

## After God's Own Heart - "Absalom My Absalom"

David's heart is set free from guilt and shame, but his family is filled with pain. The downward spiral has begun; the final years of David's reign will be tarnished and tawdry. The Lord promised David, "The sword will not depart from your house," and in the course of time three of his sons will come to violent deaths. Our focus will be upon Absalom, the son who led a rebellion against his father and perished in battle.

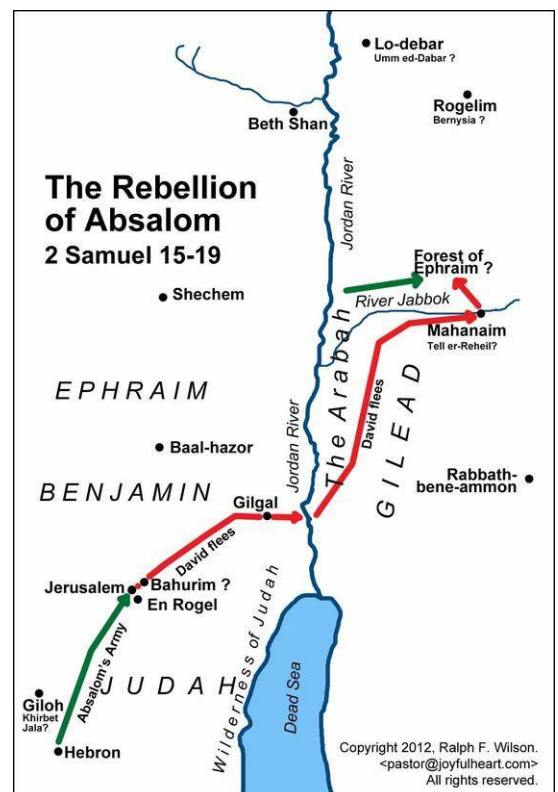
### Some Background

Several years pass between the end of 2 Samuel 12 and 2 Samuel 13. But 2 Samuel 13:1 sounds an ominous note, "In the course of time, Amnon son of David [David's eldest] fell in love with Tamar the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David." By the end of the chapter Amnon will rape his half sister, and Absalom will avenge her by killing Amnon. He will then flee to Talmai the king of Geshur (an independent city-state in what is today the Golan Heights and perhaps also the New Testament city of Bethsaida). Absalom will live there for about 3 years before Joab, the commander of David's army devises a plan to bring Absalom home. He does this to ease David's grief at having his 2 oldest sons taken from him. When Absalom returns, David appears to have a change of heart and refuses to see his son for over 2 years. This sets the stage for the conspiracy to overthrow the king.

### Absalom's Rebellion - 2 Samuel 15-17

Absalom began his revolt against his father by usurping one of the duties of the King, namely, to act as a judge in the disputes of the people. All of Israel's leaders from the time of Moses onward served not only as political and military leader but as the judiciary as well. Absalom would get up early each morning and position himself by the side of the road leading into the city, intercepting everyone who came with a "complaint to be placed before the king for a decision." He would validate the claim and then announce there was no one at the palace to hear the matter. He would then announce, "If only I were appointed as a judge in the land. Then everyone who has a complaint or case would come to me and I would see that he gets justice." (2 Sam 15:4)

Gradually Absalom won the hearts of the people. He receives permission to travel to Hebron to offer a sacrifice to the Lord, but used the trip to expand his influence.



When news of this comes to David in Jerusalem, the king flees the city. As he travels east to the Mount of Olives and beyond he is alternately blessed and cursed by the people he encounters. Some including Ittai the Gittite and Ziba the steward of Mephibosheth join David while others like Shimei from the family of Saul curse him. Zadok the priest brings the Ark of the Covenant to David but is told by the king to return to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile Absalom moves to Jerusalem. He moves into the palace and begins to reign as king. Two of David's advisors offer him advice on what to do about his father. One suggests a targeted attack to assassinate the king while the other calls for all out war against David and his army. Absalom chooses the second option setting up a battle in the Forest of Ephraim east of the Jordan River.

## **The Battle - 2 Samuel 18**

Here are some key points of the battle:

- David sends out three divisions to battle Absalom and his army
- David remains in the camp on advice of his commanders
- He instructs the soldiers to "Be gentle with Absalom."
- The battle begins in a field but David's soldiers prevail forcing Absalom and his troops to flee into the thick forest. More men are killed in the forest than in battle.
- Absalom who has beautiful thick hair (2 Samuel 14:26) gets caught by his hair in a tree.
- Joab defies David's instruction and kills Absalom with 3 darts to the heart.

Back in the camp David eagerly awaits news from the battle. He hopes to hear that Absalom has been spared, but it is not to be.

"O my son, Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you – O Absalom, my son, my son" – 2 Samuel 18:33

## **Aftermath**

Though David returns to the throne in Jerusalem, restoring his reign is no easy thing. His grief over Absalom makes his army question their loyalty to him, nearly to the point of mutiny. Tribal jealousies are aroused and before long the kingdom is convulsed again as Sheba, a "troublemaker" from the tribe of Benjamin leads another revolt against David.

## **What Does This Mean for Us?**

If you think you had family problems, you have nothing on David! He has family problems beyond most of our wildest imaginings! But there is more than that. We often call the great figures of the Old Testament "Heroes of Faith." We use that term deliberately. Despite being God's servants and leaders of the people, their lives are often pretty messed up. Noah, Abraham, Moses and now David are all flawed characters. Their lives are not necessarily to be

imitated. However, while being caught in all too human failings, they are at the same time people of great faith. They are sinners and saints at the same time.

David's family is a shipwreck, but where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. As at other times in his life, the struggles with Absalom lead David to turn to the Lord for protection and help. Psalm 3 was written by David when he fled from Absalom. It is a psalm of faith in God to protect, avenge and deliver.

### **Psalm 3**

O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me;  
many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God.  
But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.  
I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill.  
I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.  
I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all  
around.  
Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God!  
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked.  
Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people!

This psalm recounts this dark period in David's life. Despite his foes' claim that David's sins preclude him from salvation, David remains confident that God will protect and deliver him. Despite our miserable condition (and certain end), God shields us from our foes, lifts us, and directs our eyes to His great mercy displayed in the cross of Christ. He assures us that salvation belongs to Him and is given to those who trust in Him.

**"You, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God!" Amen.**