

CHAPTER 9: REBUILDING

THE BIG PICTURE

David and his men have won back the rule of Israel with the death of Absalom, but the kingdom is far from united. Deep cracks in national morale and unity have spread in the aftermath of Absalom's rebellion and the civil war. There is developing tension between the Northern and Southern tribes. David needs to deal with the personal wounds of the past, and set the kingdom back on the proper course for his heir. As the narrative unfolds, David will rise from the ashes of the recent calamity level-set and ready to move forward. He now understands just how poorly he has prepared his children for the throne. When David sees the state of the kingdom he sees some big issues that need to be sorted out before he dies. First, there is growing tension between the northern and southern tribes, a reality threatening to tear the kingdom in two. Second, David has allowed Joab to circumvent his authority multiple times in the past because Joab has proven to be effective. David needs to bring Joab under control or Joab will be a leadership challenge for David's heir. And finally, there is lingering uncertainty about who David will name as his heir. As long as David does not officially endorse any one of his children, they will continue to fight for position as rivals. This section covers 2 Samuel chapters 19 and 20.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. 2 Samuel 19 begins with David in mourning. He has now lost three children as the result (indirectly) of his own sin. The weight of his loss is heavy on his heart and the king becomes paralyzed with sadness. In his despair, he neglects his men and his leadership starts to decline. The truth of Joab's rebuke in vv. 5-7 must have been hard for David to accept. Joab reminds David that as the king, he cannot afford such a selfish display of grief. David has lost much, but he has a responsibility to lead his faithful men, and if this responsibility is ignored he will lose even more. This conversation is even more poignant considering that Joab is the one who just killed Absalom. David has been knocked low, but he needs to get back up and get to work rebuilding his kingdom. Otherwise, when he finally gets around to leading, he might discover that there is no one left to lead.
 - Joab's charge is that David's display of grief is selfish. Do you agree? What would be a more appropriate way to feel?
 - David has been knocked low, but he cannot afford to wallow in self-pity and sorrow because of the demands of the kingdom. What other sacrifices do those in leadership make?

- Proverbs 27:6 says “wounds from a friend can be trusted.” Do you think Joab is acting like a friend in this chapter? Have you ever had to rebuke a friend? Have you ever needed to be rebuked by a friend? How did it go? How could Joab have better communicated his rebuke to David?
- This chapter tells of David recovering from a long series of calamities. Take a moment and journal about the possibility that you need to “reboot” your life right now.

- II. The rest of 2 Samuel 19 tells the story of David’s return to Jerusalem. David endured many offenses as he was fleeing from the usurper, and now that the rebellion is over, there are some scores to settle. As David left Jerusalem, he heard rumors of Mephibosheth’s betrayal from his servant Ziba, a heartbreaking development if true. David was berated and humiliated by Shimei, who made the king’s mournful march worse with insults and abuse. Now the political situation has changed, and the rightful king is returning to his throne. In each case, David has a choice: revenge or forgiveness. David Joab’s rebuke seems to have level-set the king and David quickly goes about the business of rebuilding the confidence between the king and his subjects.
- Shimei brought an escort of a thousand Benjamites, revealing his justified fear of the king. He hopes to find safety in numbers as he begs for mercy. Shimei sings a completely different song now that David is in power. He admits his wrong and asks for a pardon. For the second time, Abishai asks to kill Shimei, but David will not have it. He chooses something noble and beautiful, to forgive. He knows the only way forward is to break the cycle of evil repaid for evil. David is setting the tone for how he hopes to restore his kingdom. He is acting like the kind of king God desires, one who embodies the covenant! Don’t miss how kingly David is in this moment. He overlooks a grave offense and chooses to forgive. Why do you think David was able to forgive like this? What does it say about his heart? Take a moment to journal about the people you need to forgive.
 - David next has to decide the truth about Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, whom David had adopted as a covenant friend. Ziba the steward accused Mephibosheth of betraying the king, but now Mephibosheth has appeared to defend the accusations. He has the appearance of someone that has been in mourning, and he claims he has been distraught over the plight of the king and eagerly awaiting his return. According to Mephibosheth, Ziba is the traitor. Who do you believe? How do you feel about the justice of David’s ruling that the two should divide the land between them (if Mephibosheth is telling the truth, he gets the short end of the stick because his servant just acquired half his wealth by treachery)? Read carefully

Mephibosheth's response to the king's decree. What does this say about his guilt or innocence?

- III. The northern tribes are stung because the tribe of Judah gets preferential treatment from David on his return journey to Jerusalem. David's mismanagement of the kingdom and its affairs and the adverse effects of Absalom's rebellion have left deep cracks in national morale and unity. There is growing tension between north and south; they jockey and politic for position and prominence, trying to stake their claim on David or influence the policy of the nation. There is a tug of war for power, and David is the rope. This rivalry burns to a flashpoint in the leadership vacuum right after Absalom's rebellion. David's hold on the tribes is uncertain...and an ambitious person named Sheba makes his move. He rallies some of the northern tribes, mostly people from the tribe of Benjamin (Saul's tribe), and they try to secede from the kingdom. David now has another rebellion to put down, so he calls his tells his new commander Amasa to put them down quickly.
- Note how David fires Joab and replaces him with Amasa in 2 Samuel 19:13. Joab has just killed the king's son against his orders, and the king is hoping to prevent further defiance. Amasa led the armies of Absalom in the rebellion, who were just defeated by Joab. Joab is not likely to respect the commander he so recently defeated. Nevertheless, appointing Amasa seems like a political choice for David. David is hoping to offer something of an olive branch to those subjects that supported Absalom. Has something similar ever happened to you? Maybe you lost your spot on a team to another player that you could outperform? How do you think Joab felt about the arrangement?
 - Students of the Bible should recognize the foreshadowing here of the eventual split between north and south into separate kingdoms in the time of David's grandson. What could David have done differently in these narratives to heal this growing rift?
- IV. Restoring order in the kingdom also involves dealing with Joab. David has allowed Joab to circumvent his authority multiple times because Joab has proven to be effective and a good friend to the king. He can get the job done, but he is unpredictable. David needs to bring Joab under control or Joab will continue to be a leadership challenge for David's heir. Joab is a character. He is clearly a capable warrior. The body count you could place at his feet is staggering. He is also a gifted leader and shows substantial political influence. He is someone that does what he thinks needs doing, whether the king commanded it or not. He does seem to have the king's back, as he shows many times. He took Jerusalem, he defeated Abner, he backed the king with the issue of Uriah. He defeated the armies of Absalom. Other times he seems to be out for himself. Joab is

close enough to David to see his faults and weaknesses. The reader gets the sense that many times Joab is convinced he knows better than the king does. **2 Samuel 20:4-13** showcases the Joab's impulsive character in a dramatic way. *Don't miss this story, because it is as intense as they come!*

- It is hard to know how to feel about Joab. David certainly had conflicted feelings. How do you feel about Joab? Is he a friend or foe of the king, truly? Is Joab misunderstood and the king's most loyal servant, or is Joab an out of control rogue?
- The relationship between David and Joab is complex and multidimensional. Do you think the friendship between David and Joab made their enhanced their working relationship or made it more difficult? Why?
- Posing as a friend, Joab treacherously killed his rival Amasa with one blow and takes control of his troops. The ease with which the men accept Joab's command reveals their confidence in their long-time commander. It appeared that Amasa was botching his first assignment, but he was the person that David appointed. Joab again saves the kingdom, but this capable and confident person has also habitually killed those the king put in authority. What should David do with Joab after this? What would you do?
- The bottom line for Joab is the issue of authority. His gifts, talents, and effectiveness cannot outweigh his disregard for the king's orders. Joab cannot expect to be placed in authority unless he can learn to function under authority. For this reason, David cannot leave him in a position of power, despite his accomplishments. Read **Romans 13:1-5**. What authority are you under? Are there limits to the submission that God asks of us in this passage? Have you ever struggled with submitting to authority with which you did not agree? Why does God channel his blessing through those in authority?