

I Samuel

Lesson 34 - Chapter 20 and 21

As we concluded our lesson in 1st Samuel chapter 20 last week, we were as an audience to Jonathan and David establishing a new covenant between them. The covenant I speak of begins with the 12th verse and it continues to be elaborated upon until verse 23.

Verse 12 begins, “*Y'honatan said to David, "ADONAI, the God of Isra'el [is witness]:* This is a familiar vow formula that accompanies a covenant in the Bible. A vow is not a covenant nor is a covenant a vow. Rather the covenant is the promise portion of the agreement, and the vow is the seal and validation of the covenant. In ancient times this validation was to invoke the name of your god as the guarantor with the idea that if one of the parties broke the agreement the guarantor-god would take action to punish the violator. Thus what we read here is actually in Hebrew, “*YHWH elohim Yisra'el*” (Yehoveh the God of Israel). Yehoveh is the god of this covenant.

Let's re-read that covenant.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL 20:12-23

It is interesting to note that the terms of the agreement are bracketed with vow language. The opening statement is, *Adonai the God of Israel is witness*; and the closing statement is, *Adonai is between me and you forever*.

What makes this a new covenant, and different from the earlier one, is it expands those who are involved. The first covenant between Jonathan and David was one of loyal friendship between them. This new one takes another step and extends that loyalty to Jonathan's and David's descendants, their future families.

I don't know for certain if it was intended as such, but I believe this new covenant between David and Jonathan is a pattern for the New Covenant that is sealed with the sacrificial blood of Yeshua. I've taught often that modern Christianity has assumed (wrongly) that because we have a so-called New Covenant (or New Testament) that all the earlier covenants (testaments) between God and Noach, Abraham, and Moses were rendered null and void; that the concept is that a New Covenant replaces an Old Covenant. That is far from the Biblical pattern. Rather Holy Scripture demonstrates that each successive covenant is established **not** as a replacement for an earlier one, but rather it addresses other matters entirely, or it pushes the redemption agenda forward another step, or it extends the benefits and scope of the earlier ones.

Just as there was established the initial covenant (of loyal friendship) between David and Jonathan, and now (here in chapter 20) the benefits and scope of the covenant have been extended to their future descendants in this new covenant; so it is that the scope and benefits

of the earlier Biblical covenants that were made between the Lord and the Hebrews were extended to all people of this earth; all tribes, all nations (gentiles). The earlier covenants of God were NOT abolished! Of course, there were caveats that made it clear that no one could enjoy the benefits of any of God's covenants if they weren't squarely in His camp, and that meant adopting the set of heavenly ideals that when taken as a whole the Apostle Paul calls them "spiritual Israel" or "true Israel" of the "Israel of God".

This new covenant agreed to in 1st Samuel chapter 20 further assumes that David will be in authority over Jonathan. So this is where we see that the implied becomes the explicit; the shadow becomes the shape. We (as the audience listening in on their conversation) have had the benefit (for a couple of chapters) of knowing that God has secretly anointed David to be the King of Israel at the same time Saul has been rejected. While others who surrounded David and Saul may have had some suspicion and speculation that something was up, in reality only Samuel and Saul know that God has rejected Saul as king, and interestingly no one knows that David was to be the new king (and that includes David himself). Samuel had indeed anointed David but the Scriptures imply that Samuel didn't know for certain what the anointing signified (and so neither was David told).

So as we see this scene between Jonathan and David unfolding, one must grasp that it was a combination of some kind of mysterious instinct within Jonathan accompanied by some strange and disturbing circumstances concerning his father, which caused him to conclude that David would soon be the King of Israel. This had all kinds of important ramifications for Saul's family, Jonathan personally, and Jonathan's familial offspring. The most immediate concern was that once David becomes king that he wouldn't turn on Jonathan and kill him, as was a rather typical thing for the new dynasty to perpetrate upon the former one in that day and age. But even more this new covenant required David to show **chesed** (fidelity and faithfulness) to Jonathan and to all of his descendants. And the reason that David owed this to Jonathan is because Jonathan willingly forfeited his customary right to succeed his father, Saul, to the throne of Israel; and because Jonathan put his own life on the line to show a greater loyalty to his friend David than to his own father.

Once again in verse 17 we run into the statement that gives the reason that **Y'honatan** was willing to give up so much and turn it over to David: it is because "he loved him as he loved himself". It's important that we see this in the dual context that it is intended. The first sense of this is to express the deep loyalty and connection of their souls through God who is the common point of that connection. Note how this connection between them has been established in much the same way as Believers are interconnected through Yeshua. The second sense is as a political reality. Recall that we have discussed that "to love" can be presented in the Bible in a number of different senses and meanings and one of those is to express a proper and expected king/vassal relationship. That is, it was a common terminology for that era to say that the king loved his vassal and the vassal loved his king.

In ancient Assyrian royal records is found the standard loyalty instructions that the generals of Ashurbanipal (King of the vast Assyria Empire) formally demanded that the kings and potentates of the many nations that he conquered, declare. It said, "ki-i-nap-shat-ku-nu-latar-a-ma-ni"; this translates to, "you must love him (Ashurbanipal) as you love yourselves".

Obviously this was referring to “love” in the sense of acceptance and co-operation on a political, not a personal, level. So Jonathan was vowing not only to continue with loyalty in their personal relationship but now also in the changed political reality whereby David would become king and Jonathan would become subject to the king. This also means that Jonathan no longer saw himself as subject to his father, Saul; for it is impossible for him to serve both Saul and David. This of course is the playing out of a God-principle that will be restated centuries later by Messiah: ^{CJB} **Luke 16:13 No servant can be slave to two masters, for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can't be a slave to both God and money."**

It is all the more so in a very practical sense in this case because it is not possible for Jonathan to serve both the legitimate anointed king and the rejected anti-king of the same nation! And yet, how much do so many of us who claim loyalty to Jesus Christ attempt just such an impossible dichotomy day after day, painful reproof after painful reproof, thoroughly convinced that we can stand with one foot in the world (appeasing Satan) and the other in heaven (appeasing God); that we can simultaneously submit to our fleshly desires and obey our heavenly master in some kind of rational and workable compromise.

Starting in verse 18 the plan for Jonathan to discover his father's true intentions towards David, and for David to be informed of them, is decided upon. David will not go to the **Rosh Chodesh** (the New Moon) festive meal and sit at Saul's table (as was customary), but Jonathan will. While Jonathan is gathering the information David will remain in hiding and then on the 3rd day of the New Moon celebration he is to hide himself behind a mound or a stone in the countryside. Jonathan will come with a bow and arrows, and a young servant boy. Jonathan will shoot some arrows and then send the boy after them. If he instructs the boy that the arrows are near to him, then this is the signal to David that he is in no danger. If Jonathan instructs the boy that the arrows are further in the distance, beyond him, this is the signal that David is in harm's way and needs to flee.

Then the agreement is sealed with Jonathan's vow that, **“Adonai is between you and me forever”**. It is understood that David makes himself part of this vow even though Jonathan is doing most of the talking.

Let's read a little more.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL 10:24 - end

Rosh Chodesh comes a few hours later (at sundown) and it is time for the festive meal at Saul's table. King Saul sits at his usual place of honor at the head of the table, where his back can be against the wall. This was the customary place for royalty to sit because his back was protected from a sneak attack and he could also look out over the room and better observe all that was happening. Abner, Saul's supreme general, sat next to him as both a symbol of his 2nd in command status and as Saul's private guard. Rather surprisingly the king said nothing about David's absence; instead we are told that in his private thoughts Saul merely figured that David must have been in a ritually unclean state (**tamei**) and thus disqualified to eat this “holy” meal.

We once again see how distorted the practice of the Torah Laws had become. While Numbers 28 explains the God-ordained observance of **Rosh Chodesh**, we find that it is the priesthood that must preside (not the king), and that the sacred meal is for the priests and thus must be eaten in the presence of the Lord (meaning at the sanctuary). There is no thought that the New Moon observance meant that there was to be a special dinner meal eaten by the secular authority; and while there is certainly no prohibition against laymen having a celebratory dinner for **Rosh Chodesh** there was equally no authority to declare such a meal to be “holy” unless perhaps the meal contained a portion of meat that had been properly sacrificed to Yehoveh on the altar. Otherwise (as is here with King Saul) this was essentially only some kind of manmade tradition whereby the ritual cleanliness status probably shouldn’t even matter in these circumstances.

Newsflash: that which is NOT prohibited by God does not mean that what is permitted is holy. We don’t have “holy” altars in churches even though we call them that. We don’t have “holy” Christmas or Hanukkah holidays, even though we often deem them as such. We don’t have “holy” wars against our country’s enemies, even though our enemies may have godless evil in mind. If you want to know what is holy, check with God’s Word. In it and it alone we will find what is and is not holy. It is a closed case and we have no authority to add to or subtract from God’s list no matter how good or pious the cause may seem to us. But that didn’t stop Israel’s leaders like Sha’ul, or later Jewish or Christian leadership, from trying to establish holiness upon their own authority.

The 2nd day of **Rosh Chodesh** arrived (again, a manmade observance that was assigned a “holy” aura) and once again David didn’t appear at King Saul’s table. This time Saul asks Jonathan what’s going on; why isn’t David here? And Jonathan quotes the fabrication that he and David had prepared for just this occasion (that David had gone home to Bethlehem for a family feast and that Jonathan had authorized his absence). Well that was just too much for the king; he flew into a rage and cursed at him.

The occasion that Jonathan says David is attending is in Hebrew **Zevah Mishpachah**. This most literally means, “clan voluntary sacrifice” so the idea is that this family celebration indeed is supposed to follow the Levitical Law concerning sacrificing but since the **Zevah** is a voluntary class of sacrifice, it is here being coupled with kind of an annual clan-wide reunion of David’s kin because the bulk of the meat can be used by the participants for a festive meal. It is thought that there was an altar in Bethlehem at one time, as there was in many places throughout the Holy Lands. This arrangement of several altar and/or sanctuary sites was not at all in line with the Torah Laws ordaining only a single central sanctuary, yet it seemed to be an accepted norm at this time by the tribes and clans. No doubt the priests protested this to some degree, but it appears that by now the priests had split into factions and dedicated themselves to serve one sanctuary or cult site or another according to their personal loyalties and preferences.

Saul was so angry at Jonathan for allowing David to go home to his family rather than show a greater loyalty to the king that he started shouting curses at Jonathan. He yells, “**Ben Na’awat hammardut**” at his son, which means, “you son of a rebellious woman”. This is an insult to Jonathan; it is not a reference to his mother. It’s like calling a man “a dirty rat”; there is no

intent of blaming rats for this man's poor character. But Saul does make it a tad more personal when in verse 30 he says, literally, "to the disgrace of your mother's nakedness" (it kind of tries to make that sound a little nicer in the CJB). Again, Saul is not insulting Jonathan's mother. A mother's nakedness is referring to her private parts; the idea is that the female part of his mother where birth occurs has been shamed because of her son's disloyal actions towards his family. This is all very Middle Eastern cultural dialogue.

Saul makes it clear that Jonathan's friendship with David has been a source of suspicion to Saul and now claims that his suspicions have proved to be true. And then in verse 31 the crux of the matter becomes clear: as long as David is alive Saul's dynasty (with Jonathan next to rule) won't become entrenched. David is indeed a danger to the throne and Saul is perplexed as to why Jonathan can't see that.

Poor naïve Jonathan retorts with a defense of his dear friend: "What has he done?" he says to his father. This further infuriates Saul to the point that he takes the javelin that is always in or near his hand and throws it at Jonathan with full intent to kill him. The naivety instantly vanishes; Jonathan now realizes what David has been trying to tell him, and what Saul had so openly demonstrated: that the king would not stop at anything to put David in his grave.

So now everything is out in the open. Saul knew God had rejected him as king, but he wasn't about to give up his throne to anyone but his son. Saul didn't know that God had chosen David; nonetheless David bore all the earmarks of being a genuine threat to Saul's dynasty so he had to be eliminated. Jonathan on the other hand was now convinced that David was the Lord's choice for king and that his father would do all in his power to prevent that from happening no matter how blasphemous and rebellious such a thing was. There is little discernable difference at this point between Saul and the Pharaoh of Israel's captivity. Jonathan was humiliated, angry, and shaken. He left the table and didn't eat. Understand that the purpose of this meal was not to satisfy hunger; it was supposedly a "sacred" meal before the Lord. It was a religious ritual (as tainted as it was) so to not partake of it was a serious decision that probably brought gasps from the servants and the guests.

In what could only have been a depressed condition, Jonathan followed through with the plan. On the 3rd day he summoned a young servant boy, gathered his bow and arrows, and went out to the countryside where David would be hiding. Three is significant because in the Bible three is symbolic of divine influence. Using the arrow signals they had agreed upon, Jonathan indicated to David that his worst fears were true and he'd need to escape the area immediately. Jonathan dismissed the boy (who had no idea of this plan) and told him to back to the city (Gibeah). Once they were alone David emerged and they bade each other the saddest of farewells. David howled in anguish not simply because he would have to leave behind the most loyal friend one could ever imagine; but because his life would never be the same. He was now a hunted fugitive who had done no wrong.

It all seemed so unfair. All David had ever done was to fight Saul's wars, defeat Saul's enemies, soothe Saul's inner demons with music, and show him the greatest deference at all times. I have thought about this long and hard; David had no idea that Saul was actually the one who better understood the reality of the situation. Saul (and Jonathan) knew that David

was destined for the throne of Israel unless he could be stopped. David was totally unaware of the immense honor that the God of Israel had bestowed upon him, and so he couldn't understand why things were going this way. What a lesson for us; like for Job, the things that happen to us in our lives may seem inexplicable at the time but easily could be the Lord working out His will through us. It may be that we suffer. But it also may be that we just don't have a need to know in God's eyes. This is perhaps the best definition of the trials that the Bible explains many of God's followers will endure. Will we be perplexed and confused, but remain faithful and continue to trust that the Lord is in control? Or will we melt and start incessantly demanding to know "why?" in our prayers and petitions to the Father?

Don't lose heart if you've done the latter; so has David. In many Psalms as David contended with God in his prayers he began with a pleading or fearful "why?" but ended with a peaceful acceptance of God's sovereignty and agreement with the Lord's right to David's life.

This chapter ends with a tearful farewell, but that is not the meaning of the "go in peace" statement by Jonathon to David. "Go in peace" is a technical/legal term that more or less means, "OK, we have a deal". The matter is concluded. And the matter is that a new covenant is now in force, and that Jonathan kept up his end of the covenant bargain by warning David of Saul's true intentions and by giving up any right he held to the throne. Now he reminds David that this covenant bargain is not only between the two of them, but between their descendants. And it was to be a "forever" agreement.

Let's move on to chapter 21.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 21 all

The 1st verse of this chapter really belongs as the last verse of chapter 20 ("so David got up and left and Jonathan went back to the city"). In the next two episodes we see a dark side emerge to David's character as he regularly employs lies and deception to escape King Saul's assassination attempts or to more easily achieve his own purposes. We'll see in a couple of chapters that although on the one hand he seems to be cunning and careful and the deception was not intended as evil (just a means to avoid Saul and save his own neck), on the other hand his actions will prove disastrous to many innocent people as often happens when sins are casually committed.

Verse 2 has David fleeing to Nob, which is a very short distance north of Jerusalem; it is still in the territory of Benjamin and not far from Gibeah. He goes to see **Ahimelech** the priest. When the Bible says "the priest", it is just code for the High Priest. Ahimelech (meaning "my brother is king") was the son of **Ahitub** and the great grandson of Eli, Samuel's former mentor. He is one of at least 2 competing High Priests living at this time, but unfortunately Ahimelech was not of the God-authorized line of High Priests; rather he was from the line of Ithamar.

When David shows up alone at Nob the alarm bells go off for Ahimelech. This is suspicious and so the priests emerges, trembling, before this renowned warrior whose name the young women chant in their songs. Why would such a well known member of the king's court travel unescorted (that would be a dangerous and foolhardy thing to do)? Ahimelech has no idea

what has just transpired between David Saul and Jonathan, but his instincts tell him something isn't right.

Ahimelech is also the brother of **Achiyah** (my brother is God) who is Saul's personal priest. That means David (who is always thinking two steps ahead) knows he can't be sure if he can trust Ahimelech and so makes up a whopper of a story by telling the High Priest that King Saul has sent him on a secret mission and in order not to arouse suspicion the men who are with him are hiding and will meet him shortly. So David asks for bread (which was one of the reasons he came there), 5 loaves. If he told the High Priest that 5 loaves were only for himself the priest would have known that something was amiss.

The High Priest explains that at the moment the only bread available is what has just been retired from serving as the consecrated bread in the sanctuary. The Priest is speaking of Shewbread. The Law is that 12 loaves of specially prepared and consecrated bread are to be baked and placed in the Tabernacle, before the Lord. Then every Shabbat, they are to be exchanged for fresh ones and the priests may eat the week-old loaves.

This Shewbread were unusually large loaves made from about 12 cups of flour each. Not only could no one but priests eat the week-old bread but it had to be consumed at the sanctuary. What this tells us is that some sort of sanctuary had to exist at Nob. What was it and what did it look like? No one knows. Almost certainly it was a tent of some sort and not a permanent building. But again, the sanctuary at Nob was by no means ever referred to in the Tanach as being "the central sanctuary" or the one place where God established His Name. It was but one of several that had been built since the divinely authorized Wilderness Tabernacle at Shiloh had fallen into such disrepair that it was abandoned. I think it is hard for us sometimes to get a mental picture of what this fact of the abandoned authorized sanctuary, the fractured priesthood, the competing High Priests, etc., ought to mean to us so that we have a more complete picture of Hebrew society as it existed then. The best illustration I can think of is modern day Great Britain. At one time this great nation was thoroughly Christian, but today it is almost devoid of any spirituality or religion except for Wicca and Islam. The magnificent Churches and Cathedrals of England's golden era of Christianity are now defunct. They are either boarded up, have become Museums, sold as restaurant locations, or more recently turned into Mosques. This new reality has happened at a relatively slow pace, and so the full effect of it wasn't realized until people started looking around and the churches were gone. But, it was too late. It is now considered "normal" and only a few lament what once was (and mostly that consists of startled foreigners). The young British generation knows nothing else and so pays no attention to the spiritual void that has overtaken them.

This was Israel at the time of David's escape from Saul. The religious situation was confused and contorted. Who was Israel's ultimate human religious authority? It once was Samuel but ever since Saul became King, Samuel became retired. So the answer to that important question depended on where you lived and who you asked. There were supposed to have been 48 Levitical cities for the priests and Levites to live in and perform their critical religious duties, scattered throughout the Promised Land and funded by the 12 tribes. Never at any point did Israel attain that full number. Some of the priests and Levites turned to hiring themselves out to be private priests to wealthy families (we read about this back in the Book of

Judges); others gave their allegiance to tribal and clan leaders so that a ritual worship site could be erected and maintained so at least they could perform something that resembled the Torah duties that they were born to do, and so they could make a living and their families survive.

Anyway, back to verse 5; the priest (likely intimidated) offers to give David 5 of the consecrated loaves but only under the condition that he and his phantom men were ritually clean. David assures him that he his men are honorable; they are on duty and therefore they had abstained from relations with women (which would have rendered them unclean and this is what seemed to worry Ahimelech the most). The reality is that the priest had no right to offer common men consecrated bread (***lechem kodesh***), and the common men had no right to eat it. But the rules were so loosely applied in this era that Ahimelech didn't have any serious problem finding a way to comply with David's request. Besides, under the circumstances, one has to wonder just how "holy" these "holy loaves" actually were in God's eyes.

However (to give the High Priest the benefit of the doubt), the Rabbis say they he employed the Kal V'homer argument to the problem. Recall that Kal V'homer is a theological means of balancing the light versus the heavy. The principle is that there were times when the 613 laws could conflict with one another.. For instance lying is a sin but if one must lie to save the life of an innocent person what should one do? The example I most often give is of Carrie Tenboom in WWII, hiding Jews from the German authorities and lying to her government about it. The purpose was to save their lives and her action was nothing short of heroic. But she broke the commandment to never lie and also to respect her human government. The Rabbinical argument of Kal V'homer says that although it is indeed always a sin to lie, it is an ever greater sin to help facilitate the taking of innocent life. Light versus heavy. Therefore she made the right choice.

The High Priest had a hungry man in front of him, who held himself up as representing the king on crucial mission and so compassion led him to "love thy neighbor" at the expense of obeying the law on who could eat the consecrated bread.

We'll stop here and continue in chapter 21 next time.