

“A Wise Woman for a Broken King”
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Continuing a series *A King for God’s People*

2nd Samuel 14:1-21

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She’d raised two sons; their father had died. One day the brothers quarrelled and fought. One struck the other and killed him. Her surviving son was guilty of a terrible crime. They were calling for his execution. But he was all she had left. Without him, she would be alone and destitute. Her husband’s name and legacy would be lost forever.

She’d brought her tale to break hearts to her king. She pleaded at his feet. *“Rescue me, your majesty, from those who would kill my son and cast me out. You know between good and evil. Your word will change everything.”*

The king ruled in her favour. He pardoned her son and promised to personally deal with anyone who came after him. *“As surely as God lives,”* the king vowed, *“not so much as a hair of your son’s head will be lost.”*

The king did not know how easy it would be to keep his vow. The truth is, she had no sons (dead or alive). Her story was a fiction. Yet it allowed the king to see a truth he was missing.

The woman was wise. The king was David.

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David was the king for God’s People. He was strong and courageous, sensitive and open-hearted. God was fond of David.

All was well . . . until David schemed himself into a sordid affair. He made Bathsheba sleep with him. She was married. David made her pregnant. Her husband was in the way. David had him killed. David married her. He would have got away with it, except God judges between good and evil. That’s good news for victims of kings or anyone with power. God vindicates victims.

David’s sin will have effects through his family, his dynasty, God’s People. Violence and calamity will poison them.

David had a huge family. Like other kings, he had many wives (with a harem on the side). From these came many sons. Daughters too, though we only know one’s name: Tamar.

Amnon, David oldest son and heir to his throne, fell hard for his half-sister Tamar. When she refused his advances, he raped her. David found out, was furious, but did nothing. After two years of silent rage, Tamar’s full-brother Absalom killed Amnon. Absalom fled. He was a murderer, guilty of killing the crown prince. David loved Absalom. Yet Absalom stayed banished.

Let's listen now to the Scripture reading. Three years have passed, and David can't stop thinking of Absalom.

See the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

III

This woman from the village of Tekoa was wise: quick on her feet, good with words, courageous.¹

Joab recruited her to perform a theatre for the king (though his majesty would not know she was acting). Joab got her ready — stage, costume, script. Like all good actors, she then made it her own story.² Like any great story, hers planted deep into David's imagination. There, it grew into a new possibility.

Her play was the story of a mother, torn between two sons, one who had murdered the other. The neighbours are screaming for law-and-order. The wrong must be righted, the price paid, and the guilty punished. Should she join in their cries? The victim is her son. What does she owe to him? Yet the victimizer is also her son. What of him?

She cannot help the first. He is dead and gone. The second son's crime is done. He cannot, to make up a word, be "un-guiltied." But he can be protected and restored! She pleads that possibility of saving him before the king. As we saw, the king sides with her.

Her play was based on true events, and she turns it to David himself. He is torn between two sons, one murdered by the other. Though Amnon committed brutal rape and incest, his blood is no less red on Absalom's hands. With the heir apparent assassinated, the House of David totters and the nation trembles. Justice must be done, for Amnon!

¹ Claudia Camp observes that "she persists through the dangerous and unpredictable turns in her conversation with David: she clearly understands that "with patience a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue can break bones" (Prov 25:15)." Claudia V. Camp. "Wise Woman of Tekoa: Bible" Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. March 1, 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on June 28, 2017; <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wise-woman-of-tekoa-bible>)

² I agree with Leah Kohn's assessment: "'And Joab put the words into her mouth,' suggest that, in addition to suggesting the woman of Tekoa present herself as a woman in mourning, Joab explains to her David's predicament and the reasons why Absalom does not legally deserve to be put to death. Beyond this information, Joab leaves to her discretion the exact words to use in addressing the king, as well as her replies to his questions. That Joab trusts the woman of Tekoa to this extent suggests her strength as a diplomat and the depth of her instinct, self- possession and intelligence." Leah Kohn. "The Woman of Tekoa: A Proper Use of Personal Talent" Torah.org December 19, 2012. (Viewed on June 28, 2017; <https://torah.org/learning/women-class66/>)

But what of Absalom, his son too? Amnon is beyond helping now. But Absalom? He cannot be “un-guiltied.” Yet he can be returned and restored.

The woman decided for her living son, and David backed her up. Now, can David imagine doing the same for his own real-life living son? For Absalom?

IV

Did you notice the image for death the wise woman offered? *“Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die.”* True. But does she use it truthfully? I worry? Is she trying to persuade David to “banish” murdered Amnon from his memory? “Amnon’s gone. You can’t help him. Forget him.”

Is forgetting the way to reconciliation?

David’s family has had too much forgetting. David wanted everyone to forget Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband whom he’d murdered.³ And what of Tamar? After Amnon raped her, David did nothing. I think he’d rather it be forgotten.

Dare we forget? Forget the wronged, the murdered, the abused and assaulted? Dare we forget? Forget those covered in mass graves, or sent in ashes up death-camp chimneys?

Canada’s 150! I am happy to celebrate our country, but not at the cost of forgetting. Dare we forget that this land is for sharing with First Nations? Those are the terms of the treaties we signed, but then ignored and tried to forget. Dare we forget land theft, cultural destruction, child kidnapping, exploitation and bigotry? Dare we forget wounded lives and communities? Dare we cover up, “get over it” and move on? The good news of Canada 150 is that we are not forgetting. Even if we try to, we are not being allowed to. Thank God!

V

Thank God! As followers of Jesus, people who trust him and been entrusted to him, we don’t need to try to forget. We must not be afraid of remembering.

The woman offered this wisdom to her king:

*Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered,
so we must die.*

But that is not what God desires.

*Rather, he devises ways so that a banished person
does not remain banished from him.*

³ God would not allow Uriah to be forgotten. The Bible continues to remember Uriah by referring to Bathsheba as “Uriah’s wife.” (See 2nd Samuel 12:10,15; 1st Kings 15:5 and in the New Testament, Matthew 1:6.

She sees the heart of God. God makes ways so those banished from God do not stay banished.

But, not at the expense of forgetting. The dead, the wronged, the victims forgotten like water soaked into the ground . . . that is not what God desires. The wise woman realizes that restoration does not happen, if the cost is forgetting.

While remembering, while never forgetting, God makes ways to bring back the banished, the cast-out, the criminal, the wrongdoer. God makes ways to bring them home.

The dead who have been wronged are not forgotten. But, remembering them well does not veto the restoration of the wrongdoers.

God makes ways, so the prodigal can come back to the delighted Father.

God makes ways, so the exiles can return to the Holy City.

God makes ways, so those expelled from the garden near the start of the Bible can, after long wanderings, be brought to the tree of life at the completion of God's Story.

God makes ways.

For on the wood of another tree of life, rough-sawed and nail-driven, God the Son held in himself all victims. For Jesus was wrongly condemned, having submitted himself into the hands of powerful injustice. And God the Son held in himself all victimizers. For Jesus took upon himself the guilt of us all. Jesus held in himself all Tamars, and all Amnons, and all Absaloms.

Jesus made the way for all of us to be reconciled, restored, and remembered.

Amen.