

2 Samuel 15:1-37

Absalom's Conspiracy

The next chapters describe Absalom's rebellion against David. David is driven out of Jerusalem, and Absalom has the backing of most of the people.

We need to read this story as a picture of Jesus being rejected by his people, and betrayed by one of his disciples, as well as a depiction of the arguments our minds use to persuade us to let self persecute Christ and drive Him out of His rightful place as Lord.

In fact, David had to enter into "the fellowship of His sufferings," and be rejected like the Son of David would later be rejected.

[See https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/2-samuel/2-samuel-15.cfm]

Absalom finds himself back from exile and in Jerusalem, but isolated and excluded from the palace. So he devises a plan to slowly garner political support, and begins to display a higher profile in any way he can. Even if he knew that Solomon had been chosen to succeed David, he wasn't going to agree to it - he considered himself the rightful heir and would usurp the throne.

David had ordered that he not enter his house from the main street (according to the rabbis). So Absalom pushes back on that by gathering the equivalent of an entourage of black SUVs and limousines whenever he would travel.

2 Samuel 15:1 - "And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him."

[Adonijah afterwards did the same when he tried to usurp the throne from Solomon (**1 Kings 1:5**).]

Absalom slowly began to act like a king himself, positioning himself as an alternative to those who wanted to appeal their case to the king, or those who were not satisfied with David's judgements.

2 Samuel 15:2-4 - "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!"

Again, this takes us back to the Garden of Eden, when the serpent proposed that Eve

would be a better judge than God of whether to eat of the forbidden fruit. In fact, our own minds are constantly complaining, "Oh that I were made judge!" instead of Jesus the Son of David.

Absalom pretended a personal interest in people, asking where they are from, etc. Absalom would always tell people "thy matters are good and right." In this way he imitates the future false prophets who would tell Israel "Peace, peace" when there is no peace. False prophets tell people what their itching ears want to hear.

- **Jeremiah 23:17** - "...they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you."

He was subtly promoting discontent while appearing to be just helping David deal with troubled petitioners.

Like the worst version of a politician, Absalom told people what they wanted to hear to gain support, all without directly opposing David. A true leader tells people what they NEED to hear, speaks the truth and leads by example.

But in this situation, God's judgment on David's sin was responsible for Absalom's growing support, just as Nathan had predicted. David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah became more widely known, and David lost his moral authority. And in the case of Amnon's rape of Tamar, David wavered and failed to punish Amnon. So the people viewed Absalom's murder of Amnon as justified.

Also, David was getting older, and Absalom was a young, vigorous and charismatic leader.

2 Samuel 15:5-6 - "And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

Absalom could be called a populist. He projected himself as a "man of the people," ignoring protocol and dismissing social and class distinctions. He cunningly displayed aspects of democracy and equality, while striving for the crown and absolute power - possibly he even truly thought he was right.

Recall the demands of Korah against Moses and Aaron in **Numbers 16:3** - "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?"

David had respected King Saul's position even during his most desperate days as a fugitive. But David too had gathered to himself as followers all who were desperate, or in debt, or had a grievance, or were disaffected in Israel (**1 Samuel 22:2**). David had maintained that balance of being a man of the people but also under submission to

God's anointed. Now he was watching his son participate in a political charade, almost a cartoon version of David's own rise in esteem and popularity.

Note: Aspects of democracy were already present in Israel, which operated like a constitutional monarchy. David had to be accepted and anointed king first by his own tribe, Judah, and then by representatives of the rest of the tribes. An Israelite king was under the Law just like everyone else, and his power was constrained. At the same time, all had ministries and offices that had to be respected.

When we come to the New Testament church, all are equal, and gifts and ministries are distributed by the Holy Spirit. There is evidence from the earliest records that rather than a hierarchy, church business was conducted by a vote and consensus. Jesus is the head, and the Body responds and carries out his will, just as in the human organism.

But Absalom's "man of the people" act was to further his own ambition and agenda.

Absalom Makes His Move

2 Samuel 15:7-9 - "And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron."

"after forty years" - either Absalom was 40 years old, or this is a corruption of the text. Josephus has "four years."

Absalom under the guise of worshipping God, begins a rebellion.

2 Samuel 15:10 - "But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron."

Hebron was where David had been anointed king (**2 Samuel 2:4**) and where the patriarchs were buried. Absalom hoped this would put the stamp of authenticity on his power grab.

The blowing of the shofar, usually reserved for calling solemn assemblies, calls to war or declaring religious events, is here corrupted for use in rebellion.

2 Samuel 15:11 - "And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing."

This unknowing crowd would give the illusion of wide support for his cause. They would "prime the pump," to induce a flood of new supporters of Absalom.

Ahithophel, the Judas of the Story

2 Samuel 15:12 - "And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom."

Ahithophel was renowned for his wisdom and wise counsel

- **2 Samuel 16:23** - "And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom."

But he was also the grandfather of Bathsheba, and perhaps resented what David had done to her and was bitter.

The betrayal by Ahithophel was a bitter blow for David, which he describes in Psalm 41:

- **Psalm 41:9** - "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

Of course, that verse also was fulfilled in Judas.

- **John 13:18** - "I am not speaking about all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the Scripture: 'The one who shares My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.'

Like Judas, Ahithophel later commits suicide (**2 Samuel 17:23**).

David Flees Jerusalem

2 Samuel 15:13-14 - "And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword."

In the urgency of the flight from Jerusalem, David seems to recover some of his wisdom.

"smite the city with the edge of the sword" - Why didn't David - a great warrior - stay and fight? David fled because he did not want the city of Jerusalem to be a battleground. And he also knew that this was God's judgment on him. He could not fight against that.

We see the same spirit in Jesus, telling Peter to put away his sword. he knew His path was going to the cross (**Matthew 26:52**).

2 Samuel 15:18 - "And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites,

and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king."

Just as Christ was rejected by his own Jewish nation, but followed later by believers from many Gentile nations, here David's Gentile bodyguard sticks with him, along with Gittites - 600 Philistines who became attached to David when he was exiled in Gath (1 **Samuel 27:2**) They become his companions in exile. They follow him even in his seeming defeat.

- **Galatians 3:28** - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"

- **John 12:32** - "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Ittai the Gittite almost re-enacts the scene of Ruth the Moabitess vowing to go with Naomi (**Ruth 1:17**). David even warns him to go back, as Naomi did to Ruth and Orpa. Ittai knew that following David would cost him something - it requires self-sacrifice to follow the Son of David, too. We must "pick up our cross and follow" Him.

2 Samuel 15:21 - "...surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be."

2 Samuel 15:23 - "And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness."

David relives this sorrow in his Psalms:

Psalms 3:1-8 (read the whole psalm) - [A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son] "LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me."

Or "the great rise up against me" - meaning Ahithophel, according to the rabbis.

And in **Psalms 55:4-8** - "My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. And I said, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest."

Psalms 41; 61; 62; and **63** were also written by David during this period.

This scene could also be a foreshadowing of the Jewish exile after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem.

When David refers to Absalom as "the king" it appears he expected him to succeed, and so he exhibited the same respect he had toward King Saul previously.

David Sends Back the Ark

2 Samuel 15:24-26 - "And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him."

David doesn't want to presume anything with the Ark of God. He puts his trust in God, and "let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." Of course this reminds us of Jesus' cry to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane - "Not my will, but thine be done" (**Luke 22:42**).

2 Samuel 15:30 - "And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

David understood that this disaster was judgment for his sin, and he had inflicted it on his friends and followers and on the city.

David ascended the Mount of Olives on his way, directly across from the City of David. There was as yet no Temple built. This is the same way Ezekiel sees the glory of God leaving the Temple and ascending to the Mount of Olives (**Ezekiel 11:23**). David did this in humility and mourning - barefoot with his head covered. It was not only a tragedy for David, but for the whole nation. When Jesus went from the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray He retraced these steps of David. Jesus also ascended from there (**Acts 1:12**) after His resurrection.

2 Samuel 15:31 - "And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

In other words, frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel, let his normally wise words become foolish.

2 Samuel 15:32 - "And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head:"

"where he worshipped God" - i.e. where David was wont to worship God, to prostrate himself whenever he returned to Jerusalem and saw the tent that contained the Ark and God's glory.

Hushai the Archite is a friend and counselor to David. He is an old man, which is why he would be a "burden" on the journey. He arrives as the answer to David's prayer in verse

31.

2 Samuel 15:34-35 - "But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests."

Summary:

This is a kind of medieval morality play being acted out here, revealing what goes on in our own hearts.

Ahithophel seems to represent the counsel of the voices in our head that push us toward rejecting Christ's Lordship and advancing our own fleshly will. Hushai is like the Holy Spirit, which counters that counsel, and causes it to fail.

- **Jeremiah 2:19** - "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts. For long ago you broke your yoke and tore off your chains, saying, 'I will not serve!'"

Like Absalom, we can deceive ourselves into thinking our rebellion is the right thing to do. We believe we can do a better job directing our life than God can.

Pray that such deception will be revealed and we can repent and quickly turn back to Him.