

Sunday Night Message

July 12, 2020

2 Samuel 18 – The Rebellion of Absalom, Continued

Topics – David; Absalom; rebellion

Series – *2 Samuel*

Introduction

We have been studying the life and reign of King David and have observed some of the problems that have taken place within his family. The trouble begins in chapter thirteen, where we discovered that Amnon, one of David's sons, raped one of David's daughters, a girl named Tamar. They were actually half-brother and sister, which does not make it any less vile. Tamar's full brother Absalom learns about how his sister was treated, and plots the murder of his older brother. After two years, Absalom finally goes through with his plan and kills Amnon for what he did to Tamar.

Absalom then fears punishment from his father David, and flees to Geshur, which is in Syria. It was also the place where his mother was from. David's wife, Absalom's mother was the King of Geshur's daughter. Absalom remains in Geshur for three years.

When we get to chapter fourteen, we learn that Joab intervenes on behalf of Absalom and secures permission from David to bring him back to Jerusalem, but David refuses to see him for another two years.

However, at the end of chapter fourteen there appeared to be a full reconciliation between them. David agrees to see his son and it seems on the surface that all was well.

However, in chapter fifteen, we learned that there was war in the heart of Absalom, and he launched a full-scale rebellion against his father, David. Absalom seduces the people of Israel, convincing them that David was not a good king and that he could do a much better job. He blows the trumpet and declares himself to be king in Hebron.

Note – the Bible says in 2 Samuel 15:7 that this rebellion took place “after forty years.” This time span has been a source of much debate. Some scholars dismiss the number as being wrong altogether, and claim that it should have been four instead of forty. The King James is accurate, but does the forty years represent. We stated that it could have meant forty years from the time that David was anointed by Samuel to be king. But, it also could be that this rebellion by Absalom takes place at the very end of David's life. We know that David reigned for forty and a half years (7 ½ years in Hebron and 33 years in Israel – 2 Samuel 5:5). If this is true then it means that all of the events that take place in the remaining chapters of 2 Samuel are not in chronological order. The reason for this is that the writer to 2 Samuel placed the entire story about Absalom in one place. It is in a logical order. William Crockett's *A Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles* places these events just before David's death.¹

¹ William Crockett, *A Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles: The Books of the Kings of Judah and Israel* (New York; Chicago; Toronto; London; Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1897), 154.

David knows that Absalom will make a move on Jerusalem so he abandons the city, in order to keep the battle away from there, and thereby sparing the city much damage, and the citizens much danger.

In the last part of chapter fifteen, we see the leaders of Israel and supposed friends of David all choosing sides. Most will remain faithful to David, but some would betray him. The two main characters we meet are Hushai and Ahithophel. Both were trusted counselors for David, but we find out that Ahithophel has switched sides and allied himself with Absalom. Perhaps, Ahithophel was upset with David for what he had done to his grand-daughter Bathsheba. See 2 Samuel 11:3; 23:34 - Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, and Eliam was the son of Ahithophel.

Hushai, on the other hand, was still a trusted counselor to David, but was pretending to be a friend to Absalom. He was a double agent.

In chapter sixteen, we met more characters and saw where their allegiances lay. Some were for David; some for Absalom; but many were just out for themselves.

At the close of chapter sixteen, Ahithophel was counseling Absalom as to what he should do about David and here in chapter seventeen, the advice continues. However, Absalom also receives advice from Hushai, which sounds a lot better. It appeals to his ego. He pictures himself as the conquering hero who defeats the mighty warrior. The counsel of Hushai, however, will be used against Absalom.

I. The Meeting in Mt. Ephraim (vs. 1 – 8)

Verses 1 - 2 – “numbered” – David will later (or earlier if Crockett’s *A Harmony* is correct) get in trouble for numbering the people (2 Samuel 24). But here the meaning is different. In 2 Samuel 24, David is numbering the people in order to see how strong he is. Here, David is numbering the people in order to see where he was going to place them. The word, “muster,” would be a good synonym to the word, “number” in this context. He will divide them into three groups: one under Joab; one under Abishai, Joab’s brother; and the third under Ittai, David’s new friend.

We are not supposed to number the people in our church in order to brag about how many we have, either. But, we are supposed to know who we have to work with, and how we can effectively organize the people to do what they are supposed to do for the Lord.

Verses 3 – 4 – The king wants to go with them to battle, but the people won’t let him. They ask him to “succor” them or “support” them from the city.

According to 2 Samuel 21:15 – 17, the leaders of the army determined that David would never accompany them again to battle. Again, according to Crockett’s *A Harmony* this event took place years prior to the Battle of Mt. Ephraim. As a matter of fact, Crockett places David’s sin with Bathsheba after 2 Samuel 21:17, which means that the reason why David was not with his men at battle was because his men had refused to let him go.

That means that it was not David’s fault that he wasn’t where he was supposed to be. It was still his fault, however, that he sinned with Bathsheba and had Urijah killed. Sometimes the devil will

arrange circumstances in your life where your “fence” will come down, but it is still your choice as to whether you allow yourself to cross the line or not.

Verse 5 – David asks that Absalom be taken alive. It was a tall order, consider all of the damage that Absalom had caused. All of these men had to be removed from their homes, away from the city. Many Israelites were going to lose their lives as a result of this rebellion. Absalom should have been brought to justice, and in Old Testament Israel that meant death. However, the king wanted him alive.

Verses 6 – 8 – The Battle of Mt. Ephraim took the lives of twenty thousand men from Israel, presumably men that were fighting for Absalom.

Note – it seems that Absalom was actually considered the king of Israel for this period of rebellion.

Notice – “the wood” took more lives than the battle, indicating that the terrain was very rough. It would be “the wood” that would ultimately be responsible for Absalom’s death.

II. The Murder of Absalom (vs. 9 – 18)

We know Absalom had very long hair (2 Samuel 14:26).

"And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight (approximately 5 ½ pounds)." (2 Samuel 14:26)

According to Josephus, his hair got caught in the branches:

Then did Joab put his army in battle array over against the enemy in the Great Plain, where he had a wood behind him. Absalom also brought his army into the field to oppose him. Upon the joining of the battle, both sides showed great actions with their hands and their boldness; the one side exposing themselves to the greatest hazards, and using their utmost alacrity, that David might recover his kingdom; and the other being no way deficient, either in doing or suffering, that Absalom might not be deprived of that kingdom, and be brought to punishment by his father, for his impudent attempt against him. (237) Those also that were the most numerous were solicitous that they might not be conquered by those few that were with Joab, and with the other commanders, because that would be the greatest disgrace to them; while David’s soldiers strove greatly to overcome so many ten thousands as the enemy had with them. Now David’s men were conquerors, as superior in strength and skill in war; (238) so they followed the others as they fled away through the forests and valleys; some they took prisoners, and many they slew, and more in the flight than in the battle, for there fell about twenty thousand that day. But all David’s men ran violently upon Absalom, for he was easily known by his beauty and tallness. (239) He was himself also afraid lest his enemies should seize on him, so he got upon the king’s mule and fled; but as he was carried with violence, and noise, and a great motion, as being himself light, he entangled his hair greatly in the large boughs of a knotty tree that spread a great way, and there he hung, after a surprising manner; and as for the beast it went on farther, and that swiftly, as if his master had been still upon his back; but he hanging in the air upon the boughs, was taken by his enemies. (240) Now when

one of David's soldiers saw this, he informed Joab of it; and when the general said, That if he had shot at and killed Absalom, he would have given him fifty shekels,—he replied, "I would not have killed my master's son if thou wouldst have given me a thousand shekels, especially when he desired that the young man might be spared, in the hearing of us all." (241) But Joab bade him show him where it was he saw Absalom hang; whereupon he shot him to the heart, and slew him, and Joab's armor bearers stood round the tree, and pulled down his dead body, (242) and cast it into a great chasm that was out of sight, and laid a heap of stones upon him, till the cavity was filled up, and had both the appearance and the bigness of a grave. Then Joab sounded a retreat, and recalled his own soldiers from pursuing the enemy's army, in order to spare their countrymen.²

Notice in vs. 11 - 13 that Joab wanted the man to kill Absalom, but this soldier had more sense than to go against the king's orders.

Note – sometimes people will try to get you to do their dirty work for them. Joab here is a picture of the Devil. He tries to get you to do wrong, and then he accuses you and tries to get God to punish you.

Notice in verse 18 – The pillar that Absalom set up to himself indicates that he had no sons. Yet, according to 2 Samuel 14:27, he had three sons and one daughter. Either the sons had died, or he set the monument up before their birth, or there is some other meaning to this. Absalom obviously had a problem with pride. It is pretty egotistical to set up a pillar to yourself. There is apparently a monument today, perhaps in the same spot, on the eastern side of Jerusalem in the Kidron Valley, which bears Absalom's name. The orthodox Jews spit on it when passing by.³

"Absalom was given a burial of humiliation though he intended something of great honor. Absalom's legacy was not what he intended. His monument may be given his name, **but his life determines his legacy**. Men who want to establish a legacy will find that their life establishes their legacy no matter how they manipulate things to make themselves look good."⁴

III. The Messengers Bringing the Tidings (vs. 19 – 32)

Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, was a good runner. He wanted to bring the news to David, but Joab would not let him.

Joab tells Cushie to deliver the news, perhaps because it was going to be bad news for David. Cushie is short for "the Cushite," a descendent of Cush and probably a servant from Ethiopia. Perhaps Joab thought that David would react poorly, or even violently to the news.

Ahimaaz runs ahead of Cushie, but only wants to give David the good news. He neglects to tell David about Absalom. Cushie will give him "the whole counsel of God," so to speak. He tells him all of the truth, not just the part that David wanted to hear.

² Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 198–199.

³ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 454.

⁴ John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: I & II Samuel* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2010), 777.

According to Wiersbe:

No doubt he had prayed that the worst would not happen, but it happened just the same. In one sense, David pronounced his own sentence when he said to Nathan, "And he shall restore the lamb fourfold" (12:5), for this was the final payment of David's great debt. The baby had died, Tamar was raped, Amnon was slain and now Absalom was dead. David tasted once again the pain of forgiven sin.⁵

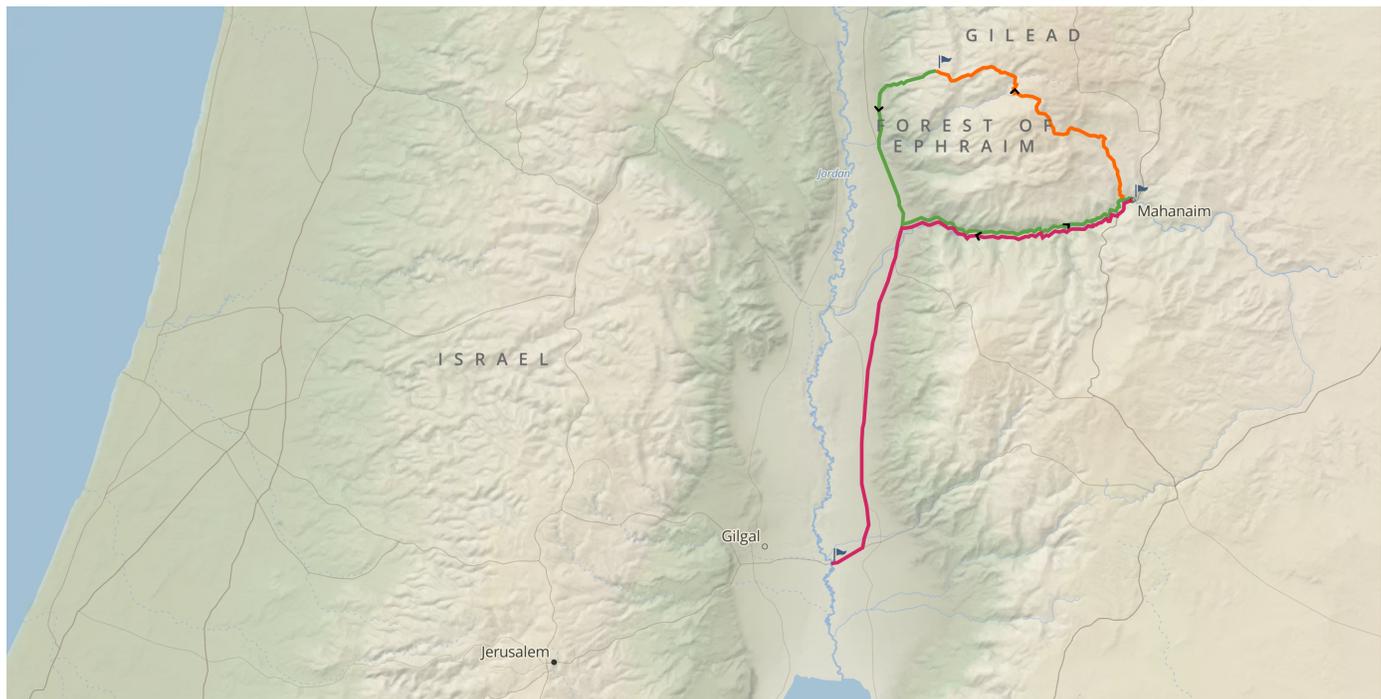
IV. The Mourning of a Father (v. 33)

David was a father. It is completely natural that David would not want Absalom to be killed. That is precisely why, he should not be making any decisions regarding the fate of Absalom. David was guilty, as many fathers are of being blind to their children's faults:

"Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him. And his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom." (1 Kings 1:5-6)

It had already been determined that Solomon was going to be king. Yet, David did nothing to stop Adonijah as he was doing the same thing that Absalom did.

"Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever." (1 Chronicles 22:9-10)



⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Restored*, "Be" Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2002), 115.