

1st Samuel 20:1-42
The Covenant Between David and Jonathan

Introduction

1. The book of 1st Samuel is filled with so many interesting characters, some good and some not-so-good
2. There's a lot we can learn from the faithfulness of Elkanah and Hannah, the devotion of Samuel, and the humility of David
3. We see these wonderful examples of faith contrasted with the wickedness of the likes of Eli and his corrupt sons and a self-righteous, self-serving, murderous king
4. At first glance, chapter 20 appears to focus on another one of these characters, David's loyal and faithful companion Jonathan, King Saul's son (in fact, the section heading in your Bible may say something like, "Jonathan's Loyalty to David")
5. However, the real focus of this chapter is the **covenant** between David and Jonathan:
 - a) Determining the author's intent, especially in OT narrative, can be a challenge at times (e.g. What is the author trying to tell us with this story?)
 - b) It's possible that the author of 1st Samuel simply wanted to highlight the special relationship between David and Jonathan and recording the events of chapter 20 were his way of honoring Jonathan for his loyalty to David
 - c) It's also possible that the author recorded these events to explain David's kindness to Mephibosheth, one of Saul's and Jonathan's descendants (2 Samuel 9:1=13)—an unusual act by a king (usually, they destroyed the descendants of their rivals)
 - d) However, there may be another motive here: Is it possible that the author wanted the events of chapter 20—which focus on the covenant between David and Jonathan—to serve as a reminder to Israel of their covenant with God?
 - e) Is it possible that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the author intended for us to see in the covenant between David and Jonathan a reflection of the New Covenant we now have with Jesus?

A. The covenant between David and Jonathan provided certainty in uncertain times (1-11)

1. In the face of confusing, uncertain and dangerous times David seeks out Jonathan:
 - a. David's life was in danger but he really didn't know why (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?"**
 - 1) He had defeated Goliath and sent the Philistines retreating
 - 2) He had served Saul faithfully in his court, playing music to soothe him when he was tormented
 - 3) He fought along with Saul in battle and became one of his most successful military commanders
 - 4) Yet, Saul was doing everything he could to kill him (there had been at least six attempts on David's life so far)
 - b. Even though Jonathan was aware of his father's previous attempt to kill David, David had been brought back into the king's presence after Jonathan intervened (19-6-7)—it's no wonder Jonathan finds it hard to accept David's claim (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!"

- c. So, David proposed a test to prove his claim (3-7):
 - 1) David is certain that due to his friendship with Jonathan, Saul is keeping his plans to kill David secret from Jonathan (3-4)
 - 2) To force Saul to reveal his intentions, David planned to skip an important festival meal with the King and have Jonathan observe Saul's response (5-7)
 - a) If Saul missed David, Jonathan was to tell him that David traveled back home to celebrate with his family
 - b) If Saul responded that it was "**good**" then David was safe
 - c) However, if Saul responded in anger then Jonathan and David would know that Saul's intent was "**evil**"
- 2. In the next verse (8) we get our first glimpse into why David sought out Jonathan at such an uncertain time: He found a sense of certainty and security in his covenant with Jonathan (8-11):
 - a. He calls on Jonathan to "**deal kindly**" with him because of their "**covenant**" (8a): "**Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you.**"
 - 1) There are two critical words here and they go hand in hand
 - 2) The first is the Hebrew word *hesed*, translated here as "**deal kindly**"—it's often translated by the NASB as loving-kindness, but more specifically it refers to a special kind of kindness and loyalty
 - 3) It is tied very closely to the second word David uses here: "**covenant**"
 - 4) You see, *hesed* refers to the kind of kindness and loyalty that is secure by a covenant between two parties
 - 5) David knew that he could trust Jonathan, even though he was the son of the very man trying to kill him, because he and Jonathan were bound together in loyalty through a covenant instituted by Jonathan himself
 - b. We can see the depth of their loyalty to one another in the next few verses (8b-10):
 - 1) David was convinced that if he indeed had sinned against Saul, that Jonathan should kill him himself (8b)
 - 2) Jonathan was convinced that if Saul was planning "**evil**" against David that he should warn David (9)
 - 3) David asks, and Jonathan agrees, to warn him if indeed his suspicions are correct (10-11)
- 3. How does this reflect our covenant with Jesus?
 - a. In His covenant with Israel, God promised Israel an inheritance along with rest and security in the Promise Land (Deuteronomy 12; especially 8-10)—Israel can be certain of this rest because God bound Himself with a covenant
 - b. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus promised rest through the New Covenant to all those who come to Him: "**Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.**"—we can be certain of our rest because Jesus bound Himself to us with a covenant
 - c. Just as David found rest and certainty in his relationship with Jonathan because it was bound with a covenant, we can be assured that we will find rest and certainty in our relationship with the LORD because it, too, is bound with a covenant

B. The covenant between David and Jonathan reflected uncommon loyalty (12-17)

NOTE: What do I mean by uncommon? It means it's out of the ordinary, unusual, or even remarkable

1. Jonathan's loyalty to David was uncommon because he chose loyalty to David over loyalty to his own father (READ 12-13):
 - a. Jonathan promises to inform David of Saul's plans, good or bad
 - b. He binds himself with an oath—that the Lord would take his life if he fails to warn David and send him away to safety
2. David's loyalty to Jonathan was uncommon because he chose to do something that most kings did not do (14-17):
 - a. Many kings would execute potential rivals too their throne along with their descendants (so that no rightful descendants could claim rights to the throne)
 - b. David's own son, Solomon, did this (1 Kings 2:25, 46), along with many others (Abimelech, Baasha, Elah, Omri, Jeju and Athaliah)
 - c. As Saul's son, Jonathan and his descendants had a rightful claim to the throne and from a human perspective and conventional wisdom would pose a threat to David's kingdom
 - d. We've already seen that Jonathan gave up those rights to David when he recognized him as the rightful king and gave him his royal robe, armor, etc. in 19:4
 - e. However, here Jonathan asks David to show him **"the lovingkindness of the LORD"** (hesed) and not kill him when David becomes king (14): **"If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die?"**
 - 1) Notice that he doesn't simply ask David to be loyal to him, but to show him the kind of covenant loyalty found in the LORD
 - 2) But his request didn't stop there: he called on David to extend such uncommon loyalty to his descendants forever (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."**
 - f. David not only promised his faithfulness to Jonathan (v. 17), but made good on the promise when he honored Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, with wealth and a regular place at his royal table (2 Samuel 9:7-13)
3. Like David's covenant with Jonathan, our covenant with Jesus is one of uncommon loyalty:
 - a. Our loyalty to Jesus should be greater than our loyalty to any other earthly person or things (see Luke 14:26-27)
 - b. Jesus' loyalty to us is beyond remarkable: 2 Timothy 2:11-13

C. The covenant between David and Jonathan came with a cost (18-34)

1. Jonathan devises a plan to both protect and warn David if his father is intent on killing him (READ 18-23)
 - a. David would hide in the field
 - b. Jonathan would then shoot arrows three arrow out toward David:
 - 1) If the arrow landed short ("this side" of David) then David was safe
 - 2) If the arrows landed beyond David then he was in danger

2. Jonathan explains David's absence to Saul (READ 24-29)
3. Saul becomes enraged with Jonathan and tries to kill him (READ 30-34):
 - a. Enraged might be a bit of an understatement here
 - b. He first refers to Jonathan as an illegitimate son: "**You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!**" (in essence denouncing him as his own son)
 - c. He then claims that Jonathan's loyalty to David has brought shame to Jonathan himself and his mother because he would never ascend to the throne as long as David was alive (30b): "**Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness (NIV "of the mother who bore you")? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. "**
 - d. He even orders Jonathan to bring David to him so he can kill him (31): "**Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die.**"
 - e. When Jonathan refuses, Saul tries to kill Jonathan just as he did David (READ 32-33)
4. Jonathan's response once again reflects his loyalty and affection for David—he expresses anger and grief not over nearly being killed himself by his own father, but rather because his father had "**dishonored**" David (34)
5. Just as Jonathan paid a steep price for his covenant with David, Jesus paid a steep price for his covenant with us:
 - a. He paid with his life (Romans 5:8): "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**"
 - b. We were also warned by Jesus that our covenant with Him would come with a cost:
 - 1) He warned his disciples to count the cost before following Him
 - 2) He told us we would be hated by the world, just as He was hated
 - 3) He said we'd be persecuted, even martyred, for our faith

D. The covenant between David and Jonathan assured a measure of peace (READ 35-40)
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1. Jonathan warns David (by shooting his arrows beyond David) that he is in danger from Saul (35-40)
2. David and Jonathan mourn together before David departs (41-42):
 - a. David falls on his face and bows before Jonathan:
 - 1) According to ancient Armenian letters from the time period, this was an act of subservience and loyalty
 - 2) To do so three times indicates David's tremendous humility and gratitude toward Jonathan
 - b. They kissed each other and wept:
 - 1) Kissing was often an expression of farewell in the ANE
 - 2) Weeping obviously indicates the anguish and emotion of the situation, likely the result of realizing they may never see each other again (they see each other only one more time before Jonathan dies)
 - 3) The author's note that David "wept the more" may be his way of stressing David's loyalty and devotion to Jonathan (up to this point, most of the attention has been on Jonathan's loyalty to David)
3. Jonathan bids David peace as they each go their separate ways (43):

- a. Jonathan's words are rather remarkable because he bids David peace at a time when there seems to be little peace for David
 - b. However, the peace of which Jonathan refers is that which exists between himself, David and their descendants
 - c. This peace was a result of their covenant and the oath that **"The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever"** (42b)
 - d. So, while David would face his adversaries, and certainly times of turmoil and those without peace, he would always have this peace
4. Isn't it interesting how this reflects the peace we have as a result of our covenant with Jesus?
 - a. Romans 5:1: **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"**
 - b. Jesus reminded us in John 16:33 that even though we will have tribulation in the world, we will have peace in Him: **"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."**
 - c. Just as David's and Jonathan's covenant assured them that they would always have a place of peace amidst the trials and tribulations they would face against their enemies, our covenant with Jesus assures us that we have peace with our Father and Savior no matter what we face in the world

Conclusion

1. The covenant between David and Jonathan provided certainty in uncertain times, just as our covenant with Jesus provides us with certainty, especially when it comes to our eternity
2. The covenant between David and Jonathan reflected uncommon loyalty, just as our covenant with Jesus reflect uncommon loyalty
3. The covenant between David and Jonathan came with a cost, just as our covenant with Jesus did
4. The covenant between David and Jonathan assured a measure of peace, just as our covenant with Jesus guarantees peace with our heavenly Father and Savior