

2 SAMUEL—WEEK 12

RECONSTRUCTION



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

Absalom's coup is over, and David begins the task of reunifying the nation. He forgives far and wide, and it bring many back into the fold.

The spirit of pardon is catching.

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2 Samuel, Week 12 — Reconstruction
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1 2 Samuel 18:28–33

So Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, “All is well!” Then he bowed down with his face to the earth before the king, and said, “Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king!”

The king said, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

Ahimaaz answered, “When Joab sent the king’s servant and me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what it was about.”

And the king said, “Turn aside and stand here.” So he turned aside and stood still.

Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, “There is good news, my lord the king! For the LORD has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you.”

And the king said to the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

So the Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm, be like that young man!”

Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: “O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!”

Ahimaaz has to know that Absalom is dead. Otherwise, why would Joab hesitate to send him to David?

Recall David’s reaction to hearing of Saul’s death. Bringing news like that to David has proved dangerous. That’s why Ahimaaz twice said (in verses 22 and 23) that he wanted to bring the news regardless of what may happen. That wouldn’t make sense unless the news includes Absalom’s death.

Ahimaaz’s response to David’s question about Absalom sounds contrived—like he’s trying to prepare David for the bad news.

That seems to be why he raced to get there first.

David’s reaction to Absalom’s death is puzzling. It wasn’t that long ago that David wouldn’t give him the time of day. Everything Absalom has done since then has been horrible—sure grounds for being disowned. So, why is David heartbroken now? What changed?

It must be David; any change in Absalom was for the worse. Since David’s grief over his own sin (and his resulting growth) is a recurring theme in this book, what specifically might be at play here?

The answer may come in the words, “*my son, my son.*”

David is grieved, specifically, as Absalom’s father. His failures there are great, and he knows it.

2 2 Samuel 19:1–8a

And Joab was told, “Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. For the people heard it said that day, “The king is grieved for his son.” And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, “O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, “Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well. Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now.” Then the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, “There is the king, sitting in the gate.” So all the people came before the king.

David’s weeping for Absalom may make sense personally, but it makes no sense for the nation. “Suck it up, buttercup! You’ve got a nation to run,” (or something like that). So, Joab delivers the word to David.

But he adds a harsher note, which basically says, “Act like a king, or we’ll find someone else who does.” *“And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now.”*

Joab’s advice is good. David takes it and positions himself in the gate. The king is back.

While it’s good for David to grieve over his sin and its consequences, it is not okay to do that instead of being responsible. David is only thinking about himself. There’s a lesson in this.

Many good things are not good if done too much or at the wrong time. Reading this devotional is a good thing, but only when you have time. If something important pops up, let this wait.

All Christians are called to properly balance their priorities. That can get tricky, especially for high impact people such as doctors and pastors. Families often get neglected, to a catastrophic extent. Some things are hard to say no to. “No” can have significant consequences. Families can often be counted on to say, “It’s okay.” So the “emergency” gets addressed, and the family gets ignored. Again.

And that’s just one example. We all have priority challenges. How can they be weighed?

That question is too deep for a daily devotional, but do watch out for two traps: the temptation of self-importance and “The Tyranny of the Urgent.” Beware of any task that will make you feel important, and be especially cautious if someone tries to sell it to you on that basis. Also, watch out for tasks that cry out for immediate attention. This holds double with people who consistently make their tasks seem urgent.

<https://www.amazon.com/Tyranny-Urgent-Charles-Hummel/dp/087784092X>

3 2 Samuel 19:8b–15 (ESV)

Now Israel had fled every man to his own home. And all the people were arguing throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?”

And King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests: “Say to the elders of Judah, ‘Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house, when the word of all Israel has come to the king? You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?’ And say to Amasa, ‘Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me and more also, if you are not commander of my army from now on in place of Joab.’” And he swayed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, “Return, both you and all your servants.” So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan.

The rebellion is over, and Absalom is dead. David is the king and should be returning to his throne, obviously. Just one problem—how to unify the nation.

The people are arguing over David’s return, but that argument has a strange twist. The quote in verses 9 and 10 has people asking, “*Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?*”

The criticism isn’t for opposing David’s return, but for merely being silent about it. The critics seem to be saying that David’s return is such a no-brainer that mere silence is an offense. And note that they don’t call him David; he’s “the king.”

The people are divided over whether they should be divided.

The problem is, at its heart, that many folks backed the wrong horse and are now worried about what David will do to them when he’s back in power. The king has the power to make them pay.

So, David does something incredibly bold; he promotes Absalom’s chief general, Amasa, to command his army. This demotes Joab, which seems just after his disobedient killing of Absalom, but that’s not the key. David is signaling that all the rebels are pardoned.

“Reconstruction” has begun.

David’s pardon works partly because it came from a position of strength. Thus, it shocks people into rethinking things and brings many of them around.

The word “reconstruction” above is deliberate. It highlights the similarities with the issues faced by the United States in the 1860’s. The grace displayed in the post-Civil War era was profound and wise.

It didn’t eliminate all hard feelings (not by a long shot) but the alternative would have been much worse.

4 2 Samuel 19:16–23

And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, who was from Bahurim, hurried and came down with the men of Judah to meet King David. There were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over the Jordan before the king. Then a ferryboat went across to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good.

Now Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king when he had crossed the Jordan. Then he said to the king, "Do not let my lord impute iniquity to me, or remember what wrong your servant did on the day that my lord the king left Jerusalem, that the king should take it to heart. For I, your servant, know that I have sinned. Therefore here I am, the first to come today of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king."

But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed?"

And David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should be adversaries to me today? Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I am king over Israel?" Therefore the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king swore to him.

Shimei displays great courage in coming before the king to apologize. He simply decides to act like a grown-up, come what may. Still, he must have had his heart in his teeth when he did it.

To those of us who've been following David's character development closely, what happens next is not surprising.

David is perfectly willing to let bygones be bygones.

Shimei did toss a few rocks while he was screaming at David, but basically what he did was just words.

And David listened, which is surprising. Shimei's rant seemed designed to get David to write him off as a nut. Nothing Shimei said connected with anything David did wrong.

Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!" — 2 Samuel 16:7–8

This wasn't about a legitimate complaint, like the death of Uriah, but about things like the death of Abner, or Ish-bosheth, or Saul and his sons. It was all nutty.

But, to his credit, David wasn't hurt by Shimei's words.

Shimei's repentance is genuine, and David is genuinely pleased. There's no point to paybacks.

5 2 Samuel 19:24–30

Now Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. And he had not cared for his feet, nor trimmed his mustache, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he returned in peace. So it was, when he had come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said to him, “Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?”

And he answered, “My lord, O king, my servant deceived me. For your servant said, ‘I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go to the king,’ because your servant is lame. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king, but my lord the king is like the angel of God. Therefore do what is good in your eyes. For all my father’s house were but dead men before my lord the king. Yet you set your servant among those who eat at your own table. Therefore what right have I still to cry out anymore to the king?”

So the king said to him, “Why do you speak any more of your matters? I have said, ‘You and Ziba divide the land.’ ”

Then Mephibosheth said to the king, “Rather, let him take it all, inasmuch as my lord the king has come back in peace to his own house.”

The instant David lays eyes on Mephibosheth, he knows something’s wrong. He’s a wreck. Was Ziba lying when he said that Mephibosheth chose to stay in Jerusalem?

Then the king said, “And where is your master’s son?”

And Ziba said to the king, “Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, ‘Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me.’ ” — 2 Samuel 16:3

Mephibosheth’s condition proves that he’s been mourning, rather than anticipating coronation. You can’t fake having not shaved for months.

Still, David is willing to let Ziba keep half of Mephibosheth’s land, and Mephibosheth is happy to let him have it all. He doesn’t need it anyway; he’ll be eating at the king’s table.

The spirit of pardon is catching.

Mephibosheth’s response is amazingly mature. There’s nothing Mephibosheth can actually *do* with his land. His ownership only provides some form of financial security.

But he doesn’t need financial security; he has it in David. Thus, he doesn’t care about his land.

It’s hard to let go of a valuable possession, even if you know you can’t use it. We just can’t seem to think clearly about these things.

Mephibosheth’s rational attitude towards material possessions is an example for us all.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever tried to soften bad news by delivering it less than straight?
2. Do you suffer from the tyranny of the urgent?
3. Was the US post-Civil War reconstruction successful?
4. Have you seen a payback avoided or canceled?
5. Do you know someone who doesn't seem to care about material things?

Items for prayer: