

1st Samuel

Lesson 43

For the choir director: A psalm of David. 1 I trust in the LORD for protection. So why do you say to me, "Fly like a bird to the mountains for safety!" 2 The wicked are stringing their bows and fitting their arrows on the bowstrings. They shoot from the shadows at those whose hearts are right. 3 The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the righteous do?" 4 But the LORD is in his holy Temple; the LORD still rules from heaven. He watches everyone closely, examining every person on earth. 5 The LORD examines both the righteous and the wicked. He hates those who love violence. 6 He will rain down blazing coals and burning sulfur on the wicked, punishing them with scorching winds. 7 For the righteous LORD loves justice. The virtuous will see his face. (Psalm 11).

For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time Saul sent soldiers to watch David's house in order to kill him. To be sung to the tune "Do Not Destroy!" 1 Rescue me from my enemies, O God. Protect me from those who have come to destroy me. 2 Rescue me from these criminals; save me from these murderers. 3 They have set an ambush for me. Fierce enemies are out there waiting, LORD, though I have not sinned or offended them. 4 I have done nothing wrong, yet they prepare to attack me. Wake up! See what is happening and help me! 5 O LORD God of Heaven's Armies, the God of Israel, wake up and punish those hostile nations. Show no mercy to wicked traitors. Interlude 6 They come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. 7 Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like swords. "After all, who can hear us?" they sneer. 8 But LORD, you laugh at them. You scoff at all the hostile nations. 9 You are my strength; I wait for you to rescue me, for you, O God, are my fortress. 10 In his unfailing love, my God will stand with me. He will let me look down in triumph on all my enemies. 11 Don't kill them, for my people soon forget such lessons; stagger them with your power, and bring them to their knees, O Lord our shield. 12 Because of the sinful things they say, because of the evil that is on their lips, let them be captured by their pride, their curses, and their lies. 13 Destroy them in your anger! Wipe them out completely! Then the whole world will know that God reigns in Israel. Interlude 14 My enemies come out at night, snarling like vicious dogs as they prowl the streets. 15 They scavenge for food but go to sleep unsatisfied. 16 But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress. 17 O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love. (Psalm 59)

Chapter 20

a) A Summary of Jonathan's Covenant with David

(1) The Plan of Concerns of David and Jonathan (20:1-4)

Three sets of messengers had been sent to Naioth to retrieve David for King Saul. Each set was changed when they arrived by the Holy Spirit and began prophesying the revealed Word of God. David and Samuel surely knew that Saul would come shortly behind when his messengers did not bring David to him. David was smart enough to leave Naioth before Saul arrived. In telling us this, the writer begins to summarize Jonathan's covenant with David and the plan of concerns of David and Jonathan. Chapter 20, verse 1.

"Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?"² 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. So why should my father hide

this thing from me? It is not so!”³ Yet David vowed again, saying, “Your father knows well that I have found favor in your sight, and he has said, ‘Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved.’ But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death.”⁴ Then Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you say, I will do for you.” (20:1-4)

What is clear in this passage is the fact that Saul had plans for the death of David that he had not shared with his son, Jonathan. In addition, Jonathan is dead set on protecting David if, in fact, David is correct about Saul. In this passage, we see the wonderful covenant of love and friendship between Jonathan and David. David felt so assured in this relationship that he sought out the son of his enemy, his brother-in-law, to seek help.

(2) The Plan for the New Moon Celebration (20:5-11)

With Jonathan, David posed a plan for the new moon celebration. David plans to allow Saul to reveal his real heart to Jonathan. Verse 5.

“So David said to Jonathan, “Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening.”⁶ If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family.’⁷ If he says, ‘It is good,’ your servant will be safe; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil.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 iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; for why then should you bring me to your father?”⁹ Jonathan said, “Far be it from you! For if I should indeed learn that evil has been decided by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you about it?”¹⁰ Then David said to Jonathan, “Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?”¹¹ Jonathan said to David, “Come, and let us go out into the field.” So both of them went out to the field.” (20:5-11)

The new moon occurs on the first day of each new month. The calendar of the whole Old Testament is based on the lunar year. The lunar year consists of twelve months. Each month starts with the appearance of the new moon. In God’s perfect creation, the first month of each lunar year has exactly thirty days. Each odd month also has exactly thirty days. The second month of each lunar year, and all the even months thereafter, have exactly twenty-nine days. The accuracy of the lunar year has never faltered; it has never changed. Each lunar year has exactly three hundred and fifty-four days. Just for knowledge’s sake, long after the end of the Old Testament, with the end of Malachi, when the Romans become a prominent nation, an attempt will be made to change from a strict lunar calendar to a seasonal calendar timed by the sun. We call it a solar calendar. Other nations will attempt the same task but fail. The Romans failed miserably for more than three hundred years until the time of Julius Caesar. In the Roman year 708, which, about 600 years later, will be retrofitted with the yearly name 46 BC, Julius Caesar will extend that year to have four hundred and fifty-five days. In doing so, his new calendar for Rome, called the Julian Calendar, could begin on March 1, 709 (Roman year), or 45 BC, as it would later be named. March was the first year in the calendar; February was the last. That is the reason, as the Caesars through time were renaming a month in the year after themselves and requiring the month to be equal in days to all the other months dedicated to a previous Caesar, which was 31 days, the days would be taken from the last month of the year, February. Thus, February, to this day, has fewer days than all the rest of the months in the solar year. The reason March was the first month of the calendar was that the astrologers of that day could accurately determine the Spring Equinox and set it as March 21st for the year 45 BC. Caesar Augustus, who was the Caesar at the time of the birth of Jesus, came into power in 27 BC, eighteen years after Julius Caesar. He would discover some hiccups in the inauguration of the Julius’ calendar and have to make a ten-day adjustment. The Spring Equinox had shifted ten days. To do so, he adjusted one day every three years to correct the calendar and put the Spring Equinox back on the right day. His correction will not fix the problem. In 1582 AD,

another ten days will have to be removed from the calendar to correct the problem again. This time, Pope Gregory will stabilize the calendar. Nowadays, we correct the calendar by a tiny part of a second every so often on New Year's Day to keep the Gregorian Calendar in sync with the Spring Equinox.

I have gone a long way around to make the point that in the New Testament when Roman events are named with a yearly date, such as Tiberius' fifteenth year as Caesar, that is the Roman year, not the lunar year. When, in the New Testament, a reference is made to a Jewish date, such as Passover, that date is on the original strict lunar calendar that the LORD put in place, not ours.

With that interesting sidebar, we come back to David and Jonathan. They were talking together on the last day of the month. The next day would be the new moon, the beginning of the new month. The new month began with great festivities every time. A special offering was made by the priests; trumpets were sounded, all in accordance with the Law (Numbers, 10:10; 28:11-15).

Because David says to Jonathan, "*it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family*," we know that this new moon is the first of a new year. At the beginning of each new year, a yearly sacrifice for the whole family was required. In David's day, it was simply called the *first month*. All the months were known simply by their number in order. Long after this story, when all of Israel was in exile in Babylon, which was on the same strict lunar calendar at the time, they would attach the Babylonian calendar names to their Jewish calendar. Thus, the first month of the religious year becomes Nissan. The first month of the civil year becomes Tishri. Both are Babylonian names. Nissan is the first month; Tishri is the seventh month. The celebration of both months was the same, except for the month of Nissan when the yearly offering was made. That was done on the religious calendar, not the civil calendar. Therefore, this story occurs at the beginning of Nissan.

Evidently, Saul had established the tradition of a banquet on the day following the new moon for his court. No instruction from the LORD is given for this banquet. It was evidently all Saul's idea, but it must have occurred enough times in the past for David to know the routine and that Saul would expect his whole court to be at the banquet. From the day before the new moon until the day of the banquet consisted of three days – the day they were speaking and planning, the day of the new moon, and the day after the new moon, three days. In all of the Bible Scripture, any part of a day is counted as a day. David was not looking ahead three days; he was counting the day they were in and adding two days to that to come to the third day. Such was the case with Jesus on the cross. He was buried on Friday, late in the day, yet still in the tomb on day one. He was in the tomb on the Sabbath, day two. He was resurrected on Sunday, day three. All Israel counted days in this same manner all the way through the book of Revelation, which will not be written for more than a thousand years.

At each yearly sacrifice for the family, the family all joined together. It was a good excuse for David not being at the banquet. But more than that, David trusted Jonathan enough that if he found out from Saul that his deeds were not evil, David permitted Jonathan to kill him. But Jonathan responded to David with the promise that if he found his father to be evil, he indeed would tell David about it. Notice that David answered that promise with a question. "*Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?*" In other words, David asked who would be able to get Jonathan's message to David without putting Jonathan in harm's way. Who could they trust? Jonathan had a plan.

(3) The Plan of the Covenant with Jonathan (20:12-17)

The writer tells us of the covenant plan with Jonathan and David. It involved the two going to the field and laying out the plan. Verse 12.

"Then 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 there is good feeling toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you?' ¹³ If it please my father to do you harm, may the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also,

if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the LORD be with you as He has been with my father. ¹⁴ *If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die?* ¹⁵ *You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.* ¹⁶ *So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies."* ¹⁷ *Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.* (20:12-17)

In the plan, Jonathan first sets the parameters for when he will speak with his father. It will be "...about this time tomorrow, or the third day...." As we have already stated, the two are talking on the first day. "Tomorrow" will be the second day and the new moon. "... the third day" will be the day after the new moon. Jonathan is doing what we all tend to do. He is going to give himself two days to speak with his father. He will be looking for the right time to broach the subject with dad. Not too soon, not too late. Nevertheless, in this plan, he promises that he will speak to his father by the end of the third day, even if he has to force the scene to question his father.

Second, Jonathan promises to get the word to David regardless, whether good or bad. He tags an interesting chip on the table of the covenant. Concerning his father, he says, *"if there is good feeling toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you?"* ¹³ *If it please my father to do you harm, may the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also, if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety.* What is Jonathan saying here? He says that if his father intends evil on David, he will protect David by stalling his father, even if it means allowing his father to take his life in anger.

Third, Jonathan says, *"If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die? You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth."* Again, what is Jonathan saying to David? He is asking that if his father does not kill him as a result of the exchange, will David continue to love him in their covenant relationship? In addition, Jonathan asks David to be kind to his children and children's children, even if he survives, but his father pursues David to try to kill him. In other words, Jonathan asked David not to destroy his family because of what his father will try to do to him.

Fourth, Jonathan does not let his father off the hook. He said to David, *"May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies."* In other words, Jonathan was saying, "David, do what the LORD tells you to do with my father, if he is your enemy, but please do not harm my family because my father is your enemy."

Finally, Jonathan expresses his love for David, which began when David killed Goliath. It was the reason for his covenant with David.

(4) The Plan for Safety or Danger

(a) Jonathan to Shoot Arrows in the Field (20:18-23)

With the covenant renewed by Jonathan, he sets the plan for safety or danger. The plan is for Jonathan to shoot arrows in the field they are standing in on the day before the new moon. Verse 18.

"Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed because your seat will be empty." ¹⁹ When you have stayed for three days, you shall go down quickly and come to the place where you hid yourself on that eventful day, and you shall remain by the stone Ezel. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target. ²¹ And behold, I will send the lad, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I specifically say to the lad, 'Behold, the arrows are on this side of you, get them,' then come; for there is safety for you and no harm, as the LORD lives. ²² But if I say to the youth, 'Behold, the arrows are beyond you,' go, for the LORD has sent you away. ²³ As for the agreement of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever." (20:18-23)

Jonathan is just summarizing the plan in his mind and that of David's. David is to miss the new moon feast. We already know that the excuse Jonathan will give Saul for his absence is the yearly family sacrifice. But on the third day, the day after the new moon feast, David is to hide by the

“*stone Ezel*” passed the field but in earshot of Jonathan. The Hebrew word *Ezel* means *stone of departure*. It can also mean *the stone of entry*. It was a large stone, or perhaps a heap of stones at the entrance to the field. To enter the field, you went by the stone. To leave the field, you went by the stone. It was a safe place for David to hide on the third day. It was far enough away for Jonathan to shoot three arrows and have the boy retrieve them. As the boy was running to them, Jonathan could signal David with the instructions to the boy that the arrows were “*on this side of you ... beyond you....*” “*... this side...*” was the signal that David was safe with Saul. “*... beyond you ...*” means that David is not safe with Saul. But either way, Jonathan assured David that their covenant would last forever and the LORD was his witness.