David and Mephibosheth

Bible Stories Anthology — 2 Samuel 9

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

A Seat at the King's Table

A young man who cannot walk is carried into the throne room of the king of Israel. He is the grandson of the king's worst enemy. He has spent most of his life hiding in a town whose name means something like *no pasture*, expecting that one day the new king's soldiers would find him. Now they have.

He throws himself face down on the floor. The king speaks his name. And instead of a sentence of death, he hears: "Fear not."

By the end of the day, he owns his grandfather's estate, has a household of servants to farm it, and has been given a permanent seat at the king's own table, "as one of the king's sons."

Only thirteen verses long, 2 Samuel 9 is one of the least-known stories in the Old Testament, and one of the clearest pictures of grace in the whole Bible. Every piece of it — the enemy's house, the lame feet, the far-off hiding place, the covenant made for someone else's sake, the invitation, the table — describes what God has done for everyone who believes in His Son.

The Setting

When. Some years after David became king. Saul and his son Jonathan had died together in battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31). David had reigned seven and a half years in Hebron over Judah, and then over all Israel from Jerusalem, which he had captured from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5). God had given him victory over his enemies on every side (2 Samuel 8), and had made him a

great promise: his house and his throne would be established for ever (2 Samuel 7). David was secure, successful, and at peace.

Where. Jerusalem, the new capital, and David's palace there. The story reaches back across the Jordan River to Lo-debar, a small town in the hills of Gilead east of the Jordan, far from the court.

Who. David, king of Israel; Ziba, a former servant of Saul's household; Mephibosheth, the lame son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul; Machir son of Ammiel, the man who had sheltered him; and, behind it all, Jonathan, David's friend, now dead.

The situation. This is the **Mosaic Law administration**. An **administration** is a period in which God deals with mankind on a particular basis; Israel lived under the covenant of the Law given at Sinai. Within that administration, God was now doing something new: establishing a royal line through David, from which the Messiah would come.

To understand this story, the reader needs to know three things from earlier chapters.

First, a friendship. Saul hated David and tried many times to kill him. But Saul's eldest son, Jonathan — the heir to the throne — loved David. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1). Jonathan took off his own royal robe and gave it to David, with his sword, his bow and his belt (18:4) — as though handing over the kingdom that should have been his.

Second, a covenant. When Saul's hatred forced David to flee, Jonathan made David swear an oath:

> **1 Samuel 20:14** *And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not:*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:15** *But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.*
>
> **1 Samuel 20:42** *And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever…*

Jonathan knew David would one day be king. He knew what new kings usually did to the families of the old ones. So he asked David to promise that when that day came, David would show "kindness" to Jonathan's family for ever.

Third, a fall. When word came that Saul and Jonathan had died, panic swept Saul's household:

> **2 Samuel 4:4** *And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.*

A five-year-old boy lost his father and grandfather in one day. His nurse snatched him up and ran — and in her haste, she dropped him. Both his feet were crippled for life. The grandson of a king, heir to a royal house, spent the rest of his childhood lame and in hiding.

The Story, Told Faithfully

For Jonathan's Sake

> **2 Samuel 9:1** *And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?*

David asked the question. No one had come to him to ask for anything. No one from Saul's house was petitioning the king. David went looking.

This is a **figure of speech** — a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used to add emphasis or feeling. This one is **erotesis**, a question asked not simply for information but to express something the speaker feels deeply. David was not merely curious. His question showed what was on his heart.

"The house of Saul." In the ancient East, when a new dynasty came to the throne, the new king very often killed every male of the old king's family, so that no rival could ever rise up and claim the crown. Scripture records it happening again and again in Israel's later history (1 Kings 15:29). One of Saul's sons, Ish-bosheth, had already been murdered in his bed by two men who expected David to reward them (2 Samuel 4:5-7); David had them executed instead. Anyone left of Saul's house had every reason to fear the new king.

"That I may shew him kindness." The word is *chesed*: loyal love, covenant faithfulness, the love that keeps its promises. It is the same word Jonathan had used when he asked David to swear: "thou shalt not cut off thy *kindness* from my house for ever" (1 Samuel 20:15).

"For Jonathan's sake." Here is the key to the whole story. David did not ask whether anyone from Saul's house *deserved* kindness. He did not ask whether anyone had been loyal to him. He wanted to show kindness *for someone else's sake* — for the sake of the friend he had made a covenant with.

The Kindness of God

> **2 Samuel 9:2** *And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he.*
>
> **2 Samuel 9:3** *And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.*

Ziba had been a steward in Saul's household. David asked him the same question — and this time, listen to how David phrased it: "that I may shew *the kindness of God* unto him." Not just David's kindness. God's kindness. The kind of kindness God shows: undeserved, freely given, faithful to His word. David meant to treat Saul's family the way God had treated him.

Ziba's answer is interesting. Before he said anything else about the boy — before his name, before where he lived — he said: "which is lame on his feet." Perhaps he meant it as a warning: *he is no threat to you; he cannot fight or rule.* Or perhaps as a reason David would not want him: *he is crippled; he would be no credit to your court.* Either way, the first thing Ziba mentioned was the thing that made Mephibosheth weak.

Remember that in David's day, the lame were looked down on. When David captured Jerusalem, the Jebusites had mocked him from their walls by saying that even the blind and the lame could hold the city against him, and a saying grew up from that day: "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house" (2 Samuel 5:8). Now David was about to bring a lame man into his house — to stay.

Lo-debar

> **2 Samuel 9:4** *And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.*
>
> **2 Samuel 9:5** *Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar.*

"Where is he?" David did not ask whether he was worth finding. He asked where he was.

"In Lo-debar." The meaning of the name is debated, but it is usually explained as *no pasture* — or, from a closely related word, *no thing*, *nothing*. It was a small town in Gilead, across the Jordan, well away from Jerusalem. Mephibosheth was not even living in his own house; he lived "in the house of Machir," dependent on another man's hospitality. The grandson of the first king of Israel was a lame man living as a guest in a place called *nothing*, far from the court, hoping the king would never think of him.

"Then king David sent, and fetched him." The king did not wait for Mephibosheth to come to him. He sent for him. He "fetched" him — the word means to take, to bring. Mephibosheth could not have made the journey on his own feet. He was carried to the king.

Machir, the man who had sheltered him, appears again years later. When David was driven from Jerusalem by his son Absalom's rebellion, a group of men brought David and his exhausted followers food and bedding in the wilderness — and among them was "Machir the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar" (2 Samuel 17:27-29). The man who had once hidden Saul's grandson from David ended up caring for David himself. As this series understands it, David's kindness to Mephibosheth had won Machir's heart too.

Face Down Before the King

> **2 Samuel 9:6** *Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!*

Notice how he is introduced: "Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul." Both halves of his identity are named. He was Jonathan's son — the son of David's dearest friend. And he was Saul's grandson — the grandson of the man who had spent years trying to kill David.

His name is worth knowing. *Mephibosheth* means something like *from the mouth of shame*; the *bosheth* at the end of it is the Hebrew word for *shame*. In the family list in Chronicles, he is called Merib-baal (1 Chronicles 8:34). *Baal* meant *lord* or *master*, and was used in personal names in Saul's time; but it was also the name of the Canaanite god, and many scholars think the name was later changed in the books of Samuel to *bosheth*, shame, so that the idol's name would not be spoken. Whatever its history, the name he carries in this story is *shame*. A lame man named Shame lay face down on the floor of the king's palace.

"He fell on his face, and did reverence." This was how a subject came before a king in the East: flat on the ground, face to the floor. For a man with crippled feet, it was also the only way he could have come

down before the throne — carried in, and lowered, or dropping himself to the floor. He had no idea what was about to happen. He had spent his whole life expecting this day to be his last.

“And David said, Mephibosheth.” The king said his name. Not “son of Saul.” Not “the lame one.” His name.

“Behold thy servant!” Mephibosheth’s answer was the answer of a man with nothing to bargain with. *I am your servant. Do with me what you will.*

Fear Not

> **2 Samuel 9:7** *And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father’s sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.*

“Fear not.” The first words the king said to him after his name. The thing Mephibosheth had feared all his life was not going to happen.

Then came three gifts, each one greater than the last.

“I will surely shew thee kindness.” In Hebrew, the verb is doubled — literally, *showing kindness I will show thee*. This is a figure of speech called **polyptoton**, the same word repeated in different forms for emphasis. It means *I will most certainly show you kindness*. There is no “maybe” in it. And it is “for Jonathan thy father’s sake.” Mephibosheth’s standing before the king rested entirely on someone else — on his father, and on the covenant his father had made.

“And will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father.” “Father” here means grandfather; in Hebrew, *father* is used of any ancestor. Saul’s family estate, which had passed to the crown, was given back. A man who had lived on someone else’s charity in Lo-debar now owned land.

“And thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.” This was the greatest gift of all. To “eat bread” at a king’s table was more than a meal. It was a permanent place in the king’s household, an honour, and a lifelong provision. When David was dying, he told Solomon to show kindness to the sons of a loyal friend by letting them “be of those that eat at thy table” (1 Kings 2:7). And the last verses of the book of Kings record how a Babylonian king released Judah’s captive king Jehoiachin from prison, “changed his prison garments: and he did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life” (2 Kings 25:29). To eat at the king’s table was to be taken into the king’s own household.

A Dead Dog

> **2 Samuel 9:8** *And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?*

“What is thy servant?” — erotesis again. Mephibosheth was not asking for information. He was saying: *I am nothing*.

“Such a dead dog as I am.” In the East, the dog was not a pet; it was a scavenger of the streets, unclean and despised. A *dead* dog was lower still: useless, worthless, something to be thrown out. This was an **idiom** — an expression whose meaning is found in the way a people used it rather than in its separate words — for utter worthlessness. David had once used it of himself, when Saul was hunting him: “after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea” (1 Samuel 24:14). Mephibosheth used it with

complete sincerity. He knew what he was: the grandson of the king's enemy, lame, living on charity, with nothing to offer. And the king was looking on him with kindness.

That is exactly how grace feels to the one who receives it. It is always a surprise, because it is always undeserved.

As One of the King's Sons

> **2 Samuel 9:9** *Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.*
>
> **2 Samuel 9:10** *Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.*

David did not simply hand Mephibosheth a deed to land he could not farm. He provided the workers too. Ziba, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants — a large household, which had evidently been doing well managing Saul's property — was assigned to farm the estate for Mephibosheth and bring him its produce. The lame man who could not work his own land was given everything needed to make it productive. And still — "but Mephibosheth… shall eat bread alway at my table." The land would provide for his household. The king would provide for him.

> **2 Samuel 9:11** *Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.*

"As one of the king's sons." Here is the height of it. Mephibosheth was not seated at the table as a servant, or a guest, or a pensioner. He was seated as a son. The grandson of David's enemy was treated as though he were David's own child.

> **2 Samuel 9:12** *And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.*

He had a young son of his own. The kindness David promised to Jonathan's house "for ever" (1 Samuel 20:15) reached the next generation too. The family line that should have been wiped out would go on.

> **2 Samuel 9:13** *So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet.*

Four times in this short chapter the table is mentioned: "thou shalt eat bread at my table continually" (9:7); "shall eat bread alway at my table" (9:10); "he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons" (9:11); "he did eat continually at the king's table" (9:13). The repetition is deliberate. The table is the point of the story.

And then the last words of the chapter: "and was lame on both his feet." The chapter began with his lameness (9:3) and ends with it. David's kindness did not heal his feet. He was still lame. But now he was lame *at the king's table*. Many readers have pictured it this way: when Mephibosheth sat down at the royal table among the king's sons, his crippled feet were hidden under it, and he looked like every other son of the king. Scripture does not draw that picture itself, but it captures the truth of the chapter. What he was had not changed. Where he sat had.

The Rest of the Story

The account of Mephibosheth does not end in chapter 9, and to tell it faithfully we should follow it to its end.

Years later, David's son Absalom rebelled, and David had to flee Jerusalem. As he left, Ziba met him with donkeys loaded with bread, raisins, summer fruit and wine for the king's people — a generous and timely gift. David asked where Mephibosheth was.

> **2 Samuel 16:3** *And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father.*
>
> **2 Samuel 16:4** *Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth…*

Ziba claimed that Mephibosheth had stayed behind hoping the rebellion would give him Saul's throne back. David, in the heat of his flight, believed it, and gave Ziba all Mephibosheth's property on the spot.

When the rebellion was crushed and David returned, Mephibosheth came down to meet him:

> **2 Samuel 19:24** *And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace.*

In the East, these were signs of deep mourning. From the day David left, Mephibosheth had not cared for his feet, trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes. He had grieved for the king the whole time he was gone.

> **2 Samuel 19:26** *And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame.*
>
> **2 Samuel 19:27** *And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes.*
>
> **2 Samuel 19:28** *For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?*

Mephibosheth's account was that he had wanted to go with David, had told Ziba to saddle a donkey for him since he could not walk, and that Ziba had gone off with the donkeys and then lied about him. Scripture does not tell us plainly which man was telling the truth. But the signs of mourning speak for Mephibosheth, and so does his answer. He did not demand his rights. He said: *all of my family deserved death from you, and you set me at your table instead. What right do I have to ask for anything more?*

> **2 Samuel 19:29** *And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land.*
>
> **2 Samuel 19:30** *And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.*

David split the land between them. Scripture records the decision without comment. But it records Mephibosheth's reply, and his reply says everything: "let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is

come again in peace unto his own house." He did not care about the land. He cared about the king. The man who had once been given everything for another man's sake now loved the king for his own sake.

And one more mention closes his story. Later, when a famine and a demand for justice for Saul's crimes against the Gibeonites led to the deaths of seven of Saul's descendants, scripture records:

> **2 Samuel 21:7** *But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.*

Once again, Mephibosheth was kept safe — not because of anything in him, but "because of the LORD's oath." The covenant held to the end.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

The son of David. The king in this story is David, the man to whom God had just promised, "I will set up thy seed after thee… and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever… my mercy shall not depart away from him" (2 Samuel 7:12-15). The word "mercy" there is *chesed*, the same kindness David showed Mephibosheth. The angel told Mary that her son would be given "the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). Jesus Christ is the Son of David, and what David did for Mephibosheth, the Son of David does for everyone who comes to Him.

He seeks the one who is hiding. David went looking — "Is there yet any?" — and sent for a man who would never have come on his own. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

The lame at the table. In one of His parables, Jesus told of a great supper, and of a master who said to his servant: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind" (Luke 14:21). The "halt" are the lame. The King's table is for those who could never have earned a place at it.

Lameness healed. David could seat Mephibosheth at his table but could not heal his feet. The Son of David could. After Pentecost, at the gate of the temple, a man "lame from his mother's womb" heard Peter say, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk," and "he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God" (Acts 3:6-8). And the prophet promised a day when all such brokenness would end: "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart" (Isaiah 35:6).

To the Grace Administration

This small story is one of the clearest pictures of grace in all of scripture. Set it beside what Paul writes to believers today:

- **From the enemy's house.** Mephibosheth was of "the house of Saul," David's enemy. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10).

- **Lame, and unable to come.** Mephibosheth could not walk to the king. “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6).
- **Far away in Lo-debar.** “At that time ye were without Christ… having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12-13).
- **Sought and fetched.** David sent and fetched him. God “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).
- **For another’s sake.** Mephibosheth received everything “for Jonathan’s sake.” We receive everything for Christ’s sake: “even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32); “he hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6).
- **Because of a covenant, not because of merit.** “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- **“Fear not.”** The first word Mephibosheth heard was the end of his fear. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16).
- **An inheritance restored.** He was given back all the land of Saul. The Father “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12).
- **As one of the king’s sons.** He was seated “as one of the king’s sons.” “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:7). “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1).
- **Seated at the table, continually.** He ate at the king’s table “continually.” God “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6) — seated with the One who was raised from the dead and ascended to God’s right hand.
- **The kindness shown for all to see.** David showed “the kindness of God.” Paul says God raised and seated us “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7).

And like Mephibosheth, believers still carry weaknesses in this life. Grace did not remove his lameness; it gave him a place. God “knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:14). Our standing does not depend on our feet. It depends on the King’s word, and the covenant made for another’s sake. One day, when Christ returns, the weakness itself will be gone.

To the Topic of Keeping Your Word

David had made a promise to Jonathan years before, when he was a fugitive with nothing. Now he was king, Jonathan was dead, and no one would ever have known if David had forgotten. He did not forget. He went looking for a way to keep his word. And he kept it again years later, when he spared Mephibosheth “because of the LORD’s oath.” A promise made in the LORD’s name is not dissolved by time, by success, or by the death of the one it was made to.

The Main Takeaway

We are brought from the house of the enemy to the King’s table — not for our own sake, but for the sake of Another, and because of a covenant that cannot be broken.

- **Grace goes looking.** David asked, “Is there yet any?” God sought you before you ever sought Him.
- **Grace begins with “Fear not.”** The King’s first word to the one who expected judgment was mercy.
- **Grace is for someone else’s sake.** Mephibosheth had nothing to offer; everything came “for Jonathan’s sake.” Everything we have comes for Christ’s sake.
- **Grace gives a place, not just a gift.** Not only land, but a seat at the table “as one of the king’s sons.”
- **Grace covers what we cannot fix.** He was still lame — but he was lame at the King’s table.
- **Grace changes the heart.** The man who received everything came to care only that “the king is come again in peace.”
- **Keep your word, as David did.**

For Our Learning — The People

- **David.** King of Israel, secure and established, who remembered his covenant with Jonathan and went looking for someone to show “the kindness of God” to. He restored Mephibosheth’s land, seated him at his table “as one of the king’s sons,” and kept his oath to the end.
- **Jonathan.** Saul’s eldest son and heir, who loved David “as his own soul,” gave him his robe and weapons, and made him swear to show kindness to his house for ever. He died in battle with his father, but his covenant outlived him.
- **Mephibosheth.** Jonathan’s son and Saul’s grandson, crippled at five when his nurse dropped him as she fled. He lived in hiding in Lo-debar, came before David expecting death, called himself “a dead dog,” and received land, servants, and a seat at the king’s table. Years later, slandered, he answered, “let him take all,” caring only for the king’s return.
- **The nurse.** Mephibosheth’s unnamed nurse, who fled with him in panic when news came of Saul’s and Jonathan’s deaths, and dropped him in her haste.
- **Ziba.** A steward of Saul’s household with fifteen sons and twenty servants, who told David where Mephibosheth was and was assigned to farm his land. During Absalom’s rebellion, he brought David supplies and accused Mephibosheth of treachery — an accusation Mephibosheth called slander.
- **Machir son of Ammiel.** The man of Lo-debar who sheltered Mephibosheth, and who years later brought food and supplies to David in the wilderness.
- **Micha.** Mephibosheth’s young son, through whom Jonathan’s line continued.
- **The LORD God.** The God in whose name David and Jonathan swore, whose “kindness” David set out to show, and whose covenant faithfulness to David’s own house stands behind the whole story.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Killing the old king’s heirs.** New dynasties in the ancient East often killed every male of the former king’s family (1 Kings 15:29), which is why Saul’s household fled.
- **A covenant between friends.** Sworn “in the name of the LORD,” binding on both men and on their descendants “for ever.”

- **The gift of a robe and weapons.** Jonathan gave David his royal robe, sword, bow and belt — a sign of deep covenant friendship and, in effect, of yielding his right to the throne.
- **Falling on one's face.** How a subject came before a king.
- **"A dead dog."** An expression of complete worthlessness and self-abasement.
- **The king's table.** A permanent place at the king's table meant lifelong provision, honour, and membership in the royal household (1 Kings 2:7; 2 Kings 25:29).
- **"Father" for grandfather.** In Hebrew, "father" can mean any male ancestor; David calls Saul Mephibosheth's "father."
- **Restoring an estate.** The family lands of the old king, which had passed to the crown, were given back to his heir.
- **Stewards and tenant households.** Ziba's large household farmed the estate and brought in its produce for the owner.
- **Signs of mourning.** Not washing one's feet or clothes and not trimming one's beard.
- **Names changed out of reverence.** *Baal* in names like Merib-baal (1 Chronicles 8:34) appears as *bosheth*, "shame," in Samuel — likely to avoid the idol's name.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Erotesis** — a question asked to express feeling or make a point rather than simply for information. "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul?" (9:1); "What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?" (9:8); "What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?" (19:28).
- **Polyptoton** — the same word repeated in different forms for emphasis. "I will surely shew thee kindness" (9:7), literally *showing kindness I will show* — certainly, without fail.
- **Idiom** — an expression whose meaning comes from how a people used it. "A dead dog" (9:8) — utter worthlessness; "eat bread at my table" (9:7) — a permanent place in the royal household; "as an angel of God" (19:27) — wise and able to discern the truth.
- **Repetition** — the same statement made again and again for emphasis. The king's table is named four times (9:7, 10, 11, 13); "lame on his feet" opens and closes the chapter (9:3, 13).

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Mephibosheth was not born lame.** He was crippled at five, when his nurse dropped him as she fled (2 Samuel 4:4).
- **Mephibosheth did not come asking for anything.** David went looking for him and "sent, and fetched him" (9:5).
- **The kindness was not for Mephibosheth's own sake.** It was "for Jonathan's sake" and because of a covenant made years before.
- **He was seated "as one of the king's sons,"** not merely fed as a servant or guest.
- **David's kindness did not heal him.** The chapter ends, "and was lame on both his feet."

- **“Father” in 9:7 means grandfather.** Saul was Mephibosheth’s grandfather.
- **The story continues beyond chapter 9.** Ziba accused Mephibosheth during Absalom’s rebellion; Mephibosheth called it slander, showed every sign of mourning for the king, and said, “let him take all” (2 Samuel 16; 19).
- **Mephibosheth was spared again later “because of the LORD’s oath”** (2 Samuel 21:7).

God’s Will and Intent

- **God seeks those who cannot come on their own.** David’s search pictures God’s.
- **God’s kindness is covenant kindness.** It rests on His promise, not on the worthiness of the one who receives it.
- **God shows kindness for His Son’s sake.** As David showed kindness “for Jonathan’s sake,” God receives us “in the beloved.”
- **God removes fear.** “Fear not” is His first word to those who come before Him expecting judgment.
- **God gives a place, not just provision.** A seat at His table, as sons.
- **God keeps His oath for ever.** David’s covenant with Jonathan held through a lifetime; God’s covenant in Christ holds for ever.
- **God wants His kindness displayed.** “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us.”