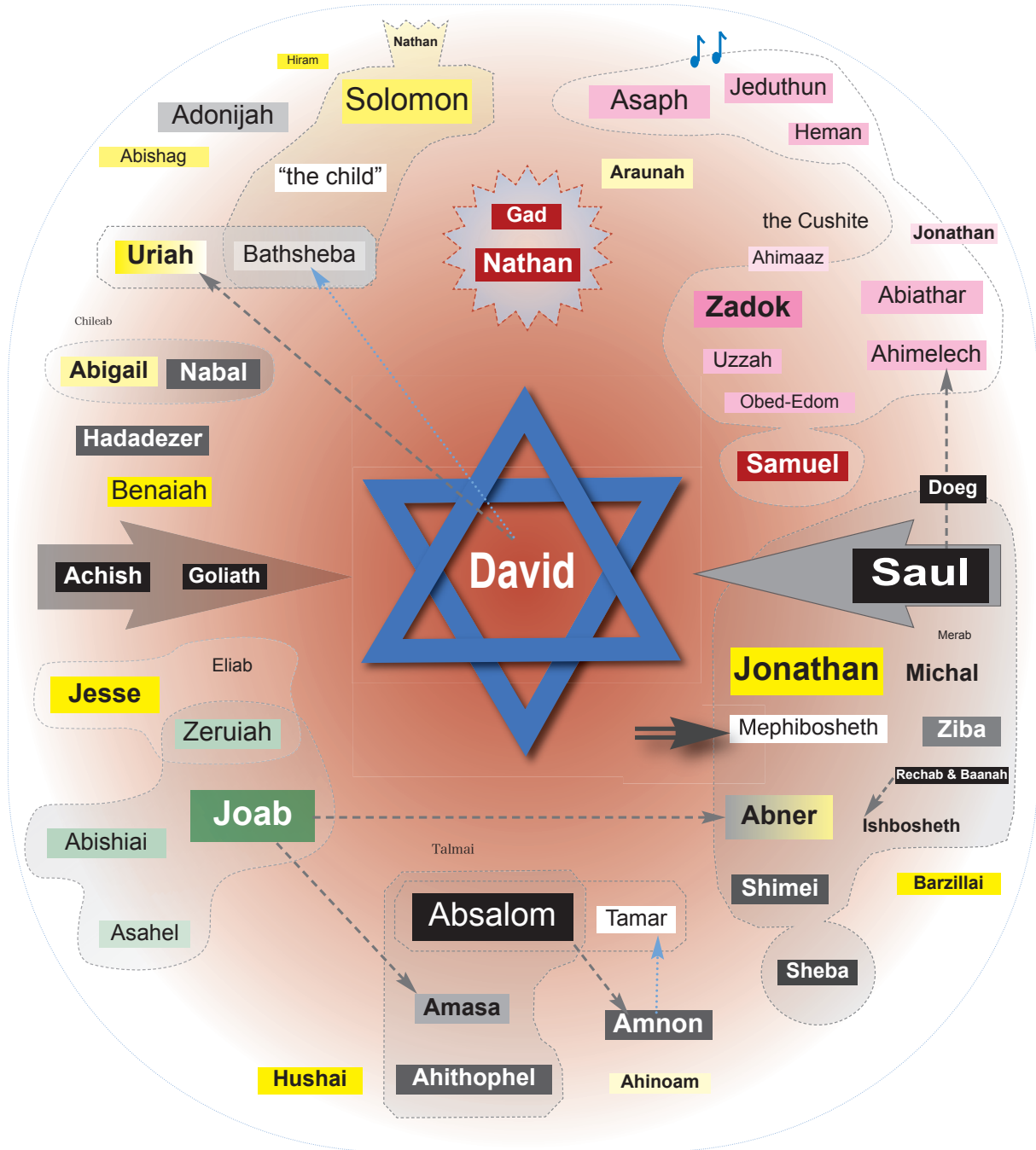


surrounded



people in the life of David

about Mephibosheth

1.) Mephibosheth was introduced briefly in 2 Sam. 4:4 as a son of Jonathan who was lame because of a childhood accident. His age and lameness probably disqualified him from becoming king of Israel. He was only five when his father died and probably only about seven or eight when his much older brother, King Ishbosheth, died.

2.) Mephibosheth was probably overlooked and spared by those who killed Ishbosheth in ch. four because of his handicap, as well as because of his young age. So it was good that he was not a physical or political threat to King David, even though his handicap must have been a personal sorrow and struggle.

3.) Though many years had passed since David made a covenant with Jonathan, Mephibosheth's father, in First Samuel ch. 20, David had not forgotten. So, when it was finally possible for him to do so, David searched for Jonathan's descendants and learned of Mephibosheth (9:1-5), to whom he showed the kindness of God (9:3), giving to him all the land that had belonged to King Saul (9:9-10), as well as treating him like one of his own sons (9:11).

4.) Saul's servant, Ziba, appears to be helpful (9:1-4) and obedient (9:11-12) in chapter nine. But later he slandered Mephibosheth in order to gain Saul's land for himself (16:1-4, 19:26-27). Through it all, however, Jonathan's son remained loyal and thankful to King David (19:24-30).

5.) It's helpful to ask what connection, if any, there may have been between Mephibosheth's godly character and his physical handicap and weak social position. As the grandson of King Saul it was natural for him to be afraid of David (9:6-7, 19:28). But the bigger question is if God had used his handicap to make him a godly man.

6.) The adjective, "humble," is derived from the verb "to humble" which often has to do with being afflicted or oppressed, like the people of Israel in Egypt (Ex. 1:11). Moreover being humble and being poor are closely related, with the same Hebrew term used for both. In his perfect time and way God removes affliction from his people.

7.) In the Gospels Jesus healed the lame and other handicapped folks, but Mephibosheth was not healed in Second Samuel. He is no longer handicapped, for he is with the Lord in heaven. Yet, one wonders why he was not healed. God miraculously spared David's life many times, so why didn't he heal this poor lame man? There are undoubtedly various reasons, including the fact that God's grace is often best seen and appreciated in the midst of our afflictions (2 Cor. 12:9).

8.) Let's describe Mephibosheth carefully and with sensitivity, since there is more involved than just the facts about his situation. A few points on the worksheet on the right are incorrect. At first glance many points appear to be true, but may only be partly or temporarily so. Various answers are possible.

Mephibosheth was...

Read Second Samuel 4:4, 9:1-13, 16:1-4, and 19:24-30.

() **handicapped?**

- () an accident victim (4:4)?
 - () unable to become king (4:4)?
 - () unable to walk (4:4, 9:3, 6, 8, 13)?
 - () unable to work (9:13)?
-

() **poor?**

- () lazy (9:8, 13)?
 - () homeless (9:4, 9-10)?
 - () without any land or servants (9:9-12, 16:1-4)?
 - () humble (9:8) and unselfish (19:29-30)?
 - () single, unmarried (9:12)?
-

() **important to David?**

- () afraid of David (9:6-7)?
 - () Jonathan's son (9:1-3)?
 - () treated like one of David's sons (9:11, 19:24-30)?
 - () always loyal to David (16:1-4, 19:24-27)?
 - () useful to the Lord (9:3)?
-
-
-
-
-

conclusions and applications

Mark the descriptive terms and phrases above as correct (), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

What's good about Mephibosheth?

Which of the three comments below do you like best?

WARM POSITIVE COMMENTS

“There are lots of positive things to say about Mephibosheth. Only Saul's dishonest servant, Ziba, described him negatively (16:1-4). It's true that he was not directly involved in farm work (9:10-13); but there is nothing that indicates that he was lazy. He did what he could, whenever he could, such as coming to meet David in 19:24. Also it is wrong to say that he was unable to walk at all. The verses merely say that he was lame, meaning that he could not walk very well. Moreover, he was not a total social outcast; other people cared about him (9:5) and he was married and had a son (9:12).”

“Best of all, Mephibosheth was a humble and godly man who pleased God in everything that he said. Let's not forget the Book of James and the fact that speaking properly is very important. What a wonderful man Mephibosheth was compared to Ziba! Ziba could walk well and work well but his words in 16:3 were wicked. Aside from Ziba's false charges, there's **nothing** negative said about Mephibosheth's character.”

COLD NEGATIVE COMMENTS

“If Mephibosheth was so great, why does the author of Samuel stress his lameness? We're told about this up front in 4:4 and again in 9:3. It's also the last thing said about him at the end of ch. nine. Sure Ziba was morally perverse, especially for taking advantage of Mephibosheth's handicap, but Jonathan's son was still lame and unable to walk well. So it wasn't just Ziba that took him lightly; others did so earlier in ch. four, as well.”

“It sounds cold hearted to say it, but the most obvious thing about Mephibosheth was his lameness. Argue if you will about his ability to walk some and to speak well, but he still could never physically repay David for his kindness. That's why he referred to himself as a “dead dog” in 9:8. It's popular to stress the things that those with handicaps can do rather than what they can not do. That's important in a way, but Mephibosheth was still lame and it doesn't do any good to deny it. Isn't it better to acknowledge his need?”

FINAL COMMENTS

“The author of Samuel stressed Mephibosheth's lameness, but he did so to emphasize “the kindness of God” (9:3) through David, rather than to put him down. This is a beautiful picture of God's grace toward us which we would not have if Mephibosheth had been as able bodied as everyone else. It's wasn't nearly as important for him to be useful to David or others for physical work, as it was for him to be useful to God spiritually, as he was.”