

1 Samuel (Sh'mu'el Alef)

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Chapter 20

1 And David fled from Naioth¹ in Ramah and came and said before Jonathan (Y'honatan),² What have I done? What is my iniquity or what is my sin before thy father that he seeks my life?³

2 And he said unto him, No, in no wise; thou shalt not die. Behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it me,⁴ and why should my father hide this thing from me?⁵ It shall not be so.

3 And David swore moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knows that I have found grace in thine eyes, and he saith in himself, Let Jonathan not know this lest he be grieved; but truly as the LORD (ADONAI) lives and as thy soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.⁶

¹ David knew that it was not safe to stay in Naioth, regardless that Saul had prostrated himself before Samuel. He must have surmised that Saul would figure out some way to assassinate him, or to punish the Torah students there, if he remained hidden among them. He figured this correctly, for Saul later had a whole town of priests and their families murdered because one of the priests helped David and his men. Leaving the town did not help it, in that case.

² David had friends at court. Someone hid him and passed on a message to Jonathan for them to meet. He would have had to stay away from Michal, though. Saul likely had her watched, to try to catch David, if he should visit her. I wonder if he ever sent her a message, asking her to join him in his exile, or if he thought she was too great a liability. She might have sent a message to her father, telling him of their location, if she thought that Saul was in jeopardy, such as the time that David cut off the hem of Saul's robe.

³ David would have related the following events more than once, to show that his flight from Saul was justified, as well as to relive with poignancy one of the last times that he spent with the best friend he ever had, whom he missed to the end of his days. It is a joy to realize that David and Jonathan have been together in Heaven for centuries now, continuing to enjoy their friendship, and that they will never be parted again.

⁴ Proverbs 25:3 says that the heart of kings is unsearchable. They don't trust anyone fully, for they never know who will betray them to gain their throne, but Saul found in Jonathan one whom he could share nearly everything that was on his mind. He depended on Jonathan to be there for him to talk to, and this is possibly the main reason why Jonathan stayed with his father, so that he would not be alone and have no one to confide in as much as he confided in his eldest son. There likely was no one else whom Saul could trust as much. Jonathan did not want his father to be lonely, even though he was in great error at times. He probably hoped to help Saul recover his soul.

Saul knew better than to speak his mind to Jonathan in regards to what he felt about David because he knew that Jonathan loved David as his own soul. When he let that secret out, though, and Jonathan defended David, Saul was furious that he could not depend on Jonathan to take his side, though he was his most trusted confidante; his emotions over-ruled his sense of logic; he saw it and felt it as a personal rejection and responded with rage.

⁵ Jonathan was apparently a forgiving man. In spite of the fact that his father, at one time, had ordered his death for eating a little honey (breaking a vow Saul made that Jonathan knew nothing of). Jonathan was apparently the person whom Saul confided in the most. Saul knew that Jonathan was honourable and would not betray him, and, indeed, he did not betray his father, though he apprised David of what was going on. Noble loyalty is not blind loyalty; it does not go against morality and justice in order to keep faith, but rather challenges when morality and justice are not followed.

4 Then Jonathan said unto David, Whatever thy soul saith, I will do it for thee.

5 And David replied unto Jonathan, Behold, tomorrow is the new moon (Rosh-Hodesh), and I should not fail to sit with the king at food,⁷ but thou shalt let me go and hide myself in the field until the evening of the third day.

6 If thy father at all misses me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem (Beit-Lechem), his city, for all those of his lineage have an anniversary sacrifice.⁸

7 If he should say, It is well;⁹ thy slave shall have peace; but if he is very wroth, then be sure that the evil is determined in him.¹⁰

⁶ It seems that Jonathan thinks that Saul has changed his mind about killing David because of his humiliation before Samuel and having prophesied the word of the Lord, which possibly included acknowledging that David was to be his successor. David is more discerning and realizes that people can still go against God, even after such a powerful experience.

David likely has a premonition that Saul has issued instructions to his guards to hold David, if rage comes upon him and he tosses his spear at David again, to not let him escape this time. Saul has seen the futility of going after David when he is under Samuel's protection, but he seems to think that David would not be able to escape him, if he can get him into his own lair.

⁷ The statement that David made that he should not fail to be at the king's table on the beginning of the new moon indicates that Saul prophesied good towards him at Ramah, and that therefore seemed to be no more reason for him to be on the run. If he returned to Gibeah to attend the court, the public would perceive that to mean that David never had ill intentions towards Saul, but if he failed to show up, then it might look like that he was plotting insurrection. David was concerned that putting himself within Saul's reach would be a hazard to his life.

⁸ Old Testament practices among the Jews made allowances for telling lies, based on the motive for the lie. When Yeshua came along, though, He praised Nathaniel that there was no guile in him. In matters of honesty, Nathaniel was outstanding even among the finest characters.

There would, however, be an actual feast held in Bethlehem at that time; that part had to be true, else Saul would have had a legal right to arrest David for sedition, as a blatant lie would be taken as evidence of it. I doubt that David attended that feast, while waiting for Jonathan's reply to his inquiries. He had to stay near at hand to meet with Jonathan, and, also, Saul may have sent spies to see if David was at Bethlehem and to arrest him there. Saul was probably prepared to arrest David's whole family, but not until after David showed up. He would want David to think there was no danger, so that he would meet with his family and be apprehended.

What would be the rationale for such spies to spy on David and arrest him? Some people need no rationalization and do what they are told, so that they can get paid for it, or achieve some other advantage. Others, with a conscience, might have rationalized, "Well, this is what I have been ordered to do, and if David is innocent, he will be cleared at his trial." If he was given a fair trial, that is, but an unfair arrest usually does not portend a fair trial.

⁹ This possible reply, put forth by David, suggests that a reasonable king would have no problem with excusing David from the feast due to the reason given, even if it meant David missing the king's own feast. This would be due to David's status at court; it isn't something that any official or servant would dare to do, if they had duties to attend to at court. This test was set forth by David to gauge his status at court, to see if he was still appreciated as a great hero and accorded the privileges that came with being part of the king's family.

¹⁰ This test was like sticking a thermometer in something to determine its temperature. Saul should not have minded David attending to family duties of this nature. If Saul was only slightly irked that David put his blood relations ahead of his in-laws, it would not have been a big deal, but if he got really angry about it, it would indicate that fury towards David still resided in his heart.

8 Therefore, thou shalt deal in mercy with thy slave, for thou hast brought thy slave into a covenant of the LORD with thee; notwithstanding, if there is iniquity in me, slay me thyself, for why should thou bring me to thy father?

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 I not be obliged to show it to thee?¹¹

10 Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? Or what if thy father answers thee roughly?

11 And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And both of them went out into the field.

12 Then Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I shall have asked my father tomorrow at this time or after tomorrow and, behold, if there is good toward David and I then do not send unto thee and show it to thee,

13 the LORD do so and much more to Jonathan. But if it pleases my father to do thee evil, then I will show it to thee and send thee away that thou may go in peace; and the LORD be with thee as he has been with my father.¹²

14 And if I live, thou shalt show me the mercy of the LORD,¹³ but if I am dead,

15 thou shalt not cut off thy mercy from my house for ever.¹⁴ When the LORD has cut off one by one the enemies of David from the face of the earth, remove even Jonathan from thy house if I fail thee and require it at the hand of David's enemies.¹⁵

16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David.¹⁶

17 And Jonathan swore unto David again because he loved him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.¹⁷

It would be expected of Saul to be patient with this reply, as David would be thought to be conceited, thinking himself above his family, if he disobeyed his brother's summons.

¹¹ He would be obliged by integrity and justice to warn David. Though he is a royal prince, he acknowledges that there is a higher duty to God that supersedes that of one's duty to their king. It is not a duty that is owed to friendship. In this statement, Jonathan acknowledges that he knows David is a man of integrity who has not been disloyal to the crown in any way that he is obliged to be loyal to it. This would indicate that it was not disloyal of David to flee from Saul, contrary to Saul's will. A person is not obliged to stand still and allow themselves to be arrested, if they have been unjustly accused, especially if they know that they will be tortured or killed, if apprehended, or not be met with justice in the courts.

¹² Confirmation that Jonathan knew that David would be king.

¹³ Jonathan wanted a promise from David that he would not kill him or have him assassinated when David became king.

¹⁴ Jonathan also wanted to ensure the safety of his descendents. A promise made by David would be expected to be upheld by David's descendents. When one befriends a man or woman of God, they do good also to their own family by their association, as Matthew Henry pointed out in his commentary.

¹⁵ Jonathan expected this promise to be kept, though, only if he and his descendents did not rise up against David to do evil to him or to David's house. It was not an unconditional promise, which would have been unreasonable. In this Jonathan demonstrates his integrity.

¹⁶ This verse indicates that David's promise to Jonathan would be binding upon his descendents.

¹⁷ It has been said that power corrupts, and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. This was not true of Jonathan. He had power, but he did not use it to grasp for more power than what God had allotted to him. He

18 Then Jonathan said to David, Tomorrow is the new moon, and thou shalt be missed because thy seat will be empty.¹⁸

19 And when thou hast stayed three days, then thou shalt go down quickly and come to the place where thou didst hide thyself on the day of the work and shalt remain by the stone Ezel;¹⁹

20 and I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof as though I shot at a mark.²⁰

21 And, behold, I will send a lad, saying, Go, find 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 unto thee and no hurt, as the LORD lives.

22 But if I say thus unto the young man, Behold, the arrows are beyond thee, then go away, for the LORD has sent thee away.²¹

23 And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, let the LORD be between thee and me for ever.

24 ¶ So David hid himself in the field, and when the new moon was come, the king sat down to eat bread.²²

25 And the king sat upon his seat as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall;²³ and Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, and David's place was empty.

26 Nevertheless, Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, Something has befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean.

27 And it came to pass on the next day, which was the second day of the new moon, that David's place was empty, and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Why did not the son of Jesse come to food, neither yesterday nor today?

28 And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem.

walked in the fear of the Lord and knew that it is futile to go against God. Likely, he did not even wish he could oppose God, for he was a man who loved God, and valued his relationship with God more than anything else. He knew that God had chosen David to be king, he was submissive to God's will, and he even helped fulfill God's will concerning David, protecting him, instead of turning him over to his father when it was in the power of his hand to do so. I love Jonathan!

¹⁸ After Saul's humiliation and apparent repentance of having sought his life, David is expected to return to court no later than the beginning of the new moon. A seat at the king's table has been reserved for him at that time. Michal, as well, probably expected him to come back, or hoped that he would.

¹⁹ Jonathan had to know where David was hiding in the field, so that he didn't shoot him by accident.

²⁰ Jonathan was renowned as an archer. There would be nothing remarkable about him practicing his archery to cause comment. It was probably his habit to head out to a field at that time of day to practice his archery.

²¹ The Lord uses even the unjust actions of others to put us in the right place at the right time. David was sent into the wilderness to build his core group of mighty men and show Israel that he had a high degree of character in that he did not try to wrest the throne from Saul, and by how he behaved wisely and justly towards his fellow Israelites, even when he was in desperate circumstances.

²² David waited that day, but no word came because Saul made no comment. He knew Jonathan's habits and could go away when Jonathan did not show up that day during the usual time that he practiced his archery.

²³ The seat in the corner, opposite the door, was the chief place to sit. Perhaps this was so because it was a place that could be defended by the guards, if anyone launched an attack on the principal man in the room.

29 And he said, Let me go, I pray thee, for those of our lineage have a sacrifice in the city, and my brother,²⁴ he has commanded me to be there, and now, if I have found grace in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he has not come unto the king's table.

30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman,²⁵ do I not know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse (Yishai) to thine own confusion²⁶ and unto the confusion of thy mother's shame?²⁷

²⁴ An eldest brother had the authority to command the younger brothers, and to even supersede a royal event, apparently, if the royal event was not a major one that nobody dared to miss. Even a national hero was expected to obey an older brother's summons. Saul, perhaps, thought that David was too arrogant to submit to an older brother whom he exceeded in exploits, and that this excuse had to be a lie. If he thought that David was arrogant and would not care about his brother demanding his attendance at a family feast, it would indicate that Saul still had a twisted perspective about the nature of David's character.

²⁵ This is possibly a clue that Saul's wife was a godly woman who stood up to him when he thought to do evil, and Jonathan apparently inherited these qualities of justice and moral courage from her. These attributes of her character, which opposed Saul's wilfulness, may have been why Saul decided to take a concubine, which was apparently not a normal thing for him to do, as he had only the one concubine. It was normal for kings to have many concubines. By taking only one concubine, he was showing his wife that he had given his heart to another woman; that it was not merely for sexual amusement.

Indeed, Rizpah displayed an individualistic personality in that she openly consorted with Abner, against all moral convention and political practice, and her strong will was evidenced by how she kept the ravens from eating the bodies of Saul's sons.

God gave Saul's wives into David's care. What a strange situation that must have been. Not too bad at first. David would have honoured Jonathan's mother greatly, because she was Jonathan's mother, and Rizpah, knowing that she had been special to Abner, who had become his ally and was assassinated against David's will. Because of the relationship that Abner had with Rizpah, and the accusations Ishbaal made because of it, Abner went over to David's side, and then he was murdered by Joab. These circumstances likely prevented Rizpah from being stoned for adultery.

Then the Gibeonites demanded the lives of Saul's children and grandchildren to atone for breaking the covenant that Israel had with them. David must have wrestled with that, knowing the heartache it would cause Jonathan's mother (if she was still alive at that time), and Rizpah. Hopefully, Jonathan's mother had passed on by then, and was spared the pain of seeing her grandchildren executed.

In that case, it would be Rizpah who was mainly traumatized by his decision. He probably didn't care much about that, seeing as she was supposed to be his concubine by inheritance, but he did not consider her a faithful woman. He probably left her alone because she'd had an affair with Abner, though David likely provided her with financial support.

Another rendering of the phrase can mean that Saul was telling Jonathan that he was extremely perverse, and the epithet may have had nothing to do with his mother's values and behaviour. By bringing Jonathan's mother into it, Saul may have had no other thought than to grossly insult Jonathan, for that is what such references to one's mother intend to do in that culture. It is the kind of insult that would call for a duel in European culture historically, where a man who did not call for satisfaction would be considered a snivelling coward or extremely disrespectful of his mother, to his own shame. Of course, Jonathan could not challenge his father to a duel, so he would have to just swallow the insult.

²⁶ Saul thinks that Jonathan's friendship with David will backfire on him, that David will end up destroying him.

31 For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the land, thou shalt not be established nor thy kingdom.

²⁸Therefore, now send and bring him unto me,²⁹ for he shall surely die.

32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father and said unto him, Why shall he be slain? What has he done?³⁰

33 And Saul cast a spear at him to smite him whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.³¹

34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved for David and because his father had done him shame.³²

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.

²⁷ Saul may be saying here that Jonathan is cannot possibly be his son, that his mother must have committed adultery and he is the son of some other man, not carrying Saul's royal blood, and therefore not eligible to inherit the throne. Why else would he be taking David's part and ruining his own chances of inheriting the throne? Of course, even as he said this, Saul knew it was not true. He wanted Jonathan to think that it was an insult to his mother to stand up for David, who would likely become king, if he was not killed.

Or Saul may have merely been saying to Jonathan that his mother would be ashamed of his behaviour. Obviously, Jonathan had a deep emotional attachment to his mother and great respect for her, which Saul tried to manipulate to his own advantage. It would seem that she was a gracious lady, for Jonathan to have such feeling towards her, for Jonathan was a great admirer of character. It is likely his mother who influenced him in that direction, rather than his father.

²⁸ Saul has convinced himself that David is conniving and plotting to take over his throne. Deep in his heart, he knows it is not so, that God has truly chosen David to rule Israel, and David has never done anything to forcibly wrest Saul's place from him, or connived to do it by cunning, and that he should give up his throne to David voluntarily.

But he does not want to give up his place of being the first man in the land, the ruler over all the others, even over Samuel, whom he could put to death, which is why Samuel avoids him. Not wanting to face up to the truth about his own weakness of character and lack of godliness, he has accepted the lie that satan put into his mind that David is an evil person who has managed to control Jonathan, to turn members of his own family against him.

²⁹ Saul wanted Jonathan to share the guilt of David's murder, to get his endorsement of it. Perhaps he threw this out to him as a challenge to demonstrate that he had the guts to be a king, as his concept of having what it took to be a king included being brutal enough to kill even his friends and relatives, if thought to be a threat to the throne, and to be treacherous enough to give them an order that would betray them into the hands of their murderers.

³⁰ All this interaction between Saul and Jonathan was played out before the eyes of the court. What did Abner think? He was Saul's general and went out against David at Saul's command, in spite of the fact that Saul's heir defended David and declared his innocence. It very likely influenced him to later on switch his allegiance to David. Ishbosheth's accusation of him wanting to steal his throne only provided him with the excuse to make the move that his conscience, for a long time, had been urging him towards. Jonathan's public defense of David probably influenced many others in the court to later on accept David as the king of all the tribes of Israel.

³¹ Jonathan knew that, if his father would seek to slay even his own son in a fit of anger, he most certainly was set on killing David.

³² Saul shamed David by going back on his repentance for having sought David's life, and he was still slandering David, accusing him of being an enemy to the throne.

36 And he said unto his lad, Run and find the arrows which I shoot. And as the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.³³

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?³⁴

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.

39 But the lad did not understand anything; only Jonathan and David understood the matter.

40 And Jonathan gave his weapons unto his lad and said unto him, Go, carry them to the city.

41 And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the Negev³⁵ and fell on his face to the ground and bowed himself three times,³⁶ and they kissed one another³⁷ and wept one with another, although David exceeded.³⁸

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,³⁹ and Jonathan entered into the city.⁴⁰

³³ It appears that Jonathan was not shooting at a target, but testing the distance that he could shoot.

³⁴ David's heart probably sank when he heard those words.

³⁵ David had been hiding south of the rock, where he would not be accidentally shot by arrows falling to either side of it.

³⁶ David was thanking Jonathan for his protection.

³⁷ There was nothing homosexual about this. Jonathan was old enough to be his father, had been his mentor, and was like a father to him, besides also being like an older brother who loved his younger brother very much. Jonathan had younger brothers, but none of them had a heart for God like David had, whom Jonathan could relate to. They had spent a lot of time together, Jonathan mentoring David to be a courtier and a warrior, and David sharing with Jonathan his unique insights about intimacy with God and his faith-filled mindset that contributed to victorious battles.

³⁸ Yes, David's sorrow would exceed Jonathan's. Jonathan would miss David when he went away, but Jonathan was allowed to remain at court among friends and family. David would be on the run, possibly for many years until Saul died, have his name slandered, be regarded with suspicion, separated from his wife and friends, especially from his closest friend, and his family had to go into hiding, too. His mother and his elderly father could not stay in their own lovely home, bequeathed from Boaz and Obed, to spend their old age quietly and comfortably, but had to seek refuge in Moab, among idol worshippers.

David would have to scrape for meals, sleep on the ground many times, without a roof over his head, and be alert for betrayal everywhere he went. The life of a nomad, a fugitive, was before him and his family. With his father and brothers gone from Bethlehem, his village would be vulnerable to attack, and it was taken over by the Philistines in their absence. He had plenty to cry about.

³⁹ David apparently wrote Psalm 7 when he fled from Saul. A Benjamite named Cush spoke against him. Cush, or Kish, was probably an opportunist who knew that Saul would believe slander against David and it would win him favour with the king. It may have even been Saul's aged father who spoke against David.

⁴⁰ This would be Gibeah, Saul's city. By returning to his father, Jonathan pacified his father's wrath towards him and was able to stay in a place where he could do the kingdom much good, calming his father down when he was being unreasonable, dispensing justice, such as he was authorized to do, and to keep David informed of ambushes that were set up for him.