

2 Samuel 15-18 describe Absalom's rebellion against his father David and his attempt to steal the kingdom. Like an insincere politician, Absalom pretended to be a champion of the people so that he could sway public favor and loyalty away from his father and toward himself. Once he felt he had the people on his side, he put his plan into motion and David was forced to flee for his life.

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## 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.

After having his name cleared by the king's kiss of forgiveness, Absalom begins his "campaign" to steal the kingdom from his father. Capitalizing on the popularity of his good looks, Absalom exercised the symbols of royalty once he was no longer considered a fugitive for killing his brother. Whenever he traveled around Jerusalem, he would do so with the equivalent of a modern royal motorcade with men running ahead to announce his coming in order to impress the public with the appearance of importance.

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2 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.

Like an insincere politician, Absalom would pretend to be someone who cared about the common man. He would arrive early at the gate of Jerusalem and would greet anyone who came to see the king about a matter, pretending to be interested in them.

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3 And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. 4 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!

Absalom would feign empathy with the person by agreeing that their cause was right, and then undermine his father's administration by saying that this person's "just cause" would likely not get a fair hearing. Then he would pretend to mourn over the fact that he wasn't a judge because if he were, then he would certainly make sure that people got justice.

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5 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.

The Hebrew word translated "to do him obeisance" means "to bow down." Whenever anyone would bow down to show him respect for being the king's son, Absalom would pretend that he didn't care about receiving such honor because his love was for the people of Israel. He would kiss the man, pretending to treat him as an equal and not as a subject. In actuality, Absalom's intention was the opposite of what he portrayed since this pretense was part of his plan to steal the kingdom from his father.

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6 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.

Everything that Absalom did when people came to Jerusalem to get the king's judgment on their legal matters was an act with the intent of swaying the public's favor and loyalty from the king to himself. Those who came for judgment would return home thinking that Absalom would do a better job as king than David.

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13 And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.

After 4 years of swaying public opinion in his favor, Absalom begins putting his plan into action. In vs. 7-12, Absalom goes to Hebron and uses it for his base-of-operations in executing his takeover of the kingdom. Even Ahithophel, David's advisor, had traveled to Hebron to join Absalom. Apparently Absalom's activities were noticed and a messenger was sent to warn David of the impending takeover by Absalom since he had enough support among the men of Israel to do so.

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14 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.

David decided not to stay and fight since that would likely result in the deaths of many residents in Jerusalem and potentially cause significant damage to the city. Instead, he opted to make a strategic retreat before Absalom's forces had the chance to capture and likely kill him, his wives and all of his servants that were still loyal to David.

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15 And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. 16 And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house.

The servants with David were ready to faithfully obey whatever course of action that he decided to take, so he had them pack up quickly so that they could flee the city. However, David left ten of his concubines behind to take care of the house in his absence.

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17 And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. 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.

After escaping the city, David and his servants went a certain distance and waited for a small band of 600 soldiers to join him. These were foreign mercenary soldiers (Cherethites, Pelethites and Gittites) who had apparently gotten word from David to come to his aid.

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.

Covering the head and going barefoot were expressions of grief and mourning. David and everyone with him wept as they climbed the Mount of Olives, grieving over David's expulsion from Jerusalem.

## 2 Samuel 16

15 And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him.

Absalom left Hebron and came to Jerusalem and found that David had fled. He likely had come with his men to fight a battle against David to take the kingdom by force, but it was not necessary since David had already left. Ahithophel, David's advisor, also came with Absalom. Ahithophel, who was also the grandfather of Bathsheba, had apparently not forgiven David stealing her from Uriah and having Uriah killed. Perhaps he felt that joining Absalom would enable him to get his revenge against David.

20 Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. 21 And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong.

Finding the kingdom to be his for the taking, Absalom asks his advisors (headed by Ahithophel) what his first order of business should be. Ahithophel, perhaps remembering David's sin with Bathsheba, advises Absalom to show that he was ready to take the throne by laying with the ten concubines that David had left behind. Since the custom of the day was for a new king to inherit the harem of the previous king, following Ahithophel's advice would show that Absalom was taking the throne of his father and give confidence to his loyal supporters. This act also fulfilled the judgment spoken by Nathan in 2 Sam. 12:11-12.

## 2 Samuel 18

14 Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak. 15 And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.

**"Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee"** – By this time David has had time to rest and prepare for battle against the forces of Absalom. The David's soldiers had engaged and defeated Absalom's forces in battle, sending Absalom fleeing on a mule. As he rode through a thick forest, his head got caught in the low-hanging tree branches above him. The mule continued on without him, leaving him hanging helpless by the hair that had been a source of pride for him. One of David's soldiers saw him hanging there but was afraid to do anything because David had given strict orders that Absalom was not to be harmed. This soldier reported what he saw to Joab, who now is anxious to get to Absalom before he escaped. He tells this soldier that he does not have the time to waste standing around talking.

**"And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak"** – Joab's desire to end Absalom's rebellion is apparent since he used three spears to impale Absalom while he was hanging helplessly from the tree.

**"And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him"** – Three spears through the heart was a mortal wound, but ten of Joab's armor bearers also attacked Absalom to make sure that he was dead.

32 And the king said unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is.

**"And the king said unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom safe?"** – Since Absalom was dead, Joab recalled David's soldiers from the battle (v. 16) and then he sent a messenger named Cush to report to David the results of the battle (v. 21). After hearing that the LORD had given him victory that day, David's first priority was to know of the welfare of his son Absalom.

**"And Cush answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is"** – Cush replies that all of the enemies of David that would attempt to harm him ought to share the same fate as "that young man" (Absalom).

33 And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

**"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept"** – David immediately understood that Absalom was dead and found a place where he could be alone to weep and mourn for his son.

**"and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!"** – David obviously still loved Absalom despite his son's rebellion. Apparently David had hoped to end the rebellion quickly so that he could rehabilitate his son.

**"would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"** – In addition to his love for his son, perhaps David also felt guilt and responsibility for Absalom's rebellion and subsequent death because of his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah. Part of the punishment for those sins was violence and trouble from within his family (2 Sam. 12:10-11). These factors may help explain why David cried out that he would have preferred to die in Absalom's place.