
1SAMUEL 20: 1 David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity? What is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?"

David complains to Jonathan of Saul's enmity against him; Jonathan comforts him, 1Sam 20:1-10. They walk out into the field, and renew their covenant, 1Sam 20:11-17. David asks Jonathan's leave to absent himself from Saul's court; and Jonathan informs him how he shall ascertain the disposition of his father towards him, 1Sam 20:18-23. David hides himself; is missed by Saul; Jonathan is questioned concerning his absence; makes an excuse for David; Saul is enraged, and endeavors to kill Jonathan, 1Sam 20:24-33. Jonathan goes out to the field; gives David the sign which they had agreed on, and by which he was to know that the king had determined to take away his life, 1Sam 20:34-39. He sends his servant back into the city; and then he and David meet, renew their covenant, and have a very affectionate parting, 1Sam 20:40-42.

Verse 1

David fled from Naioth - On hearing that Saul had come to that place, knowing that he was no longer in safety, he fled for his life.

1SAMUEL 20: 2 He said to him, "Far from it; you shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small, but that he discloses it to me; and why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so."

Verse 2

My father will do nothing - Jonathan thought that his father could have no evil design against David, because of the oath which he had sworn to himself 1Sam 19:6; and at any rate, that he would do nothing against David without informing him.

1SAMUEL 20: 3 David swore moreover, and said, "Your father knows well that I have found favour in your eyes; and he says, 'Don't 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."

Verse 3

There is but a step between me and death - My life is in the most imminent danger. Your father has, most assuredly, determined to destroy me.

The same figure used here, there is but a step between me and death, may be found in Juvenal, who, satirizing those who risk their lives for the sake of gain in perilous voyages, speaks thus: -

I nune et ventis animam committe, dolato

Confisus ligno, digitis a morte remotus

Quatuor aut septem, si sit latissima teda.

Sat. xii., ver. 57. "Go now, and commit thy life to the winds, trusting to a hewn plank, four or seven fingers thick, if the beam out of which it has been cut have been large enough."

1SAMUEL 20: 4 Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever your soul desires, I will even do it for you."

1SAMUEL 20: 5 David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to dine with the king; but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field to the third day at evening."

Verse 5

To-morrow is the new moon - The months of the Hebrews were lunar months, and they reckoned from new moon to new moon. And as their other feasts, particularly the passover, were reckoned according to this, they were very scrupulous in observing the first appearance of each new moon. On these new moons they offered sacrifices, and had a feast; as we learn from Num 10:10; Num 28:11. And we may suppose that the families, on such occasions, sacrificed and feasted together. To this David seems to refer; but the gathering together all the families of a whole tribe seems to have taken place only once in the year. There is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family, 1Sam 20:6.

1SAMUEL 20: 6 If your father miss me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city; for it is the yearly sacrifice there for all the family.'

1SAMUEL 20: 7 If he says, 'It is well;' your servant shall have peace: but if he be angry, then know that evil is determined by him.

1SAMUEL 20: 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, kill me yourself; for why should you bring me to your father?"

Verse 8

If there be in me iniquity - If thou seest that I am plotting either against the state, or the life of thy father, then slay me thyself.

1SAMUEL 20: 9 Jonathan said, "Far be it from you; for if I should at all know that evil were determined by my father to come on you, then wouldn't I tell you that?"

1SAMUEL 20: 10 Then David said to Jonathan, "Who shall tell me if perchance your father answers you roughly?"

Verse 10

Who shall tell me? - Who shall give me the necessary information? What means wilt thou use to convey this intelligence to me?

1SAMUEL 20: 11 Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out into the field." They both went out into the field.

Verse 11

Come, and let us go out into the field - In answer to David's question, he now shows him how he shall convey this intelligence to him.

1SAMUEL 20: 12 Jonathan said to David, "By the LORD, the God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if there is good toward David, shall I not then send to you, and disclose it to you?"

Verse 12

Jonathan said - O Lord God of Israel - There is, most evidently, something wanting in this verse. The Septuagint has, The Lord God of Israel doth Know. The Syriac and Arabic, The Lord God of Israel is Witness. Either of these makes a good sense. But two of Dr. Kennicott's MSS. supply the word 'n chai, "liveth;" and the text reads thus, As the Lord God of Israel Liveth, when I have sounded my father - if there be good, and I then send not unto thee, and show it thee, the Lord do so and much more to Jonathan. This makes a still better sense.

1SAMUEL 20: 13 The LORD do so to Jonathan, and more also, should it please my father to do you evil, if I don't disclose it to you, and send you away, that you may go in peace: and the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father.

Verse 13

The Lord be with thee, as he hath been with my father - From this, and other passages here it is evident that Jonathan knew that the Lord had appointed David to the kingdom.

1SAMUEL 20: 14 You shall not only while yet I live show me the loving kindness of the LORD, that I not die;

Verse 14

Show me the kindness of the Lord - When thou comest to the kingdom, if I am alive, thou shalt show kindness to me, and thou shalt continue that kindness to my family after me.

1SAMUEL 20: 15 but also you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever; no, not when the LORD has cut off the enemies of David everyone from the surface of the earth.”

1SAMUEL 20: 16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “The LORD will require it at the hand of David’s enemies.”

1SAMUEL 20: 17 Jonathan caused David to swear again, for the love that he had to him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

1SAMUEL 20: 18 Then Jonathan said to him, “Tomorrow is the new moon: and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty.

1SAMUEL 20: 19 When you have stayed three days, you shall go down quickly, and come to the place where you hid yourself when this started, and shall remain by the stone Ezel.

1SAMUEL 20: 20 I will shoot three arrows on its side, as though I shot at a mark.

Verse 20

I will shoot three arrows - Jonathan intended that David should stay at the stone Ezel, where probably there was some kind of cave, or hiding place; that, to prevent all suspicion, he would not go to him himself, but take his servant into the fields, and pretend to be exercising himself in archery; that he would shoot three arrows, the better to cover his design; and that, if he should say to his servant, who went to bring back the arrows, "The arrows are on this side of thee," this should be a sign to David that he might safely return to court, no evil being designed; but if he should say, "The arrows are beyond thee," then David should escape for his life, Saul having determined his destruction.

1SAMUEL 20: 21 Behold, I will send the boy, saying, ‘Go, find the arrows!’ If I tell the boy, ‘Behold, the arrows are on this side of you. Take them;’ then come; for there is peace to you and no hurt, as the LORD lives.

1SAMUEL 20: 22 But if I say this to the boy, ‘Behold, the arrows are beyond you;’ then go your way; for the LORD has sent you away.

1SAMUEL 20: 23 Concerning the matter which you and I have spoken of, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever.”

1SAMUEL 20: 24 So David hid himself in the field: and when the new moon had come, the king sat him down to eat food.

1SAMUEL 20: 25 The king sat on his seat, as at other times, even on the seat by the wall; and Jonathan stood up, and Abner sat by Saul’s side: but David’s place was empty.

Verse 25

The king sat upon his seat - It seems that there was one table for Saul, Jonathan, David, and Abner; Saul having the chief seat, that next to the wall. As only four sat at this table, the absence of any one would soon be noticed.

1SAMUEL 20: 26 Nevertheless Saul didn't say anything that day: for he thought, "Something has happened to him. He is not clean. Surely he is not clean."

1SAMUEL 20: 27 On the next day after the new moon, the second day, David's place was empty. Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why doesn't the son of Jesse come to eat, neither yesterday, nor today?"

1SAMUEL 20: 28 Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem.

1SAMUEL 20: 29 He said, 'Please let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city. My brother has commanded me to be there. Now, if I have found favour in your eyes, please let me go away and see my brothers.' Therefore he has not come to the king's table."

Verse 29

Our family hath a sacrifice - Such sacrifices were undoubtedly festal ones; the beasts slain for the occasion were first offered to God, and their blood poured out before him; afterwards all that were bidden to the feast ate of the flesh. This was a family entertainment, at the commencement of which God was peculiarly honored.

1SAMUEL 20: 30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse rebellious woman, don't I know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"

Verse 30

Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman - This clause is variously translated and understood. The Hebrew might be translated, Son of an unjust rebellion; that is, "Thou art a rebel against thy own father." The Vulgate, Fili mulieris virum ultro rapientis; "Son of the woman who, of her own accord, forces the man." The Septuagint is equally curious, Υιε κορασιων αυτομολουντων; "Son of the damsels who came of their own accord." Were these the meaning of the Hebrew, then the bitter reflection must refer to some secret transaction between Saul and Jonathan's mother; which certainly reflects more dishonor on himself than on his brave son. Most sarcasms bear as hard upon the speaker, as they do on him against whom they are spoken. Abusive language always argues a mean, weak, and malevolent heart.

1SAMUEL 20: 31 For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Therefore now send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die!"

1SAMUEL 20: 32 Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?"

1SAMUEL 20: 33 Saul cast his spear at him to strike him. By this Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death.

1SAMUEL 20: 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 done him shame.

Verse 34

Jonathan arose - in fierce anger - We should probably understand this rather of Jonathan's grief than of his anger, the latter clause explaining the former: for he was grieved for David. He was grieved for his father - he was grieved for his friend.

1SAMUEL 20: 35 In the morning, Jonathan went out into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little boy with him.

1SAMUEL 20: 36 He said to his boy, "Run, find now the arrows which I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.

1SAMUEL 20: 37 When the boy had come to the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried after the boy, and said, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?"

1SAMUEL 20: 38 Jonathan cried after the boy, "Go fast! Hurry! Don't delay!" Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows, and came to his master.

Verse 38

Make speed, haste, stay not - Though these words appear to be addressed to the lad, yet they were spoken to David, indicating that his life was at stake, and only a prompt flight could save him.

1SAMUEL 20: 39 But the boy didn't know anything. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter.

1SAMUEL 20: 40 Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy, and said to him, "Go, carry them to the city."

Verse 40

Jonathan gave his artillery - I believe this to be the only place in our language where the word artillery is not applied to cannon or ordnance. The original (כֵּלֵי keley) signifies simply instruments, and here means the bow, quiver, and arrows.

1SAMUEL 20: 41 As soon as the boy was gone, David arose out of the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times. They kissed one another, and wept one with another, and David wept the most.

Verse 41

Until David exceeded - David's distress must, in the nature of things, be the greatest. Besides his friend Jonathan, whom he was now about to lose for ever, he lost his wife, relatives, country; and, what was most afflictive, the altars of his God, and the ordinances of religion.

Saul saw David's growing popularity, and was convinced of his own maladministration. He did not humble himself before God, and therefore became a prey to envy, pride, jealousy, cruelty, and every other malevolent temper. From him David had every thing to fear, and therefore he thought it was safer to yield to the storm, than attempt to brave it; though he could have even raised a very powerful party in Israel, had he used the means which were so much in his power. But as he neither sought nor affected the kingdom, he left it to the providence of God to bring him in by such means, at such a way, and in such a time, as was most suited to his godly wisdom. He that believeth shall not make haste: God's way and time are ever the best; and he who, even in God's way, runs before he is sent, runs at random; runs without light, and without Divine strength.

Feeble, therefore, must be his own might, his own counsel, and his own wisdom: though he encompass himself with his own sparks yet this hath he at the Lord's hand - he shalt lie down in sorrow.

1SAMUEL 20: 42 Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, because we have both sworn in the LORD's name, saying, 'The LORD shall be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, forever.'" He arose and departed; and Jonathan went into the city.
