

David Returns to Jerusalem After the Defeat and Death of Absalom

2 Samuel 19

"And Joab was told, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom."² So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. For the people heard it said that day, "The king is grieved for his son."³ And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.⁴ But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

⁵ *Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines,⁶ in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well.⁷ Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now."⁸ Then the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, "There is the king, sitting in the gate." So all the people came before the king. For everyone of Israel had fled to his tent.*

⁹ *Now all the people were in a dispute throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "The king saved us from the hand of our enemies, he delivered us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled from the land because of Absalom.¹⁰ But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, has died in battle. Now therefore, why do you say nothing about bringing back the king?"¹¹ So King David sent to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, saying, "Speak to the elders of Judah, saying, 'Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house, since the words of all Israel have come to the king, to his very house?¹² You are my brethren, you are my bone and my flesh. Why then are you the last to bring back the king?'¹³ And say to Amasa, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if you are not commander of the army before me continually in place of Joab.'"¹⁴ So he swayed the hearts of all the men of Judah, just as the heart of one man, so that they sent this word to the king: "Return, you and all your servants!"*

¹⁵ *Then the king returned and came to the Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to escort the king across the Jordan.¹⁶ And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, who was from Bahurim, hurried and came down with the men of Judah to meet King David.¹⁷ There were a thousand*

men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over the Jordan before the king. ¹⁸ Then a ferryboat went across to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good.

Now Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king when he had crossed the Jordan. ¹⁹ Then he said to the king, "Do not let my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember what wrong your servant did on the day that my lord the king left Jerusalem, that the king should take it to heart. ²⁰ For I, your servant, know that I have sinned. Therefore here I am, the first to come today of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king." ²¹ But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed?" ²² And David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be adversaries to me today? Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I am king over Israel?" ²³ Therefore the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king swore to him.

²⁴ Now Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. And he had not cared for his feet, nor trimmed his mustache, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he returned in peace. ²⁵ So it was, when he had come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" ²⁶ And he answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me. For your servant said, 'I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go to the king,' because your servant is lame. ²⁷ And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king, but my lord the king is like the angel of God. Therefore do what is good in your eyes. ²⁸ For all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king. Yet you set your servant among those who eat at your own table. Therefore what right have I still to cry out anymore to the king?" ²⁹ So the king said to him, "Why do you speak anymore of your matters? I have said, 'You and Ziba divide the land.'" ³⁰ Then Mephibosheth said to the king, "Rather, let him take it all, inasmuch as my lord the king has come back in peace to his own house."

³¹ And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim and went across the Jordan with the king, to escort him across the Jordan. ³² Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. And he had provided the king with supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very rich man. ³³ And the king said to Barzillai, "Come across with me, and I will provide for you while you are with me in Jerusalem." ³⁴ But Barzillai said to the king, "How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? ³⁵ I am today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men

and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king? ³⁶ Your servant will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. And why should the king repay me with such a reward? ³⁷ Please let your servant turn back again, that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what seems good to you."

³⁸ And the king answered, "Chimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him what seems good to you. Now whatever you request of me, I will do for you." ³⁹ Then all the people went over the Jordan. And when the king had crossed over, the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own place.

⁴⁰ Now the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. And all the people of Judah escorted the king, and also half the people of Israel. ⁴¹ Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, "Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David's men with him across the Jordan?" ⁴² So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?" ⁴³ And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, "We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you. Why then do you despise us—were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?" Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel."

Background Notes

2 Samuel 18 records the defeat and death of Absalom, who had usurped the throne of Israel. In 2 Samuel 19 King David was brought back to Jerusalem as the rightful king. Many in the nation realized that they had made a mistake by following Absalom, so when David was invited to return home from defeating Absalom in the battle, he was welcomed back as king.

Doctrinal Points

1. Doing the right thing involves controlling your emotions.

When David heard of Absalom's death, he deeply mourned the loss of his son (2 Samuel 18:33). Mourning the loss of his son rather than celebrating the victory was proper behavior for David at this point. However, David continued to mourn the loss of Absalom - so much so that he made his people feel humiliated and ashamed. Finally Joab, David's nephew and his military general, came and talked sense to David. In essence, Joab told David to take control of himself, and do the right thing by encouraging the people who had been so faithful to him. David listened to reason and regained control of his emotions. He went out and sat in the

gate of Mahanaim, where all the people could come and he could encourage them and thank them for their loyalty and support.

Although David did the right thing by controlling his emotions, it was not wrong for David to experience deep grief and emotion at the death of his son. As Ecclesiastes 3 indicates, however, there is a time to mourn and a time not to mourn. After a reasonable period, David needed to control his emotions and continue on with the job God had given him - to take care of his people and important matters of state.

It's not wrong for us to weep and show our emotions at times of grief and loss, but just like David, after a time we need to control our emotions and get on with the job God has given us to do. For example, when my parents went to be with the Lord, I had to control my emotions because I conducted both of their funerals. Doing the right thing involves controlling your emotions.

2. Doing the right thing involves listening to reason.

In verses 16-39, David was confronted by a number of different individuals as he returned to Jerusalem as the rightful king, and with each confrontation, he had to make decisions. We see David trying to do the right thing as he listens to reason in each case and makes a decision.

In verses 16-23 we have Shimei. Shimei was the man from the house of Saul who cursed David as David fled from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 16). Now Shimei knew his life was at stake, and along with Ziba and a thousand men from the tribe of Benjamin, Shimei hurried to the Jordan River to welcome David home. Shimei profusely apologized for his wrongdoing. David listened to reason and did what he believed was the right thing to do - he showed mercy to Shimei.

In verses 24-30 we have Mephibosheth. When we compare Mephibosheth's story with what Ziba said about him in 2 Samuel 16, it's hard to determine for sure who was lying - Ziba or Mephibosheth? Whatever the case, apparently David believed that *neither* Ziba *nor* Mephibosheth was telling the full truth. He therefore did what he believed was the right thing to do, and divided the estate between them.

In verses 31-39 we have Barzillai the Gileadite. Remember Barzillai? When David escaped from Jerusalem, crossed the Jordan and came to Mahanaim, Barzillai was the man from Gilead who welcomed David and brought him supplies. Now David requested Barzillai to go back up with him to Jerusalem. Barzillai said that he would rather not leave his home because he was getting older -

but he would be very thankful if Chimham (who may have been Barzillai's son) could go with David. David listened to reason, and did what he believed was the right thing. He followed Barzillai's advice. In all of these cases we see a biblical principle and a teaching point: doing the right thing involves listening to reason.

Practical Application

Don't expect smooth sailing after the storm is over!

Notice that 2 Samuel 19 doesn't end with these words: "and David returned to Jerusalem and lived happily ever after." The Bible is not a fairy tale! Verses 40-43 reveal that the seeds of division were already being planted, and would ultimately result in the split of the kingdom.

Praise the Lord, He can and does bring calm to the troubled waters in the storms of life – in the church, in the home, and in our personal lives. But we still have sinful natures, and the enemy is still active. So don't expect smooth sailing after the storm is over!