

"GOD'S ARROW"

1 Samuel 20:1-42

God had an amazing purpose and plan for David's life. He was anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. The Spirit of God came mightily upon him from that day forward. God made a covenant with him and in that covenant, He promised that the Messiah would come through his lineage and He would establish a kingdom that lasts forever. Despite this, things were not going well for David.

After David's victory over Goliath, the tension between Saul and David rises to a dangerous level. Saul sees the kingdom slipping from his grasp, and he senses it is just a matter of time before his reign will end and the reign of David will begin. King Saul was committed to killing him. I suppose we could divide his life into four segments . . .

- ⇒ **The Shepherding years**
- ⇒ **The Hiding years**
- ⇒ **The Fighting years**
- ⇒ **The Reigning years**

At this point in the narrative, David found himself in "*The Hiding Years.*" For the next 10-15 years he was a fugitive running from Saul and his henchmen. Beneath the surface of Saul's life lay a dreadful, noxious brew of jealousy and hatred.

1 Samuel 18:28–29... When Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and *that* Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, **29** then Saul was even more afraid of David. *Thus Saul was David's enemy continually.*

He basically had one friend that he could turn to and that was Jonathan, *the son of King Saul.* Here's a piece of their conversation . . .

1 Samuel 20:1–4... Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?" **2** He said to him, "Far from it, you shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. So why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!" **3** Yet David vowed again, saying, "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your sight, and he has said, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved.' But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death." **4** Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

Did Jonathan grasp the seriousness (*there was hardly a step between David and death*) of the situation? No doubt he was still holding out hope for his dad. Saul had promised his son Jonathan that he would not put David to death. We can safely assume that David wanted to know what *Saul* was thinking, but it was more important for David to know what *Jonathan* was thinking. Would Saul's son stick his neck out to help his good friend David?

1 Samuel 20:5–11... So David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I ought to sit down to eat with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field until the third evening. **6** "If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked *leave* of me to run to Bethlehem his city, because it is the yearly sacrifice there for the whole family.' **7** "If he says, 'It is good,' your servant *will be safe*; but if he is very angry, know that he has decided on evil. **8** "Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; for why then should you bring me to your father?" **9** Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! For if I should indeed learn that evil has been decided by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you about it?" **10** Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" **11** Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out into the field." So both of them went out to the field.

The "New Moon" (**Numbers 10:10; Numbers 28:11-15**) was a religious observance that involved special meals and the offering of sacrifices. David was a part of Saul's royal court; therefore he would be expected to attend.

David was under enormous pressure. Pressure like that can cause a godly man to doubt the loyalty of his friend and even doubt the promises of God. So, David's plan was to hide for the two nights of the festivities. David and Jonathan agreed that Saul's reaction to David's absence would tell them if David would ever be safe again in Saul's presence (20:7).

1 Samuel 20:12–13... Then Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel, *be witness!* When I have sounded out my father about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if there is good *feeling* toward David, shall I not then send to you and make it known to you? 13 "If it please my father *to do* you harm, may the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also, if I do not make it known to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. And may the LORD be with you as He has been with my father.

Jonathan knows that if his father Saul intends evil against David it means that David must go away. He would not be welcome again in the palace and he would not be safe again at home. By giving David an early warning of this, Jonathan will help to save David's life and underscore his steadfast love and loyalty to his best friend. Jonathan's encouragement must have been like a drink of cold water to a thirsty man.

"David, even if you must leave the palace and your home behind and flee as a fugitive, the LORD will be with you. You can be sure of it."

1 Samuel 20:14–17... "If I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die? 15 "You shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." 16 So Jonathan made a *covenant* with the house of David, *saying*, "May the LORD require *it* at the hands of David's enemies." 17 Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.

In those days when one royal house replaced another it was common for the new royal house to kill all the potential rulers from the old royal house. Jonathan knew that one day David and his descendants would rule over

Israel and he wanted a promise that David and his descendants would not kill or mistreat the descendants of Jonathan.

Jonathan and David made a covenant with one another. Jonathan agreed to care for David in the face of Saul's threat and David agreed to care for Jonathan and his family in the future. David fulfilled his promise (**2 Samuel 9:1-8 and 21:7**). So, Jonathan submitted himself to God's will and pledged loyalty to the future king.

1 Samuel 20:18–23... Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed because your seat will be empty. 19 "When you have stayed for three days, you shall go down quickly and come to the place where you hid yourself on that eventful day, and you shall remain by the stone Ezel. 20 "I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target. 21 "And behold, I will send the lad, *saying*, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I specifically say to the lad, 'Behold, the arrows are on this side of you, get them,' then come; for there is safety for you and no harm, as the LORD lives. 22 "But if I say to the youth, 'Behold, the arrows are beyond you,' go, for the LORD has sent you away. 23 "As for the agreement of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever."

After Jonathan learned his father's heart and intention towards David, he would communicate to David through a signal. Jonathan would take target practice and where he shot the arrows would tell David the answer. David was to hide himself in the spot where he previously had hidden. Jonathan would shoot three arrows. As the servant went to retrieve the arrows, Jonathan would say "the arrows are beyond you" or "the arrows are on this side of you." The first would indicate danger, the second, that everything was all right with Saul.¹

1 Samuel 20:24–34... So David hid in the field; and when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. 25 The king sat on his seat as usual, the seat by the wall; then Jonathan rose up and Abner sat down by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. 26 Nevertheless Saul did not speak

¹ James E. Smith, [The Books of History](#), Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 303.

anything that day, for he thought, "It is an accident, he is not clean, surely *he is not clean.*" **27** It came about the next day, the second *day* of the new moon, that David's place was empty; so Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" **28** Jonathan then answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me *to go to Bethlehem,* **29** for he said, 'Please let me go, since our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to attend. And now, if I have found favor in your sight, please let me get away that I may see my brothers.' For this reason he has not come to the king's table." **30** Then Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? **31** *"For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die."* **32** But Jonathan answered Saul his father and said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" **33** Then Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down; so Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death. **34** Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him.

David was expected to be at this special feast of the New Moon, and so his absence was clearly noticed. At first, this did not trouble Saul greatly because he thought, *"Something has happened to him; he is unclean, surely he is unclean."* So when it happened the next day...that David's place was empty, Saul demanded an explanation. He was furious. He wanted David to be killed!

Jonathan's support of David enraged Saul even more. *Saul cast a spear at him to kill him.* This shows how deep Saul's hatred of David was—he would kill his own son for siding with David.

1 Samuel 20:35–40... Now it came about in the morning that Jonathan went out into the field for the appointment with David, and a little lad *was with him.* **36** He said to his lad, "Run, find now the arrows which I am about to shoot." As the lad was running, he shot an arrow past him. **37** When the

lad reached the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the lad and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?" **38** And Jonathan called after the lad, "Hurry, be quick, do not stay!" And Jonathan's lad picked up the arrow and came to his master. **39** But the lad was not aware of anything; only Jonathan and David knew about the matter. **40** Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad and said to him, "Go, bring *them* to the city."

This was a crucial time in David's life—A DESTINY DEFINING MOMENT. Just a matter of a few yards would decide David's future! All he could do was stand by the "*Stone Ezel*" and wait. Alan Redpath observed . . .

I have called this place "the stone of David's destiny".... Driven by all the pressure of circumstances, David is brought to the place where he sees that the decision is not in his hands. I wonder if this is the lesson the Lord is trying to teach some of us. For each of His children in every circumstance of life there is a stone of destiny.... It is a living stone, for it is the Lord of glory Himself. He is destined to have all power, to overthrow all our enemies and to set up His kingdom which will never be destroyed. If I truly belong to Him, if He has filled me with His Spirit and marked me as His, then whatever the pressure upon my life at this point, the issue is out of my hands altogether. Jesus Christ is our stone of destiny.... Only He can guide. All you can do is what David did, as he took his stand at his stone of destiny and waited. "The Making of a Man of God," pp. 62-63.

There are many paths we must choose from when we come to these crucial, destiny-defining moments in our lives.

- ⇒ **Some look reasonable.**
- ⇒ **Many of them look attractive.**
- ⇒ **Still others look to be lucrative.**

There is only one path that leads to God's best and that is His will for your life. WAIT. STAND BY THE STONE AND LET JESUS DECIDE!

Isaiah 28:16... Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone *for* the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed.

1 Peter 2:6... For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

David waited. Soon God's answer to his dilemma was revealed The signal of a single arrow told David his whole life was changed. He would no longer be welcome at the palace. He would no longer be welcome among the army of Israel. He could no longer go home. David was now a fugitive on the run from an angry, jealous king determined to destroy him. He would see Jonathan only one more time!

1 Samuel 20:41–42... **When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David wept the more. 42 Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.' "** Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.

Though David and Jonathan would be physically separated from one another, they would remain inseparably joined by the oath they swore in the Lord's name (42).

This was a pretty bleak road for David to walk, but it was *God's* road for him. This bleak road was important in David's life because if God would put David in a place where people must depend on him, God must teach David to depend upon Him alone. Not himself, not Saul, not Jonathan, not anyone except God! Redpath wrote . . .

Let God empty you out that He may save you from becoming spiritually stale, and lead you ever onward. He is always calling us to pass beyond the

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thing we know into the unknown. A throne is God's purpose for you; a cross is God's path for you; faith is God's plan for you."