

107—TRUE FRIENDS

(1 Samuel 20)

From the first time Saul's son Jonathan met David, he was drawn to him and loved him as he loved his own soul. The two became fast friends, and Jonathan took his own clothes, even to his robe and his sword, and put them on David.

But, though the bond between Jonathan and David was strong, things did not go well between Saul and David. When David became popular with the people, Saul grew jealous and sought to destroy him. On several occasions, David had to flee from Saul to save his life. Jonathan and David's wife Michal seemed to be the only members of Saul's household who were not seeking to destroy David. Jonathan pleaded David's cause to his father on several occasions, and though Jonathan was successful in his pleadings, any good feelings that Saul had toward David were always short-lived.

When David left the prophet Samuel at Naioth, he returned to Gibeah and sought out his friend Jonathan. He thought Jonathan might know why Saul was trying to kill him. "What have I done," he asked Jonathan, "and what is my sin against your father that he seeks my life?"

Jonathan was surprised at David's question, for he was not aware of the extent of his father's wrath. "My father no longer seeks your life," replied Jonathan. "For he does nothing without telling me first. What you say cannot be true, for surely he would not hide such a thing from me."

"Perhaps because your father knows of your love for me, he would hide this matter from you," said David. "But as Jehovah lives, and as you live, there is but a step between me and death."

Jonathan was stunned and he wanted to help. "Whatever you ask of me," he vowed to his friend David, "I will do it." And the two men made a covenant of friendship before Jehovah.

The following day was the new moon, and though David was expected to dine with King Saul for three days,²⁸ he dared not show his face. "I will hide in the field until the third day," he told Jonathan. "If your father misses me, tell him that I asked your leave to go to Bethlehem for a family sacrifice. If he approves, then

²⁸ Israel offered special sacrifices in connection with the new moon or the first day of each lunar month. It was, like the Sabbath, treated as a day of rest. It was also the occasion of state banquets. By Saul's time, these observances had expanded to three days. It was no doubt such banquets in the king's household that David was expected to attend.

I will have peace. But if he is angry and is determined to do me harm, you must let me know, for we have covenanted before Jehovah."

David and Jonathan walked together in the field as Jonathan proposed a plan. "Come on the third day and hide yourself at the stone called Ezel," he said. "I will come with a lad and shoot three arrows, sending the lad to find them. If I tell him that the arrows are on this side of him, then my father will do you no harm and you may come out of hiding. However, if I tell the lad that the arrows are yet beyond him, you will know that my father seeks your life and that you must leave. But, whatever happens, David, Jehovah will be between us forever." And the two men swore again an oath of peace and friendship because of the great love they bore for each other.

When Saul came to eat on the new moon, he said nothing about David's absence. On the second day, however, he asked Jonathan, "Why did the son of Jesse not come to meat either yesterday or today?"

Jonathan gave the answer that David had told him. "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem for a family sacrifice," said Jonathan, "and he is unable to come to the king's table."

Saul became very angry at Jonathan's answer and shouted at him. "You son of the perverse rebellious woman," he roared. "Why have you chosen the son of Jesse before me? Can you not see that your choice is to your own harm? As long as David lives, your kingdom can never be established. Send now and bring him to me, for he must surely die! If you do not destroy David for your own sake, you should do it for the sake of the mother who bore you in nakedness."

"Why must David be slain?" asked Jonathan, trying to reason with his father. "What wrong has he done?" No man was a truer friend than Jonathan was to David. Unlike his father, Jonathan was not jealous of David, even though David would someday sit on the throne of Israel instead of him.

When Saul became so furious that he hurled a javelin at Jonathan, Jonathan could see the strength of his father's resolve. He left the table in anger, grieving for his dear friend who had been treated so shamefully by the king.

The next day, Jonathan went to the field at the appointed time, taking a small lad with him. "Run and find the arrows that I shoot," he said to the lad. And, as the lad ran, Jonathan shot three arrows over him and called, "The arrows are yet beyond you!"

When the lad had gathered the arrows, he returned—unaware of Jonathan's agreement with David. Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and sent him back to the city. When the lad was gone, David arose from his hiding place and fell on his face

to the ground. Then he and Jonathan fell upon each other, weeping together till they could weep no more.

“Go in peace,” said Jonathan to David. “Your life is in grave danger here! But remember that we have sworn in the name of Jehovah that he will be between you and me and between your seed and my seed forever.” Then David departed—once more fleeing for his life.