

JONATHAN IS CONVINCED AND DAVID NOW UNDERSTANDS

INTRODUCTION

We may feel that in some ways 1 Sam. 20 is a strange chapter in that the central character is Jonathan - rather than either David or Saul, whose intertwined histories occupy all other chapters from chapter 16 to the end of the book. Indeed apart from this chapter, Jonathan puts in only brief appearances in the history from the time when David first entered the stage in chapter 16.<sup>1</sup> We may wonder why such a large amount of space is devoted to the devising and executing of a plan to establish once and for all whether - and why - Saul was determined to kill David. But that is precisely the point!

As I see it, the point is not only that *Jonathan* needed to be persuaded that his father was determined to kill David, but that *David* needed to know the reason for this and that he needed to be aware that there was now no way he could either remain in Saul's court or ever be accepted back there.

That is, the chapter marks a very clear boundary in David's life. The events in the chapter convinced, not only Jonathan, but David that Saul had made up his mind to kill him (apart altogether from the temporary visitations by the 'spirit of distress') - and that he had done this because David posed a very real threat to his kingdom and dynasty.

At the outset of the chapter, David is genuinely perplexed. He asks Jonathan to inform him why Saul is out to kill him, v.1, because he honestly doesn't know. And neither does Jonathan - indeed Jonathan isn't even willing to accept that Saul *does* still intend to kill David, v.2. We, the readers, have been able to listen in to Saul's private thoughts at all times, e.g. 18.10, 17, 21. So we know what makes him tick. But neither Jonathan nor David are in on the know. Yes, Jonathan knew that at one stage Saul had wanted David dead, 19.1-2, but there is no suggestion that Jonathan had guessed why. It is highly likely that he attributed his father's murderous intent to another visit from the 'spirit of distress' - as in 16.14, 23; 18.10-11 - which in the latter case had been linked with an attempt by Saul on David's life.

Jonathan had no doubts that David was destined to follow Saul as the next king of Israel<sup>2</sup> - and that the day would come when God would 'cut off' all David's enemies, v.15. (We have seen that David's future role as king was no problem to Jonathan - indeed that he had happily given his royal robe and weaponry to David and, in so doing, had symbolically renounced his own claim, as crown prince, to the kingdom - in David's favour, 18.3-4.)

But it was not until Jonathan got it straight from Saul's own mouth that Jonathan came to see how *his father* perceived the prospect of David's becoming king - that it was just this which provided Saul with his motivation to murder - 'As long as the son of Jesse liveth ... thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom ... wherefore ... he shall surely die', v.31. Then 'Jonathan knew', not only that Saul was 'determined' to kill David, but why, v.33! (There is repeated emphasis throughout the chapter on who knows - or doesn't know - one thing or another. Words using the root 'to know' occur more often ... than in any other chapter in the book. See 'knoweth', v.3; 'know', vv.3, 30; 'knew', vv.3, 33, 39 (twice); 'certainly' (lit. 'knowing'), vv.3, 9; 'be sure', v.7.)

(It seems unlikely that Saul had ever shared with Jonathan his shameful secret - that he had been told by Samuel in the clearest of terms that his blatant disobedience to the word of God had lost him both his dynasty and his own kingship. Note that Samuel's key declarations to Saul about his kingdom not continuing, 13.14, and about God's rejection of him as king, 15.23, 26, 28, had both been made to Saul privately, 13.10; 15.13, 31.)

I have no doubt that, when David and Jonathan parted at the end of the chapter, Jonathan told David everything he had learned at Saul's table. After all, the whole incident had risen out of David's questioning him about the driving force behind Saul's repeated attempts on his life. Now Jonathan - and more to the point - David - knew the answer to David's questions!

In such circumstances there clearly was no going back to Saul's court - as had been possible back in 19.7. David therefore has no choice but to turn his back on Saul's court and to 'depart', v.42. But at least he went knowing that it was, ultimately, 'the Lord' who had sent him away, v.22. That is, in summary, the open declaration made by Saul in chapter 20 (v.31) marked a major development in David's life. Hence the importance of chapter 20.

The contents of this chapter stand in marked contrast to the contents of the opening of chapter 19 :

(i) At the beginning of 1 Sam. 19, *Jonathan tells David* of Saul's purpose to kill him - 'Jonathan told David, saying, Saul *my father seeketh to kill thee*: now therefore ... *hide thyself ... in the field*', 19.2-3.



Jonathan was probably unaware of Saul's more recent actions in 19.11, 15, 20-23. If he had heard of them, he was probably hopeful that his father was now a changed man. After all, had not the Spirit of God, who had left him in 16.13, come upon him again – exactly as at the beginning of Saul's reign when 'God gave him another heart?', 10.9-13. Might the Lord not have done so again?

Either way, as a trusting son as well as loyal friend, Jonathan, with characteristic generosity, refused to accept that his father, in his normal rational moments, would really intend to harm David. 'Love thinketh no evil!'

'*God forbid*'. Better 'Far be it!', 'May it never be!' Interestingly, Jonathan used the same interjection as the people had back in 14.45 when they sprang to Jonathan's defence against Saul's murderous intentions towards *him*, his own son – 'Never: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground'. Now Jonathan encourages David with the same expression.

'*But that he will show it me*'. 'That he will uncover my ear', literally – an idiom<sup>4</sup> used by Jonathan again in vv.12-13. That is, 'without telling me privately. He has no secrets from me'.<sup>5</sup>

'*Why should my father hide this thing from me?*' David was able to explain why, v.3!

'*Thou shalt not die*'. Another echo of the event in chapter 14; 'Saul answered, God do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan', 14.45<sup>6</sup>.

Although Jonathan was wrong in his assessment of his father's true attitude towards David, he remains an example of those 'worthiest minds' who – until events prove them wrong – 'are least suspicious and most charitable in their opinions of others', Matthew Poole.

**Verse 3.** '*Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace ('favour') in thine eyes*'. Saul was shrewd enough to realize that, as v.29 confirms, David had indeed 'found favour' (the same word) in Jonathan's 'eyes'.

'*As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death*'. Note the contrast between life and death - 'The Lord lives, and you live, but I may well not!'

Note the continued stress which is laid on oaths or strong affirmations through the chapter; vv.3, 12, 13, 16, 17, 23, 42. This oath in v.3 is particularly strong.

In some ways, David's anxiety is surprising. Has he not witnessed a whole series of remarkable and unmistakable interventions of God's providences on his behalf in chapter 19? What of God delivering him then through (a) a loyal friend, vv.2-6; (b) a directed spear, v.10; (c) a loving wife, vv.11-17; and (d) the irresistible power of God's Spirit, vv.20-24? What of his confident expressions of faith in Psa. 59 – for example, 'Thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble. Unto thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defence'?

But David was 'a man subject to like passions as we are'.<sup>7</sup> The repeated attempts of Saul on his life had thoroughly unnerved him. The bravest of men have their moments of anxiety and fear; compare Elijah, 1 Kings 19. 1-4. David's courage and faith in God can never be questioned – as witness his delivering his flock from the beasts of prey and Israel from the Philistine champion – not to speak of his later great military exploits. Yet now he was perplexed and anxious.

'*There is but a step between me and death*'. In one sense, of course, this is true of all – 'man knoweth not his time ... the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them', Eccles. 9.12; 'ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away', James 4.13-15. But, in the context here, David's words are evidence that, for this moment, David is looking only at his circumstances, and has lost sight of the God who is over them all. (Ouch!) For his part, David *thought* that he was likely to face an early death, and, for his part, Saul *was determined* that he would ('he shall surely die', v.31). But they were both wrong! Little did young David suspect that it would be another 50 years or so (when he was 70 years old) before he would say, to his son and successor, 'I go the way of all the earth', 1 Kings 2.1.

## Verses 5-23

### David and Jonathan formulate their plans - the signal agreed

**Verse 5.** '*Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat*'. Apart from all the other sacrifices and offerings which Israel made to the Lord, monthly burnt offerings were required at the appearance of the new moon - 'in the beginnings of your months ye shall offer a burnt offering unto the Lord ... this is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year', Num. 28.11-14.

The occasion was celebrated with a sacrificial meal, and God insisted that the occasion of the 'new moon' offering was accompanied by celebration and rejoicing - 'in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you for a memorial before your God', Num. 10.10; 'Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob. Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob', Psa. 81.1-3.<sup>8</sup>

The day on which the monthly offering was made was observed as day of rest; 'Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat', Amos 8.4-5.

In Saul's case at least the offering was made the occasion of a family festival, lasting two days, v.27. David would be expected to be there - not only because, as Saul's son-in-law, David was a close family member - but because he was one of Saul's high-ranking military commanders.

'*Let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even*'. That is, until after the monthly two-day celebration was over.

**Verse 6.** '*Say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Bethlehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family*'. David asked Jonathan to tell Saul that David's absence could be explained - that

he had been called to go quickly ('run') to his own family festival. David's desire to participate in such an annual sacrifice with his family would not, in itself, have been considered unusual.

In more stable times, such sacrifices would have been offered at the central sanctuary; we read, for instance, that Samuel's father, 'the man Elkanah, and all his house, *went up* to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his vow', 1.21, and again that Samuel's 'mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she *came up* with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice', 2.19.

During Samuel's boyhood days the venue for the sacrifice had been Shiloh, 1 Sam. 1.3, the site of the tabernacle and house of the Lord, 1.24. God required that all sacrifices to Him should be offered at the central sanctuary; 'there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the Lord', Deut. 12.11 - see the whole of vv.5-18.

By David's time, however, the ark of the covenant had been removed from the tabernacle, 4.3, Shiloh itself apparently had been destroyed<sup>9</sup>, and the tabernacle had ceased to be the focal point for all sacrifice and offering. In such an unsettled state it seems that the annual sacrifices (along no doubt with others) were offered in the worshippers' hometown. Presumably, there was an altar of the Lord at Bethlehem for the Lord had told Samuel to take an heifer with him to Bethlehem 'and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord', 16.2.

Was David telling Jonathan to lie for him? Either (a) David regarded his story as a justifiable deception in the circumstances (in which case, I think he was wrong to lie - however difficult the circumstances), or (b) he really did go to Bethlehem as instructed, v.29, and then returned in time to hide in the field. Jonathan's words in v.19 are in favour of the latter explanation; 'when thou hast stayed three days, then ... go down quickly, and *come to the place where thou didst hide thyself when the business was in hand ...*'. That is, the agreed schedule was that David would 'run' to Bethlehem to share in the annual family meal, and then return 'quickly' to take up his hiding position towards the south of the field and by the stone Ezel, vv.19, 41.

David's earlier words to Jonathan, 'that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even', v.5, probably mean that David would be back at the field by the evening of the third day. And the statement of v.24, 'David hid himself in the field', probably looks forward in time to when David returned in accordance with Jonathan's directions; cf. v.35. It is highly unlikely, in any case, that David would have stayed for three days in a field.

**Verse 7.** *'If he say thus, It is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him'*. David's suggestion that Jonathan should excuse David's absence from Saul's feast by his attendance at the yearly family-sacrifice at Bethlehem was well calculated to expose Saul's true feelings and intentions. If, as David believed, Saul really was intent on killing David, once having revealed his hand in chapter 19, he would no doubt be planning to do so at the first opportunity. If David managed to evade him now, Saul had no idea when he would get another opportunity. Any frustration on Saul's part at David's absence and escape was sure to show - the more so, if, as indeed happened, Jonathan should speak up on behalf of his absent friend. David's absence would therefore be a test of Saul's intentions toward him. It wasn't that David really saw any possibility of Saul responding 'It is well' - thereby proving that David was back in his good books. His proposal was aimed at provoking Saul to an angry outburst before Jonathan to convince Jonathan of how things really were.

**Verse 8.** *'Thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee'*. It was 'a covenant of the Lord' because it had been ratified in His name by solemn oath. It was at the same time an expression of their mutual love for one another. In terms of sequence, their love for each other expressed itself in the solemn covenant into which they entered, and they were then able to refer back to the security afforded by the covenant, and to make their appeal to it - as both David and Jonathan do in vv.8, 14, 15.

David expects Jonathan to act with 'kindness' (Heb. *'hesed'*<sup>10</sup>) toward him because of the covenant between them - even though David sees himself as the lesser and needy partner in that covenant. (Note how David refers to himself as 'your servant' three times in vv.7-8.) Similarly, Jonathan (who, clearer than David at this moment, could see the long-term prospects for David) seeks assurances from David that he will show 'kindness' to him and to his seed, vv.14-15. Both David and Jonathan are looking to the other to demonstrate covenant loyalty.

*'If there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father?'* David would rather die at the hand of his friend than at the hand of a man who regarded him - and treated him - as his enemy.

**Verse 10.** *'Who shall tell me?'* But who in Saul's court, David wondered, could be trusted to inform him of the outcome?

*'What if thy father answer thee roughly?'* This may well be translated, 'If what your father answers you is harsh' - that is, if his answer is unfavourable to me.

**Verse 11.** *'Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field'*. As Jonathan and David were at Saul's court, and as there were great risks of them being overheard by some official who was sympathetic to Saul, Jonathan proposed that they continue their discussion in a safe place. Jonathan's purpose in going into the field to talk with his 'covenant-brother' was to assure David of his loyalty to him and to agree with David the details of how, if need be, David could later be protected from Saul's wrath. This contrasts starkly with Cain's actions towards his natural brother in a field; 'Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him', Gen 4.8.

**Verses 12-13.** *'Jonathan said unto David, O Lord God of Israel'*. We should supply the words 'be witness' - which would, in the context, though unspoken, have been taken as understood. See, for instance, 'The Lord, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out ...', NASB.

*'As he hath been with my father'*. It is sad, but, whether Jonathan realised it or not, the Lord - in terms of His presence and blessing - was *no longer* with Saul.

**Verses 14-15.** *'Thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not: But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever'*. When any new regime or dynasty came to power, 'purge' was the name of the game. It was the normal practice in the ancient Near East for the king who began a new dynasty to eliminate all the descendants of the former king to prevent them from rising up, from staging a coup and from reclaiming the throne. Within the later kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Baasha, Zimri, Jehu and 'Queen' Athaliah are notable examples of this procedure.<sup>11</sup>

As a prominent member of the existing royal house, it was therefore natural enough that Jonathan should be concerned about the future prospects for both him and his seed. It was the very same concern which later led Saul to seek - and obtain - a similar assurance from David in terms of his seed and house, 24. 21.

For his part, Jonathan was able to rest on the covenant between David and himself - which, of course Saul couldn't in that he had no such covenant with David. But Jonathan knew that the terms of their existing covenant would need to be refined and extended. The covenant into which they entered in chapter 18 had been a covenant between them as two men - between them as individuals. What Jonathan was now talking about was a covenant between two houses, between two dynasties - a covenant which extended to David's descendants and his descendants<sup>12</sup> - and that in perpetuity ('for ever'), v.15; cf. 'between me and thee for ever', v.23, and 'between my seed and thy seed for ever', v.42.

The subsequent history proved that Jonathan had nothing to fear. After David became king, David went out of his way to honour his covenant with Jonathan - 'David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? ... And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? ... David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake', 2 Sam. 9.1, 3, 7. (Note the connecting link, 'the kindness of the Lord', 1 Sam.20.14, and 'the kindness of God', 2 Sam. 9.3 - references to the fact that the covenant had been made before God, and with Him as witness.<sup>13</sup>) Also, following the famine which came on Israel because of the slaughter of the Gibeonites, David 'spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul', 2 Sam. 21.7.

*'Not cut off thy kindness ... when the Lord hath cut off the enemies'*. Probably a deliberate play on Jonathan's part on the word translated 'cut off' ('*karath*'). Indeed, the writer may be carrying on the word-play into v.16, which tells us that 'Jonathan cut a covenant ...', using exactly the same word.

*'When the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth'*. Note Jonathan's unqualified confidence that in God's time this *would* happen - 'When', not 'If', and indeed 'every one' of David's 'enemies'. But little did Jonathan suspect when he said this that his own father had recently spoken to Jonathan's sister about David as his 'enemy', 19.17! And so it was that when, on Gilboa, the Philistines 'cut off' (the same word) Saul's 'head, and stripped off his armour', 31.9, the man who had declared David to be among his enemies was himself 'cut off' by the Lord as if he was one of David's!

**Verse 16.** *'Let the Lord even require it at the hand of David's enemies'*. I am not sure exactly what Jonathan had in mind. He seems to be wishing that any who broke the covenant he had made with David should share the fate of David's enemies - namely that of being 'cut off', v.15. I quote two suggested interpretations offered by the older commentators; (a) "'The Lord require it at the hand of David's seed" (for of David himself he had no suspicion) if they prove so far David's enemies as to deal wrongfully with the posterity of Jonathan, David's friend', Matthew Henry, and, coming at it from the opposite end, (b) 'take vengeance on Jonathan, or on any of his posterity, should they break this covenant, by showing themselves enemies to David', John Gill. Perhaps Jonathan meant to cover both 'interpretations' - and to wish the Lord's judgement on any - of his or David's descendants (note that the covenant was made, not only with David personally, but with 'the house of David') - who presumed to violate the covenant which he and David had made in such solemn terms.

**Verses 18-19.** *'Thou ... shalt remain by the stone Ezel'*. 'You will sit by ...', literally. That is, instead of taking his 'seat' at Saul's table, v.18, David was to 'sit' by himself by the stone Ezel. Nothing is known of this stone; it was clearly some well-known landmark. It might have been a road-stone - effectively a kind of signpost. The name 'Ezel' is formed from the word 'to go'. 'The stone Ezel' might therefore signify either 'stone of demarcation' (that is, to mark a boundary), or 'stone of departure' (a name given to it later as a memorial of this parting of David and Jonathan).

**Verse 20.** Jonathan proposed a form of signal system between him and David because they couldn't rely on having a further personal meeting.

*'I will shoot three arrows'*. A well-chosen sign and indicator because Jonathan was famed for his archery skills; see how David singled out Jonathan's 'bow' for mention in his eulogy over Jonathan in 2 Sam.1.22, and after which he named the eulogy; 'he told them to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow', 2 Sam. 1.18 NKJV. No suspicions would be aroused by Jonathan going off for some archery practice!

**Verses 21-22.** The young boy sent to find the arrows would be told either that the arrows were 'on this side' of him, v.21, or that they were 'beyond' him, v.22. If the former, David would know that all was well - he was safe, v.21, which was, of course, what Jonathan hoped and expected, vv.2, 13. In that case, the way would be clear for David to return to the royal court. But if the arrows were beyond the boy, then David would know that his life was in danger, and he go, v.22.

*'The Lord hath sent thee away'*. Jonathan was then prepared to recognize that it was *the Lord's will* for David to become a fugitive and to leave Saul's court for good.

**Verse 23.** *'The Lord be between thee and me for ever'*. Jonathan invoked the Lord as witness between them - his language echoing the ancient agreement between Jacob and Laban; 'Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast between me and thee; This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will

not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us', Gen 31.51-53.

### Verses 24-34 Saul puts Jonathan in the picture

This section opens with David's place empty, vv.24-25, and closes with Jonathan's place empty, v.34. The section has a well-balanced structure, and breaks down into two sub-sections in which the two central characters reverse their roles.

#### Stage 1.

- (i) Question from Saul - 'Wherefore cometh not ...?', v.27
- (ii) Response and 'revelation' by Jonathan, vv.28-29
- (iii) 'Anger' of Saul, vv.30-31

Followed by :

#### Stage 2.

- (i) Question from Jonathan - 'Wherefore shall he ...?', v.32
- (ii) Response and 'revelation' by Saul, v.33
- (iii) 'Anger' of Jonathan, v.34

**Verses 24-25.** *'The king sat upon his seat, as at other times, even upon a seat by the wall'*. It was Saul's practice to sit 'by the wall', partly no doubt because it was the seat of honour immediately opposite the entrance to the room, and partly because he knew that he was then safe from attack from behind.

*'Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side'*. It appears from this statement that, when Abner (Saul's cousin, Commander-in-Chief, and seemingly principal bodyguard, 26. 5, 15, 16<sup>14</sup>) arrived, Jonathan resigned his seat next to his father for Abner to take it. Jonathan then sat down elsewhere within easy speaking distance of Saul; see *'Jonathan arose from the table ...'*, v.34.

Whether he had any good grounds for it, I don't know, but Josephus reports the seating arrangement rather differently; 'On the next day, which was the new moon, the king, when he had purified himself, as the custom was, came to supper; and when there sat by him his son Jonathan on his right hand, and Abner, the captain of his host, on the other hand, he saw David's seat was empty, but said nothing', Ant. VI.XI. 9.<sup>15</sup>

**Verse 26.** *'Saul spake not any thing that day: for he thought, Something hath befallen him, he is not clean; surely he is not clean'*. It was not difficult or unusual for men and women in Israel to contract ceremonial defilement.<sup>16</sup> If, for instance, somebody simply touched a dead body - human or animal - they were unclean. If somebody was 'unclean', they were forbidden to partake of any religious feasts or any 'sacred' food; see Lev.7.20-21 and compare 1 Sam. 16.5; 21.4-5.

**Verse 27-28.** *'On the morrow'*. Although ceremonial uncleanness would cause somebody to miss such a religious feast - such as at the new moon, in most cases that uncleanness only lasted for a single day; see the formula, 'unclean until the even' which occurs at least 26 times of men and women in Leviticus and Numbers.<sup>17</sup> Note in particular that it is said of the priest who touched certain unclean things that he 'shall be unclean until even, and shall not eat of the holy things ... when the sun is down, he shall be clean, and shall afterward eat of the holy things', Lev. 22.6-7. Saul now realised that the mental explanation with which he had previously satisfied himself couldn't in fact be correct.

*'Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday, nor to day?'* It is difficult to know the extent to which - if at all - Saul meant to insult David by speaking of him as 'the son of Jesse'.

On the one hand, David spoke of himself in that way in his 'last words'; David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel', 2 Sam. 23.1. Again, Amasai addressed David by that description, 'Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee', 1 Chron. 12.18,

But, on the other hand, we note the following points :

- (a) That, in the very cases just cited, the words 'son of Jesse' are linked with 'David' as his personal name.
- (b) That David was now Saul's son-in-law.
- (c) That Saul had previously used David's personal name in communication with Jesse, 16.19, 22.
- (d) That, when warmly inclined towards David, Saul would address him as 'my son David', 24.16; 26.21, 25.
- (e) That Saul usually used the form 'son of' when angry with someone; cf. 'son of Ahitub, 22.12 (along there with the personal name 'Ahimelech', v.16). Even Jonathan gets Saul's 'son of ...' form of address here, v.30.
- (f) That when Jonathan refers to David in the context here, he speaks of him by his name 'David', v.28.

On balance, it seems to me that Saul could not bring himself to use David's proper name and that he used the title 'son of Jesse' in a somewhat disparaging sense - as a mild form of insult - perhaps as if to say 'the son of that old sheep-farmer Jesse', thereby underlining David's lowly family background.

*'Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem'*. In reporting these words, the writer may have engaged in a gentle word-play; David would prefer to celebrate with his humble family in 'Bethlehem' (*'bet lahem'*, v.28 - the 'house of bread') than risk coming to partake of the king's 'meat' (*'lahem'* v.27<sup>18</sup>).

**Verse 29.** *'My brother, he hath commanded me to be there'*. There is nothing implausible in the pressure having come from one of David's brothers - probably Eliab, the eldest - in that Jesse himself was a man of greatly

advanced age, 17.12. Note that the story told to Saul is that David had been, not invited', but 'commanded' (charged, ordered) to attend the sacrifice at Bethlehem. And yet, the story also ran, that David had nevertheless courteously sought, and obtained, Jonathan's permission before going. There was no problem, Jonathan was saying, about David being missing. The explanation for David's absence was as simple as that. Well, as Jonathan was soon to find out, it was most certainly a problem to Saul!

**Verse 30.** *'Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan'*. The result of David's proposed test turned out just as he had expected. Saul raged like a lion disappointed of its prey. Clearly he had been counting on the new moon festival to give him the opportunity he wanted to be rid of his 'rival' once and for all.

How different then Saul's anger now to that with which he began his role as king. Back then 'the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly', 11.6<sup>19</sup> – and he went on to perform a great exploit for God and His people. But look at him now - not doing the will of God, but setting himself against the will of God - not the servant of God to work 'salvation', 11.13, but a slave to his own malice to work only destruction - if not of David or Jonathan, then of himself! I note that, if there is no mention of the Spirit of God (as there was in chapter 11), neither is there any mention of the 'spirit of distress' (as there was on the previous casting of Saul's spear, 18.10-11; 19.10). That is, Saul's own envy and hatred of David has taken over.

*'Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?'* Before Saul gets to hurling his spear at Jonathan, he first hurls his insults - and they were very nasty insults! It was hard for the oriental mind to imagine anything worse - or more offensive - than for someone to speak in a vulgar way about a man's mother. Saul speaks of Jonathan's mother (Ahinoam by name, 14.50) as 'perverted' ('bent', 'twisted', 'warped') and rebellious.<sup>20</sup> By speaking with such venom about Jonathan's mother, Saul was deliberately intensifying his insult to the very extreme.

*'To thine own confusion (shame)'*. Which probably means that, in choosing to befriend David and in supporting his cause, Jonathan was paving the way for David to become king and so to displace him. In Saul's book, only an imbecile would do that – hence it was to Jonathan's own 'shame'.

*'The confusion (shame) of your mother's nakedness'*. This is a euphemistic reference to Jonathan's conception and birth. Saul is saying one of two things : (a) that it was a dreadful humiliation for his mother to have borne such a worthless son – who would fail to ever fulfil the royal role to which he had been born, and whose birth had therefore been in vain; or (b), with even more venom, that Jonathan's actions would lead men to conclude that he had no royal blood in his veins after all – that is, if the truth were told, he was an illegitimate child and that his mother was therefore a loose and immoral woman. In other words, 'Your conduct argues persuasively that I am not your true father – if I was, you wouldn't behave this way, loving a man I hate - and that for your own sake'.

**Verse 31.** *'As long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground<sup>21</sup>, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom'*. Saul felt he had to spell it out to Jonathan. No doubt, with bulging veins and red face, he roared at his dense and stupid son the only three words in the whole world which should have mattered to Jonathan - 'You' and 'your kingdom!' Certainly, although Saul left it unsaid, the only three words which mattered to Saul in the whole world were 'me' and 'my kingdom'. Which raises for me the obvious – but red hot – question, 'And what matters most to me?' Is it a case of 'me' and 'my kingdom', or of 'God' and 'His kingdom'?<sup>22</sup> Which do I seek first?

Saul spoke entirely in terms of the threat which David posed to Jonathan and his kingdom - which was the implication of what Samuel had said to Saul in 13.14, 'thy kingdom shall not continue'. But Saul knew full well, from Samuel's words in 15.28, that David also posed a very serious threat to him *personally*, 'The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou'. But though it is this which *also* drove him, of this he said nothing – leaving the impression that his only concern was for Jonathan his son – a son who, within minutes, he was prepared to pin to the wall!

But although Jonathan's father says less than he means, he says enough. Saul is unmasked! Now Jonathan understands – at least in part – Saul's reason for wanting David dead. Saul sees David as the menace to his dynasty.

*'Now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die'*. The reader can hear clear echoes from Saul words in chapter 19, when, believing David to be sick, he expressed his willingness to kill David personally; 'Saul *sent* (the same word as here) messengers to take ('to *fetch*', the same word as in 20.31) David ... Saul sent the messengers again ... saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may *slay* (the same root as 'die' here) him', 19.14-15.

Saul is clearly convinced that Jonathan knows of David's whereabouts – which underscores the wisdom of the elaborate precautions which Jonathan had proposed to keep David's hiding place secret, vv.20-22.

*'He shall surely die'*. Literally, 'a son of death' – a person who deserves to die. That is, to Saul, this 'son of Jesse' is also 'a son of death'. This particular idiom appears only twice elsewhere in the Old Testament. On both occasions the expression is found, as here, in the books of Samuel. On those other two occasions it comes from the lips of David, and follows the same solemn adjuration ('as the Lord liveth'). It is found in the words of David to Abner; 'As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die (literally, 'you are a son of death'<sup>23</sup>)', 26.16; and in his words to Nathan, 'As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die (literally, 'is a son of death')', 2 Sam 12.5. It is this last occurrence, spoken, as here, in the heat of anger, which would haunt David for the rest of his life – for the prophet immediately identified David himself as that 'son of death'; 'Thou art the man!', 2 Sam 12.7. And so, one day the words of Saul would indeed be true – David would be 'a son of death', one worthy to die. But it wasn't true now! Nor is Jonathan slow to challenge Saul about his words, v.32.

**Verse 32.** *'Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?'* If Saul had hoped that his straight speaking and taunts would have aroused envy in Jonathan's heart – instilling there the same poison which had long worked in his own – he was sorely disappointed! For Jonathan responded, not only by taking David's side against his father, but by

confronting Saul with the injustice of what he was attempting to do – and challenging Saul to produce some evidence against David. His question, 'what hath he done?' is a straight verbal echo of David's question to him, which opened the chapter, 'What have I done?', v.1.

**Verse 33.** *'Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him'*. Now Saul is really mad! He grips his spear, always near at hand, and hurls it at Jonathan. 'At him' – at the same man whose future prosperity Saul had claimed, but a few breaths before, was his reason for wanting to kill David. Saul certainly wasn't behaving rationally – but then neither was he throwing accurately. For, fortunately for Jonathan, Saul's aim hasn't improved since his futile attempts to nail David to the wall! In one sense, therefore, we can say, with a sigh of relief, that Jonathan *didn't* get the point! But in another - and in a far more important sense - he most certainly *did!* There was no longer any doubt in Jonathan's mind.

*'Whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David'*. Jonathan was convinced – David was right. Jonathan had heard and seen the evidence for himself – and that when there was no indication of the temporary madness and violence caused by the 'spirit of distress' coming on his father.

**Verse 34.** *'Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger'*. If 'Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan' in v.30, now it is Jonathan's anger which glows hot in v.34. And now Saul has two empty places at his table!

*'And did eat no meat the second day of the month'*. The noble son of Saul rose up to fast - not to raise a rebellion against the king – as later did a less noble son of David, 2 Sam. 15.

*'For he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame'*. Jonathan's great concern wasn't the vile slur and insults which Saul had flung at him and his mother's name, but the public wrong which Saul had done David. What a magnificent character was Jonathan!

## Verses 35-42

### David and Jonathan execute their plans - the signal given

**Verse 35.** *'Little lad'*. The boy who Jonathan took with him to retrieve his arrows is specifically described as 'little'. This may indicate that, on this particular occasion, Jonathan took with him a younger lad than usual so that he wouldn't ask any embarrassing questions about the orders he was given, or be capable of spotting anything odd about whatever happened.

**Verse 36-38.** Jonathan told the boy to find the 'arrows' which he fired, one of which he deliberately shot beyond him, v.36. When the lad reached (or neared) the spot where this arrow had landed, Jonathan called him back with the pre-arranged signal-shout, 'Is not the arrow beyond thee?', v.37. (Jonathan had originally thought of shooting several arrows beyond the lad, v.22, but it seems that, since Jonathan's aim was accurate, in the event he needed to shoot only one 'arrow' beyond him.)

**Verse 39.** *'The lad knew not anything'*. Here is one of those instances in scripture where it is essential that a character who plays a key – although seemingly unimportant – role doesn't know what is really going on. A more tragic example is that of a certain noble Gittite warrior who carried a sealed letter from David to the commander of David's forces! (See 2 Sam. 11.14-17.)

**Verse 40.** Although the original plan had been for David to leave the scene immediately if Jonathan had told the young lad that the arrows were beyond him, v.22, evidently Jonathan could see that the coast was clear and felt that it was safe to send the lad on his way and speak with David face to face once more.

*'His artillery (weapons)'*. That is, his bow and quiver.

**Verse 41.** Though both Jonathan and David were aware of God's purpose that David should be the future king, David showed proper respect to Jonathan as being the present king's son – first prostrating himself on the ground and then rising to bow three times; compare the similar actions of Abigail before David, 25.23.

*'David exceeded'*. That is, though they both wept, David wept the most.

**Verse 42.** Jonathan may well have felt 'in a straight betwixt two'. His was the unhappy position of feeling the tug of two competing loyalties – that of his covenant-brother and that of his father and king. He chose to submit to the *domestic* authority of his *father* and to the *civil* authority of his *king*. I guess that we could hardly argue that it is wrong to 'honour' one's father, Exod. 20.12; Matt. 15.4; Eph. 6.3, or to 'honour' the king, 1 Pet. 2.17. But was Jonathan wrong to do this in the circumstances? Scripture is silent on the matter. It simply notes that he 'went into the city'. And so will I.

*'David arose and departed'*. He knew that he was now legally an outlaw, a fugitive hunted by the king. And so the two friends parted.<sup>24</sup>

For Jonathan's part, he believed that one day David would be king and that, when David became king, he (Jonathan) would be next to him, 23.17. But Jonathan was a realist and must have known that there were no guarantees – why, for all he knew, he might even fall to his own father's spear, v.33!<sup>25</sup> And so, as far as Jonathan was aware, he might never see David again. In fact, apart from one other brief meeting, 23.16-18, this was the last time they were together.

For David's part, he headed off into the unknown – with no clear plans beyond obtaining some supplies from the priests at Nob and then seeking refuge – for a time at least – outside of Saul's territory.

Did David wonder why, if it was God's *plan* and *purpose* for him to be king, there were no shortcuts? I wonder how he would have felt if he could have seen something of the hardships and trials – the fears and tears – of the coming years?

But, whether David appreciated it or not, he was not yet ready to be given the rule over the Lord's people. His character had yet to be formed. The gold of his faith had yet to be refined. And so, between him and his being made king by all Israel and Judah, lay many hard times. And it is no different today for the 'heirs of the kingdom',



James 2.5, who are one day to 'reign for ever and ever', Rev. 22.5.<sup>26</sup> Have we the right to expect a smooth and easy road – any more than David did?

'Jonathan said to David, Go in peace'. Jonathan had earlier promised David, that, if it pleased his father to do David 'evil', then he (Jonathan) would send David away, that he might 'go in peace', v.13. And Jonathan was a man of his word. Given the circumstances in which they were spoken, Jonathan's words might seem somewhat incongruous - almost laughable. But they weren't. Jonathan was right – David could 'go in peace...'. And so can we! Whatever our outward circumstances. The Lord Jesus told His disciples, '*In me* ye ... have peace; *in the world* ye ... have tribulation', John 16.33 (emphasis as in the Greek). We don't have peace because everything around is peaceful. We have peace because a Greater than Jonathan has pledged us His unfailing friendship.

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## End-notes

<sup>1</sup> See 18.1-4; 19.1-7; 23.16-18.

<sup>2</sup> Compare 23.17.

<sup>3</sup> Compare Abimelech's plea in Gen 20.9 and Obadiah's question in 1 Kings 18.9.

<sup>4</sup> See TWOT, Vol.1, page 160.

<sup>5</sup> But the king's son was wrong. In this case at least, although Jonathan's father undoubtedly loved him, his father was 'doing' something which he did not - and would not - 'show' him. But I have read of another Son ... ! The Lord Jesus told the Jews, 'The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth', John 5.20! The Lord Jesus had just healed the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda (or 'Bethzatha') on a sabbath day, John 5.1-9. When persecuted by the Jews for doing this and for saying that God was His own Father, vv. 16-18, He had responded (in full), 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him ('is constantly showing him') all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father', vv.19-23.

At all times, the Father was showing the Son everything He was doing by way of working out His plan of salvation - and the performing of miracles (such as the healing of the infirm man) was an integral part of that plan. The Father had absolutely no secrets from the Son. The Father loved the Son so much that He was determined that all men should honour the Son even as they honoured Him. To this end, (a) there was no prerogative which He did not share with Him - including the raising and quickening of the dead (both spiritually in the present and physically in the future; being the prerogative of God alone, 2 Kings 5.7), and (b) He has committed all judgement to the Son. Nothing which the Son did was therefore done independently of the Father. And, Jesus was saying, the Son's activities ('works') were not only a reflection of the Father's activities, but they were a *complete* reflection of them - because the Father always showed the Son *all* that He was doing.

When Jonathan claimed that his father would do nothing without showing him, Jonathan was in error. But when Jesus claimed that His Father would do nothing without showing Him, Jesus spoke the truth. (Hence His 'verily, verily'). Jonathan's father kept secret from him his purpose to take life - that of David. Jesus' Father had no secrets from Him - including that of the giving of life to the dead!

<sup>6</sup> Three very important principles come out of 1 Samuel 14 - each of which relate to man-made rules. See the man-made rule about eating in v. 24 - which no doubt seemed very useful and sensible to Saul at the time. (i) Non-biblical constraints and shackles can easily lead to an extreme - and totally non-biblical - reaction later, vv.32-33; Lev. 17.12-14. (ii) When reacting against man-made rules, great care must be taken to distinguish the man-made rule from what scripture says - don't throw out the baby with the bathwater! Israel ate blood and thereby infringed God's law. (iii) The keeping of man-made rules very easily becomes more important than the good of people; see Saul's willingness to have his own son put to death to comply with his non-biblical oath, vv. 39, 44!

<sup>7</sup> See Acts 14. 15; James 5.17.

<sup>8</sup> See too the response of the husband of the woman from Shunem; 'she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again. And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him to day? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath', 2 Kings 4.22-23.

<sup>9</sup> See Jer.7.12, 14; 26.6, 9, together with 'he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; and delivered his strength (a reference to the ark; compare Psa. 96.6) into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand', Psa. 78.60-61.

<sup>10</sup> See Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr., eds., *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Nelson, 1980) - included in 'Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament Words', Nelson, 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Baasha (1 Kings 15.27-30), Zimri (1 Kings 16.8-13), Jehu (2 Kings 10.1-11) and Athaliah, 2 Kings 11.1). Life expectancy was short for members of any previous regime!

<sup>12</sup> Compare the case of Abimelech and Phichol, who requested something similar of Abraham concerning their descendants in recognition that God was with him, 'Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: but according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me', Gen. 21.22-23. (Note the 'with thee' of Gen. 21.22 and of 1 Sam. 20.13.)

<sup>13</sup> The word 'kindness' in each case refers to God's '*hesed*'; see v.8.

<sup>14</sup> 'David said to Abner ... wherefore then hast thou not kept thy lord the king? ... As the Lord liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed', 1 Sam. 26.15-16.

<sup>15</sup> We read of two ambitious disciples in the New Testament who coveted the right and left hand seats in our Lord's manifested kingdom which they thought he was about to establish in Jerusalem. When Jesus asked James and John, 'What would ye that I should do for you?', they 'said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory', Mark 10.36-37. Later, they were doubtless very glad that the Lord had declined their request to have places on His right hand and on His left hand at Jerusalem. John at least was

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there to witness that 'with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors', Mark 15.27-28.

<sup>16</sup> Key chapters on causes of uncleanness are Lev. 5, 11, 12 and 15. See for example, 'if a soul touch any unclean thing, whether it be a carcase of an unclean beast, or a carcase of unclean cattle, or the carcase of unclean creeping things, and if it be hidden from him; he also shall be unclean, and guilty', Lev. 5.2; cf. 11.24-28,31, 39-40,43; 'if a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean', Lev. 12.2; cf. v.5; 'when any man hath a running issue out of his flesh, because of his issue he is unclean', Lev. 15.2; 'he that sitteth on any thing whereon he sat that hath the issue shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even ... he that toucheth the flesh of him that hath the issue shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even ... if he that hath the issue spit upon him that is clean; then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even', Lev. 15.6-8; cf. v.10-11; 'if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall wash all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the even', Lev. 15.16 and so on. See also, 'He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean', Num. 19.11.

<sup>17</sup> Lev. 11.24,25,27,28,31,39,40; 14.46; 15.5,7,8,10,16,17,18,19,21,22,23,27; 17.15; 22.6; Num. 19.7,8,10,22. There were occasions, however, where ceremonial defilement continued for seven days; see, for example, Lev. 12.2; 15.19,24; Num. 19.11,14,16.

<sup>18</sup> '*Lahem*' is 'bread' or 'food in general'.

<sup>19</sup> There is such a thing as 'righteous anger'; see, for example, 'when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand', Mark 3.5.

<sup>20</sup> The expression used by Saul is literally, 'you son of perverse rebellion'. That is, although the word translated 'perverse' is feminine, for there is no Hebrew word of 'woman'. Some therefore, having regard to the fact that in Hebrew 'son' is often used to express a person's qualities, have taken the expression to mean 'you perverted rebel' – with no reference to a mother. See, for example, 'The idiomatic expression ... delineated Saul's estimation of Jonathan's (and not his mother's) character', NIDOTTE, Vol.2, page 1099. Most translations (e.g. RV, RSV, JND, NRSV, ESV, NASB and NIV), follow the AV lead and supply the word 'woman'. (The New Jerusalem Bible, attempting to capture something of the vulgarity of the expression, renders it, 'You son of a rebellious slut!')

<sup>21</sup> Compare, 'everyone from *the face of the earth*', v.15.

<sup>22</sup> See Matt. 6. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Pedantically, the expression in 1 Sam. 26.16 is 'you are sons of death', but, spoken as it is of Abner alone, the meaning is clearly 'son of death'.

<sup>24</sup> Note the many 'parting' scenes in the latter section of 1 Samuel – 15.34; 20.42, 24.22; 26.25; 29.11. (Compare John 7.53-8.1.)

<sup>25</sup> Compare Saul's declared suspicion that Jonathan had actually 'stirred up' David against him, 22.8. There was no knowing with Saul what he might do.

<sup>26</sup> Compare 'he shall reign for ever and ever', Rev. 11.15. And we shall reign with Him!