

Lesson 9

II Samuel 19:11-24:25 David Regains the Throne with Great Difficulty

Introduction

Absalom is killed and David returns to Jerusalem but the kingdom is never quite the same under his rule. In his later years the scars of the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah remain, just as God through Nathan the prophet had prophesied. Time and again we see that David's faith in God has not waned, yet he struggles with the consequences of sin and the reality of his humanness. In last week's study we left David sitting at the city gates of Mahanaim in Gad, mourning the death of Absalom, wishing he himself had died and Absalom were still living. The people found this to be odious and hurtful, even humiliating and asked the question, *"The king rescued us from the hand of our enemies, and delivered us from the hand of the Philistines. Now he has fled from the land, from before Absalom, and Absalom, who we had anointed over us, has died in battle; and now why are you silent regarding bringing back the king?"* Many of the people have slipped away in shame and seriously questioning the veracity of David and wondering if they are better off with David on the throne or should they seek another king from among their ranks.

Chapter 19:11-44 A less than glorious return to Jerusalem

Vs. 11-15 Before the king returns to Jerusalem he sends messengers to ask if the people will accept David back on the throne. The majority of the people quickly switched loyalty to Absalom, some out of fear and some out of the excitement of something new, but now there is confusion as Absalom has died in battle and the previous king, David had fled the country. The hearts of the people are unsure, and there are perhaps many who might treat the king with treachery. Even Judah, the tribe of David, has been slow to accept the return of David to the throne.

David sends the priests, Zadok and his son Abiathar to the elders of Judah to ask the question, *"Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house?"* In what seems to be a surprising move David promised Amasa, Absalom's general who led the attack against David, though a fellow Judahite, the position of commander of David's army. This accomplished two things, it would hopefully build some peace and unity following the Absalom coup, and it helped satisfy the anger and hurt David felt knowing it was Joab who killed Absalom.

The people responded with renewed loyalty to David and the men of Judah went to Gilgal on the Jordan River to meet the king and return him and his servants to Jerusalem.

Vs. 16-21 Along with the men of Judah, one thousand men of the Benjaminites also went to meet David and his servants. Leading the men of Benjamin was none other than Shimei, son of Gera, the very man who threw rocks and dust at the king (chapter 16) and his servants at Bahurim as David was fleeing Jerusalem. Shimei was most repentant for his behaviors as the king was fleeing, and asked forgiveness. Among the Benjaminites was Ziba and his 15 sons, the servant David had assigned to work the land given to Mephibosheth, grandson of Saul (Chapter 9). In chapter 16 Ziba had also approached David and gave a false report of Mephibosheth turning against David and seeking honor and position from Absalom.

Abishai, one of the commanders of the army, David's nephew, requests the honor of executing Shimei for his disrespect of the king. Here we see the contrite David, the man who realizes how close to death he came from his own son. David responds to Abishai, *"What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah (David's sister), that this day you should be an adversary to me? Should any man be put to death in Israel today? For do I not know I am king over Israel today?"* Then David forgave Shimei.

I wonder if Shimei might be a foreshadow of Saul of Tarsus. We find Saul, a Benjaminite, holding the coats of those stoning Stephen and then persecuting the church. After his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul (Paul) becomes a loyal follower of Jesus and commits himself to expanding the Kingdom of God.

Shimei refers to the men of Benjamin as being of the house of Joseph. This is a euphemism referring to the tribes representing the sons of Rachel; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. These have come representing a collective of Israel, along with Judah, in welcoming the king back to Jerusalem.

Vs. 24-30 Mephibosheth came to greet David, and he had not cared for his feet, trimmed his whiskers or washed his clothes since David was forced to flee Jerusalem. These are all signs of mourning, as Mephibosheth grieved for David. Mephibosheth reported that his servant, Ziba, had deceived him when it came time to depart and flee with David and he knew Ziba had spoken slanderously to the King about Mephibosheth. David restored half Mephibosheth's property to him, allowing Ziba to retain the other half.

Vs. 40-43 National discontent becomes evident as the men from throughout Israel, referring to the 10 northern tribes provoke an argument with the men of Judah – who owns a higher interest in the King? Their complaint is that it appears Judah is receiving more favor from the king and they want equality, thus leading up a revolt against David.

Chapter 20 A revolt in the land

Vs. 1-3 A base and worthless fellow of the tribe of Benjamin, named Sheba, blew his shophar and called all the men of Israel to retreat from David, *“We have no portion in David, nor do we have an inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, O Israel!”*

So all the men of Israel, the ten northern tribes, retreated and followed Sheba. The men of Judah remained loyal to David.

Vs. 3 Upon returning to the palace, David took the ten concubines who had been violated by Absalom (16:21) and put them away. The women were deemed to no longer be appropriate for the king and since they had been intimate with the king, they were forbidden to marry common men. David could neither live with them nor divorce them, so they lived as widows the rest of their lives.

Vs. 4-14 Without great fanfare in writing, Chapter 19:12 records that David replaces Joab with Amasa as commander of the army. Joab is a hard warring man and he is the one responsible for killing Absalom, so David replaces him as commander.

David gave Amasa the command to have the military ready to go to war against Sheba in three days, to track Sheba down and stop the revolt. The army showed up in three days but Amasa did not. So David sends the army out under the command of Abishai, brother of Joab. Joab and his men were a part of the army of David and went out to pursue Sheba, to track him down and stop him before he might be able to completely escape and find refuge in some fortified city.

But Joab had a personal mission as well. When they reached the large stone in Gibeon (Gibeon was known for its large rock outcrop), Amasa caught up with them and met them there. Joab stealthily greeted Amasa with his right hand while striking him down with a sword with his left. He cut Amasa so that his entrails began to flow out of his body and left Amasa in the road to die. In the eyes of Joab, Amasa had been chosen to replace him as commander of David’s armies, but Amasa had also disgraced himself and dishonored the king by not personally meeting David’s time command. Joab left Amasa bleeding in the road but his men, out of respect for others, dragged Amasa off the road into a field and covered his body. The treachery of the rule of David was great, even when it was carried out against his own people. These enemies are Israelites, God’s people, David’s fellow members of the Kingdom of God, and such great violence is occurring. Why? I remember a quote I read in graduate school, attributed to Dr. Rollo May, one of the fathers of modern day psychology, *“People are nauseatingly similar”*. Are the people of Israel in David’s day any different than people of today? Are they not driven by the forces as man is today – greed, power, lust, and personal aggrandizement? The story of David reinforces this over and over. Man has continually fallen short of God’s ideal, requiring the need for redemption from the only One who can provide true redemption.

Vs. 15-22 Sheba ran far but he could not get away. Joab and David's army chased Sheba throughout the entire land of Israel and were finally trapped in the town of Abel-Beth-Maacah, in the farthest northern boundary of Israel. A siege ramp was constructed against the wall of Abel-Beth-maacah and David's men began to destroy the wall.

As Joab's men were tearing down the walls of the city, a wise woman from the city appeared and asked to speak to Joab. Joab spoke with her and she stated she was a peaceful person, faithful to King David, one of many in the town and she feared the destruction of the army of Judah would destroy her city and kill many innocents. When Joab told her all they wanted was Sheba because he had lifted his hand against David the king, and if she could hand Sheba over to him, he would leave the rest of the city in peace. She agreed they would give Joab the head of Sheba, and thus she did by throwing the head of Sheba over the city wall to Joab. Joab blew the trumpet and all the military retreated to their tents and Joab returned to Jerusalem.

There have been books written about women in the scriptures who have done amazing, life saving things. Rahab hid the Israeli spies (Joshua 2); Jael who drove a tent peg through the head of Sisera the feared military general oppressing Israel (Judges 4); Deborah, the judge who lead Israel in this conflict against Sisera (Judges 4-5); Esther, the queen of Babylon (Esther 7-9); and one of my favorites, Judith as recorded in the Apocryphal book bearing her name. These are just a few of the women who have played such significant or major roles in the lives of god's people. This unnamed woman living in Abel Beth-maacah was obviously wise, intelligent, highly regarded and favored among her people, and able to deliver something as grizzly as the head of Sheba.

We have read of several beheadings throughout these two books, most notably the beheading of Goliath by David. The act of beheading an enemy signified total destruction and absolute death of the enemy. There is no doubt the enemy has been defeated if you can show his severed head. By taking the head to towns and villages, peace can resume knowing that the dread of the adversary has been defeated and people can get on with their lives.

Vs. 23-26 For a period of time David's kingdom finds a place of rest and structure as several leaders of different fields and industries are listed in these closing verses of chapter 20. Joab was reinstated as commander of all the army for his handling of Sheba, however, I Kings 2:5-6 records David instructing Solomon to punish Joab for his treachery against both Abner and Amasa, former commanders of the army appointed by David and murdered by Joab.

Chapter 21 Famine, restitution and Philistine warfare

Vs. 1-9 A famine of three years duration occurs in the land to disturb the peace. David entreats God regarding the famine and learns that the famine is a punishment against the treacheries of King Saul when he had many Gibeonites put to death. Saul's home town was Gibeah in the tribe of Benjamin. The Gibeonites were descendents of the Amorites or Hivites but had become loyal to Israel. Joshua 9 records how the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into making covenants of safety with them when Joshua was leading Israel in taking the land. Israel had been tricked by the Gibeonites but they had made solemn oaths for safety and preservations and so honored those oaths. Joshua made the Gibeonites hewers of wood and drawers of water and they served the high priest at the tabernacle from that day forward. However, Saul chose to have them exterminated, so all these years later God punishes this treachery with a famine on the entire land.

Gibeah is located just three to four miles north of Jerusalem. David called on the Gibeonites to ask what could be done to provide restitution and atonement for Saul's atrocities. They requested that seven descendents of Saul be turned over to them to be hanged and they would be at peace. David agreed and turned over to them Amoni and Mephibosheth, sons of Saul by Rizpah; and five grandsons of Saul born to his daughter, Merab and her husband, Adriel, son of Barsallai, the 80 year old man from Mahanaim. The Mephibosheth handed over is not the son of Jonathan whom David had taken into his own home.

The seven men were taken to the rocky hill that Gibeah was known for (the same area Joab had killed Amasa in 20:8) and hanged them till they died. This occurred at the beginning of the barley harvest in early spring, and the first harvest of the year. Due to the famine, most likely caused by drought, there was probably not much of a barley harvest that year but if the drought lifted, they could look forward to a wheat harvest in early summer.

Vs. 10-14 Rizpah, the mother of two of the slain descendents of Saul grieved greatly. She set up a tent of sackcloth and ashes and preserved the bodies of the seven men from burial from the spring time when they died till the fall rains came months later. She mourned daily for her sons and the others and she kept the birds of prey from their bodies by day and the wild animals away by night. When David was informed of this mourning vigil he sent to Jabesh-gilead for the bones of Saul and Jonathan from where they had been buried and returned them to Gibeon and buried them with the bodies of the seven who had been hanged at Zela, in the land of Benjamin, in the grave of Saul's father, Kish.

After this, God answered the prayers of Israel and lifted the famine from off the land. The sages teach that eventually all ungodly deeds will be punished. Exodus 20:5 records God's own words that the sins of the fathers may be visited on the children even to the third and fourth generations. We certainly see an example of that here. Exodus 34:5-7, again

recording God's own words, restates the consequences on the children to the third and fourth generations. It also says that God will forgive the sin, trespass and iniquity, but will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.

Vs. 15-22 There was a Philistine uprising again and David lead the army into battle. However, David became exhausted and Ishbi-benob, a son of Goliath made it clear he intended to kill David. Abashai stepped in and killed Ishbi-benob. Following this, David's men together swore that David should not go to war anymore, "so that you may not extinguish the lamp of Israel".

The battles with the Philistines continued, and Israel continued to kill the descendants and brothers of Goliath of Gath. Saph, a son of Goliath was struck down at Gob as was the brother of Goliath, Lahmi (I Chronicles 20:5). In Gath, during another battle, a son of Goliath who is described as a man with huge dimensions with 6 fingers on each hand and 6 toes on each foot, was struck down by David's nephew, Jonathon.

Chapter 22 A song of David

This song of David is essentially recorded in Psalms as Psalm 18. It is a song for all who believe in God, for all time. You and I may have never experienced the "holocaust" of life but we know people, or of people who have. We have all experienced loss, anger and great sorrow or pain. Walter Brueggemann in his book, "Spirituality of the Psalms", writes about psalms such as Psalm 18,

"... their use is an act of bold faith, albeit a transformed faith. It is an act of bold faith on the one hand, because it insists that the world must be experienced as it really is and not in some pretended way. On the other hand, it is bold because it insists that all such experiences of disorder are a proper subject of discourse with God. Nothing is out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate. Everything properly belongs in this conversation of the heart. To withhold parts of life from that conversation is in fact to withhold part of life the sovereignty of God. Thus, these psalms (like Psalm 18) make the important connection: everything must be brought to speech, and everything brought to speech must be addressed to God, who is the final reference for all life." (page 17)

Brueggemann goes on to explain that these conversations with God represent a transformed faith, an acknowledgement that God is present in, participating in, and attentive to our lives, even in the darkness of our lives. In Psalm 23 David recognizes that even when one walks through the deep dark canyons of life, God is there. Not only is God present in these very dark times, He provides transformation for His children. At times the darkness is turned to light once again (disorientation becomes reorientation). For David, it was the vindication over his foes. However, it is important to recognize that reorientation

may occur beyond the grave where reorientation takes place in the very presence of the Living God, receiving the crown of life for a life well lived.

Chapter 23 David's last song

Vs. 1-7 David writes his last song extolling the brilliance of God, His blessings on the righteous and his wrath against the unrighteous.

Vs. 8-39 The remainder of Chapter 23 seems to be dedicated to the mighty men of David. These were amazing warriors, totally loyal to David and extreme defenders of Israel, especially as Israel was related to David their king. The mighty men of David are listed by name as a lasting tribute to them and their feats.

Additionally, specific battles are recorded and acts of bravery, stealth and strength. David loved these men and trusted them completely. These men proved their loyalty to David over and over again, showing they would most happily lay down their own lives for the sake of their commander in chief, David. It takes a good leader to extract such love and devotion from the people who follow him. The last mighty man listed was Uriah the Hittite, the one David had killed in battle to cover his sin with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. This listing of Uriah at the end of the list of mighty men seems to emphasize the sting of the sinful manner in which David treated him and serves as a lasting tribute to the man slain for his faithful service to the king.

Chapter 24 David foolishly takes a census of his potential military

Vs. 1-14 David ordered a census of all the men available to serve in the military of Israel. It took Joab and his men nine months and 20 days to complete the census and they found 800,000 valiant men across Israel and an additional 500,000 within the tribe of Judah.

God was displeased with David for numbering his available warriors because it indicated David put more faith in the numbers of warriors available to call upon than he placed in God as the protector of Israel (I Chronicles 21:1-8). David realized his sin and asked God to forgive him, *"I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly"*.

God sent the prophet Gad to David to inform him of God's great displeasure and to inform David that God will punish David and through him all of Israel for this sin. David is allowed to choose the consequence of his sin from three options:

1. Seven years of famine on the land
2. David must flee from his enemies for three months

3. Three days of pestilence on the land

David chooses three days of pestilence on the land.

Vs. 15-17 God sends a pestilence on the land and 70,000 men died from Dan to the north and Beersheba in the south. David prays to God from the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Threshing floors are known as places of judgment so it is reasonable David is heard praying to God over this judgment against Israel. The threshing floor is located just north of the City of David, on the top of Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham offered Isaac on the altar (Genesis 22) and Jacob had the dream of the ladder stretching into heaven (Genesis 28). David pleads with God to cease the destruction of innocent people and offers God his own life rather than take the vengeance being meted out on the people.

Vs. 18-25 God held up the angel He had sent to bring the pestilence on the land and commanded David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah. David purchased the threshing floor from Araunah to build an altar and cease the curse on the land. Araunah offers to give the property to David, but David resists the gift and purchases the threshing floor at full value, 50 shekels of silver for the property and the oxen to offer on the altar. David offered the oxen and prayers and God stopped the pestilence on the land.

The lasting significance of the purchase of the threshing floor on Mount Moriah was not just the ceasing of the pestilence on the land. In years to come, this is the site Solomon would build the temple in honor of God.