

# A Game of Thrones

Mike Southern

April 2018

*There's a reason that novels and movies about the power struggles between kings continue to catch the imaginations of readers and viewers. It's because battles for the control of a country's throne are as old as time itself. And those battles destroy not only countries, but families and friendships—especially if, like King Saul, they begin to show signs of madness as well.*

*But occasionally a friendship rises above the lust for power... and when it does, it can change history.*

*This story comes from 1 Samuel 20:1-42.*

King Saul had been jealous of David since the day he first met him,  
from the day the young man killed Goliath with a stone  
and the crowds celebrated by singing, "Saul has slain his thousands  
and David his ten thousands."

And it didn't help that Prince Jonathan and David had grown close,  
like brothers who would gladly die for each other.

They had even vowed to each other that,  
should either one die, the survivor would care for his family.

So when it became clear to Saul  
that God would no longer tolerate his disobedience  
and had instead chosen to make David king in his place,  
he decided that David must die.

But after Saul tried and almost succeeded several times,  
David ran to Jonathan for help.

"What have I done to your father?" he asked.

"Why does Saul want me dead?"

"That can't be true!" Jonathan said. "I can't believe it!  
My father does nothing without telling me.  
If he truly meant to kill you, he would tell me."

"No," David said, "you are the one person he WOULDN'T tell!  
He knows how close we are,

and he knows how much it would hurt you.

But I am not imagining this.

I swear to you—I am but one step from death!"

So Jonathan said, "Then tell me what I can do to help."

"Find out for sure how your father feels about me," David said.

"Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival,

and I've always joined you and your father.

But this time I'll spend the next three days hiding in the fields.

When Saul misses me, tell him I asked permission  
to join my family in Bethlehem to celebrate our own sacrifice.  
If he says that is okay, then you will know all is well;  
but if he gets angry, you'll know that he meant to kill me.  
Then you can come tell me, out in the field.  
Just please, please don't betray me to him!"

And Jonathan comforted his friend.

"Never! If I knew he meant you any harm, I'd tell you. You know that."

So David asked, "How will I know whether your father is angry with me or not?"

Jonathan said, "Come with me."

And as they went to the fields, he said,

"I'll find out the truth in the next day or so. I would never risk our friendship.  
So when I find out, I'll come here and tell you."

The two friends again promised to care for each other and their families.

Then David asked, "How will you let me know?"

Jonathan pointed to a big pile of rocks. "Hide there," he said.

"The day after tomorrow I'll come here, with a young boy.

I'll shoot three arrows and send him to fetch them.

If you are safe, I'll tell him the arrows are on this side of the pile;

but if not, I'll send the boy farther on past the rocks.

In that case, you'll know you have to leave immediately."

So David hid in the field and Jonathan went back to his father.

The first day of the festival passed;

Saul noticed David was missing but said nothing,

thinking that something must have delayed him.

But when he didn't show up on the second day,

Saul asked Jonathan why David hadn't come.

And Jonathan said,

"He begged me to let him go home to Bethlehem,

to join his family for the feast

because his older brother demanded he come.

So I gave him permission."

At that, Saul stood up and cursed Jonathan.

"Do you think I'm a fool,

that I don't know you want David to be king in your place?

As long as he lives, you will never be king.

Now bring him to me, *and I will kill him!*"

Jonathan was shocked but refused to be afraid. "I don't understand!

What has he done to you, Father? Why should he die?"

But in his anger Saul flung his spear at Jonathan,  
nearly killing him as well,  
and Jonathan realized David was right.  
He was so angry at his father that he left the table  
and refused to return that day.

The next morning Jonathan took his bow and arrows and a young boy to the fields.  
He told the boy to start running so he could find the arrows more quickly,  
then he shot them well over the boy's head.  
"Keep going," he yelled, "You need to go farther."  
And when the boy retrieved them, he sent the boy back to the city.

When he was gone, David came out and bowed down before Jonathan,  
both in thanks and in sadness  
because they would probably never see each other again.  
The two of them cried in each other's arms, said goodbye,  
and repeated their promises to each other.  
Then David left and Jonathan went back to the city.

For years Saul tried to kill David, but he kept failing.  
Eventually Saul was killed in battle, and Jonathan with him.  
And when David became king, he punished the men who killed them...  
and he found the rest of Jonathan's family,  
brought them to his palace and cared for them,  
just as he had promised his close friend.  
Even now, we remember David and Jonathan's friendship  
as one of the greatest friendships in history.

Perhaps David's son Solomon had them in mind when he wrote Proverbs 18:24:

*A man of many companions may be ruined,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*