

In this chapter David fulfills the pledge of familial support he made to Saul as well as to Jonathan son of Saul (cf. [1 Sam 18:3](#); [20:42](#); [23:18](#); [24:21–22](#)), the one initially positioned in the Saulide dynasty as David’s chief challenger for Israel’s throne. Through this narrative the biblical writer portrays David as the supreme Israelite example of covenant faithfulness (Hb. *ḥesed*), the highest virtue in Hebrew society. Judged by David’s own demanding criteria (cf. [Ps 15:1, 4](#)), the king proved himself worthy to live on the Lord’s holy hill by keeping his oath to Jonathan even though it ran the risk of hurting his own dynasty.

[9:1–3](#) Established on the throne in Jerusalem after having effectively put down both internal and external opposition, David was now in a position to fulfill his commitment to “the house of Saul” (v. [1](#)). Accordingly, at an unknown point in time but perhaps before the events of [2 Sam 21:1–10](#) (cf. esp. [21:7](#)), he began a search for someone to whom he could “show kindness for Jonathan’s sake.” Ziba, a well-to-do (cf. v. [10](#)) “servant of Saul’s household” (v. [2](#)) who apparently managed the former king’s royal estate, was called in and questioned by the king.

The narrator’s seemingly unnecessary repetition of David’s question in v. [3](#) (cf. v.

[1](#)) is in fact significant in establishing the theme of this chapter. It underscores that David was not an enemy of “the house of Saul” (v. [3](#)); in fact, he was an agent of “God’s kindness” (Hb. *ḥesed*; “loving faithfulness”) working to benefit Israel’s former dynastic family.

[9:4–10](#) Through his inquiry David learned that there was “still a son of Jonathan” (v. [4](#)) apparently living with a wife and son (cf. v. [12](#)) in a self-imposed internal exile “at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.” Makir, mentioned here for the first time, was a wealthy and powerful individual living east of the Jordan at Lo Debar (modern Umm ed-Debar?) in the Jordan river valley of Gilead. Later he proved to be one of David’s most loyal supporters (cf. [17:27–29](#)).

Mephibosheth, known outside of 2 Samuel as Merib-Baal⁹² (cf. [1 Chr 8:34](#);

⁹² Cf. comments at [4:4](#). In keeping with the literary/theological tendency of extant copies of 1, 2 Samuel, Mephibosheth’s name appears to have been modified from its original form. The name “Mephibosheth” appears to mean “From the mouth of shame,” or possibly “One who scatters shame” (cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, [124–25](#); S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Samuel*, [254](#)). The name “Merib-Baal” means “He who contends with Baal.” The

9:40), was “crippled in both feet” (v. 3) as a result of an accident in early childhood (cf. 4:4). David summoned him for appearance at the royal court. Appropriately—and perhaps somewhat awkwardly—the lame young man “bowed down” before the king “to pay him honor” (v. 6).

Using a dialogic script reflective of an interchange between a social superior and an inferior (cf. 1 Sam 3:9), David called out Mephibosheth’s name; in turn, Mephibosheth referred to himself as “your servant.” After establishing the sociological parameters of this relationship by giving the proper initial exchange, David issued a magnanimous decree that changed Mephibosheth’s fortunes forever. First, David restored to the disfigured, exiled Saulide “all the land that belonged to ... Saul” (v. 7). This would have meant that the family estate located about three miles north of Jerusalem in Gibeah would be returned to Mephibosheth. Second, David gave Mephibosheth a privilege that seemed to have perished the day his father Jonathan had died, the right to board at the king’s table “always.”⁹³ Saul had accorded David

this dispensation during his youth (cf. 1 Sam 20:5); now David returned the favor. Third, David provided Mephibosheth with a large contingent of servants and material wealth. He ordered “Ziba, Saul’s servant” (v. 9) along with his “fifteen sons and twenty servants” (v. 10), “to farm the land” that had originally belonged to Saul “and bring in the crops” for Mephibosheth so that Jonathan’s son “may be provided for.”

Mephibosheth’s response to the king’s magnanimous pronouncements was one of abject humility (cf. 2 Sam 7:18). After bowing down once again before David, he called himself “your slave” (v. 8; NIV, “servant”; Hb. *‘ebed*) and “a dead dog” (cf. 1 Sam 24:14).

9:11–13 Ziba, whose destiny had also been changed by the king’s imperial edict, had no choice but to accept the new assignment—and this he did. However, when the opportunity presented itself, Ziba apparently tried to manipulate David to issue a different, more favorable edict (cf. 16:2–4).

Mephibosheth—and presumably his entire family, including “a young son named Mica” (v. 12)—was permanently

⁹³ Youngblood understands this provision for Mephibosheth “as a metaphor referring to house arrest” (1, 2 Samuel, 918). I understand it

much more positively, as does Baldwin (1 and 2 Samuel, 227). Payne detects “mixed motives” (1 and II Samuel, 197).

relocated back in Benjamite territory “in Jerusalem” (v. 13).⁹⁴ There Mephibosheth “always ate at the king’s table” even though “he was crippled in both feet.” David’s acceptance of a lame man in his house confirms that the royal pronouncement banning “the lame” in the royal residence was intended as a figurative reference to an ethnic group, not mobility-impaired individuals (cf. comments at 5:8).

⁹⁴ Concerning the tribal assignment for Jerusalem, cf. [Josh 18:28](#).