

Confidence During Times of Uncertainty (1 Samuel 20)

Context: Three times Saul has attempted to thrust his spear through David (18:11; 19:10), twice he tried to send David on a mission against the Philistines that was dangerous (18:17, 25), and three times he enlisted his servants to plot against David (19:1, 11, 20). David is an innocent man who has served Saul faithfully (19:4-6).

1. The Tension (v.1-4)

- David departed from Samuel at Naioth (19:18) and has found Jonathan. As of now, Jonathan is unaware of Saul's three recent attempts to kill David (19:8, 15, 18-23). David fears for his life and wants to know why Saul wants to kill him (v.1).
- Why does David flee to Jonathan? He needs to know who his friends are, who he can trust, and why Saul is behaving like a madman. Jonathan and David have already established a covenant (18:3). The reader is not informed on the covenant details.
- Jonathan is highly skeptical about David's report concerning Saul's hostility. He is convinced that Saul would have consulted and informed him if anything had changed since the last brokerage (19:1-7).
- Jonathan has a filial respect to Saul and is very hesitant to think that he would attempt to kill David, despite his innocence. Jonathan is placed in a precarious situation: who does he trust?

2. The Stratagem (v.5-7, 12, 18-23)

Stratagem: an unconventional or elaborate scheme that is deployed to outwit an opponent. Stratagems are often unnecessary and can cause unanticipated and convoluted outcomes.

- David's stratagem includes Jonathan lying to his father about David's whereabouts during a new moon festival. Jonathan was to watch for his father's reaction to David's absence; Saul's response will determine his level of hostility towards David.

New Moon Feast (v.5, 18, 24): a festive occasion and special event where sacrifices were carried out (Num. 10:10, 28:11-15; Ezra 3:5; Ps. 81:3; Ezek. 46:6). It may have been celebrated at the end of the month when the Sabbath and the new moon coincided. This may have occurred several times per year. This king and prince would have heavily participated in this event (Ezek. 45:17).

- While Michal has already lied twice (19:14, 17), Jonathan hasn't. David is acting out of fear and not faith. Jonathan may be able to determine Saul's intentions if he followed the same course of actions as he did previously (19:1-7). Once Jonathan determines Saul's intentions, he will fire three arrows into a field. The direction he gives the boy will indicate whether David should flee or stay (v.18-24).

3. The Implementation (v.24-34)

- When Jonathan arrives at the feast, there are at least four chairs at Saul's table (Saul, Jonathan, David, and Abner). David's seat is empty. The table is against a wall to protect the king from assassins.

Day 1 (v.26): David's seat is empty, and Saul assumes that David is ritually unclean. The Torah prohibited the consumption of a ritual meal during times of uncleanness (Lev. 11-17; Num. 19).

- How ironic that Saul thinks this since he is obsessed with rituals (11:14; 13:8-11; 14:35, 41; 15:15-25, 31). It never dawned on Saul that David may perhaps be absent because of his incessant obsession with killing David.

Day 2 (v. 27): David seat remains empty. Saul refers to David as the “son of Jesse” which is a term of derision (22:7, 8, 13; 25:10; 2 Sam. 20:1). Jonathan lies to Saul – there was no sacrifice in David’s hometown.

- Saul determines that Jonathan is lying and berates him (v.30-31). This is a foul-mouthed epithet in which Saul tries to shame, embarrass, and guilt Jonathan to side with him:
 - Shame and Guilt (v.30): Saul tells Jonathan that he is a disappointment to his family in bringing shame to his father and mother (Ahinoam).
 - Greed (v.31): Saul reminds Jonathan that his kingdom will not be established while David is alive. David must be killed.
- Jonathan attempts to bring the same reconciliation as before, but it is too late (19:1-6). In an outburst of ironic rage, Saul throws a spear in attempt to kill Jonathan. Jonathan now knows that Saul seeks David’s life. David was right (v.3, 34).

4. The Farewell (v.35-41)

- Jonathan departs the feast without eating and went out to the appointed field in the morning (v.21-23, 35).
- The original plan included no personal encounter, yet after Jonathan dismisses the servant boy to return home with his weapons, Jonathan and David meet one another. This will be the second-to-last time they speak with one another face to face before Jonathan dies in battle against the Philistines (23:16; 2 Sam. 1).
- David bows to the ground three times and in an emotional exchange, both weep and kiss each other; David weeping the most (v.41).
- Esau and Jacob (Gen.33:4), Joseph and Benjamin (Gen. 45:14-15), and the apostle Paul with the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:37) all expressed deep emotion through weeping and kissing. These kisses are not indications of lust, but tokens of love.

5. The Covenant (v.8-17, 42)

- This covenantal loyalty is expressed through the Hebrew word “hesed.” It is translated as “kindly” (v.8) and “lovingkindness” (v.14-15). “Hesed” extends beyond love, kindness, compassion, and affection. It has an additional connotation of loyalty, faithfulness, and reliability. Jonathan establishes another covenant with David (18:1-3) and promises to protect David (v.9, 13).
- David in return will not blot out Jonathan’s future descendants (v.14-15). Typically, when there was a transfer of dynasties, all the previous descendants of the kingdom being replaced would be slaughtered to ensure there were no threats or challenges to the new throne: Baasha (1 Kgs. 15:29), Zimri (1 Kgs. 16:11) Jehu (2 Kgs. 10:6-7).
- Mephibosheth will be incorporated into David’s court despite reasonable suspicion that he participated in the revolt against David (2 Sam. 19:25-29).
- Their covenant before the LORD, combined with Jonathan’s benediction for David to go “in peace” would have been brought tremendous encouragement to David.