

1 Samuel 20

When David left Naioth, where did he go (v. 1)? To see his friend Jonathan, the King's eldest son.

What did he ask Jonathan? David was wondering if he had done something wrong that had provoked Saul's hatred. Walking with God is sometimes confusing. We need to learn, as David did, that, when we try to follow God faithfully, some people will oppose us simply because we want to do God's will.¹

How did Jonathan answer David's questions (v. 2)? Jonathan assured David that he had done nothing wrong but at the same time Jonathan apparently knew nothing of his father's continued attempts on David's life.²

What was David's response (v. 3)? David explained that the king would not share his plans to take David's life with Jonathan because of the friendship that existed between the two of them.

So, what was David's suggested plan (vv. 5-7)? A test was proposed that would make it plain whether David was in danger or not. David was one of Saul's high-ranking military commanders. Instead of taking his normal place at the royal table for the New Moon feast held on the first day of every month (Numbers 28:11-1), David would be absent. If Saul inquired as to his absence, Jonathan would explain that he had gone to the yearly sacrifice at Bethlehem. If Saul didn't object, this would show that David was safe; but if the king became angry then Jonathan would know that David was in grave danger.³

Anticipating the possibility of his death at the hand of Saul, what did David request of Jonathan (v. 8)? David appealed to the covenant he and Jonathan had made (18:3-4) and asked Jonathan to personally kill him if he must die, rather than allowing Saul to do it. David wanted to die at the hand of his friend rather than at the hand of his enemy. David had temporarily lost sight of God's promise that he would rule over Israel.⁴

How did Jonathan respond (v. 9) Jonathan refused to agree to kill David but promised to tell him if Saul responded angrily, as David predicted he would.

What did David ask (v. 10)? How will I know if your father answers you harshly?

What was the plan Jonathan revealed to David (vv. 12-13)? Jonathan would sound out his father and ascertain the condition of his heart and would report it to David by means of a prearranged sign to say if he was favorably inclined or not toward David.

vv. 14-17 describe another covenant between David and Jonathan. What was that covenant all about? Previously, David and Jonathan had made a covenant that Jonathan would yield the throne to David and support him (18:3-4). Now David promised not to kill Jonathan and his descendants after David became king. It was common in the ancient Near East for kings who began a new dynasty to kill all the descendants of the former king, in order to keep them from rising up and trying to reclaim the throne.

What was the specific plan to ascertain Saul's intent/attitude that Jonathan next detailed to David (vv. 18-23)? Saul would miss David at his feast, not only because his seat would be vacant, but because warriors normally expressed their support for their king by eating with him at important meals. Saul's reaction to David's absence would be a giveaway as to his intentions.

Jonathan then suggested a plan by which he could communicate with David without revealing David's location. Jonathan would come to the field and shoot some arrows near a rock where David would be hiding. The directions he called to the lad who would fetch the arrows would tell David to flee for his life or to return to the court in safety.⁵

How did Saul deal with David's absence at the New Moon Festival (vv. 24-33)? On the first night of the feast, Saul said nothing about David's absence, reasoning to himself that David was probably ceremonially unclean (cf. Leviticus 7:20-21; 15:16). But on the second day, when he quizzed Jonathan about David's whereabouts and found that he had gone to Bethlehem,⁶ Saul flew into a rage toward David and also toward Jonathan accusing Jonathan of befriending the man who would rob him and his mother of honor. He tried to pin his own son to the wall using his spear, transferring his hatred for David momentarily to Jonathan.⁷ As long as David lived, Saul said, there was no hope that his own dynasty would continue (v. 31).⁸

This brush with death finally convinced Jonathan that David had been right about Saul's intentions after all (cf. v. 3). It also convinced him to get out of the king's presence.⁹

What did Jonathan do the next morning (vv. 35-40)? Jonathan proceeded to communicate Saul's evil intentions to David in the way they had previously planned (vv. 19-22). Jonathan probably used a very young boy as his arrow retriever so the lad would not ask embarrassing questions or figure out what was happening.

God allowed David and Jonathan to say good-bye to one another face to face. How would you describe Jonathan and David's parting (vv. 41-42)? David gave proper respect to Jonathan as the king's son even though they were best friends. Saul's rebellion against God's will had made their companionship impossible. They parted, reminding themselves of the commitments they had made to each other and to their descendants (v. 42; cf. 2 Samuel 9). David and Jonathan decided not to see each other again for their mutual protection (but cf. 23:16-18).¹⁰

The men wept in each other's arms; they must now travel separate paths, no longer to enjoy each other's companionship. David went into hiding, a necessary part of God's plan to prepare him for the throne. Jonathan went back to the royal court, remaining loyal to his father, yet knowing deep inside that he would not be Israel's next king.¹¹

Jonathan said that his own bond of loyalty with David would never be broken. Jonathan was giving up a kingdom for the love of a friend.¹²

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel, 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 154.

² William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 312.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel, 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 156.

⁵ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 312.

⁶ Ibid., 313.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 450.

⁹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Samuel 2024 Edition (published by Sonic Light), 157.

¹⁰ Ibid., 158.

¹¹ William MacDonald, Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 313.

¹² Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 450.