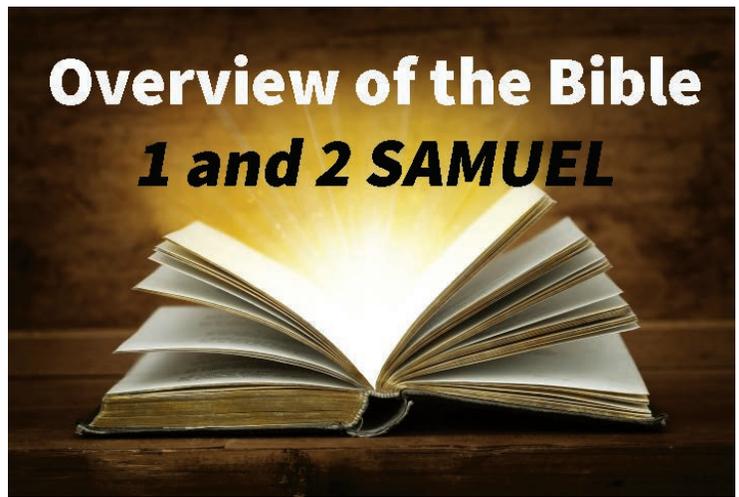


SECTION ONE

DAVID RUNS FOR HIS LIFE —AGAIN

2 Samuel 15:13-37
Lesson 84

Wednesday, April 20, 2022



Big Idea: *In the midst of a crisis, submission to the Lord's will and wise action go hand in hand.*

The Text in Context

The tension in the plot heightens in this episode of the story. When the news of Absalom's revolt and widespread support reaches Jerusalem, David decides to flee the city immediately. Apparently he feels that the city is indefensible, and he does not want Absalom to slaughter the city's people (v. 14). Yet all is not lost: the foundation is laid for a favorable resolution to the plot as David places his destiny in the Lord's hands (v. 26) and then takes actions that will prove to be of utmost importance. He sets up a spy network that will prove valuable (cf. 15:28, 35–36 with 17:15–22) and enlists Hushai to counteract Ahithophel's influence in the royal court (cf. 15:34 with 17:7–14).

Interpretive Insights

15:13 *The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.* The language recalls the Shechemites' response to evil Abimelech (Judg. 9:3). If the echo is intentional, Absalom's misguided, rebellious allies are likened to Abimelech's misguided, rebellious followers, creating another literary link between two figures who are guilty of fratricide (see 13:29–30). We know how Abimelech's rebellion ended (Judg. 9:52–57), so this does not bode well for Absalom, even though he appears to have the upper hand at this point.

15:16 *but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace.* This apparent sidenote should grab the attention of the careful reader, for it brings to mind one of the elements in Nathan's prophecy (12:11–12; cf. 16:21–22). Amid this crisis we are reminded once more that everything transpiring is rooted in David's crimes.

15:21 *there will your servant be.* For whatever reason, David refers to Absalom as "the king" (v. 19 AT) and advises Ittai the Gittite to enlist in Absalom's service (v. 20). But Ittai will have none of it. Calling David "my lord the king," he vows his allegiance even if it means death. Loyal Ittai is a literary foil for deceitful Absalom and his band of rebels.

15:25 *Take the ark of God back into the city.* David refuses to use the ark as if it were a magical charm or palladium by which one could manipulate or compel God (cf. 1 Sam. 4) or an object designed to ensure his personal protection. It belongs in the place David has designated as its dwelling place. He does not assume that it will, by its very presence in the city, bring blessing to Absalom.

If I find favor in the LORD's eyes. David realizes that his destiny is in the Lord's hands, and he submits himself to the divine will.

15:31 *LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness.* Sometimes the Lord answers prayers through human instruments. In this case the answer to David's prayer immediately appears in the person of Hushai (v. 32). David's suggestion that Hushai frustrate Ahithophel's advice (v. 34), when compared with his prayer that the Lord would make Ahithophel's advice foolish (v. 31), shows that David understands the providential working of the Lord quite well.

Theological Insights

David's response amid this crisis reflects a balance between reliance on God and pragmatism. On the one hand, he resigns himself to God's sovereign decisions and refuses to try to manipulate or compel God. On the other hand, he also prays specifically that God will thwart his enemies, he sets up a spy network in Jerusalem, and he instructs loyal Hushai to use deception and counter Absalom's advisers. His reaction is reminiscent of Jacob: when confronted with the frightening prospect of meeting Esau, he responds by praying fervently for God's blessing (Gen. 32:9–12) while at the same time implementing some very pragmatic measures to protect himself and his family (32:3–8, 13–23). Trust in God and wise actions are complementary, not antithetical—an important lesson for God's people in all ages to remember. The book of Ruth also holds trust in divine sovereignty and human responsibility in balance. It shows us that God is concerned about needy people, yet it also reminds us that God often meets their needs through people who are willing to do what is right and to sacrifice for the good of others.

Key Themes of 2 Samuel 15:13–37

- David submits himself to the Lord's sovereign will and looks to the Lord for protection.
- David also makes shrewd decisions and uses his loyal supporters to the best possible advantage.

Teaching the Text

One overriding principle emerges from this account: *In times of crisis, it makes sense to entrust one's destiny to the Lord while at the same time praying for divine aid and making wise plans.* As noted above, David submits his destiny to the Lord's sovereign will, recognizing that apart from the Lord's favor, he will not be delivered and vindicated (vv. 25–26). To his credit, he refuses to try to manipulate God. But this does not mean that he adopts a fatalistic, do-nothing attitude. On the contrary, he prays specifically that the Lord will thwart the advice of Ahithophel, who has shifted his allegiance to Absalom (v. 31). Furthermore, he does everything in his power to set up a system of spies and counteragents who will promote his best interests and keep him informed of Absalom's intentions. The Lord's people must avoid the extreme of fatalism ("Let go and let God"), which stresses the role of divine sovereignty but downplays the importance of petitionary prayer and human responsibility; they must also avoid the other extreme of self-reliance ("God helps those who help themselves"), which stresses the role of human responsibility but downplays divine sovereignty. Our sovereign God typically works out his purposes in response to prayer and through human agency. One sees this in David's case, where the Lord providentially begins to answer his prayer regarding Ahithophel immediately through loyal Hushai, who just happens to meet David at the top of the hill after David has prayed while ascending it (vv. 30–32).¹

SECTION TWO

THE LORD THWARTS A CURSE

2 Samuel 16:1-14

Big Idea: *The Lord vindicates his repentant servants when they humbly submit to his discipline.*

The Text in Context

Absalom has gained widespread support and declared himself king. Even David's counselor, Ahithophel, has switched his allegiance. Knowing that Absalom would soon march with his army to Jerusalem, David has hastily left the city and was forced once more to run for his life. In this crisis David has submitted to God's sovereign will, but he also has prayed and wisely enlisted the support of those who remained loyal to him. In this next section we see his reliance on the Lord vindicated. As Abigail earlier did (1 Sam. 25:18), now Ziba brings provisions for David, and, in the face of hostile opposition from Shimei, a relative of Saul, David again places his destiny in the Lord's hands and

¹ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 256–258.

refuses to take vengeance against a member of Saul's family (2 Sam. 16:5–13). In fact, as he has done on one occasion with Saul, he prohibits Abishai from killing his perceived enemy (16:9–10; cf. 1 Sam. 26:8–11). These literary links with 1 Samuel 25–26 bode well for David: The Lord delivered him earlier, and he will do so again. David's eventual vindication in the face of Shimei's curse also contributes to the narrator's apology for David, a theme that has not been as prominent in the story since the account of David's sin, but one that nevertheless remains present, if at times beneath the surface, throughout the unfolding narrative. Shimei's curse is not realized (the Lord does not hand the kingdom over to Absalom) because his accusation that David has murdered members of Saul's household is false (2 Sam. 16:7–8).

Interpretive Insights

16:1 *He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded.* One cannot help but be reminded of Abigail's gift to David and his men. The lists of provisions are identical in some respects and similar in others:

Abigail's Gift

(1 Sam. 25:18)

200 loaves of bread

2 skins of wine

5 sheep

5 seahs of roasted grain

100 cakes of raisins

200 cakes of pressed figs

Ziba's Gift

(2 Sam. 16:1)

200 loaves of bread

1 skin of wine

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100 cakes of raisins

100 cakes of summer fruit (i.e., figs)

Just as the Lord providentially provided for the fugitive David on that earlier occasion, so he is providing for the fugitive David now.

16:3 *Today the Israelites will restore to me my grandfather's kingdom.* Taking Ziba's report at face value, David decrees that (supposedly) disloyal Mephibosheth's property be given to (supposedly) loyal Ziba (v. 4).

Key Themes of 2 Samuel 16:1–14

- The Lord provides for the physical needs of David and his supporters.
- David trusts the Lord to vindicate his innocence in the face of Shimei's false accusation.

16:5 *he cursed.* The only other individual to curse David in 1-2 Samuel is Goliath (1 Sam. 17:43). The intertextual link does not cast Shimei in a very positive light.

16:8 *for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul.* It is likely that Shimei and other Benjamites believe that David is responsible for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (after all, David was employed by the Philistines at the time of Saul's death), Abner (after all, it was David's nephew and right-hand man, Joab, who murdered Abner), and Ish-bosheth (after all, Ish-bosheth's murderers took their victim's head to David). It is also possible that Shimei is referring, at least in part, to the incident recorded in 2 Samuel 21:1–9, which tells how David hands seven descendants of Saul over to the Gibeonites for execution. But the narrator absolves David of guilt in all of these instances. Shimei's accusation is unfounded and based on superficial, circumstantial evidence.

16:9 *Let me go over and cut off his head.* David's response to Shimei's false accusations and hostility is a reminder of his own innocence. Once before Abishai volunteered to kill a perceived enemy (Saul himself!), and David ordered him not to do so (1 Sam. 26:7–12). That incident was proof of his loyalty to Saul; the episode is replayed here, as it were, as a reminder that David has never taken or endorsed any hostile actions against Saul or his royal house.

16:10 *Curse David.* From his past experience with Saul, David realizes that opposition and the suffering it entails are part of God's sovereign design (see the comment above on 1 Sam. 26:19).

16:11 *for the LORD has told him to.* David's words to Abishai express his reliance on the Lord. David undoubtedly

realizes that he is being punished for his earlier crimes. His very own son is seeking his life, and David suspects that the Lord himself has prompted Shimei to utter his curse. Actually, if the curse fails to materialize, David's innocence with respect to the house of Saul will be proved, so David is willing to suffer this indignity in the meantime.

16:12 *and restore to me his covenant blessing.* David's use of the verb "restore" (*heshib*) counterbalances Shimei's use of the term (cf. "repaid" in v. 8). David submits to the justice of God: if Shimei's charge that the Lord is repaying David for crimes against Saul's house is wrong, perhaps the Lord will demonstrate the false nature of the accusation by repaying him with good.

Theological Insights

David accepts what Shimei is dishing out as part of God's discipline. This does not mean that David agrees with Shimei's accusation, but he is willing to accept such unjust treatment as coming from the hand of God. David realizes that God is merciful, even in the midst of dishing out punishment. After all, following the death of David's infant son as punishment for his crimes, the Lord has given him a child and named him Jedidiah, as a sign of his favor (see 12:24–25). David hopes that the Lord will take notice of his suffering and grant him favor in the face of Shimei's curse.

Teaching the Text

When undergoing divine discipline, it is wise to submit to the will of God. In the face of Shimei's physical violence, insults, and false accusations, David does not strike back in anger or vengeance, but submits to the Lord's discipline. In the aftermath of his crimes and Nathan's prophecy, he recognizes that he is subject to divine discipline, and he understands that God sometimes sends unjust suffering for disciplinary reasons. He is content to place his destiny in the Lord's hands, knowing that the Lord is capable of vindicating and delivering him (16:12). David articulates this same notion in Psalm 38, where he acknowledges that his suffering is due to his sin (vv. 1–4). Surrounded by enemies who hate him without cause (vv. 16–20), he begs for the Lord to vindicate him before them and deliver him from his self-imposed suffering (vv. 5–15, 21–22). David is broken in the face of Shimei's cursing. We no longer see the manipulative David exploiting his power with no regard for the lives of others (cf. 2 Sam. 11), but a lamenting David who is submissive to the sovereign plan of God. Though David's suffering is disciplinary, the Lord does not abandon him.

Ziba's Deception

As the story unfolds, we are in for a surprise. When David returns to the city after Absalom's death, Mephibosheth greets the king, declares his loyalty, and claims that Ziba has lied (19:24–30). David is not certain who is telling the truth, so he reverses his earlier decree to Ziba and divides Mephibosheth's property evenly between Ziba and Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth declines the offer, claiming that his only concern is the king's safety. Does the text give us any clue to resolve the dilemma? In 19:24 the narrator tells us that Mephibosheth has been mourning since the day David left the city. This is a peculiar way for him to act if he expects to be made king (cf. 16:3). In retrospect, the explanation given by Ziba for Mephibosheth's absence seems unlikely. Apparently Ziba has been lying. Through this deception he is able to rob his master of at least half his wealth.

Yet as we read 16:1–4, we do not yet know all of this. All we see at this point is that the Lord has provided for David. But once we read the story a second time, knowing all the facts, this episode takes on an additional dimension. The incidents involving Ziba and Mephibosheth illustrate the point that many who live under David's rule are really just self-serving. Just as Ziba turns on his master Mephibosheth and expresses loyalty to David only for the sake of personal gain, so many Israelites, including David's trusted adviser Ahithophel, have turned to a new master, Absalom, because they think it is to their advantage to do so. In this way the narrator reminds us just how precarious David's situation is, at least from a human perspective. (We saw this much earlier with the people of Keilah [1 Sam. 23:1–13].) But despite David's apparent vulnerability, the Lord uses Ziba's improperly motivated gift to care for David and delivers him from all the self-serving, deceptive individuals that are potentially a threat to his throne.²

² Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 260–263.