

2ND SAMUEL

Week 13, chapter 9

As we enter 2nd Samuel chapter 9 I want to remind you that precise chronological order is not maintained in the book. And this is because the authors and/or editors were not endeavoring to create a blow-by-blow account of David's reign but rather they were weaving together the most significant events that shaped David's career, illuminating his admirable qualities as well as his flaws, and revealing God's plan and intentions. We're going to have to do a little weaving ourselves, today, to gain a better understanding of what we see occurring. I promise you that the several hidden elements of what seems on the surface to be a rather simple story are going to surprise many of you.

Chapter 9 is the story of David remembering his promise to his dear friend Jonathan and ostensibly of showing compassion upon the house of Sha'ul. Let's recall those circumstances that led David to do this by reading 1st Samuel 20:11-17. Keep your Bibles handy as we're going to move around quite a lot in them today.

READ 1ST SAMUEL 20:11-17

Now that things were relatively stable and battling for survival was no longer his everyday task, David turned his attention to less urgent matters. Long ago David had promised Jonathan that he would show kindness, **chesed**, to his children and that he would not annihilate the remnants of Saul's family (as was customary when a new king and his family deposed a former king and his family).

The date of this story in 2nd Samuel 9 we can only approximate as about the middle of David's reign (a total period of 40 years). The main character used to demonstrate David's faithfulness to a vow made so many years earlier (a vow made before the Lord) is Mephibosheth (also known in the book of Chronicles as Meriba'al), who was lamed as a 5 year old child when his attending nurse dropped him in a panic as they fled believing that David was coming to kill those who remained of Saul's dynasty.

READ 2ND SAMUEL 4:1-4

It was the murder of **Avner** by David's supreme military commander **Yo'av** that precipitated the widespread panic that led to this tragic accidental crippling (probably due to a spinal injury) to the child Mephibosheth and no doubt David learned of it and probably felt a twinge of guilt if not responsibility for it.

Let's read 2nd Samuel chapter 9.

READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 9 all

Verse 1 has David asking the question of his royal court if anyone was aware of a family member of Saul that was still alive. One has to reasonably ask, why now? What was the catalyst for David suddenly, after probably 2 decades having passed, thinking about Saul's family? Surely David's wife **Michal** (who was King Saul's daughter) would have been aware if she had aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins, or others of her family that were still living and even where they were located. Why didn't David just inquire of her?

The answer may well lie in a later chapter of 2nd Samuel that we'll study in due time. Let's jump ahead and go there now and read part of it. Go to 2nd Samuel chapter 21.

READ 2ND SAMUEL 21:1 – 14

We certainly aren't going to study this chapter in depth today; however it contains pertinent information about a slaughter upon Saul's family that occurred with David's blessing. And interestingly we find that Mephibosheth is mentioned as having specifically been spared. Further the same chapter ends (although we did not continue our reading to include it) that David was still dealing with the Philistines, even though in chapter 8 we're told that the

Philistines had been subdued and rendered weak.

Thus it is commonly (and I think correctly) held that likely this event of 2nd Samuel 21 occurred BEFORE the event of 2nd Samuel chapter 9, which leads David to ask several months (perhaps a couple of years) later after the genocide upon Saul's family, ***“Is there anyone still alive from the family of Saul to who, for Y'honatan's sake, I can show kindness?”*** David was fully aware who Mephibosheth was (he was Jonathan's son), and no doubt that is why he refused to give royal permission to allow the Gibeonites to kill him along with all the others from Saul's family. However, Mephibosheth had disappeared and his whereabouts didn't seem to be known (we'll talk more about that shortly). Blood revenge was the mode of the day and certainly the Gibeonites were not about to rest (after they had killed several members of Saul's family) until they also killed Mephibosheth, so he was taken to a secret and protected place that even David didn't know about.

So the context of our story (and of David's inquiry) is that the known remaining members of Saul's family had been executed with David's consent, and now David is concerned about that vow he made before the Lord especially as concerned Jonathan's descendants.

More evidence that this is the correct context of the story is further verified by verse 2 that has a fellow named ***Tziva*** being brought to David to answer David's inquiry. ***Tziva*** (probably meaning statue) is said to be a servant of Saul's household; in Hebrew it is ***eved*** and indeed it means slave or servant. While there is no specific mention of it, ancient Hebrew tradition is that ***Tziva*** was a gentile (which accounts for a name like “statue” that would have probably been a reference to an idol). So this ***Tziva*** is a hired non-Israelite steward over Saul's estate and (at the moment at least) seems to be the person having the most authority over whatever remains of Saul's holdings. A good logical question is: why isn't a surviving member of Saul's family running things instead of a hired foreign caretaker? Answer: because of what we just read in chapter 21. Saul's few remaining family had somewhat recently been executed and so the highest ranking servant of the family suddenly found himself standing alone at the top of the pecking order. There was no one else left to oversee Saul's estate. ***Tziva*** had won the lottery (or so it seemed)!

So ***Tziva*** stands before David and verse 3 has David directly inquiring with the same question: ***“Is there anyone still alive from the family of Sha'ul to who I can show God's grace?”*** Now look at your Bibles and compare the question that David asks in verse 1 with what is said in verse 3. Most Bible versions have in verse one “show kindness”, and in verse three “show grace” or “show mercy”. I merely want to use this passage to point out to you why translating the Bible from Hebrew to English (or from Greek to English for that matter)

is so problematic. All 3 of these English words (kindness, grace, and mercy) that each has a somewhat different meaning for us, is actually the SAME Hebrew word, **chesed**. So for the average Bible student it appears as though the question that is asked is slightly different between verses 1 and 3, and thus the characterization of what David is proposing to do for a hypothetical survivor of Saul's family is slightly different; but in fact it is not so. **Chesed** is a uniquely Hebrew concept that indeed includes elements of kindness and grace and mercy, but that is not all. Unfortunately as a practical matter a Bible translator has little choice but to pick SOMETHING as his translation of preference, and it needs to be a single word and not a long explanation otherwise we'd have Bibles the size of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Already the Old Testament in our English Bible is 1/3rd more words than the Hebrew Old Testament just in trying to get across some semblance of a reasonable translation.

So when we take these regular detours in Torah Class to carefully examine even a single word in a passage understand that it is necessary because there is no way that our Bibles, as translated to English, can fully convey these Hebrew thoughts or cultural nuances to us as we have received them. So very often we have all heard that the Bible (especially the Old Testament) makes little sense and is filled with contradictions. But the reality is that most of those supposed contradictions are due to necessarily limited or quite poor or agenda driven translation efforts, and because a book of only a few hundred pages (the Bible) spans an enormously long period from the Creation of the world to the coming of Christ. It is impossible to explain to the reader cultural norms. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to learn about the ancient culture and history of the era and of the Middle Eastern region of the world, and to delve into the original languages as much as possible, so as to resolve most of these difficulties.

Therefore (now that I've set you up!) it's time for another one of our infamous detours. In verse 3 where it says that David wants to demonstrate "God's **chesed**" to any surviving member of Saul's family, it is not meant that it is Yehoveh that is showing the **chesed**; rather it is that David is making it clear that the purpose of seeking out survivors of Saul's family is to keep a vow (that by definition has invoked God's name as the guarantor of the vow). **Tziva** responds that indeed there is a survivor, he is **Y'honatan's** son, but he has lame legs. It is interesting that the last verse of this chapter also points again to the fact that Mephibosheth has lame legs, and this has not escaped the attention of the Rabbis. Their take on this emphasis of lameness is that **Tziva** is sort of showing scorn for Mephibosheth because inherent in David's question about there being any survivors of Saul's family is why a gentile servant would be in charge of this former King's substantial estate if there were indeed family members still living. It is certainly to **Tziva's** advantage if there were no survivors, because his status as top-dog would remain unthreatened. Even though **Tziva** is not so unwise as to boldly lie to Israel's king he does quickly point out that while there is a survivor he is a cripple (thereby answering the unasked but obvious question). So why does it matter that **M'fivoshet** is lame?

The thing is that in ancient times cripples were seen as near worthless. They were a burden and, barring some unusual circumstance, they usually wound up as street beggars in order to survive. A cripple could never hold a position of prominence or authority because he would be seen as unable to carry out the duties or to defend his position from people who would take it from him. The disabled weren't merely seen as having little use they were actually despised and looked down upon as undesirables bordering on ritually unclean. In fact we'll find several lessons in the New Testament involving disabled people where Yeshua speaks against the custom of the era to see these unfortunate folks as little more than bugs to be stepped on. Even more, it was often reckoned that their disability was of divine doing and so there must be something inherently distasteful about them that caused them to be cursed and rejected by God.

Let's briefly look at but one example to better help us understand just how the lame and blind were viewed all throughout Bible times. Turn to John chapter 9.

READ JOHN 9:1 – 17

Here is one of the first stories that children are taught in Sunday School. I don't want to get into the deeper theological aspects of this story, but rather I merely want to use it to point out from a social aspect that what so terribly rankled the population of Jerusalem by what Yeshua did (and it especially upset the religious elite) is that this blind man should NEVER had been healed. It was WRONG to heal him; that he was healed on Sabbath mattered but equally so the Sabbath issue was secondary, it was an excuse to find fault. What actually mattered to them is that this man was SUPPOSED to be blind. Thus Yeshua's disciples ask the question of their Master (and I paraphrase), is it the man's own sin or is it that of his parents that caused his blindness? In other words, every person among the surrounding onlookers as well as Yeshua's own disciples took it as self-evident that the man's blindness was divine retribution caused either by the man's own sin or that of his parents. So he was certainly worthy of his affliction and of the Jews' scorn and derision for him. And Yeshua completely overturns standard societal thinking (as well as the faulty theology) of the era by saying that it was neither one: sin had nothing to do with it. The man's blindness was not a divine curse. That in fact the Lord was **using** this social outcast's unfortunate condition to demonstrate divine glory and mercy.

The public attitude was that God didn't love the disabled otherwise He wouldn't have caused their disability in the first place. The crippled and lame were generally even barred from the Synagogue because they were seen as abandoned by God. Thus when Yeshua healed the blind man the Judean people and the religious authorities saw it as the greatest offense and

outrage that a mere man had seen fit to intervene and overturn a divine decision to punish this man by making him blind. It was obvious to most of the eye-witnesses that Yeshua had healed this man, and just as obviously He must have had some supernatural power that enabled Him to do it. But since most of them didn't believe Yeshua was divine, then the only alternative as to where this power came from for Yeshua to heal is that he was of the devil (something he was regularly accused of after He had performed a miracle). Some did think that the power He had was a good power, so they openly wondered if perhaps He was "The Prophet" (possibly a reincarnated Elijah) who many thought was due to appear.

Now let me sermonize just a moment. What we do NOT hear in John 9 is the crowds shouting that this blind man deserved to be blind and that God didn't love him so Yeshua was wrong to heal him. However **it was** what they thought deep inside; and it was a principle that they took for granted without further examination because it was how things had been for thousands of years. Only in private circles and in hushed tones would they ever actually say that thought out loud because it would sound so pitiless and harsh if they did otherwise.

Do we not do the same thing at times? Is it not our knee jerk, almost unconscious, reaction to see someone that we have had little regard for, or someone that we have watched do things that we find spiritually dangerous and just morally repugnant, and if something serious happens to them we think (but usually won't say it out loud), "they had it coming. It was bound to happen. It was God giving them what they deserved for sinning"? Humankind's attitude regarding physical disability and personal calamity hasn't changed all that much in several thousand years, even if we act outwardly different towards it in Western society by providing wheelchair ramps, restrooms equipped for the disabled, signs in brail and so on.

But let me also be clear that Messiah never said or implied that **no** physical disability or calamity was God caused; certainly some was. The issue is that it is rare that we have any actual insight as to which is which. And that it is just as wrong of us to assume that all physical distress or calamity is the result of a person's sin, as it is to assume that God would never intentionally pour out calamity or disability on people He loves as punishment or discipline. We do not know and we probably ought to be considerably more humble in our personal estimations about it.

Thus, back to our story, Mephibosheth is automatically seen as cursed by God and thus disqualified to be anything but a person to be ignored. Even though Mephibosheth had legal rights of inheritance as Jonathan's son (King Saul's grandson) here instead was a gentile servant running Saul's estate due to no more than social customs, superstitions, and false religious doctrines that deemed it to be that way.

In verse 4 David asks where Mephibosheth was residing. Interestingly he is NOT dwelling on Saul's estate that **Tziva** is running. Rather he is living in the house of **Makhir** in a place called **Lo-D'var**. **Makhir** is a standard family name in the portion of the tribe of Manessah that chose to live in the Trans-Jordan. So Mephibosheth (a Benjamite) is being hidden from the Gibeonites by members of the **Makhir** clan in the northern Trans-Jordan. The **Makhir** group was one of many who had been fiercely loyal to King Saul and so it is no surprise that they would offer sanctuary to Saul's grandson.

Lo-D'var is either a translation error or a copyist error. For one thing, **Lo-D'var** means "no pasture" or "no word" depending on which vowel sounds one uses to pronounce it. Either way, that is nonsensical. Rather the place name is actually **Lid-Bir** and we find it first mentioned in Joshua 13:26. It is located east of the Jordan River (the Trans-Jordan) near Jabesh-Gilead. The people of that area had very close ties with the tribe of Benjamin and especially Saul's family even before Saul was king because they were rescued from the brutal King Nachash of Ammon by a large contingent of men from the tribe of Benjamin, led by Saul. Later still, after Benjamin was decimated in a severe police action by the other 11 Israelite tribes, women from Jabesh-Gilead were given to the few remaining Benjamite males to repopulate the Benjamite tribe. So the relationship between the people living in that area and Saul's family was more than mere political loyalty, they were closely related by blood.

So why would Jonathan's son be living in the Trans-Jordan, among another tribe, and not on his own family's estate, being well cared for by the hired caretaker **Tziva**? Because of what we read in 2nd Samuel chapter 21. Mephibosheth was essentially the sole survivor of a David-approved blood vengeance vendetta by some Gibeonites against Saul's family. These Gibeonites were duty bound to finish the job, despite David's instructions to leave Mephibosheth alive (and I suspect that David somehow felt he was absolved from liability before God by ordering the men to spare Mephibosheth). But of all people David fully understood the timeless nature of Middle Eastern blood vengeance and well knew that the danger to Mephibosheth remained. In fact, I suspect that David never thought Mephibosheth would survive for very long and was probably a little surprised to hear that he was still alive and living across the Jordan River.

So David sends for **M'fivoshet** and when **M'fivoshet** is presented to the king he falls on his face in submission, no doubt figuring his life is over. In verse 7, when David says, "Don't be afraid" it is not because Mephibosheth is intimidated by being in the presence of royalty. Rather it is because he thinks David is going to execute him or turn him over to the Gibeonites for retribution.

Mephibosheth is shocked to hear that not only is he going to live but that Saul's considerable estate is going to be turned over to him. Even more, the lame Mephibosheth is going to eat at David's table from here forward, and this is framed as a kindness (**chesed**) to him for the sake of his father Jonathan whom David loved. Mephibosheth, a cripple, useless, who has earned nothing, looked down upon with disdain all of his life and perhaps only with pity even among the clan that had been hiding him, is dumbfounded. In typical oriental fashion he asks why a "dead dog" such as himself should be accorded such unmerited privilege. A dead dog is merely an expression of great humility, of being the lowest of the low, the least worthy.

David now turns to **Tziva** and tells him of a new reality; the crippled and formerly useless Mephibosheth is now his Master. And the estate is being given to Mephibosheth in the name of his former master, King Saul. Giving it all to Mephibosheth rather than allowing **Tziva** (who had maintained it all for years) to remain in possession, is seen as **mishpat tzedek**, righteous justice.

How does David have the right to order such a thing? Because he is king. Especially since Saul's estate had no current legal owner, then it reverted to the monarchy. It was David's to do with as he pleased. He could have kept it for himself, but he didn't. **Tziva** had the benefit of running the place and reaping its rewards for some time; and now he would still do well for himself, but he would do so under the ownership and authority of Mephibosheth. I can't imagine **Tziva** thought that this was very fair or right; I'm certain he had hoped for a better outcome.

READ MATTHEW 20:1 – 16

The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. God's justice is quite different than man's justice and the story of David and **M'fivoshet** highlights this principle. Mephibosheth wasn't merely the last; he was the last of the last. But now he stands before the king as his friend. Now the estate belongs to him.

Tziva will remain in charge, but it is for the purpose of providing for Mephibosheth's family and probably whatever women and children remained of the house of Saul. Mephibosheth is being relocated not to the family estate but to Yerushalayim, and there he will eat at David's table. It is the usual take that the reason for this relocation to Yerushalayim is because he is lame and

thus needs to be near to David to receive the food David has promised.

However it's important to understand that "eating at David's table" is not always literal. It doesn't necessarily mean that a person is going to dine with the king. Rather it is that the king gets only the best food, and any kind of food his heart desires, in any quantity he wants. So the idea is that Mephibosheth will receive food of a quality fit for a king, and it will be provided at no cost. Notice that Mephibosheth is NOT going to live in the City of David, but rather in Yerushalayim. So it is also NOT that Mephibosheth is going to become an honorary member of David's court and become a high official and thus dine daily with the king.

But I think there is something else at play as well. Whereas before now **M'fivoshet** was in hiding and thus protected from the blood avengers of Gibeon, he is now out of hiding and the word of what has proceeded here today will be known far and wide in but a few days. If Mephibosheth was to reside on Saul's estate (that now belongs to him), virtually at the front door of those who wanted blood vengeance upon him, he probably wouldn't last very long. His only other option was to go to one of the Levitical sanctuary cities, but that was hardly something than anyone welcomed. Living in a City of Refuge was virtually as a self-exiled prisoner and on a subsistence level. Thus David took on the responsibility to protect **M'fivoshet** and the only way he can do that was to keep him nearby where David's private bodyguard could deter any murderous intentions against him.

In verse 11 **Tziva** really tries to deter David's decision, but in the so doing further exposes his haughty attitude. He tells the king that he will certainly obey every aspect of David's decree; however he had been doing a good job of caring for Mephibosheth and that Mephibosheth had been eating "at **my** table". First of all, notice again that "eating at my table" does NOT mean literally dining together. Rather it means "providing for". Most often it is referring to food, but depending on the context it could indicate providing for all a person's needs. But to hear **Tziva** saying that it was "**my** table" is rather arrogant. **Tziva** owned nothing. **Tziva** was a gentile servant. **Tziva** sat at the table that had been owned by King Saul, and then (essentially) by King David. **Tziva**, the gentile outsider, was given the privilege of joining in the bounty of an Israelite's harvest, in Israelite land, that was an Israelite inheritance from the God of Israel. That privilege was given to him by the king of God's kingdom. But it was ONLY because of the king's kindness (his **chesed**) that the gentile **Tziva** could partake of Israel's bounty; and such a privilege could be easily removed if **Tziva** thought too much of himself or didn't want to obey the conditions for this beneficial relationship as given to him by the king.

Turn your Bibles to Romans 11 where this pattern is retold in another way. And gentile Believers (especially) please pay very close attention.

READ ROMANS 11:13 -22

We'll begin 2nd Samuel chapter 10 next week.