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David and Mephiboseth

Second Samuel 9: 1-13

David and Mephiboseth DIG: What does David's kindness to Sha'ul's descendants emphasize about covenants (see First Samuel 20:15 and 42)? Why didn't the Ruach ha-Kodesh make Ziba nameless here? Why all the details? How might have Ziba known Mephiboseth was living at Makir's house? According to Second Samuel 17:27 and 29, what kind of a region was Lo Debar? What might Mephiboseth have felt as he was escorted back to Tziyon? To the throne room? To the dining table? In this regard, what do you make of Mephiboseth's handicap? And his likening himself to a dead dog?

REFLECT: In what ways are you like Mephiboseth as you stand before God's throne? As you break bread at the LORD's table? As you are an heir to your heavenly Father's Kingdom? When have you shown or received YHVH's kindness as a "friend of a friend," as epitomized in this story? To whom can you be that kind of a friend this week? How do the things David provided Mephiboseth compare to the things God provides us? What does God provide for His children? Do you ever tire of showing favor to the less fortunate? God is never too far away to reverse a horrible situation.

987 BC

After all **he** had suffered at the hands of **Sha'ul**, it would have been understandable if **David** had conveniently forgotten **his** promise to **Y'honatan (to see link click [As - Y'honatan Helps David Escape](#))**, especially in view of the fact that **Y'honatan** had initiated the covenant agreement between them. But it was one of **David's** strengths that **he** did not forget the oath **he** had given, even though it had been about thirty years since the covenant had been made. **David** had seen **his** enemies defeated (see [Cx - David's Victories](#)), **his** throne secured, and **his** empire established. **He** therefore had time to reflect and was in a position to fulfill the obligation **he** had undertaken to show loyalty to **Y'honatan's** descendants.³¹⁵

David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Sha’ul to whom I can show kindness (see commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed) for Y’honatan’s sake.”** Normally, monarchs would execute any potential competitors to the throne, but David threw a wider net than **his** promises required, extending **his** generosity to any of **Sha’ul’s** surviving descendants because **he** remembered how much **he** owed to **Y’honatan**. Because of **David’s** love for **Y’honatan**, **he** wanted to do something, and because of **his** covenant with **Y’honatan**, **he** was obligated to do something. **Now there was a chief servant of Sha’ul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” “At your service,” he replied. The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Sha’ul to whom I can show God’s kindness?”** Since **David** swore an oath **to God**, to fulfill it, he meant **to show God’s chesed. Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Y’honatan; he is lame in both feet (Second Samuel 9:1-3).”**

David’s devotion to the well-being of **his** friend **Y’honatan** did not cease even after **the prince** had died. Years before, **David** had sworn that **his** favor would extend to **Y’honatan’s** descendants. **David swore to show ADONAI’s kindness not only while Y’honatan was alive, but so that his family line would not die; but David would continue showing kindness to his family forever (First Samuel 20:14-17a CJB).** This pledge by **David** came in response to **his friend’s** request. **Y’honatan**, certain that one day **David** would be **king** – sought to make a covenant with **him** for the protection of **his** descendants (**First Samuel 20:14-16**). True to **his** promise, **David** continued to honor the covenant **he** made with **his friend**.

The most wonderful example of **David’s** covenant loyalty was **his** response to **Y’honatan’s** only **son, Mephiboseth. He** was only **five** when **the Philistines** killed **his father** in 1011 BC. **His** nanny, hearing the horrific news, was afraid they would also come after **him**, so **she** picked **him** up to escape, but in **her** terrified anguish, **she** dropped **the boy** and **his** legs were broken (**Second Samuel 4:4**). As a result, **Mephiboseth** was permanently crippled. **“Where is he?” the king asked. Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar on the east side of the Jordan not far from Mahanaim where Ish-Bosheth, the son of Sha’ul, ruled.” So King David had him brought to the royal court (Second Samuel 9:4-5).**

Because **he** was crippled, **his** original name was **Meri-ba’al (First Chronicles 8:34)**. It is doubtful that this was the name given to **him** at birth, but a name that

he was called because he was crippled. **The rabbis taught that if a person was crippled, they had committed some sin;** therefore, people that had the god **Ba'al** in their name were called **bosheth** (Hebrew: *shame*) because it was *shameful* (**Jeremiah 3:24; Hosea 9:10**). So **his** name was later changed to **Mephi-bosheth (Second Samuel 9:3-13)**. Another example of this was **Ish-Bosheth, king of the northern Kingdom after Sha'ul died. His** personal name was **Eshaba'al**, which means *the fire of Ba'al* (**First Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39**). But **Eshaba'al** became **Ish-Bosheth**; *the fire of Ba'al* became *the man of shame*. In addition, **Jerubba'al (Judges 8:35)** became **Jerubosheth (Judges 11:21)**.³¹⁶

When Mephiboseth, who was about thirty years old at that time, **came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.** Despite the close relationship between **his father** and **David, Mephibosheth** had never before have been to the court of **the king**. It would have hardly been surprising if he felt both fear and resentment at the summons **he** had received, therefore, **David** reassured **him** and said: **Don't be afraid. It was common for new dynasties to kill all the possible rivals from the old regime.** Instead, **David** said: **I will surely show you chesed** (see commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**) **for the sake of your father Y'honatan.**

But **David's** provision for **Mephibosheth** seems to have gone well beyond **his** promise to **Y'honatan**, saying: **I will restore to you all the land in Gibeah** (along the Central Benjamin Plateau, 3.8 miles north of Jerusalem) **that belonged to your grandfather Sha'ul.** This **land** would have been obtained by **David** as **Sha'ul's** successor, this explains why **Mephiboseth** was living in relative obscurity in **Lo Debar**. But now **David** was going to give **all the land in Gibeah** back to **him. Mephiboseth**, who had apparently been dependent on the hospitality of a generous individual because **he** could not work, was suddenly a rich man, the owner of wealth-producing property. **And**, as an act of honor, **you will always eat at my table.** In other words, David was saying, "I'm going to treat you like one of my own sons." **Mephiboseth bowed down and** said: **What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog** (an idiomatic statement meaning *the most vile and worthless of all*) **like me (Second Samuel 9:6-8).** **He** didn't feel worthy of such an honor, probably because of his disability.³¹⁷



It was an honor to bestow property to **Mephiboseth**, but it required management. **Then the king summoned Ziba the chief servant of Sha'ul's** estate that now belonged to **David (who had fifteen sons and twenty servants** under him) **and said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Sha'ul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephiboseth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table"** (Second Samuel 9:9-10).

Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do." So Mephiboseth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. Mephiboseth had a young son named Micah (First Chronicles 8:34-40), and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephiboseth. And Mephiboseth lived in Yerushalayim, because he always ate at the king's table, he was lame in both feet (Second Samuel 9:11-13).

David's kindness toward **Mephiboseth** was motivated by nothing more than gracious love and covenant faithfulness; as such, **his** actions give us a wonderful analogy of **the LORD's** unmerited love for sinners. **David** took the first step. **David** was **a man after God's own heart (First Samuel 13:4)**. **He** sought out **Mephiboseth** and welcomed **him**, and made the palace **his** home. **He** did so even though **Mephiboseth** was the grandson of **Sha'ul - Isra'el's** cursed **king** and **David's** greatest persecutor. **Mephiboseth** couldn't do anything to repay **David** or offer **him** any significant service. Nonetheless, **David** brought **him** into **his** family, invited **him** to **his** table, and even granted **him** an inheritance of land to which **he** was not legally entitled. In grateful response, **Mephiboseth** became a lifelong, loyal servant to **David (Second Samuel 19:24-30)**. **Mephiboseth's** son, **Micah,**

sustained the family line for many generations and produced noble warriors (**First Chronicles 8:34-40**). As **the prince, Y'honatan** had been faithful to protect **David**. Now, as **the king, David** was faithful to honor **his** covenant promise to **Y'honatan** by graciously embracing **Mephiboseth** as a member of **his** own family.³¹⁸

The spiritual application to believers today is obvious: **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (First Thessalonians 5:9). Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).**