

# 1 Samuel 18 • The Greater Test of Faith

## Introduction

Although his battle with Goliath was a momentous event and definitely a milestone of biblical proportions, it probably wasn't David's greatest test of faith. Like many of the role models provided in the Bible, great men and women respond well during times of crisis but sometimes fail in the course of prolonged, everyday living. David's greater test of faith came after his defeat of Goliath in the course of his daily service in Saul's court. Keeping in mind that the word "faith" in the Bible can always also be translated as "faithfulness", David's faithfulness – like that of most believers – was put to the test several different ways in the course of his everyday life.

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. <sup>2</sup>Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. <sup>3</sup>Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. <sup>4</sup>Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. <sup>5</sup>So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

## [Read v.1-5]

**Q: From a purely worldly point of view, why might this relationship between David and Jonathan be surprising?**

A: Because although David has been anointed by God through Samuel to become the next king, it was Jonathan who by birth was in line to inherit the crown.

**Q: What is the greater spiritual principle at work here?**

A: The greater spirit of the Law to love others.

**Application:** *It is not uncommon to find people who believe their ministry and calling is more important than their feelings for and relationships with other people. But every believer is called to put God's Word into practice. If someone cannot love on a personal level, they will not effectively love at the corporate level when carrying out their ministry and calling.*

**Q: What was Saul's purpose in v.2 to "not let him return to his father's house"?**

A: It signifies a change in their relationship. Whereas David previously divided his time between serving Saul and his own father, now he was commanded to be devoted exclusively to Saul's service alone.

**Q: What was the point of Jonathan giving David his robe?**

A: So that David might no longer appear in Saul's court as a simple shepherd but be recognized as a prince.

**Q: Why did Jonathan give David his armor and weapons?**

A: So that David would appear not just merely as a prince but as a soldier. All these things combined to elevate David to the same status as Jonathan, the prince and heir of the kingdom, that they might seem like one.

**Point:** *David's ministry and calling changed so that from this point on he was in full-time service of the king, just as believers are called from the old life to the new.*

**Q: What was the ultimate effect of David establishing his service to Saul through genuine love of personal relationships?**

A: It pleased not only the people but Saul's servants. (v.5) In other words, personal faithfulness begat reciprocal faithfulness from others.

**Application:** *As with all leaders of God, David was tested in the course of his popularity. Would he allow it to change the way he treated others or the way he viewed himself? We know he passed the test in that it was the lives of all those around him that changed rather than David himself changing.*

<sup>6</sup>It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. <sup>7</sup>The women sang as they played, and said,

“Saul has slain his thousands,  
And David his ten thousands.”

<sup>8</sup>Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?”

<sup>9</sup>Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on.

<sup>10</sup>Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul’s hand. <sup>11</sup>Saul hurled the spear for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David escaped from his presence twice.

<sup>12</sup>Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. <sup>13</sup>Therefore Saul removed him from his presence and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. <sup>14</sup>David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him. <sup>15</sup>When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him. <sup>16</sup>But all Israel and Judah loved David, and he went out and came in before them.

### [Read v.6-11]

**Q: From a purely worldly point of view, why are we probably NOT surprised by the relationship between Saul and David?**

A: Saul, having flunked all tests of personal faithfulness, most certainly failed all tests of personal love. Therefore it is not surprising that the issue of popularity invoked jealousy and rage within him, exactly opposite of what it worked in David.

**Q: What would be particularly disturbing about the way the women framed their praise?**

A: They did not attribute the results to God as would be customarily expected, but praised David directly. Saul therefore immediately seized upon the notion that this was an issue between him and David personally, whereas David seems to have dismissed it entirely.

**Application:** One of the key differences between the righteous and the unrighteous is their concern, or lack thereof, for men’s praise more than God’s. A symptom of deeper sin is often revealed by the degree that people’s opinions shape how a person serves God.

*The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold,  
And each is tested by the praise accorded him.  
Proverbs 27:21*

**Application:** Praise is like a hot furnace revealing what a person is really made of. The praise that instilled humility in David only brought to the surface the dross in Saul’s heart to reveal his pride and personal desires.

**Q: So why did God allow an evil spirit to come upon Saul? Was Saul just unlucky or cursed?**

A: This kind of thing is always the logical conclusion to a very long series of personal choices. It comes about as the result of steadfastly refusing to repent of sin and instead embracing sin ever tighter. Saul is given over to the unrighteousness he has been personally pursuing at the expense of his own faithfulness.

**Q: Where does unfaithfulness ultimately lead?**

A: To taking matters into one’s own hands. In Saul’s case, he thought killing David would resolve the issue of popularity between them.

**Application:** Note how David’s practice of love led to faithfulness while Saul’s lack of love led to unfaithfulness. How is our greater character shaped by our daily actions and decisions in the “little” things?

### [Read v.12-16]

**Q: From a purely worldly point of view, what has happened to David’s career?**

A: It appears that he was demoted from being in charge of Saul’s personal body guard to merely being a captain over a thousand men.

**Q: Why did Saul do this?**

A: Whereas Saul first feared David for his greater popularity with the people in v.1-15, now Saul fears David for his greater popularity, so to speak, with the Lord.

**Point:** *The unrighteous consciously recognize they have a spiritual problem but deceive themselves as to how they can fix it their self rather than personally repenting and responding to God.*

**Q: What was the final result? How did this build upon David's previous efforts?**

A: Whereas his faithfulness previously caught the attention of some of the people and Saul's servants, it now states in v.14 that "*all Israel and Judah loved David*". Ultimately the contrast of his righteousness to Saul's unrighteousness showed through to everyone.

**Application:** *It takes faith to experience a demotion in the eyes of everyone around us and still maintain our humility and service. Have you ever been tested in such a way so that God may determine whether we're more concerned about what others think about us than what He thinks of us?*

**[Read v.17-30]**

**Q: Why is Saul not really promising something extra to David in offering his daughter Merab to David?**

A: Saul was already obligated by his word to give one of his daughters in marriage to whomever slew Goliath.

*The men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who is coming up? Surely he is coming up to defy Israel. And it will be that the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."*

1 Samuel 17:25

**Application:** *One of the distinguishing characteristics between the faithful and the unfaithful is the degree to which they keep their word. Those incapable of keeping their word with God are often betrayed by the fact they are incapable of keeping their word with men.*

**Q: What was Saul's true intention?**

A: Having unsuccessfully tried to kill David himself, he tries to get others to do it, in this case in the course of battle with the Philistines.

**Q: What would have been the greater tragedy had David married Merab?**

A: Ultimately all of her sons – heirs of Saul – had to be delivered to the Gibeonites to be hanged in order to make things right. It is possible that David would have found himself having to pay for Saul's sins, so to speak, with his own sons' lives.

**Q: What did Saul recognize in his youngest daughter Michal?**

A: Saul recognized that spiritually she would "*become a snare to him*". He hoped this, combined with the threat from the Philistines, would ultimately take care of the problem for him.

**Q: Was Saul correct in his assessment of Michal?**

A: Yes. Michal would eventually turn on David and complete separation would ultimately result.

**Q: What did Saul do in the mean time to enhance his chances of overcoming David?**

A: Saul demanded from David what he thought would be an impossible dowry, hoping that David would be killed in the process of completing the

<sup>17</sup>Then Saul said to David, "Here is my older daughter Merab; I will give her to you as a wife, only be a valiant man for me and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "My hand shall not be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him."

<sup>18</sup>But David said to Saul, "Who am I, and what is my life or my father's family in Israel, that I should be the king's son-in-law?" <sup>19</sup>So it came about at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, that she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.

<sup>20</sup>Now Michal, Saul's daughter, loved David. When they told Saul, the thing was agreeable to him. <sup>21</sup>Saul thought, "I will give her to him that she may become a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David, "For a second time you may be my son-in-law today."

<sup>22</sup>Then Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David secretly, saying, 'Behold, the king delights in you, and all his servants love you; now therefore, become the king's son-in-law.'" <sup>23</sup>So Saul's servants spoke these words to David.

But David said, "Is it trivial in your sight to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?"

<sup>24</sup>The servants of Saul reported to him according to these words which David spoke. <sup>25</sup>Saul then said, "Thus you shall say to David, 'The king does not desire any dowry except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to take vengeance on the king's enemies.'"

Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. <sup>26</sup>When his servants told David these words, it pleased David to become the king's son-in-law. Before the days had expired <sup>27</sup>David rose up and went, he and his men, and struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave him Michal his daughter for a wife.

<sup>28</sup>When Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, <sup>29</sup>then Saul was even more afraid of David. Thus Saul was David's enemy continually. <sup>30</sup>Then the commanders of the Philistines went out to battle, and it happened as often as they went out, that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed.

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**Q: What is remarkable about David's efforts?**

A: Saul only required "a hundred foreskins of the Philistines" (v.25) but David slew "two hundred men among the Philistines". (v.27).

**Q: What is the contrast between Jonathan and Michal?**

A: Although both were children of Saul, both were a different kind of test of David's love, the one responding in the best way possible, the other in the worst, most disappointing fashion.

**Application:** *David's faith was tested in the presence of disappointment, first in the person of Saul who did not keep his word, then by the wife David ultimately was given. Jonathan, Saul, and Michal represent different types of people we encounter on a daily basis, and the quality of our faithfulness in dealing with each one reflects the overall quality of our spiritual faithfulness in our relationship with Christ. Some love us, some hate us, some eventually turn on us.*

**Q: What was Saul's final condition?**

A: "Saul was even more afraid of David". (v.29) The unrighteous often express their fear of God by their treatment of others.

**Q: What was David's final condition?**

A: "David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul. So his name was highly esteemed". (v.30) The way the righteous treat others reflects the way they personally treat God in their life.

### Overall Application

*Some would say that after defeating Goliath, everything should have been downhill for David. But like many Christians, we successfully pass the "milestone" tests which occasionally come once or twice in the course of life, but struggle with living consistently each and every day in between them. David's faithfulness was tested on both the personal and public levels by popularity, then demotion, and ultimately by disappointment.*

- *What are the things you struggle with most on a daily basis?*
- *How are you trying to give those things to the Lord? Or are you working according to your own notions or desires?*
- *How does the quality of your personal relationships betray what is truly going on in your relationship with Christ?*