

Absalom's Rebellion

2 Samuel 15

Lesson Outline

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Rebellion in Israel

2 Samuel 15:1-12

Absalom's Charm: 2 Samuel 15:1-6

Absalom's Conduct

Absalom began his relentless pursuit of the kingdom. He started by making himself appear to be great.

1. *Absalom prepared chariots and horses* – he was proud, self-willed, and aspiring. While David and his family rode upon mules, he traveled with horses (1 Kings 1:33, 38; 2 Samuel 13:19).
2. *Absalom assigned fifty men to run before* – he had an escort that fit his ego. Apparently they were to give notice of his arrival.

There was little substance and plenty of show, which seems to have impressed the people. Because he appeared like royalty he began to be looked upon as a king. That attitude is prevalent today. Politicians are often elected on presentation instead of their principles or performance. Likewise, many churches have become more interested in appearance than their message. Because appearances can be deceiving it's best not to make decisions solely upon what is seen.

Absalom would rise up early to meet those seeking the king concerning a problem. This zealous move made him appear considerate and endeared him to the people. Without doubt Absalom was a diligent worker, but it was in disobedience. Had he humbled himself before the LORD, choosing to follow His ways, he may have been a good king. Instead he refused to submit to anyone, leading to a life of rebellion (Proverbs 11:2, 21:4).

Absalom's Counsel

Placing himself at the gate, Absalom received any man that arrived at the palace with a concern. Normally a "hearer" was an officer who would listen to the people's matters then place them before the king who would render a verdict.¹ David excelled in decision-making, so he might have worked without an official "hearer" (2 Samuel 8:15). Or the position was vacant. Either way Absalom saw an opportunity to influence the people by shrewdly dealing with their problems before they reached the king. In doing so, he assumed responsibility that did not belong to him. Had he truly desired to be a judge, he could have prepared himself. Instead Absalom craftily dealt with the people, cordially inquiring about their residence. Evidently people from all over the kingdom, conquered lands included, came to David for judgment and justice (2 Samuel 8:15). After hearing their matter, apparently Absalom would render a decision.

1. *Absalom made immediate decisions* – without consulting other parties involved.
2. *Absalom made hasty decisions* – without consideration of the consequences.

Absalom implied David was careless because he refused to establish a man to hear their issues. If he were king this would not be the case, or so he wanted the people to believe. It was made clear he would look out for the people and hear their problems. Apparently Absalom held no office of authority – either he was unqualified, distrusted, or both. This ungrateful man was not satisfied with being restored to his former position but wanted to be king. His deceptive behavior went a long way towards achieving his goal.

1. *He befriended the people* – he affectionately embraced anyone that would bow before him.
2. *He charmed the people* – he flattered the people with easy and kind words. Like many modern politicians, he gained office by pretending to care while running down his inferiors.
3. *He stole the hearts of the men of Israel* – he seduced the Israelites until they followed willingly. Apparently many, if not all, began to seek his counsel.

Absalom took advantage of David's kindness and proved to be dangerous (Proverbs 6:12-14). He patiently worked to destroy David's administration, in order to take the kingdom from him.

Absalom's Conspiracy: 2 Samuel 15:7-12**Absalom's Deception**

Absalom approached David seeking permission to go to Hebron, claiming he had a vow unto the LORD that needed to be kept. Knowing what transpired, it is doubtful he had a vow to keep. Absalom displayed no dedication unto the LORD and proved to be extremely deceptive. Since vows were private matters nobody could question his motives. The wicked often resort to any means necessary to gain an advantage (Proverbs 11:18).

¹ John Lange, "Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Samuel," (Michigan: Zondervan, 1951) p. 502

It is likely Absalom did not require David's permission but sought it to avoid any suspicion. Knowing David loved the LORD, there would be no objection to his son keeping a vow unto Him. The king encouraged his son to go in peace. Perhaps David's heart was filled with joy believing Absalom loved the LORD. It is important that parents pay attention to their children's actions as well as their words. As A. W. Pink said, "Let this be a warning to parents not to assume too readily that their children have experienced the new birth, but wait to see *the fruits of the same*."² David trusted Absalom though he never proved himself to be trustworthy (Proverbs 25:19).

Absalom's Direction

Absalom's real reason to go to Hebron was to establish himself as king. It was his birthplace and where David first reigned (2 Samuel 2:1-4, 3:3-5). Preparing for this opportunity, Absalom had sent spies throughout the land to gather the people at the sound of the trumpet. This trumpet blast would indicate, falsely of course, that Absalom was king of Israel. The people would be swayed into following their new king. It is possible many came under the impression that David resigned in support Absalom. Had they known the truth, they might have refused the rebellious upstart.

Absalom's rebellion was strengthened with numbers. Two hundred men followed him from Jerusalem. The scriptures say they went in simplicity and knew not anything. Apparently these men were unaware of Absalom's true intentions. Ahithophel, David's wise counselor, also joined Absalom (2 Samuel 16:23). Some believe he was Bathsheba's grandfather, which is why he easily turned against David when the opportunity presented itself (2 Samuel 11:3, 23:34). Ahithophel provided substance to Absalom's rebellion, immediately after his joining the numbers increased.

Retreat From Jerusalem

2 Samuel 15:13-37

David's Decision to Depart: *2 Samuel 15:13-23*

David Left Immediately

David received a message informing him of Absalom's treacherous conduct. Perhaps it came from one of the two hundred men that mistakenly went with Absalom to Hebron. Enough information was given for David to conclude his life was in danger. Absalom would eliminate anyone that threatened this takeover, including the king. As David discovered, life is filled with difficulties (1 Peter 4:12). Count it a blessing when troubles are not prevalent. Trust in the LORD when they are.

David departed with his family, including Solomon who was around ten years old at the time. He left ten concubines behind to watch over the house believing they would be safe, however Absalom's wickedness proved to be greater than David realized (2 Samuel 16:21-22). Many have wondered why did David left instead of putting up a fight?

² Arthur W. Pink, "The Life of David, Volume 2," (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981) p. 90

1. *Perhaps it was Absalom's advantage* – he had great numbers along with the element of surprise.
2. *Perhaps it was Jerusalem* – he did not want to see the city smitten with the edge of the sword.
3. *Perhaps it was for the future* – he saw an opportunity to rally his supporters and make a stand.

David was older, his favored son had rebelled, and his trusted counselor was a traitor. The king chose to retreat and regroup instead of dying in a needless fight.

David Left With a Following

Many faithful men joined David as he left Jerusalem. They had nothing to gain by following the ousted king, but went anyway. The royal guards, Cherethites and Pelethites, accompanied him (2 Samuel 8:18). The Gittites, who were of Gath, also went with David. Apparently they were converted Philistines. Perhaps they joined David after he took the Philistine cities (2 Samuel 8:1; 1 Chronicles 18:1). Blessings often come from unlikely sources.

David noticed Ittai, the apparent leader of the Gittites, and discouraged him from following because it would be difficult. It appears David tested Ittai's loyalty and dedication. He was a Philistine by birth, not an Israelite, so he was under no obligation to join with David. If he decided to return to Jerusalem, David would hold nothing against him. David was a considerate leader. Ittai declared his allegiance to David as king. He would go wherever David went, even if it meant death. David was blessed with faithful friends (Proverbs 18:24). When times become tough, you will find out whom you can trust (Proverbs 17:17). As they left Jerusalem for the wilderness, the people wept. It was a sad day in Israel. Their devoted king was rejected for an unqualified and ungodly man.

David's Direction For His Followers: 2 Samuel 1:19-27

Direction for Zadok

Zadok followed David out of Jerusalem along with priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant. They set the ark down while Abiathar led others out of the city. Abiathar was the high priest and Zadok the assistant. Apparently Zadok attended the ark while Abiathar dealt with the people. It must be recognized that the spiritual leaders followed David instead of aligning with Absalom. Much to their surprise the king directed them to return the ark to Jerusalem.

1. *David trusted the LORD* – if the LORD chose to bless, David would return.
2. *David submitted to the LORD* – if the LORD chose not to bring him back to Jerusalem, David would be content (Philippians 4:11).
3. *David respected the LORD* – the LORD had a right to do as He pleased with David and others.

David encouraged Zadok to return to Jerusalem with his family, his son Ahimaaz, and Abiathar's son Jonathan. As a priest his responsibility was with the ark. Also as a wise man David could depend upon him for information. Zadok returned to Jerusalem while Ahimaaz and Jonathan remained in Enrogel (2 Samuel 17:17). Together they were able to relay vital messages to David. These selfless men were willing to endure hardness to assist their king.

Direction for Hushai

David found out his trusted counselor Ahithophel had allied with Absalom. This discouraging news was handled correctly.

1. *The correct prayer* – David prayed his counsel would be foolishness. Notice, he did not pray for harm upon Ahithophel, seeking vengeance. Instead he prayed for him to be confused in his counsel to Absalom.
2. *The correct power* – David trusted the LORD in the matter (Proverbs 3:5-6). He believed God was able to disrupt their wicked administration. The LORD reigns over all, whether they believe it or not.

It must be pointed out that David, in the midst of great troubles, took the time to worship the LORD. His priorities were correct and his love for God was evident. Sometime during this ordeal David recorded Psalm three.

David met Hushai, one of his servants, either while or after he worshiped the LORD. The king was provided a good friend that could help in his time of need. Hushai, a wise counselor, would be beneficial to David if he returned to Jerusalem. He could serve Absalom allowing him to be involved with the decision-making. He could also pass along information to the priests, who would relay it to David. Sadly, Hushai was encouraged to lie. This was not needed but was probably said due to the hectic situation. David was imperfect and his faith may have faltered a bit. Hushai proved to be valuable asset to David.