



David's Friend for Life: Blood not Thicker than Water (1 Sam 20)

Notes: Week Eleven

1 Samuel 20 (HCSB)

Jonathan Protects David

²⁰ David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came to Jonathan and asked, “What have I done? What did I do wrong? How have I sinned against your father so that he wants to take my life?”

² Jonathan said to him, “No, you won’t die. Listen, my father doesn’t do anything, great or small, without telling me.^[a] So why would he hide this matter from me? This can’t be true.”

³ But David said, “Your father certainly knows that you have come to look favorably on me. He has said, ‘Jonathan must not know of this, or else he will be grieved.’” David also swore, “As surely as the LORD lives and as you yourself live, there is but a step between me and death.”

⁴ Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you say, I will do for you.”

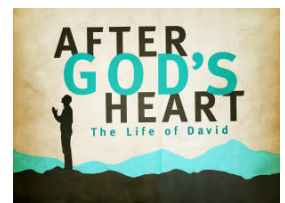
⁵ So David told him, “Look, tomorrow is the New Moon, and I’m supposed to sit down and eat with the king. Instead, let me go, and I’ll hide in the field until the third night. ⁶ If your father misses me at all, say, ‘David urgently requested my permission to quickly go to his town Bethlehem for an annual sacrifice there involving the whole clan.’ ⁷ If he says, ‘Good,’ then your servant is safe, but if he becomes angry, you will know he has evil intentions. ⁸ Deal faithfully with your servant, for you have brought me into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I have done anything wrong, then kill me yourself; why take me to your father?”

⁹ “No!” Jonathan responded. “If I ever find out my father has evil intentions against you, wouldn’t I tell you about it?”

¹⁰ So David asked Jonathan, “Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?”

¹¹ He answered David, “Come on, let’s go out to the field.” So both of them went out to the field. ¹² “By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will sound out my father by this time tomorrow or the next day. If I find out that he is favorable toward you, will I not send for you and tell you?^[b] ¹³ If my father intends to bring evil on you, may God punish Jonathan and do so severely if I do not tell you^[c] and send you away so you may go in peace. May the LORD be with you, just as He was with my father. ¹⁴ If I continue to live, treat me with the LORD’s faithful love, but if I die, ¹⁵ don’t ever withdraw your faithful love from my household—not even when the LORD cuts off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.” ¹⁶ Then Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD hold David’s enemies accountable.”^[d] ¹⁷ Jonathan once again swore to David^[e] in his love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said to him, “Tomorrow is the New Moon; you’ll be missed because your seat will be empty. ¹⁹ The following day hurry down and go to the place where you hid on the day this incident began and stay beside the rock Ezel. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows beside it as if I’m aiming at a target. ²¹ Then I will send the young man and say, ‘Go and find the arrows!’ Now, if I expressly say to the young man, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you—get them,’ then come, because as the LORD lives, it is safe for you and there is no problem. ²² But if I say this to the youth: ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you!’ then go, for the LORD is sending you away. ²³ As for the matter you and I have spoken about, the LORD will be a witness^[f] between you and me forever.” ²⁴ So David hid in the field.



At the New Moon, the king sat down to eat the meal. ²⁵ He sat at his usual place on the seat by the wall. Jonathan sat facing him^[g] and Abner took his place beside Saul, but David's place was empty. ²⁶ Saul did not say anything that day because he thought, "Something unexpected has happened; he must be ceremonially unclean—yes, that's it, he is unclean."

²⁷ However, the day after the New Moon, the second day, David's place was still empty, and Saul asked his son Jonathan, "Why didn't Jesse's son come to the meal either yesterday or today?"

²⁸ Jonathan answered, "David asked for my permission to go to Bethlehem."²⁹ He said, 'Please let me go because our clan is holding a sacrifice in the town, and my brother has told me to be there. So now, if you are pleased with me, let me go so I can see my brothers.' That's why he didn't come to the king's table."

³⁰ Then Saul became angry with Jonathan and shouted, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you are siding with Jesse's son to your own shame and to the disgrace of your mother?"^[h] ³¹ Every day Jesse's son lives on earth you and your kingship are not secure. Now send for him and bring him to me—he deserves to die."

³² Jonathan answered his father back: "Why is he to be killed? What has he done?"

³³ Then Saul threw his spear at Jonathan to kill him, so he knew that his father was determined to kill David. ³⁴ He got up from the table in fierce anger and did not eat any food that second day of the New Moon, for he was grieved because of his father's shameful behavior toward David.

³⁵ In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for the appointed meeting with David. A small young man was with him. ³⁶ He said to the young man, "Run and find the arrows I'm shooting." As the young man ran, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him. ³⁷ He came to the location of the arrow that Jonathan had shot, but Jonathan called to him and said, "The arrow is beyond you, isn't it?"³⁸ Then Jonathan called to him, "Hurry up and don't stop!" Jonathan's young man picked up the arrow and returned to his master. ³⁹ He did not know anything; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement. ⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his equipment to the young man who was with him and said, "Go, take it back to the city."

⁴¹ When the young man had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone Ezel, fell with his face to the ground, and bowed three times. Then he and Jonathan kissed each other and wept with each other, though David wept more.

⁴² Jonathan then said to David, "Go in the assurance the two of us pledged in the name of the LORD when we said: The LORD will be a witness between you and me and between my offspring and your offspring forever."^[i] Then David left, and Jonathan went into the city.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Samuel 20:2](#) Lit *without uncovering my ear*
- b. [1 Samuel 20:12](#) Lit *and uncover your ear*
- c. [1 Samuel 20:13](#) Lit *will uncover your ears*
- d. [1 Samuel 20:16](#) Lit *LORD require it from the hand of David's enemies*
- e. [1 Samuel 20:17](#) LXX; MT reads *Jonathan once again made David swear*
- f. [1 Samuel 20:23](#) LXX; MT omits *a witness*
- g. [1 Samuel 20:25](#) Text emended; MT reads *Jonathan got up*
- h. [1 Samuel 20:30](#) Lit *your mother's genitals*
- i. [1 Samuel 20:42](#) The last sentence of v. 42 is 1Sm 21:1 in Hb.

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

1 Samuel 20

20:1 David came to Jonathan, probably at a secret meeting place because Saul's men would have been watching for David around Gibeah.

20:2 Jonathan reassured David that as eldest son and army commander he knew everything, great or small, that his father planned. He did not believe Saul would hide this matter or any other matter from him.

20:3 David, however, had keener insight into the situation. Saul knew about Jonathan's and David's covenant and friendship. David suspected the king did not want Jonathan to be grieved by the struggle between him and David, though in the end Jonathan would be ([v. 34](#)). Yet, David knew he was potentially close to death if Saul could capture him.

20:5 The New Moon refers to a monthly festival ([Num 28:11-15](#)) commemorated by the blowing of trumpets ([Num 10:10](#)). David knew Saul would expect his presence at the meal, but he did not want to risk his life by coming to the palace until he knew Saul's intentions.

20:6 Jonathan would tell his father why David was not there if Saul asked about David's absence. The annual sacrifice to which Jonathan referred could have been some kind of offering the whole clan had determined to offer.

20:7 David trusted that God could reveal Saul's heart through the king's response to Jonathan's words.

20:8 David reminded Jonathan of the covenant they had made before the LORD. David's passionate request If I have done anything wrong, then kill me yourself revealed the depth of his desire for integrity.

20:9 The text emphasizes Jonathan's loyalty to his friend David despite the fact that with David dead, Jonathan would most likely succeed Saul as king.

20:11 The two men probably went out to the field so no one would overhear their plan.

20:12-13 Jonathan swore an oath and invited God's punishment on himself if he did not report to David everything Saul intended to do. Jonathan's words of blessing, May the LORD be with you, affirm what the text has revealed—that God was with David ([16:13,18](#); [18:12,28](#)). Jonathan's words as He was with my father suggest he knew the Lord's Spirit had departed from Saul ([16:14](#)).

20:15 Jonathan asked David never to withdraw his faithful love from his house. Many new kings ordered the death of the former king's family to eliminate contenders for the throne. The Lord might judge every one of David's enemies, but David had nothing to fear from Jonathan. After Jonathan's death, David honored Jonathan's request ([2Sam 9](#)).

20:16 Jonathan now established a covenant with the house of David, not with David alone. God Himself would hold David's enemies accountable for their actions against His chosen servant.

20:17 On he loved him as he loved himself, see note at [18:1](#).

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), *WORDsearch* CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 20".

[20:19](#) The Hebrew word translated rock also means "stone," but Ezel, though unknown outside this verse, was large enough to be known and to have its own name.

[20:21-22](#) Jonathan proposed code language to alert David about Saul's intentions. Calling the young man back toward Jonathan to retrieve the three arrows meant that all was safe. Telling him to seek the arrows beyond him meant David should flee at once.

[20:23](#) Jonathan invoked the Lord's oversight on his and David's agreement and their relationship.

[20:25](#) Saul's seat by the wall offered greater security since no one could approach him from behind.

[20:26](#) Saul's assumption that David was ceremonially unclean rested on his knowledge of David's faith, which would have prohibited him from partaking of the meal ([Lv 7:20-21](#)).

[20:27](#) Saul became suspicious on the second day, when uncleanness would not have required David's absence.

[20:28-29](#) Jonathan explained David's absence along the basic lines the two of them had agreed on ([v. 6](#)).

[20:30](#) Saul's words, son of a perverse and rebellious woman, were an insult to Jonathan by defaming the character of his mother Ahinoam ([14:50](#)).

[20:31](#) Saul's reference to your kingship reveals that he intended for Jonathan to succeed him, despite Samuel's pronouncement against his house ([13:13-14](#)). Send for him and bring him to me indicated Saul believed Jonathan knew David's whereabouts.

[20:32](#) Jonathan cared about justice, not about the personal gain his father suggested might be in store for him. He would show loyalty to David, no matter what.

[20:33](#) Saul threw his spear at Jonathan because he had sided with the king's enemy.

[20:34](#) Jonathan was angry and sad over what had happened. It was his father's shameful behavior toward David that pained Jonathan more than having to dodge his father's spear.

[20:37-38](#) Jonathan's words, The arrow is beyond you, signaled trouble for David ([v. 22](#)). He knew that David needed to flee as quickly as possible.

[20:40](#) Though the coded signal had been sent and Jonathan could have departed, perhaps he could not bear to leave without talking with David first, so he sent the young man away. The yearning for a personal farewell led them to abandon the caution afforded them by their system of signals.

[20:41](#) David's position shows the stone Ezel probably lay south of Gibeah, so that when Jonathan came out with his servant, they would not immediately see him. David bowed three times as a sign of his respect and admiration for Jonathan, and they kissed each other—a common sign of greeting and farewell among close friends in that culture. They wept because both sensed they might not see each other again.

[20:42](#) Go in the assurance is literally "Go in peace." Jonathan could say this to David because of what they pledged in the name of the Lord—on His authority and with Him as a witness. The two of them would always remain friends, and they would do all they could to ensure their friendship extended to their offspring. David then left, heading southward ([21:1](#)), while Jonathan went into the city, where soon he would have to face his father again.

English Standard Version - *Study Bible*²

1 Samuel 20

20:1 It seems that before Saul had arrived in Naioth, David had come there. After that David **fled from Naioth** and went back to Gibeah, and things settled down. Then he **came... before Jonathan**. Hence, it could be interpreted: “Now David had fled from Naioth in Ramah. He came before Jonathan and said....”

20:3 David vowed again. Perhaps a reference to [v. 1](#), since the triplet of rhetorical questions in [v. 1](#) (“What... ? What... ? What... ?”) may resemble an oath. Another possibility is that David’s earlier oath is unrecorded.

20:5 The **new moon** was the day of the new appearance of the crescent moon in the western sky at sunset, marking the beginning of the month in the lunar calendar. It was one of the principal festivals (see [Num. 10:10](#); [1 Chron. 23:31](#); [Isa. 1:14](#); [Ezek. 46:3](#); etc.). It seems that the king, as head of the clan, presided over his household’s celebration of the festival. It was often impossible to predict the exact day when the new moon would become visible, so it may be that the feast was held on the first possible day, and if the moon did not appear on that day, the feast was held on the second day as well ([1 Sam. 20:27](#)). Hence, David proposed meeting on the “third day.”

20:13 The LORD do so to Jonathan and more also is an oath formula (see note on [3:17](#)). **as he has been with my father.** The past tense may show that Jonathan recognizes that the Lord has left Saul.

20:15 my house. I.e., “my offspring”; see [v. 42](#) and [2 Samuel 9](#), where David fulfills his “kindness” to Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth.

20:22 if I say to the youth, “Look, the arrows are beyond you.” To any other observer, Jonathan would appear to be shouting to the young man who had run to retrieve the arrows. But David, in hiding, would also hear the words and know they had another meaning, a warning to flee from Saul.

20:26 Because the feast involved sacrifices, one had to be **clean** in order to participate.

20:29 My brother presumably refers to David’s eldest brother, Eliab ([17:28](#)). It reflects a system of family leadership passing to the eldest son; his father Jesse had already retired (see [17:12](#); cf. Laban’s role in [Gen. 24:50](#)).

20:30 to the shame of your mother’s nakedness. The emphasis is on the disgrace or shame that Saul thinks Jonathan has brought to himself and his family.

20:31 neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. This was true, but Jonathan had already come to terms with it ([vv. 14-15](#)). Saul took for granted that kingship was hereditary, though there was no divine justification for his doing so.

20:37-38 Is not the arrow beyond you? See note on [v. 22](#). **Hurry! Be quick!** Jonathan seeks to indicate to David the urgency of his warning.

20:40-41 as soon as the boy had gone. Jonathan had presumably arranged the signal of the arrow ([vv. 20-22](#)) so that David would not be seen, but now he seems to decide that it was safe enough to risk the farewell meeting he longed to have.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 20".

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

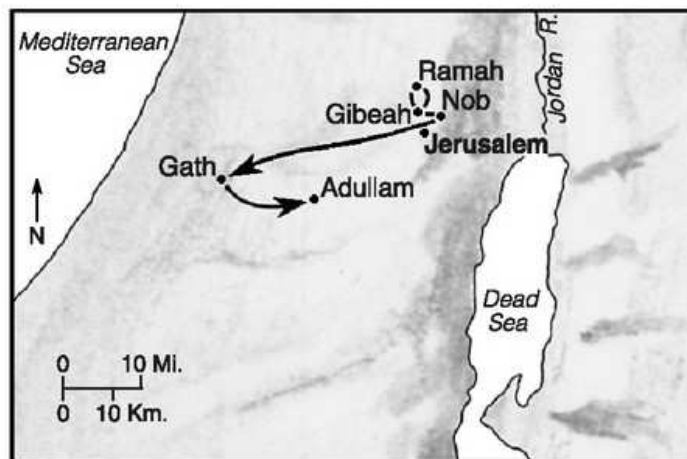
1 Samuel 20

20:5 At the beginning of each month, the Israelites gathered to celebrate the new moon festival. While this was mainly a time to be enjoyed, it was also a way to dedicate the next month to God. Other nations had celebrations during the full moon and worshiped the moon itself. The Israelites, however, celebrated their festival at the time of the new moon, when the moon was not visible in the sky. This was an added precaution against false worship. Nothing in the creation is to be worshiped—only the Creator.

20:15 Jonathan asked David to keep a promise to treat his children kindly in the future. Years later David took great pains to fulfill this promise: He invited Jonathan's son Mephibosheth into his palace to live ([2 Samuel 9](#)).

20:26 Because the new moon festival involved making a sacrifice to God ([Numbers 28:11-15](#)), those attending the festival had to be ceremonially clean according to God's laws ([Exodus 19:10](#); [Leviticus 15](#); [Numbers 19:11-22](#); also see the note on [Joshua 3:5](#)). This cleansing involved washing the body and clothes before approaching God to offer a sacrifice. The outward cleansing was a symbol of the inward desire for a purified heart and right relationship with God. Today our hearts are purified by faith in God through the death of Jesus Christ on our behalf ([Hebrews 10:10, 22](#)) and by reading and heeding God's Word ([John 17:17](#)).

20:31, 32 Saul was still trying to secure his throne for future generations even though he had already been told his dynasty would end with him ([13:13, 14](#)). Even worse, he was trying to do this by sinful human means because he knew he would get no help from God. Jonathan could have made a move to become the next king by killing his rival, but he bypassed this opportunity because of his love for both God and David ([23:16-18](#)).



David's Escape

David learned of Saul's plans to kill him and fled to Samuel at Ramah. Returning to Gibeah to say good-bye to Jonathan, he then escaped to Nob, where he received food and a sword from the priest. He then fled to Gath in Philistine territory. When the Philistines became suspicious, he escaped to the cave of Adullam, where many men joined him.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 444-445.

Jonathan

Loyalty is one of life's most costly qualities; it is the most selfless part of love. To be loyal, you cannot live only for yourself. Loyal people not only stand by their commitments; they are willing to suffer for them. Jonathan is a shining example of loyalty. Sometimes he was forced to deal with conflicting loyalties: to his father, Saul, and to his friend David. His solution to that conflict teaches us both how to be loyal and what must guide loyalty. In Jonathan, truth always guided loyalty.

Jonathan realized that the source of truth was God, who demanded his ultimate loyalty. It was his relationship with God that gave Jonathan the ability to deal effectively with the complicated situations in his life. He was loyal to Saul because Saul was his father and the king. He was loyal to David because David was his friend. His loyalty to God guided him through the conflicting demands of his human relationships.

The conflicting demands of our relationships challenge us as well. If we attempt to settle these conflicts only at the human level, we will be constantly dealing with a sense of betrayal. But if we communicate to our friends that our ultimate loyalty is to God and his truth, many of our choices will be much clearer. The truth in his Word, the Bible, will bring light to our decisions. Do those closest to you know who has your greatest loyalty?

Strengths and accomplishments

- Brave, loyal, and a natural leader
- The closest friend David ever had
- Did not put his personal well-being ahead of those he loved
- Depended on God

Lessons from his life

- Loyalty is one of the strongest parts of courage
- An allegiance to God puts all other relationships in perspective
- Great friendships are costly

Vital statistics

- Occupation: Military leader
- Relatives: Father: Saul. Mother: Ahinoam. Brothers: Malkishua, Abinadab, Ishbosheth (and possibly Ishvi). Sisters: Merab, Michal. Son: Mephibosheth.

Key verse

"How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan! Oh, how much I loved you And your love for me was deep, deeper than the love of women!" ([2 Samuel 1:26](#)).

His story is told in [1 Samuel 13-31](#). He is also mentioned in [2 Samuel 9](#).

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

A Principle to Live By:

True Friendship

from [1 Samuel 17:48—18:4](#)

We are to honor one another, be devoted to one another, and even be willing to lay down our lives for one another.

Saul’s son Jonathan was greatly impressed with David’s exploits, leading to one of the greatest friendships in biblical history. As crown prince he was probably in on the conversation between his father and David following the victory over Goliath, and he admired David’s character ([17:57-58](#)).

Because of his respect and love for David, Jonathan “made a covenant” ([18:3](#)) with him. They vowed to be loyal to each other the rest of their lives. Jonathan sealed his contract with what some still consider the most significant thing one human being can bestow on another. Prince Jonathan clothed David with his own royal garments.

This was definitely not a homosexual union as some suggest. If it were, their relationship would clash with the law of God, which states, “You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman; it is detestable” ([Lv 18:22](#)). The apostle Paul extended this prohibition into the New Testament era, identifying homosexual relationships as “degrading passions” ([Rm 1:26-27](#)).

The deep friendship between David and Jonathan constitutes an Old Testament picture of a New Testament reality—the relationships God intended for believers within the church, the family of God. Consider the following parallels:

| David and Jonathan’s Relationship: | Relationships within the Church: |
|---|--|
| Jonathan honored David above himself (1Sm 18:4). | <i>Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor (Rm 12:10).</i> |
| Jonathan served as a faithful intercessor. He was devoted to David and did everything he could to help David build a relationship with Saul (1Sm 19:1-3). | <i>But serve one another through love (Gl 5:13b).</i> |
| Jonathan continued to be faithful to David no matter what the cost to him personally. In fact, his life was in jeopardy when he tried to defend David’s absence (1Sm 20:24-34). | <i>This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers (1Jn 3:16).</i> |

Reflection and Response

What specific steps can each one of us take to “show family affection to one another with brotherly love” and to “outdo one another in showing honor” ([Rm 12:10](#))?

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 373.