



Finer Grounds Bible Study

2 Samuel

Lesson 9: 2 Samuel 14-15

The next several chapters of 2 Samuel describe the rebellion of David's son, Absalom. The events in this section are so dramatic and sensational that they are often alluded to in popular fiction books and television series. While these chapters are full of intrigue, deception, and betrayal, they are also full of important truths about the connection between grace and justice.

Read 2 Samuel 14:1

Make a list of all the things you know about Joab.

The translation of this verse is disputed as some translations state that David "longed" for Absalom, while others state that David's heart was "averse" to Absalom. Either way, Joab sought to reconcile his uncle with his cousin. It is unclear why Joab decided this was necessary. Absalom was living "on the run" for murdering Amnon, and David may have missed his son despite Absalom's actions. Perhaps Joab sought to lift David's spirits. At the same time, Absalom was likely considered the heir apparent to David's throne. As long as he remained in exile, Absalom would be a threat to whoever assumed the throne after David's death. Joab may have hoped that he could manipulate David into bringing

Absalom back, thus saving Israel from a probable civil war.

Read 2 Samuel 14:2-11

Read Numbers 35:10-15 and Numbers 27:8-11.

Considering the references in Numbers, what was the woman's problem and why did she ask for leniency from King David?

Joab used a "wise woman" from Tekoa, a town near David's birthplace of Bethlehem, to indirectly make a point to the tortured king. The woman pleaded for forgiveness for her son for the murder of his brother. David willingly granted leniency for the woman's son in an effort to preserve the land that belonged to the inheritance of the widow's husband (Tsumura 218).

Read 2 Samuel 14:11-17

Why did the woman call David guilty?



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Describe the similarities and differences between the woman's "situation" and the situation in David's family at the end of 2 Samuel 13.

As king, David had the responsibility to make judgements for his people, just as the judges did before him. In this passage, the woman accused David of failing Israel by refusing to grant forgiveness to Absalom. She sought to prove that although Absalom was guilty of murder, granting him mercy and continuing the kingly line was of more importance to the nation. David would be dead one day and she implied that it was his responsibility as king to secure the line of succession for the sake of the kingdom.

Read 2 Samuel 14:18-24

How did David respond to the woman's ruse?

How did Joab react to David's decision?

What happened to Absalom?

David was not fooled by the woman's story and quickly saw that Joab was at work.

Even after the woman revealed the deception, David stuck to his initial judgement and agreed to restore Absalom to the kingdom. Though Absalom could return, David refused to see his "restored" son.

At this point in the passage, you might be confused, intrigued, or both. Was David's restoration of Absalom righteous? Should he have forgiven his son earlier? Was it right for David to refuse to see Absalom?

Write down some questions you have about this passage.

This passage draws a clear distinction between godly wisdom and worldly wisdom, (otherwise known as foolishness). In my experience, I am not often fooled by influences that promote obvious sinfulness and are outspokenly opposed to God and His ways. However, when worldly advice sounds *almost* right, or has a grain of truth in it, I am more likely to listen and be deceived. If we put Joab's/the woman's advice into context, we quickly see that this "wisdom" lacked Godly direction and eventually led to a disastrous outcome.

First, let's consider why the advice was not inspired by God. We will do so by comparing this passage to other passages in 2 Samuel.

Consider 2 Samuel 7. What was God's promise to David concerning his dynasty? Could David do anything for this promise



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to be revoked? Considering this promise, how was the woman's accusation in 2 Samuel 14:13-14 a baseless claim?

Compare the woman's story to Nathan's parable in 2 Samuel 12:1-6. What are the purposes of these stories? Compare the sources of each story and who sent the messengers to tell the stories.

Consider 2 Samuel 14:14 in conjunction with what God did for David in 2 Samuel 12:13-14. Did Absalom repent of his sin as David did? Who paid the penalty for David's sin? Who would pay the penalty for Absalom's sin in the woman's proposal?

Compare the woman's story to David's situation. Did David lack another heir to replace him on the throne? Read 2 Samuel 12:24-25 for help.

After working through these questions, I am sure you see that there were several flaws in the "wisdom" offered to David through the "wise" woman. To start, the source was questionable. Joab rarely was a source of

godly advice in David's life and was known to be vengeful when it suited his needs. While he may have been attempting to help his nation in this passage, he did so without considering God's promises or justice. God had clearly promised that a son of David would reign after him. It was not David's responsibility to make this happen in his own way. It was his responsibility to trust God and His commands and live with those promises in mind.

God's prescribed justice was also shirked in this advice. Absalom had committed murder and the punishment for this sin was clear. David, himself a murderer, may have felt that Absalom deserved the same mercy that he himself had received from God. However, Absalom had never repented of his sin. He knew the consequences, he fled the scene, and he never petitioned his father, or more importantly, God for forgiveness. In contrast, David repented of his sin and was forgiven, but not without cost. His infant son died in his place. Yet, in his fallen logic, David may have felt that forgiving Absalom for the good of the kingdom validated his decision to pardon his son.

It is hard to know exactly what David was thinking when he gave into the persuasions of the false widow. Her words were convincing, and I wonder if it they were because of the truth she spoke in 14:14.



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How do the woman's words in 2 Samuel 14:14 express an important truth that applies to everyone, us included? How is that truth misapplied in this situation?

Nothing deceives better than a truth misapplied. The woman speaks truthfully about God's character in this verse. Ever since Adam's fall, God has been working through various people through various times to bring humanity, once banished from his presence, back into a right relationship with Him. That is the whole story of the Bible! As we have seen through David's own experiences, that restoration requires a firm faith, a repentant heart, and a costly payment for sin. Anyone who is a Christian knows the great grace and mercy that God has shown use through offering His son Jesus as a sacrifice for sin so that we could be justified by faith.

David made a critical error. He took the truth that God is merciful to deny the truth that God is righteous and just. David chose to believe that because God does extend mercy, he could, as God's chosen king, extend forgiveness to his unrepentant son. He focused on the attribute of God that suited his desires. As we read on, we will see how David disregard for God's justice almost caused him to lose his kingdom entirely.

2 Samuel 14:25-15:6

What are Absalom's physical attributes? Who else is described in a similar way (see 1 Samuel 9:2)

Describe Absalom's character as displayed through his actions towards Joab and his actions at the city gate.

How does Absalom "steal" the hearts of the people (15:6)?

The description of Absalom is so very close to the description of Saul in 1 Samuel. Both are handsome men, and both became men focused on the approval of the people. Unique to Absalom was his thick hair that was obviously a source of pride for him. He takes the time to weigh, not measure, his braids at his yearly haircut and they total 5 pounds in weight. Can you imagine having that much hair!

Besides his signature locks, we find that Absalom was a brazen man. When Joab did not initially respond to Absalom's request for help, Absalom set fire to his fields, threatening him to cooperate. With Joab's help, Absalom defied David to punish him for the murder of Amnon. When David allowed Absalom to see him and kissed him, he



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basically showed the nation that Absalom was innocent in regard to the murder of Amnon.

With a cleared reputation, Absalom used access to David's court to convince the people that David was unwilling or unable to hear their issues when they came to seek the king's judgment. Absalom would validate the people's issues and then lament that he lacked the position to enact his "favorable" ruling. He told the Israelites what they wanted to hear, building opposition towards David and support for himself in the process.

Absalom was also patient. He worked over the course of four years to steal away the people's support for David. The use of the phrase "stole the hearts of the people" is so vivid. Even though Absalom was the prince of Israel, the hearts of the people should have belonged to King David. Absalom took support that did not belong to him. The Hebrew word for "stole" is the same word used in Exodus 20:15, where it says, "you shall not steal." Absalom's deception of the people allowed him to steal their loyalty away from the true king of the nation.

Think about it: How are our hearts "stolen" away from our king, Jesus? Think about how Absalom gained the people's favor. Is there anything in your life that "steals" your affections from where they should be?

Read 2 Samuel 15:7-12

What ruse did Absalom use to explain his trip to Hebron?

Who helped Absalom in his conspiracy (15:12)?

Absalom fooled his father again. In a similar deception to the one he used to murder Amnon, Absalom used the ruse of a vow to God to disguise his purposes in going to Hebron.

Compare David's actions in 2 Samuel 1:4 to 2 Samuel 15:7-12

Just as his father did, Absalom went to Hebron to become king. However, the anointing of father and son resulted from very different circumstances. David asked for God's direction and God led him to Hebron where the people anointed him king. In contrast, Absalom deceived his father by offering sacrifices in Hebron and proclaimed himself king over the people without their consent. Absalom takes a kingdom without God's approval and through the deception of the people, while David accepts the privilege given to him by God and recognized by the people.



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To add to the conspiracy, Absalom sought the help of Ahithophel, one of David's best and wisest counselor. We will learn more about Ahithophel in the next chapters, but it is interesting to note that Ahithophel may have been the grandfather of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:3 and 23:24).

Considering this connection, what are some possible motivations for Ahithophel's betrayal of David?

We will see in the next chapters that Ahithophel becomes a major player in the conspiracy. David's sin with Bathsheba continued to produce terrible consequences for his own position and for his nation.

As we close out this lesson, let's consider the events that led to Absalom's rebellion.

Make a list summarizing the events and decisions that led to Absalom's rebellion.

There are many terrible decisions that must be included on this list. The most heinous are the decisions made by David's son. Amnon's decision to rape his sister and Absalom's decision to kill his brother stand out. Yet, the effects of these decisions were worsened by David's inability to be just. In our last lesson, we examined how David failed to provide justice for Tamar. In this lesson, he failed to carry out justice regarding Absalom.

These miscarriages of justice both seem to result from David's regret for his failure to be righteous towards Bathsheba and Uriah.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul calls out a sinful situation in the church at Corinth. He scolds the Corinthians for not dealing with this sin, saying in 5:6 "Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?" Paul knew that unchecked sin eventually influences those around the sinner(s). The sin of David's sons caused misery in his family and eventually led to civil war in his kingdom. He withheld punishment from his sons, not because they repented or regretted their actions, but because he regretted that they deserved punishment. Absalom's sin snowballed out of control into a full-blown rebellion; this could have been prevented if David had carried out justice as he should have.

Think about it: Why is justice necessary? Read Psalm 89:14. Why is it important to know that righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne?

Compare David's actions to Jesus's actions concerning righteousness and mercy. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 for help.

As we have seen since chapter 11, David's character in these chapters contrasts the character of Jesus. David, an imperfect king,



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refrained from punishing sin but in doing so, neglected the need to justly respond to the sins of his sons. In contrast, Jesus did not hesitate to call out sin (John 2:13-17, Matthew 12:33-37, Matthew 23:29-36) but also did not hesitate to lay down his life to provide propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:24-25). Through his love and sacrifice, Jesus graciously provided relief from the punishment for sin while also justifying its perpetrators by taking the punishment on himself.

We should not see justice and grace as conflicting traits at the opposite ends of the spectrum of God's attributes. Instead, it is

God's grace that allows for our justification through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Yet it is only by repenting of our sins and recognizing our need for Jesus that we can accept the gift of grace that he offers to any willing to take it in obedience (Acts 2:38).

Think about it: Why should we be thankful for God's justice as well as for his grace?
