Jonathan and David, Resolute Friends

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:16-17, 32-34, 42; 2 Sam 1:25-27; 2 Sam 21:7
SS Lesson for 06/21/2026

Devotional Scriptures: 1 Sam 19:1-7

OUTLINE

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Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
Key Verse: 1 Sam 20:42

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COMMENTARY THOUGHTS FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH
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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The books of 1 & 2 Samuel introduce three key figures: Samuel, Saul, and David. The boy Samuel grew up to be an important transitional figure, taking Israel from the era of judges to the time of Israel's united monarchy. He first anointed Saul, then David as king (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13). Kings at this time (eleventh century BC) were seen especially as military protectors, able to lead their subjects in battle (example: 8:11-12). Before Saul's disastrous rule ended, God prepared David to take over as leader in Saul's place. The secret anointing of David and plan to make him king created a potential conflict with Saul and his household, especially with Saul's firstborn son and heir, Jonathan. Jonathan had the most to lose and could have easily rejected God's choice of king. Jonathan is first mentioned in 1 Samuel 13-14, where he proves to be an impressive captain of fighting men. In one exploit, Jonathan and his armor-bearer manage to single-handedly defeat about twenty Philistines, turning the tide in favor of the Israelites (1 Samuel 14:1-14). Jonathan speaks like a virtuous leader, one who knows "nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few" (14:6; compare 17:45). But God's choice of David, "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), interrupts the dynastic rule and demonstrates that God is in charge. Both then and in the future, the rise and fall of rulers and empires is subject to God's control (see Daniel 7:27).

Key Verse: 1 Sam 20:42

42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'May the Lord be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.'" So he arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Unexpected Friend (1 Sam 18:1-4)

1 Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.
2 Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore.
3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.
4 And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.

Friendship that is close (1-2)

Friendship with God first (James 2:23)

23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.

Friendship that comforts during grief (Gen 38:12)

12 After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.

Friendship that loves at all times (Prov 17:17)

17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Friendship that never forsakes (Prov 27:10)

> 10 Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you — better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

Friendship that provides earnest counsel (Prov 27:9)

> 9 Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel.

Friendship that provides strength (Eccl 4:9-12)

> 9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: 10 If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Made with love (3)

Love because it is the only thing that counts in the Kingdom of God (Gal 5:6)

> 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Love because love comes from a pure heart and good conscience (1 Tim 1:5)

> 5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Love because it prompts all to do good works (Heb 10:24)

> 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Love because love is commanded (Heb 13:1)

> 1 Keep on loving each other as brothers.

Love because it means that we love God (1 John 4:21)

> 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Love because love compels us to edify others (John 21:15-18)

> 15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." 16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

Friendship pledging protection (4)

Protection that only God can provide (Ps 18:2)

> 2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

Protection in the form of refuge in God (Ps 46:1-3)

> 1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

Protection from calamity (Prov 14:32)

> 32 When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.

Protection in the form of deliverance (2 Cor 1:10)

> 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

Unwavering Alliance (1 Sam 20:16-17, 32-34, 42)

16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "Let the Lord require it at the hand of David's enemies."
17 Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.
32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?"
33 Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David.
34 So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully.
42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'May the Lord be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.'" So he arose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city.

An alliance through a covenant vow (16-17)

A vow that must be kept (Eccl 5:4)

> 4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow.

A vow that must never be slow about fulfilling (Deut 23:21)

> 21 If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin.

A vow that must be kept even when it hurts (Ps 15:2-4)

> 2 He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart 3 and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, 4 who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the Lord, who keeps his oath even when it hurts

A vow that must not be hastily or rashly made (Prov 20:25)

> 25 It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows.

An alliance knowing about anger of others (32-34)

Anger from a hot-tempered man (Prov 22:24-25)

> 24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, 25 or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

Anger that makes one a fool (Eccl 7:9)

> 9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

Anger from a wicked heart (Eccl 9:3)

> 3 This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.

Anger against an innocent man (Luke 23:22)

> 22 For the third time he spoke to them: "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

An alliance that seeks peace (42)

Peace through trust in God (Rom 15:13)

> 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Peace through the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22)

> 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Peace that transcends all understanding (Phil 4:7)

> 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Peace that comes through faith (Rom 5:1-2)

> 1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Unbroken Promise (2 Sam 1:26-27; 21:7)

1:26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, Surpassing the love of women.
27 "How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"
21:7 But the king spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

A promise that ends grief (26-27)

There is a promise from God that those who mourn will be comforted (Matt 5:4)

> 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Christians are commanded to share in the grief of others (Rom 12:15)

> 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Share other's grief by reminding the griever that grief is only temporary (John 16:22)

> 22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

A promise that provided for descendants (7)

Provision of kindness (Josh 2:12-14)

> 12 Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign 13 that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death." 14 "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land.

Provision of safety (Josh 9:18)

> 18 But the Israelites did not attack them, because the leaders of the assembly had sworn an oath to them by the Lord, the God of Israel. The whole assembly grumbled against the leaders,

Provision of friendship (Prov 27:10)

> 10 Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you, better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

David Proposes a Test (20:1-23)

I wish I could say I understand why David **"fled"** from Ramah to find Jonathan at what must have been Saul's palace (verse 1). In Ramah, David is with Samuel the prophet. In Ramah, Saul cannot lay a hand on David. When Saul sends the three parties of men to arrest David, they are all divinely prohibited by the miraculous work of the Spirit of God. This happens to Saul as well (19:18-24). Why then does David "flee" to the place where Saul and Jonathan live? The only explanation that makes any sense to me is that this is where his beloved friend Jonathan can be found. David does not seem to be fleeing *from* Saul as much as he is fleeing *to* Jonathan, much like he fled to Ahimelech and Samuel earlier.

Unless David is hypocritical in what he is saying to Jonathan, he is humbly taking the most praiseworthy position. He does not begin by accusing or attacking Saul. He begins by focusing on his own sin. Notice the two-fold reference to sin **("iniquity," "sin")** in verse 1. David seems to be genuinely interested in knowing if he has done something wrong which has brought about the treatment Saul has been dishing out to him.

Initially, Jonathan is a couple of steps behind David. He does not respond to David's inquiry about iniquity, but instead challenges David's assessment that he is in grave danger – from Saul! Jonathan challenges David's statement that Saul is seeking his life rather than his question concerning his own sin. Jonathan is a little nave here, for he assures David that if his father is intent on killing him, he would surely tell him – his son – about it first.

David strongly disagrees with Jonathan's assessment of the situation. He takes a solemn vow to underscore just how serious he is about this. Let Jonathan not brush his concerns aside so quickly. Now that Saul knows David and Jonathan are friends, bound together by a covenant, why would he be so foolish as to reveal his plans to kill David to Jonathan? Saul has purposely kept his plans to kill David quiet so that Jonathan will not know what he is doing.

David then affirms, in the strongest possible words, the fact that his life is in grave danger. He is but a hair's length away from death. Jonathan now realizes how serious David is and how strongly he feels about this danger. He understands that David desperately wants him to take him seriously, and so Jonathan relents, assuring David that he will do whatever he wants. Jonathan may not yet be convinced of his father's evil intentions, but he is convinced that David is both distressed and in fear of his life. Jonathan will take David at his word.

In verses 5 and following, David proposes a plan that will demonstrate Saul's intentions toward him. This seems to be as much for Jonathan's benefit as for David's. The plan is simple. The next day is the new moon, and thus a time for Saul to make a sacrifice and share a sacrificial meal. David is a part of Saul's household and thus expected to be present. If Saul does intend to kill David, he will be very upset to find that David is not present at this meal. If Saul has no plans to kill David, his absence should not be a problem to Saul. And so David plans to be absent, and by his absence to test Saul's intentions toward him.

David's absence will need to be explained in such a way that it appears reasonable for him to be absent. David has already worked out the explanation. Since Jonathan will be present at the celebration, he can make David's excuse for him. If and when Saul asks about David's absence, Jonathan can tell the king that David had asked him for permission to miss this celebration because he felt he should go to Bethlehem to be with his family for this celebration. It is a reasonable explanation, one that should not cause Saul any problems, unless indeed he is looking for an excuse himself – an excuse to kill David.

But why would David's absence be such a big deal to Saul? I take it that David has not eaten many meals at Saul's table recently. Twice already, Saul has attempted to kill David with his spear while he was in his house. David fled from Saul's household and even from his own house, ending up in Ramah with Samuel. For some period of time, David has been absent. This festive meal must be something like Christmas is for us, a family time when family members are expected to be present . It does not matter that David has his own family, and they might want him to be with them. Saul expects David to be with him, which provides him another

opportunity to finish him off. If David does not attend this meal, Saul has no idea when his next opportunity to kill him might come. David's absence is therefore to be a test of Saul's intentions toward him.

David appeals to Jonathan to carry out this plan to see whether still Saul really intends to kill him. The basis for his appeal is the love these two men have for each other and the covenant they have already made (see 18:1-4; 19:1). David speaks to Jonathan as to his master, as though he were the servant (20:8). In fact, this is true. Jonathan is, at that moment, the son of the king, and David is his subordinate. David appeals to the covenant the two have already made with each other and asks Jonathan to carry out the plan he has proposed. Rather than turn David over to Saul, David requests that Jonathan execute him himself, if indeed he is guilty of sin. Jonathan is appalled at such a suggestion. Does David really think he would betray his friend by turning him over to his father to be killed? If Jonathan were to learn of any plot against David by his father, does David suppose for a moment that his friend will not warn him rather than betray him?

Jonathan makes it very clear that he will warn David of any plot against him. If his father really intends to kill David, he can be assured that Jonathan will warn him. There is, however, a possibility the plan will backfire. Suppose King Saul does intend to kill David, and that he kills Jonathan for trying to learn what his intentions toward David are? If Saul kills Jonathan for trying to help David, who will warn David then? What I have spelled out more bluntly, David says much more delicately:

"Who will tell me if your father answers harshly?" (verse 10b).

At this point, Jonathan does something strange and quite unexpected. He says no more to him about this matter until they are standing out in the middle of *the* field (verse 12). This seems to be the field where Jonathan reasons with his father, as David looks on (19:1-6). I believe Jonathan is beginning to realize just how serious this situation has become. If Saul is insanely jealous, and scheming to put David to death, it is likely that someone overhearing the conversation between David and Jonathan might report it to Saul. The two of them are not going out into the field to get a breath of fresh air. They are going out into the field where curious eyes and finely tuned ears cannot discern what is being said between these two friends. Since this is also the place where Jonathan will communicate the outcome of the "test," they are able to point to the places each person will take.

If the test shows that Saul has changed his mind about David, and his intentions are favorable, then Jonathan will send to David to make this known (verse 12). But if Saul's intentions toward David are still hostile, then Jonathan will convey this news to David so that he can make his getaway. If this is the case, and David has to flee (as Jonathan now seems to fear), then let David know that he goes with Jonathan's blessing and love (verse 13).

Now, if David must flee, Jonathan has a request of him, a request based upon the covenant these two have made with each other. If Jonathan survives this test, then let David spare his life, just as he has sought to protect David's life. Jonathan knows that David will survive and that he will become Israel's king. When David becomes the King of Israel, Jonathan asks that David spare his life. He knows all too well that when one king replaces another, the prevailing king kills off any rivals for the throne, including their heirs. Jonathan wants David's assurance that he and his descendants will not be annihilated, as is normally the case. The two men refine and reaffirm their covenant with each other, as a manifestation of their love. There is a very critical difference between this clarified, refined covenant and the one made earlier. The former was a covenant between two men, David and Jonathan. This covenant is a covenant between two houses, two dynasties. This covenant between David's descendants and Jonathan's descendants.

A subtle change has taken place which can be clearly seen in verses 18-23. Jonathan has taken the lead in this whole matter. At first, it was all David's initiative. David fled from Ramah and sought out Jonathan. Jonathan is reluctant to believe what David is telling him about his father. Then, seeing how serious David is about this matter, he agrees to help him however David thinks is best. David proposes a plan that will reveal Saul's plans with respect to David. Then, in verse 11, Jonathan takes David out into the open field where they continue their conversation. I would argue that from this point on in our text, Jonathan has taken charge. He is no longer a reluctant hearer or a compliant assistant to David; he is the leader.

In verses 18-23, Jonathan carefully spells out a plan by which he will convey the outcome of David's test to him. David is to hide out for three days while the test is being conducted. Then, at the end of this period, he is to come to the field where they are presently standing. There, Jonathan will signal the outcome of the test to him. Jonathan will shoot three arrows, as though aiming for a target. Then, Jonathan will send a servant boy to retrieve the arrows. If Jonathan directs the young lad to seek for the arrows in Jonathan's direction, then David should understand that Saul's intentions toward him are good, and thus he can come out of hiding. But if Jonathan directs the lad to seek the arrows beyond where the lad is, then David is to understand that Saul intends to harm him, and he should flee.

Once again, the covenant between David and Jonathan is mentioned in connection with this whole plan. Jonathan assures David that he will do all that he has promised, because of their covenant. The use of the term *forever* in verse 23 indicates that this covenant is now viewed as being between Jonathan and his descendants, and David and his descendants. This extended covenant is the basis for their mutual trust and their mutual kindness.

Saul Fails the Test (20:24-34)

The next day, Jonathan sits at the table with his father and others just as he always has. King Saul sits with his **"back to the wall"** (verse 25), which offers him greater security (no one can stab or shoot someone in the back this way). Jonathan gets up, and Abner sits beside the king. Everybody seems to be seated in their customary places. David's place at the table is conspicuously empty. Saul says nothing. He reasons to himself that David has somehow become unclean, so that he cannot partake of the meal.

The following day, David's place is still empty. With what may be a feigned casual manner, Saul asks Jonathan why **"the son of Jesse"** is not present the last two days. Jonathan gives Saul the excuse he and David have rehearsed. David, Jonathan replies, has asked permission of him to be absent so that he can celebrate with his family in Bethlehem. David's brother pressured him to attend, so he asked permission to be absent from Jonathan, and Jonathan granted it. It is as simple as that -- no big problem.

It most certainly is a problem to Saul! He goes into a rage, and his anger focuses on Jonathan. It is all Jonathan's fault, Saul concludes. He calls his own son a most offensive name. All of Saul's accusations are essentially true and based upon the covenant that Jonathan and David have made. Jonathan is Saul's first-born, the heir to his throne. Jonathan is throwing all this away by pledging his love and allegiance to David. If David lives, the throne will be his and not Jonathan's. Because of this, Saul commands Jonathan to bring David to him to be killed.

Saul's reasons are self-serving and not at all godly. Saul avoids the fact that God indicated through Samuel that his kingdom would be taken away from him (13:13-14; 15:22-23). He sets aside the fact that Samuel has anointed David as Israel's next king (16:13). To kill David will be to kill God's anointed. While David would not do this to Saul, Saul most certainly intends to kill David. Jonathan presses his father to think in terms of biblical justice. If David is to be killed, just what sin is he to be executed for committing? What sin of David's deserves the death penalty? If there is no scriptural (i.e., the Law of Moses) reason for killing David, then Saul is the one who is sinning, not David.

Now Saul is really mad. He picks up his spear, always nearby, and hurls it at his own son Jonathan. Saul hurls his spear, and Jonathan gets the point. He is not hit. Fortunately Saul has gotten no better at hitting his target with a spear. There is no longer any doubt in Jonathan's mind. Now there are two empty places at that table, David's and Jonathan's. How appropriate. Jonathan is deeply grieved. His grief, you will note, is not due to the humiliation his father has heaped upon him at the dinner table, but due to the way his father has dishonored David (verse 34). David has been right all along, dead right. Saul does intend to kill him, and he will also kill anyone who tries to stop him from doing so.

A Sad Farewell (20:35-42)

It is now time for Jonathan to carry out their plan completely. He must convey to David that he was right, that Saul does intend to kill him. As agreed, Jonathan goes out to the field where he knows David is hiding and watching. He sends his young servant out into the field to retrieve his arrows. He shoots his first arrow past the young lad, and then calls out to him that the arrow is beyond him. Now David knows. Saul is trying to kill him. He must make his escape as quickly as possible. When the young lad brings the arrow back to him, Jonathan sends him back to the city.

If the plan is for David to escape unnoticed into the forest, it is not carried out. These two men know that from this point on their lives will never be the same. They may never see each other again, and if they do, it will only be in secret, and for a brief time. And so David comes out of hiding to approach Jonathan and bid him a tearful farewell. The two kiss and weep, David more than Jonathan. This is going to be a great loss to him, and he knows it. As they part, Jonathan speaks of the covenant he has made with David and his offspring and reaffirms his commitment to keep it. David arises and leaves, and Jonathan returns to the city. Things will never be the same again, and they both know it.

Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/17-when-saul-slings-his-spear-jonathan-gets-point-1-samuel-201-42)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Friendship like that between David and Jonathan doesn't just happen, it must be cultivated. The world has a way of predisposing people toward self-gain and narcissism, leaving us disinclined to connect with one another, much less show the kind of loyalty that Jonathan shows at his own expense. But the church can become a place where people are willing to serve one another sacrificially. It begins with individuals who look beyond their own needs. Simple acts of friendship and loyalty can make a difference: inviting someone to coffee, checking in with a friend, sharing a meal, and keeping confidences are just a few examples. These simple actions can open the door to a deeper relationship wherein both people recognize the dignity of the other and serve one another under Christ. This is not a foolproof strategy; some will not reciprocate. But Christians are called to hospitality (Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 5:10; Hebrews 13:2; 3 John 8; see lesson 13), even generosity and love for enemies (Proverbs 25:21; Matthew 5:43-44). If kindness goes unreciprocated, it remains kindness well-spent.