FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 20

*David and Jonathan*

**Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, “What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?” 2 “Never!” Jonathan replied. “You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn’t do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It’s not so!” 3 But David took an oath and said, “Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, ‘Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.’ Yet as surely as the Lord lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.” 4 Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you.” 5 So David said, “Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. 6 If your father misses me at all, tell him, ‘David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.’ 7 If he says, ‘Very well,’ then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. 8 As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?” 9 “Never!” Jonathan said. “If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn’t I tell you?” 10 David asked, “Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?” 11 “Come,” Jonathan said, “let’s go out into the field.” So they went there together. 12 Then Jonathan said to David: “By the Lord, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? 13 But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father. 14 But show me unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, 15 and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.” 16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord call David’s enemies to account.” 17 And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. 18 Then Jonathan said to David: “Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. 19 The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. 20 I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. 21 Then I will send a boy and say, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I say to him, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,’ then come, because, as surely as the Lord lives, you are safe; there is no danger. 22 But if I say to the boy, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you,’ then you must go, because the Lord has sent you away. 23 And about the matter you and I discussed—remember, the Lord is witness between you and me forever.” 24 So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon festival came, the king sat down to eat. 25 He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David’s place was empty. 26 Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, “Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean—surely he is unclean.” 27 But the next day, the second day of the month, David’s place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, “Why hasn’t the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?” 28 Jonathan answered, “David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. 29 He said, ‘Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.’ That is why he has not come to the king’s table.” 30 Saul’s anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, “You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don’t I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? 31 As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!” 32 “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” Jonathan asked his father. 33 But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David. 34 Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father’s shameful treatment of David. 35 In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, 36 and he said to the boy, “Run and find the arrows I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. 37 When the boy came to the place where Jonathan’s arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, “Isn’t the arrow beyond you?” 38 Then he shouted, “Hurry! Go quickly! Don’t stop!” The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. 39 (The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) 40 Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, “Go, carry them back to town.” 41 After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most. 42 Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.’ ” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.**

**20:1** *Naioth at Ramah.* See note on 19:18. (CSB)

**20:2** Jonathan is not afraid of losing his crown to David because he believes it is God’s will that David be the next king of Israel (cf vv 12–15). (TLSB)

**20:3** *as surely as the Lord lives.* See note on 14:39. (CSB)

David is more sensitive than is Jonathan to the precarious nature of life. Our lives are in the hands of the living Lord. (TLSB)

**20:4** Jonathan promises David unconditional assistance. He becomes the means by which David’s God-ordained destiny is achieved. (TLSB)

**20:5** *New Moon festival.* Each month of the year was consecrated to the Lord by the bringing of special sacrifices (Nu 28:11–15) and the blowing of trumpets (Nu 10:10; Ps 81:3). This observance also involved cessation from normal work, especially at the beginning of the seventh month (Lev 23:24–25; Nu 29:1–6; 2Ki 4:23; Isa 1:13; Am 8:5). (CSB)

Apparently, Jesse’s family gathered for a special time of worship during the new-moon celebration. (TLSB)

**20:6** Because of the covenant they made with each other, Jonathan feels responsible for David. (TLSB)

*annual sacrifice.* David’s statement indicates that it was customary for families to observe the New Moon festival together once in the year. There is no other reference in the OT to this practice. (CSB)

**20:8** *deal kindly*. Or, “show covenant loyalty.” (TLSB)

*covenant.* See note on 18:3. (CSB)

With vows in the Lord’s name. (TLSB)

**20:10** David’s question is answered in vv 18–23. (TLSB)

**20:11** *let’s go out into the field.* Jonathan acted to save David. Cain had said the same to Abel, but in order to kill him (Ge 4:8; but see NIV text note there). (CSB)

The privacy assures David of Jonathan’s loyalty and underscores their close relationship. (TLSB)

**20:12** Jonathan believes he can successfully mediate between David and his father. (TLSB)

*The Lord* … *be witness!* Solemn affirmation of the truth. (TLSB)

**20:13** *may the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely.* A common curse formula (see note on 3:17). (CSB)

*May the Lord be with you as he has been with my father.* A clear indication that Jonathan expects David to become king. (CSB)

Jonathan’s promise of loyalty to David is set in the form of a prayer. (TLSB)

**20:14** *show me the* *steadfast love of the Lord*. May be superlative for highest possible loyalty. (TLSB)

*that I may not be killed.* It was quite common in the ancient world for the first ruler of a new dynasty to secure his position by murdering all potential claimants to the throne from the preceding dynasty (see 1Ki 15:29; 16:11; 2Ki 10:7; 11:1). (CSB)

**20:15** *your kindness from my family.* This request was based on the covenant previously concluded between Jonathan and David (see note on 18:3) and was subsequently honored in David’s dealings with Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth (see 2Sa 9:3, 7; 21:7). (CSB)

Jonathan senses David’s coming greatness but feels no jealousy. His words anticipate David’s future rule as king.

**20:16–17** Jonathan prays that the Lord will ensure that David upholds his obligations to the covenant they have made. Jonathan has David reaffirm his side of their covenant. Words like these make this chapter one of the most touching accounts of friendship in literature. (TLSB)

*house of David*. His dynasty. (TLSB)

**20:16** *May the Lord call David’s enemies to account.* Jonathan alig ns himself completely with David, calling for destruction of his enemies, even if that should include his father, Saul. (CSB)

**20:17** *reaffirm his oath.* See vv. 14–15, 42; 18:3. (CSB)

*he loved him as he loved himself.* See 18:3; 2Sa 1:26. (CSB)

**20:18** *New Moon festival.* See note on v. 5. (CSB)

**20:19** *the place where you hid.* Perhaps the place referred to in 19:2. (CSB)

Likely a familiar landmark. (TLSB)

**20:21** *as the Lord* *lives*. Oath formula. Jonathan declares that the Lord would be witness to the covenant of protection agreed to in vv 14–16. (TLSB)

**20:22** God’s hand is at work in actions we have chosen to do when we respond to His will. If David’s life is in danger, he must flee so that he can be an instrument of God’s future plans. As the Lord sent Joseph away to save lives in Egypt (Gn 45:4–7), so the Lord sends David away in safety to prepare him for his future vocation as king. (TLSB)

**20:23** *the matter you and I discussed.* See vv. 15–17. (CSB)

Jonathan swears an oath of undying friendship, backed by his deep faith in the Lord. The Lord would seal the pact of friendship. (TLSB)

*the Lord is witness.* The invoking of God to act as witness and judge between them ensures that their agreement will be kept. (CSB)

**20:24** *field*. An open field was a typical place for archers to engage in target practice. (TLSB)

**20:25** *by the wall*. To be safe from attack from behind, Saul sat with Abner, his army general, beside him for protection. (TLSB)

*Abner.* Saul’s cousin and the commander of his army (see 14:50). (CSB)

**20:26** *ceremonially unclean.* See note on 16:5; cf. Lev 7:19–21; 15:16; Dt 23:10. (CSB)

Ritual uncleanness disqualified a person from participating in a religious celebration and from community involvement. Because uncleanness was temporary, Saul became suspicious when David was absent longer than necessary. (TLSB)

**20:29** *sacrifice*. Lit, “kinship sacrifice.” (TLSB)

*my brother has commanded me*. Additional detail to what David said in v 6. His brother was probably in charge of family celebrations. (TLSB)

**20:30** *son of a perverse and rebellious woman.* The Hebrew idiom intends to characterize Jonathan, not his mother. (CSB)

Jonathan’s mother was Ahinoam (14:50). That Saul says this of his own wife shows how much he has lost perspective because of his loathing of David (though the curses may also illustrate strife in Saul’s household). Saul intends to curse Jonathan rather than his mother, as the rest of the verse makes clear. (TLSB)

*shame* … *nakedness?* Saul suggests that Jonathan is so disloyal to his father that his mother is reduced in status from the bond of wedlock to that of a prostitute. (TLSB)

**20:31** *neither you nor your kingdom will be established.* Saul is now convinced that David will succeed him if David is not killed (see notes on 18:13, 17, 29; 19:1), and he is incapable of understanding Jonathan’s lack of concern for his own succession to the throne. (CSB)

Saul fears conspiracy, realizing he is no match for David and the protection Jonathan provides him. He virtually concedes David’s invincibility. (TLSB)

**20:33** *hurled his spear.* See 18:11; 19:10. (CSB)

Due to Saul’s unstable mental state, the spear he throws at his son misses him, as it had missed David (19:10). God was at work protecting the two friends. (TLSB)

**20:34** *fierce anger*. At the public humiliation he endured before Abner and the others. (TLSB)

*grieved for David.* By impugning Jonathan, Saul had slandered David also. (TLSB)

**20:36** *arrow*. The Hbr is rare, found elsewhere only in 2Ki 9:24. With accurate aim, Jonathan shoots only one arrow. (TLSB)

**20:39** Jonathan’s directions to the boy (v 38) were intended for David. The boy, of course, knew nothing of the reason behind the shooting of the arrows. (TLSB)

**20:40** *city*. Gibeah, where Jonathan was currently living (cf 15:34), c 3 mi N of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

**20:41** *bowed … three times.* A sign of submission and respect (see Ge 33:3; 42:6). (CSB)

Common gesture (Gn 33:3). David gives Jonathan the triple homage befitting a royal person. Mutual weeping and kissing is in expectation of their imminent farewell (cf Gn 45:14–15). (TLSB)

*kissed*. Likely on the neck (Gn 33:4) rather than on the lips (Sg 1:2). (TLSB)

**20:42** *sworn friendship.* See vv. 14–15, 23; 18:3. (CSB)

Swearing an oath in the Lord’s name was a solemn act, as the Second Commandment reminds us. (TLSB)

*forever*. Covenant David and Jonathan make with each other now involves their future descendants. Apart from a brief encounter in 23:16–18, this is the last time David and Jonathan would see each other. (TLSB)

*the town.* Gibeah (see 10:26). (CSB)

**Ch 20** David and Jonathan’s friendship displays lasting loyalty and personal self-sacrifice (cf Pr 17:17). Give thanks to the Lord for the friends He has blessed you with and the wonderful way He has protected you. Pray to grow in the grace of giving thanks. By grace, God treats all of us infinitely better than we deserve. • “By grace I’m saved, grace free and boundless; My soul, believe and doubt it not.” Amen. (*LSB* 566:1) (TLSB)