

## Day 98 2 Sam 6/ 1 Chron 15, 16, Psa 105, Ps 96

### The Ark Comes to Jerusalem

2 Sam 6.12a David learns of the blessing of the family of Obed-Edom, who is hosting the ark on his premises, and is reminded of his plan to bring the ark to Jerusalem.

1 Chron 15. 1-10 Once the palace of David has been finished, with the materials provided by Hiram of Tyre, David has a tent made for the ark to reside in. This raises a question – was this the ancient tabernacle of the Lord which had been made in the desert and been at Shiloh during the years of the Judges?

It doesn't appear to be. What happened to the original tabernacle is not clear. Perhaps by now it was just disintegrated from use, and retired, as some suggest. What is very significant, though, is that David does not put the ark in a house or building. God has not instructed a temple, and David prepares a place to resemble the ancient tabernacle of Moses. We are not told if it had the same divisions, but it is most likely that it did.

Thus, with David comes in a new phase in the worship life of Israel, and David will institute original elements which reflect his character and relationship with God, particularly in the area of arts and music.

David calls the Levites to carry the ark, so that there is no repeat of the previous outbreak of God against the unsanctified Uzzah. They are organised into their divisions. As well as the previously noted divisions of Kohathites, Merarites and Gershonites, there are also divisions of Levites from the descendants of the Kohathites named Elizaphan (see Num.3.30), Hebron and Uzziel (Num.3.19) .

1 Chr.15.11-16 David calls the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, and Levite leaders, and confesses to them that the reason things went so badly wrong when they brought the ark back from Kiriath-Jearim was that the correct protocols were not followed, **and no enquiry was made of the Lord** and now he wants to correct that.

David also Levites appointed as singers with instruments. This is innovation on David's part, and reflects the style of David's own worship.

15.17-24 Now appointments are made for tabernacle gatekeepers, musicians and doorkeepers for access to the ark. (These latter also sounded the trumpets before the ark.)

In v.22, Kenaniah is mentioned; he was the instructor of song, a skilful singer, and the first such to be mentioned in Scripture.

1 Chron. 15.25 – 29.(mirrored in 2 Sam.6.12b – 16) With all ready, sacrifices are made, and the King and priests are dressed in fine linen, befitting such a holy occasion. Thus the ark makes its way to Jerusalem.

On its entry into Jerusalem, David's wife Michal sees David dancing and celebrating. Whether it is because she feels David's undignified behaviour is belittling the royal office David holds, or whether she is jealous for the tradition of her father which David is changing, she despises him.

1 Chron.16.1 -6 (mirrored in 2 Sam 6.17-19) The ark arrives in its place without incident, and David marks the occasion with the gift of bread and cake for everyone in Israel to eat.

David now appoints the Levites to their musical duties, and to prayer of petition (Heb לְהַזְכִּיר *le-hazqir*, to remember, make mention) and thanksgiving before the ark.

### David's First Public Psalm

**1 Chron.16.7-36** (mirrored in **Psalm 105** and **Psalm 96**) David now hands over to Asaph, the worship leader, a psalm he has written for the occasion. This is the first time the king has published his work for the worship of the Lord, and is a milestone in the worship life of Israel.

The song is an exhortation to praise and give thanks, and to seek the Lord's presence-face (v.11) (Heb. פָּנִים *panim* – the word means both 'face' and 'presence'.)

It recalls the salvation story of God toward His people, rehearsing His covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the success and provision given to Joseph in Egypt, the deliverance through Moses and Aaron, the provision in the wilderness and the entry into the promised land.

The latter part is a song of praise, (mirrored in Ps 96) which describes the other nations' gods as idols (Heb אֱלִילִים *elilim* – from the root אַל *al*, meaning 'nothing', so worthless, good-for-nothing.)

The song ends with the praise of creation, sea, fields, forests, all sounding before the Creator God, and in 16.34, a refrain which would become a song of Israel for millennia to come, even sung today -

הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי טוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם תְּסֻדּוּ

(Above is read right to left)

*Hodu l'Adonai ki tov ki le'olam chasdo*

Sing to the Lord for good for forever His self-obligation (to His covenant.)

In 16v35, another familiar term is used – *Hoshienu* (Heb הוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ ), meaning 'Save us', from which the later term, *Hosha-na* or *Hosanna!* is taken.

And lastly, a phrase which is frequently heard in Jewish blessings up to today appears in

verse 36 בָּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן-הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם

(Above is read right to left)

*Barukh Adonai(YHWH) Elohey Yisrael min-ha'olam ve'ad ha-olam*

Blessed the Lord God of Israel from the ages and to the ages.

To which all the people respond *Amen!* (Heb. אָמֵן), meaning, ‘Sure, truly’, the word used around the planet to affirm the prayer and praise of another, and to stand with them.

With this Psalm (found also in Ps 96 and 105) David sets a new style for the worship of the Lord, (YHWH).

**Day 99 1 Chron.16.37 – 43; 2 Sam 6.20-23; 2 Sam 8.15 – 9.13; 1 Chron.17.1-2; 2 Sam 7.4-17; 2 Sam.7.18-29.**

### **David’s House is Established.**

1 Chron 16.37-43 David leaves in place an order for daily worship and sacrifice, with the Levites and Priests fulfilling their various duties, ‘in accordance with everything written in the Law of the Lord’, including the offering of sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering.

David then returns home, ready to bless his family, to share the good things God had done for him that day.

2 Sam.6.20-23 Unfortunately, David’s joy is soured by the appearance of his first wife, Michal, who accuses him of bringing down the reputation of the crown by dancing unrobed in sight of Israel, especially of the girls.

David seems to find in her accusations a sign of trying to tie him to how it was in the days of her father, Saul, and he rebukes her for her slight, reminding her that God rejected her father and his family, and called David to be king. He refuses to behave as she dictates, in accordance with her late father’s ways, and tells her that how he praises, with its exuberant dance and celebration is only a shadow of what he could be doing – ‘I can be even more undignified than this.’

Because of her insult to David, she was childless, says the writer.

*There is a real lesson here about how we assess the worship and praise of others. There is so much willingness to criticise and judge others’ worship on behalf of God, adjudicating what is and is not acceptable to Him, much of it based on what we find culturally acceptable. But God loves all our creativity, our noise and our silence – He loves us as His children, and we need to allow for all kinds of offerings of worship and not judge one another, so that we don’t fall under the judgment of God as Michal did, leading to fruitlessness and bitterness, and inability to make way for new expressions.*

2 Sam 8.15-18 (mirrored in 1 Chron 18.14-17) The order of David’s kingdom is established, with Joab as his general, Jehoshaphat his chancellor, Zadok and Abiathar the priests and his sons as advisers. David is said to do everything justly and righteously – in the original –

## וַיְהִי דָוִד עֹשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה-לְכָל-עַמּוֹ

(Above is read right to left)

*Va-yehi David oseh mishpat u-tzedakah le-khol ammo*

And he was, David, doing justice and right to all his people.

Here is the emphasis on *doing mishpat*. This is the same *right-wising* task which the Judges were engaged in, setting things in order, with righteous judgment. In Hebrew, the word *mishpat* has the same root as the word *shophet*, the right-wisers of Israel, and *tzedakah* is making things straight, not crooked and warped. This is a high accolade on David.

2 Sam. 9.1-13 The ensuing story is **one of the most powerful and redemptive stories** in all of Scripture, and teaches us how seriously God takes the covenants both He and we make.

Recalling 2 Sam.4.4, Saul's grandson, Jonathan's son Mephibosheth was crippled in both legs when his nurse dropped him in their flight from David after the death of the old king. He now lives in exile, in an area called Lo-Debar (Heb. לֹדְבָר meaning, 'pastureless', no sheepfolds.) on the east side of the Jordan, in Gilead. The word can also be rendered 'nothing'. Mephibosheth is living without hope and in fear of retribution.

In 2 Sam 9.1 David asks if there are any survivors of Saul's household to whom he can *do chesed* (Heb וְאַעֲשֶׂה עִמּוֹ חֶסֶד *Ve-e'eseh immo chesed*, I will do with him *chesed*, my covenant obligation) for the sake of Jonathan, in fulfilment of the promises made to his dearest friend in 1 Sam 20.15. It has to be noted here how poorly the English translation, 'so that I can show him mercy' or even 'love' serves the original Hebrew. David is not just acting out of emotion or magnanimity – he is acting in accordance with his covenant, his *berith* with Jonathan, which holds him.

He is told by an ex-servant of Saul, Ziba, that there is a survivor, Mephibosheth. The crippled man is brought to Jerusalem, and must wonder what will happen to him, since he grovels at David's feet, even describing himself as a dead dog, the lowest form of self-despising name one could give oneself in Israel.

But David reveals his intention to do *chesed* to Mephibosheth, whose name means *dispeller of shame*. **Mephibostheth is rescued by David's action.** Not only that, but David adopts him as one of his sons, and gives him a place at his table, just as Saul gave to David at first, and restores to him the lands of his grandfather Saul.

He also restores Saul's servant Ziba to serve Mephibosheth, on his returned lands. This is such an act of grace, of honour, that it is a wonderful foreshadowing of God's action to us in Christ, and it is worth noting here that in the Hebrew translation of the New Testament, the word *chesed* (Heb חֶסֶד) is invariably used for our English word 'grace' to translate the Greek χάρις (*charis*), for grace is not just given on God's whim, but is his *covenanted* obligation to those who call on the name of Jesus Christ.

1 Chron. 17.1, 2 (mirrored in 2 Sam 7.1-3) David now feels bad that he is living in a fine palace and God is living in a tent! He mentions it to Nathan the prophet (whom it seems David retains as God's voice to his royal court.) and Nathan encourages David to take action.

2 Sam.7.4-17 (mirrored in 1 Chron.17.3-15) However, Nathan hears something to contradict his advice to David from the Lord that night. What we learn from this word is very important for the future direction of Israel.

The Lord makes it clear to Nathan that **He doesn't need a permanent building to live in**. Because of the nature of God as *the Adventurer*, God needs to be mobile, His purposes are to be on the move, and therefore, a Tent is the most suitable place for Him to dwell. God points out that **He has never asked for a permanent structure**, and David's sense of feeling sorry for God comes out of his own comfortable situation.

God now turns the tables and says that, far from David building God a house, the Lord will establish David's house, through his son, who will also build a house for the Lord's name – but notice *even here God does not require the building of a Temple*.

He promises David's throne will last forever – a big promise for God to make.

Nathan delivers this word to David.

2 Sam. 7.18-29 (mirrored in 1 Chron.17.16-27) David is overwhelmed by God's favour, and he goes and sits before the Lord (in the tabernacle, most likely) and speaks out his thanks for God's word.

He acknowledges the story of God's supernatural establishment of Israel, and that God has redeemed (Heb לִפְדּוֹת *liphdot* from the root word *padah* meaning to ransom or release) Israel for Himself to make a name for Himself and to have a nation for Himself.

It is a very personal and intimate prayer, and David's heart of humility and self-awareness is prominent in it. However, there is only one factor that is missing, and that is the sense of God's planetary purpose, the 'all nations touched' through Abraham's descendants, which God is intent upon. Rather, the focus is upon God's 'special relationship' with Israel and with David, which may end up missing the point of God's heart for a while to come. David's elation, however, is understandable and his thanksgiving instructive.

**Day 100 2 Sam. 21.15 – 22; 1 Chron 19; Psalm 60; 2 Sam.11-12.17; Psalm 51**

**David Triumphs, then Blows It**

2 Sam 21.15 – 22 (18-22 mirrored in 1 Chron.20.4-8)

The Philistines continue to attack and harry the Israelites from their coastal cities, but David's army continue to gain advantage over them. During one battle, however, David becomes exhausted and is targeted by Ishbi-Benob, who is blocked and killed

by Abishai, Joab's brother. However, from this time, it is decided that David is not up to the battles as he was formerly, and needs to remain behind. This must have been a blow to David's pride as a warrior.

In v17b, David is described as the 'lamp of Israel' (Heb. נֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל *Ner Yisrael*) which must not be allowed to go out, thus the desire to keep him out of the battle.

1 Chron.18.1 (mirrored in 2 Sam 8.1) David's forces have managed to subdue the Philistines, taking the city of Gath and its suburbs into Israeli territory.

### **Failed Diplomacy Leads to Battles**

1 Chron.19.1 – 19 (mirrored in 2 Sam.10.1 – 19) David decides to pursue diplomacy with the Ammonites on his eastern borders, and on the death of Nachash, who has treated David well, he sends a delegation to his successor, Chanun, 'to *do chesed*', (Heb. אֶעֱשֶׂה-חֶסֶד *e'eseh chesed*, to fulfil a covenant obligation) to his ally's heir.(v.2)

However, Chanun's advisers convince the new king that David's ambassadors are spies, and disgrace them by shaving them, and ripping their clothes to expose their buttocks; they are then sent away in shame.

David hears of this, and allows them leave to stay at Jericho until their dignity is restored, before coming to court at Jerusalem.

v.6ff Realising that David will now retaliate for the slight, Chanun hires mercenaries from the north, from Mesopotamia, including thirty-two thousand chariots to resist David's attack. As a consequence, David sends out the whole Israeli force against them. Joab, with Abishai his brother second in command, divides the troops into two, half against the Ammonites who are defending their city, and half against the Aramean mercenaries who are on the open field.

v.16ff When the Ammonites see Joab's rout of the mercenary forces, they take fright and retreat into their city (Rabbath-Ammon?) Joab then returns to Jerusalem for further instructions.

The northern troops, however, smarting at their defeat, now call for reinforcements from beyond the Euphrates, which provokes David to come out of his retirement to lead the armies himself against Shophach the Aramean. As result, the northern invaders are repulsed, and Shophach killed in the battle.

As a result, the representatives of King Hadad-Ezer of the Arameans sue for peace, and become tributaries to Israel, no longer willing to aid the Ammonites in their battles.

## **Psalm 60**

### **David's Prayer for Vindication**

This Psalm is written during the battles with the Arameans, perhaps before David goes out to battle himself, when the Ammonites had managed to retreat into their city. Despite the triumph of Joab, David sees it as a rejection by God, and prays for help.

The Psalm begins with David's acknowledgement of God's displeasure, but he prays for restoration and rescue, and for God to raise a banner for them against their enemies.

For David, the land belongs to the Lord, and it is His to allocate and to command, with Moab and Edom as outcasts beyond Israel. The Psalm ends with a call to the Lord to aid them against their enemies.

### **David acts without Integrity**

2 Sam 11.1- 12.17

For so many men, when sexual desire comes upon them, their 'brains go to their trousers' and idiocy ensues. This has already been seen with Samson, and now David falls prey to his own deceptive heart, which seems so set on God's ways.

It may well be during this campaign, while his troops are away in the eastern lands besieging Rabbah, and David, 'lamp of Israel' is back in Jerusalem that David plays peeping-torn on a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, naked at her bathing. Instead of letting go of her shapely form from his mind, David plays out the scene again and again in his mind, inflaming desire. He sends to find out who she is, but the message comes back that she is the wife of one of his soldiers.

However, David's wisdom has been overridden by the sickness in his heart for sex with this woman. The woman, who had just been ritually cleansing herself from her monthly period, is brought, and David commits adultery with her, by which she becomes pregnant.

6ff. David now compounds adultery with deception, and has Joab send Bathsheba's husband Uriah back home for some R&R with his wife, counting on a soldier's desire aroused on seeing his own wife to cover up David's sin. 'Go down to your house and wash your feet' (v.8) (Heb. **רָד לְבֵיתְךָ וּרְחַץ רַגְלֶיךָ** *red le-bheytekha u-rachatz raglekha*); bear in mind that 'feet' in Hebrew is a euphemism also for genitals, and you have David giving a nod and a wink to Uriah, telling him to have a nice time with his wife.

Uriah, however, as he goes out, sees David's men camped out at the palace gates, and doesn't go home. David is told this, and calls Uriah to account. Uriah explains that he can't go and have a good time, while his comrades in arms and God's purpose are on the field. They are in tents, why should he be in bed with his wife?

David tries another ruse, and has Joab come for a feast, hoping that when he is relaxed a bit, his thoughts will turn to the comely form of his wife. All that happens is that he gets drunk, and stays the night again with the guys at the gate.

v. 14-21. David descends the next step into the pit, by writing to Joab, and ordering him to put Joab in the front line, where the fiercest fighting is, then to leave him standing alone as a sitting duck.

v.22-25 In the fierce battle, Uriah is killed, and David excuses Joab for his complicity in this murderous action.

v.26-27 Bathsheba has lost a faithful husband, and mourns him; as soon as her mourning is over, deceitful David has her brought to the palace as his new wife. All seems to be covered up, David's reputation as 'the lamp of Israel' intact, but God is 'broken up' (Heb. **עָרַע** *yera'*) about David's actions.

2 Sam 12.1-12 Faithful Nathan, the prophet to David, tells David the parable of the rich man who steals the poor man's lamb, and David is insensed, ready to strike the villain of this story. Nathan reveals to David 'you are the man!' (Heb. **אַתָּה הָאִישׁ** *attah ha-ish*) and the 'lamp of Israel' is eclipsed by his own folly.

The Lord speaks his disappointment and anger over David's actions, when God has given so much, to take this man's wife. Because of this, David's dynasty will be full of violence and bloodshed. Furthermore, David is going to be shamed as his women are given to another, close to him, so that his secret sin will result in public exposure and shame.

*These are the moments in Scripture which are most real and immediate to us, because we see that God is not trying to protect us from the truth by making great saints out to be sinless. Instead, He puts us in the place where we can get a full view of the anguish David has caused, where we feel the pain of Bathsheba and the shame David feels. And we feel it with him, because we are sinners and know it also. We are thus ever reminded of our need of a rescuer, and of the recognition of our own deceptive hearts.*

## **Psalm 51**

### **An Appeal to the God of Covenant**

The setting of this Psalm is right after the expose of David's sin with Bathsheba.

There is something very New Covenant about this song of repentance, for adultery and murder under the law are capital offences, but David appeals to something in God, knowing that God has committed Himself irrevocably to David in covenant, establishing his house forever.

He opens with an appeal

**חַנְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים כְּחַסְדְּךָ** *Chaneni Elohim ke-chasdekha* Favour me, O God, because of Your covenant obligation, Your *chesed*.

He then appeals to God's *rachamim*, His compassion, asking Him to blot out His failures and to remove His sin.

David shows us a pattern here for us also, in open confession of his propensity to mess up, and asks for God's cleansing.

He also appeals for renewal of his spirit, his inner being, which has been violated by this whole affair. He appeals for God not to take His precious Holy Spirit from Him, for David knows what happened to Saul and Samson in similar circumstances. He asks God for restoration of joy and purity.

David promises he will teach the lessons of his failure to others, so that they will also follow the Lord.

There is an absolutely golden moment in this Psalm, where David acknowledges that it is not sacrifices and blood that God is really after, but brokenness of spirit and heart, in humility and dependence on the Lord. Then any sacrifices will be made relevant, backed up by the inner sacrifice of heart-reality.

2 Sam. 13b-17 God answers David's prayer, removing his sin. But the consequences of David's dishonouring God's name will be that the child to be born will not survive, and the child becomes ill. We leave David there, fasting and praying for a change of heart on God's part, his attendants pleading with him to get up and eat. David is in agony of heart, reaping the harvest of his failure.

**Day 101 2 Sam 12.18 – 31; 2 Sam.8.2- 12; 1 Chron.18.12-13; 1 Chron.11.10-47; 2 Sam. 23.9-17**

### **David Extends Israel's Borders**

The main reason David's reign is seen as the golden age of Israeli history is because he more than any other establishes the borders of Israel nearest to those delineated by God's promise to Abraham. David now pushes the northern territories right up to the River Euphrates, as he subdues the north-eastern Ammonites and Arameans (Syrians.)

2 Sam 12.18-23 David's prayer and fasting for his dying son by his adultery with Bathsheba is answered after a week in the death of the child. Although his servants fear telling him, David's reaction is to yield to the choice of God, and not to attack the Lord for His response. Perhaps David is remembering the God who is holy and before whom so many in the past had fallen in their sin, and realising that this is the consequences of dealing with a holy God with a planetary purpose.

2 Sam.12.26-31 (mirrored in 1 Chron.20.1b-3) Meanwhile, the campaign against the Ammonites and the Arameans is still going on. Joab sends word that they have captured Rabbah, into which the Ammonites had retreated after the battle, and they await David's coming to take charge. He takes the crown of Ammon, and puts the people to bonded labour under Israel's charge.

2 Sam.8.2 (mirrored in 1 Chron 18.2) David also subdues the Moabites in the south-east, slaughtering two thirds of their army, and sparing a third, bringing them into subjection to Israel.

2 Sam.8.3-4,7-8 (mirrored in 1 Chron.18.3-4,7-8) The Israelite armies also defeat Hadadezer, who had supplied the Ammonites with mercenaries and chariots from the north, thus establishing Israel's power along the Euphrates river.

2 Sam.8.5-6 (mirrored in 1 Chron 18.5-6) When the fellow Arameans from Damascus come to Hadadezer's aid, David has many of their troops slaughtered, and brings Damascus also into tribute to him.

1 Chron.18.12-13 (mirrored in 2 Sam.8.13-14) In a great battle in the south-eastern territory of Edom, at the battle of the Valley of Salt, Abishai, David's number three, conquers the Edomites, killing many thousands and bringing them into tribute.

2 Sam.8.9-12 (mirrored in 1 Chron 18.9-10) Tou of Hamath now realises that it is not wise to resist David, and so he sends a delegation to congratulate David on his victories, and sue for peace. David dedicates all the gifts received to the Lord, not his personal wealth.

1 Chron.11. 10 – 47 (mirrored in 2 Sam.23.9 – 39) There now follows a heroes gallery of David's warriors, in Hebrew, the *Gibborim* (Heb הגִּבּוֹרִים ) Of note among them are the three who risked their lives in the battle against the Philistines to break through the lines to bring David a drink of water from the well of his home town of Bethlehem (1 Chron.11.17-18) which he then poured out as an offering before the Lord, and Benaiah who fought a lion in a pit on a snowy day (1 Chron.11.22).

It's worth remembering as we look through the lists of names that these were key men to David, who were thought worthy of inclusion in the royal chronicles. Now they find their place in what has become for us the Scriptures, each a witness to God's rescuing power.

#### **Day 102 2 Sam.12.24 – 25; 1 Chron.3.4 – 9; 2 Sam 13.1 – 14.24**

##### **Family Trouble Begins for David**

2 Sam.12.24 – 25 Having experienced such crushing loss from the Lord's hand, David and Bathsheba now experience his grace. And what is such a sign of the way God rescues and redeems situations is that this troubled couple now give birth to the boy who will become the illustrious successor of David, Solomon, (Heb. שְׁלֹמֹה *Shlomo*, meaning 'peaceful, whole', a sign of the wholeness returned to David and Bathsheba) to whom his father also gives a prophetic name, Jedidiah (Heb. יְדִידְיָהּ *Yedidi-Yah*, 'beloved of YHWH'), significant in view of the turbulent circumstances of his birth.

1 Chron.3.4- 9 (mirrored in 2 Sam.5.13-16 and 1 Chron.14.3-7) During David's thirty-three year reign, many children are born to him, including a daughter named Tamar.

2 Sam.13.1-14 In this Story, we are never spared the grim detail of human sin. We have already seen it with David, the great king. The promise of bloodshed in his household now begins to unfold in a terrible episode in his family.

Amnon is David's firstborn son by his wife Ahinoam of Jezreel; he falls in love with his beautiful half-sister Tamar, daughter of David by Ma'acah the Geshurite princess (See 2 Sam.3.3) who is also the mother of Absalom.

Amnon is consumed by his lust, but Tamar is so well protected that there seems no access to her. He then enlists the help of his cousin, Jonadab, after he confides in him his passion for the girl. Jonadab hatches a plot for Amnon to feign illness, and get the sympathy of his father the King, getting him to send Tamar with a meal to cheer her half-brother up.

David goes along with the charade, and Tamar bakes and brings bread to Amnon; but he refuses to eat and sends everyone away except Tamar, whom he inveigles into his bedroom to hand-feed him. As she is offering the food, Amnon grabs her and despite her horrified protests, and even offers to marry him, he overwhelms and rapes her.

2 Sam.13.15-22 In a complete turn of attitude, Amnon now despises Tamar, perhaps for her rejection of his advances, and he throws her out. She pleads with him not to disgrace her, but he gets his servant to eject her, at which she tears her beautiful clothing and marks her head with ash as a sign of mourning.

Her brother, Absalom, now discovers what has happened, and takes Tamar into his own household to protect her and rescue her from shame. David is furious about the event, but does not seem to take any corrective action to bring Amnon to book. Meanwhile, Absalom nurses enraged hatred in his heart towards his eldest half-brother .

2 Sam 13.23-29 The old saw about revenge being a dish best eaten cold is true of Absalom's nursed grudge. Two years later, at the sheep shearing, Absalom organizes a family feast at Ba'al Hazor in Ephraim, inviting David. When David refuses, Absalom asks David to send Amnon to represent him, along with the other brothers.

David seems to smell a rat here, asking why Absalom should invite Amnon, perhaps sensing the brooding enmity between them. However, Absalom pushes and David sends all his sons to the party.

While everyone is enjoying a good celebration, Absalom orders his hit-men to murder Amnon, which they do, causing panic among the rest of his brothers, who flee the scene.

2 Sam 13.30-39 A 'Chinese-whisper' rumour comes to David that not only Amnon, but all his sons have been killed by Absalom, which sends him into an apoplexy of grief and prostration on the floor. But his nephew Jonadab puts him right, saying that only Amnon has been killed.

Absalom now flees to his mother's family at Geshur for protection , while his brothers return home, shocked and traumatized by the death of their eldest brother on the orders of Absalom. There is a shared time of open grief and tears when the brothers come back.

For three years, Absalom stays away in Geshur, but he is something of a favourite with David, and perhaps David understands the anger of this young man against Amnon.

2 Sam. 14.1-24 Joab the King's Commander sees his dear friend's grief, and wants to help him see the need for reconciliation and restoration of his son. He puts together a drama, in which a woman asks the king's help to reconcile her family with her son who has murdered his brother, against whom the family are baying for his blood.

David swears to her that he will intervene and bring back her son to her unharmed, at which she boldly asks David why he has heard her case, but still keeps Absalom in exile. She asks David to apply the same godly wisdom to his own situation as he has given to her.

David realises that Joab has had a hand in this plan, and he comes and acknowledges his gratitude to David for granting his desire to see Absalom pardoned. However, David

refuses to have Absalom in his presence, given the circumstances of his banishment, that he has murdered the crown prince.

### **Day 103 2 Sam 14.25 – 16.14; Psalm 3**

#### **David Descends, Absalom Ascends**

In the story of Absalom's coup against his father, there is much evidence of the movements of the human experience characterised by the teaching of Franciscan writer, Father Richard Rohr. Fr. Rohr's thesis is that pain which is not transformed is transmitted, and that the journey of a man's life begins with ascent, and then comes to a place of losing control, moving into descent, the way of the cross, but which is transformative, and leads to his maturity as 'the holy fool'.

For David, his ascent has brought him to a place of kingship, but he has abused power to accumulate, and specifically, in a violent manner to get power over Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. He is now at the place where his power is being broken on the wheel of family upheaval, as God promised him, which will, if he submits, transform him, and will lead to the place of wisdom, albeit wisdom bearing scars.

But Absalom is the 'angry young man' of Rohr's thesis, looking to gain power, to get position, driven by his ambition. He appears on the surface to want to use power for the good of his people, as though he has learned through initiation, but he lacks one great lesson, that of being mentored and 'initiated' to use Rohr's language, by the elders of his people. Thus, his power is politico-positional, seeking to ascend by means of gaining favour enough to violently displace his father in what a Freudian analysis might see as the typical Oedipal syndrome, particularly given that he also takes his father's wives and possesses them. However, Absalom does not last long enough to be broken by God through pain, and will not live to see the transformational power of suffering which his father will know.

2 Sam 14.25 – 28 We are told of Absalom's popularity and good looks – he has it all. Note that he names his daughter Tamar after his violated sister, keeping open that wound of injustice he feels over his father's estrangement from him for two years, even though he is back in the city.

2 Sam 14.29 -33 Absalom uses Joab, David's commander as his go-between, getting his attention by ruining his property, a power-move to force Joab to react. Finally, he gets an audience with the king, and David is reconciled face to face, and his son returned to court.

In terms of the law, Absalom has not done anything deserving punishment. The Mosaic code provides for the death of a rapist, and for a family member of the wronged woman to pursue and carry out the penalty would be acceptable. Thus Absalom makes the appeal on the basis of his legal action. (Deut.22.25)

2 Sam.15.1-12 Absalom now trades on his popularity, and gains favour by dispensing justice to those to whom he suggests the king is too busy to see them. He takes to himself the power, which is describes by the writer as 'stealing the hearts of Israel'. (v.6)

At Hebron, Absalom launches his bid for control, and before an assembly of guests, who have no idea what he is about to do, he has himself proclaimed king; he is supported in this by his father's counsellor, Ahithophel, and the popular support of many Israelites.

2 Sam. 15.13-37 David, the David who has confronted Goliath and the Philistines, who has led Israel against her enemies, now seems to crumble before his son. He hears of the popular support which Absalom has (v.13) and decides to go into exile for his and his family's safety, leaving concubines behind to care for the palace.

At this point, it becomes clear where the land lies. David has much support still, including a faithful foreigner, Ittai the Gittite, who swears a covenant of allegiance to David and puts his troops at David's disposal.

Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, offer him God's artefacts, bringing the ark to his aid; but David knows his God does not take sides in that way, and he asks them to go back to Jerusalem and let him know when the word of the Lord comes to them to call him back.

As David's tragic entourage heads east into the desert, a place very familiar to David from his days of hiding from Saul, one of David's advisers, Hushai, arrives in mourning to accompany the king. However, David urges him to go back and work against Absalom on his behalf to bring down his son's rebellion. Hushai agrees to serve David in this way, and goes back to Jerusalem.

2 Sam.16.1-14 In any political upheaval there will always be those who seek to capitalise on the chaos, and now Zibah arrives with a gift of provisions for the king, to gain the king's favour against his master, the restored son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth. Zibah accuses his master of staying in Jerusalem to support Absalom, thereby hoping to regain the throne. In response, David gives Ziba all of Mephibosheth's estates for his own. However, later it transpires that things are not all they seem.

David now also faces insult from Saul's clan, whom he deposed when he became king. A man called Shimei curses him and stones him as 'man of blood' who is getting his just deserts for what he did to Saul. Joab's brother Abishai wants to strike out against him, but David, yielding to the pain of rejection, puts the outcome into the Lord's hands, and asks for Him to judge between himself and Shimei.

Exhausted, they arrive in the desert, and take rest.

### **Psalm 3**

This Psalm is written by David at the time of his flight from Absalom.

David pours out his complaint to God, but also declares his utter reliance upon God, who lifts up his head.

In particular, David is able to sleep in safety because Lord is with him. In such a dire situation, there would fear at every moment, yet because of David's trust, even though he is pursued, he is confident in God.

He acknowledges that deliverance will come from the Lord, and ends with a call not for God only to deliver him, but to bless the people who are still in David's heart.

## Day 104 2 Sam. 16.15 – 19.4

### The Fall of Absalom

2 Sam.16.15-19 Absalom question Hushai's loyalty to him as a friend of his father, but Hushai takes advantage of Absalom's self-deception and flatters him as the one the Lord has chosen, with whom he would rather remain. Thus he is taken into the confidence of the usurper.

16.20-22 In fulfilment of Nathan's prophetic word to David, Ahithophel, David's renegade adviser, now advises Absalom to demonstrate his power and his disdain for his father's name by sleeping with the ten concubines left behind. Absalom does so, in a shockingly shameful public display of immorality.

16.23 – 17.4 Ahithophel knows how dangerous David's continued threat is to the new young ruler. (Note that Ahithophel is having his moment of power through manipulating the young prince – being the wearer of the crown is not necessarily the most powerful position, it seems.) He advises that David alone should be killed, and the people with him spared, to show Absalom's mercy. This seems good counsel.

2 Sam.17.5 – 14 But Absalom's pride and perhaps his determination not to give Ahithophel total control over him looks for a second opinion, and Hushai's advice is sought. Hushai points out David's ferocity, given his situation, and advises rather a general mobilisation of all Israel; this will also appeal to Absalom's vanity, the idea of his being victorious by crushing his father and supporters at the head of a vast army.

Hushai's advice is accepted, and Ahithophel's refused.

17.15-23 Hushai now gets word to the faithful priests Abiathar and Zadok that David should leave his hideout, in case Ahithophel's advice is followed. Hushai is buying them time, and putting them beyond reach of Ahithophel's plan.

The priests' messengers, Jonathan and Ahima'az, are almost discovered by Absalom's men, but manage to get away and warn David, who moves with all his people away from the fords of Jordan.

As a result of this rejection of his advice, Ahithophel now realises the battle is lost, and he commits suicide by hanging himself.

17.24-29 David continues to the ancient mustering point of Mahanaim, across the Jordan. Absalom and his troops pursue David into the eastern territories, but supporters from beyond Israel including Ammonites and Moabites bring David and his people supplies to keep them alive; perhaps these tributaries of Israel know it is better to live under David than under the treachery of Absalom.

2 Sam.18.1-5 There is a moment of choice here for David. He organises his armies, and is about to lead them out into battle, until it is pointed out that David will become the major target if he rides out with them. Does he then reject their advice and bravely put himself in the front line – or does he listen to his people and stay back, letting them be his defenders? This is a key decision for the warrior-king whose praise Israel has sung for years. Upon this perhaps much hangs for the future.

David decides to listen to them, and watches them as they march out to the battle from Mahanaim. With a heart of concern even at this point, he tells them to be gentle with Absalom for his sake, instructing each unit to spare his son.

18.6- 18. The battle takes place in the forest of Ephraim, which seems to be linked to Joshua 17.15, 18, where the people of Ephraim, a western tribe, do not have enough grazing land, so they are given extra land in the forest, here east of the Jordan, to extend their territory.

David's forces are victorious, and twenty thousand are killed in the battle.

In a freak occurrence, Absalom gets caught by his head in a tree and can't get down. This is reported to Joab, David's commander, who reprimands the messenger for not finishing off Absalom. But the messenger has heard David's explicit command not to harm Absalom. Joab, however, takes men with him and kills Absalom outright, bringing an end to the battle. Absalom is buried where he falls, with a heap of stones piled over him.

There is a touching tail-piece to this story, demonstrating Absalom's drive for power and recognition. Because he has no son to be remembered by, he builds himself a pillar, and names it after himself so that he will be remembered.

18.19- 19.4 Ahima'az, the son of Zadok who warned David to flee from Absalom, now wants to go and tell the king of the death of his enemy. However, Joab knows how David will react, and sends instead a Cushite messenger, with Ahima'az bringing up the rear. Ahima'az overtakes, and arrives there first, however, he doesn't give the news, perhaps because it's not his to give. The Cushite finally delivers the message of Absalom's death, and David is distraught, going to his room, and turning a day of victory into a day of mourning and defeat.

David is mourning because he realises where this tragedy was birthed, back in his own abuse of power with Bathsheba and Uriah. His family have played out his script of shame – the baby dying, his firstborn, Amnon, killed by his son for the rape of his daughter, the estranged Absalom then overthrowing his father, and now the death of a fine son whom he wanted to spare. As David mourns, he is weeping over the whole broken story, but will be transformed by his pain into a holy fool, who knows he does not control his own destiny by his actions.