

# **The Life of David**

## **David Flees from Jerusalem**

*2 Samuel 16:1-23*

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# David Flees from Jerusalem

## Scripture

John Stott observed in a sermon, “It was your great American wit, Mark Twain, who once said, ‘Man is the only animal that blushes, and the only animal that needs to.’” He went to say, “We are ashamed, are we not, of things we’ve done in the past. Nobody is free who is unforgiven. Instead of being able to look God in the face or to look one another in the face, we want to run away and hide when our conscience troubles us.”<sup>1</sup>

God had forgiven King David for his sins of adultery and murder. But the consequences of those sins dogged David, primarily through the evil that arose from within his own household. His oldest surviving son, Absalom, staged a revolt against David, forcing him to flee from his capital city, Jerusalem.

Let’s read about David fleeing from Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 16:1-23:

**<sup>1</sup>When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine. <sup>2</sup>And the king said to Ziba, “Why have you brought these?” Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink.” <sup>3</sup>And the king said, “And where is your master’s son?” Ziba said to the king, “Behold, he remains in Jerusalem, for he said, ‘Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father.’” <sup>4</sup>Then the king said to Ziba, “Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.” And Ziba said, “I pay homage; let me ever find favor in your sight, my lord the king.”**

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1998/february/3604.html>.

<sup>5</sup>When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually. <sup>6</sup>And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. <sup>7</sup>And Shimei said as he cursed, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! <sup>8</sup>The Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.”

<sup>9</sup>Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.” <sup>10</sup>But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’ ” <sup>11</sup>And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. <sup>12</sup>It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today.” <sup>13</sup>So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust. <sup>14</sup>And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself.

<sup>15</sup>Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. <sup>16</sup>And when Hushai the Archite, David’s friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, “Long live the king! Long live the king!” <sup>17</sup>And Absalom said to Hushai, “Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?” <sup>18</sup>And Hushai said to Absalom, “No, for whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. <sup>19</sup>And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you.”

<sup>20</sup> Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give your counsel. What shall we do?” <sup>21</sup> Ahithophel said to Absalom, “Go in to your father’s concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened.” <sup>22</sup> So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel. <sup>23</sup> Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom. (2 Samuel 16:1-23)

## Introduction

Absalom killed his older brother Amnon because Amnon had violated his sister, Tamar. Absalom fled to Geshur, where he stayed for three years. He then returned to Jerusalem but David would not see him for another two years. David’s chief military general, Joab, brokered a reconciliation between father and son. While he was living in Jerusalem, Absalom conspired to overthrow his father as king over all Israel. After four years, Absalom asked David if he could go to Hebron to make good on a vow. David allowed him to go Hebron, and Absalom mustered men from all over Israel to join him in a coup to overthrow David as king. David heard about this and made a hasty retreat out of Jerusalem with a number of people who were still loyal to him. He also sent some men back to Jerusalem to act as spies for him.

As we read about David’s flight from Jerusalem, we also learn about the behavior of several of his enemies.

## Lesson

Second Samuel 16:1-23 shows us the behavior of the king’s enemies.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The King's Enemy Is Deceptive (16:1-4)
2. The King's Enemy Is Derisive (16:5-14)
3. The King's Enemy Is Destructive (16:15-23)

## I. The King's Enemy Is Deceptive (16:1-4)

First, the king's enemy is deceptive.

David fled from Jerusalem in an easterly direction. He crossed the brook Kidron and then went up the Mount of Olives. Verse 1a says, **“When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him.”** We met Ziba in 2 Samuel 9:1-13. He used to serve King Saul. However, when David met him, he told David that Saul's son Jonathan, who was also David's best friend, had a son named Mephibosheth, who was crippled in his feet. David gave everything that had belonged to Saul to Mephibosheth, and he ordered Ziba and his servants to serve Mephibosheth and to farm his lands for him.

So, as David and his loyal supporters were fleeing from Jerusalem, Ziba met him **“with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine”** (16:1b). In their haste to flee Jerusalem, David and his supporters almost certainly did not pack food for the journey. **And the king said to Ziba, “Why have you brought these?” Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink”** (16:2). These must have seemed to be a thoughtful and kind gesture from Ziba.

Wondering where Mephibosheth was, **the king said, “And where is your master's son?” Ziba said to the king, “Behold, he remains in Jerusalem, for he said, ‘Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father’ ”** (16:3). *What an ingrate!* David must have thought to himself. After all that David

had done for Mephibosheth, this is how he was being repaid?

Though David would not act in decisive ways regarding his children, he did act decisively in this instance. David **said to Ziba, “Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours”** (16:4a). Ziba was understandably thankful. **And Ziba said, “I pay homage; let me ever find favor in your sight, my lord the king”** (16:4b).

Now, I asserted that the king’s enemy is deceptive. In what way was Ziba deceptive? How in the world was crippled Mephibosheth going to seize the throne from virile Absalom? Why, the notion is absurd! Moreover, later in 2 Samuel we learn that Ziba lied about his master (19:24-30). Mephibosheth was *never* disloyal to King David.

Ziba also did not join David. After he gave David the supplies, he returned to work the fields around Jerusalem. He probably thought that if David eventually won, he would have David’s favor. But, if David lost to Absalom, then Absalom would probably want Ziba to supply him with food.

David’s error was that he accepted on face value Ziba’s statement. David did not give Mephibosheth an opportunity to answer Ziba’s allegation that Mephibosheth was going to get back his grandfather’s kingdom.

The lesson for us is that there are always two sides to a story. It is incumbent upon us to hear both sides of the story before we make a judgment. For if we act hastily, we too may be deceived.

## II. The King’s Enemy Is Derisive (16:5-14)

Second, the king’s enemy is derisive.

Verse 5 says, **“When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually.”** Shimei was on a hill above David and his supporters

when he derisively hurled insults at David. You know the saying, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” That is simply not true. Words may be powerfully damaging. However, Shimei added stones to the barrage of words that he hurled at David (16:6). Shimei believed that God was punishing David with Absalom’s revolt for the death of Saul, as he shouted in verse 8, **“The Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.”**

Shimei’s derisive words eventually got under the skin of General Joab’s brother, Abishai. He offered to go and take off Shimei’s head, knowing that headless men are no longer able to curse.

But David would not agree to his proposal. He acknowledged that the Lord was punishing him for his sins. But David also humbled himself before the Lord, as he said in verse 12, **“It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today.”** David knew that it did not matter nearly so much how Shimei viewed him. It mattered far more how God viewed him. David was illustrating a spiritual principle that was taught by the Apostle Peter, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you” (1 Peter 5:5b–6).

People like Shimei come across our paths from time to time. They believe that the problems we are experiencing must be due to God’s punishment for our sin. They don’t really care about God and the things of God. They just care about deriding God’s children and blaming them for their own problems. They are not interested in reconciliation or restoration of the relationship. They just want us to get our “just deserts.” Bitterness consumes them and we are the targets of their derisive venom.

David’s response is illustrative as well. He demonstrates a

godly response to ungodly cursing. David could have responded in kind. But he did not. David could have allowed Abishai to take off Shimei's head. But he did not. Why? Because David understood that while Shimei was obsessed about David's imagined sins, David knew that he had real sins. David knew that Shimei's derisive outburst against him fell far short of what he really deserved from God. David knew that he was really guilty before God for his sins but he also knew that God had provided pardon to him.

So, the king's enemy is deceptive. And the king's enemy is derisive.

### III. The King's Enemy Is Destructive (16:15-23)

And third, the king's enemy is destructive.

David passed by Bahurim and arrived at the Jordan River. At about the same time, **Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him** (16:15). Commentator Dale Ralph Davis says, "Ahithophel is the Judas Iscariot of the Old Testament."<sup>2</sup> Ahithophel was at one time David's trusted advisor. But Ahithophel was also Bathsheba's grandfather. After David's sin against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, Ahithophel's relationship with David apparently soured. He left Jerusalem and went to his home town of Giloh. It was from there that he went and joined Absalom in Hebron so that Ahithophel was now counseling Absalom.

We might ask: Does Ahithophel not have the right to serve whomever he wants? Can he not change loyalty from David to Absalom? The answer to both questions is *No*. David and not Absalom was God's anointed king on earth. Davis states in startling language, "Ahithophel has no more right to forsake David than a true disciple has to forsake David's Son (cf. John 6:66–71)."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 206.

<sup>3</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 206.



Before continuing with the destruction by Ahithophel, the author of Second Samuel gives a brief description of Hushai's introduction as David's agent of espionage. You may recall that Hushai the Archite met David at the summit of the Mount of Olives. David believed that Hushai was God's answer to his prayer to turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. So he asked Hushai to return to Jerusalem on his behalf to thwart the counsel of Ahithophel. Therefore, Hushai returned to Jerusalem.

He went and said to Absalom, **“Long live the king! Long live the king!”** (16:16). This was not merely a formal greeting but was an abbreviated oath of allegiance. Here is where I marvel at Hushai's double entendre. Absalom wondered if Hushai was referring to him. Hushai, however, was undoubtedly referring to David, for David was God's king for whom Hushai wished long life.

Absalom pressed Hushai about his loyalty to David. He asked him, **“Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?”** (16:17). Absalom did not realize that Hushai had just been with his friend, David.

**And Hushai said to Absalom, “No, for whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain”** (16:18). Absalom again assumed that Hushai was referring to him. But Hushai was referring to David. Hushai was going to remain with David, although he assured Absalom that he would serve him, **“And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you”** (16:19). Absalom was satisfied that Hushai had left David. He was allowed to stay in Jerusalem. We shall see next time how Hushai thwarts Ahithophel's counsel.

Meanwhile, the action returns to Ahithophel. **Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give your counsel. What shall we do?”** (16:20). Absalom was able to enter the city of Jerusalem with no opposition whatsoever. It had been surprisingly easy. He wanted to know how to assert his supreme authority. **Ahithophel**

said to Absalom, **“Go in to your father’s concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened”** (16:21). It was common in those days for conquering kings to take the vanquished king’s wives and concubines for himself. Ahithophel knew that this would send a message to all Israel—and especially to David—that Absalom was now the king over all Israel. Verse 22 says, **“So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.”** It should be noted that this sexual sin took place on the same roof from which David saw the beautiful Bathsheba and took her for himself.

Second Samuel 16 concludes with this statement, **“Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.”** Ahithophel’s words were considered wise, as if God himself had given them. But, when he turned away from David, his counsel was that of a betrayer and his words were intended to destroy David.

After Nathan confronted David about his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, the Lord said to David through Nathan, “ ‘Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.’ Thus says the Lord, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun’ ” (2 Samuel 12:10–12). We must see that Ahithophel’s counsel was actually a fulfillment of God’s judgment against David.

Yet there is hope even in the destructive intention of Ahithophel. He intended to destroy David. However, his counsel was a

fulfillment of God's judgment against David. God shows that he uses even an enemy to fulfill his ultimate purposes.

### Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed David fleeing from Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 16:1-23, let us take comfort from God's sovereign control even over his enemies.

David's enemies were deceptive, derisive, and destructive.

Ziba was deceptive. He pretended to be on David's side. Later he was found out to be liar.

Shimei was derisive. He cursed David and threw stones at him.

And Ahithophel was destructive. He counseled Absalom to violate David's concubines. He betrayed David to Absalom.

Enemies similar to David's enemies were deceptive, derisive, and destructive toward David's Greater Son, Jesus Christ.

The crowd was deceptive. They pretended to be on Jesus' side. Later they called for Jesus to be crucified.

The thief on the cross was derisive. He blasphemed Jesus saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39).

And Judas was destructive. He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:15).

Although Jesus was crucified, he eventually was raised back to life again by his heavenly Father. He endured deception, derision, and destruction for all of David's sins and also for all of the sins of his elect.

God is still sovereignly controlling all the actions of his enemies. And there is great comfort in that for us. Amen.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

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