

Joab Confronts The King

2 Samuel 19:1-8

*Joab was told, "The king is weeping
and mourning for Absalom." (v.1)*

Our lesson today focuses on David's reaction to the death of his son. While it is natural for a father to mourn the death of his son, even one who has gone so far astray as Absalom, David cannot be permitted to focus on his private personal feelings while his nation is still in crisis. The whirlwind of his sowing is still not spent.

While this should have been a day of rejoicing and celebrating – David and his men had been successful in crushing the uprising led by Absalom. The King's grief over the loss of Absalom turned it into a day of mourning. The King's army instead of being welcomed into Mahanaim as victors, slipped into the city ashamed as if they had lost the battle or even fled from the battle. Hearing of the King's grief disheartened the army.

And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, "The king is grieving for his son." 2 Sam 19:1-2

David had many reasons for his mourning. Obviously he loved his son. He probably regretted all the bad blood between them, his failure in parenting and raising him up. His failure to pay any attention to the goings on in his own house that precipitated his son's betrayal. There was no reconciliation between them and there never would be. All of these are powerful reasons to be distraught and grief stricken. The problem was that Absalom was the instigator of the rebellion that created a schism in the nation of Israel. As we will see in this week's homework there is great tension between David's Judah and the rest of Israel. This rebellion cost the lives of thousands of men. Joab comes back to Mahanaim to find the king mourning desperately over the death of Absalom, his wayward son who has caused a civil war and the death of 20,000 men of Israel and Judah – from both sides! (See 18:7: *There the army of Israel was defeated by David's men, and the casualties that day were great--twenty thousand men.*).

Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. (v.5)

David's failures regarding his son cost the nation a great deal, and David's continued behavior could cost even more. Had this been any other rebellion there would have been rejoicing, music and dancing in the streets, headed up by David himself. David's mourning has the appearance of regret over even fighting the battle, let alone winning it. He expresses no sense of gratefulness, no words of encouragement or appreciation for his men, or grief for those lost in battle. David's behavior carries an attitude of ingratitude and contempt for the people whose support he most depends upon for successfully reuniting the nation. Not only was David's public behavior inappropriate, but potentially detrimental. Privately he could grieve as much as he liked, but publicly his responsibility was to the nation and the throne. His actions offended his troops and if he didn't remedy the situation quickly, he would find he had no allies left by nightfall (v. 7).

David is consumed with his own emotions and failures. Joab confronts the king harshly. No consolation for the death of Absalom is uttered. (Of course, it was Joab who did the murderous deed unrepentantly and in disobedience to the command of the very king he stands before.) But who else could rock David enough out of his grief but Joab?

Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the LORD that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come upon you from your youth till now." (v.7)

Joab's decisive actions regarding Absalom's death and David's attitude are what saved the kingdom and put David back on the throne. All was not at peace in Mahanaim. David's men were upset and Absalom's supporters still in the area. Notice what it says in verse 8b when David finally follows Absalom's advice: "*Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes.*" Israelites fleeing from the region of Ephraim, where the battle took place, would not have been David's supporters, but supporters of Absalom fearing retribution or charges of treason! If David hadn't snapped out of his grief those same Israelites could have turned David's own men against him and finished what Absalom had started. David was holed up inside the gated fortress of Mahanaim, blinded by grief and mourning. A simple siege would have brought an end to David's reign before he even realized what was happening around him. Joab's murder of Absalom may have been utter defiance of the King, but his actions in this passage prevent further treasonous actions on the part of David's subjects, both loyal and disloyal. Joab reminds the king of his obligation to the nation which supersedes the death of a traitorous son.

*A Woman After God's Own Heart:
A Study of King David
Lesson 8: Notes*

The last thing I want you to notice is where David went after Joab's harangue. Verse 8 says:

So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, "The king is sitting in the gateway," they all came before him.

Do you recall how this whole mess with Absalom started? Turn back to and read 2 Samuel 15:1-6. *"There is no representative of the king to hear you"* (v3). Absalom was standing at the gate, the very gate where the king or his representative should have been. The gateway was the very center of the public and commercial life of the city. Within the gates would be rooms to house the guards, weaponry, as well as rooms where court would convene to hear trials and give sentences. Executions would be held outside the gates. The gateway therefore was a center of administration and justice. David's absence from the gates was possibly a delegation of authority to another suitable individual, but it also signaled a lapse in his obligation to the nation. David was absent to the nation just as he had been absent for Absalom and his siblings at times of crisis. In this passage we see David make a conscious effort to take back his responsibility by taking his place at the gate in Mahanaim. This whirlwind was chockfull of hard lessons!