

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 20:1-42

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1 Samuel 20:1-42

Verses 1-11

¹ *Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to kill me?"*

² *"Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without letting me know. Why would he hide this from me? It isn't so!"*

³ *But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."*

⁴ *Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."*

⁵ *So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon feast, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. ⁶ If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.' ⁷ If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. ⁸ As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?"*

⁹ *"Never!" Jonathan said. "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?"*

¹⁰ *David asked, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?"*

¹¹ *"Come," Jonathan said, "let's go out into the field." So they went there together.*

- King Saul, in the power of an evil spirit, had tried, unsuccessfully, to kill David three times. David, with the help of his wife, Michal, escaped and

went to Samuel at Ramah (see 1 Samuel 19). Saul pursued David but was prevented from killing him by the Holy Spirit. David fled from Ramah and went to Jonathan, King Saul's son and Israel's crown prince.

- David confronted Jonathan with Saul's intentions. Jonathan found David's assertions incredible because Saul had taken an oath before him NOT to kill David (see 1 Samuel 19:6). Jonathan was in his father's favor; Saul never acted without consulting his son. He did not believe that David was in danger from Saul.
- But David also took an oath before Jonathan that his words were true. He contended that Saul did not confide in Jonathan on this matter because he knew that Saul was aware of Jonathan's friendship with David.
- Jonathan agreed to assist David in any way David requested.
- David proposed a plan. The next day there was a festival planned at which David was supposed to sit at the king's table. It would have been an insult to the king for David not to be present at this feast. David's intention was to miss the feast. If the king missed him, Jonathan was to tell his father that David was called to Bethlehem, his hometown, because of an annual event that he needed to attend there. If the king dismissed the matter as of no importance, Jonathan would know that David was safe. However, if the king lost his temper, Jonathan would know that Saul's intention was to harm David.
- David reminded Jonathan that they were bound to each other by covenant (see 1 Samuel 18:3). David asked that if he was guilty of some crime which deserved death, that Jonathan kill him himself rather than turn him over to Saul.
- Jonathan said that he would never raise his hand against David for any reason. He swore that he would tell David if he knew of his father's intention to kill him.
- It was agreed between them that David would hide in a particular field until after the festival. Jonathan went with David to the field to see where David would be hiding. He agreed to meet David there after the feast and tell David what happened.

Verses 12-17

¹² Then Jonathan said to David, "I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you

know? ¹³ But if my father intends to harm you, may the LORD deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ But show me unfailing kindness like the LORD's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, ¹⁵ and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth.” ¹⁶ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD call David's enemies to account.” ¹⁷ And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

- Jonathan and David reaffirmed their love for each other on oath. Jonathan promised to find out his father's intention concerning David and to report them to David. He asked God's blessing to be on David. He asked David to show kindness to him and his family when he, David, was affirmed as Israel's new king.
- David agreed to all Jonathan asked.

Verses 18-23

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said to David, “Tomorrow is the New Moon feast. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. ¹⁹ The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. ²¹ Then I will send a boy and say, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I say to him, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,’ then come, because, as surely as the LORD lives, you are safe; there is no danger. ²² But if I say to the boy, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you,’ then you must go, because the LORD has sent you away. ²³ And about the matter you and I discussed—remember, the LORD is witness between you and me forever.”

- Jonathan was obviously concerned that he would be followed. So, he devised a way to pass a message to David without putting David in danger. He would go out to the place where David was hiding to shoot arrows. There would be a boy with him to retrieve his arrows. If he told the boy, “Look, the arrows are on this side of you” the coast was clear, and David could come to him. However, if he said to the boy, “The arrows are beyond you,” David was to understand that Saul intended to harm him, and he must go away at once.

Verses 24-31

²⁴ So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon feast came, the king sat down to eat. ²⁵ He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty. ²⁶ Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, "Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean—surely he is unclean." ²⁷ But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?"

²⁸ Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. ²⁹ He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."

³⁰ Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? ³¹ As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!"

- On the first day of the feast, David's absence was noted but nothing happened. However, on the second day of the feast, Saul asked Jonathan where David was. When Jonathan told Saul that he had given David permission to be absent, Saul flew into a rage. Obviously, Jonathan's remarks indicated that he and David had been in consultation about the matter. Saul was furious with Jonathan because he remained David's friend. He told Jonathan that as long as David lived, he, Jonathan, would never be king of Israel. He ordered Jonathan to bring David to him so that he could kill David.

Verses 32-34

³² "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. ³³ But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

³⁴ Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the feast he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

- Jonathan protested that David was innocent of any crime against him or his father. In anger, Saul tried to kill his son, Jonathan, in exactly the same way he had tried to kill David.
- In anger, Jonathan stormed out of the feast. He was grieved at the way his father was treating David.

Verses 35-40

³⁵ In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, ³⁶ and he said to the boy, “Run and find the arrows I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. ³⁷ When the boy came to the place where Jonathan’s arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, “Isn’t the arrow beyond you?” ³⁸ Then he shouted, “Hurry! Go quickly! Don’t stop!” The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. ³⁹ (The boy knew nothing about all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) ⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, “Go, carry them back to town.”

- The next morning, Jonathan went to the field with a boy. As the boy went to retrieve his arrows, Jonathan shouted the message to David as they had agreed. He told David that his life was in danger and that David should flee, using the words they had agreed to.
- He added, “Hurry! Go quickly! Don’t Stop!” This message was for David, showing the urgency of the situation.
- Jonathan then sent the boy away with his weapons so that the boy would not know anything about his meeting with David and to show David that he had come in peace.

Verses 41-42

⁴¹ After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most.

⁴² Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.’” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

- Then David came out of hiding. He bowed before Jonathan three times. They kissed each other and they wept. David was sorrowful for how things had turned out.
- He and Jonathan swore their eternal friendship to each other.

- David left and Jonathan returned home.

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