

# David and Y'honatan's Friendship

## First Samuel 18: 1-9

**DIG:** Why do you think David and Y'honatan became such close friends? What was their age difference? How do we know the two were not involved in a homosexual relationship? Why did Sha'ul insist that David stay in the royal court permanently? What especially galls Sha'ul about the little jingle sung by the women? What did the women's song say about them? How did their song compare with Miriam's? What did that say about the spiritual condition of Israel? What did Sha'ul understand about God's will for David at this time? What made him suspicious?

**REFLECT:** In their first meeting, Y'honatan and David were immediately bound together for life. Do you have a friend like that? Do you have any older friends? Any younger friends? John the Baptist said: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). How does that scripture reflect your life? Are you increasing or decreasing?

**1020 BC**

Chapters 18-20 describe David's service in Sha'ul's court. The story is told in terms of the relationship between David and Y'honatan. It is the Holy Spirit's purpose to show that the very man David displaced in succession to the throne was his best friend, and that Sha'ul's own son acknowledged the legitimacy of David's rule.<sup>47</sup>

**The Friendship of David and Y'honatan:** Sparked by the incident with Goliath years earlier, a deep friendship developed between David and Y'honatan: After David had finished talking with Sha'ul, that the soul of Y'honatan, who was much older, was knit to the soul of David, and Y'honatan loved him as he loved himself (First Samuel 18:1). The name Y'honatan means *gift from ADONAI*, and the prince would certainly prove himself to be that for David. The two would survive the clash of loyalty between a father and a friend. It would overshadow a sense of jealousy over David's ascent to the throne, even though Y'honatan was older than David and the apparent heir to the king. Many people still view David and Y'honatan as two lighthearted teenagers who liked each other because they had many common interests, but this picture is shallow and mistaken. Y'honatan had already been the commander of one-third of the army and won two great victories (First Samuel 13:1-4 and 14:1-23). This indicates that he was a seasoned soldier and not an inexperienced young man. Y'honatan was about 40 and David was probably half his age.

Today there are homosexual opponents of the Bible that claim that **David** and **Y'honatan** had a sexual relationship, and thus, it justifies a homosexual lifestyle. More than that, they believe that the Bible endorses homosexuality (see the commentary on **Genesis Ey - Two Angels Arrived at Sodom in the Evening**). But the verb **love** (Hebrew: *aheb*), is never used elsewhere to express homosexual desire or activity, for which the TaNaKh uses the verb **to know** (Hebrew: *yada*), in the sense of *having sex with* (**Genesis 19:5** and **Judges 19:22**). The narrator probably used the ambiguous word *aheb* because it meant more than natural affection however deep and genuine it may have been.<sup>48</sup> The same Hebrew word *aheb* is used of Jacob's **love** for Benjamin in **Genesis 44:30** and no one is claiming that the patriarch was having sex with his youngest son.

From that day forward **Sha'ul** kept **David** with him and did not let him return home to his family (**1 Sam 18:2**). After **David's** remarkable victory, **Sha'ul** insisted that the young musician and giant killer come live at the palace. He gave **David** his own daughter to marry, along with a position of leadership in **the army**. In addition to his duties as a musician in the royal court, **Sha'ul** gave **David** his own daughter to marry and a position of leadership in **the army**. And as a consequence, **YHVH** prospered **David** so that he became immensely popular with the people.<sup>49</sup>

No doubt **Y'honatan** recognized the kindred spirit of one whose faith was in **the LORD** in the face of deadly enemies. **And Y'honatan made a covenant of brotherhood with David because he loved him as himself. Y'honatan took off his robe** (a symbol of the Israelite Kingdom) **he was wearing and gave it to David as a ratification of the covenant, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt (First Samuel 18:3-4).** **Y'honatan's** action in stripping off his royal insignia, and his royal armor and weapons, only to give them to **David**, was more than spontaneous generosity to meet the need of his new-found friend. He was, in effect, transferring to him his own status as heir.<sup>50</sup> When people saw **David** wearing **Y'honatan's** clothing they would understand that **the king's son** was not jealous over **God's** blessing of **David**.

**The Jealousy of Sha'ul:** After **David's** dramatic victory over **Goliath**, **Sha'ul** brought him into his palace once again. Initially, the relationship was quite good. **Whatever mission Sha'ul sent him on** (indicating a time lapse of years between the slaying of **Goliath** and now), **David was so successful that Sha'ul gave him a high rank in the army**, commander of a thousand despite his young age. He had to be at least 20 to serve in **the army** and was probably only about 15 when he killed **Goliath**. **This pleased all the troops, and Sha'ul's officers as well (1 Sam 18:5).** But from the start of his relationship with **Sha'ul** at the king's court, **David** found himself in a life-threatening conflict with King **Sha'ul**.

Then the narrator gives us a flashback to show how the tension began in the mind of **Sha'ul** years earlier when the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine. The women came out from all the towers of Isra'el to meet King Sha'ul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lyres (1 Samuel 18:6). As they danced, half of the women sang, "Sha'ul has slain his thousands," and the other half responded, "David his tens of thousands." This little jingle became widely known because even the Philistines heard of it and used it against David later in First Samuel 21:12. Sha'ul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?"

For **Sha'ul**, as well as for **David**, it was a great homecoming. **David** was hailed as the warrior, **Sha'ul** as the commander. There was enough joy for both of them to share fully. There was no need for any tension. But when the women sang that new celebration song, **Sha'ul** had neither the maturity nor the security to accept it; but instead, he became embittered and incurably jealous.<sup>51</sup> In one sense their praise was exaggerated (in true Hebrew fashion). The slight to **Sha'ul**, though probably unintended, was inevitable. It poisoned his relationship with **David** and from that time on **Sha'ul** kept a fearful eye on **David** with envy and suspicion (First Samuel 18:7-9). **Sha'ul's** proud heart, darkened in sinful brooding, could not bear a comparison that was tilted toward another.

Only the narrator **Samuel**, **David** and the readers know that **David** is destined for the throne. As yet, **Sha'ul** had no clue of the LORD's resolve for **David**. But **Sha'ul** is frightened enough and suspicious enough to see what others cannot see. On his own terms and through his own fear, **Sha'ul** also sees **David's** future. There is profound irony in that fact that the fearful discernment of **Sha'ul** and the grand intent of **ADONAI** converge in seeing **David** destined for royal power. The king had it right for all the wrong reasons. **Sha'ul** knows more than he understands, for he sees **David** as merely ambitious - not destined. This means that **Sha'ul** is destined to struggle against the rise of **David** but he cannot succeed against it.<sup>52</sup>

The women's song revealed more than political naivety, however. Isra'el's low spiritual state was revealed by the fact that no praise was given to **YHVH**, but only to men. Compare this with the Song of Miriam and the women after the destruction of Pharaoh's army (see the commentary on Exodus 15 - Then Miriam the Prophetess Took a Tambourine in Her Hand). No praise was devoted to **Moses**, who had stretched out his hand over the Sea of Reeds so that it parted, because the people knew that the power and the glory belonged to **Ha'Shem** alone. It also reveals the low spiritual state of believers when they take after the world in praising men and women instead of **God**. Yet this is the very tendency we can see

today in the marketing of celebrity ministers and their empires. We should, of course, give thanks for able and faithful believers, but glory should be reserved for **ADONAI** alone.<sup>53</sup>

**Sha'ul's** response to **David's** success was exactly the opposite of John the Baptist when he was told of the great success of **Yeshua**, "**He must increase, but I must decrease**" (**John 3:30**). Envy is a dangerous and insidious enemy, a cancer that slowly eats out our inner life and leads us to say and do terrible things. **Proverbs 14:30** correctly calls it **the rottenness of the bones**. Envy is the pain we feel within when somebody achieves or receives what we think belongs to us. Envy is the sin of successful people who can't stand to see others reach the heights they have reached and eventually replace them. By nature, we are proud and want to be recognized and applauded. Envious people max out their credit cards to buy things they don't need just to impress people who really don't care!<sup>54</sup>