

2 Samuel 4: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 August 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] 2 Samuel chapter 4 When Ish-bosheth Saul's son heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of raiding bands.

The name of the one was Beanna, and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon, a man of Benjamin from Beeroth, for Beeroth also is counted part of Benjamin. The Beeroths fled to Gittayim, and have been sojourners there to this day.

Jonathan the son of Saul had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled.

And as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame, and his name was Mephibosheth. Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Beanna, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-bosheth, as he was taking his noonday rest.

And they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Beanna his brother escaped. When they came into his house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him.

[1 : 07] They took his head and went by the way of the Arabah all night, and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul your enemy, who sought your life.

The Lord has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring. But David answered Rechab and Beanna his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity.

When one told me, Behold, Saul is dead, and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth?

And David commanded his young men, and they killed them, and cut off their hands and feet, and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron.

In 2 Samuel chapter 4, following the defection of Abner, Ish-bosheth's situation is fairly dire. Ish-bosheth is described as Saul's son at the beginning of the chapter. He displays the same loss of courage that Saul often exhibited here.

[2 : 19] All the signs are that Ish-bosheth would make peace come to terms with David, given the chance. However, before he could do so, someone else acts. Rechab and Beanaiah are men of a Gibeonite city in the region of Benjamin, Beeroth.

The Benjaminites would likely have had tensions with the Gibeonites, as they had to live alongside each other, and we find out later on that Saul had killed a great number of the Gibeonites. Rechab and Beanaiah are Benjaminites, though.

They're not getting revenge for something that had been done to their people, but trying to take advantage of the turn in Ish-bosheth's fortunes. Mephibosheth is introduced to us at this point. Mephibosheth was crippled at the age of five, after his father and grandfather were killed in the battle at Jezreel.

Like Ichabod back in 1 Samuel chapter 4, he's a child whose life is indelibly marked on the day that he loses his father and grandfather in a great battle, in which Israel suffers a terrible defeat.

Both Ichabod and Mephibosheth stand as remnants of their father's houses, remnants that show the judgment that their father's houses have fallen under. At this point, after seven years of David's reign, Mephibosheth would be twelve years old.

[3 : 28] He's a cripple now. He's probably not acceptable as a king on account of this fact. Cripples could not become priests, and we must presume that they couldn't become kings either. Apart from Ish-bosheth, Mephibosheth is the last man who could potentially have continued Saul's dynasty.

Mentioning him at this point underlines the importance of Ish-bosheth his uncle and Michael his aunt. Rechab and Beanah kill Ish-bosheth in a way similar to Saul's own death. Ish-bosheth is struck in the belly and then he is decapitated.

Once again, there is someone bringing trophies of the dead king to David. David himself draws the parallel between the killing of Saul and the action of the Amalekite, and the actions of Rechab and Beanah here in the case of Ish-bosheth.

Once again, it would seem that David is compromised by the actions of violent and opportunistic men, who seek to make him complicit in the deaths of his adversaries. As in chapter 1 with the Amalekite, David's young men perform the execution.

The hands and the feet of Beanah and Rechab are cut off, perhaps to emphasise David's abhorrence of the action that they had performed with them. They are hanged as a public spectacle, a warning to any who would seek to gain favour in the same way.

[4 : 36] We probably would not be wrong though to contrast the extent of David's zeal, in this instance, from his handling of Joab in the previous chapter. Compared to what he does to Rechab and Beanah, his treatment of Joab seems quite lacklustre.

All of this colours the reader's judgement of David's motives in these matters. When people are dispensable, and the action is politically expedient, David is prepared to exercise the most vigorous justice against them.

However, when it is not so expedient, and the people are not so dispensable, as in the case of Joab, David's actions seem to be somewhat more restrained. David, although he does abhor the actions of Joab, does not punish him with anything like the vigour that he punishes Rechab and Beanah.

This is a common human tendency. We are all often reluctant to execute true justice upon people who are key figures within our institutions, people who are close to us, or that we have some personal attachment or beholdenness to.

However, when justice is not truly impartial in such matters, our institutions and our societies can become compromised at their roots. David's failure to deal effectively with Joab, and impartially with Joab, political expediency be damned, is a crack in the very foundation of his regime that only grows over time.

[5 : 51] It would cost David very dearly in the long term. A question to consider. In what ways might the story of Rechab and Beanah remind us of the story of Ehud and Eglan, back in Judges?

What might the parallels teach us? Rechab and Beanah'm