

# Commitments

## 2nd Samuel 15 and 16

This morning we are going to look at several small scenes from 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15 and 16. Since chapter headings were not put in by an inspired author and because I don't like where this one is, I'm disregarding it. Normally we read the whole passage at the beginning, but this morning I think it will be more helpful to take it in smaller bites as we go forward. So let us pray for God's help before starting. It is belief that in these scenes David thinks and moves faithfully. And I want us to see what it means to think and move faithfully when things are desperate.

### Review

Last time we were together in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel we considered chapter 15. As it has been a while, let me remind you what has been happening. David's rebellious son Absalom, was leading a coup. He had spent some time out of the country after he murdered his brother; but through persistence, charm, and forcefulness he made his way back into the country as well as into the hearts of the people of Israel. But now he was in Hebron, where kings are made; and he declared himself King in defiance of David, his father, the true king. He had gathered men around him by favor, charisma, and manipulation and now the rebellion had legs at it moved toward Jerusalem, the capital, to unseat King David.

David was faced with a choice: fight or run. 2 Samuel 15:13–14

*Then a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." <sup>14</sup> David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise and let us flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."*

David decided to run for two reasons: first he didn't think he could beat Absalom's forces, if he were to stay and fight. Secondly, he didn't want Jerusalem to become a battlefield. So David ran. That is where we left things last

time David was on the run. Absalom was heading north to the capital and David was running east to the boarder. On the map that is Absalom in green and David in red.

**Leaving serves another purpose** as well. If David was to stay in Jerusalem he would never really know who supported him or who supported Absalom. By leaving he is forcing certain people to **take a side**. You either have to go with David, explain why you are not, or be considered a supporter of Absalom.

### **Choosing sides**

In the last half of chapter 15 and much of 16 we see **snapshots of people being sorted out as either pro-David or pro-Absalom**. Most of this sorting of people was done by the people themselves - they either stayed willing and maybe even excited to live under the new king, or they came to David to tell him that they were with him. Last time we looked at **one group and three individuals** who were in some way counted as loyal to David. In a quick manner I want to remind you of them.

### **10 Concubines**

Verse 17 mentions **10 concubines who didn't have a say in the matter**. They are second tier wives of David and it was decided for them that they would stay in Jerusalem rather than flee with David. This may have been in **consideration of them**, not wanting them in to have to live like fugitives; or David might have been practical thinking the **10 ladies would slow him down**. But for whatever reason they were left in Jerusalem; later this will be seen to be a bad decision.

### **Ittai**

Then there were three men, though they were representatives of small groups. The first was Ittai, mentioned in **verses 19-21**. He was a mercenary who David released from his employment. However, it looks as if they had not only a

business deal but a **real friendship**. Somewhat surprisingly this mercenary pledges allegiance to David and joins him. Neither David nor Absalom was his king by birth. But listen to Ittai in verse 21

*<sup>21</sup> But Ittai answered the king and said, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be."*

Ittai pledges faithfulness to David and his God, calling him Lord and king. David's Israelite son didn't have the loyalty of this foreigner.

## **Zadok**

In verses 24-29 there was a priest named **Zadok**, who was trying to get the Ark of the Covenant out of the city. He didn't want it in the hands of Absalom; and it also had some historical properties that might make it valuable weapon for David if God decided to do a miracle. However, **David sent the ark back to Jerusalem with Zadok, Abiathar, and his son Jonathan**. David made a faithful declaration in 15:26-27 saying:

*<sup>25</sup> ... "Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation. <sup>26</sup> "But if He should say thus, 'I have no delight in you,' behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him."*

David threw himself on the mercy of God, Himself, ark or no ark. If God showed him "favor", or grace, God would restore David; If God chose not, then he was willing to live with the will of God. "...*here I am let Him do to me as seems good to Him.*" He says this in the context that **God's will for him might be his own failure.**

## **Defection - Prayer - Answer**

In verse 31 David is told what we already knew: there is a problem:

<sup>31</sup> *Now someone told David, saying, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom."*

This doesn't seem bad until you know that this guy was **extremely valuable to David**. He was considered the wisest of David's advisors. Having him in your corner was **worth armies**. The thought that not only would David be without him, but that Absalom would be benefitting from his advice was a real blow. Note David's immediate reaction to the news about Ahithophel:

*"And David said, "O LORD, I pray, make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness."*

He immediately prayed for **God to bring confusion**. What he might not have realized that God would immediately answer the prayer. The next person David meets is **Hushai the Archite in verses 32–34**

<sup>32</sup> *It happened as David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, that behold, Hushai the Archite met him with his coat torn and dust on his head. <sup>33</sup> David said to him, "If you pass over with me, then you will be a burden to me. <sup>34</sup> "But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so I will now be your servant,' then you can thwart the counsel of Ahithophel for me.*

This guy doesn't look like an answer to prayer; he looks like a mess. He is torn and dusty. But the notable point is that **Hushai is also a well-known advisor – though probably not the reputation of Ahithophel**; but David got a plan. He sent him back to Jerusalem where Hushai was to present himself to Absalom as a traitor, become his advisor, and give him bad advice against the good advice of Ahithophel.

What we have at the end of chapter 15 is that three friends pledged their support of David: Ittai, Zadok, and Hushia. These three are key to what follows: Ittai will be a leader of the military with David and Joab; Zadok and Hushia are behind enemy lines trying to disrupt Absalom's rule.

So David at his lowest point has some encouragement of faithful friends during this time of trouble. However, **not everyone was with David**. As David kept moving to the east, he went through land that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. The significance is that this was the area that Saul the previous King was from and there were still some lingering animosities within Saul's tribe. The men we saw in chapter 15 were going to stick with him through thick and thin; the people in chapter 16 weren't. We have three scenes of people reacting negatively to David.

### **Chapter 16: Ziba and Mephibosheth (VV. 1-4)**

*<sup>1</sup> Now when David had passed a little beyond the summit, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him with a couple of saddled donkeys, and on them were two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred clusters of raisins, a hundred summer fruits, and a jug of wine. <sup>2</sup> The king said to Ziba, "Why do you have these?" And Ziba said, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride, and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine, for whoever is faint in the wilderness to drink." <sup>3</sup> Then the king said, "And where is your master's son?" And Ziba said to the king, "Behold, he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me.' " <sup>4</sup> So the king said to Ziba, "Behold, all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours." And Ziba said, "I prostrate myself; let me find favor in your sight, O my lord, the king!"*

There is a back story here. Mephibosheth held an interesting position. He was the **son of David's best friend, Jonathan; and he was the grandson of David's greatest enemy, the old King Saul**. Both Saul and Jonathan have long since died. When David became King he wanted to show love to the family of the deceased Jonathan and so he found Jonathan's son Mephibosheth and set him up in a great situation. He provided everything Mephibosheth needed and even fed him at the King's table. This was **generous of David** because Mephibosheth had a claim to the throne since his grandfather had been King. The smart move, and what typically happened would have been for David to kill all Saul's family, not

bless his grandson. But **for the sake of Jonathan**, David chose to take care of Mephibosheth.

When Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant showed up with a great gift of supplies for David, the king asked, "Where is your master? **Where is Mephibosheth?**" Ziba said that Mephibosheth was trying to manipulate the current rebellion in such a way that he could get back his grandfather's throne. It seems that Mephibosheth saw David's weakness as an opportunity for his advancement.

Now this guy was alive because David was unconventional in his mercy. He lived for years off David's generosity, eating his food, drinking his wine and running up David's credit cards. **Now that David had some problems, Mephibosheth shows his true colors** and tries to advance himself on David's troubles.

The up-side here is that we see **Ziba's loyalty**. He is willing to supply David even though his employer is anti-David. This act of kindness to the troubled David meant Ziba was going to be at odds with Mephibosheth, his boss.

That is why in **verse 4 David took back what he committed to Mephibosheth and gave it to Ziba**. I would mention that this gift is "by faith". If David doesn't make it through this rebellion he will not be able to give Ziba what he promises; but he promises it, none the less.

Doesn't Mephibosheth look bad, abandoning the one who fed him; and doesn't Ziba look honorable, serving the true king despite the traitorous nature of his master. Here is a **spoiler alert** - We are going to see that Ziba's whole story was a lie. He just made it up. Ziba is making a small bet of some food at this point that David might win in the end. If he does, then Ziba will be set for life. Ziba is running a con game and trying to cash in on David's problems.

**Shimei**

Verses 5–14 show a weird scene. David runs into Shimei, a supporter of Saul who was not pleased that David, from the tribe of Judah replaced Saul from the tribe of Benjamin. By the way, this guy is crazy.

*<sup>5</sup> When King David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out from there a man of the family of the house of Saul whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as he came. <sup>6</sup> He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were at his right hand and at his left. <sup>7</sup> Thus Shimei said when he cursed, “Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! <sup>8</sup> “The LORD has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!”*

David is in a forced march with his armies and this guy starts throwing rocks and cursing him **because he replaced the house of Saul**. He accused him of bloodshed and murder. Remember that **when Hebrews executed criminals they would stone them**. So it is kind of like this guy is holding his own personal trial against David, declaring him guilty and then throwing the rocks to simulate an execution.

A couple of problems other than the fact that he is just mental. Number one - he is re-writing history. David didn't bring down the house of Saul; God used another army to defeat Saul. Though Saul would pursue him, David's army didn't fight Saul's.

Secondly, David did not kill Saul or Jonathan; rather he executed the man who confessed to killing the two of them. In fact, David had two very good opportunities to kill Saul and he didn't. You can argue that David was a man of bloodshed and that is true, but not against the house of Saul.

Third, Shemei was never going to seriously hurt anyone; but they were irritated and nobody was in the mood to hear him popping off like that.

Abishai, a pretty violent man himself said what everyone was thinking:

*<sup>9</sup> Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head.”*

Abishai wanted to shut the punk up... forever. He was threatening the king which is a crime anywhere. He was an obvious traitor against King David, not to mention a pain in the neck. But David held him back:

*<sup>10</sup> But the king said, “What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the LORD has told him, ‘Curse David,’ then who shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’ ” <sup>11</sup> Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my son who came out from me seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite? Let him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him.*

In his restraint of Abishia, David says two things. First, the more significant problem is Absalom, my son in rebellion, not so much this crazy Benjaminite.

Secondly, and more interestingly, David said, what if God has led him to do this, let him be. That seems strange. I think most people would assume that God would not want someone cursing him and throwing rocks at him. There are two ways the term “will of God” is used. By one definition it is moral. It is God’s will that nobody murder or steal or curse the King. You find the will of God in the moral statements of scripture. However, because God is controls everything, and nothing happens that He doesn’t know or permit. We can say that no matter what happens it is the will of God. That is why Shemei is throwing rocks and cursing Abishai has the thought, this isn’t right let me go fix it. He instinctively knows that it isn’t moral and it is against the will of God. David sees it differently. He says that it is happening and God is letting it happen so it must be the will of God. Upon just the evidence that it is happening, David says let him keep cursing me, the LORD has told him to do so. Now there are nuances and problems to this, but ‘m trying to give part of the reason David, and other believers can look at negative things and say this was the will of God. Think about that and you can

ask more questions tonight if you would like. The bottom line here is because it is happening David can assume that God is behind it.

However, just because the LORD has allowed Shimei to do this that **doesn't mean there isn't hope**. David goes on to say:

*<sup>12</sup> "Perhaps the LORD will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day."*

David looks forward to the time when rather than facing cursing, the LORD will bless him in light of his troubles.

*<sup>13</sup> So David and his men went on the way; and Shimei went along on the hillside parallel with him and as he went he cursed and cast stones and threw dust at him. <sup>14</sup> The king and all the people who were with him arrived weary and he refreshed himself there.*

So David **allowed Shimei to keep up** with his pestering until he wore himself out. The deposed king and his people got to a temporary destination and rested.

## **Conclusion**

Let's let the story rest with David right here and **think** about what we have seen. This type of Old Testament story has a few levels to think about.

One is just sort of **history**: it is the narrative of King David in retreat. It shows how three men were faithful to him and how two other men used his decline to go against him. We might learn **some principles of human nature** from this. There is a timeless truth that those who with you in the bad times are your real friends. See Ittai.

There is the caution that when you are down and out that unscrupulous people will turn on you or try to **turn your sorrows into their advantage**. One of my friends once said, "There is a lot of money to be made on other people's dysfunctions." That seems to be **Ziba's working philosophy**.

There is the warning that some people, like **Shemei will kick you when you are down**. So I guess the first thing is to not get down; but if that doesn't work at least don't be surprised when you are down that people start piling on.

So there are some practical things that you may see here. But if that is all these little scenes are about, the conclusion is unsatisfactory. **Are we just to see human nature playing out in history?**

## **Faithfulness**

There is also another aspect that we have noted before that is more helpful. This **is more than just a historical situation, it is a spiritual one as well**. Truth be known all life takes place simultaneously in physical and spiritual realms. In fact, as always does, **the spiritual situation is more important** and even determines what is playing out. What I mean is that it is always more interesting what God is doing though we can't observe it clearly. We always see the physical and historical, but what makes this story interesting is that we know about the spiritual side of it as well. We have some clues about what God is doing.

To find the spiritual cause to all of this you have to back up and see a little bit bigger picture. You have to go back to Nathan's words in **2 Samuel 12**, Let me read just two verses of what Nathan said to David. **Verses 9-10** say:

*<sup>9</sup> 'Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. <sup>10</sup> 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.'*

When David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, it says that he despised the LORD and He despised the word of the LORD. That is a strong indictment. I wonder **do we think of our sin as despising God and His word**, I confess to you

that since considering Nathan's words I've had to make some adjustments in the way I understand my sin.

Nathan also said that **David sinned in the face of God's kindness** to him. God had given him everything and was willing to give more. But rather than being ready to graciously receive from the LORD, David greedily took. In doing so he despised God. So in these last few chapters we are reading what God meant when He said **"the sword would not depart from David's house."**

It meant two previous chapters of **violent assaults within the family**. Here it means the son, Absalom, whom David had restored, would rebel and usurp his father's throne. Therefore, these tragedies are under the control and sovereignty of God. All that happens is permitted by His will, but in this case we get to know why. All of this calamity is right in line with the declaration of the LORD. David is right this is the will of the Lord, we know that because the prophet of the Lord said it was going to happen.

I am pretty sure David understands this. We have seen in chapter 15, verses 25 and 26 David say:

*If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation. <sup>26</sup> "But if He should say thus, 'I have no delight in you,' behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him."*

David knows that what he is going through is God's discipline for the sins he committed. He says much the same thing in chapter 16:11-12.

*"... Let him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him. <sup>12</sup> "Perhaps the LORD will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day."*

This is interesting because **David doesn't see his problems in light of a deranged man** with a chip on his shoulder; that is the way that Abishai sees it, but not David. Isn't it interesting that he **doesn't blame the situation on Absalom,**

whose evil has him on the run? Isn't it interesting that he doesn't attribute it to **Karma** and say, "what goes around comes around; I acted out and now it has come back to bite me"? Isn't it interesting that he doesn't attribute this situation to **Satan's attack** on God's anointed or demons?

David interprets life situations in light of the **spiritual realities between himself and God**. He knows he is under the discipline of the LORD because he believes the word of the LORD. If he despised the word of the LORD in his sin, he is now living according to it in his calamities. He understands that his real problem isn't Shemei, or Absalom, or Satan. **His problem is that the LORD is disciplining his son.**

I want to stress that he knows this **by the word of God through Nathan**. Some of you don't like where this is heading. The next logical thought is to take what is happening here and ask the question, "If David's troubles come from sinfully despising God and His word, then are my problems discipline of the LORD for my sin?" the answer is, 'maybe. It is possible, I don't know.'" Hebrews 12 says that like a good parent, God disciplines his children. And if He doesn't discipline us, then we are illegitimate – not His. So for the believer, it is possible that God is disciplining us, like He is doing to David. So maybe, it is possible.

However, I once did a Bible study that looked at why bad things happened in a world controlled by a good God. There were about 10 or 12 reasons scripture gives for bad things happening. **Therefore, it is almost impossible for us to draw a straight line from this problem to that sin.** So is God disciplining you for your sins? I don't know. The reason David could know is that Nathan brought an authoritative word from the LORD and told him. Nathan is not talking to me or you.

Do you see where that leaves us? The believer must acknowledge that **God is sovereignly moving** us through life including the **ups and downs** and everything

that comes into our lives must pass through His will. And at the same time when you ask **why did God let that happen**, we all have to answer, **"I'm not quite sure."** **That He is doing it, is without question; why He is doing it, is without certainty.** Am I being disciplined because I sinned; I don't know... but maybe. David had Nathan, I don't.

But do you see the faith of David in these pictures? **David interpreting the world that comes to Him in light of the word of God.** Why is he able to send off the Ark of the Covenant when historically it was a weapon? Because he is interpreting the things that come at him according to the Word of God. How does he suffer the words and rocks of Shemei rather than respond like Abishai? He is interpreting life as it comes to him through the Word of God.

That is difficult, because the word to David was tragic and full of doom, "*the sword shall never depart from your house*". Where is the hope in that? How can David say within these chapters, "*If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back again and show me both the ark and His habitation.*" As well as, "*Perhaps the LORD will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day.*"

David, how do you have that kind of hope when the word of the LORD was a hard discipline against you? First of all, that was not the only thing God had told to David.

### **In light of the Davidic Covenant**

If we back up and get an even bigger picture of David's experience with God, we are reminded that God also told Nathan to say this to David in 2 Samuel 7:8–16

<sup>8</sup> "... *Thus says the LORD of hosts, "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel.* <sup>9</sup> *"I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies*

*from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. <sup>10</sup> "I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, <sup>11</sup> even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. <sup>12</sup> "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, <sup>15</sup> but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." ' ' "*

David lived in reliance on the word of God. God's word is true in discipline, then His word is true in promise. In chapters 15 and 16 David isn't living in his house, he is on the run. His throne isn't established forever, it is toppling. God's people are homeless, not in a place that He appointed for them. The wicked are afflicting them; they don't have rest. David's son is not a blessing, he is a traitor. He is not trying to establish the throne of God; he is trying to establish the throne of Absalom.

But David understood that God's word was true in blessing and in discipline and life was to be lived in light of God's word. If the word of the Lord is true, it cuts both ways. What we see here is that David believes that his current troubles are just what God told him. And yet there is still hope because of God's previous promise.

Secondly, not only was it the word of God that can give David hope, it is the experience of God. As the LORD said to David:

<sup>9</sup> *"I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you;*

I don't know how to describe this properly, **but the more you live your life consciously with God, seeing Him move throughout your life, the more you find yourself entrusting to Him.** He is faithful and reliable in such a way that you find and assurance that you will be okay. People can disappoint, abandon, use and throw rocks; and it is okay, because God allowed for that to happen to you and He has always seen you through these kinds of things. David is faithful here. One of the reasons is God's word can be trusted; the other is that the believer's experience with God can be trusted.

Previously I said, "David had Nathan, I don't." Yet we are not without a word from the LORD, are we? We have the ability to understand who God is because He has told us about himself. We have the ability to have confidence in His promises, if we know His promising word. We can see our way through difficult dark times, if His word is a light on the path. But it means understanding and knowing what he has said.

Secondly, we know from our history with God, and the testimony of other believers that we can trust the LORD. It doesn't mean that trouble won't come for as many as ten different reasons and we can't be sure of why it is there. But the word and our experience with God can help us live faithfully and righteously at those times.

# The Rebellion of Absalom

## 2 Samuel 15-19

