

IDENTIFICATIONAL GRACE

A Devotional Meditation on Va'etchanan (And I Plead)

Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11; Isaiah 40:1-26;
2 Samuel 9:1-8; 16:1-4, 19:24-30; Luke 22:39-46; 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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The story of the rebellion by King David's son, Absalom, says a lot about our God and his relationship to his people. It also says a lot about Messiah's first and second coming. When much of Israel followed Absalom in the revolt, David chose to go into exile rather than fight at Jerusalem.

On the way into exile, David met Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, who had come with provisions for the king's entourage. Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan, son of King Saul. Because of their covenantal relationship, Jonathan



Mephibosheth and Ziba. Image generated by Grok, created by xAI.

had advocated for David when Saul declared him an enemy of the state and mobilized all of Israel to try and kill him. When God elevated David to the throne, he repaid Jonathan's kindness by bringing Mephibosheth out of exile, giving him a place at the king's table in Jerusalem, and restoring to him the lands of his grandfather.

This remarkable kindness David gave to the descendant of one who tried to kill him was also an act of mercy for a disabled man who had no hope of livelihood. Mephibosheth had been crippled as a child, and as the only surviving heir to the former king, he had to rely on the charity of others. That's what moved him receive David's gracious mercy with the exclamation, "What is your servant, that you should show regard for a dead dog such as I?" (2 Samuel 9:8)

Imagine David's distress when, at his lowest moment, Ziba met him with the story that Mephibosheth refused to go into exile with the king and instead was plotting how to profit from Absalom's rebellion. The devastating news moved David to remove his grace from Mephibosheth and give all his lands to Ziba.

The story took another twist upon David's return:

And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. He had neither taken care of his feet nor trimmed his beard nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in safety. And when he came to Jerusalem to meet the king, the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" He answered, "My lord, O king, my servant deceived me, for your servant said to him, 'I will saddle a donkey for myself, that I may ride on it and go with the king.' For your servant is lame. He has slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you. For all my father's house were but men doomed to death before my lord the king, but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to cry to the king?" And the king said to him, "Why speak

any more of your affairs? I have decided: you and Ziba shall divide the land.” And Mephibosheth said to the king, “Oh, let him take it all, since my lord the king has come safely home.”

2 Samuel 19:24-30 ESV

Why didn't David commission an inquiry into the matter to determine the best way to achieve justice? At least one of the men was lying, so it would be right to find out the truth. However, as the absolute monarch, David had already issued an irrevocable decree when he stripped Mephibosheth of his possessions on the accusation by Ziba. He couldn't reverse that decree, particularly since Ziba had supported the king during the rebellion, and before that had served Ziba faithfully for many years. That's why he did the best he could by dividing the land between the two of them.

How Ziba received this decree is not recorded. Perhaps he was satisfied with receiving title to his own estate. What is more important is Mephibosheth's response. He spoke as one who knew his very identity was bound to the King. At the King's word, he would live or die, prosper or perish. If the King was merciful once, he would be merciful again, even if Mephibosheth had to start over with nothing. Or, if the King chose otherwise, he had no defense, because he owed his very life to the King.

We've seen this elsewhere in the Bible. It's not a fatalistic acceptance of the decree by a capricious deity, but the complete surrender of one who knows he would not exist if his sovereign willed otherwise. That's what moved Job to declare,

Though he slay me, I will hope in him;
yet I will argue my ways to his face.

Job 13:15 ESV

It's what moved Paul to declare that God's grace was sufficient even when the Almighty chose not to relieve him of the mysterious “thorn in the flesh.” It's also what moved Messiah Yeshua to accept and obey the Father's will even though he prayed fervently that he might be spared the ordeal of the cross.

They learned this attitude from Moses. He also pleaded with God after receiving what seemed a harsh and unjust judgment:

And I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying, “O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours? Please let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon.” But the Lord was angry with me because of you and would not listen to me. And the Lord said to me, “Enough from you; do not speak to me of this matter again.”

Deuteronomy 3:23-26 ESV

This tells us much about why the righteous suffer. It's not that they have suddenly become wicked, but because they are already clinging tightly to their Redeemer. The wicked and those with a casual religion might not even know how to cling to him, or why they should. Thus, when suffering inevitably comes, it often falls on those who are able to bear it because their identity is in the one who will bring them through it.