

Y'honatan Defends David

First Samuel 20: 24b-42

DIG: How is the Adversary's influence seen in the life of Sha'ul? How did Sha'ul justify his anger? What did it take for Y'honatan to finally catch on to his father's true intent with regard to David? Why is Y'honatan so slow to catch on? Does he want to believe the best about his father at all costs? Or is Sha'ul that good at masking his motives? Knowing his father tried to kill him also, why did Y'honatan go back home instead of going into hiding with David? How do you think Y'honatan felt about being caught in the middle? How did Y'honatan demonstrate his friendship with David in Chapter 20? What did it cost him?

REFLECT: In your experience, how common is deep and faithful friendship between women? Between men? When is it right going against authority in obeying ADONAI? When is it wrong? What elements in civil disobedience or family dissonance are never right? Has the pressure of some trial thrown you into despair, causing you to doubt God's promises? Do you have the peace of the Lord that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7)? Why or why not? What are some examples of this peace in your life?

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Y'honatan's Defense of David Before Sha'ul: Y'honatan's duty to David required him to go back to the presence of his father in his palace at Gibeah. When Rosh-Hodesh came, the king sat down to eat his sacrificial meal on **the first day**, which could only be eaten in ceremonial cleanliness. Constantly afraid of personal attack, the king sat at his usual place with his back against the wall. Y'honatan stood up, and Abner sat next to Sha'ul (which was highly unusual because he normally sat next to his father) and Y'honatan sat across from his father. All the principles were there, but David's place was empty. However, Sha'ul didn't say anything that day; because he thought, "Something has happened to him to make him ceremonially unclean. **And as if Sha'ul were trying to convince himself that uncleanness was the only reason for David's absence, he repeated the phrase over and over again to himself.** Yes, that's it, surely he is unclean. An acceptable excuse . . . once (First Samuel 20:24b-26 CJB).

But the day after Rosh-Hodesh, **the second day**, David's space was still empty and Sha'ul said to Y'honatan his son, "Why hasn't Jesse's son **(the use of this name is deliberately contemptuous)** come to the meal either yesterday or today? Uncleanness

only lasted one day (Leviticus 15:16), so that could not account for his absence. Y'honatan answered Sha'ul, "David begged me to let him go to Beit-Lechem." He said, "Please let me go, because our family has a sacrifice in the city and my brother demanded that I come. **The eldest brother exercised a measure of authority over the others.** So now, if you look on me favorably, please let me get away and see my brothers." That's why he hasn't come to the king's table (1 Samuel 20:27-29 CJB). However a savvy person such as Sha'ul was able to see right through him. **The king's explosive response was stunning.**

It took almost nothing to set Sha'ul off when the subject was David. **At that Sha'ul flew into a rage,** but instead of attacking David, **Sha'ul attacked his own son!** Had YHVH not intervened back in Ramah, **Sha'ul would have killed David** in the very presence of Samuel (First Samuel 19:22-24) and now **he detested his own son,** saying: **You son of a perverse** (meaning thoroughly perverse in his resistance to his father's will) **and rebellious woman!** In the Near East it is the greatest possible insult to a man to call his mother names. **Don't I know that you've made this son of Jesse** (couldn't even say his name) **your best friend? You have chosen him over me! You don't care that you're shaming yourself and dishonoring your family? Because as long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, you will not be crowned king, neither you nor your kingdom will be secure. Sha'ul was haunted by the fear that David's popularity with the people would secure for him the succession to the throne.** But Y'honatan already knew that David would be the next king, moreover, **he wasn't concerned about his own ambitions.** By this point, even Sha'ul must have realized that David must have been the one that God chose according to Samuel's prophecy (First Samuel 15:28) and **he blindly thought he could reverse it.** With these poisoned darts planted in Y'honatan's heart, **Sha'ul then issued his demand: Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die (First Samuel 20:30-31)!**

Sha'ul's great concern was the preservation of the Kingdom that ADONAI had already token from him! YHVH had made it very clear that none of Sha'ul's sons would ever inherit the throne and David was the king of God's choice, so Sha'ul was fighting the will of the LORD and asking his son to do the same thing.⁷⁵

Y'honatan answered his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done." In the heat of the moment Sha'ul threw his spear at him, aiming to kill, but narrowly missing his target. Nobody moved. The only sound in the room came from the still-vibrating spear handle plunged ominously into the wall. Y'honatan could no longer doubt that his father was determined to put David to death. This incident erased any doubt in Y'honatan's mind that his father wanted to kill the next king of Isra'el, his best friend - David. The tension for Y'honatan had become unbearable. Silently seething with rage, he got

up from the table and made a quick exit. He ate no food the second day of the month, although it was a feast day, both because he was upset over David and because his father had put him to shame (First Samuel 20:32-34 CJB). In retrospect, this was an act of stunning loyalty on Y'honatan's part.

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters - yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be My disciple. The word **hate** here is not an emotion, but rather the act of choosing or not choosing (Malachi 1:2-3). A better translation would be: **Anyone who comes to Me but refuses to let go of parents, spouse, children, brothers and sisters - yes, even one's own life! - such a person cannot be My disciple.** The theme of this verse is not alienation from one's family, but the cost of **discipleship**; nothing, not love for **father** or **mother** or even **one's own life**, is to come before loyalty to ADONAI and His Meshiach. **And whoever does not carry their cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple** (Luke 14:25-27 The Message).

The Final Separation Between David and Y'honatan: The next morning the melancholy prince found his way out into the country at the [place] he had arranged with David to discuss the test, taking with him a young boy. As they had prearranged, he told the boy, "Now run and find the arrows I'm about to shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow far beyond him. When the boy reached where the arrow was that Y'honatan had shot, with a heavy heart, the prince shouted to the boy, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" That coded question meant that Sha'ul was angry and set to kill David. And he shot more arrows far beyond him. And Y'honatan continued shouting after the boy, "Quick! Hurry! Don't just stand there!" Y'honatan's boy gathered the arrows and returned to his master, but the boy didn't understand anything about the matter - only Y'honatan and David understood. Y'honatan gave his weapons to his young boy and said to him, "Go, carry them to the city" (First Samuel 20:35-40 CJB). **When David heard Y'honatan dismiss the boy, indicating that he wished to stay behind, David understood that Y'honatan felt that it was safe for the two of them to have a few minutes together before they finally parted.**

As soon as the boy had gone, David got up from his hiding place behind the **Departure Stone** and came to say goodbye to Y'honatan, who had remained. Pent up emotion found relief, first in tears and then in remembrance of their mutual commitment before YHVH. David fell down on the ground and prostrated himself three times; and they kissed one another as brothers and wept together until it became too much for David. Then Y'honatan repeated the oath of 1 Samuel 20:23, but now the stakes of the covenant are much higher. He said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each

other in the name of ADONAI, saying, 'ADONAI is a witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants (see Da - [David and Mephiboseth](#)) forever" (First Samuel 20:41-42a). There is something final and breathtaking about these words. It is as though Y'honatan now fully recognized that the tide had turned. Sha'ul had failed, and his own life as Sha'ul's son was gravely in danger. David would have his way in the future and Y'honatan wanted access to the future that only David could give.

Then Y'honatan went back to Gibeah. David was only about 24 years old when he left his friend (First Samuel 20:42b). David slowly departed and Y'honatan went back to his path of duty to live with a father who didn't understand him at all, who hadn't the slightest interest in his principles. Only once more, briefly in a desperate and dangerous setting, would the two men meet again in life. Though physically separated and pulled apart by different obligations they would remain inseparably joined by the oath they swore.

Y'honatan speaks the final words in this bitter chapter, "Go in shalom." On the face of it, these words are ridiculous. They were leaving for war and conflict. David was about to flee for his life and would live for five years as a fugitive, and Y'honatan was returning to the service of his wicked and deranged father. How could Y'honatan speak of their going in shalom? The answer was the covenant they had made, which established peace between them. Although troubles would come, both men would be faithful to their covenant till the day they died. So in the midst of great conflict, they departed in peace and lived in peace. If we will likewise commit to a life of faithfulness in covenant with others, we too will enjoy peace in a world of conflict.

More important still was the peace they received through their covenant with ADONAI. Their shalom rested on YHVH's covenant promises and His faithfulness to keep His oath. This is where our souls find peace as well. We gain peace with God through the covenant of grace, which says: Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31). Through faith in Messiah's blood, we are forgiven of our sins and justified (meaning just as if I'd never sinned) in His sight. His covenant promise then secures our peace, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Though all the world should overwhelm us, Ha'Shem's covenant of faithfulness will calm our souls. Like Y'honatan and David, we do not have the power to control the events around us. Nevertheless, like them, we can live in troubled times with the peace of the Lord that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Just as Y'honatan and David separated in **peace**, having rested **their** hearts in a bond of covenant love, we rest our souls in the promised grace of our sovereign Lord and **Savior**. He promises to **His** covenant people: **What I AM leaving with you is shalom - I AM giving you My shalom. I don't give the way the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (Yochanan 14:27 CJB).**⁷⁶