

“THE LORD BE BETWEEN ME AND THEE FOREVER”

OT LESSON 23

Aby Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Zoram, we are told, was a “true friend” to Nephi (see 2 Nephi 1:30), as was Amulek to Alma. Hyrum was a true friend and brother to Joseph

The friendship of David and Jonathan has become a standard. Rarely have two individuals been as devoted to one another as these two.

As we study what they did for each other, we can learn principles that will assist us as we evaluate our own friendships and the influences they have on us.

We need to measure very carefully who our true friends are. The measure of a true friend is one who will not have us choose between his way and the Lord’s way. A true friend makes it easier for us to live the commandments of the Lord. A true friend will not let us do anything we want. True friends will correct us when we do something wrong and bring us back on the straight and narrow path that leads to exaltation.

Every one of us needs to know when to walk or run away from those who would call themselves friends but in reality are not. Joseph of old recognized the evil in Potiphar’s wife and ran from it (see Gen. 39:7–12). We too must recognize evil and shun it. If we allow machoism to overtake our personal lives and influence choices and decisions we make, we can severely limit our progression in this life and in the eternities (Robert D. Hales, “Return with Honor,” *Ensign*, June 1999, 12).

There are those kinds of friends from whom we we should run. Judah’s friend Hirah, the Abdullamite, was willing to pay Judah’s debt to a harlot (Genesis 38:20). Jonadab, the friend of Amnon, counseled Amnon on how to put himself in a position to take advantage of his half-sister, Tamar (see 2 Sam. 13).

Job's three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, came to comfort Job in his misery, and then added to his misery by telling him he was suffering because he was so wicked.

1. JONATHAN AND DAVID MAKE A COVENANT OF FRIENDSHIP. SAUL BECOMES JEALOUS OF DAVID AND TRIES TO KILL HIM.

And it came to pass. . . . that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul (1 Sam 18:1,3)

The fact that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David just after the defeat of Goliath is interesting. Jonathan and his armourbearer, with only a few weapons and their faith in God, had attacked and routed the Philistine garrison (see 1 Sam. 14 and Old Testament lesson 22 from last week). David, armed with a staff and a sling, had gone against the Philistine champion, a man from whom the other Israelites had all fled. It is not hard to imagine that common faith and courage drawing these two young men together.

What does the final phrase of 1 Sam. 18:3 ("he loved him as his own soul") suggest about true friendship?

Jonathan was the crown prince of Israel. David and Samuel knew that Jonathan was not next in line for the throne, and it is possible that Jonathan knew it also.

And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle (1 Sam. 18:4).

Saul also was pleased with David. He took him into his own service after the death of Goliath "and would let him go no more home to his father's house" (1 Sam 18:2). David served Saul well.

And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's

servants (1 Sam. 18:5)

But something caused Saul to turn against David.

And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? (1 Sam. 18:6-8).

What was the initial cause of Saul's anger at David? The final phrase of 18:8 suggests that perhaps at this time Saul has begun to suspect that the neighbor mentioned by Samuel in 1 Sam. 15:8—the neighbor who would take the throne from Saul—is none other than David.

Reading these passages reminded me of the talk given by Elder Holland in April Conference about the parable of the two sons.

The younger son has returned, a robe has been placed on his shoulders and a ring on his finger, when the older son comes on the scene. He has been dutifully, loyally working in the field, and now he is returning. The language of parallel journeys home, though from very different locations, is central to this story.

As he approaches the house, he hears the sounds of music and laughter.

"And he called one of the servants [note that he has servants] and asked what these things meant.

"And [the servant] said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

"And [the older brother] was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him."

You know the conversation they then had. Surely, for this father, the pain over a wayward child who had run from home and wallowed with swine is now compounded with the realization that this older, wiser brother, the younger boy's childhood hero as older brothers always are, is angry that his brother has come home.

No, I correct myself. This son is not so much angry that the other has come home as he is angry that his parents are so happy about it. (Ensign, May 2002, pp. 62,63).

Can you see Saul in these paragraphs? Saul is angry that his people are happy with David's success. How insidious a jealous heart can be!

Who is it that whispers so subtly in our ear that a gift given to another somehow diminishes the blessings we have received? Who makes us feel that if God is smiling on another, then He surely must somehow be frowning on us? You and I both know who does this—it is the father of all lies. It is Lucifer, our common enemy, whose cry down through the corridors of time is always and to everyone, "Give me thine honor."

It has been said that envy is the one sin to which no one readily confesses, but just how widespread that tendency can be is suggested in the old Danish proverb, "If envy were a fever, all the world would be ill" (Ensign, May 2002, p. 63).

There must be a warning here for all of us. We are required by our religion to rejoice in, rather than resent, the good fortune of others.

Saul will later have other excuses for his hatred of David, but for now it is enough for him that David is doing well and is loved. "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward" (1 Sam. 18:9).

David knew of this burgeoning animosity. Saul had tried to kill him.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice (1 Sam. 18:10,11).

How did he respond?

And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him. Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them (1 Sam. 18:14-16; see also 18:5, 30).

Brigham Young said something about *behaving ourselves wisely* when others speak and think evil of us. He was giving instructions to departing missionaries in 1861. He said:

You will have all manner of evil spoken against you, and all I ask of you and all that God or angels will ask of you is that not one word spoken against you shall be true; and I want you for my sake and for your own sake and for the sake of Christ and the Kingdom of God to live so that the wicked shall have no cause to speak evil against you. (cited in *Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors*, pp. 412-413).

2. SAUL FAILS IN THREE MORE ATTEMPTS TO TAKE DAVID'S LIFE.

The account of David's marriage to Saul's daughter, and the events surrounding that marriage, sound very much like the plot of a poorly written soap-opera. What purpose did Saul have in offering his daughter to David? What was the underlying reason for the dowry he required of David? (See 1 Sam. 18:17,21,25)

When the Philistines failed to accomplish Saul's objective, his subtlety vanished. "And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David" (1 Sam. 19:1).

But Jonathan was a true friend to David and he knew what was right.

But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee. And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good: For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain. And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past (1 Sam. 19:2-7).

However, Saul's oath, *sworn by the life of God*, was soon forgotten.

And there was war again: and David went out, and fought with the Philistines, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled from him.

And the evil spirit which was not of the LORD was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand: and David played with his hand [I have copied this verse from the JST; note that the JST always indicates that this evil spirit was *not* from God. See 16:14,15,16,23;18:10;]

And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin; but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall: and David fled, and escaped that night.

Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life to night, to morrow thou shalt be slain.

So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped.

And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth.

And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick.

And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him.

And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster (1 Sam. 19:8-16).

Michal also turns out to have been a true friend to her husband, David.

3. DAVID AND JONATHAN RENEW THEIR COVENANT OF FRIENDSHIP, AND JONATHAN SAVES DAVID'S LIFE.

The foundation of the friendship of David and Jonathan is the Rock of Christ. Before this bulwark, all other considerations must defer. Thus Jonathan feels a greater responsibility to David than to his own father. The issue is not a generation gap. It is not a matter of filial rebellion against parental authority. It is not a matter of Jonathan's appreciation of David's personality more than that of his father. It is a matter of right and wrong.

Saul had planned to kill David at the three-day feast of the new moon. But David suspected perfidy and did not come. In his anger, Saul told Jonathan:

For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die (1 Sam. 20:31).

We were told in 1 Sam 16:14 that Saul lost the Spirit. Have you seen evidence enough of this to convince you? Samuel thought his life was threatened by Saul (see 1 Sam. 16:2); Saul tried repeatedly to kill David; and now . . .

And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done? And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David (1 Sam 20:32-33).

David fled from the household and presence of Saul for the final time. Future attempts to kill David will be made in locations of David's choosing.

4. SAUL IS CONSUMED BY HATRED FOR DAVID. DAVID SPARES SAUL'S LIFE.

Saul's maniacal rage continued even with David gone from his presence. What happened to the priests of Nob who gave David assistance? (see 1 Sam. 22:18,19). What did Saul intend to do to the city of Keilah where David had found assistance? (see 1 Sam 23:10).

What would cause a man to be so destitute of basic values and Christian principles that he would destroy a city to kill a single man?

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