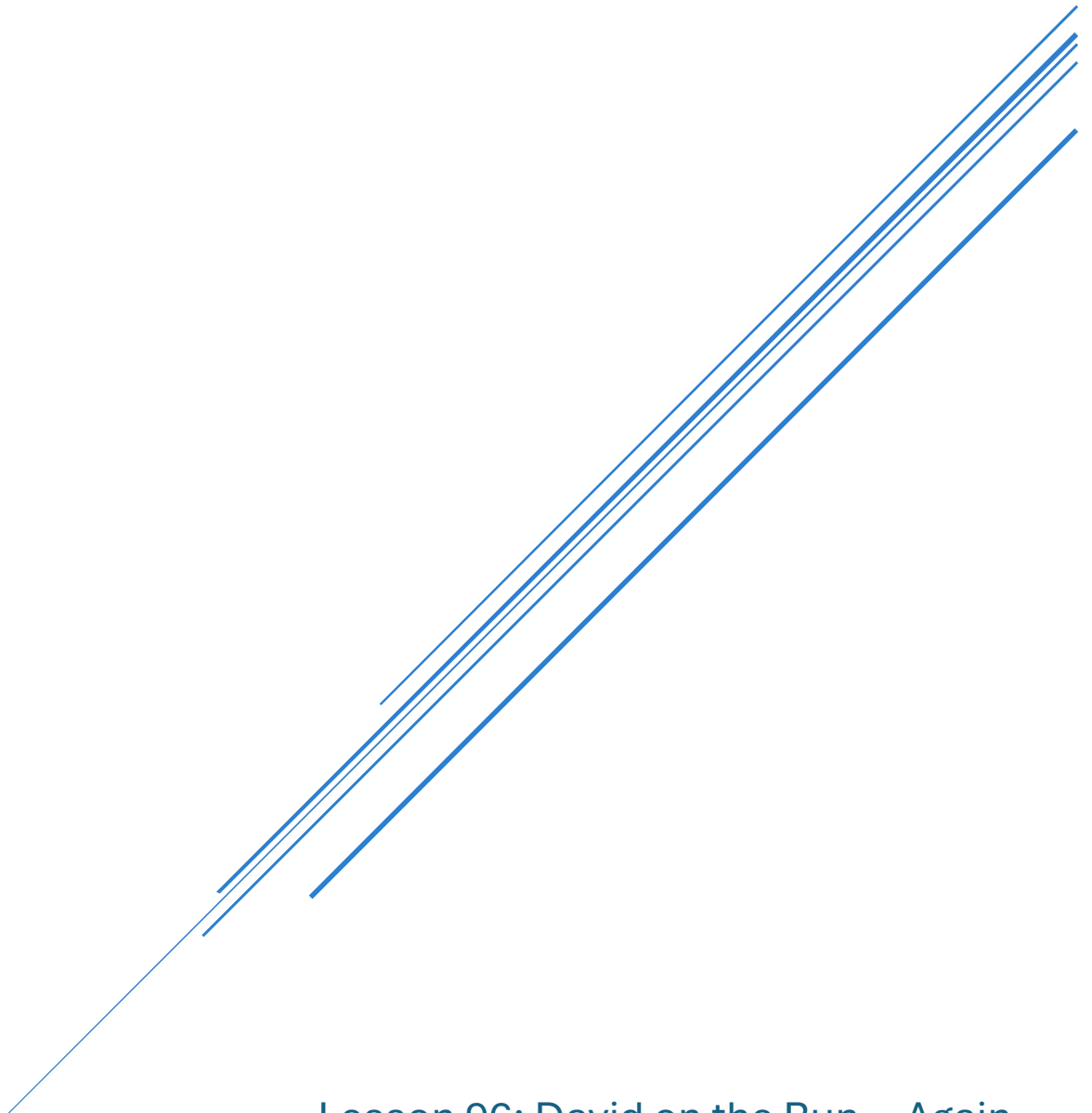


THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding the Bible's story, Jesus' importance, & our place in God's kingdom plan



Lesson 96: David on the Run... Again
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Introduction

We covered chapter 13 in our last lesson, which introduced the start of David's troubles after his sin with Bathsheba and ordering her husband be killed. God warned David that trouble would begin from his own family. In chapter 13, Amnon, a son of David, sexually assaulted his half-sister, Tamar, a daughter of David. This triggered a chain of events that lead to Tamar's brother, Absalom, kill Amnon out of revenge.

Absalom fled to his grandfather's kingly territory in self-imposed exile. In chapter 14 we see more events build up that work against David.

Joab's Secret Messenger

2 Samuel 14

Joab notices that David's heart was longing for Absalom to be back. Joab devised a plan to ask David, without asking David himself, for the king to bring back Absalom. He finds a wise woman from Tekoa and gives her a task. "Wise" is a Hebrew word that can mean several ideas such as a technically skilled person, a person with experience who has gained much knowledge, or what we think of as a wise person through discernment and experience.

Joab selected a woman that he felt was up to his task. He needed a woman that could go before the king and faithfully use her words to convince the king to act towards Absalom. He instructs her to put on mourning clothes, like a woman who is customarily mourning a dead loved one for days. Joab told her the words to speak to king David.

When she is given an audience before the king, she cries out to the king for his help to adjudicate a matter in her family. She says that her husband died, and they had two sons. However, they fought in the field and one son struck and killed the other. The woman (the mother) has given shelter and safety to her only living son, but the rest of her family is angry with her because they need him to be put to death for taking the life of his brother. The woman says she cannot permit this because her and her husband would then have no living heir on earth. David assures her that he will deliberate on the matter and issue a verdict. David offers protection by his own authority; he also assures her he will not let the "avenger of blood" kill her son.

Many scholars point out that they believe Joab was intentionally using the story in the Torah from Genesis 4 about Cain and Abel. They see strong parallels between how

Genesis 4 shares the story with Cain and Abel and how the woman of Tekoa tells her story. This may indicate that Joab purposefully knew he could convince David by using a very familiar Bible story David would have known by heart.

The woman begs the king for one more word with him before she leaves. David agrees. Beginning in verse 13, she turns the situation around onto David's situation with Absalom. She accuses the king of being the guilty one because while he is willing to protect her son from revenge for killing his brother, why will the king not receive back his son, Absalom, who killed his brother, Amnon? She lavishes the king with praise saying she was told the king was a wise and discerning man of God, that he would judge rightly. Yet, she says they cannot understand why he treats his own banished son with contempt.

David asks her if Joab put her up to this. She confirmed that Joab was behind her tactic. David turns to Joab and confirms he will agree to bring Absalom back from exile. However, David said in verse 24, that Absalom must return to his own house and not see the king's face.

Why do you think David decreed Absalom could not see him?

It seems that Absalom's killing of Amnon got him kicked out of the royal court. This means that Absalom would have heard the bigger message loud and clear. That message was that Absalom was also kicked out of the considerations for royal succession of David's throne. Absalom was home, but he was not received back as a royal son anymore.

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

The end of verse 24 says Joab went and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. However, as we shall see, this sets into motion more events against David.

Beginning in verse 25, we read that Absalom was a strikingly handsome man and was highly praised by those around him. It says there was no defect in his appearance. He had long thick hair that when he cut it every year, it weighed about 4 pounds (200 shekels). The author is drawing our attention to the fact that from a physical standpoint, Absalom appeared to be a very capable, strong, and man that others would want to follow for his apparent kingly looks. In a sense, the author is showing us

that Absalom is not the king, but he outward looks like the kind of person people would want to be their leader. Absalom had three sons and one daughter while in Jerusalem. He named his daughter Tamar, no doubt in honor of his sister.

Absalom forces Joab's Hand

Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem and never saw David's face. Absalom sent messengers to Joab requesting that Joab get him an audience with the king. However, Joab ignored his messages. Absalom orders his servants to go set on fire some of the barley plots of Joab's farm that are next to Absalom's property. This caused Joab to personally visit Absalom's house to ask why he set his crops on fire. Absalom explained in verse 32 that he was told he could come back to Jerusalem and see the king, yet no one has taken him to the king in two years. Absalom says it would have been better for him to remain in his exiled territory. Absalom pressures Joab to give him an audience with the king.

Absalom and David Reunited

Joab relents and sets up an audience with the king for Absalom. In verse 33, we read that the king agreed. When they saw each other, Absalom fell down before the king, and David kissed Absalom. Finally, after all this time the father and son were reunited. However, this marks the beginning of more trouble for David.

Absalom's Coup

Absalom Undermines David's Public Support

2 Samuel 15:1-6

We are honestly not told why, but chapter 15 opens with Absalom plotting to overthrow his own father's throne. Absalom begins his plot by making himself appear to be like a king. He hires chariots, horses, and fifty men to travel in front of him. This gives the image to others that see Absalom travel that he is a king's caravan. This begins a type of public relations campaign, or one might say a military style psychological operation to win hearts and minds.

Next, Absalom plants seeds of doubt in the peoples' minds about David's ability to judge their matters. Absalom positions himself near the city gates and as he saw people going to the palace for an audience with David, Absalom would converse with them. Verse 3 records that Absalom would ask them to let him hear their case, then he

would cry out, “Oh that someone would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has a lawsuit or claim could come to me, and I would give him justice! (v. 4)” This further set up Absalom in the minds of the populous as the kingly-judge they needed. Not only this, Absalom lied to some of the people, per verse 3, and said that their case sounded valid to him, but that there was no one in David’s court to listen to them.

Why do you think the text species in verse 2 that Absalom asked each person what city they were from?

Next, Absalom would let people who came before him, bow before him. Then, he would put out his hand and let the person kiss it. This all signifies that Absalom is portraying himself, and letting the people view him, as a king. He is making people approach him and treat him as their king. Verse 6 says people began to regularly go to Absalom for their cases, instead of David. And Absalom, “stole the hearts of the people of Israel.”

Why do you think Israel was willing to leave David in their hearts and support Absalom so willingly?

Absalom Enacts a Coup

2 Samuel 15:7-12

This carries on for four years. Absalom must have realized he had enough of the support of the people to convince them he should be their king over David. Absalom lies to David and requests that David let him go to Hebron so he can honor a vow he made to the Lord. David agrees to let him go. However, Absalom set into motion his coup. Verse 10 says Absalom sent spies (hidden messengers) throughout all tribes of Israel. He ordered them that when they hear trumpet sounds throughout the lands, this was their sign to enact the plot. They were to cry out in the cities like a royal messenger that “Absalom is king in Hebron!”

Absalom also invited 200 men to travel with him, however these men did not know of Absalom’s plot (v. 11). We can assume these 200 men were types of administrators in David’s royal administration. Absalom also sent for Ahithophel, one of David’s inner circle of counselors. Ahithophel willingly switched sides. We learn from 2 Samuel 11:3

and 23:34, that Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba. It is quite possible that he betrayed David over his disdain for David's actions with his granddaughter. Verse 12 summarizes these events by informing us Absalom's conspiracy was strong, and more people began siding with Absalom.

David Goes into Exile... Again

2 Samuel 15:13-23

Much like David had to go on the run from Saul, he one again finds himself on the run. This time, from his own son. Messengers make it to David and report to him that Absalom has gained the majority of support from the people. They must have also informed him of his plot from Hebron. David then orders all of his servants (such as cabinet and palace people) to quickly prepare to flee with him.

Absalom's work over the last four years must have been immense. David is a mighty warrior and has Joab by his side. Joab and David both would have been considered some of the top military minds of their day. Despite all of this, David fears that if Absalom makes it to Jerusalem, he will lose. David flees, leaving 10 of his concubines to tend to the palace. David and 600 men and their families flee with him.

Why do you think David left Jerusalem without a fight?

Zadok and the Ark of the Covenant

2 Samuel 15:24-29

Zadok, the priest, and other Levites came out to meet David. They carried with them the ark of the covenant. "And the king said to Zadok, 'Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the Lord, then He will bring me back and show me both it and His habitation. But if He says this: 'I have no delight in you,' then here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him (vv.25-26).'"

Why do you think David was concerned to keep the Ark of God in Jerusalem?

David's Spy Network

2 Samuel 15:30-37

David also tells Zadok that it would be better for them all if Zadok returned and spied for David. He says in verses 27-28 that Zadok can return to Jerusalem and send his sons to David to give reports on Absalom's plans. Abiathar was also with Zadok. He was a priest, and the son of the priest, Ahimelech, whom Saul had murdered for helping David flee the first time. Abiathar had fled with David during the days of Saul. Now, Abiathar and Zadok would spy for David during his exile.

Messengers informed David as he traveled on that Ahithophel had conspired with Absalom. Ahithophel was one of David's closest inner circle of advisors and all signs appeared that he had betrayed David. David prayed, "Lord, please make the advice of Ahithophel foolish (v.31)." As David traveled along, Hushai met him. Hushai had intended to join David's group since he knew David was the rightful king and he was a personal friend of David's.

However, David had a better idea. He told Hushai the best thing he could for David would be to go to Absalom and say, "I will be your servant, O king; even as I was your father's servant in time past, so now I will also be your servant" (v.34). David wants Hushai to spy on Absalom. However, not just spy, but directly work against the counsel that Ahithophel may give. David told Hushai that if he did this, he would also have the support network of the priests Zadok, Abiathar, and their sons. Even though David's situation is not good, he is not without resources. David has effectively formed a spy network around Absalom and a counter-spy system to actively thwart Absalom's efforts.

Ziba's Provisions

2 Samuel 16:1-4

Ziba came out to meet David with provisions of food and donkeys for traveling. Ziba was one of the chief servants of Saul's house whom David made the personal attendant to Mephibosheth, Jonathan's only living son. In a curious turn of events, Ziba seems to show support for David with these provisions.

However, Mephibosheth is not with him and when David asks why not, Ziba says because Mephibosheth said he wanted to stay near Absalom since the Lord might restore the kingdom of Saul to him. However, we later find out that Ziba was lying and

instead he abandoned Mephibosheth. In the moment though, David believes Ziba and says in verse 4 that all that belongs to Mephibosheth will be transferred to Ziba.

I should point out that some Bible commentators are undecided over the issue of Ziba's story. Some say it is possible he told the truth and that later on in chapter 19 when David confronts Mephibosheth that he lied to David instead.

David is Cursed by Shimei

2 Samuel 16:5-14

As they traveled further, a man from Saul's family came out near David. His name was Shimei and he began swearing and yelling curses at David. He also threw stones at David and his servants, even the warriors. Shimei said to David, "Go away, go away, you man of bloodshed and worthless man! The Lord has brought back upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have become king; and the Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. And behold, you are *caught* in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed! (vv.7-8)"

Some of David's men offered to David to go over and cut his head off. However, David told them they do not know whether God had told Shimei to come curse David. David says that perhaps God will help David and let him return to Jerusalem, or God will not help David, but God will do what He pleases. David and his men went on and rested on a hillside.

Why might David have thought it possible that Shimei was sent from God?

Conclusion

We see that David's troubles have only multiplied. David is a man after God's heart and God has made eternal promises to David. However, none of that changes the fact that even a man like David must face the consequences for his sin. These may be direct consequences where God directly brings punishment, and the indirect consequences where the proverb "we reap what we sow" takes effect.

David must know that his troubles are a fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy that the sword would never depart David's own household. The favored king by God has now lost his

throne and is on the run... again. Just like the days in the wilderness hiding from Saul, David finds himself in a very similar situation.

David must hold on to the promise made by God that David would always have a son to sit on the throne. The question I would have were I David, is could Absalom be the next son to reign? Was this God's will and a way of judging David? Or, did God have other plans?

We see in stories like these that God never breaks His promises, yet He will bring discipline when His servants abandon His ways. In the next lesson we continue exploring the coup by Absalom.