful in battle without formal military training. (TLSB)

**18:1–5** Jonathan's unselfish affection for David is seen when Jonathan renounces his own right to the throne—something highly unusual. Mixed motives can easily mar friendships. In Christ, the friend of sinners, we have a faithful and forgiving friend who will never leave or forsake us. • “What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry Ev'rything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit; Oh, what needless pain we bear— All because we do not carry Ev'rything to God in prayer!” Amen. (*LSB* 770:1) (TLSB)

**18:6–8** After a military victory, it was common for women to celebrate their nation's triumph. Their song gives Saul pride of place by mentioning him first; they do not intend to offend the king. However, Saul took grave offense at their words and felt threatened by their suggestion of support for David. The song uses poetic exaggeration; David had not yet slain hundreds, let alone thousands, of people. (TLSB)

**18:6** *instruments.* The Epic of Gilgamesh mentions women as musicians. (TLSB)

**18:7** *David his tens of thousands.* In accordance with the normal conventions of Hebrew poetry, this was the women's way of saying “Saul and David have slain thousands” (10,000 was normally used as the parallel of 1,000—see Dt 32:30; Ps 91:7; Mic 6:7; also in Canaanite poetry found at Ugarit). It is a measure of Saul's insecurity and jealousy that he read their intentions incorrectly and took offense. His resentment may have been initially triggered by the mention of David's name alongside his own. See note on 21:11 for how the Philistines interpreted the song. (CSB)

**18:9** In light of vv 12, 15, 29, this means “Saul kept a fearful eye on David.” Perhaps he suspects David may succeed him. (TLSB)

**18:10–11** As Saul's military commander, David was at the king's beck and call. If the king wanted entertainment to soothe his mental torment, David was obliged to comply. A spear in Saul's hand and a lyre in David's—what a contrast between Saul's harmful intentions and David's helpful assistance. (TLSB)

**18:10** *evil spirit from God.* See note on 16:14. (CSB)

*prophesying.* The Hebrew for this word is sometimes used to indicate uncontrolled ecstatic behavior (see note on 1Ki 18:29) and is best understood in that sense in this context (see also note on 10:5). (CSB)

*as he usually did.* See 16:14, 23. (CSB)

**18:12** *the LORD was with David but had left Saul.* See 16:14 and note. (CSB)

Saul feared David because Saul had alienated himself from God, while God was with David, protecting him from harm and destruction. (TLSB)

**18:13** *he sent David away.* His apparent motive was the hope that David would be killed in battle (see vv. 17, 21, 25; 19:1), but the result was greater acclaim for David (see vv. 14, 16, 30). (CSB)

Whatever Saul does to minimize David's influence has the reverse effect. He had hoped David would die in battle. Instead, support for David grows among the people. (TLSB)

**18:14** *success.* Because God was an intimate part of David's daily life. (TLSB)

**18:16** David's God-given success binds the people all the more closely to him in a covenant relationship.(TLSB)

*loved.* People gave David allegiance and loyalty. (TLSB)

*he went out.* David's military activities elevated him to prominence before the people. (TLSB)

**18:6–16** Saul's jealousy does him no good; meanwhile, David is faithful to the Lord, who gives him success. Envy and jealousy diminish our enjoyment of life, stealing our contentment. God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:3). What more do we need? • Lord, help me to be content with all the blessings You give me. Enable me to use them to bring blessings into the lives of others. Amen. (TLSB)

**18:17** *Here is my older daughter.* David was entitled to have Saul's daughter as his wife because of his victory over Goliath (see 17:23). This promise had not been kept and is now made conditional on further military service, in which Saul hoped David would be killed. (CSB)

Saul does not yet give his daughter to David, who might soon die in battle. He only promises her to David. Royal marriages were highly political. Luther: "King Saul did not like David and would have liked to kill him; but since he wanted to be holy, he decided not to kill him himself, but to send him among the Philistines to be killed there, so that his hand would remain innocent" (AE 21:74). (TLSB)

*battles of the LORD.* See 25:28.

**18:18** David sees Saul's political agenda clearly and responds modestly. (TLSB)

**18:19** In order to humiliate David, Saul gives Merab to Adriel. Merab would bear Adriel five sons (2Sm 21:8). (TLSB)

**18:20** Michal's love for David parallels Jonathan's and may have the same covenant connotations. Both love David more than they love their father.(TLSB)

*they.* Michal and David or others at court who observed them. (TLSB)

**18:21** Saul intends Michal to be a snare for David in keeping him off guard and by requiring a ridiculous dowry, or bride-price (v 25), which could prove fatal for David. (TLSB)

**18:23** Unlike today's culture of self-promotion, the culture of David's time was one of self-deprecation. (TLSB)

*poor.* He cannot afford to marry the king's daughter. (TLSB)

*man.* Cf 21:14. David is no longer a youth. (TLSB)

*no reputation?* David's family is not aristocratic. (TLSB)

**18:25** *no other price.* Normally a bride-price was paid by the bridegroom to the father of the bride (see Ge 34:12; Ex 22:16) as compensation for the loss of his daughter and insurance for her support if widowed. Saul requires David instead to pass a test appropriate for a great warrior, hoping that he will "fall" (see vv. 17, 21). (CSB)

Paid to the bride's father as compensation for her loss and as insurance for her support if she were widowed. In Gn 29:20, service to the bride's father also substitutes for a monetary dowry. (TLSB)

*foreskins.* Would show that these men were Philistines. A thirteenth-century Egyptian relief shows scribes counting a pile of hands taken from Hittite soldiers and recording their number. Israelites, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, as West Semitic people, practiced circumcision. Philistines, of Greek cultural origins, did not. (TLSB)

**18:27** Although David killed more men, he brought only what Saul required. Ironically, Saul thought David would die pursuing the bride-price. (TLSB)

**18:28** *Michal loved David.* God's favor on David is revealed not only in his military accomplishments, but also in Michal's love for him—now added to that of Jonathan. Everything Saul seeks to use against David turns to David's advantage. (CSB)

Michal's love for David, now added to Jonathan's love (covenant loyalty) to him, shows God's blessing on David. (TLSB)

**18:29** *Saul became still more afraid of him.* Saul's perception that God's hand was on David did not lead him to repentance and acceptance of his own lot (see 15:26) but into greater fear and jealousy toward David. (CSB)

The more God blesses David, the more Saul fears him as his rival and potential heir to the throne, aided by his marriage into the king's family. Though Saul could clearly see that God was with David, it led to no change of heart on the king's part. (TLSB)

**18:30** Philistines are no match for David's superior skills. (TLSB)

*highly esteemed.* David's name was "precious" (cf Ps 139:17; Is 43:4). (TLSB)

**18:17–30** At the beginning (v 5), middle (v 15), and end of this chapter (v 30), we are told that David is successful in all he does, because the Lord is with him. As with Joseph (Gn 50:20), what others intend for evil against David God turns into good. Fear of others (v 29) can be a sign of little faith. Our Lord says, "Fear not" (Lk 12:32). When afraid, we are urged to trust the

Gospel promise of Rm 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” • Lord, give me faith to believe that “for those who love God all things work together for good” (Rm 8:28). Amen.  
(TLSB)