Nicomachean Ethics: The Friendship Of David And Jonathan

As stated by Aristotle in book eight of Nicomachean Ethics, friendship is necessary and virtuous, and this is clearly present within the covenants within The Bible. It is said that all people need friends for one thing or another. Aristotle discusses three types of friendships: those which get utility out of it, those who get pleasure out of it, and complete friendships (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 8, 1156a-1156b7). The friendship presented within The Bible of David and Jonathan in comparison to the friendships discussed by Aristotle is considered a friendship of utility as David benefits, but this eventually cultivates into a complete friendship. From this idea of David and Jonathan's developing friendship, inferences can be made about early Judeo-Christian culture in which they value a great warrior with near-impossible skills and piety for the fact that Israel was a culture almost constantly warring to keep its identity. Moreover, the nature of friendships itself, based on that of David's and Jonathan's, is founded on love.

It is evident that the friendship between David and Jonathan is not a complete friendship at first but rather a friendship where one benefits as a result, but this companionship blossomed into a complete friendship. The first two types of friendship, utility-based and pleasure based, last only as along someone benefits from it, whereas complete friendships are long enduring where it is present that "those who wish goods to their friends for their friends own sake", for it is selflessness to the other that makes good friendships (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 8, 1156b10-11). The beginning of the "friendship" of David and Jonathan did not initially start out as a complete friendship but rather their camaraderie derived itself from one that one gains utility as an end. After David was promised kingship through God and defeated the Philistinians and their great warrior, Goliath, Jonathan came to praise David for his win in battle and began to protect him from the attempted executions on his life by Saul, Jonathan's father. (1 Samuel 19:1-2). Later, it is notable Jonathan says, "The Lord, the God of Israel, take witness! … If I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty from my house for ever" (1 Samuel 20:12-16). This exemplifies Jonathan's reasoning to disclose his father's secret plans and protect David because he declares his allegiance to the Lord. From this, it is taken away that Jonathan is not being a friend to David for both parties' sake of mutual flourishing, but rather Jonathan is doing so to show his piety to God. Jonathan would hate to go against God's word like Saul had in the past when given the task of sieging the city of the Amalekites and killing its population. So, from his father's wrongdoing, He feels it is his duty to warn and help David escape with his life, so he is looked higher upon by God. But from this though, David is rather not providing means to uphold the relationship between him and Jonathan, but rather David is used as a mechanism for JonathDISan to promote himself in his religious duty to God. While David is grateful for the safety Jonathan provided, He himself provided nothing to the friendship and provides nothing to Jonathan for his well-being, therefore it cannot be considered a complete friendship as it is very one-sided at this point in time.

After David fled Judah for safety from the threat of Saul, the Philistines began to reinvade Judah overtaking and murdering Saul and his three sons, including Jonathan. Upon returning to Judah, David finds the blood-reddened battlefield at the step of Mount Gilboa and hears of the news of Saul and Jonathan and weeps for his friend. He says Jonathan was "beloved and

lovely” and that David too said that he was “distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women” (2 Samuel 1:26). This began to show the love David gave back in return to Jonathan for his dutifulness to himself growing this friendship into a complete one where they provide for the other’s sake rather than their own. It is also notable that David says he loved Jonathan like a brother and compared it to the love of a woman like a mother would to her son. Overall, this shows the magnitude of love David developed for Jonathan. This love could not have been existent without time for David to reflect on the service Jonathan provided for him, which could have only have been revealed when David lamented over Jonathan’s death. ¬¬¬

From this friendship, a lot can be learned about the foundations on which Judeo-Christian culture laid its values and principles onto. The first most notable value to the culture, and many cultures, is the idea of a great warrior being exemplified through David and Jonathan. As previously mentioned, David started his military career defeating Goliath, “whose height was six cubits and a span. He had a helmet of bronze on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze” (1 Samuel 17:4-6). This clearly depicts a strong and formidable soldier with skills that appear to be beyond human capability, and that which seems to be undefeatable in battle. David then decides to challenge the massive Goliath humbly with no armor or weaponry, with the exception of a sling and five smooth stones. David then in battle took out a stone “and slung it, and struck [Goliath] on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and [Goliath] fell on his face to the ground” deeming David to be the victor (1 Samuel 17:40-49). This seems to be an impossible task on David’s part to take down a foe of this size and when Goliath was this heavily armored. It took precision and tons of strength to be able to accomplish this act. From this, it was noted that David gained much attention from this action by Saul and Jonathan, but David accredits this accomplishment for having the Lord being with him giving him the strength and ability to be able to be a great warrior and defeat Goliath (1 Samuel 17:37). This further shows humbleness on behalf of the Israelites giving thanks to God and developing a sense of piety. For if the strongest warriors show their faith in the Lord, the Israelites will praise and be faithful to the Lord to be able to achieve the strength and power that David had been able to possess.

Most importantly, as a result of the kinship of David and Jonathan, the nature of friendship itself can be best described through means of love. Aristotle provides that “Friendship … consists more in loving, and people who love their friends are praised; hence, it would seem, loving is the virtue of friends” (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 8, 1159a35). This ultimately concludes that friendship is complete and at its most pure form when the two parties love one another greater than they do upon themselves, creating the complete friendship as mentioned prior. The love of Jonathan is exemplified through his covenant with David where it is said Jonathan “loved [David] as his own soul. And Johnathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt” (1 Samuel 18:3-4). This shows a deeper admiration that Jonathan has for David for he is willing to give up his sword, which signifies that he does not wish to fight and makes him vulnerable to David but make amends to grow and flourish their friendship through love and appreciation. David too shows love towards Jonathan in gratitude for helping him against Saul’s multiple attempts at taking David’s life. David says to Jonathan, “Whatever you say, I will do” (1 Samuel 20:4). This shows that David has come to see Jonathan as a trustworthy person and is willing to put his life in Jonathan’s hands like Jonathan had done prior. Where if Jonathan wanted to lie to David to put his life in danger, he could do so but chooses not to, so David in response grows to love Jonathan.

In conclusion, the friendship of the two Biblical characters, David and Jonathan, are best categorized, according to Aristotle, as a friendship of utility which then is subjected to change where it metamorphoses into a complete friendship. Initially, Jonathan used David's power and connection to God as a means to grow his spirituality, but eventually, this changes as David is challenged with the death of Jonathan and realizes their true friendship. David's power to exemplify the culture of early Israeli history for the importance of a warrior of and for God and that the nature of true friendship itself is love.