

Absalom Claims the Throne; David Escapes to the Jordan River

2 Samuel 16

2 Samuel 16 - *"When David was a little past the top of the mountain, there was Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, who met him with a couple of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred summer fruits, and a skin of wine. ² And the king said to Ziba, "What do you mean to do with these?" So Ziba said, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who are faint in the wilderness to drink." ³ Then the king said, "And where is your master's son?" And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me.'" ⁴ So the king said to Ziba, "Here, all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours." And Ziba said, "I humbly bow before you, that I may find favor in your sight, my lord, O king!"*

⁵ Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. ⁶ And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. ⁷ Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue!" ⁸ The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!"

⁹ Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" ¹⁰ But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" ¹¹ And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. ¹² It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction,^[a] and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day." ¹³ And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust. ¹⁴ Now the king and all the people who were with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there.

¹⁵ Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him. ¹⁶ And so it was, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, that Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" ¹⁷ So Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" ¹⁸ And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, but whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with him I will remain. ¹⁹ Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father's presence, so will I be in your presence."

²⁰ Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give advice as to what we should do." ²¹ And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." ²² So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

²³ Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. So was all the advice of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom."

Background Notes

In 2 Samuel 15, David wisely decided to leave Jerusalem in the face of Absalom's rebellion. Absalom's conspiracy was gaining strength, and David knew that many people would be killed if he stayed in Jerusalem and fought. He didn't want to subject the city to a bloodbath, so he decided it was best for him and his faithful followers to leave Jerusalem before Absalom could organize a pursuit, and make their way down to the Judean wilderness, and eventually cross the Jordan River.

As David crossed over the Mount of Olives to the east of Jerusalem, Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant, met him with supplies - but no Mephibosheth! When David asked him where his master was, Ziba replied that Mephibosheth had not come because he was hoping that through this civil war his family would be restored to the throne! Remember, his grandfather was King Saul, and his father was Jonathan. The question here is - was Ziba lying? The strongest point for the idea that Ziba was lying is found in 2 Samuel 19. When David came back to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth presented a very good case that the only reason he hadn't fled with David was that he was lame and he had no one to help him - and that Ziba had lied about him. We really don't know who was telling the truth, but at this point David believed Ziba, and moved on toward the Jordan.

Verse 22 says, "*So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.*" This verse is a fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy of judgment upon David because of his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, given in 2 Samuel 12:11-12 - "*Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun.'*"

Doctrinal Points

1. God sometimes allows the situation to go from bad to worse.

East of the Mount of Olives a man named Shimei, who was related to the former king, Saul, came out and began to throw stones at David and curse him. Shimei's taunts were unfair, but not without some foundation. David had indeed murdered Uriah, but he was not responsible for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, or the murders of Ishbosheth or Abner.

In fact, David had gone the extra mile in showing kindness to the family of King Saul, in his care for Mephiboseth. And the very fact that Shimei was of the house of Saul and still alive, shows that David had been merciful to Saul's family. Most kings in that day would have sought out and purged any possible claimant to the throne from the previous dynasty, but David had not.

When Abishai wanted to put this troublemaker out of commission, David said no. David recognized that God had allowed Shimei to curse him: "...*Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him...*" David even realized that God had allowed this bad situation so that something good might come out of it.

What about us? When things go from bad to worse - and they do many times, wouldn't you agree? - do we recognize that God has allowed the negative things to happen? Do we trust that God can bring something good out of a bad situation? Do we believe that "*in all things work God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose*" (Romans 8:28)? Notice it doesn't say all things are good – it says that *God can work all things together* for good!

A number of years ago when I was working with a youth ministry, the ministry's finances went from bad to worse, and I had to go out and get a part-time job just to make ends meet. Little did we realize at that time that my new part-time boss would end up *sending me to seminary – all expenses paid!* God sometimes allows our situation to go from bad to worse, but it's all part of His perfect plan for us!

2. God always provides the believer with help from behind the scenes.

In this chapter there are three ways in which God, in His grace, provided help for David from behind the scenes.

a. **Encouragement from the Lord Himself.** The title of the Psalm 3 says that David wrote this psalm when he fled from Absalom his son:

"LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. ² Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God." Selah ³ But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. ⁴ I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill. Selah

⁵ I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me. ⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around... ⁸ Salvation belongs to the LORD. Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah"

David found strength and encouragement from the Lord at this time. If you were facing a similar dilemma, would you be able to write a psalm of praise like this? Would you find your strength and encouragement in the Lord?

b. **Encouragement of a time of rest and refreshment.** "*Now the king and all the people who were with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there*" (v14). The Lord brought David and all his company to a quiet place along the Jordan River, and gave him time to rest and regroup before the attack of Absalom.

c. **Encouragement from a faithful friend.** The Lord provided help through Hushai, who bought time for David by thwarting Ahithophel's counsel. When Hushai said to Absalom, "... *whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with him I will remain*" (v18) - do you think Hushai had Absalom in mind? No! But Hushai was not lying - there's no doubt that he was thinking of David when he said that he would serve "God's choice of anointed king" for the glory of God and the good of Israel!

So, God provided help for David in different ways. And the Lord will do that for us as well (Hebrews 4:16). In times of need, God will always provide the believer with help from behind the scenes, in many different ways.

Practical Application

Can you suffer in silence?

When Shimei cursed and insulted David, David didn't retaliate. He could have easily defended himself and justly removed Shimei, but David suffered in silence. David was able to suffer in silence because he recognized the will of God.

Our Lord suffered in silence. "... *when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously*" (1 Peter 2:23). Our Lord was able to suffer in silence, because He knew the plan of God for our salvation.

What about us? Being insulted and mocked and cursed is hard to take, especially when you have the power to retaliate. The Lord didn't retaliate, and we are to follow His example: "... *Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps*" (1 Peter 2:21). Rather than retaliating, we are to commit our situation to "*the One who judges righteously*" because He has a good and perfect plan for our lives. Can you suffer in silence?