

## 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL

### Week 23, Chapters 14 and 15

Last week we left off with the wise woman of **Tekoa** standing before King David, telling him a fabricated story about her supposed plight of being a widow with only one remaining son, but his life was in jeopardy. The problem was that this son had killed her other son in an act of murder and now the family's **go'el hadam** (blood avenger) was intent on taking justice upon the surviving son by executing him. This, according to the widow, would not only make her destitute but it would also deprive her deceased husband of having his life essence continue on in his offspring (this being the standard belief of that era, even for Hebrews).

King David's top military commander, **Yo'av**, had asked the woman to approach the king even giving her the words she was to say. David, thinking that what was laid before him was a real case, made a decision and then, when pressed by the woman, also made a vow in Yehoveh's name that the son who committed the murder is to be pardoned so that the woman, and her deceased husband's spiritual afterlife, will not suffer from their son's rash act. However merciful David's decision might have seemed (and was probably a popular one); in fact (despite what the Rabbis say) it was entirely wrong minded and based on nothing but a humanistic philosophy.

I have spoken to you before about the Rabbinical principle of **Kal V'homer**, which is a brilliant theological and practical tool used mostly to choose between the lesser of two evils. This principle of light versus heavy says that when we are confronted by a situation whereby two commandments of God both apply and yet they conflict with one another in application to the particular case, and thus no matter what we choose one of the commandments is necessarily going to be violated, then we are to weigh the matter carefully and select and act upon the commandment that carries the heavier weight, does the most good and the least harm.

So is that what David is doing here? Is he weighing the matter and choosing one commandment over another; life over death? Is he choosing mercy over punishment for the

good of the widow? Yes, I think so; but he is doing so wrongly. In fact the Rabbis who work so diligently to find David faultless on every matter couldn't themselves turn to ***Kal V'homer*** to validate their position that David was right to pardon this murderer because they too would have had to find David guilty in such a case. The Torah simply doesn't allow pardon for intentional murder nor does it allow for any kind of Levitical atonement for homicide that could reconcile the sinner in God's eyes. Thus they say that because this killing occurred in the field with no witnesses, and since that meant there was no one to warn the killer that to kill his brother was a sin, effectively no sin had been committed. Thus for David to prohibit the blood avenger from executing the murdering brother was the righteous and correct thing to do.

In reality however all David is doing is using his own human sense of mercy and justice and in so doing contravening God's well defined and codified sense of mercy and justice as found in the Law. Over and over the Torah commands the death penalty for certain terrible sins that are abominable to Yehoveh and especially dangerous for the Kingdom community. And the stated reason for executing such criminals is usually so that wickedness will be purged from the assembly of God's people. And that concept of purging wickedness is intended on two levels: the earthly and the spiritual.

From the earthly standpoint the execution of the criminal is a warning to others not to do the same and it also eliminates the person who is obviously predisposed to commit such a wicked act and keeps them from injuring yet another innocent person. From God's standpoint taking the life of the guilty saves the lives of the innocent thus it is really a matter of preserving life. And finally, it is justice and justice is at the center of the Lord's dealing with mankind. From a spiritual standpoint the only means of atonement for murder is the blood (the life) of the criminal. Thus when the divine commandment to take the life of the criminal is not followed, the curse of God's law hangs over the community who refused to obey Him and therefore wickedness remains imbedded within the community.

We see the practical results of David's foolish decisions regarding the abandonment of justice for his family and when it brings a personal or political benefit in these many stories of the latter days of David's life in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel and then of his descendants in Kings and Chronicles; and those results were attempted coups, murder, rape, incest, violence, and utter disregard for the needs of the people of Israel. We also see all around us the practical results of modern society refusing to obey God's required punishments for sin. Christianity has overridden God's Torah justice (declaring it abolished) and replace it with a manmade doctrine of "love covers a multitude of sins", and the secular world has overridden God's Torah justice with a politically correct doctrine of endless mercy and rehabilitation for the criminal. And of course the outcome is predictable with overflowing jails, ever increasing rates of violent crime, an amoral society, the disintegration of the family unit and we've even had to invent a term for those people who live to do wrong: career criminals. These are people upon whom our combination of misapplied

and misguided Christian and secular justice keeps finding reasons to pardon and show mercy for evil; thus career criminals are released back into the community to harm the innocent again and again. And this strange mindset says that it is for the sake of Christian forgiveness and enlightened intellectualism that it is right that the entire community should suffer and have to live in fear of these known evil people, rather than simply following God's prescription to obey Him and execute the dangerous criminals and thus purge wickedness from our society.

Well, King David's merciful decision on behalf of the widow became a snare for him. The instant he declared it as a royal decree (backed up by an irrevocable sworn oath to Yehoveh), the woman springs the intended trap by asking why then he doesn't apply the same rationale to the situation concerning his son Avishalom? In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 14, verse 13, the woman asks:

***CJB 2 Samuel 14:13 ..... "Why is it, then, that you have produced a situation exactly like this against God's people? By saying what you have said, the king has virtually incriminated himself- in that the king does not bring home again the son he banished.***

In other words, since you promised to guarantee the safety of my son who murdered his brother (effectively pardoning him), and did so for the sake of but one widow and her deceased husband, it follows from your own judgment that your son Avishalom should also be pardoned. And this is because it is better for the whole community of Israel that he be forgiven and brought home rather than punished according to The Law. And, by the way, don't try to reverse course and say that what you decreed to me was a mistake because that would be hypocritical and unjust.

But in verse 14 the woman continues the argument by saying that death is inevitable and irreversible so there was no need for David to enact judgment upon his own son (something that he would regret). Her argument is one of humanitarianism: men should never take life; rather it is our human job to resist the urge for retribution and so to preserve life. This is the argument that the Enlightenment philosophers would come to embrace because it runs completely counter to Holy Scriptures. And it is one that so many Christians embrace because on the surface it sounds so good and right to us. But in fact we have a God-commanded duty to preserve innocent life by eliminating guilty criminals who take life and infect our society with evil that causes broken relationships with God and leads to earthly misery and eternal death.

The Rabbis, despite their many erroneous conclusions concerning David in this story, have done an excellent job in dissecting the heart of this woman's argument on behalf of Absalom,

and they say that it consists of 4 points:

1. We shall all die. That is, Amnon was going to eventually die no matter what so all Avishalom did in having him killed was to hasten the inevitable.
2. Amnon's lost life is like water flowing onto the ground that can't be gathered back up. Following the Torah commandment to execute Avishalom won't bring back Amnon because that is impossible; so to do so is pointless and counterproductive and merely dismisses yet another life.
3. God spares no one. It is OK for David to spare Avishalom now because in God's time, and in His own way, the Lord will deal with Avishalom (David doesn't have to). The Lord will eventually exact His own justice (in this life or the next), it's not necessary for David to do it for Him.
4. God wishes that no one is banished Him. That is, His will is that all people, even those who hate Him or trespass against Him, would someday be part of the World to Come. So David should be an example of this and welcome Avishalom back to God's Kingdom.

I suspect that some of you are hearing a logic pattern (if not a doctrine) in this wise woman's soliloquy that we've heard Priests, Pastors, and Politicians use ad infinitum and that we have probably quoted to one another. And I hope that with what you have learned from studying the Torah, actually seeing what God says about justice, and now when it is laid out before you in the context of this hard-hitting story, that you're able to see that while this way of thinking sounds good, and there are nuggets of truth buried in it, in fact such an overall philosophy is entirely humanistic in its source and as such violates the very core of God's justice system. And the repercussions of us (whether God worshippers or pagans) having greater regard for our own emotions and intellect than for God's divine commandments and principles are evident in the Bible stories of old and in the condition of our present world.

And beginning in verse 15, so that she might cover all her bases, the woman starts to backtrack by explaining why it is that she would be so presumptuous as to approach the king in this devious way; she says she was coerced. But just to be sure that she doesn't get into trouble she starts to slather the king in flattery; you are like an angel from God in discerning good from bad, she tells the king.

Actually, using the English word angel here is a bit off track. The Hebrew is **malach** and it means messenger. While at times it is appropriate to translate **malach** to the word angel, it is when there is specific reference to a spiritual being. But here the better meaning is simply the more general word "messenger" (that is, David is an earthly messenger from God like a

prophet and not that he is like a divine spiritual being). By now it is has become obvious to the experienced politician King David that he's been had; this was all a set-up (but by whom?) The king surmises that it was Joab and insists that the woman verify if that is the case.

We discussed last week that someone had to arrange for David to meet with this woman. Israel's population was probably in the neighborhood of at least 5 million people so a commoner didn't just show up at the palace and knock on David's door. Only an insider could arrange a meeting and without doubt that insider was Joab. And since Joab had arranged for the meeting it was now clear that Joab had orchestrated this entire farce to achieve some end. Besides, what would a random woman from small village know about the inner workings of David's family? Why would she speak to the defense of someone she didn't even know (Absalom)? The woman congratulates King David for being so insightful as to discern that Joab was the instigator.

The king calls for **Yo'av** and tells him that he has decided to call for **Avishalom** to come back to Jerusalem, and **Yo'av** reacts in a typical Middle Eastern show of humility. The king was doing this grudgingly and no doubt because he realized that his verdict in favor of the widow's son and David's vow made in God's name had boxed him in. But David must also be asking himself a very troubling question: why is Joab so invested in bringing Absalom home? There is no doubt in my mind that David suspected that Joab was at least tacitly part of the popular movement to escalate **Avishalom's** influence if not actually make him the new king.

However, even though David was going to allow Avishalom to return without prosecution for Amnon's murder, there would be a consequence. Avishalom would not be able to reside in David's palace and he would not be allowed to be in David's presence. The external exile would end but David was in no ways ready to rehabilitate Absalom. So 3 years after Amnon's demise and Avishalom's flight to Geshur, he returns through the back door to Jerusalem.

Since the main function of chapter 14 is to show that David's poor choice to show mercy and allow the incorrigible Absalom to return to the Kingdom was mostly due to Yo'av's now transparent scheming, and to set the scene about how Absalom had planned for years to overthrow his father, verse 25 now turns our attention to Absalom's violent and narcissistic nature. And we find that the main attribute that attracted the masses to Absalom, and the one that he used most to his advantage, was his outward appearance. It is interesting that apparently beauty was a genetic characteristic of those children and grandchildren of David's wife **Maacah** (Avishalom's mother). Absalom's self-love led him to allow his hair to grow long to the point that he only cut it once per year. And he only cut it then because (it says) it weighed him down as it was so thick and heavy. In fact supposedly what was annually cut off

weighed the equivalent of 4 or 5 pounds (I say supposedly because while no doubt his hair was very unusual, that is an almost impossibly huge amount of hair).

Now there has been some interesting commentary written about his hair and some Rabbis say that he grew his hair long because (like Sampson) he was a Nazarite for life. However there is absolutely no evidence of such a thing; and other Rabbis rightly look at his character and rather obviously deduce that his lengthy hair was an act of sheer vanity.

What the Scriptures say is that his hair weighed 200 shekels. This might be a good time to explain that in Biblical times the shekel was NOT a unit of money (like a dollar) as it is today. A shekel was a measurement of weight, such as an ounce or a pound or a gram. And the reason is that the creation of coins as standard units of money did not come until very late, and was probably introduced to the Hebrews by the Greeks. So the medium of exchange was silver or gold, and thus a shekel indicated not a value but an amount of weight. So a shekel of silver was not worth as much as a shekel of gold (just as an ounce of silver is less valuable than an ounce of gold). However it is even more complicated. There was no Middle Eastern bureau of weights and measurements. Every king generally determined just what a shekel was in his own kingdom. In fact within Israel there was also the standard shekel (for everyday use) and the royal shekel (for when dealing with matters involving the king and his court). And what a shekel amounted to changed substantially between David's time and Christ's time. That is why you'll find so many different estimations in our Bibles of what a talent is, or how much a thousand shekels is in modern money, and so on.

We're told that Avishalom had 3 children and he named one of his daughters after his sister, the sad rape victim: Tamar. And this Tamar also turned out to be a very beautiful girl. After living for 2 years in Jerusalem Absalom grew frustrated of still being on the outside; and since Joab had been successful in persuading David to allow Absalom's return, Absalom thought perhaps Joab could influence David to remove all the barriers and allow a full return to grace. But for some reason Joab had become indifferent to Absalom, perhaps figuring that he wasn't going to become the king after all (he could well have reckoned by now that it was going to be Bathsheba's son, Solomon, and there was no point in backing Absalom any longer). Absalom summoned Joab to come to him on more than one occasion but Yo'av didn't show up. Let's face it: Joab didn't want to be associated with a fellow that the king had put on the shelf and whose future prospects were bleak. It could be seen as an overt attempt to prop up Absalom and that could cost Joab his job or his life.

So Absalom had Joab's field of Barley burned up to get his attention. It worked. Yo'av confronted Absalom and Absalom made it clear that he was not satisfied with the current

arrangement and demanded to get an audience with his father. Saying “if I am guilty of anything he can kill me” means that Absalom would explain to his father that killing Amnon was justifiable, and that he is certain that David will see it his way. But if he doesn't, then he'll accept being executed (there was just about a zero chance of that and he knew it).

Remembering that Joab was David's chief military commander and second in command over all Israel, it would be nearly unthinkable that David would refuse a direct request by Joab for pretty much anything. So David allows Avishalom to come to him. Avishalom shows proper humility and prostrates himself before his father, whereupon David kisses him. Do not think that this was a kiss of affection whereby a father has a change of heart. The Rabbis point out that in the Scriptures a ***lamed*** is used as a prefix to Avishalom's name in this instance, which indicates that this was merely a typical kiss of courtesy as is customary in the Middle East to this day. It did serve to release Absalom from something akin to house arrest, but by no means was a relationship restored. But for Absalom it was all he needed to set the stage for treachery that would change David's life forever.

Despite everything that had gone on, and despite all the human decisions that had led up to this point, God's providence was squarely in control of all that would lead up to Absalom's rebellion, just as David was promised (in such an ominous way) back in chapter 12:

**(2Sa 12:10-11 CJB)**

***<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, the sword will never leave your house- because you have shown contempt for me and taken the wife of Uriyah the Hitti as your own wife.'***

***<sup>11</sup> Here is what ADONAI says: 'I will generate evil against you out of your own household.....'***

Let's move on to chapter 15.

**READ 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL CHAPTER 15 all**



In what must be simultaneously one of the most scurrilous and saddest tales in all of Scripture, the next four chapters go into unusual detail about Absalom's rebellion against his father the king. And as God's curse of chapter 12 emphatically ensured, it involved killing, sexual immorality, and deception within David's closest family on a grand scale; all as a proportional, measure-for-measure consequence for David's debacle with Bathsheba.

Many Psalms were written by David during this disastrous period of his life and time permitting we'll look at some of them because they fill in a lot of blanks about the mood of the times, David's mindset, and it provides the all important context for studying the Psalms themselves. We must never take Psalms to be some kind of a series of generic prayers that we read like a book; rather each Psalm can be identified to a certain set of circumstances and so that is how we must understand them or risk creating false understandings and doctrines (and believe me, that is exactly what has occurred over the centuries within the institutional Church structure).

Here is another point of reference to consider: I think that as much as we should always look at David as a type of Messiah (however imperfect) then in this case we should also see **Avishalom** as a type of Anti-Messiah (Anti-Christ). I don't want to overplay that aspect of the story or to give him that official label, but on the other hand I think that there is a pattern here that is quite legitimate to apply to the coming Anti-Christ of the End Times. We do have a battle between the illegitimate prince who is convinced he can overcome the chosen and anointed king, thwart God's will and thus rule over God's Kingdom in hopes of making it his own.

We also find the similarity that there were those who were at one time dedicated to their King (the Messiah like figure of David) but their hearts grew dissatisfied and suddenly a man from the king's family tries to overcome him and take control of the Kingdom. Most of Israel, rebels, will follow the illegitimate Avishalom and only a remnant will stay loyal to King David. In fact we're going to see several instances of citizens boldly standing with David (knowing that such a stand is putting them and their families in great danger) under the premise that David is God's choice to rule, and Avishalom is an illegal and wicked usurper, and whatever happens to them personally it is better to stand with God and His anointed.

The thing that is being made clear in these next chapters is that the majority of Israel saw Absalom as a rational choice because he was of the proper lineage on at least one side of his family (David's). It was well understood that the King of all Israel was to be of the tribe of



Judah (a Jew). Further, Absalom went far out of his way to make it seem as though he was so loving and caring for the people that he had only their best interests at heart; that he was there to solve their problems and give them what they wanted in a way that the current king could not or would not. All this smacks of the various descriptions of the future Anti-Christ who will take advantage of our human evil inclinations and naivety and convince many of the Judeo-Christian world and even the secular world, that he is the Messiah.

But, at the risk of drawing the ire of some (especially our Jewish members), let me also point out the pattern present in our story of the Anti-King being of the same family as the Anointed-King. The Bible implies that for some reason the future Anti-Christ is going to be accepted by many Jews and Christians as the legitimate Messiah as prophesied in the Bible. But what Jew (no matter how secular or Traditional they might be) would accept anyone but another Jew as their Messiah? Even a goodly portion of the gentile Church still acknowledges the indisputable Biblical fact that Messiah Yeshua was a Jew, and thus when He returns He'll still be a Jew.

So if it is reasonable (as I maintain) to view some elements of the relationship between David and Avishalom as a pattern for the Christ/Anti-Christ End Times scenario, then could it be that the Anti-Christ is going to have a Jewish heritage? Let me ask that in the opposite way: how could any Jew or Christian expect that the appearance (or reappearance) of Messiah would be as a gentile? Therefore those who will accept the Anti-Christ as the Messiah (God) will certainly expect a Jewish person. Do not think that I'm picturing an Orthodox Rabbi or some such overtly religious person. Rather, I'm thinking in terms of a man who has hidden his Jewishness (or at least not made it an issue) until the proper moment. We have several world leaders who surprisingly recently divulged their Jewish heritage; and two of them especially have shown themselves to be decidedly anti-Israel and no friend of the Jewish people: President Sarkozy of France and Senator John Kerry of the USA. By no means am I suggesting they are Anti-Christ; I'm merely saying that a politician could achieve great power by first hiding their Jewish heritage, and then later using it for a political purpose if it was to their advantage.

Verse 1 says that some unspecified time after David accepted (at least tacitly) Avishalom back into the fold Absalom began in earnest to execute his plan of overthrowing the government. No doubt he had been organizing, winning key loyalties, making promises, and generally working towards his goal of overthrow ever since arrival back into Jerusalem. On the surface it seems incomprehensible that the nation of God could turn against its greatest king, the Lion of Judah, King David. But people are fickle and a charismatic personality coming along at the right moment with the right message has swayed the masses towards himself on numerous occasions throughout history.

History also shows that often a formerly great leader rests on his laurels and turns passive and that is what opens the door for takeover. After 20 years in power David seems to have distanced himself from the common folk, delegated duties to underlings that ought to rest upon him, and generally conducted himself poorly and with an aloof attitude that turned the people away from him. The Bathsheba affair had rocked Israel and no doubt substantially reduced the people's trust and admiration of their leader.

We'll continue with chapter 15 next week.