Who was Jonathan in the Bible?

Ten men named Jonathan are mentioned in the Bible, but we will only look at two here. The first is the son of Gershom, making this Jonathan the grandson of Moses. He was of the tribe of Levi and is notable (or notorious, rather) for being the priest hired to lead idol-worship in the tribe of Dan during the chaotic time of the judges (Judges 18:3-4, 30).

The other prominent Jonathan in the Bible is the son of King Saul. This Jonathan was a noble man of true character, faith, and integrity. Despite Saul's hatred of David, Jonathan and David were very close friends (1 Samuel 18:1-3), and Jonathan protected David and helped him to escape Saul (1 Samuel 19:1-2). Since David was married to Jonathan's sister Michal, Jonathan was also David's brother-in-law.

In 1 Samuel 14, we see Jonathan's good character contrasted with his father's foolishness. Saul and his men were battling the Philistines, and Jonathan decided to raid a Philistine outpost (1 Samuel 14:1). He took only his young armor-bearer with him, and he told no one else of their plans (verse 3). Jonathan's bravery as they approached the enemy garrison was rooted in faith, as he told his armor-bearer, "Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" (verse 6). The Lord was indeed with Jonathan, and he and his companion killed about twenty Philistines (verse 14). Then God sent a panic into the enemy camp, along with an earthquake, and the enemy was routed (verses 15, 20, 23). Meanwhile, King Saul had placed his troops under an oath: no one was allowed to eat anything all day (verse 24). Jonathan, who had not been present when Saul made his foolish demand, found some honey after the battle and ate it (verse 27). When Saul found out that his son had eaten the honey, he demanded that he be slain (verse 44). It was only through the intervention of

the rest of the army that faithful, brave Jonathan was spared that day (verse 45).

Jonathan was not much like his father. Jonathan was known for his deep love, loyal friendship, and faith in God, while Saul repeatedly showed foolishness, pride, and disobedience to God (1 Samuel 13:8-13; 14:24-30; 15:1-34). God eventually rejected Saul's kingship and replaced him with David (1 Samuel 16:11-13). Jonathan was faithful to the Lord and positioned himself against his father politically, because he knew that God had chosen David to be the next king. He made a covenant with the house of David and therefore recognized David's family, rather than his own, as the chosen line of kingship (1 Samuel 20:16). Jonathan and Saul were obviously not on good terms, for Jonathan actually desired that the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies (1 Samuel 20:16), and Saul, when he suspected Jonathan's betrayal in favor of David, threw a spear at his son in an attempt to murder him (1 Samuel 20:33). Saul also insulted both Jonathan and his mother, calling Jonathan a "stupid son of a whore" (1 Samuel 20:30, NLT).

In a later battle with the Philistines, Jonathan was killed alongside two of his two brothers, Abinadab and Malchi-shua (1 Samuel 31:2). Saul himself was also badly wounded and told his armor-bearer to slay him. When the armor-bearer was unwilling to take the king's life, Saul fell on his own sword, and his grieved armor-bearer followed his example. Even in death, Jonathan's righteousness exceeded that of his father. In that way, the line of Saul ended, and David's line continued as prophesied. Jonathan's five-year-old son, Mephibosheth, was crippled on the day that his household received news of Jonathan's death (2 Samuel 4:4). Later, King David honored Mephibosheth and treated him as his own son for the sake of his friend Jonathan (2 Samuel 9).