

It did not take long for the punishment for David's sin with Bathsheba to manifest itself from within David's family (2 Sam. 12:10-11). This trouble began when David's oldest son Amnon raped his half sister Tamar, which was followed by her brother Absalom's vengeful murder of Amnon. The resulting rift between David and Absalom never fully healed and Absalom would later rebel against his father.

2 Samuel 13

1 And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. 2 And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her.

Absalom, David's third son, was the full brother of Tamar, having the same mother and father (Maacah and David – 2 Sam. 3:3). Amnon, however, was David's first son by Ahinoam (2 Sam. 3:2) and was therefore the half-brother of Tamar. She was beautiful and caught Amnon's eye but his "love" for her was based on sexual desire rather than a true love for her. Since unmarried daughters were kept in seclusion from men in those days to avoid premarital indiscretions, Amnon had not been able to arrange a way for him to be alone with Tamar.

6 So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand.

In vs. 3-5, Amnon's friend, Jonadab, conceives a plan for Amnon to be alone with Tamar that required Amnon to pretend to be sick. He would then ask that Tamar be allowed to bring him food and feed him on his sick bed. When his father came to check on his son's welfare, Amnon asks him to have Tamar come to his house and feed him.

11 And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister. 12 And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly. 13 And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee. 14 Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice: but, being stronger than she, forced her, and lay with her.

In vs. 7-10, David sends Tamar to do as Amnon has asked, and he refuses to eat what she has made until she brings it into his bedchamber and feeds it to him herself. When she does, Amnon reveals his true intentions by urging Tamar to have sex with him. She protests since she is not married to Amnon and the shame of such an act would follow them both for the rest of their lives. Even though the Mosaic Law prohibited marriage between half-siblings (Lev. 18:9, 11), Tamar suggests that Amnon ask their father David to allow them to be married to legitimize the sex between them. One commentator suggested that Tamar made this suggestion in a desperate attempt to escape the immediate situation, hoping that Amnon would eventually come to his senses. Amnon's lust, however, overpowered his good sense and he raped Tamar. Once the act was completed and his lust was satisfied, he found that he no longer "loved" Tamar (likely because of her lack of cooperation) and sent her away (v. 15).

23 And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baal-hazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons.

Absalom took care of his sister after the rape, giving her a place to live, but he said nothing about the crime perpetrated against her and pretended to not be angry about it (vs. 20). However, Absalom was planning his revenge, so two years later when any suspicion that Absalom would seek revenge would have been forgotten, he held a feast celebrating the time of sheep shearing and invites all the king's sons, including Amnon (vs. 24-27).

28 Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant.

Absalom had instructed his servants to wait until he gave them the signal after Amnon had become intoxicated and thereby could be easily killed. In case his servants were hesitant to kill the king's son, Absalom reminded them that he, who was also a king's son, was commanding them to do this. When Amnon was killed, the rest of the king's sons fled in fear for their lives. When news of the event reached David, he was told that all of the king's sons were dead, but this was not the case, for only Amnon was dead (vs. 29-36).

37 But Absalom fled, and went to Talmi, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day. 38 So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years. 39 And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.

Absalom knew that he was under the death penalty for the premeditated murder of Amnon, so he fled the country and sought refuge with the king of Geshur, who was his and Tamar's grandfather (2 Sam. 3:3). Over the next three years, David mourned for Amnon every day, but at the end of the three years he seems to have accepted Amnon's death and began to miss his other son, Absalom. In effect, he had lost two sons. David could not be reunited with Amnon since he was dead, but reconciliation with Absalom was still possible.

2 Samuel 14:1-20: Joab recognizes that David desired to be reunited with Absalom but had done nothing about it, so he hires a woman to pretend to be a widow coming to David for help. The story that Joab sent her to tell was that she had two sons but one had killed the other and the extended family wanted to kill her remaining son in vengeance. She asked that David would protect her and her son, to which David agrees. She then asked David why he had not extended the same mercy to Absalom, who was also guilty of killing his brother, and bring him home. David then realized that the woman's story was fictitious and that the charade had been arranged by Joab.

2 Samuel 14

21 And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again.

“And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing” – The “thing” that David is apparently referring to is the thing that Joab has been wanting David to do: decide to allow Absalom to return home. He speaks to Joab to inform him of his decision.

“go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again” – David gives Joab permission to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem. Joab thanks the king for granting his request and personally traveled to Geshur to bring Absalom home (vs. 22-23). Apparently Joab had already requested that David allow Absalom to return home during the past three years.

24 And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face.

Even though David missed his son, apparently he was not ready to face the one who had killed his oldest son Amnon. Evidently he was still angry with Absalom and could not yet bring himself to fully forgive him. Thus Absalom is allowed to return to Jerusalem but is forbidden to visit the king.

25 But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.

Verses 25-27 give us some parenthetical biographical information about Absalom in a temporary break from the narrative. He was a handsome man that drew admiration for his impressive looks. He had no physical flaws in his appearance, which added to his popularity. Absalom was apparently proud of his hair because he only cut it once a year and the haircut yielded about 200 shekels (5 lbs.) of hair (v. 26). Absalom took advantage of his looks and used slick talk to enhance his popularity among the people when he later prepared to rebel against his father and steal the kingdom.

27 And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance. 28 So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face.

“And unto Absalom there were born three sons” – These three sons apparently died before Absalom's rebellion because later Absalom builds a monument in his own honor so that his name would be remembered since he had no son to continue his name at that time (2 Sam. 18:18).

“and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance” – Absalom apparently named this daughter after his sister who had been raped by Amnon, implying that he and his sister were close.

“So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face” – Despite the proximity of Absalom, David still had not allowed Absalom to see him two years after bringing him back to Jerusalem. David was apparently still not ready to forgive Absalom for killing Amnon.

Verses 29-32: After the two years, Absalom sent for Joab because he wanted to send him to the king on his behalf. After Joab refused to come even after two summons, Absalom decided to get his attention by sending his servants into the barley fields of Joab and setting them on fire. When Joab finally came, Absalom sent him to the king with a message asking why he had been brought back to Jerusalem if he was not going to be allowed to see the king. Absalom insisted on seeing the king and ending his estrangement.

33 So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

“So Joab came to the king, and told him” – Joab delivers the message to the king, advising him on what Absalom wants.

“and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king” – David sends for Absalom, who comes to see the king after at least five years of estrangement. He makes a show of humility by bowing to the king, showing reverence to David both as his father and as his king. The sincerity of Absalom's humility is questionable since it is not long before he begins wooing the public in preparation for his attempt to steal the kingdom from his father.

“and the king kissed Absalom” – This kiss represented David's forgiveness and reconciliation with Absalom. This kiss may have been what Absalom was seeking since it effectively cleared his name and showed that he was no longer a fugitive. The path to his attempt to take over the kingdom would then be open since he would then be able to enhance his popularity with the people. Absalom was a patient planner who didn't mind waiting for years for his efforts to pay off. He had waited two years after Tamar's rape before killing Amnon and will wait some four years before attempting the rebellion against his father (2 Sam. 15:7).