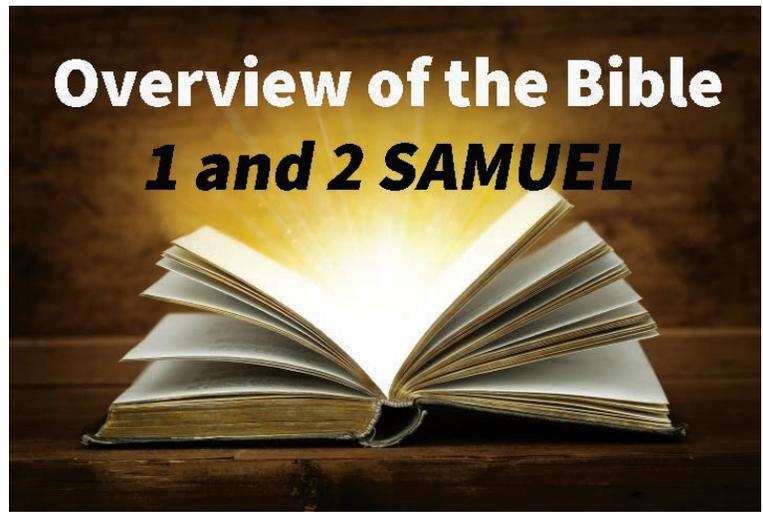


GOD'S PROTECTION TAKES THE FORM OF A FAITHFUL FRIEND

1 Samuel 20 Lesson 61

Wednesday, October 13, 2021
Pastor Blake Gideon



Big Idea *Sometimes God protects his chosen servants through other faithful servants who are willing to put God's agenda above self-interest.*

The Text in Context

Saul persisted in his efforts to kill David, but Jonathan saved David again, risking his own life in the process. David was finally forced to run away, setting the stage for the next part of the story: David needs to wander from place to place to escape Saul's hostility.

As in the previous chapters, the narrator presents contrasting responses to God's chosen king. Saul becomes obsessed with killing David, while Jonathan continues to do everything in his power to protect David, even though, from the human perspective, it does not seem to be in his best interests (cf. 20:31, 33). Though Jonathan is technically David's superior, he recognizes David's destiny and treats him accordingly (20:14–17).

Interpretive Insights

20:1 *What have I done?* David's protest reiterates Jonathan's earlier argument (19:4–6) and provides further evidence of his innocence and Saul's guilt.

20:2 *Never!* Jonathan, who obviously agrees with David, apparently has not seen or yet heard about the latest attempts on David's life (19:9–24). These take place after Saul has vowed to Jonathan that David will not be killed and has reinstated David within the royal court (19:6–7).

20:4 *Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you.* This statement does not necessarily indicate that Jonathan views David as his superior and himself as subservient. Similar statements are made elsewhere by those who are in a socially inferior (Num. 23:26; Ruth 3:5) or superior (Num. 22:17; Ruth 3:11) position. But in either case the statement does indicate the speaker's willingness to carry out the wishes of the addressee and play the role, as it were, of a servant, at least in the specific situation in which they find themselves.

20:8 *Show kindness to your servant.* David views himself as Saul's servant (17:32, 34, 36), a fact that Jonathan appeals to in his defense of David (19:4). Since Jonathan is the king's son and heir apparent (20:31), David calls himself "your servant" when speaking to Jonathan (vv. 7–8). Apparently, the terms of the covenant between David and Jonathan make provision for protection (18:3). The narrator's portrait of David as a self-professed servant of Jonathan contributes to his pro-David agenda by demonstrating that David is loyal to Saul and his house and does not plot to overthrow the king.

20:14 *Show me unfailing kindness.* Realizing that the Lord will fulfill his prayer of blessing for David (v. 13) and cut off his enemies (v. 15), Jonathan asks David to show covenantal loyalty (*hesed*) to him and his descendants. Typically, a king, when establishing a new dynasty, will wipe out the offspring of the former king to solidify his rule and prevent any attempt to reclaim the throne. In Jonathan's case, he expects to be the new king's second-in-command (see 23:17).

20:15 *When the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies.* David is not a would-be usurper or traitor. On the contrary, the Lord's enabling presence and intervention will elevate David to the throne (see 23:17).

20:16 *Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David.* Jonathan makes another covenant (cf. 18:3), this time with "the house of David." This suggests that the provisions of the covenant will extend to their descendants (cf. vv. 14–15, 42). It also implies that the Lord will establish a dynasty for David (v. 15).

20:17 *And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath.* Jonathan expresses his loyalty to David. Understood in this way, verse 17b makes good sense: Jonathan again swears allegiance to David because of his deep commitment/loyalty ("love") for him.

Key Themes of 1 Samuel 20

- The Lord protects David through loyal Jonathan.
- Jonathan's commitment to God's chosen servant necessitates self-denial and places him in harm's way.

20:27 *The son of Jesse.* Three times in this scene Saul refers to David as "the son of Jesse" and refuses to call him by name (see also vv. 30–31). But in his response to his father, Jonathan uses David's name to refer to his friend (v. 28). Earlier Saul has called David by name several times (cf. 18:8, 11, 22, 25; 19:22), but the change here indicates his growing hostility as he distances himself emotionally from his son-in-law.

20:30 *Saul's anger flared up.* See the comment above at 18:8. Saul expressed righteous anger when he heard of the Ammonite threat against Jabesh Gilead (11:6), but his anger became self-centered and misdirected when he heard the women suggest that David was worthy of greater honor than he was (18:8). His anger against Jonathan is also misdirected, prompted by his belief that his son is siding with David against him.

20:31 *Neither you nor your kingdom will be established.* Contrary to Samuel's prophecy (13:13–14), Saul desires to establish a royal dynasty, and he views Jonathan as the heir apparent. But Jonathan is not harboring such delusions (20:15–17; 23:17).

20:33 *Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him.* For the second time in the story, Saul tries to kill his own son (cf. 14:44). He tries to murder Jonathan with his spear, just as he tried to kill David on two occasions (18:11; 19:10). This is a turning point in Saul's obsessive quest to kill David; from this time onward, he will demonstrate hostility toward those who support David. The incident foreshadows his slaughter of the priests and their families at Nob (chap. 22). The verb translated "kill" is *nakah*, "strike." It is used earlier of Jonathan's striking down Israel's enemies (13:3; 14:14). The contrast is stark: like David, Jonathan struck down the enemies of God, and now Saul tries to strike down his own son. The irony is heightened even more when one considers that the verb was used earlier to describe how Saul struck down the enemies of Israel (14:48; 15:7). Now he is treating his own son as if he were an enemy.

20:41 *Bowed down before Jonathan.* The expression used here indicates an attitude of submission; the subordinate party is always the one who falls before a superior in this manner (Josh. 5:14; Ruth 2:10; 1 Sam. 25:23; 2 Sam. 1:2; 9:6; 14:4, 22; 2 Kings 4:37; 2 Chron. 20:18; Job 1:20).

Theological Insights

This account also expresses the primary theme of the preceding chapters: in the face of danger, the Lord protects his chosen servants. In this chapter the Lord protects David through the loyalty of faithful Jonathan, illustrating the point that the Lord often accomplishes his redemptive work in the world through human instruments who are committed to his purposes, even when it may not seem to be in their best interests. Jonathan is an example to exilic readers of the importance of supporting God's program and chosen leader.

Teaching the Text

1. *Sometimes God protects his chosen servants through other faithful servants, who are committed to God's program.*

As noted above, Jonathan serves as a literary foil for Saul in this story. Saul opposes God's revealed will and chosen servant, but Jonathan accepts God's plan and embraces his chosen servant. Jonathan knows God has chosen David to be king and does everything in his power to protect David.

2. *Commitment to God's plan and to his chosen servant necessitates self-denial and sometimes places one in harm's way.* Jonathan is a paradigm of obedience and submission. Even though he is the heir apparent to Saul's throne, he refuses to follow the path of personal ambition or yield to his father's sinful wishes (20:31). Indeed, he sincerely pledges his loyalty to the chosen king and prays for his success (20:13–17), even though his decision makes him the object of his father's wrath and jeopardizes his life (20:30–33). Like Jonathan we must support God's program, even when it involves self-denial and puts us in harm's way. Jonathan's absolute loyalty to David should inspire us to demonstrate the same allegiance to David's greater Son and God's chosen Servant, the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:37–39; Luke 12:8–9).

Though the friendship of David and Jonathan is inspiring, this is not fundamentally a story about friendship. In the larger literary context of 1 Samuel, this account is not designed to teach the reader lessons about friendship. Certainly, one can use their friendship for illustrative purposes, *if* one's primary text for a lesson or sermon is dealing with that theme (see, e.g., Prov. 17:17; 18:24). But if one is teaching or preaching through 1 Samuel, the real point of the story lies elsewhere. Throughout this section of the book, the narrator is validating David's claim to the throne of Israel and demonstrating that God has rejected Saul. As noted above, Saul disobeys God and resists his plan, while Jonathan submits to God and embraces his chosen servant. The point of the story—and of Jonathan's friendship with David, when contrasted with his father's hostility toward him—is this: one must fully support God's plan and his will rather than allowing pride and personal ambition to stand in the way of and impede what God is trying to accomplish.

Illustrating the Text

God protects his chosen servants in the midst of grave danger

Christian Biography: *Tortured for Christ*, by Richard Wurmbrand. A Romanian evangelical minister and one of Romania's most widely known Jewish believers, also a leader and author, Wurmbrand spent fourteen years in Communist imprisonment, often undergoing torture. When the Communists seized Romania, Wurmbrand immediately began an underground ministry to his people and to the invading Russian soldiers. He was eventually arrested in 1948 and spent three years in solitary confinement, seeing only his captors, while his wife, Sabina, served as a slave laborer. Because of his growing international fame, diplomats from various foreign embassies asked for his release. Eventually his release was negotiated, and he testified in Washington before the Senate's Internal Security Subcommittee, at this point stripping to the waist and showing eighteen deep torture wounds on his body. His testimony has gone worldwide.

Believers are called to self-denying commitment to God even in the face of potential harm and danger

Christian Biography: *John and Betty Stam*. The story of the Stams, both graduates of Moody Bible Institute and missionaries to China in the 1930s, is compelling both for the poignancy of their martyrdom and the acceptance and trust they showed in the face of their deaths. After marrying and having a baby daughter while working in Tsinan, they were asked by their mission to relocate to Tsingteh and work under what seemed like safe conditions. John was cautious, but the couple concluded that their move would be fine. Then they were taken captive by a group of two thousand Communists. Betty's great concern all along was for her baby, whose life was spared numerous times by miraculous means. Finally, Betty and John were to be led to their execution. Betty laid her baby down for the last time; turning to follow the soldiers, she committed baby Helen to the protection of God, remembering a vow she had made long before: "All the people whom I love are to take a second place in my heart.... Work out Thy whole will in my life, at any cost, now and forever. To me to live is Christ. Amen." Following this prayer, she was forced to watch the execution of her husband; witnesses say she faltered, then became strong and knelt for her own beheading. The baby was rescued and lived to be an adult. A poem by missionary E. H. Hamilton was written to commemorate the martyrdom of the Stams, his fellow missionaries. The theme of it is "Afraid? Of What?"⁵¹

¹ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., [1 & 2 Samuel](#), ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 134–139.