

2 Samuel 19:1-43

Joab Reproaches David for His Excessive Grief

2 Samuel 19:1-4 - "And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

This is a remarkably strange situation. Because of David's grief for his son, there was a cloud over this victory. Victory was turned into mourning (**verse 2**). David's soldiers quietly returned to the city, utterly confused. Apparently David had forgotten his responsibilities as King and leader, and was drowning in his personal sorrow. There was no congratulating his troops, reclaiming his throne or any action to consolidate this victory, reunite the people or recapture Jerusalem.

David was saying, "My son Absalom, my son! My son Absalom! Oh, would that I had died for thee! Absalom, my son - my son?" While David's faithful followers had put their own lives on the line to preserve his life by protecting him.

David's grief was not just for Absalom. David vividly understands it was his own actions that caused the disfunction in his family. He was still in a state of moral paralysis.

David repeated the phrase "My son" eight times, the Talmud says, in order to raise his soul up from the seven levels of Gehenna and into Paradise. (Sotah 10b)

This moment represents the last, lingering vestige of the Judgment prophesied by Nathan on Davids House.

- **2 Samuel 12:10-12** - "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."

Now Joab steps in. He can't stand to see David neglect his responsibilities, and tells him so. But he uses rude and sharp language, which disrespects the king. (At the same time, Joab must have realized this he shared responsibility, by his personal order to kill Absalom against David's wishes).

2 Samuel 19:5-7 - "And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast

declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.

"Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now."

This was harsh, but true. Despite Joab's disrespect, David heard and received his argument.

So he went to sit by the city gate and receive his people.

2 Samuel 19:8 - "Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent."

Confusion Throughout the Land

2 Samuel 19:9-10 - "And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?"

The people of Israel were fickle. They had quickly embraced Absalom, now they remember the glory days of David and wonder why their tribal leaders haven't immediately called David back as king.

David first wants to consolidate his support from his own tribe of Judah.

2 Samuel 19:11-12 - "And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king?"

At this point, although David assented to Joab's advice, he must have heard that Joab had ordered Absalom's death. Joab had also previously gone against David's orders and killed Abner (**2 Samuel 2:13-3:21**). David was losing trust in his longtime general. So he replaces him.

2 Samuel 19:13 - "And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab."

Amasa was Absalom's cousin and David's nephew. But he had also been Absalom's general in the rebellion! David hoped this would put the worries of the rebellious tribes

at ease.

So Judah became the first tribe to request his return as king.

2 Samuel 19:14-15 - "And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants. So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan."

Gilgal was significant because that was where Saul had been crowned king.

Shimei, the Benjamite who had cursed David as he fled Jerusalem, now appears, this time accompanied by 1,000 Benjamite warriors. along with Ziba - who probably knew his previous actions against Mephibosheth would come to light. They hoped to get on David's good side.

2 Samuel 19:16-18 - "And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David. And 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 Jordan before the king. And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan;"

Shimei's Plea

2 Samuel 19:19-20 - "And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king."

Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, descended from Rachel, were sometimes called the "house of Joseph." The phrase was also is used for all Israel in **Psalm 80:1**.

To receive Shimei's contrition would mean 1,000 warriors of Benjamin would join with David's cause. To punish him might mean fighting those same warriors. So David acts diplomatically. There were thousands who had joined with Absalom. If he killed the first traitor who asked for pardon, there would be chaos instead of unity in the land.

2 Samuel 19:21-23 - "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, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him."

"adversaries" = *satan* - opposer.

Abishei wanted to kill Shimei initially. He also wanted David to kill Saul when he had the chance.

This exchange is similar to Jesus rebuking Peter even though Peter's motive was good.

- **Matthew 16:23** - "But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

Mephibosheth Arrives

2 Samuel 19:24 - "And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace."

Now he contradicts Ziba's story.

2 Samuel 19:25-28 - "And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth? And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes. For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?"

David "Cuts the Baby in Half" as a Test

2 Samuel 19:29-30 - "And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house."

Like Solomon's test in **1 Kings 3:16**, David offers to split the land, to see where Mephibosheth's true loyalty lies. Mephibosheth says "Let him take all."

But it is not recorded what actually happened to the land. Probably it remained divided. The Talmud says that this broke the promise to Jonathan to "not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever" (**1 Samuel 20:15**). "In the hour when David said to Mephibosheth, 'Thou and Ziba shall divide the land,' a *Bath Kol* (voice of God) came forth and said to him: 'Rehoboam and Jeroboam shall divide the kingdom'" (Shabb. 56 b.).

In all this, David is shown as sort of like the steward who was commended in Jesus'

parable for making "friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" (**Luke 16:9**) by cutting deals with his enemies and compromising to gain adherents on his way to Jerusalem.

The Generosity of Barzillai

Barzillai the Gileadite was 80 years old. He was rich but spent his wealth in supporting David and his entourage in the city of Mahanaim. David invites him to cross over the Jordan and basically to come live at the palace. Barzillai says he's too old to enjoy it or to be of any service. Instead he would be a burden. Besides, he protests, what he did for David was so little that it doesn't require any recompense.

Instead, he suggests that his servant Chimham (his son according to the rabbis) go in his place. David agrees.

Hundreds of years afterward there was a place called the habitation of Chimham near Bethlehem, (**Jeremiah 41:1**).

The Other Tribes Argue with Judah

2 Samuel 19:41-43 - "And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan? And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift? And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye: why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel."

So, just when it seems like everybody is getting together, another schism is created.

In **verse 11** we see that "the speech of all Israel is come to the king" calling for him to be reinstated as king.

Now the 10 tribes point to that and say, "was not my word first to bring back my king?" David made a pact with Judah first without consulting the other tribes or even letting them know.

Fierce words arise, and this will lead to another rebellion!

This bickering between the tribes is always a severe problem with Israel. Even among the Lord's disciples, right after Passover meal the disciples argue over who would be greatest in the Kingdom.

- **Luke 22:24** - "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest."

This is also a danger to the church.

- **Galatians 5:15** - "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

Summary

Grief is a necessary part of living and of relationships. Death results in grief - we miss the person in the here and now, even if we believe we will see them again in the hereafter.

But like all things, there are parameters and boundaries to grief.

- **Ecclesiastes 3:4** - There is "A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;"

For most Jews there is wide latitude given for grief.

How long could mourning last?

- 70 days with Jacob (including 40 days for embalming (Genesis 50:3)),
- 30 days for both Aaron (Numbers 20:29) and Moses (Deuteronomy 34:8),
- a month for a captive woman mourning her parents (Deuteronomy 21:13),
- and "many days" when Jacob believed that Joseph was dead.

Current Jewish practice is to mourn for a year for a parent, a month for other close relatives.

But priests were an exception to this:

Burying someone involved touching the dead body to bath and wrap it. This caused uncleanness that required a period of separation and cleansing with the waters of the ashes of the Red Heifer. But this would render priests unfit to serve for a time.

- **Leviticus 21:1-4** - "And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto the priests the sons of Aaron, and say unto them, There shall none be defiled for the dead among his people: But for his kin, that is near unto him, that is, for his mother, and for his father, and for his son, and for his daughter, and for his brother, And for his sister a virgin, that is nigh unto him, which hath had no husband; for her may he be defiled. But he shall not defile himself, being a chief man among his people, to profane himself."

A "chief man" - because the priest had a vital job to do that life's normal activities had to give way to.

The High Priest could not even mourn for his closest relatives.

The Example of Aaron

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu are killed by God when they enter the Tabernacle with strange fire (**Leviticus 10**). Aaron's response? "Aaron was silent."

He was caught between this tragedy and his responsibility to continue to inaugurate the Tabernacle services and sacrifices.

Like David's mourning for Absalom, Aaron perhaps had guilt mixed in with his grief. Maybe he should have instructed his sons more carefully, etc. Also like David, Aaron's sons were considered next in line to be the High Priest, just as most assumed Absalom would succeed David as king.

(The difference was that Aaron knew his sons had been taken by God, and he could only accept the fact. Absalom however had died at the hand of men).

David's grief was excessive and largely misplaced, as Joab explained. Guilt and grief together can be toxic.

Aaron expresses his grief in a particular way.

The text tells us that Aaron completes the sacrifices, but he does not eat from the sin offering. Moses expresses concern, worried that this will invalidate the offering. Aaron responds, "Were I to partake of a sin offering today, would it find favor in God's eyes?" (**Leviticus 10:20**).

In this way, Aaron managed to authentically mourn the tragic loss of his children while at the same time continue his service to God.

Aaron was rewarded for his silence, according to Rashi. The "reward" was that Aaron received directions from God through direct prophecy, and Jewish tradition says that one cannot receive prophecy in sadness. Prophecy is only received when the prophet experiences joy.

The Talmud cautions against excessive grief, probably from the example of David in this chapter, and of Aaron.

"A person should not become excessively broken-hearted because of a person's death." (Mishneh Torah Hilchot Aveilut 13:11).

This attitude also is reflected by Jesus:

- Luke 9:59-60 - "Then He said to another man, "Follow Me." The man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. You, however, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Believers are called a nation of priests, a royal priesthood.

Some things take precedence. In Jewish tradition, a funeral procession must give way

to a wedding procession.

On the other hand, Jesus Himself wept in grief.

Jesus wept at hearing of the death of Lazarus, even though he would raise him from the dead (John 11:1-45) He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:4). He also wept over Jerusalem, seeing it's final end.

He also said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

The Kaddish

See <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/learning-from-aaron-how-to-mourn-and-live/>

This is the Kaddish - The Mourner's Prayer - it's all about God, not the person who died or even those left behind:

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will.

May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen.

May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.