

1 Samuel Chapter 20 Continued

1 Samuel 20:23 "And [as touching] the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, the LORD [be] between thee and me for ever."

The plan being concerted, the friends separated for a time, and the amiable character of Jonathan again peers out in his parting allusion to their covenant of friendship.

In the last lesson, Saul had tried to kill David. David and his friend, Jonathan, had gone out in the field and renewed their covenant of friendship. Jonathan and David had figured out a way that Jonathan could get word to David in the field, if it was safe to come in or not. Jonathan would shoot three arrows out toward a rock. Jonathan would send a youngster to get the arrows. Jonathan would then, call out to him that the arrows were back toward Jonathan, if it was safe for David to come in. If he told the youngster to go past the rock, it meant that David must leave quickly. We see that the LORD is witness with Jonathan and David.

1 Samuel 20:24 "So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon was come, the king sat him down to eat meat."

Not directly, but at the time appointed; for he went to Beth-lehem, and returned from thence before that time.

"And when the new moon was come": The first day of the month, which was a solemn festival.

The king sat him down to eat meat": Saul sat down at his table to eat of the provisions that were set upon it; which it is very probable were the peace offerings for that day, which he, his family, and nobles, feasted on together. It is in the Hebrew, "he sat down at the bread", which is put for all the food on the table and the provisions of it.

David was not at his usual place at the table for this feast of the new moon. He was hiding in the field, until he hears from Jonathan whether it is safe to come in or not.

1 Samuel 20:25 "And the king sat upon his seat, as at other times, [even] upon a seat by the wall: and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty."

"Abner": Saul's cousin and commander of his army (see note on 14:50).

1 Samuel 20:26 "Nevertheless Saul spake not any thing that day: for he thought, Something hath befallen him, he [is] not clean; surely he [is] not clean."

"Not clean": At first, Saul did not question David's absence at the feast, assuming that he was ritually unclean and thus could not participate in the meal (Lev. 7:20-21; 15:16).

They all took their places at the table. Saul did not say anything about David not being at the table. He supposed that he was ceremonially not clean for some reason.

1 Samuel 20:27 "And it came to pass on the morrow, [which was] the second [day] of the month, that David's place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor today?"

The time of the moon's appearance being uncertain, whether at midday, in the evening, or at midnight, the festival was extended over two days. Custom, not the law, had introduced this.

Saul said unto Jonathan his son, "Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse" The question was asked, as it were, casually, and with as great an air of indifference as he could assume.

Saul is suddenly aware that something is wrong with David not being present on this second day. Since Jonathan and David were best friends, Saul asks Jonathan where he is.

1 Samuel 20:28 "And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked [leave] of me [to go] to Beth-lehem:"

In reply to Saul's question, and to excuse David, he said.

"David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Beth-lehem": His own city, his native place, where his family lived, whom he was desirous to see, and yet chose not to go without asking leave. And as Saul was not at home, he asked leave of Jonathan, who was next to him and acted for him. And he was very pressing and importunate in his suit, and therefore Jonathan could not well deny him it. And he hoped this would have been sufficient excuse for his absence, especially when what follows should be observed.

1 Samuel 20:29 "And he said, Let me go, I pray thee; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me [to be there]: and now, if I have found favor in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he cometh not unto the king's table."

In the city of Bethlehem where they lived, a peace offering on account of the new moon, and as an anniversary thanksgiving for the mercies of the year (1 Sam. 20:6). And seeing, though he was not at the feast in one place, he observed it in another, his absence at court was the more excusable; and the rather, since it was kept by him with his own family in his own city: besides, it is added.

"And my brother he hath commanded me to be there": His elder brother Eliab, whose commands, as a younger brother, he judged he ought to obey. It is probable his father was now dead, since no mention is made of him, and his elder brother took upon him the command of the family.

"And now, if I have found favor in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, see my brethren": He should take it as a favor to have leave to depart, and be free for the present from waiting upon the king at court, and so have an opportunity of seeing his brethren, for which he had a great desire. Having not seen them a long time, not even since he saw them in the camp, when he slew Goliath.

"Therefore he cometh not to the king's table": This was the reason of it, at least one reason of it, and Jonathan was not obliged to tell the whole.

This is the story that Jonathan and David had prepared to tell Saul, except Jonathan adds that the brother wanted him to come. This would generally have been acceptable. It appears at this point, that Saul has not suspicioned anything.

1 Samuel 20:30 "Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious [woman], do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?"

And Jonathan having replied that David had asked and obtained his permission to attend a family anniversary at Beth-lehem (Acts 20:28-29), the pent-up passions of the king burst out in a most violent storm of rage and invective against his son.

"Son of the perverse rebellious woman": With a vile epithet, Saul was cursing Jonathan, not Jonathan's mother, for having sided with David to his own shame and the shame of the mother who birthed him.

Saul did not like Jonathan siding in with David. It was really Jonathan he was calling perverse and rebellious. He said this about Jonathan's mother to hurt Jonathan more deeply, than if he had said it about Jonathan. He is saying that Jonathan's mother will be ashamed of Jonathan choosing David over his father.

1 Samuel 20:31 "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."

He would not, though heir to the crown be sure of it. It would be precarious to him, he would be in great danger of being deprived of it on the death of his father; and therefore it would be his highest wisdom to deliver David up to be slain, as it was his greatest folly to protect him and provide for his satiety.

"Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me": Send to Beth-lehem for him to come to court directly.

"For he shall surely die": Or he is "the son of death"; guilty of death, as the Targum, deserves to die, and Saul was determined upon his death if possible.

Saul is trying to tell Jonathan that his inheritance to the throne has been taken by David. Really Saul is not interested in Jonathan; he just wants to turn Jonathan against David. He is trying to get Jonathan to kill David. He knows that David would come in for Jonathan.

1 Samuel 20:32 "And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?"

Making no answer to the charges of perverseness, rebellion, and folly brought against himself, which he bore with patience. But could not bear to hear his dear friend spoken against, and as worthy of death; and therefore in answer to that says.

"Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?" Has he attempted to take away thy life? To deprive thee of thy crown? To settle himself upon the throne? What overt act of treason has he been guilty of that he should die? On the contrary, has he not done many things worthy of immortal honor, for the good of the nation, and the glory of thy reign? And if God has determined the kingdom for him, and anointed him to it, what blame can be laid upon him? Nay, should he not be the rather respected and honored?

Saul knows David has done nothing to be killed for. Saul is afraid of losing his throne to David. That is Saul's real reason for killing David.

1 Samuel 20:33 "And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David."

So provoked to wrath was he by what he said. It seems by this that Saul always had a javelin or spear in his hand, which is to be accounted for by the custom of those times. In other countries, as well as in this, the kings used to carry spears in their hands instead of scepters, and which they used as such.

"Whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David": For since he attempted to smite him, his own son, for speaking on his behalf, it might be well concluded, that such was his state of mind, that he would if possible kill David, if he could get him into his hands.

Saul attempted to hit his own son with the javelin, because he did not want to kill David. Jonathan realizes that Saul will not be satisfied until he has killed David.

1 Samuel 20:34 "So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame."

Resenting his father's attempt to kill him; and also Saul's resolution to kill David.

"And did eat no meat the second day of the month": Not then at that meal he was just sat down to, nor at another time that day, his stomach was so full through indignation at his father, and grief for his friend David. Besides, being a mourner on the above accounts, he might not eat of the sacrifices.

"For he was grieved for David": That his death should be determined upon by his father, and he in so much danger of it; as also that he himself must be parted from and lose so dear a friend, which was one reason he ate no meat that day.

"Because his father had done him shame": The copulative "and" being wanting; and this he did by calling him a perverse and rebellious son, and representing him as an errant fool, and particularly by casting a javelin at him to smite him.

Jonathan was now angry with Saul, his father. He knew Saul had no good reason for wanting to kill David. Jonathan left the feast. He refused to eat the meat of the feast.

1 Samuel 20:35 "And it came to pass in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad with him."

The next morning that was the morning of the third day of the month.

"That Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David": He went to the place in the field, or near it, where David hid himself, and at the time agreed between them; which, Abarbanel says, was the time the nobles agreed on for walking, and motion, and for hunting, and casting of arrows. So that Jonathan could go forth without suspicion.

"And a little lad with him; to carry his bow and arrows, and fetch his arrows when cast.

Jonathan remembered his promise to David, and went out with the lad to shoot the arrows.

1 Samuel 20:36 "And he said unto his lad, Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot. [And] as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him."

He no doubt told him the mark which he should shoot at, the stone Ezel, and bid him look out about that for them.

"And as the lad ran": Before he had got to the mark.

"He shot an arrow beyond him": Or it; beyond the lad, or beyond the mark he shot at; purposely shooting with great strength, that he might exceed, and thereby give notice to David how things stood, which was the sign agreed on.

This was done, so Jonathan could shout instructions for him to go further. This was the sign to David that he should flee. The fact that Jonathan had the little lad with him was to keep down suspicion.

1 Samuel 20:37 "And when the lad was come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, [Is] not the arrow beyond thee?"

To the mark which he told him he should shoot at and whereabouts he might expect to find the arrow.

"Jonathan cried after the lad, and said, is not the arrow beyond thee?" He cried with a loud voice and said this, not so much that the lad might hear him, but that David, who lay hid near the place, might hear him. So that if they had no opportunity of seeing and conversing with each other

through any person going by at that time. David might know by this sign that evil was determined against him, and must flee for his life.

Jonathan was making sure that David realized it was necessary for him to flee.

1 Samuel 20:38 "And Jonathan cried after the lad, Make speed, haste, stay not. And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows, and came to his master."

But bring the arrows to him directly, that he might dismiss him. For, observing that no man was passing by, he was desirous of embracing the opportunity for a few minutes to have an interview with David alone before he fled.

"And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows": For though the textual reading is singular, the marginal is plural, to show, as Kimchi observes, that he cast three arrows, as he said he would (1 Sam. 20:20).

"And came to his master": With the arrows.

1 Samuel 20:39 "But the lad knew not any thing: only Jonathan and David knew the matter."

What was meant by shooting the arrows and by shooting them beyond where he was, and by bidding him make haste to bring them back to him.

"Only Jonathan and David knew the matter": What was signified by them, those being signs agreed upon between them.

This would not have been kept secret, if the lad had known what the reason was for running after the arrows. Jonathan cried out all of these things, so no one would know the reason.

1 Samuel 20:40 "And Jonathan gave his artillery unto his lad, and said unto him, Go, carry [them] to the city."

"His vessels" Or instruments; his arms, as the Targum, his quiver, bow, and arrows.

"And said unto him, go, carry them to the city": To Gibeah, to Jonathan's house, or to his apartments at court there.

This was a way to get rid of the boy. Jonathan sent his weapon back to town with the boy, so he could say goodbye to David.

1 Samuel 20:41 "[And] as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of [a place] toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded."

“Bowed three times”: David’s bowing down more than once acknowledged Jonathan as the prince, and expressed humble affection for him.

These close friends hugged, and as was the custom in their land, they kissed. David had bowed before Jonathan prior to their hugging each other. "Exceeded" means that David broke down weeping. These good friends thought this might be their last time to see each other.

1 Samuel 20:42 "And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city."

Hereafter, “David” would remain a fugitive, living in exile and in flight from Saul until the king’s death.

“Sworn” (see note on 20:17).

“The city”: I.e., Gibeah, the home of Saul. From this point until Saul’s death, David was an outcast from the royal court.

They would always be friends. They would let this friendship live on in their children, if one of them die. Their bond of friendship was sealed with an oath to God. David fled to hide and Jonathan went back into the city.

1 Samuel Chapter 20 Continued Questions

1. Where had David and Jonathan gone to renew their covenant?
2. How was Jonathan to warn David not to come in?
3. Where did David hide to wait?
4. What was the feast celebrating?
5. Who ate with Jonathan and Saul?
6. Why did Saul think David was not there the first day?
7. What does Saul call David, in verse 27?
8. Why does Saul ask Jonathan, where David is?
9. What reason does Jonathan give for David not being there?
10. What had Jonathan added to the story he and David had prepared?

11. Who was Saul's anger kindled against?
12. What terrible things does Saul call Jonathan's mother?
13. Saul accuses Jonathan of choosing _____ over himself.
14. What excuse does he give Jonathan for killing David?
15. Is Saul really interested in the good of Jonathan?
16. What question does Jonathan ask Saul?
17. Why does Saul want David killed, really?
18. What did Saul do, that could have killed Jonathan?
19. What does Jonathan do?
20. How was Jonathan feeling toward his father?
21. Who did Jonathan take to the field with him?
22. What was the lad to do?
23. What did Jonathan cry out to the lad, after he shot the arrow?
24. Who were the only ones who knew the plan?
25. When the boy left, what did David and Jonathan do?
26. What did Jonathan say to David?