

## 1 Samuel 20-21 – “Between the Promise and the Throne”

This period of time that we’re looking at in David’s life is a difficult time. It’s one where he is on the run from Saul often. David began as a shepherd, and now he’s a fugitive. And it’s going to be this way for a number of years. From the time that David was anointed by Samuel at Jesse’s house until he actually takes the throne, will be about 15 years. David may have wondered what’s taking so long. *God have you forgotten about me?* But these were years of preparation, years of building up David to be the right kind of king.

- It’s tough to wait, but we see throughout the Bible that God often times brings His people through times of waiting, times of learning and times of growth so He can do a greater work in them and through them.
- Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap... (Galatians 6:9). It’s a good promise to hold on to in our times of waiting. That due season just looks different in God’s economy than ours. But learn to trust Him.
- We’re going to see some reasons why David needed to learn some lessons because we’re seeing a man becoming a little too reliant on other people and other means, rather than on God.

### 1. The Problem – 20:1-11

**20:1-4 - *Then David fled from Natioth in Ramah, and went and said to Jonathan, “What have I done? What is my iniquity, and what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?”<sup>2</sup> So Jonathan said to him, “By no means! You shall not die! Indeed, my father will do nothing either great or small without first telling me. And why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!”<sup>3</sup> Then David took an oath again, and said, “Your father certainly knows that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said, ‘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.”<sup>4</sup> So Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you.”***

While Saul was prophesying before Samuel, David made his escape. And remember, this seemed like an intervention from the Lord to incapacitate Saul and give David time to escape (19:24).

So, David comes now to Jonathan for help. He’s wondering what he’s done to have Saul want to take his life.

And Jonathan tries to comfort him by saying nothing will be done without Saul consulting Jonathan about it. (I'm sure David is thinking, where were you when he was throwing spears at me?).

David then under oath lets Jonathan know that this is a serious matter. David has looked into this madman's eyes and knows there's **but a step between him and death**. David isn't doubting Jonathan's words, he's just letting him see he doesn't know the whole story.

- And this reveals a great truth for all of us, that we are but one step away from eternity. We're not guaranteed tomorrow, and we're not guaranteed our next step. That's why it's so important you live every moment ready to embrace eternity. That you are prepared to stand before God. Everything we do would change drastically if we truly felt this day could be our last.

And again, this deep friendship comes through in that Jonathan is ready to put his life on the line and do whatever is needed to help David out. That's true commitment.

- That's what we should be willing to do among our relationships, especially those centered in Christ. It's what Jesus did for us in laying His life down on the cross to save us.

**20:5-8 - And David said to Jonathan, “Indeed tomorrow is the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third day at evening. <sup>6</sup> If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked permission of me that he might run over to Bethlehem, his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.’ <sup>7</sup> If he says thus: ‘It is well,’ your servant will be safe. But if he is very angry, be sure that evil is determined by him. <sup>8</sup> Therefore you shall deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you. Nevertheless, if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?”**

David devises a way for Jonathan to see for himself whether Saul was wanting to kill David or not.

Now there's some questions of ethics that get brought up here. David had Jonathan tell a lie to his father to test his motives towards David. Is this something that God allows when in times of trouble?

- Attempting to justify lying is a very slippery slope. God has made it clear throughout Scripture that we're to be people of our word as He is a God of

His word. Yet we have a couple accounts in Scripture of people not always telling the truth: the Hebrew Midwives to protect the newborn Hebrew babies (Exodus 1:15-21) and Rahab's lie to protect the Israelite spies (Joshua 2:5). And this almost seems like an honorable thing. Yet nowhere does the Bible condone these actions, as much as they may have been helpful at the time. The Bible reveals these things as descriptive narrative to simply show what was taking place. They're never meant to be prescriptive.

- There's a lot of people today that can find ways to justify dishonesty. Some will feel that it's ok to fudge your taxes a little because the government is taking too much anyways. This is rightfully mine, they'll say!

So basically, the test is if Saul responds favorably to David being absent from the king's table at the New Moon feast (which was basically a monthly celebration based on the lunar calendar and consisted of special offerings) then he has no interest in killing David.

But if Saul responds with anger, then it's evident that he wants David dead.

David once again looks to examine himself and see if there's anything he's done to cause an unfavorable reaction by Saul.

- This is always a good thing to do. We typically find it easier to point the finger and say the problem is with the other person and not with us. But it's good to take a step back and really look inwardly to see if we're at fault in anyway.
- David is basically giving Jonathan license to take him out if he's done wrong rather than have to drag him before Saul.

**20:9-11 - *But Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! For if I knew certainly that evil was determined by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you?"*<sup>10</sup> Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me, or what if your father answers you roughly?"<sup>11</sup> And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So both of them went out into the field.**

David and Jonathan work out now the way to communicate with each other if indeed Saul shows anger and wants to see David dead.

## 2. The Promise – 20:12-17

**20:12-13 - *Then Jonathan said to David: "The Lord God of Israel is witness! When I have sounded out my father sometime tomorrow, or the third day,***

***and indeed there is good toward David, and I do not send to you and tell you, <sup>13</sup> may the Lord do so and much more to Jonathan. But if it pleases my father to do you evil, then I will report it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And the Lord be with you as He has been with my father.***

Jonathan is committed to protecting David and even doing so at the expense of his own life calling upon God as witness.

However, I'm not sure that was a positive thing to say to David that the Lord be with him as He was with Saul 😊. Things aren't going well for Saul.

***20:14-17 - And you shall not only show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live, that I may not die; <sup>15</sup> but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the Lord has cut off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” <sup>16</sup> So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “Let the Lord require it at the hand of David’s enemies.” <sup>17</sup> Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.***

It was quite common for an incoming king to kill all the family members of the previous king. This would prevent any uprisings or rebellion and an attempt to seize back the throne in honour of the family dynasty.

Jonathan could have thought that since he was the rightful successor to the throne maybe David would try to take him out and eliminate any threat of avenging Saul. But Jonathan has no intention of trying to seize the throne.

- What makes this friendship so special is that Jonathan seemed to know that David was God's man to be on the throne after Saul and yet Jonathan had no jealousy. He was ready to support David in spite of what he was having to give up and surrender.
- And so Jonathan simply asks David to show this same kindness to his family down the road. Something David does with Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9).
- That story is a great picture of Jesus bringing all to the king's table who are in covenant with Him.

And with this covenant between Jonathan and David, God was providing for each person what they needed. For David, He had Jonathan be a buffer for him from Saul's sporadic outbursts. For Jonathan, He had David loyal to him and his family and protected them after taking the throne. But Jonathan just asks David for a little reassurance and asks him to confirm the vow.

- It's like with any human relationship; we like to hear those words of affirmation. You don't stop telling your spouse you love them because you exchanged vows on your wedding day.

### 3. The Plan – 20:18-23

**20:18-23 - *Then Jonathan said to David, “Tomorrow is the New Moon; and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. <sup>19</sup> And when you have stayed three days, go down quickly and come to the place where you hid on the day of the deed; and remain by the stone Ezel. <sup>20</sup> Then I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target; <sup>21</sup> and there I will send a lad, saying, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I expressly say to the lad, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you; get them and come’—then, as the Lord lives, there is safety for you and no harm. <sup>22</sup> But if I say thus to the young man, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you’—go your way, for the Lord has sent you away. <sup>23</sup> And as for the matter which you and I have spoken of, indeed the Lord be between you and me forever.”***

So the plan was to go out into the field as though Jonathan was having a little archery practise. David was to hide by a known rock, Ezel, which means, ‘departure’.

- I love the picture here, when times are tough, hide out in the Rock. Take refuge in the Lord. One day we're going to depart from all our troubles and remain safe with Him for all eternity.

When the arrows went out the lad would go and retrieve them. If Jonathan said, the arrows are on this side of you, then all was well for David. He could come out and be welcomed in. If Jonathan said, the arrows are beyond you, then it meant David needed to go. The Lord has sent him away.

### 4. The Provocation – 20:24-34

**20:24-26 - *Then David hid in the field. And when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast. <sup>25</sup> Now the king sat on his seat, as at other times, on a seat by the wall. And Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, “Something has happened to him; he is unclean, surely he is unclean.”***



Saul notices David's absence, but he just thinks David has done something that has defiled him and made him ceremoniously unclean. He's thinking David will be back the next day once he goes through a ritual washing.

**20:27-29 - *And it happened the next day, the second day of the month, that David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to eat, either yesterday or today?" <sup>28</sup> So Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked permission of me to go to Bethlehem. <sup>29</sup> And he said, 'Please let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there. And now, if I have found favor in your eyes, please let me get away and see my brothers.' Therefore he has not come to the king's table."***

The next day David isn't there again and this time Saul is suspicious. He refers to David as the **son of Jesse**, this was a bit of an insult where Saul reveals his disdain for David.

So Jonathan shares the prepared lie to see how Saul will handle this. And it's not good...

**20:30-34 - *Then Saul's anger was aroused 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? <sup>31</sup> For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." <sup>32</sup> And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?" <sup>33</sup> Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David. <sup>34</sup> So Jonathan arose 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 treated him shamefully.***

Saul just goes a little ballistic here. It's off the charts. He starts dragging his poor innocent wife in all this calling her a perverse, rebellious woman! Yikes. The language is quite vivid in regards to what Saul is saying to Jonathan. It would be equal to calling him *a bastard*, or, *you son of a b---ch*.

Saul is all over the map, because right after making a diss of Jonathan's mother, he says that Jonathan is going to shame her by his actions. That her birth of him would now be wasted by Jonathan not taking the throne and siding with David.

Saul's argument is that as long as David is around, Jonathan will not be established on the throne. The problem with that is it's already a done deal. God is the One orchestrating all this, not David.

- **1 Samuel 15:28**, *"So Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.'"* (see also 1 Samuel 13:13-14).
- In wrestling for his way he's only fighting against God. Saul seems to think that there's still a way to retain control. But in so doing he's only losing control. He's a madman fueled by jealousy, anger, and rage.
- If he had submitted his will to God's will and walked in obedience it would have been a different outcome for Saul.
- I wonder how often I forfeit God's blessing and peace because I've not walked in surrender to Him?

As Jonathan tries to reason with his father, his father turns on him and throws a spear to take out Jonathan. Saul has just lost all sanity.

- Ironically, Saul argued for Jonathan to take the throne, yet was willing to kill him and lose the hope of having a family member sit on the throne.

Jonathan now knows that David was right in his assessment. Time to say their goodbyes.

## 5. The Predicament – 20:35-42

**20:35-42** - *And so it was, in the morning, that Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad was with him. <sup>36</sup> Then he said to his lad, 'Now run, find the arrows which I shoot.' As the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. <sup>37</sup> When the lad had come to the place where the arrow was which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried out after the lad and said, 'Is not the arrow beyond you?' <sup>38</sup> And Jonathan cried out after the lad, 'Make haste, hurry, do not delay!' So Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows and came back to his master. <sup>39</sup> But the lad did not know anything. Only Jonathan and David knew of the matter. <sup>40</sup> Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad, and said to him, 'Go, carry them to the city.' <sup>41</sup> As soon as the lad had gone, David arose from a place toward the south, fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times. And they kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so. <sup>42</sup> Then Jonathan said to David, 'Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the*

***name of the Lord, saying, ‘May the Lord be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.’ ” So he arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city.***

Jonathan and David come and say a tearful goodbye. From this point on Jonathan and David will see each other only one other time (1 Samuel 23:16).

This has been a deep covenantal relationship where their souls were knit together (18:1). There’s a deep admiration and respect for one another but they will not have the joy of hanging out or going on hunting escapades.

Friendship is a valuable gift which we must not take for granted.

- **Proverbs 17:17**, *"A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity."*
- **Proverbs 18:24**, *"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."*
- May you know this kind of friendship and may you be this kind of friend to others.

As we continue along in this story we’ll see that it’s not going to be an easy path for David for the next number of years. But it is the path with purpose – God’s purpose. We can often think when we are on that avenue of difficulty that it’s because we’ve done something wrong. But often times that path is God’s way of preparing us for what He has in store for us. It will be so in the life of David, and as we’ll see, there are still areas that need to be surrendered to the Lord.

## 6. The Pretense – 21:1-9

***21:1-3 - Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, “Why are you alone, and no one is with you?”<sup>2</sup> So David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, ‘Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.’ And I have directed my young men to such and such a place.”<sup>3</sup> Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found.”***

David is now on the run as a fugitive from Saul. He comes and seeks help from Ahimelech the priest.



- Nob “was a priestly town three miles south of Gibeah where the tabernacle was located. (The Ark was still in the house of Abinadab in Kiriath Jearim; 7:1.)” <sup>1</sup>

David was looking for provision and protection, yet he comes without trusting the Lord fully. Notice what he says: ***The king has ordered me on some business...*** This is a blatant lie. David is resorting to deception to keep him safe rather than letting the Lord keep him safe. He’s willing to stand up to a Philistine giant but he’s wilting under a fleshly Israelite king. And yet the same Lord that defeated the giant is the same Lord to preserve his life against a raging king.

- We miss out so much on seeing what God will do by not giving Him a chance to work on our behalf.
- It’s becoming evident that David still has some room for growth. There are still some chinks in his armor that need to get filled in.

Ahimelech was a little suspicious about this whole thing. David has been a captain in the army and Ahimelech is a little puzzled why David is showing up here.

David is essentially wondering if there’s any food around by which he may partake of for he and his men.

***21:4-6 - And the priest answered David and said, “There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women.” <sup>5</sup> Then David answered the priest, and said to him, “Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day.” <sup>6</sup> So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.***

As you would enter the tabernacle, on the right side was the table of showbread. It contained 2 stacks of bread 6 high, totaling 12. Since eating in this day spoke strongly of intimate fellowship, these 12 breads were to picture the fellowship God had with the 12 tribes of Israel. And the bread was to be replaced each

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (2001). *Be successful* (p. 115). Victor/Cook Communications.

week, reminding us of how our fellowship and devotional life needs to remain fresh.

- When new bread was brought in, the priests were allowed to eat the old bread, it was God's way of providing for them in their service.

There's some uncertainty whether this bread should be given to David and his men, but upon some examination as to their purity, the priest decides it's ok to give this to David.

Though you could make a case to say it was unlawful for David and his men to have this bread, Jesus used this story to defend his disciples plucking heads of grain and eating it on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8). The Pharisees said it was unlawful work on the Sabbath. Jesus said, remember what David did when he was hungry? He went and ate the consecrated bread that was for the priest only.

- Jesus wasn't condemning either act but was showing that the law of mercy and human need supersedes religious rules. Better to have a person helped than a law protected.

**21:7-9 - *Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul. <sup>8</sup> And David said to Ahimelech, "Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." <sup>9</sup> So the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."***

Seeing a representative of Saul there, David gets a little worried. So he asks for some weapons. Only the sword of Goliath is there, and David seems more than excited to have this in his possession.

- But again, what a sad commentary on the heights by which David has fallen. When he faced the giant and captured his sword, he did so through trusting in the Lord. He abandoned conventional weapons. But now, allowing fear to creep in, he's turning to the things of the world. He's putting his hope and trust in the wrong things.

It only gets worse...

## 7. The Panic – 21:10-15

**21:10-11 - *Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. <sup>11</sup> And the servants of Achish said to him, “Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands’?”***

Fear will often lead you to do things that are neither helpful or healthy. Here's David now leaving the tabernacle to go into Philistine territory. Not only that, he goes to Goliath's hometown with his sword in his hand!!!!

David, are you out of your mind!?!?!? Well, he began to act like it...

**21:12-15 - *Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. <sup>13</sup> So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. <sup>14</sup> Then Achish said to his servants, “Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? <sup>15</sup> Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?”***

In ancient times madness was associated with being controlled by an evil spirit. Not only that, they now viewed that person as being set apart, or holy to those gods. So nobody wanted to harm David because of that.

Somewhere through this scene David learned to give it all over to the Lord, and the Lord protected him. Psalm 34 was written during this encounter, and we begin to get a further insight into David's change of heart and attitude. He saw it was the Lord who delivered him.

- It's important that we learn these lessons through the difficulties we go through. That was a big difference between Saul and David. Saul continued to slide downwards, where David would turn to the Lord and recognize Him as his help and deliverer.

### Points to Ponder:

1. Waiting on God is not wasted time, it is shaping time.
  - David's delay was not God's neglect; it was God's preparation.
2. Godly Friendships are one of God's great gifts in tough times.
  - When Saul is attacking David's peace, Jonathan is building David's faith.
3. The safest place is not the absence of danger, but the presence of God.

- Where do I run first when hit with fear – God’s presence or my own devices?