

Second Samuel Chapters 18-19 - John Karmelich

If I had to describe these two chapters in one word, it's: "decisions". Obviously, God wants us to make the best decisions we can in life. As I preach about decisions: Pray for guidance to start a day, consider the situation in front of us, make the best decisions we can, or gather more information if it's needed to make a big decision. I know that's obvious. My point is the bible's a lot more than "believe in Jesus, go live your life as a witness for Him and that's that". The bible is full of lessons on lots of things for us to be a good witness for Him and that includes making good decisions.

I get into all this as the bible could have just said, "David had to deal with his son rebelling against him and eventually that rebellious son got himself killed for his actions and again, that's that". Instead, we'll get two chapters essentially on decisions David had to make during this period of his life. As I've said a lot in past lessons, this book isn't here to make us an expert on David or Israel's history about 1,000BC. It is about teaching us how to be a witness for God. That includes making good decisions in a situation that would be difficult for most people. Of course, the decisions we must make will be different, still it gets us in the mind set of thinking about long term implications on making tough decisions. That's why I'd argue all of this is here in the bible for us to study. OK then, time for the details:

We last left David in a civil war over Israel with his oldest son Absalom trying to overthrow him. That war caused David to flee across the Jordan river to what is the country of Jordan today. Obviously, no father wants to have to kill his son! David organized an army with those who went with him plus local forces from "Jordan". He divided his forces into three groups. In military strategy, often forces are put into three groups, with one in reserve for a second charge as needed. David wanted to lead the charge. However, David was probably in his mid-sixties at that time! His troops told him in effect, "You stay here, because if you're killed the war's over!" David made a wise decision here and stayed there during the battle!

The battle took place in a part of Jordan that was once Israel territory (back when the 12 tribes divided up the land). Bottom line is David's side won big time partially because he knew the territory which is a forested area. Speaking of "problems in the forest", Absalom was riding on a mule when he got stuck in the trees and his mule took off. Most speculate it was his long hair that he bragged about that was in the tree branches and well he was hanging there. The soldiers who spotted him refused to kill him as it was David's order not to kill his son and everyone understands a father's love for his son.

The text mentions that Absalom didn't have any sons. A few chapters back a few were mentioned, so it is assumed they died young. The text mentions he built a monument to himself. One exists today there but historians say the modern one only dates back to the Greek or Roman times. A tradition to this day is for religious Jewish fathers and sons to spit on the monument or throw rocks at it for his rebellion!

Word got to head general Joab and he's thinking, "To hell with this, I want the war to end!" He tells the guy who found Absalom, "I'd give you money and a belt (a promotion)"! Still he refused to disobey the order of David and didn't kill him. So Absalom and his men finished that job then and there! What that meant is discussed in Chapter 19 coming up in a bit! Bottom line that ends the war, and the scene now goes to how do we tell David the news? Remember he's back at headquarters (a city in Jordan)!

Then we get a strange little story about two "runners" to deliver the message to David. The first wanted to go, but Joab didn't want that Israelite to deliver the bad news to David about his son. He decided that he wanted to run anyway. (I ran for years, I know the feeling!) The second runner was a foreigner who

delivered the message to David that the war was over and his son was dead. In short it's a another story about a wise decision. The chapter ended with us reading about David morning hard for the loss of his son. Obviously, he blamed himself for not raising him properly and felt guilty. As we know for grown children, there comes a time when we got to let them go and let them take responsibility for their lives.

Speaking of dealing with decisions, that leads perfectly to Chapter 19. Let's just say General Joab had it with David feeling sorry for his son and ignoring the people who saved his life, not to mention all the rest of his family who went with him (Solomon had to be there!) Joab who's known "Uncle David" all of his life chews him out. David then made the wise decision to publicly thank all of those who helped him live through that. At the same time, since the war was over the rest of the Israelites who fought on Absalom's side went back to Israel (from where the war was in "Jordan").

We still have the issue of David being king again. The Israelites are collectively worried since they did "back the wrong horse in the war". David asked the top priests to ask those of his tribe of Judah to lead David back home. When David got to the Jordan River, there was also 1,000 men from Benjamin, one of the 12 tribes that Saul was from. Leading them was a man who cursed David out when he fled out of Israel. Bottom line is this was a big apology greeting tour. The man was worried David would kill him for what he did and I picture him apologizing like there was no tomorrow. David said in effect, "There was enough death so far, no one else will die today". So that was David's next wise decision.

Then we get a story of Saul's grandson who was the son of David's late best friend Jonathan. Earlier in the book this man's caretaker lied to David about him not wanting to go with David. So now here's the son of Jonathan, crippled begging for his life and telling the truth of what happened. David says he gets his stuff back (in effect) but Mephibosheth (his name) says in effect, "I'm just happy your back so don't worry about the stuff." That was the end of that decision.

We then get a story about a wealthy man in the city David lived in, in Jordan. David requested that he come to Israel with him. The man responded in effect, "I'm old, I'm set in my ways and I'm too old for a change in lifestyle now. I'll stay put. He requests another man (probably his son) go with David as a sign of gratitude for David accepting his help. Another wise decision.

The chapter ends with a small argument over who's more happy to have David home. It's a strange end to the chapter but the important thing is David is accepted as king again and all the tribes agreed to it.

OK John that's all good and neat. None of us are kings and the decisions we must make are not like the decisions David had to make. How do we relate? As I said in the beginning, begin one's day in prayer. Then we go through life making the best decisions we can and trust God with the results. Think about it this way: David had an affair and killed the girl's husband over it. In effect that's what started all the mess. Still God forgave him and David is still king because God promised David he would have a line of kings as descendants. OK John, so what? It's a reminder that God's unconditional promises to us are well unconditional! Do we mess up as bad as David? Of course, but we still trust God to guide us even though we make mistakes, God still wants us to be a witness for Him. That's what David does as all he can do is make the best decisions he can with the situation in front of him. That's all God asks of us as well as we live to glorify Him with our lives.

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