

1 Samuel Chapter 20

Verses 1-13: God was showing David his true support system.

1 Samuel 20:1 "And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what [is] mine iniquity? and what [is] my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life?"

The strange course of events in the prophetic schools by Ramah, while warning David that even the home of his old master, the great seer, was no permanent sanctuary where he could safely rest, still gave him time to fly, and to take counsel with his loved friend, the king's son. It was, no doubt, by Samuel's advice that he once more betook himself to the city of Saul, but his return was evidently secret.

Alone with his friend, he passionately asserts his entire innocence of the crimes laid to his charge by the unhappy, jealous Saul. His words here are found in substance in not a few of his Psalms, where, in touching language, he maintains how bitterly the world had wronged and persecuted a righteous, innocent man.

"Naioth in Ramah" (see note on 19:18).

We remember from the previous lesson, that Saul was under the influence of the Spirit of God and lay naked 24 hours before Samuel there. David wanted to be a member of Saul's family. David was close friends with Jonathan and was married to the daughter of Saul. David inquires of Jonathan, if he knows anything he has done to cause Saul to hate him?

1 Samuel 20:2 "And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it [is] not [so]."

"Why should my father hide this thing from me?": Although Jonathan expressed his certainty that Saul was not seeking David's life, he may have been unaware of the most recent attempts on David's life (19:9-24), and was trusting in his father's oath not to harm David (19:6). Jonathan expected to be informed by Saul of any change in his plans.

Jonathan speaks in horror. His worst imaginations would not allow him to believe that Saul would kill David. Jonathan believes that Saul will surely tell him before he attacks David. It would appear that Saul's experience before Samuel at Ramah would have calmed him down, so he would not want to kill David. Jonathan could not believe that Saul had broken his oath he had made before the LORD.

1 Samuel 20:3 "And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly [as] the LORD liveth, and [as] thy soul liveth, [there is] but a step between me and death."

To assure Jonathan of the truth of it, that he did most certainly seek after his life, of which, as he had no doubt himself, by an oath he endeavored to remove any that might be in Jonathan, who was not willing to believe his father could be guilty of so foul a crime.

"Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes": That he was high in his favor and that he had a great value for him, and he had a large share in his love and friendship, and that was the reason why he hid from him his base intentions.

"And he saith, let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved": As he would be, both for the evil his father would be guilty of, and the danger David, his beloved friend, would be in.

"But truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death": As appeared by his casting a javelin at him (1 Sam. 18:11), sending messengers to his own house to slay him (1 Sam. 19:11), and others to Naioth to seize him (1 Sam. 19:20), and coming himself thither with an intention to kill him (1 Sam. 19:22). And in each of these instances he had a narrow escape for his life. And this he declared in the most solemn manner by an oath, for the confirmation of the truth of it to Jonathan.

David speaks the truth to Jonathan about his father, Saul. David reminds Jonathan that Saul knows of their friendship. Saul would not tell Jonathan, for fear he would do as Michal had. Saul kept it from Jonathan, to keep from grieving his own son. He also did not tell him for fear he would warn David.

1 Samuel 20:4 "Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do [it] for thee."

Now giving credit to what he had said, and in order to comfort and support him under the apprehensions he had of danger.

"Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee": For the preservation of his life, by speaking to his father on his behalf, endeavoring to dissuade him from his evil intentions, or by hiding and concealing him in some obscure place. That he might not execute his evil designs upon him, or by any method he could point out to him.

Jonathan and David are best friends. Jonathan will help David any way he can.

1 Samuel 20:5 "And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, tomorrow [is] the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third [day] at even."

"The new moon": The first day of the month, referred to as "the New Moon," was celebrated with a sacrificial meal (2 Kings 4:23; Isa. 1:13; Amos 8:5), and served both as a religious and civil festival (Num. 10:10; 28:11-15).

"Hide ... in the field" (as in 19:2-3), David hid from Saul in a secret place.

The new moon celebrations were accompanied by a burnt and a sin offering. The trumpets were blown on the new moon also. This was a time of great festivity. David will hide during this time. He will hide until the third day. The festival will last two days. David was expected to celebrate new moon with Saul because he is Saul's son-in-law.

1 Samuel 20:6 "If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked [leave] of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city: for [there is] a yearly sacrifice there for all the family."

“A yearly sacrifice”: Apparently, David’s family held an annual family reunion that coincided with one of the monthly New Moon celebrations (verses 28-29).

Saul is to believe, that David is missing from the celebration, because he went to his own father's house for a yearly celebration.

1 Samuel 20:7 "If he say thus, [It is] well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, [then] be sure that evil is determined by him."

It is very well; it is very good and right in him to do so.

"Thy servant shall have peace": It will be a token that the wrath of the king was removed, and that his mind was well disposed towards David and things had taken a happy turn, and would issue in his peace and prosperity.

"But if he be very wroth": With Jonathan for giving leave, and with David for going away.

"Then be sure that evil is determined by him": That he has a settled obstinate malice in his heart, which is become implacable and inveterate, and confirmed in him. And that it is a determined point with him to slay David if possible, which he hoped to have an opportunity of doing at that time in which he was disappointed, and caused such wrath in him.

If Saul is peaceable about the excuse that Jonathan gives for David not being at the festival, it will mean that he no longer wants to kill David. If it angers him, it will mean he still wants to kill David.

1 Samuel 20:8 "Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the LORD with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father?"

“Covenant” (compare 1:1, 3). Jonathan and David had solemnly pledged their friendship and loyalty to each other before the Lord. Their covenant is further amplified (in verses 13-17, 42; 23:17-18).

“Slay me thyself”: As his covenant friend, David asked Jonathan to kill him, if he was deserving of death because of his possible sin.

David knows the only true friend he has is Jonathan. David reminds Jonathan, that they had gone into covenant agreement to be friends forever. David tells Jonathan, he will gladly let Jonathan kill him, if he has sinned against Saul.

1 Samuel 20:9 "And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee?"

To entertain such a thought of me, or to have the least suspicion of me, that I should conceal my father's ill intentions against thee, if known to me.

"For if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would I not tell it thee?" Certainly I would; canst thou doubt of my kindness and fidelity? Surely thou hast no reason, when such a covenant of friendship exists between us, and there has not been the least breach of it on either side.

Jonathan repeats his loyalty to David. If he knows anything about his father's plans for David, he will get word to him.

1 Samuel 20:10 "Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what [if] thy father answer thee roughly?"

Meaning what is the disposition of Saul's mind towards him, whether he gave a kind answer to the report of Jonathan concerning him.

"Or what if thy father answer thee roughly?" Or hard words as the Targum; whether he answers in a kind, loving and smooth manner, or whether in a rough and angry one. The question is here, how he should be informed of this, since especially, if in the latter, it would not be safe for Jonathan to come himself to him, nor could he trust the message with any other. Abarbinel thinks that the first of these expressions is by way of question, who should declare to him his father's will and intention, whether good or bad. And the latter by way of outcry; woe unto me, if thy father should answer thee roughly. I greatly fear he will chide thee for my sake; my heart will be filled with sorrow if thou shouldst suffer reproach and rebuke on my account.

David is getting skeptical of even his best friend Jonathan. He knows that Jonathan would tell him, if it were anyone but Jonathan's father. He thinks perhaps, Jonathan will be too afraid of Saul to come and tell him.

Verses 11-16: In this scene, Jonathan once and for all transferred his allegiance from his father to David.

1 Samuel 20:11 "And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field."

That they might more fully, and freely, and familiarly talk of this affair between them, without any danger of being overheard by the servants of Saul, as they were in his palace, where they now were.

"And they went out both of them into the field": Which belonged to Gibeah.

Out in the field there would be no ears to hear their conversation. What they say will be for just their own ears.

1 Samuel 20:12 "And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about tomorrow any time, [or] the third [day], and, behold, [if there be] good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and show it thee;"

Or by the Lord God of Israel, I swear unto thee; for this is the form of the oath, as Jarchi and Kimchi observe.

"When I have sounded my father about tomorrow any time, or the third day": Searched, inquired, and found out how his disposition is.

"And, behold, if there be good toward David": If he is well disposed to him, as may appear by speaking respectfully of him, or kindly inquiring after him, and by being satisfied with the account given him.

"And I then send not unto thee, and show it thee": Then let the vengeance of God fall upon me in some remarkable manner or another, as follows; or "shall I not then send unto thee, and show it thee"? Certainly I will; that is, I will send a messenger to thee to acquaint thee with it, who shall tell it, and cause thee to hear it, as from myself.

The main thing we must note in this is the fact that Jonathan makes his promise to David with the LORD as witness between them. David will know the sincerity of Jonathan, by it being sworn to in the presence of the LORD God.

1 Samuel 20:13 "The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father [to do] thee evil, then I will show it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father."

Recompense evil more than can be thought of and expressed, should he neglect to inform David of the good disposition of Saul unto him.

"But if it please my father to do thee evil": If he seems determined upon it to take away thy life.

"Then I will show it thee": Not by a messenger, by whom it would not be safe to communicate it, lest by that means Saul would know where he was, and come and slay him. But Jonathan would come himself, and acquaint him with it.

"And send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace": Give him leave, and advise him to depart, and provide for his own safety, adding his blessing on him and prayer for him.

"And the Lord be with thee, as he hath been with my father": In the beginning of his reign, giving him counsel and advice in all things, and victory over his enemies, succeeding and prospering him in whatsoever he engaged in; the Targum is, "the Word of the Lord be for thy help", etc. Jonathan seemed to be fully apprised that David was to succeed in the kingdom.

Jonathan not only swears to his loyalty to get the proper word to David, but he also speaks a blessing on his good friend. Jonathan says, God can punish him severely, if he does not do what he promises here.

Verses 14-16: It was common practice for a new king to murder all the heirs of the former king, thus ensuring fewer threats to the throne. Jonathan asked that David and his "house" (descendants), to spare him and his house. David fulfilled this promise when he extended kindness and hospitality to Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9:3, 7; 21:7).

Verses 14-17: "Kindness" and love are essential ingredients in the "covenant" stipulations of the ancient Near East. They speak of a relationship whereby each party treats the other as a full family member, with loyalty, dignity, and devotion. "Jonathan" continues with recognition of David's divinely established preeminence (compare verse 8; 18:3-4). The everlasting covenant between Jonathan and "David" (compare verses 23, 42), will be remembered by David when he becomes king (2 Samuel Chapter 9).

1 Samuel 20:14 "And thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not:"

"The kindness of the Lord": Jonathan acknowledged that David would one day be Israel's king. With that in mind, Jonathan requested protection for him and his family when David took the throne.

1 Samuel 20:15 "But [also] thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth."

The covenant they had made was not merely personal, but reached to their posterity, and was to be kept even when David should have the greatest power, and there were none to oppose his will. These verses seem strongly to indicate that Jonathan knew of David being anointed to the kingdom! How unspeakable a generosity is here shown by Jonathan to stipulate for his own life, and the lives of his posterity, with that man whose life, humanly speaking, was now in his power!

Jonathan wants a promise from David, that he will be kind to Jonathan and his descendants, when he is in power. Jonathan believes that David will overcome all of these problems with Saul,

and will reign in the stead of Saul. This is a great show of confidence in the relationship David has with the LORD. Jonathan knows his friend well. He truly believes David will reign in Saul's place.

1 Samuel 20:16 "So Jonathan made [a covenant] with the house of David, [saying], Let the LORD even require [it] at the hand of David's enemies."

“The house of David”: This covenant was not only binding on Jonathan and David, but also upon the descendants of each (see 2 Sam. 9:1-8), for the account of David’s kindness to a descendant of Jonathan in fulfillment of this covenant.

“David’s enemies”: Jonathan perceived that among David’s adversaries who would be cut off when he became king was his own father, Saul (18:29; 19:17).

1 Samuel 20:17 "And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul."

“Swear”: In response to Jonathan’s words, David solemnly pledged to fulfill the covenant between himself and Jonathan.

“Loved him . . . his own soul”: A deep concern and affection was the basis of the covenantal relationship between Jonathan and David. This is the affection commanded by God when He said, “Love you neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39).

These two friends have renewed their covenant agreement with each other, in the presence of the LORD. They will be loyal to each other, regardless of the circumstances.

Verses 18-42: Jonathan and David honored their vows to each other (20:11-16), in the events that followed.

1 Samuel 20:18 "Then Jonathan said to David, Tomorrow [is] the new moon: and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty."

Jonathan resumes, after the passionate conclusion of the solemn covenant betwixt the friends; the last trial shall be as you propose. At the State banquet of my father tomorrow your seat, as agreed upon, will be empty, then you and I, when King Saul misses you, will know the worst.

David will stay away from the house of Saul as planned. The very next day will be the new moon, when they generally celebrate together.

1 Samuel 20:19 "And [when] thou hast stayed three days, [then] thou shalt go down quickly, and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was [in hand], and shalt remain by the stone Ezel."

“Stone Ezel”: Ezel may mean “departure stone.” The location of this stone is unknown, but it was a well-known landmark in the field where David was hiding.

It appears that, David had hidden once before in this place. Both, David and Jonathan knew where it was. David would stay as long as he could away from the house of Saul. At the last minute he could slip down to the meeting place for the signal of whether it was safe to come in or not.

1 Samuel 20:20 "And I will shoot three arrows on the side [thereof], as though I shot at a mark."

On the side of the stone Ezel; three are pitched upon, according to the number of the days David was missing.

"As though I shot at a mark": As if he made the stone the mark he shot at; so that his shooting would not be taken notice of.

Many people target practiced, so it would not be unusual for Jonathan to shoot three arrows. Anyone looking on would think he was just sharpening up his aim.

1 Samuel 20:21 "And, behold, I will send a lad, [saying], Go, find out the arrows. If I expressly say unto the lad, Behold, the arrows [are] on this side of thee, take them; then come thou: for [there is] peace to thee, and no hurt; [as] the LORD liveth."

The servant boy of Jonathan was to go and pick up the arrows. David would be in hearing distance. Jonathan would cry out loudly to the boy, the direction the arrows were in. If Jonathan cries out to the servant boy, that the arrows are on this side of the stone Ezel, that is a signal that all is well and David can come in.

1 Samuel 20:22 "But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows [are] beyond thee; go thy way: for the LORD hath sent thee away."

Being shot to a greater distance than where the young man was.

"Go thy way, for the Lord hath sent thee away": Then he was to depart directly, without staying to have any conversation with Jonathan, which would not be safe for either of them, and so make the best of his way into the country, and escape for his life. For so it was ordered by the providence of God, that he must not stay, but be gone immediately. The signals were these, that if things were favorable, then he would shoot his arrows on one side of the lad, and David might come out and show himself at once. But if not, he would shoot them beyond him, by which he might know that he must flee for his life.

In the case that Saul is still angry with David, Jonathan will cry out to the servant boy, that the arrows are on the other side of the rock. If this happens, David must flee quickly. This will be as a sign from the LORD. The two men and the LORD are working together on this. In the next lesson, we will see the outcome of this.

1 Samuel Chapter 20 Questions

1. Where did David go, when he left Ramah?
2. What questions did David ask Jonathan?
3. How does Jonathan answer David?
4. Jonathan still believes what about his father, Saul?
5. What should have calmed Saul down?
6. What was so unbelievable to Jonathan about Saul?
7. Why does David say, that Saul did not tell Jonathan of his intentions?
8. In verse 4, Jonathan offers to do what?
9. What was special about the next day?
10. What was this celebration accompanied by?
11. How long will David hide in the field?
12. Why would David be expected to be at the feast?
13. What was Jonathan to tell his father about David?
14. If Saul accepts David's excuse, then all is _____.
15. Who is the only true friend David has?
16. If David has sinned, he will let Jonathan _____ him.
17. Why does David believe that Jonathan might not tell him of Saul's intentions?
18. Why did Jonathan and David go out in the field to talk?
19. Who is a witness to the promise Jonathan makes David?
20. What does Jonathan do for David, besides swear he will help him?
21. What does David promise Jonathan?
22. Why does Jonathan want this agreement?
23. Why will David be missed at the new moon celebration?
24. After 3 days, where shall David go to hear from Jonathan?

25. Why will the people not realize that this is a signal?

26. How will David know whether to come in, or not?