

Second Samuel Chapter 15 - John Karmelich

I assume most of us know the expression, "Grandchildren are our reward for not killing our kids when we seriously considered it!" That thought popped in my head, as I studied this chapter. This chapter is in essence, David's oldest son Absalom organizes a rebellion against David so Absalom could rule now as opposed to when David died! And you thought your family had issues! By the chapter's end, David left the land of Israel as Absalom organizes a rebellion against him! Yes, this is also the price David is paying for his martial affair with Bathsheba. Still "two wrongs never make a right"! What I hope we'll get out of this lesson is a few tips on how to deal with personal conflict. At the least this chapter shows God cares more than just if we are saved! He desires we live as a witness for Him, even when life isn't going well! Ok then, let's delve deeper into this chapter to see what God wants to show us.

Before I begin an obvious question needs to be asked: At what age is a child responsible for his or her own actions? For those who don't know the actual religious purpose for a bar mitzvah is for the parents to say in effect, "We're no longer responsible for the sins of our child, he or she is accountable for what they do". I bring this up as the son (Absalom) is definitely an adult at this point and has children of his own (as stated in the last chapter). My point is David made mistakes raising him. What parent doesn't? Anyway, Absalom's grown and must take responsibility for his actions. I assume most of us know one person (at least) who hasn't matured so his/her parents keep on bailing them out! Of course, we want to help our grown children, but as most of us know, the best way for them to learn is to take responsibility for their actions. That's common sense, but it's important to state that before we dive into this chapter!

In the last chapter, Absalom fled Jerusalem as he murdered his half-brother. After a long ordeal, David lets him come home, and that chapter ends with David kissing him. Yes, we can get on David's case for not disciplining his son and I'm sure Absalom's lack of respect for his father led to the things we'll read about in this chapter. As most of us know, one of the 10 Commandments is to honor one's mother and father, so for Absalom to rebel against his father to a point of wanting him dead is a violation of that to put it mildly!

With that said, Chapter 15 opens with Absalom "making plans" to grow in popularity in Israel. It starts with him going to the city gates via "a parade" of him riding on a chariot with 50 men following along. At the city gate (where business is usually conducted as to who could enter that city) Absalom tells any Israelites with an issue in effect, "You made a good point, if only I was in charge, your issue would not be a problem!" He did all this publicly till word got around Israel that Absalom's the "power behind the throne" (a lie, but that's the image he was creating) and he could get justice for a person who needed it!

Verse 7 implies Absalom's antics went on for four years. (Some translations say forty, but that that is a bible "typo"). After that time frame, Absalom tells David a lie that he needs to return to where he lived after killing his brother, because he promised God he would make a sacrifice there if he could return to Jerusalem. I would be thinking if that was true, why not do that a long time earlier? Still David let him go figuring who was he to interfere with a vow Absalom made to God? Absalom left to that place. It is also where David first became king over one Israel tribe before he became king over the whole thing! I bring it up, because now in that other city, Absalom invited two hundred leading men with him, but the other men had no idea what he was up do! He sacrificed an animal in effect to keep his word to David! He also sent for one of David's counselors to join him to make this fake coordination seem legitimate!

Anyway, word of what's really happening (a conspiracy against David) reached "the castle". He had to have realized by now Absalom was growing in popularity but I'm sure David was thinking, "Well he is

going to the next king, let him enjoy it" but never suspected Absalom would try to overthrow him! The next thing David did was organize an escape plan. This included all his household servants and the rest of his family (realize the next king, Solomon experienced all of this!) skipped town as fast as possible.

The only people he left were ten "concubines" (kind of like a wife with less privileges, no it's not what God would approve of, but it is what it is!) In fact, when David fled for his life, Absalom then returned to the king's house and "violated" them (next lesson). A few chapters back God told David in effect, "I told you you'd suffer in horrible ways for what you did to Bathsheba". Anyway, those who fled out of town with David appear to be foreigners (loyal to David) who were part of the staff. The text states he and that group left by going over the Mount of Olives (Yes, that one!) to flee before Absalom returned.

One of the fascinating little details is David traveled barefoot. That is a symbol of submission as slaves in that culture went barefoot! It was David telling God in effect, "What happens is up to you, I'm going to do what's logical and run for my life with those who desire to go with me!" The priests who were in charge of carrying the ark of God went with David, but he ordered them to go back to Jerusalem. What is interesting is David didn't want Jerusalem associated with a civil war, so he asked those priests to go back and David said in effect if it's God's will, I'll return in peace one day!

The last few verses are about another one of David's trusted counselors. Despite the fact David can ask God for help, he still had some wise counselors on staff. Proverbs 15:22 says a multitude of counselors brings wisdom (i.e., asking a few trusted people what to do and getting different opinions helps)! All of that meant David asked one of his top counselors to stay behind to pretend to help Absalom so he'll get the message secretly to David of what his plans are! There was another counselor mentioned earlier in the chapter who was already going to be loyal to Absalom and David said in effect, "Make that counsel be a waste of time"! God answered that prayer as it wasn't God's will for Absalom to succeed!

Bottom line is we are watching David's son sin in multiple ways: Not honoring his father, trying to get the king's job before David's natural death is a good pair of reasons. As I mentioned in the last lesson, a monument exists in Israel and a tradition is for fathers and sons to together throw rocks at it as if to say this is no way for any son is to act!

OK, John nice palace intrigue story. We know this is punishment for David for what he did and it does not excuse Absalom for the sins he committed! Yes it's a horrible true story. Why is it in the bible? I'd first argue to teach us about proper discipline of our children and what happens when we don't do that.

Next I'd argue that while people seem to get away with stuff all the time, we can't avoid judgment God will give on all people! It's one of those learn from reading or "learn the hard way" types of lessons. I love to preach that the purpose of life is to use it to glorify God. When we are blatantly avoiding what He commands us to do we may not lose our salvation, but we do become a bad witness for Him when a blatant sin is being committed. The good and bad news is Absalom will be killed in a few chapters due to his actions. Whether or not he's saved is God's business. We're just to judge behavior and treat those who commit sins appropriately ("the law", not take matters in our own hands).

Bottom line a chapter in the importance of discipline and letting our children suffer the consequences for their own actions! On that tough note, time to call it a week!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! If you'd like you can read the rest or stop now. Either way, I'm grateful for you reading this. To see the other one, click on one of the two links on this web page. Thanks again, John