

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 20

Jonathan Warns David

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came and said before Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" 2 And he said to him, "Far from it! You shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so." 3 But David vowed again, saying, "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he thinks, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.' But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death." 4 Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." 5 David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit at table with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field till the third day at evening. 6 If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the clan.' 7 If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. 8 Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?" 9 And Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! If I knew that it was determined by my father that harm should come to you, would I not tell you?" 10 Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?" 11 And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field. 12 And Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? 13 But should it please my father to do you harm, the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father. 14 If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the LORD, that I may not die; 15 and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." 16 And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD take vengeance on David's enemies." 17 And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul. 18 Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. 19 On the third day go down quickly to the place where you hid yourself when the matter was in hand, and remain beside the stone heap. 20 And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. 21 And behold, I will send the boy, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you, take them,' then you are to come, for, as the LORD lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. 22 But if I say to the youth, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then go, for the LORD has sent you away. 23 And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever." 24 So David hid himself in the field. And when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. 25 The king sat on his seat, as at other times, on the seat by the wall. Jonathan sat opposite, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. 26 Yet Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him. He is not clean; surely he is not clean." 27 But on the second day, the day after the new moon, David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has not the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" 28 Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. 29 He said, 'Let me go, for our clan holds a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be

there. So now, if I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away and see my brothers.’ For this reason he has not come to the king's table.” 30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? 31 For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die.” 32 Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” 33 But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. 34 And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had disgraced him. 35 In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy. 36 And he said to his boy, “Run and find the arrows that I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. 37 And when the boy came to the place of the arrow that Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the boy and said, “Is not the arrow beyond you?” 38 And Jonathan called after the boy, “Hurry! Be quick! Do not stay!” So Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master. 39 But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter. 40 And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, “Go and carry them to the city.” 41 And as soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times. And they kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most. 42 Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘The LORD shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.’” And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city.

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 truly as the LORD lives.* 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.* 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)

yearly 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. 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. (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. (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 die. 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 steadfast love from my house.* This request was based on the covenant previously concluded between Jonathan and David 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 take vengeance on David's enemies.* Jonathan aligns himself completely with David, calling for destruction of his enemies, even if that should include his father, Saul. (CSB)

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

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. (CSB)

20:26 *ceremonially unclean*. 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, 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*. 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*. 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)

into the city. 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)