

Jonathan Helps David

A Retelling of 1 Samuel 20



(1) David came to Jonathan and said, “What have I done wrong that your father wants to kill me?”

(2) Jonathan said, “You shall not die! Indeed, my father will do nothing either great or small without telling me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so!”

(3) But David said, “Your father knows that we are friends, and he does not want to upset you. But as the Lord lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.”

(4) So Jonathan said to David, “I will do whatever you want.”

(5-10) David said, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should sit with the king to eat. But let me hide in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me, tell him that I asked permission to go to Bethlehem to be with my family. If he answers, ‘It is well,’ then I will be safe. But if he is very angry, then he means to harm me. But how will I know how your father answers you?”

(11-15) Jonathan took David out into the field and said, “I will tell you if my father wants to hurt you and send you away in peace. And you will show me the kindness of the Lord while I still live and be kind to my house [children].

(16-23) Then Jonathan said, “When you have stayed away three days, come and hide here. I will come and shoot three arrows as though I shot at a target. And I will send a boy, saying, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I say to him, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you,’ then as the Lord lives, there is safety for you and no harm. But if I say to the young man, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you,’ go your way, for the Lord has sent you away. The Lord be between you and me forever.”

(24-27) So David hid in the field. And when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast. David’s place was empty, but Saul said nothing about it. On the second day, David’s place was empty. Saul said to Jonathan, “Why has the son of Jesse [David] not come to eat yesterday or today?”

(28) Jonathan answered Saul, “David asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem to be with his family. Therefore, he has not come to the king’s table.”

(30-31) Then Saul’s anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, “You have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame. As long as David lives you will not be king. Bring him to me, for he shall surely die.”

(32-34) And Jonathan answered Saul his father, “Why should he be killed? What has he done?” Then Saul cast a spear at Jonathan to kill him, and Jonathan knew his father was determined to kill David. So, Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and he ate no food that day. He was sad for David because his father had treated him shamefully.

(35-40) And in the morning Jonathan went out into the field at the time set with David, and a little boy was with him. Then he said, “Now run, find the arrows which I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. Jonathan cried out, “Is not the arrow beyond you? Make haste, hurry, do not delay!” The boy gathered the arrows, and Jonathan sent him home.

(41-42) Now as soon as the boy had gone, David rose from his hiding place. He fell on his face to the ground and bowed down three times. And David and Jonathan kissed one another and wept together. 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, David departed, and Jonathan went back into the city.