

2 Samuel 9:1-13

David's Kindness to Mephibosheth

Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, the last remaining heir of Saul's house.

The last we heard of Mephibosheth was when he was 5 years old, after the death of Saul and Jonathan in the battle against the Philistines in **1 Samuel 31**.

- **2 Samuel 4:4** - "And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."

In most ancient societies, rivals or pretenders to the throne would all be hunted down and executed after a transition of power.

Mephibosheth is also called Meribaal. His name, like others, was changed to remove the reference to the Canaanite god Baal. "Bosheth" means shame (replacing Baal in the name). Mephibosheth can be translated "mouth of shame" or more probably "the end of shame or reproach," i.e. the edge of shame's reach, in commemoration of the end of the persecution of the house of Saul. Or it can mean "mouth of humility," recognizing his vulnerable and submissive position.

- See <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Mephibosheth.html>

2 Samuel 9:1 - "And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

In almost all ancient societies, after a transition of power the new ruler would hunt down all the possible previous claimants to the throne and execute them. In fact, Saul's son Ish-bosheth was assassinated in his sleep (**2 Samuel 4:6-7**) and two other sons were hanged by the Gibeonites (**2 Samuel 21:8-9**).

But David had made a covenant with Jonathan for just this situation:

- **1 Samuel 20:14-15** - "And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not: But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth."

Now with war at an end, it was time for David to honor that covenant.

2 Samuel 9:2 - "And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet."

Rabbinical tradition says Ziba was a Canaanite servant of Saul, possibly his chief steward. Josephus says he had been given his freedom by Saul. Ziba mentions Mephibosheth's lameness to signal to David that Mephibosheth being lame posed no danger or threat to the throne.

2 Samuel 9:4-5 - "And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar."

Machir was a descendant of Manasseh, and lived across on the east side of the Jordan River.

Mephibosheth had been 12 when David was made king, and now he was married with a young son, but still trying to keep a "low profile."

Mephibosheth's Humility

2 Samuel 9:6 - "Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!"

2 Samuel 9:7 - "And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually."

All of Saul's royal lands had been taken over by David, since the whole house of Saul had sided with Ish-Bosheth previously and were guilty of sedition. Now David gives up some portion of them to Mephibosheth. He is also granted an apartment at David's court and became like one of David's own sons, part of his family - a high honor.

2 Samuel 9:8 - "And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?"

Though he was a grandson to a former king, he understood that except for David's mercy, he was as good as dead. He states his humility, as well showing submission to David by falling on his face, which is basically a sign that he is alive only at the king's discretion.

2 Samuel 9:9-10 - "Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants."

Ziba was a Gentile servant to Saul. Ziba's family and servants are mentioned because

they would be included in the king's grant of provisions.

2 Samuel 9:11-13 - "Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet."

(Not stated, but certainly a possibility, is that David offers Mephibosheth residence in his court so he can keep an eye on hm, just in case others might try to enlist him in some sort of rebellion later).

Mephibosheth's lameness is emphasized several times. It happened while fleeing after Saul and Jonathan were killed. So Mephibosheth carried a constant reminder of that terrible day with him throughout life. Spiritually our weakness and self-seeking are reminders of our fallen state and the need for God's mercy.

There are a couple of ways to look at this story.

First, it reminds me of the encounter of the wise men with King Herod, when they said they were looking for a newly born king of the Jews in **Matthew 2**. Herod's response in his jealousy toward a possible rival to the throne is the opposite of David's here.

While here David inquires about Mephibosheth "that I may shew him kindness," Herod asks the wise men to send word when they find this new king, so "that I may come and worship him also" - when really Herod planned to kill him.

David had always respected the office that Saul had held as king and God's anointed, even while Saul was murderously pursuing him. Now, because of his former friendship with Jonathan, he wanted to honor that with kindness for his son.

David Guzik's study of this passage gives some insight:
https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/2-samuel/2-samuel-9.cfm

If you look at Mephibosheth as representing us: We have been crippled by a Fall, keeping us from our true destiny, but have been sought after by the King and are shown mercy and restoration.

Similarly, Jesus invites his disciples to sit at his table:

- **Luke 22:30** - Jesus tells his disciples "That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

- We are hiding, poor, weak, lame, and fearful, before our King comes to us.
- We are separated from our King because of our wicked ancestors.

- We are separated from our King because of our deliberate actions.
- We separated ourselves from the King because we didn't know him or His love for us.
- Our King sought us out before we sought Him.
- The King's kindness is extended to us for the sake of another.
- The King's kindness is based on a covenant.
- We must receive the King's kindness in humility.
- The King returns to us more than what we lost in hiding from Him.
- We have the privilege of provision at the King's table.
- We are received as sons at the King's table, with access to the King and fellowship with Him.
- We receive servants (i.e. Ziba) or aid from the King.
- The King's honor does not immediately take away all our weakness and lameness, but it gives us a favor and standing that overcomes its sting and changes the way we think about ourselves.

In a way, this reminds us also of God's kindness to Adam and Eve, who He seeks out when they were in hiding in the Garden, and clothes them with animal skins.

David can also be seen as a type of Christ in this story, in regards to loving our enemies:

- We should seek out our enemies and seek to bless them.
- We should look for the poor, weak, lame, and fearful to bless them.
- We should bless others when they don't deserve it, and bless them more than they deserve.
- We should bless others for the sake of someone else (Christ).
- We must show the kindness of God to others.

But analogies are never perfect, and this story is messy.

Mephibosheth could not receive David's kindnesses without a growing resentment. Living at the provision of others, being in someone's debt when you are disabled and essentially helpless is a challenge that many in Mephibosheth's situation would fail at.

We see this later, when in **2 Samuel 19:24-30** David returns to Jerusalem after being chased out during his son Absalom's rebellion, Ziba and his family and servants are among those who meet and accompany David back into Jerusalem. But Mephibosheth doesn't go. He displays a certain resentment toward David even while thanking him again profusely for his kindness.

It's sort of a strange scene. But the story of David's kindness to Mephibosheth reminds us that we can afford to be kind even to those who don't deserve it, and even to those we don't completely trust.