

2ND SAMUEL

Week 22, chapter 14

I cannot begin to tell you the challenge I feel in presenting to you the deep matters present in 2nd Samuel 14. We'll only be able to delve down so far without getting so bogged down that the time spent will outweigh the benefits. Further the life lessons are such that I'm afraid there is a great deal of discomfort for us to bear in our examination of these Holy Scriptures today, and much change is called for in our attitudes and worship **if** we take to heart what we read and are willing to put aside our insistence that as followers of Messiah Yeshua our own hearts are currently superior for the determination of justice and mercy as compared to God's commandments as given in ancient days.

Amnon, David's firstborn, was dead. In retribution for the rape of his sister Tamar, Avishalom had plotted for 2 full years since the dastardly incident to kill his half-brother. The moment had arrived at the annual sheep-shearing occasion in **Ba'al-Hatzor** when work gave way to partying, and drunkenness dulled the senses sufficiently to briefly drop one's guard.

Avishalom, not wanting to dirty his own hands, followed the blueprint of his father David. He commanded his closest most loyal servants to assassinate Amnon much like David had commanded Joab to see to the death of **Uriyah**, Bathsheba's husband. The Lord had promised David that despite the heavenly and eternal forgiveness (given to him by grace) for David's heinous sins, the remainder of his days he would suffer as one who is cursed-on-earth, with violence and death being the epitaph of his household now and on into the indefinite future.

I want to remind us all that such is a similar kind of forgiveness that we receive when we trust Christ as our salvation. Eternal rest and security in the Lord's presence is indeed afforded us; but in no ways are we held harmless from the earthly consequences of our trespasses against man and God. We are liable for punishments and miseries on account of our rebellious behavior until we breathe our last; only then will we be released from the inevitable effects of our inability to overcome our evil inclinations.

Listen to St. Paul describe this condition for us.

READ ROMANS 7:14 - end

No doubt a measure of divine mercy is regularly given to those who confess and contritely repent or none of us would remain alive and useful to the Kingdom. And with no doubt we who trust are given a greater power, in the form of the Holy Spirit, to overcome sin in our lives and avoid it. But even so, who among us does not have our regrets (almost daily), see and experience the results of our sin play out in the lives of our children (and it grieves us), and wonder in hindsight what our lives might have been if only we would have exercised that new nature and allowed the old to be truly dead to us, and thus followed our Lord and King in true obedience. I also have no doubt that David was tormented night and day with such thoughts as he witnessed deception and destruction inside of his own family, knowing with certainty that it would continue on and on for several more generations. And there was nothing he could do about it.

Despite the fact that it was Avishalom's servants who had assassinated Amnon, Avishalom also bore blood-guilt in the Lord's eyes for this crime. Even in secular Western law codes, the chief conspirator to commit murder is held as responsible for the death as is the one who physically carried it out. Thus Avishalom high-tailed it to his grandfather in Geshur once he knew that Amnon was dead, unwilling to face his father or even the unlikely event of civil justice. We need to be clear that although commentators and even a Bible character in this story of 2nd Samuel chapter 14 refer to David "banishing" Avishalom, in fact that is a mischaracterization. Avishalom had banished himself; he was not chased out of Israel. He was nothing more than a criminal on the run who had fled to avoid prosecution (although one wonders if anything whatsoever would have happened to him since David did nothing to Amnon for raping Tamar, apparently not even confronting Amnon with so little as a verbal lashing).

We're going to re-read chapter 14, but we're going to begin at chapter 13 verse 38 because this verse rightfully belongs as the first verse of chapter 14, not as the final one of chapter 13. I remind you that the original scrolls were not divided into chapters and verses; this was the work of Jewish and Christian scholars centuries after even the New Testament was canonized. Sometimes the points of division are not well done, and thus we can accidentally disjoint one

chapter from another and miss some crucial timing.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUAL CHAPTER 13:38 TO 14 end

Avishalom remained with his mother's side of the family in Geshur for 3 years and during that time David was struggling to overcome the tragic loss of his firstborn son. Losing any child was a terrible thing but losing a firstborn was catastrophic because of the high status given to the firstborn both by custom and by the Torah. However it seems as though after about 3 years David was finally healed over the loss of Amnon.

The opening verse of chapter 14 (as our Bibles have it) says something to the effect that Joab noticed that David's mind (or heart) was always towards Avishalom (it is speaking about that 3 year timeframe). Our CJB's say that the king missed Avishalom (as a sort of dynamic translation) to get across the idea that David was sorely lonely for his banished son. This is a bad translation and let's rectify it right here. What it says is that that king's *lev* was **al-Avishalom**. *Lev* means heart; but when used in this way heart means "mind" or conscious thoughts. Since Christian scholars and the Church has since time immemorial completely misconstrued the intent of the word *lev* (heart) as meaning something like "soul" or as deeply and sincerely felt emotion then one can understand why these same translators would automatically assume that David was feeling a great longing to see Absalom. But in fact the meaning is not about emotion, and it is neither negative nor positive in and of itself; rather it is the word **al** that tells us the nature of David's conscious thoughts about Absalom. **Al** can be translated as "on" or "over", but it is more usually used to mean "against". Therefore it is that David's heart was against Absalom.

As Alfred Edersheim points out, certainly if the King's heart was in favor of Avishalom he wouldn't have left him sitting in Geshur for 3 years, and then after sending for him refused to see or speak with him for 2 more years. Rather it is that David wanted nothing to do with Absalom and Joab rightly perceived this and (with some motive in mind) decided to see if he couldn't remedy the situation. But what might have been Yo'av's motivation for getting David to relent and bring back Avishalom? There has been much speculation about this, but I think that we have to recall Joab's character and actions to come to a reasonable conclusion.

First, since David was getting old and frail, and since Joab was a full generation younger than David, Joab would have rightly been concerned with who David's successor might be. **Yo'av** was a very powerful man; as chief commander of Israel's formidable military by default he was also 2nd in command over all Israel. However, he could be replaced by the king anytime the king felt like it (even though thoughtful political consideration would be given to such a drastic move). It was common that when a new king ascended to the throne that he would hand pick those who were most loyal to him to be his royal court. And the most important position was general of the military. Recall that when David ascended to the throne of Judah, and then in a few years managed to also become king over the northern tribes of Israel (those who had been under King Saul), that Saul's former general was Abner. David negotiated with Abner in order to unite the northern and southern Israelite tribes and when Joab determined that his job as David's chief general was in danger of either be given to (or being shared by) Abner, Joab murdered Abner. So Joab was going to manipulate matters to ensure his own continuing position with the next King of Israel no matter who that might be.

Second, Avishalom had popular sympathy with the people of Israel. The people saw him as a hero of sorts who had been provoked into justifiably killing Amnon due to the terrible outrage that Amnon had committed upon Absalom's sister. Not only that but as the final verses of this chapter tell us, Avishalom carried with him all the attributes that tended to attract the interest of the multitudes. He was the most handsome man in all Israel; dashing, courageous, and admirably willing to accept the consequences (no matter how unfair) of killing his father's firstborn in order to uphold his own family's honor. No doubt with Amnon gone, Avishalom seemed like the sure bet to succeed David and so Joab needed to hitch his wagon to this likely winner and support him.

Thus Joab had formed a sort of informal bond with Absalom and the longer he and David remained estranged, the more likely someone else might rise up the ladder to be next in line as king. And this hypothetical prince in waiting might not be so willing to ally with Joab. Thus Joab's best move was to facilitate reconciliation between father and son. So to facilitate this, the clever Yo'av goes to a woman in the town of Tekoa, located about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. The village eventually became famous as the Prophet Amos' hometown. Here this woman is called a **chakam ishshah** (a wise woman). This is not an official office; she is not a prophetess or a sorceress or anything that is to be seen as religiously oriented or divinely appointed. Rather she is simply known as being smart, quick witted, and able to persuade, manipulate and to think on her feet. This is a person who is not easily rattled and not above doing something that is not entirely up-and-up if it is to her advantage. She remains unidentified as she is seen as but a minor character.

Joab recruits her (no doubt with some kind of unstated reward) to go to David with a heart rending story about her two make-believe sons; the idea was to trap David into having to take

the step of bringing Absalom back or looking terribly hypocritical. So she is asked to look like a woman in mourning; sackcloth for clothing, unwashed, ashes smeared upon the garment and herself, and no anointing oil on her skin that was the basic cosmetic for even poor women of that era. Yo'av went so far as to tell her exactly what to say.

No doubt it was Joab who personally arranged for this small-town woman to see the king; after all there were layers of bureaucracy between the common folks and the king (one couldn't just show up at the City of David and receive an audience). David must have had questions from the beginning as to why in Joab's eyes this woman's problems were so extraordinarily important that it warranted the King's personal intervention.

She appears before the throne, looking forlorn and distressed, throws herself on the floor and says, "Help!" David gives her permission to state her problem and she proceeds to convincingly regurgitate the words Joab had given to her. The story is that she is a widow and not long ago her two sons were out in the field when for some unknown reason one killed the other. There were no witnesses. But now the extended family is demanding justice that the surviving son (who is the murderer) be handed over to the family *go'el hadam* (the blood avenger) who will surely kill him in retribution. But if this happens then this widow will have no sons and this will also mean that her deceased husband will have "neither name nor survivor anywhere on this earth".

Let's examine her story to understand what all of this meant to a person from that time. First, as a widow, her only hope of personal survival was from male family members. Since she had sons, then according to custom and to the Laws of Moses they were responsible to see to their mother's care for the rest of her life. However if her sons died, then unless her husband's brother married her in a Levirate marriage, she would be destitute and possibly not live very long. None of this is explained, of course, but that is how Hebrew society operated and so it didn't need to be said as it was common knowledge.

Second, she says she is concerned about her husband's name continuing on and for that to happen a son needs to remain alive. The issue here is the following: in this era there was no concept of dying and going to heaven. In fact the Hebrew way of thinking was rather par-for-the-course with the other Middle Eastern societies' concept of death and afterlife. You died, you were buried, and if the gods willed it then your essence lived on in a netherworld. In many cultures (including the Hebrew culture at least for a time) that meant that you'd need food and drink so the surviving family was responsible to occasionally bring food and drink to the grave sight and literally pour it down a hole, or to bring into a tomb and leave it.

Another aspect of the dead person's essence living on was that part of that essence continued on in their children (usually sons). Thus if a man died childless (due to a barren wife), or if a man had children but they all died, then his life essence was literally terminated. His spiritual afterlife came to an end. Even more, there was a mysterious power seen in the speaking of a person's name, so if a man had no sons to carry on his blood line and his name, then his name would not be spoken out loud any more and so the family line ended and that was seen as both a horror and a tragedy (something only the most wicked should ever suffer).

Third was the issue of civil justice. The surviving son was a murderer. That one murders a family member does not change the need for justice. And the Torah is clear that a murderer is to have his life taken for his crime. Even more, the family of the victim is to exact justice by themselves killing the murderer and the person who is the designated family **go'el hadam** (blood avenger) especially bears this duty. This too is a Torah command so there was no wrong in it. But on the other hand if proper justice was carried out in this case then a) the widow would become destitute, and b) her deceased husband's spiritual life essence would be snuffed out.

Like other aspects of this story that the author used to make a point, this was designed so that the ancient listener would hear the echoes of a well-worn tale that was a staple around the campfire: the story of Cain and Abel. They too were out in a field where there were no witnesses and no one to intervene. Cain unjustly killed his brother Abel. Cain is not executed but is banished from the land with a mark on his head warning others not to think that they can take justice on him. Thus the idea was to draw a similarity between the Amnon/Absalom situation, the widow's 2 sons, and Cain and Abel.

Now from David's viewpoint how was he to weigh this case? This was very difficult; what mattered more: to allow well defined Torah justice to take place such that this widow would indeed lose her sole remaining son to the blood avenger? Or did this woman's well being mean that blood vengeance should be blocked for her sake? After all, executing the one son would not bring back the other. The woman begged and insisted that before she left his presence David make a vow that her surviving son would not be killed; and the magnanimous King of Israel pronounced a royal edict (invoking Yehoveh's holy name) that no one should even speak to her of the matter any longer. The son should live and the blood avengers should end their hunt for him. Case closed.

But notice something ironic; David essentially pronounces sentence upon his own son without

realizing he had done so. David says to the widow, "Not one of your son's hairs will fall to the ground". Yet it won't be terribly long before Avishalom, the one who is being compared to this surviving son, will be caught by his lavish hair in a tree and killed. Was David right (as the Rabbi's tend to say) to offer that widow mercy for her son?

Before she insists on David's vow (which he freely gave) she makes this interesting statement: "My lord, let the guilt be on me and my father's family, let the king and his throne be guiltless". And to this David says that such is not necessary, the surviving son is hereby pardoned. Here is where the immense value of learning God's Word beginning at Genesis 1, taking the Torah and the Law at face value, and acknowledging its validity and worth even for the modern Believer helps us to understand what is happening here, and helps us to extract a great lesson that we must apply to our lives and society.

The Torah demands blood for blood. The Law of Moses gives no choice but that a person who murders is to be executed. The circumstance simply doesn't matter.

(Exo 21:12-17 CJB)

¹² ***"Whoever attacks a person and causes his death must be put to death.***

¹³ ***If it was not premeditated but an act of God, then I will designate for you a place to which he can flee.***

¹⁴ ***But if someone willfully kills another after deliberate planning, you are to take him even from my altar and put him to death.***

¹⁵ ***"Whoever attacks his father or mother must be put to death.***

¹⁶ ***"Whoever kidnaps someone must be put to death, regardless of whether he has already sold him or the person is found still in his possession.***

¹⁷ ***"Whoever curses his father or mother must be put to death.***

I don't have the time to go into all the nuances of manslaying, but you can go back to our study of the Torah to review it. However understand that not all killing is murder. Accidental killing is not murder. Killing an enemy in battle is not murder. Killing in self defense is not murder. But let's go one step further and also look at the book of Numbers on the subject.

(Num 35:14-21 CJB)

14 You are to give three cities east of the Yarden and three cities in the land of Kena'an; they will be cities of refuge.

15 These six cities will serve as refuge for the people of Isra'el, as well as for the foreigner and resident alien with them; so that anyone who kills someone by mistake may flee there.

16 "However, if he hits him with an iron implement and thus causes his death, he is a murderer; the murderer must be put to death.

17 Or if he hits him with a stone in his hand big enough to kill someone, and he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer must be put to death.

18 Or if he hits him with a wood utensil in his hand capable of killing someone, and he dies, he is a murderer; the murderer must be put to death.

19 The next-of-kin avenger is to put the murderer to death himself- upon meeting him, he is to put him to death.

20 Likewise, if he shoves him out of hatred; or intentionally throws something at him, causing his death;

21 or out of hostility strikes him with his hand, so that he dies; then the one who struck him must be put to death; he is a murderer; and the next-of-kin avenger is to put the murderer to death upon meeting him.

Just as in any modern secular society, there are varying degrees of homicide: some justifiable and some not. Even in secular society there are also varying degrees of justifiable homicide and varying degrees of unjustifiable homicide and so each has a different kind of remedy. And thus in some cases no penalty is called for, in other cases a monetary penalty is ordered, in still others jail time might be in order, and in the worst instances either life in prison or the death penalty is handed down. Therefore the Torah allows sanctuary cities where a killer can go to be safe, provided his was not an act of hostile intentional killing; rather it was a kind of killing where the offense was not intended nor could the result of his act have been reasonably expected to cause death of another.

So what about the case brought before David? Well in the case that the wise woman is bringing before the king, it clearly sounds like Numbers 35:21 where one person strikes the

other in hostility with his hand, and the other dies. The Law says that he is a murderer and the *go'el hadam* is to put him to death. It is NOT an option, it is a command.

Let me remind you that the case the woman is bringing to the King is **not** real; it is concocted by Joab as a means to manipulate and trap David into allowing Avishalom to return to the royal court. But David thinks that it's real and he rules based on the facts as presented. (I am going into depth on this because I want us to come to the realization that how we tend to look at such a case, how the Rabbis tend to look at it and even how some Judges and much of the Church looks at it, often runs completely counter to Holy Scripture. And this is something that has become harmful to our relationship with God and it has brought ruin upon our society and communities and families). And David says that essentially his sympathy for the plight of the widow outweighs the need of God's justice for the murderer. The woman doesn't try to hide that fact that one son intentionally murdered the other. There were no extenuating circumstances presented; this was not an accident. The only possible extenuating circumstance could have been something like the surviving son saying that while he indeed killed his brother, that it was not out of hostility but rather self-defense or that although he struck him with his fist it was not intended to cause death. And since there were no witnesses, then his word would have to be taken for it. But that is not the case here. The woman seems to substantiate that this was a confessed case of unjustifiable homicide, that indeed there was blood-guilt (and she was willing to take on that guilt herself if her son were spared), and what she was looking for was a royal pardon for admitted wrong doing.

Scriptures tell us that there is NO atonement for murder within the Law. That is, there is no animal sacrifice that can substitute the life of an innocent animal for the life of the criminal (notice that David didn't sacrifice after he had Uriyah killed and confessed this to God). The only payment that God will accept as legitimate is the life of the murderer. Further, blood-guilt is laid upon the entire local society when a murder is committed. The only way for the local society to relieve itself of this blood-guilt is to follow through with God's Law and execute the criminal. If the society refuses to do such a thing, then that society bears the blood-guilt right along with the criminal. Why is society equally guilty? Because God demands proportionate justice (a life for a life) and if the society refuses to do so, then such disobedience will bear the penalty.

The widow woman is completely aware of this and thus offers to David that SHE and her father's family offer to bear this blood-guilt instead of David (as the representative of civil justice for Israel). In other words, she fully understands that God's law is that the only route offered by Yehoveh in response to this intentional murder is the execution of the criminal. Mercy is NOT allowed because life is so important to God.

David takes the bait and says that essentially his view of mercy is such that he pardons the son. David is wrong. He has no right to do such a thing. The Bible offers no exceptions. And folks we have no right (no divine authorization) to do anything (even in our modern times since the advent of Christ) but to execute a justly convicted murderer OR we collectively bear the blood-guilt and our society bears the blood-guilt. Life in prison is no substitute. And certainly we have no right to pardon anyone unless they were wrongly convicted.

But as we discussed last week, because a large segment of Christianity says that God's sole remaining attribute is love, and then the resulting logic says that perfect love wouldn't demand the life of anyone, including that of a killer. Besides execution is really nothing but human revenge, and revenge and love certainly are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Therefore we must not execute murderers but rather we must forgive them.

Judaism on the other hand, due to its overriding belief in humanitarianism, also says that execution is wrong. In fact the Rabbis find an amazing way out for King David. Despite what the Law of Moses clearly says, the Rabbis say that David was justified for siding with the widow woman but for reasons that might surprise you. Let me quote for you from the Rubin edition of the Artscroll Commentary on the book of Samuel.

“Since they (the 2 sons) were in an isolated place (the two quarreled in the field) there were no witnesses to warn the murderer of the penalty, and according to Torah law, any crime committed without such a warning cannot be punished. The woman meant to intimate that Absalom, who was not warned before his crime, was not culpable. Although the king has the prerogative to impose punishment even in such a case, in order to protect society from wanton criminality, he does so at his discretion and has the right to let the law take its course, if he feels that that course is better.”

Understand that what is meant here by “Torah Law” is rabbinical rulings on the Torah not any stated Law of Moses. Their rationale is that despite the mother of these boys readily confessing that this was an undeniably hostile murder, since there was no one there to WARN the surviving son that he shouldn't kill his brother, there should be no penalty. And since this is to be compared to Avishalom (there was no one to warn him that ordering Amnon's death is wrong), then he committed no crime. So since David is supposed to be utterly sinless in the thinking of Judaism, then here we have this mind boggling twisting of logic and Torah to make it that if a criminal is not specifically WARNED that he is about to commit a crime (no matter how obvious), then it cannot be considered a crime, even if murder occurs. And since that is the case, then David was perfectly right to pardon the act of murder by the surviving son, and he was right to take no action against Absalom for murdering his brother and thus (once again)

David is without fault.

Modern secular society has simply decided that as human beings we just don't have the human right to execute a criminal no matter what he did. That as advanced intellectual beings, our inherent goodness dictates that since the execution of the criminal can't bring the victim or victims back to life, then it is pointless to kill the criminal and thus extinguish yet another human life. Recall how within the past year that the UK released the Lockerbie bomber (who blew up an airliner killing almost 300 people) after just a few years in prison. The reasoning? He was sick with cancer and so human mercy says it would be inhumane for this man to die in jail and besides it wouldn't bring back a single life. Thus he was freed and sent back to his own society where he now lives as a hero. And to secular minds, this is justice.

Folks, one of the reasons that our community, State, Nation, and the world in general is in a death spiral of confusion, immorality and violence is because we live under God's curse of blood-guilt. The entire earth is soaked with the blood of murder victims, while their killers are intentionally allowed to live. God's required justice and remedy for this goes wanting because we see our human justice as better than His divine justice. Not executing a killer violates one of God's most important and fundamental laws and because we are so in love with love and convinced that our hearts are the best judge; and because so many Christians have decided that God's Laws and justice are a thing of the past; and because Judaism thinks that humanitarianism is God's intent for men on earth, and because secular humanists believe that there is no higher authority than our own inherent goodness, morality and enlightened intellect, then we will continue on this destructive path until Messiah comes again to put a stop to it.

Let me be clear: for the true Believer in Messiah Yeshua, the curse of eternal separation from God is lifted because His Son paid our ransom. But that has changed nothing as regards the carrying out of His Laws on earth. Spiritual pardon is not earthly pardon. Eternal life does not cancel physical death. Love does not annul justice. Our refusal to rid the world of wickedness (using the Torah Law as the standard), simply allows more and greater wickedness to multiply and thrive.

David was wrong. He committed yet another terrible sin, which of course would lead to more death and violence within his family, and it would push the nation of Israel towards sliding down a slippery slope into God's wrath. We'll continue with chapter 14 next time.