

David and Mephiboseth

Second Samuel 9: 1-13

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 HaKodesh 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?

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 (see **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 **Cw - 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." 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 (2 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. 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. **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).**