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David and Ziba

Second Samuel 16: 1-4

David and Ziba DIG: What did the shakeup in David's family mean to some of the descendants of Sha'ul? What was Ziba's motive in coming to David bearing such gifts? Is he trustworthy (Second Samuel 19:24-30)? Why does David think so (Second Samuel 9:1-11)? Did David make a mistake with Ziba? Why was he vulnerable to that mistake?

REFLECT: In contrast to the loyalty of Ittai to his master (Second Samuel 15:19-23), we have the example of Ziba. Have you ever been betrayed? If so, how did it affect you? Where might you be tempted likewise to betray your loyalties? How will you resist that temptation?

977 BC

This is part of a 24-hour period starting at 15:13 and extending all the way to 17:23.

When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit of the Mount of Olives, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth (to see link click [Da - David and Mephibosheth](#)) waiting to meet him. Ziba represented the family of Sha'ul and he might have imagined that the king would expect him to defect, and it was for that reason that he brought extravagant and ostentatious gifts to David. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine (Second Samuel 16:1). Ziba wanted to demonstrate his loyalty to the king. It was a public act of siding with David in the civil war.

David was direct. He asked Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" There must be some motive for such unsought and unexpected generosity. Ziba was not forthcoming because his answer was no answer at all . . . only a statement of the obvious. He deftly dodged the question when he replied: The donkeys are for the king's wives to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who become exhausted in the wilderness (Second Samuel 16:2).³⁹⁵

Still skeptical, **the king then** probed further by asking **him**, “**Where is your master’s grandson Mephibosheth?**” **Ziba** was quick on the draw. **His** response - later indignantly denied by **Mephibosheth** - was that the crippled young **man stayed in Jerusalem** in the belief that the house of **Isra’el** would return the Kingdom to the house of **Sha’ul** and therefore **Mephibosheth himself** would benefit (**Second Samuel 16:3**).

Although **Mephibosheth** was heir to the throne (and even if such a claim might appear plausible to **David**), it was unlikely that **he** really believed that **Absalom** would actually turn the Kingdom over to **him**! Apparently **Ziba** either didn’t know or did not care that the kingdom of Isra’el had long ago been torn from **Sha’ul** by divine decree and given to **David**. Not only that, it was a bit risky if David checked out his story. But **Ziba** reasoned that **the king** was on the run and would not have time to check out **his** story. So basically, **Ziba** lied through **his** teeth to **David** and cleverly did **his** best to discredit and betray **his** young **master**. With one lie, **the snake** had put the loyalty of **Mephibosheth** into question, while simultaneously enhancing **his** own position.

David was weary and deeply wounded by **Ziba’s** lie, and it wasn’t the best time for **him** to be making character decisions. But in the heat of the moment, **David** impulsively chose to believe **Ziba**. Without hearing the other side of the story, **David** punished **Mephibosheth** in absentia by giving **Ziba** everything that formerly belonged to **his master**, saying: **All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours (Second Samuel 16:4)**. This was everything **Ziba** had hoped for. By this one daring regal act, **David** sent a warning to other potential defectors that they risked the loss of *their* land. **David’s** longstanding promises to Y’honatan (**First Samuel 20:14-17**) and to **Sha’ul (First Samuel 24:21-22)** were suspended by **his** own need for self-preservation. In the fog of war **the king** had not violated the letter of earlier promises, but **he** had come dangerously close to a violation of chesed (see commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**) against **Sha’ul’s** family.³⁹⁶

Not unexpectedly, **Ziba’s** response was submissive and grateful: **I humbly bow. May I find favor in your eyes, my lord and king (Second Samuel 16:5)**. **Mephibosheth** had taught him well (**Second Samuel 9:6** and **8**). It is interesting to note that **Ziba** didn’t continue on with **David**. **He** likely had a hunch that **David** would survive **Absalom’s** coup; hence **his** show of support. But suppose **Absalom** won the civil war? No problem. **Ziba** was not exiled with **David**, but working the farm ready to live under a new regime. **Ziba** was a manipulator, and **he** capitalized on **David’s** trouble in order to enrich **himself**. What motivated **Ziba** was not loyalty to **God’s** king, but greed for **his** own gain.

During the Revolutionary War (1775-1783), George Washington’s Continental Army suffered

through a miserable winter at Valley Forge. Clothes were so scarce and blankets so rare that the troops often sat up all night rather than fall asleep and freeze to death. Some of the soldiers, whose legs had frozen black, were taken to “hospitals” for amputation. Why such suffering? It was not the severe winter, for the winter was mild by Pennsylvania standards. But soldiers went hungry because nearby farmers preferred to sell to the British for hard cash. The army was half-naked because merchants in Boston refused to move government clothing off their shelves at anything less than profits ranging from 1,000 to 1,800 percent. The colonies swarmed with Ziba’s. The hardship of others was their opportunity for success.³⁹⁷