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**Barzillai:
“I Will Provide
for You”**

#1245-B

Series: Little Known Legends

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Barzillai: “I Will Provide for You”

He was a man after God’s own heart, yet he spent the bulk of his years fleeing from his predecessor, who had an unfounded grudge against him. He spent his time hiding in caves, begging for food and fighting unnecessary battles, while waiting for the day to come when God would vindicate his name. Like the Coming King like the one he was a portrait of or a picture of, his life prior to coming into his kingdom was marked by persecution, tribulation, pain, and grief.

Those of us who think the believer’s life ought to be pain-free, trouble-free, and persecution-free, perhaps don’t really understand the life of Christ, or maybe haven’t come to understand the life of even David. Even after becoming king, David’s life was one battle after another, one test after another, one unexpected turn of events after another. His life was often in peril. His reputation was pitifully slandered. His men were often in danger of either attack or starvation. And yet, he was God’s anointed one, the man chosen to lead the flock of God both militarily and spiritually.

God did not remove the Goliaths or the Sauls from David’s life. He simply produced the life of God in David as he fled from Saul and fought Goliath. His crises that were allowed by God were the platforms from which a sovereign God manifested His power, demonstrated His life, and ultimately accomplished His will. Had he not allowed David the privilege of being maligned, misunderstood, attacked and betrayed, David never would have become the man God designed him to be. And those God placed around David, both to serve him and to be served, would have missed the blessings as well.

Today’s lesson, incidentally, is not really about David. It is rather about another of those little-known legends who seemingly slipped in and out of Scripture without being noticed. By touching the life of David, he touched the heart of God as well. His name was Barzillai, and only a few words are written about him in all of the Scriptures; and what is said teaches us volumes about the heart of man that pleases the heart of God.

THE BACKGROUND

There is a little background that must be brought to light before we can come to Barzillai’s story. First we have to go back for just a few lines in history about this man called David, and the problems he was having that precipitated our hero’s coming on the scene.

It may sound more like a soap opera than a Bible story to you, but the Word of God is so clear that it produces the life of man just exactly as it really is. So stay tuned. You may be thinking before long that we are listening to “As the World Turns”.

It began like this. David’s wicked son Absalom, perhaps you have heard of him, was at the heart of the matter. It seems that a few years before, Absalom had another brother, a half-brother, named Amnon who was another of David’s sons. And Amnon had raped his own sister and then sought refuge with his half-brother Absalom. Absalom, no moral giant himself, though he was secretly seething at what had happened, on the surface he had pretended to be unconcerned, and even invited Amnon to live with him.

So here was Absalom allowing his half-brother, Amnon even though his half-brother had defiled his sister. But as time passed, Absalom’s became more and more angry at Amnon and determined that revenge was in order. So he concocted a lie we’ll find that this is not uncommon for Absalom. He concocted a lie and told his dad that he would like to go to a sheep-shearing conclave at Baal Hazor near the edge of the border of Ephraim. He had instructed the men around him to go on. We get there his brother would get drunk, he always does and once Amnon was drunk to kill him. So they did. (I told you it was like a soap opera.)

So here we are David gets word that all of his sons were dead. At first he thinks all his sons are dead but then he gets the truth and realizes that his son Amnon is truly dead and begins to grieve bitterly. Absalom, fearing for his life fled his father’s hand. He flees and goes to Geshur and remains there for three years.

So Absalom having killed his half-brother has now fled from his dad, David. David longed to be reconciled with this wayward son, but somehow couldn’t bring himself to do so. The soap opera gets worse. General Joab is the next character to enter this scene. He sends a woman to David’s door at Absalom’s request. She knocks at the door and David says, “What can I do for you?” She says, “I’m a very wise woman but I’ve been grieving for someone who had

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died and I need you to help me. And David says, "Any thing I can do." So the woman concocts a fictitious story about a family, where one boy killed another, and was being unjustly sentenced and not forgiven. David took the bait and says, "That's terrible. I will free that man from his guilt". The woman looked at David and says, "That is really a story I made up because you're the culprit. You won't forgive your son Absalom.

David realized that Joab was behind the ruse, but nonetheless he forgave Absalom and he was allowed to return to Jerusalem, but he was not allowed to see David face to face or even to enter the palace area.

So Absalom returns to Jerusalem and lives there but for two years he is unable to see dad or go near the palace. Finally this got the best of him and he decided that the only way he could possibly get free from this bondage was to have General Joab to ask him to intervene once again. So he writes a letter to Joab and no response. He sends a fax and no response. He makes a phone call and gets his answering machine. So finally Absalom I've got to get Joab's attention somehow. So he set fire, the Scripture says, to Joab's barley field. "As the World Turns" now becomes "As the Barley Burns".

That got Joab's attention. He says to Absalom, "Give me a break" (loose translation). "Why the itchy hand with the matches?" Absalom's answer was, "You didn't answer my mail, or my phone call so I thought I'd get in touch with you another way." Joab says, "Okay, you've got my attention, so what do you want?" Absalom says, "I want you to go to my dad, David, and tell him to either execute me or forgive me, I can't live like this any longer." So Joab did. David relented, Absalom was forgiven, and they hugged and kissed and made up. But unfortunately, they did not live happily ever after because now is the time for the rest of the story.

Absalom, it seems, decided that it was time for him to become king. So, patiently, he went about a scheme of his to unseat his father, David. He devised what seemed to be a unique plan and perhaps the first of its kind. But every politician in history since that time has pretty much used its scheme. Here's what he did.

It all found in II Samuel 15. He would get up early and he would stand by the side of the road right by the city gate. People would be coming in looking for King David wanting to have their case heard and having a judge to render a verdict. So here was Absalom at the

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city gate and he gland-hands everyone who comes in. He would say, “Who are you and where are you from?” No matter what they answered, he would reply, “You know that’s a wonderful part of the countryside. Wouldn’t it be neat if there were a representative that stood in your place representing your precinct and giving you a fair hearing? And they would say, “Yeah, that would be great.” What he was saying is what politicians have been saying all along. If I were king everybody would get everything. Well it sounds familiar indeed.

In verse 5 of II Samuel 15 indicates that he was beginning to get a following. Now for his plan #2. So whenever someone would come in, instead of just shaking their hand, he would reach out and grab them and kiss them. Not just the babies, mind you, he kissed everybody. After four years of such relentless campaigning and kissing, the Scriptures say that he stole the hearts of the people of Israel. In other words, in loose translation, he zoomed to the top of the polls. But since there was no way to be elected except to assassinate his own dad he decided, sure enough, that’s what he would do.

So here was his plan. He lied to King David to get out of town, then told all the troops, which gathered about him that when the trumpet sounded, they were to shout at the top of their lungs, “Absalom is king! Absalom is king!” David got word that his son had won the hearts of his countrymen, and what his plan was. Rather than allow the revolution to take place King David fled for his life. It was a sad exodus, indeed.

Now turn in your Bibles to II Samuel 15. We had all of that to preface the passage itself. We begin with verse 23 where it reads,

The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert.

Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.

Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again.

But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.”

(II Samuel 15:23-26 NIV)

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(What a neat attitude about the sovereignty of God.)

Well, do you get the picture? I mean do you see the road lined with mourners, grieving that their king was abdicating over this wayward son of his. You see Absalom had won the hearts of the warriors. David still owned the hearts of the common folks. And they lined the streets grieving that their king was leaving. David was not concerned. Oh, he was broken hearted but he said, "If I find favor with God, He will return me to Jerusalem once again. If not, whatever He wants is best." Doesn't that sound like Jesus, our David, when He said, "Nevertheless, Thy will be done." Indeed it does.

Verse 5 of chapter 16 continues the story. It goes like this,

As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out.

He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. [He had the Secret Service there and he could have stopped him.]

As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel!"

The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!"

Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head."

But the king said, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"

David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to.

It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."

So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt.

(II Samuel 16:5-13 NIV)

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What a sad sight. What a grievous ending to his reign (if indeed it were the ending and the offspring of his previous enemy is cursing him and throwing stones to his face). Now listen, David could have spoken a word and his men would have beheaded that fool in an instant. They wanted to. But, you see, David is a portrait of our King who was to come, like our King “when He was reviled He reviled not again but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (I Peter 2:23).

Just as the Father, who could have called 10,000 angels, in a twinkling of an eye, lifted Jesus to safety, so David had it in his power to overcome the adversary who was so defiling his name. But he chose rather to trust the sovereignty of God. His assumption was that if this man were cursing God’s anointed, either God was allowing it to glorify His name or it was justified. Either way it wasn’t David’s problem, it was God’s. Don’t you see, Beloved, how freeing it is to let God be responsible for your reputation.

THE PROVISIONS

But God was not finished with David yet. And until God is finished with a man, nothing an enemy can do can destroy him. Because the same God who felled a giant with a slingshot and a stone was still in David’s corner. And when maximum glory would be accrued to His name, God would move on stage and vindicate His man. You can count on it, Beloved. And so David and his men are now waiting for that to happen or for whatever God’s will was to happen. But they are now in the wilderness and they are hungry and they are lonely, and waiting for the other shoe to fall. Here, at last, is where our little-known legend comes into view. We continue with verse 27 of II Samuel 17,

When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim

Brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils,

Honey and curds, sheep and cheese from cows’ milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, “The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert.”

(II Samuel 17:27-29 NIV)

Do you see what is happening? Once again David and his men are experiencing the miraculous hand of God caring for them and

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feeding them, reminding them how their God cares. Three men arrive laden with everything from bedding to dishes to food fit for a king. Their names were Shobi, Makir, and Barzillai. God has many ways to meet His people's needs, but more often than not, it is through other people. Often times when He sends us to meet people's needs we would never go if we knew what is ahead of us. That was the case with Elijah and the woman in Zarephath. So often he sends us knowing that if we knew we wouldn't go. But this was not true of these three men. They follow David into the wilderness risking their very lives because they wanted to do what God called all of us to do, care for one another. So look how they did it.

This was no brown bag lunch. This was the same quality and quantity of supplies they would have given them had they been in their own home. Think about it. We think that when we give leftovers we don't like, or food we wouldn't eat ourselves, we have become the epitome of charity. We think that if we give clothes away we no longer have any need we are spiritual Santa Clauses. We don't understand New Testament sharing. They went and sold the very possessions they had been clinging to, and took the proceeds and laid them at the apostles' feet to give away. May be we forget, Beloved,

when we have done it unto the least of these we have done it
unto God. (Matthew 25:40 paraphrased)

We would never serve God leftovers from paper plates or give him hand-me downs and expect applause. Our concept of charity has somehow overlooked the principle of "angels unaware". Sometimes God allows others to cross our paths who have needs just to see if we would serve them with the same measure of intensity that we would serve Christ Himself if He were here. And He is here, indeed.

Back to the wilderness with Barzillai and his friends. They unload a department store full of bedding and dishes, and a grocery store full of first class meals. Meat, cheese, grain, beans, honey, and milk were among the supplies. And this was before the days of refrigerated trucks, frozen dinners, and microwaves. These men were not concerned with their own needs, or their own time, or their weariness or their own danger. God's man and God's men needed help and that was all that mattered. So they risked their lives to see that those needs were met.

Beloved, that means so much to God. His heart is warmed every

time a Christian shares even the overflow of what he has with other Christians who are hurting. How much more when we give what we cannot afford to give, or we serve at great personal risk or loss of ourselves.

THE BATTLE

The next few verses of II Samuel tell a story, a sad story. But the soap opera continues. Absalom pursues his father into the forest of Ephraim, where he proceeds to attack. But David's men, empowered by God, overpowers the attackers, and some 20,000 men died that day on the battlefield. Soon Absalom's troops were fleeing into the forest so they could hide from David's men rather than be killed. Even Hollywood couldn't come up with an ending better than this. This king-to-be is high-tailing it out of town on a donkey no less. It seems that Absalom, for one reason or another had very long stringy hair and riding under this low-lying branch he gets his hair caught in the tree. The donkey runs on its way, leaves Absalom swing from the tree limb by his curly locks. Do you get the picture?

So here is Absalom the would-be king dangling from this tree. Meanwhile one of David's men spots him there and runs back and says, "Joab, you'll never guess what I just saw. Absalom is hanging from a tree by his hair." Joab says, "Did you kill him?" And the soldier says, "No, Sir, I wouldn't kill the son of my king." Joab said, "I would have given you a bonus if you had killed him." The soldier responded, "For all the money in the world I wouldn't kill the son of my king." So Joab says, "Never mind, I'll do it myself." And Joab who obviously didn't have the gift of mercy, may be remembering the barley field incident, finds Absalom still dangling from the tree, and sends three daggers into his heart and finishes him off.

Soon the news spreads to David. While all the countryside is rejoicing that David can return as king David is weeping and crying his heart out. "Oh, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom." The whole countryside wept with David when they realized the king was grieved. It's hard to understand, Beloved, but it's the heart of a father—how deeply it can love even those in rebellion. Even how as our Father, our heavenly Father, continues to weep over our sins and love us even in rebellion.

So the people sent for King David to return and proceeded to lead him back to the Jerusalem to restore him to his rightful place

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as king. And this is when Barzillai comes back into focus again. We take up the story again in II Samuel 19:

Barzillai the Gileadite also came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan with the king and to send him on his way from there.

Now Barzillai was a very old man, eighty years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man.

The king said to Barzillai, “Cross over with me and stay with me in Jerusalem, and I will provide for you.” [I will take care of you.]

But Barzillai answered the king, “How many more years will I live, that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king?”

I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is good and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? [Not really.] Can I still hear the voices of men and women singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?

Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king reward me in this way?

Let your servant return, that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is your servant Kimham. Let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him whatever pleases you.”

The king said, “Kimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him whatever pleases you. And anything you desire from me I will do for you.”

So all the people crossed the Jordan, and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillai and gave him his blessing, and Barzillai returned to his home. (II Samuel 19:31-39 NIV)

THE GRATITUDE

What a tender scene. David’s love for this man and his gratitude for what this man had done in his time of crisis went beyond a mere “thank you.” David invited Barzillai to come back to the palace and live like a king promising, “I will provide for you.” Barzillai was a wise old man though. He knew that his destiny was sealed in his homeland, and as a man 80 years young, he was in no condition to make the transition or enjoy the benefits of life in Jerusalem. He knew as well, according to verse 35 that at his age he would

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be nothing but a burden to the already burdened king. And yet he offered to cross over the Jordan with David, and walk just a mile or two into the king’s domain before he said goodbye. His humility was overwhelming. He added, “But why should the king honor me in this way?” He had risked his life for David, yet he had expected nothing in return. What a godly example of how to give your life away.

Then he asks David to take Kimham instead. David agrees, and offers to him whatever he wants in honor of his friend Barzillai.

So all the people crossed the Jordan, and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillai and gave him his blessing, and Barzillai returned to his home. (II Samuel 19:39 NIV)

Here was a man who understood how to give of himself unselfishly. Here was King David who understood how when being served not to become presumptuous but, rather, always to give honor to the one who served to heal him.

Beloved, in closing I want you see how the Body of Christ is supposed to work. You and I were called to become Barzillais. We are not meant to sit at home and wait for the phone to ring even and for someone to say, “I’m hurting, will you help me?” That’s part of it, but that’s not all of it. You and I were called to be scouts in the Body of Christ, men and women who are looking about searching the horizons of the fellowship, seeking to find those who are hurting, seeking to locate those who are crying, those who are doing without because of circumstances beyond their control. You say, “I’ve done that.”

Sometimes they won’t even appreciate it. No, Beloved. That’s not why we do it. Sometimes, no, make that most of the time, we don’t appreciate the little things God does for us. We don’t meet their needs because they deserve it or because they appreciate it. We do it to meet their needs because as we do, we minister to Christ Himself. Any rewards we receive should be in heaven, anyway. If we have to be recognized every time we do for someone or we give to someone, we are stealing glory from God and exchanging the incorruptible rewards of eternity for the passing applause of planet Earth. And, Beloved, that’s a bad trade.

Our job and my job is to find needs and meet them. It’s God’s job to pass out the accolades, and it is far better to hear it from Him in heaven than from men on earth. We are called to become a band of Barzillais. That’s the Church in action; that’s the Church’s

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testimony to the world. "By this all men shall know that you are my disciples, by the love you have one for another." And it's not to be just a one-time quick fix ministry. Barzillai apparently continued to work to meet the needs of David and his army until the battle was over. And we think if we take food one time, or make one phone call, or make one hospital visit, we are some kind of 'super-saints' with the gift of mercy. And if we get called on again, we murmur or we complain. And so often the real hurts and the real needs begin after everyone else has left the room and written them off and said, "Well, we took to them; we cared for them." And we forget that the grief goes on, and the mourning goes on, and the needs go on. Until we become a band of Barzillais we will see people come and go from church to church because they are looking for a kind of agape love that they have read about but never experienced.

I am going to give you an assignment. No, I am going to give you an assignment. Let's leave this place today and go home and get down on our knees and simply say, "Dear Lord, give me this week, someone to minister to. Either send them to me, Lord, or give me eyes and give me a heart to find them." Now don't pray that prayer, Beloved, if you don't expect to get involved or you don't want to get involved.

Barzillai apparently was a wealthy man. He could have given buckets of money to the United Way, gotten a gold plaque to hang in his home, and stayed there, outside the range of gunfire in total safety, but he didn't. He went. He stayed. He served. That's the lesson we can learn from Barzillai. It is the one lesson we can learn from David's response to Barzillai. Sure David was a king, a mighty man, a man of influence, a man of power. But he was used to having others serve him, he never got so big that he forgot to say thank you. So grateful was he for this man's unselfishness that he offered to take care for him for the rest of his life. Oh, that we presumptuous Christians could remember how to say "thank you," not only to men, but to God.

HE MEETS OUR NEEDS

He meets our needs
In so many ways.
He loves us, he cares for us
All of our days,

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And when our stay
On this earth is done,
He takes us forever
To live with His Son.

But yet like the Jews,
So often we pray,
"Thanks, Lord,
But what have you done today?"

Isn't that the way we often approach God and others? Don't we so often lack the humility and gratitude after the crisis has passed to remain thankful? Not David. Though he was a king, he never overlooked the sacrifice someone else made on his behalf. He never took it for granted. He never passed it off lightly. He always saw it as sent from God. We can learn wonderful lessons, can't we, from this man, Barzillai? It's the story about a man most of you have never heard of before. His tale is tucked away in the midst of a war, and his name is mentioned but three or four times, but what an indelible imprint he made on the life of David. And what an indelible imprint he made on the heart of God. He is a living legend. But let's don't leave this place just impressed with Barzillai. That's not the point. Let's leave this place, determined by God's grace, to become Barzillais. You see, only then will the legend live on.

Let us pray.

Our Father and our God,

We thank You for the patience and love You show to us, for the many little ways You meet our needs day by day, for Your constant grace and forgiveness that we never take time to say, "Thank You."

Father, all about us, in this body around us are people with hurting hearts and real needs. And we just don't have time. We're so busy doing, we step over them, and we sometimes run over them, rather than helping them.

By Your grace, Father, open our eyes to see and open our hearts to serve those who are hurting that we might become Barzillais as well.

In Jesus' Precious Name,

Amen.

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- When last did you ask God to bring to your attention the needs of those in your church who are hurting and need either physical or spiritual help?

2- If God does that, (and He delights to do so) what will your response be? Will you dare to ask Him?

3- When last did you stop to say "thank you" for those who showed you love when you were hurting? Make a list and do so this week.

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(02.27.18)