

LESSON 16

The King in Exile

2 Samuel 16

“Perhaps the Lord will see my affliction and restore goodness to me instead of Shimei’s curses today,”
2 Samuel 15:6.

Class Overview: Second Samuel 16 follows David as he continues his painful flight from Jerusalem. The chapter presents three encounters that reveal the hearts of the people surrounding the king. Ziba appears to help David but hides selfish motives. Shimei curses David publicly and throws stones at him. Meanwhile, Absalom enters Jerusalem and receives counsel that deepens the rebellion. These scenes show the confusion that often surrounds times of crisis. Some people use chaos to advance themselves. Others lash out in bitterness. Still others offer destructive advice that accelerates division. Through it all, David shows remarkable restraint. Instead of defending himself or silencing his enemies, he submits to God’s discipline and leaves judgment in the Lord’s hands.

Here we learn that adversity exposes character. The crisis reveals who is loyal, who is manipulative, and who is hostile. Yet it also reveals David’s growing humility. Rather than reacting with vengeance, he entrusts his reputation and future to God.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Describe the three key encounters in this chapter and what they reveal about the people involved.
 2. Recognize how crisis exposes true motives and character.
 3. Understand David’s restraint when facing personal attack.
 4. Identify the destructive role of poor counsel in Absalom’s rebellion.
 5. Apply lessons about humility, patience, and trusting God when treated unjustly.
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Introduction:

Second Samuel 16 unfolds while David is still fleeing Jerusalem. The king who once ruled confidently now walks through the wilderness amid uncertainty and hostility. Along the way, he encounters both false friends and open enemies. First comes Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, bringing supplies but also making accusations to boost himself. Then comes Shimei, who curses David and throws stones, while the king refuses to retaliate. Finally, the chapter shifts back to Jerusalem, where Absalom seeks counsel on how to secure his new power.

Each moment tests David’s character. He could silence critics, punish enemies, and defend himself. Yet David chooses humility and patience. He accepts that God may be using these circumstances to discipline him and refine his heart.

Second Samuel 16 reminds us that when life turns difficult, the real condition of the heart is revealed—both in our enemies and in ourselves.

Ziba's Deception (16:1-4)

As David continues his difficult journey away from Jerusalem, he encounters Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant. Ziba arrives with donkeys loaded with bread, raisins, fruit, and wine. At first glance, this appears to be a generous act of loyalty. The supplies are exactly what David and his weary followers need as they flee into the wilderness.

David asks a simple question: “Where is your master Mephibosheth?”

Ziba answers with an accusation. He claims Mephibosheth stayed behind in Jerusalem because he hopes the rebellion will restore the kingdom of Saul to him. According to Ziba, Mephibosheth sees Absalom's uprising as an opportunity to reclaim his grandfather's throne. David reacts quickly. Without investigation, he gives Ziba all the land that once belonged to Mephibosheth. Ziba bows and expresses gratitude, appearing humble and loyal.

But the reader should feel tension in this moment. The story feels too convenient. Mephibosheth had shown sincere loyalty to David earlier (2 Samuel 9). Now, during a moment of chaos, his servant arrives with a story that benefits himself. Ziba gains wealth and favor from the king while his master is absent and unable to respond. David's decision reveals something about the pressure of crisis. Leaders under stress sometimes make quick judgments without full information. Later in the story (2 Samuel 19), we will discover that Ziba's account was misleading.

There are some important points to consider here. First, crisis often reveals selfish ambition. Some people use moments of instability to promote themselves. We also learn that generosity can conceal manipulation. Ziba's gifts gave credibility to his accusation. Leaders must be cautious with quick decisions. Acting without hearing both sides can lead to injustice. Ziba seemed loyal, but the chapter suggests that appearances can be deceiving. When a kingdom is shaking, motives become complicated, and the truth is harder to see.

Shimei's Curses and David's Restraint (16:5-14)

As David continues his flight, another encounter reveals a very different response to the king. A man named Shimei, from the family of Saul, comes out along the road shouting curses. He throws stones at David and his servants and hurls dust into the air. His accusation is harsh. He calls David a “man of bloodshed” and claims that the Lord is punishing him for taking Saul's throne. In Shimei's mind, Absalom's rebellion is divine justice. What Shimei says is not completely accurate, but it reflects the bitterness that still lingers from the old rivalry between the houses of Saul and David.

David's men are outraged. Abishai, one of David's warriors, asks permission to go and silence Shimei permanently. From a military standpoint, it would have been simple. One command from the king and the insults would stop immediately.

But David refuses.

Instead of reacting with anger, David accepts the humiliation. He suggests that perhaps the Lord has allowed Shimei to speak these words. David is not admitting Shimei's accusations are correct, but he recognizes that God may be using this moment to humble him.

“Leave him alone, and let him curse me; the Lord has told him to. Perhaps the Lord will see my affliction and restore goodness to me instead of Shimei's curses today.”

David continues walking while Shimei keeps shouting from the hillside. The king and his followers endure the insults and move forward until they finally stop to rest. This scene reveals how much David has changed. Earlier in his life he defended his honor quickly. Now he submits himself to God's discipline and leaves judgment in the Lord's hands.

Humility allows a person to endure criticism without striking back right away. David had the power to silence Shimei instantly, yet he chose restraint. Instead of defending his pride, he accepted the moment and continued forward. Humility often means allowing God to deal with what others say about us.

At times, God may use painful circumstances to refine His people. David recognized that this moment might be part of the Lord's discipline in his life. Rather than resisting it, he allowed the experience to shape him. Hard moments can become tools God uses to deepen faith and humility. And not every attack requires a response. Some words are better left unanswered. When we trust God with our reputation and our future, we do not have to win every argument or silence every critic.

This is where the contrast between David and Absalom becomes clear. Absalom grasps for power and demands loyalty. David does the opposite. He releases control and entrusts his reputation and his future to the Lord.

Absalom's Counsel and the Deepening Rebellion (16:15-23)

While David moves through the wilderness, the scene shifts back to Jerusalem. Absalom enters the city and takes control of the palace. At his side are two important figures: Ahithophel, David's former counselor, and Hushai, who has secretly returned to serve David by undermining Absalom's plans.

When Hushai greets Absalom, the greeting sounds enthusiastic: *“Long live the king!”* Absalom immediately questions his loyalty. Why would David's friend suddenly support the rebellion? Hushai answers carefully. He says he will serve the one the Lord and the people have chosen. His words are deliberately vague. They satisfy Absalom while secretly remaining loyal to David.

Then Absalom turns to Ahithophel for advice. This moment is critical because Ahithophel's counsel carried enormous influence. His guidance was considered almost as trustworthy as seeking the word of God. Ahithophel gives shocking advice. He tells Absalom to take David's concubines and publicly sleep with them on the palace roof. This act would send a clear message: the break with David is permanent. In the ancient world, taking the king's household was a declaration of royal authority.

Absalom follows the advice. A tent is set up on the roof, the same roof where David once saw Bathsheba. In full view of Israel, Absalom commits this act. The symbolism is heavy. What David once did in secret now becomes public humiliation for the king.

This moment fulfills Nathan's earlier prophecy: "You did it secretly, but I will do this before all Israel and in broad daylight." (2 Samuel 12:12) The rebellion has now crossed a point of no return. Absalom has publicly declared himself David's replacement. Rebellion deepens when wise counsel is rejected and destructive advice is embraced. Ahithophel's strategy strengthens Absalom politically, but it also hardens the rebellion and multiplies the damage.

The chapter ends with a sobering observation: in those days, Ahithophel's counsel was considered as reliable as the word of God. That makes the moment even more tragic. Brilliant wisdom, when used for the wrong purpose, becomes a powerful force for destruction.

Practical Application

Crisis has a way of revealing what is really in people's hearts. When David was forced to flee Jerusalem, those around him responded in very different ways. Ziba used the situation to advance himself. Shimei used the opportunity to attack. Others remained loyal. Hard moments often expose motives that would otherwise stay hidden. When pressure rises, character becomes visible.

David's response to Shimei teaches an important lesson about humility. He had the authority to silence his critic immediately, but he chose restraint. Instead of defending himself, he allowed the moment to pass and trusted God to deal with the situation in His time. Sometimes, the most faithful response to criticism is patience rather than retaliation.

Appearances can be misleading. Ziba arrived with gifts and words that sounded supportive, yet his story was self-serving. In difficult seasons, it is important to be careful about quick judgments. Truth often requires patience and careful listening.

We also see the danger of destructive counsel. Ahithophel's advice strengthened Absalom's rebellion and deepened the conflict. Wise words can guide people toward righteousness, but wisdom used for selfish purposes becomes destructive. The voices we choose to follow matter.

Finally, David's attitude points us toward trust in God's sovereignty. Even as he faced betrayal and humiliation, David believed the Lord could still bring good from the situation. He did not cling to power or defend his reputation at all costs. Instead, he placed the outcome in God's hands. When life turns difficult, faith is revealed not by control but by trust.

Conclusion

Second Samuel 16 shows the king in one of the lowest moments of his life. David is no longer sitting on the throne. He is walking the road out of Jerusalem while others take advantage of his weakness, accuse him falsely, and celebrate his fall. Yet the chapter reveals something important about David's heart. Though he has lost power, he has not lost faith.

David refuses to answer every insult or defend himself against every accusation. Instead, he entrusts his situation to the Lord. He accepts that God may be using these circumstances to humble him and shape him. In contrast, Absalom continues to strengthen his rebellion and surrounds himself with counsel that deepens the divide.

Adversity reveals character. Some people will use difficult moments to promote themselves or attack others. But God's people are called to respond differently. Humility, patience, and trust in the Lord often say more than any defense we could offer.

David's journey through humiliation prepares the way for what comes next. Though the throne appears lost, God's purposes have not changed. The story continues to show that the Lord, not human power, ultimately determines who stands and who falls.

For Discussion

1. What does Ziba's behavior teach us about how some people respond to moments of crisis or instability?

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2. Why do you think David chose not to retaliate against Shimei's insults and curses?

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3. What can we learn from David's willingness to leave judgment and vindication in God's hands?

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4. How did Ahithophel's counsel strengthen Absalom's rebellion, and what does this teach us about the power of influence?

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5. In what ways can we show humility and trust in God when we are treated unfairly or criticized?

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