

2ND SAMUEL

Week 25, chapters 15 and 16

We're going to continue our slow crawl through 2nd Samuel 15 today because it is so laden with fundamental concepts and patterns that are vitally important to who we are in Christ. We certainly won't go this painstakingly through the rest of the book, but the nature of this particular chapter compels me to take the needed time to extract the profound lessons that are built into the passages.

David, as passive and self indulgent as he had become; so back-slidden and prone to rash actions as was now his way, seems to have been jarred into action by the sudden rebellion of the Kingdom of Israel led by his son Avishalom. That same jarring also seems to have re-awakened a sense of humility and repentance within him that reflected a much earlier self that operated in a more righteous manner. So despite being the great warrior that he still was at heart, and probably quite capable of mustering a substantial force of loyal supporters to resist the rebels, David chose a different course. He chose to put his people ahead of himself.

When he heard that Absalom had won over the hearts and minds of a substantial segment of society throughout Israel (people from every tribe including even his own), David knew that had he remained hold-up in his capital city of Yerushalayim (and more specifically the City of David royal enclave), great destruction and death of the innocent would have been the result if it was attacked.

No doubt David's mind would have wondered if perhaps since so many of his people eagerly accepted Absalom as king then David was maybe no longer worthy of the throne. After all, such insurrection was promised by the Prophet Nathan when the Lord took David to task for his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriyah. David knew that (at the least) what was happening was God's will and part of the just punishment due him, so he determined that he would not fight it.

Let's re-read the last half of 2nd Samuel chapter 15 to get our bearings for today's lesson.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 15: 17 – end

The King and his followers were fleeing eastward, down and through the Kidron Valley that separated Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, and then up and over the Mount of Olives and eastward towards the wilderness. A group of 600 of his loyal personal bodyguard were led by a foreigner (probably a former Philistine) named Ittai, and as they passed in review before David he took Ittai aside and offered him the opportunity to go back and not become embroiled in an uncertain future, attached to a deposed king. In verses 19 and 20 David tells Ittai that he has no obligation to stick to David (since he is not a Hebrew) and that he is essentially free to dissolve the covenant of loyalty with David and instead serve the coming anti-king, Absalom. David also reminds Ittai that he is only a relatively recent newcomer to Israel.

Most of our Bibles say that Ittai came only “yesterday”, but that is a too rigid interpretation of the Hebrew word *temol*, which means yesterday only in the sense of “not very long ago”. We also see that David calls Ittai a *nokri* and a *goleh*: an alien stranger and an exile. Thus Ittai had not become a national member of Israel, instead choosing to remain in his foreign identity rather than becoming an official Hebrew. But as a Philistine who had thrown his loyalty to David, he was now an enemy of his former government and thus an exile from his own homeland. Ittai was in a strange situation; he didn't want to give up being a gentile and yet he had chosen to give his allegiance to God's anointed king, a Jew. Interestingly, David was satisfied with this gentile's loyalty and didn't require Ittai to become a Jew in order to serve him.

David tells Ittai that he cannot promise any kind of a known or profitable earthly future for Ittai and his fellow kinsman if he follows David into the wilderness, so he gives Ittai permission to go back and serve Absalom and to do so with David's blessings. Most of our Bible versions have David saying to Ittai, “May mercy and truth” or “May grace and truth” go with you. In Hebrew it says, “May *chesed* and *emeth*” go with you. This is no condescending or merely courteous blessing that David has offered Ittai. *Chesed* is a word that has a deep spiritual sense to it, much as does the Hebrew word *shalom*. *Chesed* (and *shalom*) are words that describe a condition or a state of being and relationship that can only come from a divine source. *Chesed*, as a concept, means that it needs definition to be properly understood. It is a concept that contains many attributes, among which is grace. The word “grace” is commonly used to translate *chesed*, as is also kindness or loving kindness, and while those English

words are not wrong it doesn't necessarily impart to us the depth and breadth of what is being proposed.

This knowledge of the Hebrew idea of **chesed** is important for us to grasp on several levels mainly because a thorough misunderstanding or ignorance of **chesed** is what has led to a corrupt manmade Theology that says that grace is a New Testament aspect of God that didn't exist prior to the advent of Yeshua. And that grace as the new basis for relationship between God and mankind makes the former Old Testament "law" relationship between God and mankind faulty, irrelevant and obsolete for the Believer.

Therefore although we've discussed it before, I want to take a few moments to detour and perhaps add a little more to the fascinating topic of **chesed** because it has such impact on the relationship between God and man in all eras. As I said it is a word that is difficult to translate because it is more a concept than a word; and as such it has a whole range of meanings that must be folded together to try and define it.

Let me give you an illustration of the issue. If we describe our typical mode of driving to work, we might say we drive to work in a car. But what is a car? A car is a device that consists of many identifiable components; it has an engine, it has 4 wheels, it has seats to sit on, a roof to keep the weather out, a transmission, and much more. Altogether these components form a car. Now if I told you that I get to work by driving an engine, I wouldn't be entirely wrong because all cars have engines. But an engine, as important as it is (and arguably it might be the key component) is but one of several components that when assembled as a unit creates a car. So saying I drive a car to work gives you a much more complete and useful mental picture and understanding of this transportation device than saying I drive an engine to work.

It works the same with the concept of **Chesed**. Included in the total concept of **Chesed** are such components as faithfulness, kindness, love, loyalty, mercy, truthfulness, and grace. Each of these components is a bit different, but all of them (plus several more) when taken together make **Chesed**. **Chesed** is so fundamental in God's idea of relationship that it transcends even the covenant relationship and may be thought of as perhaps the prime and overriding virtue in ancient Israel for any relationship. Thus we find in the book of Ruth that Ruth exhibits great **chesed** towards her mother in law Naomi even though, strictly speaking, there is no covenant between them. And at the same time, the concept of **chesed** defines the right attitude and behavior of partners in a covenant relationship towards one another.

The Mosaic Covenant between YHWH and Israel is itself an act of **chesed** of the God of Israel towards His people. Yehoveh keeping His promises to Israel and to King David even though they often transgressed those covenants was also an act of **chesed**. But God's **chesed** always calls for reciprocal behavior; therefore Israel is to respond by maintaining **chesed** towards the covenants and towards God. Thus in a simple sense **chesed** can be thought of as "loving loyalty" (with all of its necessary components) on the part of Yehoveh towards His people Israel, but also on the part of Israel towards their God to whom they have made covenant and thus obligated themselves.

Just as there is no single word or direct concept equivalent in English for **chesed**, there is also no direct Greek equivalent. So since the most ancient manuscripts we have for the New Testament are written in Greek and only then translated into English, the complex concept of **chesed** has generally been reduced by translators to only the single attribute of "grace". Do not think I'm saying that grace is bad translation or that it is wrong; but it is too narrow and incomplete to give us all the meaning we need to understand the divine transaction.

The Church has had an annoying tendency to reduce many enormous and complex Biblical concepts into overly simplified, often single word sound bites called doctrines, and it robs us of critical information and can send us down rabbit trails. For instance, even God Himself lately has been reduced in many denominations (who seek to make Him appear more attractive to potential followers) to but a single attribute: love. And certainly God is love; but that's not all He is. He is healing. He is wisdom. He is mercy. But He is also wrath. He is judge. He is warrior. He is lawgiver. So to reduce God to only a single attribute (whatever one is chosen) and to eschew the others gives us a very incomplete and limited understanding of His nature that can have a profound consequence on our view of who God is and what our relationship with Him ought to be.

So just as the underlying basis for all covenant relationship has always been **chesed**, as Believers in Yeshua it would help us to see that we are saved NOT merely by the single attribute of grace but rather by the enormity of God's **chesed** with all its attributes and components. Why do I say that? Because grace is but one of several components of **chesed**; grace may be the all important car engine, but it's not the whole car. Grace as we narrowly define it offers but a fraction of the overall divine concept of **chesed**, and therefore of what is behind our saving relationship with Christ and how we obtain it. And when we can finally grasp that, then we see that regardless of the era, and regardless of which testament or covenant we are exploring, **chesed** is and has always been the basis for relationship between worshipper and God. And why is that? Because God never changes.

But our more thorough understanding of **chesed** as an overriding Biblical principle also helps to revive and underscore the nearly extinct premise within the Church that we as Messiah's followers have obligated ourselves to God (and not just He to us) when first we signed on to the covenant that redeems us, sealed in Messiah's blood. And this obligation that is all wrapped up in the concept of **chesed** involves duties and obedience towards God and His commandments, not merely our tacit acknowledgement of our desire for this relationship.

As the New Testament Scripture passage from last week's lesson that comes from the mouth of our Savior Himself so plainly and forthrightly states:

^{CJB} **Matthew 7:21** *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.*

"Do" is an action word. To "do" goes beyond passive belief or promise and instead speaks of an obligation from God to us and from us to God. And as further evidence of the reciprocal nature of **chesed**, and of the duties and obligations that we take on when we sign on to God's covenant, and thus the basis of our relationship with Christ is formed and defined, we have these words from Yeshua's biological half-brother who (growing up in the same household as Yeshua) must have heard pronounced so very often:

(Jam 2:14, 17 CJB)

¹⁴ ***What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but has no actions to prove it? Is such "faith" able to save him?***

¹⁷ ***Thus, faith by itself, unaccompanied by actions, is dead.***

So in our story in 2nd Samuel 15, the anointed King of Israel offers the gentile foreigner Ittai **chesed** even if Ittai chooses not to live among the anointed King and his Israelite followers. Why? Because even though the bond of covenant is strong, the follower of the King is not a robot nor does he lose his free will to disavow the covenant and to go and follow another leader. Ittai, in his free will, chooses to continue following his Jewish king unto death if need

be. **Chesed** is being reciprocated; David offered **chesed** to Ittai, and so Ittai responds in **chesed** towards David. Hopefully all of this is conjuring up a shadow and a pattern of the Believer's relationship with God through Messiah, and of the always-present temptation to fall away and follow another popular leader that will be especially manifested when the Anti-Christ appears. But, it'll get even more interesting as our story continues.

Verse 23 speaks of the grieving procession of David's loyalists crossing the Kidron Valley and heading towards the desert road. Almost all English translations have some variation of this meaning, but some ancient manuscripts written in other languages and also modern scholarly re-examination of the Masoretic Hebrew texts give us some enlightening insight. It seems as though the Masoretic Texts have a few minor copyist errors regarding the description of the exact route that this grieving procession took over the Mount of Olives. The extant Hebrew copies are obviously misspelled such that (whether Jewish or Christian) a scholar has to try to figure out what the misspelled words mean because taken exactly as written they are gibberish. And the new understanding taken with the reading from some of the older manuscripts makes this verse read something like this: ".....However the king remained standing in the Kidron Valley while the entire army passed on before him along the Way of the Wild Olive Trees towards the desert."

Stay with me; in other words the context of the reference to Ittai's army is to the group of foreign mercenaries led by the gentile Ittai, and the route they took across the Mount of Olives was a certain pathway that was locally known as the Way of the Wild Olive Trees. Nothing earth shattering about that; the Mount of Olives is huge and so there were several routes to cross it depending on which compass direction you intended to travel to and from Jerusalem. The various pathways were given informal names. Now this hardly seems like an important modification to the standard translation of this verse except when we recall a rather cryptic statement of St. Paul's that incorporates a similar idea; and I think that it was this well known story among the Jews of his day (the story of David fleeing Jerusalem), and of the probably still existing pathway across the Mount of Olives in Paul's day known as the Way of the Wild Olive Trees, that Paul was using as an understandable and simple illustration of how gentile foreigners can become participants in Israel's saving covenant with Israel's God, and yet they don't stop being gentiles. Let me point out that in the Bible (as elsewhere) the purpose of an analogy or illustration is to use a commonly understood thing to help explain something that is perhaps more difficult to understand (such as the use of my car illustration in explaining **chesed**).

(Rom 11:16-24 CJB)

¹⁶ Now if the hallah offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole loaf. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷ ***But if some of the branches were broken off, and you- a wild olive- were grafted in among them and have become equal sharers in the rich root of the olive tree,***

¹⁸ ***then don't boast as if you were better than the branches! However, if you do boast, remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.***

¹⁹ ***So you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."***

²⁰ ***True, but so what? They were broken off because of their lack of trust. However, you keep your place only because of your trust. So don't be arrogant; on the contrary, be terrified!***

²¹ ***For if God did not spare the natural branches, he certainly won't spare you!***

²² ***So take a good look at God's kindness and his severity: on the one hand, severity toward those who fell off; but, on the other hand, God's kindness toward you- provided you maintain yourself in that kindness! Otherwise, you too will be cut off!***

²³ ***Moreover, the others, if they do not persist in their lack of trust, will be grafted in; because God is able to graft them back in.***

²⁴ ***For if you were cut out of what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree!***

And thus we have this metaphorical connection being made by Paul between wild olive trees and gentiles that I think may be based on the commonly known story of the pathway of wild olives that Ittai (the gentile foreigner) voluntarily followed in order to maintain his relationship with David (God's anointed king) who was a shadow and type of Messiah. And the God-principle it reveals is that our spiritual **chesed** towards Yehoveh and to His anointed king, and thus God's **chesed** towards us which preceded it, does not mean that a person must change their physical and national earthly identity in order to obtain it. A gentile can trust in the God of Israel, and can faithfully follow Israel's anointed king, and can be made part of Israel's saving covenant by means of God's **chesed** and all without being a physical Hebrew or by becoming a naturalized Israelite. Ittai did it; his men did it; and those among us who are gentiles can do it and if we are already Believers, we have done it. Let's move on.

Verse 24 gives us this tantalizing piece of information: the High Priest **Tzadok** suddenly showed up followed by a procession of Levites carrying the Ark of the Covenant on their shoulders. The Levites set the Ark down and waited while all the people who were going with David passed by as they crossed over the Kidron Valley. Although it doesn't directly say so, I suspect that setting the Ark down was meant to imitate that day several centuries earlier when

the Levites carried the Ark to the center of the Jordan River as Israel first entered the Promised Land (led by Joshua) and waited until all the people crossed over, and then picked it up to continue on. What makes this tantalizing is that we see a 2nd High Priest, **Evyatar**, also involved.

Before David was king, **Evyatar** was the High Priest. But by all accounts he was illegitimate. He had been installed by King Saul but that isn't what made him illegitimate; it's that he was a descendant of Eli, who was of the Levite line of Ithamar. But the line of Ithamar was not supposed to be the line of High Priests; High Priests were to be descended from Eleazar.

Apparently at some point David recognized this problem and appointed **Tzadok** to the High Priesthood, but he didn't remove **Evyatar**. **Tzadok** was indeed of the legitimate High Priest line of Eleazar. But as we've seen, David had become the consummate politician and played fast and loose with the Torah commandments and so apparently he figured that it would be less divisive among his subjects to merely add **Tzadok** but not replace **Evyatar**, so the result was that Israel had co-High Priests at this time (King Solomon would remedy this odd situation a few years later).

David told **Tzadok and Evyatar** that the Ark should not accompany the procession into the wilderness; they should take it back to its resting place in Jerusalem. There were two reasons for doing this: 1st is that David wanted to have the loyal ears of **Tzadok and Evyatar** and their two sons (next in line for High Priest) in Jerusalem to report the goings on to David in exile. Second is that David figured that if God had in His will deposed David, then David had no right to the presence of the Ark. The Ark was for the benefit of Israel. Therefore the Ark would be needed by the new king, **Avishalom**, as a key element of his rule over Israel.

After the matter of the Ark of the Covenant was handled, the weeping procession continued up the Way of the Wild Olive Trees towards the summit of the Mount of Olives; David and all the people had their heads covered and walked barefoot. This was a standard sign of contrition and repentance, thus acknowledging that what was occurring was God's justice for trespasses committed and that they accepted God's judgment. But then David got news that devastated him all over again; his trusted advisor and councilor **Achitofel** is among those who conspired against David (recall that **Achitofel** is Bathsheba's grandfather). David instinctively shouted out a quick prayer towards the heavens: "Yehoveh, please, turn **Achitofel's** advice into foolishness!" In other words, David pleaded with God to take **Achitofel's** formerly outstanding and sage advice and when used for Absalom's council turn it into bad advice.

As David reached the summit of the Mount of Olives Hushai the Arkite met him there. Apparently there was some kind of formal worship place at the top of the Mount of Olives, as there was in a number of other places throughout Israel as well. While the main sanctuary seems to have been at Gibeon at this moment, it didn't appear to carry much weight. Anyone of stature created their own altar, and their own worship center to Yehoveh, and the archeological finds of recent years seems to verify that private worship centers and altars were erected all over the Promised Land.

This Hushai was a very old man and was called friend of David. He, too, was grieving and penitent, clothing torn and dirt thrown over his head and shoulders, when David spotted him. But David told him that it would be better that Hushai stayed at the palace because a) his elderly state would have made his very presence a burden on David who needed to move quickly to avoid danger, and b) Hushai could be useful as a spy for David inside Absalom's administration. David tells him that he won't be alone in this endeavor, that **Tzadok and Evyatar** will remain there with him as well. The plan was that Hushai would give information to the 2 High Priests, who would pass it along to their 2 sons, who would then make contact with David.

Let's move on to chapter 16.

READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 16 all

I'll only set the stage for this chapter today, and we'll get more deeply into it the next time we meet.

This is another place where it would have been best to have no division between chapters; the last verse of chapter 15 merely flows directly into the 1st verse of chapter 16.

Thus chapter 16 begins with the procession still on the Mount of Olives and following the same pathway. What we're seeing is David meeting a whole string of folks as he exits Jerusalem.

He's met Ittai, the faithful gentile leader of a contingent of 600 armed men. He's also met **Tzadok and Evyatar** the co-High Priests and sent them (along with the Ark) back into the city as informers. An anonymous person then told David of **Achitofel's** treachery, and this was immediately followed by the faithful **Hushai** who agreed to be a spy for David in Absalom's royal court. David undoubtedly expects to meet more loyalists who were rallying to his support on his way out of town, but is surprised when **Tziva, Mephibosheth's** servant, approaches David with needed supplies and gifts for his exile. Considering the state of emergency and catastrophic event that is unfolding, David expected that even the lame **Mephibosheth** whom he had treated with such **chesed** would have come himself instead of sending a servant.

David had plucked **Mephibosheth** from hiding out in fear in the Trans-Jordan and brought him safely to David's palace, guaranteed him security and prosperity, supplied his every need and even turned over Saul's considerable estate to him so it would have seemed natural for **Mephibosheth** to now come to David in his time of need. Instead here stands **Tziva**, the gentile estate steward, armed with a slanderous story about **Mephibosheth**.

We'll continue this next time.