

The Painful Separation Between David and Jonathan

1 Samuel 20

1 Samuel 20 - *"Then David fled from Naioth 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?"* ² *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!"* ³ *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."*

⁴ *So Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you."* ⁵ *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."* ⁶ *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.'* ⁷ *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.* ⁸ *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?"*

⁹ *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?"* ¹⁰ *Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me, or what if your father answers you roughly?"*

¹¹ *And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So both of them went out into the field.* ¹² *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, ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ And you shall not only show me the kindness of the LORD while I still live, that I may not die; ¹⁵ 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."* ¹⁶ *So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "Let the LORD require it at the hand of David's enemies."*

¹⁷ *Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.* ¹⁸ *Then Jonathan said to David, "Tomorrow is the New Moon; and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Then I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target; ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ And as for the matter which you and I have spoken of, indeed the LORD be between you and me forever."*

²⁴ Then David hid in the field. And when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him; he is unclean, surely he is unclean." ²⁷ 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?"

²⁸ So Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked permission of me to go to Bethlehem. ²⁹ 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." ³⁰ 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? ³¹ 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."

³² And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?" ³³ Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David. ³⁴ 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.

³⁵ 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. ³⁶ Then he said to his lad, "Now run, find the arrows which I shoot." As the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.

³⁷ 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?" ³⁸ 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. ³⁹ But the lad did not know anything. Only Jonathan and David knew of the matter. ⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad, and said to him, "Go, carry them to the city."

⁴¹ 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. ⁴² 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."

Background Notes

In 1 Samuel 19 Jonathan went to his father, King Saul, on David's behalf. At first King Saul listened to reason, but Saul's bitter attitude toward David never really changed, and he made further attempts to take David's life. In 1 Samuel 20 David told his good friend Jonathan that Saul was clearly out to kill him again, for no good reason. So, David and Jonathan came up with an elaborate plan for Jonathan to know for sure if King Saul was still intent on killing David, and how Jonathan would communicate this information to David without being detected.

We have a problem with ethics here, because the plan that David proposed apparently involved telling Saul a lie. David told Jonathan to tell Saul that the reason he would be missing from the royal cabinet and table was because he had gone

home to Bethlehem to celebrate the annual sacrifice with his whole family. It's one thing to read that Michal lied (1 Samuel 19), but David was "a man after God's own heart"! If David lied, what is the Bible teaching us here? How should we deal with David's lie?

First of all, it may not have been a lie. Bethlehem was less than ten miles away, and there were monthly and yearly sacrifices made in the various towns (this was before the Temple was built Jerusalem). If David told a lie here, it was not justified, because God could have preserved David's life, as he had at other times, without any need for lying. And this lie almost got Jonathan killed, as we'll see! Yes, David was a man after God's own heart – but he wasn't living as a man after God's heart when he committed adultery with Bathsheba, and when he had Uriah killed – or if he lied here.

Doctrinal Points

1. There will be painful decisions in the life of faith.

How do you think that David felt at this point in his life? I wonder if David ever thought how different his life would have been, and how peaceful his life could have been, if he never volunteered to fight Goliath? He probably would have married a hometown girl in Bethlehem, and raised a family, and lived a quiet peaceful life!

But now he had to make many painful decisions. Should he leave his home and his wife and flee for his life, or should he stay and hope for the best? Should he go into hiding as a fugitive, or depend on the people of Israel to protect him? Should he go to Bethlehem and rescue his family from the possible consequences of King Saul's wrath and bizarre behavior, or just not worry about them? All of these painful decisions would have been avoided if David had not stepped out in faith and fought Goliath. But David had done the right thing, even though it now resulted in having to make painful decisions.

This is true today, too. We may think that painful decisions in life only result from doing the wrong thing, but that's not so. No. Painful decisions must be made in life, even when you have done the right thing. Here are just a few examples: Painful decisions about when to break certain relationships; painful decisions about when to leave a certain job; painful decisions about moving to a new location; painful decisions about when to leave a church. There will be painful decisions in the life of faith.

2. There will be painful separations in the life of faith.

Back in verses 12-17 David and Jonathan made a covenant together. They were loyal friends. But David and Jonathan agreed that they should separate, and in verse 41 we see the painful separation between these two faithful and loyal friends. According to the record, they only saw each other one more time before Jonathan was killed in battle. (See 1 Samuel 23.)

Why did God allow this painful separation? We don't know all the reasons. Some Christians say that Jonathan should have joined David as a fugitive. Others say that Jonathan did the right thing to stay with his father, King Saul, and try to continue his peacemaking efforts.

I don't think that we can be dogmatic about Jonathan's decision. What we can say, however, is that there will be painful separations in the life of faith. Sometimes families are separated because of service for the Lord in foreign countries, for example. Sometimes husbands and wives are separated for periods of time because of demands in the secular employment that the Lord provides, or the needs of a full time Christian ministry. Then there are the painful separations when a close friend, or a family member, or a spouse is taken in death. Yes, the Lord will always be there to bring comfort and hope, but the separation is still painful. There will be painful separations in the life of faith.

Practical Application

Use 1 Samuel 20:42 instead of Genesis 31:49 as a blessing!

Did you ever hear Genesis 31:49 used as a blessing? In that verse Laban said to Jacob, *"May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another."* That sounds like a blessing, doesn't it? I've even seen it printed as a blessing on greeting cards. But when this verse is properly seen in the context of the rest of the passage, it is actually not a blessing at all! Laban and Jacob made an agreement that they would not cheat one another, or do things behind each other backs, and Laban was calling upon the Lord to "keep a close watch" between them -- to keep them honest, and to make sure neither one of them broke his promise! So, taken in its context, Genesis 31:49 is not a blessing.

But 1 Samuel 20:42 **is** a blessing! Jonathan said to David, *"May the LORD be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever."* That sounds very similar to Genesis 31:49, doesn't it? But here it is truly a blessing, spoken to seal the promises of faithfulness between two loyal friends.

So when you want to send a verse that expresses blessing to a friend or loved one -- use 1 Samuel 20:42 instead of Genesis 31:49 as a blessing!