

## Second Samuel Chapters 16-17 - John Karmelich

As us bible veterans know, the Bible's far more than telling us what we must do to be saved. Much of it deals with how God wants us to live as a witness for Him. In effect, that is why I write these studies. In these chapters, we get into the issue of making decisions in stressful situations, which is something we can all relate to. In these chapters, we're in the middle of a "family fight": Israel's King David's oldest son rebels against him to the point of causing a civil war, and we think our family has problems! These chapters deal with the decisions David made as well as his son Absalom. What's interesting is Absalom wants his father dead as he considers him to be his rival. David wants forgiveness as he blames himself for how his son turned out. As we read this "soap opera", the historical details to me aren't as important as what we God wants us to learn about being a good witness for Him. OK then, let's begin:

To remember where we left off, in Chapter 15, David finds out that his son Absalom is very popular all over Israel and is organizing a rebellion against him. Instead of fighting his son, David decided to skip town figuring if God wants to bring him back, God will on His timing. To give us all a heads up, we'll read of Absalom's death in the next chapter. If you think about it, the bible could have just said, David had his son rebel against him, but it ended in death for the son and "that's that". Instead, we get chapter after chapter sharing the details of this saga. Again, the purpose of the bible isn't to teach history, but to teach how to be a good witness for God. That's why these chapters tell us about the decisions they both made under stress. In life we got to make tough decisions in stressful situations all the time! The issue is what we can learn from this! OK enough stalling, onto the details of these chapters.

Chapter 16 opens with David leaving Jerusalem assumedly with some supporters and his family except for the rebelling son of course! David doesn't want to fight his son, because well he's his son! Anyway as he's leaving town the first person he comes across is a man who's job it was to serve the crippled son of his late best friend Jonathan. This man's name was Ziba. He was on the road to Jerusalem at the top of a hill. He was waiting there with a present for David. He had a bunch of food, and a few mules that were intended as a gift for David. He told a story that the man he was caring for (Jonathan's son) didn't want to leave because he thought Saul's family would regain some power with David leaving. We'll see in a later chapter it was a lie and the gifts were in effect a bribe so Ziba would no longer be responsible as a caretaker. The point is David didn't hear both sides of the story. He just knew he was fleeing from his son and here was "free stuff", so he gave Ziba what he asked. It is an example of a bad decision as he didn't hear the other side of the story but was tempted by what's in front of him.

From there David continues his journey out of town. Next he encounters another man who wants Saul's family to reign. He fires off insults at David as he walks. Obviously, David's in a bad mood because of his son rebelling against him and ignores this. One of David's men says in effect, "Let me kill him. We are tired of hearing him complain!" David responds in effect, "My own son wants me dead, unless he's got a sword and wants to kill me, let's ignore him!" This section ends with David arriving at what's his "camp site" somewhere in the east end of Israel and now the scene switches back to Absalom.

We next get the story about two of his advisors. One was someone who followed Absalom, who had a great reputation as a good counselor. The other was a man loyal to David. David asked his friend to go to Absalom and be a spy for David. (It answers a famous question of is it every ok to lie? For example, if one was hiding Jewish people in WWII Germany, it's ok to lie in such cases!) The guy secretly loyal to David said in effect, "My job is to serve the king and since you are the king now, here I am".

Anyway, the other guy, the one who was always loyal to Absalom went first. His first piece of advice to the new king was to go sleep with (rape) the concubines David left behind to take care of the place. He did it in a way (setting up a tent on the roof) that everyone knew what happened. Most commentators say it was the same spot where David saw Bathsheba so this was part of God's punishment. It doesn't mean it was legal or the right thing to do. It was just a way for Absalom to announce, "no turning back now!" I also find it fascinating Absalom didn't ask for a second opinion here! He probably thought "Free sex as well as embarrass my father? Let me begin!"

After that it was time for another tough decision. The same guy who told Absalom to have cheap sex is now telling him to get 12,000 men (say 1,000 per tribe) and go after David as fast as possible before he is out of the scene. (By the way, remember all the years David was on the run from King Saul? That's one reason why God had him go through all of that to prepare him for this!) Absalom this time said, let me also hear from the other counselor (the one who left David). He (Hushai) "spun a tale" that David's men are experienced warriors and knew how to run and hide. He said it was better to get men from all over Israel to search for David. Bottom line, Hushai won the advice contest. He then sent messengers to tell David the plan so he'd have time to escape. The "hide David plot" involved a few people which included a woman who hid David and lied to Absalom's men. David escaped and he traveled across the Jordan River to what is the country of Jordan today.

We also get a strange footnote about the first advisor. When he heard his advice wasn't followed, that's when he decided to commit suicide. His fear was the other plan wouldn't work, Absalom will lose this, and he might as well kill himself. Whether it was premature or not no one knows. A quick word about suicide. It's a sin as its murder. For the Christian who believes Jesus is God I'd argue it's forgivable. I'll leave it at that!

The last few verses were about people of Ammon (part of Jordan today). That nation helped David as he was exhausted and hungry. So much for Hushai's story of a "warrior on the run"! Yes the story will continue in the next lesson.

As I said in the beginning, the issue isn't to learn history. It's about good decision making in the face of a crisis. David prayed for the bad counselor's advice to be ignored and God answered that prayer. Yes, God's still punishing David for the Bathsheba thing, but it shows He's still guiding David despite all of his mistakes. If nothing else, it reminds us that God is still guiding us even after we mess up! It is still a story of David trusting God despite the horrible consequences he's facing. I'd argue David still makes mistakes (such as giving the guy on the hill "all the marbles" despite not hearing the other side. If I get nothing else out of this lesson, it's the idea that God still wants to guide our lives even when we mess up or make bad decisions. He created us to glorify Him with our lives. It doesn't mean we are perfect. It's simply the point that we are to try to make the best decisions we can and ask God to guide us!

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