

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

LESSON VI.

May 9, 1915, Friendship of David and Jonathan.—1 Samuel 20:1-42.

Commentary.—I. The covenant (vs. 1-23). 1-10. David had fled from Saul to Samuel at Ramath and was there in the school of the prophets. Saul had learned where he was, and had pursued him. David fully realized his danger, and returned to his trusted friend, Jonathan. He asked him what he had done that Saul should seek to slay him. Jonathan assured David that his father would take no step without letting him know about it, and he would report to him any designs his father might have against him. David was aware that Saul knew of Jonathan's friendship for him, and saw in that fact a reason why he would not reveal to Jonathan his plans to cause David's death. David gave utterance to the memorable words, "There is but a step between me and death" (v. 3). Jonathan was ready to do for David whatever he desired, and when David planned a feast to determine Saul's present attitude toward him, he readily consented to do his part. The new moon, or the beginning of the month, with an occasion for offering sacrifices to God. It had become a season of feasting in the king's court, and all the chief officers of the king were expected to be present. David would not expose himself to death by being present, so he planned a report brought to him as to how the king felt toward him.

11-23. Jonathan and David went into the field and consulted how information concerning Saul might be given by Jonathan to David secretly. Jonathan pledged to David that, when he had sounded his father, he would inform him whether his attitude was friendly or hostile. Jonathan seems to have known that David would succeed Saul as king, and he therefore asked a pledge from David to show kindness to him and his house forever. It was customary for a king upon ascending the throne to slay all who might have any apparent right to reign. David gave his word, as Jonathan requested, and his subsequent history shows how he remembered the covenant and kept it. Jonathan's love for David is emphatically expressed in "He loved him as he loved his own soul" (v. 17).

II. Jonathan's fruitless plea (vs. 24-34). 24-31. David hid himself in the field, according to the plan agreed upon between himself and Jonathan, absenting himself from the feast in the royal court. On the first day Saul observed that his seat was vacant, but thought David's absence was because he was not ceremonially clean. His absence on the second day called for an inquiry, and he asked Jonathan for an explanation. Jonathan told him that David had asked permission to attend a family feast at Bethlehem, and he had granted it. This and Saul to make unkind charges against his son. He reproached him with being the son of a "perverse, rebellious woman" (v. 30). "To any oriental nothing is so grievously insulting as a reproach cast upon his mother. The mother herself is not held to be affronted in such cases, but the son who hears such words applied to her is insulted, and meant to be insulted beyond expiation."—Kitto. Saul charged Jonathan with being in league with David. Then he appealed to Jonathan's ambition, declaring that as long as David lived there would be no hope of his occupying the throne of Israel, and commanded him to have David brought to him that he might be put to death.

32. Wherefore shall he be slain.—Although Jonathan saw that his father was angry both at him and at David, he undertook the defence of his friend. What hath he done—Jonathan asked Saul a question that he could not answer and be consistent with his determination to kill David. David had been the means of preserving the kingdom of Israel. More than once he had constantly acted in the highest interests of his nation. He had not been discourteous to the king, even under the greatest provocation. He had shown himself to be brave, large-hearted and highly intelligent. It was now more than a mere fit of madness with Saul; there had come to be a settled purpose to slay David. 33. Saul cast a javelin at him.—The king could not answer his son's question, and his only reply was to hurl at him the javelin that was always within easy reach. Jonathan knew—the fact that Saul would kill his own for being a friend to David was enough to convince Jonathan that David's life was in serious jeopardy. Saul's unfriendliness toward David, even overlooking his past misdeeds. He was more concerned to have vengeance upon one of whom he was jealous than to have righteousness prevail in his kingdom. 34. In fierce anger—Jonathan had been deeply insulted by his father, but he was overlooking that and giving attention to Saul's disposition toward his friend David. "We should probably understand this rather of Jonathan's grief than of his anger, the latter explaining the former; for he was grieved for David. He was grieved for his father; he was grieved for his friend."—Clarke. Because his father had done him shame—Saul had wronged David publicly by speaking as if he might be plotting to gain the kingdom for himself. He was greatly injuring David's reputation, or he was, at least, taking a course to weaken David's influence.

III. The loving farewell (vs. 35-42). 35. In the morning after the second day of the feast from which David had absented himself. At the time appointed with David—it was a time to which David had looked forward with intense interest, for he was to learn Saul's mind regarding him. A little had been with him.—To bring back the arrows he was to shoot. 36. He shot



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...beyond him—it was understood between David and Jonathan that if Jonathan should shoot the arrows beyond where David was, that Saul's mind was hostile toward him. The lad would know nothing of the purpose of the shooting, but David would understand. 37. Jonathan cried after the lad—If David did not see the course of the arrow, his friend's call to the lad, "Is not the arrow beyond thee?" would give him the signal agreed upon; and if he had seen it, the knowledge sought would be twice given. 38. Make speed, haste, stay not—Jonathan sent this cry after the lad, but it was really directed to David. The lad suspected nothing, but caught the full import of the words. 39. Jonathan and David knew—The signal had been agreed upon previously. 40. Artillery—His bow, arrows and quiver. This word was used of weapons thrown or hurled, even before gunpowder came into use. Carry them to city—Jonathan sent the boy away that he might be alone with David. 41. Fell on his face to the ground—David showed his respect to Jonathan as to a superior in Oriental style by falling upon his knees and touching his forehead to the ground. Three times—David was deeply grateful to Jonathan for his interest in him and thus expressed his gratitude and obligation. David exceeded—David was more deeply moved than Jonathan. His weeping was more abundant than that of his friend. 42. Go in peace.—Jonathan had made it possible for David to escape with his life. We have sworn both of us—David and Jonathan had sworn to each other to be friends and to have regard for each other's families. The Lord be between me and thee.—We may well believe that when, in after years, David drew to his court the posterity of Jon-

athan, he often told them himself of these last events before their separation.—Ewald. QUESTIONS.—To what place did David go from Natioth? To what friend did David tell his grief? In what way did Jonathan show his friendship for David? What plan was made to find out Saul's attitude toward Jonathan? How did Saul feel toward Jonathan? How did Jonathan let David know how Saul felt toward him? What covenant did Jonathan and David make? What was the basis of the friendship existing between them? PRACTICAL SURVEY. Topic.—True friendship. I. Began in covenant with God. II. Constant amid life's perils. I. Began in covenant with God. David became aware that Saul's attempts on his life were not to be ascribed to fitful outbursts of madness, but to a fixed purpose, and for reasons he could not fathom. Saul was subtle and morose, charged to the full with envy and malice, ready for deeds of blood, yet fearful of a doom of which he dared not speak. A crisis had come in David's life which demanded prompt action. While in conflict with Goliath and amid the regular duties of public service, David had no fear for his life or reputation, but when he suspected secret attempts on his life and character, he felt bound to devise means of securing himself and richly manifested such anxiety and resolution. Jonathan appears to have been authority with his father in all matters pertaining to the court and government, and yet it was a very difficult matter to find out Saul's mind. It involved no little risk to Jonathan. Saul's spirit and conduct were evidence that all efforts to bring him to a right attitude were in vain. Saul

assumed that policy and prudence would regulate the succession of the throne. Jonathan's love for David and spiritual insight enabled him to see through the fallacy and to make his choice. He was proof against unholy parental influence; against material consideration delusively presented and even threatened death. The manner in which he performed his part is a beautiful instance of wise and faithful friendship under most perilous circumstances. He dared to let the court know his preference for the spiritual over the material. That was heroism which required more courage than to go amid their cheers to the annals of the world. To Saul's selfish heart this boldness of love and self-forgetfulness seemed nothing but self-will and sheer madness. Hatred had become the pervading spirit of Saul's life and it gave a coloring to everything. At the very beginning of the dark valley of trial through which David had to pass in consequence of Saul's jealousy, he was blessed with Jonathan's friendship. They entered into covenant in the name of Jehovah. I. Constant amid life's perils. Jonathan's love for David began in the midst of his new-born popularity, but it lasted all through his reverses. While Jonathan was always faithful to David, he was never false to his father. His conduct was most exemplary, eminently practical, and wholly unselfish. He had espoused the cause of right against might. The spontaneity and heartiness with which he laid aside all prospects of power and distinction and his rights to the throne, finding joy and satisfaction in the coming supremacy of David, proved his friendship to be of an eminently holy character. He carried in his heart a tender secret, that of being bound by holy bonds to the interests of a coming king. To befriend David was to displease Saul, yet there was no faltering in Jonathan's fidelity. He was indignant against injury and wickedness. He pleaded for right and innocence. He was indignant at the base insinuations against the noblest and purest of men. Being able to surrender his own prospects, he could strengthen the faith of his friend, when pressed almost beyond endurance, and weary with continued flight. He considered the loneliness and oppressed state of David. He had come into great peril in the service of God. David's description of his own condition was that there was but a step between him and death. Through the office of friendship God mercifully provided for his safety against an enraged and envious king. It was Jonathan who brought a delightful oasis in this wilderness history. The separation between David and Jonathan was one of the painful trials of life, yet they had an inalienable possession in their mutual affection, a strong and an habitual inclination to promote the good and happiness of each other. While the joy of Jonathan indicated danger and that separation would be for the welfare of both and the further interests of the kingdom, they reminded David that a strong and noble friend was standing in the breach. T. R. A.

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