

*Exegetical Outline*

Exegetical summary: The scheming of a soldier through the deception of a woman persuades God’s anointed king to extend “mercy” without justice as the beginning of the fulfillment of Nathan’s prophecy of the consequences for the king’s sin.

- I. The Scheme of the Soldier (1-3)
  1. The Basis (1)
  2. The Method (2-3)
- II. The Deception of the Woman (4-17)
  1. The Problem (4-7)
    - a. Her helplessness (4-5)
    - b. Her hopelessness (6-7)
  2. The Promise (8-11)
  3. The Pressure (12-17)
    - a. Her accusation (12-13)
    - b. Her reasoning (14)
    - c. Her motivation (15-17)
- III. The Capitulation of the King (18-23)
  1. The Realization (18-19)
  2. The Confession (20)
  3. The Decision (21)
  4. The Response (22-23)
  5. The Implementation (24)
- IV. The Return of the Murderer (24-27)
  1. The Arrangement (24)
  2. The Appearance (25-26)
  3. The Allusion (27)
- V. The Absence of Justice (28-33)
  1. The King’s Inaction (28)
  2. The Rebel’s Impatience (29)
  3. The Rebel’s Insolence (30-32)
  4. The King’s Injustice (33)

*Homiletical Outline*

Homiletical idea: The manipulation, unbelief, cheap grace, and lack of discipline of David are meant to point us to the need for God’s true Anointed King, who *triumphs* over God’s enemies, *incarnates* God’s Word, makes *true* mercy possible by assuming judgment upon himself, and wisely and lovingly *disciplines* his people.

- I. Introduction
- II. Exposition
  1. The Scheme of the Soldier

2. The Deception of the Woman
3. The Failure of the King
4. The Return of the Murderer
5. The Absence of Justice

### III. Application

1. David was manipulated by his enemy for his purposes, but Jesus sovereignly controls his enemies to accomplish his
  - A. Fulfilling his purposes
  - B. Situating his people
  - C. Response: *Trust and obey*
2. David forgot God's promise and believed a half-truth, but Jesus is the fulfillment of all God's promises and is the Truth incarnate
  - A. Issuing his Word
  - B. Accomplishing his Word
  - C. Response: *Hear and remember*
3. David tried to show mercy by ignoring justice, but Jesus embodied mercy by accepting injustice
  - A. Merciful in his sacrifice
  - B. Just in his judgment
  - C. Response: *Repent and believe*
4. David's lack of discipline led his children to rebel, but Jesus disciplines his followers in love and wisdom to make them more like himself
  - A. Good in his instruction
  - B. Wise in his discipline
  - C. Response: *Know and rejoice*

### IV. Conclusion

Manuscript

## I. Introduction

Some of you may remember that in 1968 the United States was deeply involved in the Vietnam War. And in that year, a company of American soldiers under the command of Lieutenant William Calley entered the Vietnamese village of My Lai on a search-and-destroy mission. This company had already lost 28 men to combat. But no shots were fired upon these American soldiers as they entered the village. In fact, there were no enemy soldiers were to be found--only women, children, and the elderly. But Lieutenant William Calley viewed these villagers as Vietcong sympathizers, and he gave the order to open fire. And not only to open fire but to dismember, rape, and otherwise brutalize the villagers. Once the news broke of what came to be known as the My Lai massacre, it was revealed that as many as 500 Vietnamese villagers had been killed. William Calley was convicted of premeditated murder and faced the death sentence for his actions. But many felt that this sentence was too harsh, and the shortly afterward President Richard Nixon ordered Calley to be relocated to a house arrest. Calley served just three years of an already reduced twenty-year sentence. And in 1974, Nixon offered Calley a

presidential pardon. Calley has lived as a free man ever since in Atlanta, Georgia, and rarely speaks about the My Lai massacre--except for a \$25,000 fine.

We have to admit that we'll never know all the details of the story of the My Lai massacre. We may even understand, on *some* level, how the horrors of war and the loss of 28 fellow soldiers could lead a man like Calley to take such brutal actions. But we're also led to admit that it looks as though, at least on the face of it, when President Nixon issued that pardon, justice was not done. The demands of the people and the pressures of competing motives ultimately led him to overlook the awful atrocities that were committed against these Vietnamese women and children. And we would sadly conclude that this is *not* truly an act of mercy--it's the absence of justice.

## II. Exposition

### Context

Well, in our passage tonight we'll see a similar absence of justice--one that is *also* disguised as an act of mercy. We are continuing our journey through the books of Samuel, as we've been following the life of David, his rise to the position of God's covenant king over Israel and all the blessings that has entailed, and yet in the last few weeks, and again tonight, we've begun to see the story take a darker turn. The sunshine has started to give way to some ominous clouds, and in the distance the thunder has started to roll. David's sin with Bathsheba and plotted murder of her husband Uriah led to a prophetic announcement by Nathan the prophet that although David had been forgiven by the Lord, there would be some dire consequences for his actions. "I will raise up evil against you out of your own house," the Lord had said, "And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun."

It didn't take long for that prophecy to begin to unfold. Last week we saw the first manifestation of it in the actions of David's firstborn son Amnon, in the rape of his half-sister Tamar. And in retaliation for that brutality we saw the vengeance of David's third-born son Absalom, who organized the murder of his brother Amnon in a way that was eerily reminiscent of the plotting of his father David. Having taken such complete vengeance, Absalom fled out of Jerusalem to the northern region of Geshur, the homeland of his mother, and the land where her own father was the king. Why did Absalom flee to Geshur? Because under the Law of Moses, Absalom deserved the death penalty for his actions, despite the equally heinous actions of Amnon. So Absalom sought refuge outside the jurisdiction of his father King David, living as an exile much as David had lived during the rule of Saul. That was the situation at the end of our story last week, which could have left off with the classic "To be continued..." at the bottom of the screen.

Well, this week's episode opens with a blank screen and the words "*Three years later...*"

The last few lines of chapter 13 let us know that the murderer Absalom has been living as a fugitive in the country ruled by his grandfather on his mother's side for three years, and during that time, David's anger toward him has begun to subside somewhat. Time does *not* heal all wounds, but it does numb them, and the narrator suggests that in three years' time David has come to terms with the death of his oldest son.

But chapter 14 opens on a much more ominous note as the scene shifts to Joab, the commander of David's armies whose own brutality we've seen ever since David's days of struggle with Saul. During those days, if you remember, Joab had avenged the killing of his *own* brother by murdering Abner, this other leading soldier who had just joined David's cause. David was not pleased with that decision and he actually pronounced a curse on Joab at that time, all the way back in chapter 3 (2 Sam 3:28-29). Joab popped up again a few weeks ago right after David's sin with Bathsheba when he encouraged David to go and conquer an Ammonite city for himself so that David and *not* Joab would get the credit. And now he is the first character on the stage at the beginning of chapter 14. So with that in mind, let's go ahead and read tonight's text, beginning in verse 1:

**[Read 2 Sam 14:1-33]**

### **1. The Scheme of the Soldier (14:1-3)**

In our first section of verses 1-7, the scene opens with Joab, and here we're introduced to the **Scheme of the Soldier**. The narrator clues us in that something devious might be coming through the background information that he gives us right at the beginning, in verse 1, as its **Basis**: "Now Joab the son of Zeruah *knew* that the king's heart went out to Absalom." As the commander of David's army (as well as being his nephew [1 Chron. 2:16]), Joab was certainly familiar with the events that had transpired between David's sons Amnon and Absalom, and Joab had a vested interest in the outcome of that debacle since, as far as *he* knew, one of them would probably be the heir to David on the throne. Joab's interactions with David over the past three years had made it clear to him that, even if David was no longer actively seeking to capture and punish Absalom for his crime, the matter was still very much "on his mind", as we might translate from this verse. And so Joab devised this scheme for resolving it. The narrator doesn't tell us exactly *why* Joab felt like this was necessary. From the other accounts of Joab's dealings with David, both before and after this story (2 Sam. 3:22-25, 12:26-29, 18:6-15, 19:1-8), it's clear that Joab was often frustrated with David's lack of attention or commitment to certain military operations or strategies that Joab thought were crucial—so it could be that Joab saw this conflict with Absalom as a distraction, as a drain on David's attention and his emotions that just needed to be removed. In cases of disagreement like this Joab's habit was to take matters into his own hands, and that probably explains the scheme he concocts here.

But Joab also knew David as a person. Other passages describe how easily David could be manipulated by his children, and it seems that the same tendency was true in his other relationships as well. So Joab, ever the strategist, and probably with an eye toward stabilizing his own position in the kingdom under David and whoever succeeded him, saw an opportunity, and he seized it.

As Joab puts the scheme into motion in verse 2 we begin to see its **Method**. Probably knowing that his own relationship with the king is not on good enough terms to approach the king directly, and possibly also to avoid raising any suspicion about his motives, Joab decides to enlist the help of a woman from Tekoa, a village to the south of Jerusalem. The narrator describes her as a "wise woman", and this is a bit of tongue-in-cheek, just the same as when he described Jonadab,

the one who *suggested* the scheme to Amnon for pretending to be sick in order to seduce or rape Tamar, as a “wise man” in the last chapter (2 Sam. 13:3). So a better term might be “crafty”, and probably in the sense of being a good actress. Because Joab intends to tell her exactly what to say to get the outcome he wants.

The plan is simple. She’ll pretend to be a “mourner” so that she can present a tricky legal and ethical situation to David and then ask for his judgment. When he gives it, she’ll reveal that the situation actually describes *him*, and he’ll have no choice but to apply the judgment to himself. Sound familiar? It should, because it’s the same tactic that the prophet Nathan used to convict David of his sin with Bathsheba just two chapters ago (2 Sam. 12:1-15)—which is just one more technique that the narrator uses to show how *this* episode is a direct consequence of *that* one.

To be absolutely sure that we pick up on the manipulative nature of this plan, the narrator emphasizes that Joab, literally, “put the words in her mouth”—and when Joab tells her to put on “garments”, he uses a word that has the sense of “coverings” and can just as easily mean something like “deceit” or “treachery” (root בגד).

## 2. The Deception of the Woman (14:4-17)

So in the first three verses the narrator clues us in to the scheme of the soldier, and then in verses 4-17 we see it play out in the **Deception of the Woman**.

Now in fact, if we hadn’t already been informed so clearly in the introduction that *Joab* is the puppeteer behind this exchange, we might be inclined to sympathize with the story this woman presents and the lesson she seems to be trying to teach. David *obviously* was. But the point to be made in this section is that this is all too frequently the way the lies and deceptions of the world and the enemies of God actually function—through the use of manipulation and the presentation of half-truths, or even whole truths—but without concern for the bigger picture.

First our actress describes **the Problem**, in verses 4-7. The argument opens with her presentation of *herself* in her **helplessness**. Here she is, a destitute woman, covered in the black garb of funerals and traditional mourning, lacking all the privileges and status of an Israelite man, tears mixing with the well-placed grime on her cheeks, lying prostrate on the ground before the almighty king, and she pays “homage” to him through the first words out of her mouth, a desperate plea for mercy: “Save me, O King!” And on top of that we learn that she is a widow! Her husband is dead. Who could turn her away?

But of course there’s more, as she goes on to create a sense of her **hopelessness**. Her sons have been quarreling, and the one has now *murdered* the other in the open field. Naturally, the rest of the family is enraged and they intend to act according to the Mosaic Law, which allowed and even required an “avenger of blood” to personally put the murderer to death (Gen. 9:6, Lev. 24:17, Num. 35:16-21, Deut. 19:11-13). In the story, the mother has apparently tried to protect her murderous son from the angry family because he is her only surviving heir, and in his death the family line will come to an end without any hope of restoration. She and any surviving relatives will experience the shame and exclusion and eventually extinction of those who have been cut off from the covenant community of Israel and its God, in a situation quite similar to

what we remember from the story of Naomi in the book of Ruth. It's a death sentence, not only upon the murderer but upon his entire family line. Surely, the actress suggests, the king could not be so heartless as to condemn her to a fate like that...?

We can imagine that the tremor in her voice and the moisture in her eyes were convincing as she concluded her tragic tale; Joab hadn't chosen this woman without reason. And so in verses 8-11 we see David give **the Promise**.

At first, in verse 8, he seems reluctant—maybe undecided. He knows the law of course, but the stakes for this woman are so high...and something about her story seems to resonate on a deeper level with him...

But he comes back to his senses and decides to put off the decision. "Go to your house, and I'll give orders concerning you," he says in verse 8. Very noncommittal.

But she isn't finished with him yet. She sees the conflict in his eyes. She senses the turmoil that her story has begun to evoke. And in verse 9 she goes in for the kill.

*"On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house! Let the king and his throne be guiltless!"*

Who could hold the king responsible for such a *gracious* decision?? she seems to imply. If anyone wants to quibble about ancient laws, let them take it up with her and her father's house. Certainly the king won't be to blame.

Well, this proves to be the decisive argument, and in verse 10 David succumbs. He offers his full protection to her imaginary son.

But still the woman isn't satisfied! She wants an oath in verse 11, an invocation of the name of Yahweh *himself*, that David will not allow what the Law of Moses *specifically requires* in a situation like this! Her words are a *direct* contradiction to passages such as Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19, which command that the avenger of blood *should* destroy the murderer in order to bring him to justice!

And of course this is always the way the deceptions of Satan and his kingdom work: from the very beginning his approach has been to make an enticing offer, plant seeds of doubt as to the truthfulness and reliability of God's Word, and then to directly contradict that Word with a lie of his own. "Did God *really* say, "You shall not eat of the fruit..." (Gen. 2:1) is always followed by "You will *not* surely die..." (Gen. 2:4)

But David is fully overcome, and like Adam in the garden, this covenant-leader of God's people also gives in to the temptation and swears by the holy name of God himself that not a hair of the murderer's head will fall to the ground—another clever bit of foreshadowing by our narrator, for those of you who know the way the story of Absalom ends.

The pieces have been set, David has been cornered without even realizing he is playing the game, and all that remains now is for the actress to announce, “Check Mate.” And so in verses 12-17 she applies **the Pressure**.

First she unloads **her accusation** in verses 12-13. In the equivalent of Nathan’s revelation to David “You are the man!” in the story of the rich man stealing the beloved lamb of the poor man, the actress drives home the point that the reader has sensed all along: the murderous son is Absalom, and it is within David’s power to bring home his “banished one.” By refusing to invite him to return to Jerusalem in the past three years, she says in verse 13, “the king convicts himself.” We may wonder exactly in whose eyes he stands convicted...but she has announced in verse 12 that David’s offense is “against the people of God.” Absalom was apparently a popular figure among the people of Israel, as we see in later passages, and with the death of Amnon it may have been assumed that he would succeed David as the next king.

In any case, after presenting her accusation the woman lays out **her reasoning** in verse 14: “We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.”

Oh, what an incredibly *glorious truth* to be so horribly mangled and misapplied in the service of a wicked cause! The tender, gracious mercy of God upon banished ones...this is indeed the theme at the heart of this passage, as we’ll see, and at the center of all the message of Scripture! But God’s mercy is *not* free, and it does not *ever*, not even for a *moment*, compromise his holy justice.

We’ll return to this idea later. But for now, after seeing her reasoning we now see the woman’s **motivation**, in verses 15-17. Once again she appeals to the power of the king to relieve her supposed suffering, to “deliver her from the hand of the man who would destroy her and her son together from the heritage of God.” For good measure she compares David to the “angel of God” in his ability to “discern good and evil”—she knows he’ll make the right decision. And isn’t that the comparison we’re always seeking...the power to discern good and evil like the angel of God...another subtle allusion by our narrator to Adam’s sin in the garden, eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to become like God...

### **3. Ruling of the King (18-23)**

So, having laid the groundwork in the Scheme of the Soldier and the Deception of the Woman, now the narrator unfolds the climax of this story in verses 18-23 with the **Ruling of the King**.

The cards are on the table, and David sees that he’s been had. The question now is who has orchestrated this embarrassing confrontation, and the king’s instincts serve him well in his **realization**. “Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?” he asks in verse 19.

Maybe taken off guard by his insight, and becoming more than a little nervous, the woman offers a full **confession**, but with the guilt resting squarely on Joan’s shoulders in verse 20: “It was your

servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words in my mouth.” She follows it up with another compliment of David’s god-like wisdom...just in case the first one didn’t take.

In a surprising twist, we now learn in verse 21 that Joab himself is *in the room!* Or at least close enough to be summoned quickly, as David finally cuts out the middleman (or middlewoman) and announces his **decision** to the one who instigated this whole mess: “I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.”

The scheme of the soldier has worked. The deception of the woman paid off. And despite becoming aware of their attempt to manipulate him, the king goes along with it anyway! The depth of David’s struggle with making good judgments, especially in the face of strong influence, becomes clear here.

Probably a little surprised by this verdict, Joab is nevertheless certainly not complaining, and his **response** to the king’s decision is filled with an appearance of gratitude and humility for such favor, not at all consistent with the picture of the stubborn, headstrong, scheming soldier that we know Joab to be.

Finally, there is the **implementation** of the decision in verse 23, and Joab personally returns the fugitive murderer Absalom back to his home his Jerusalem. For Joab, it’s mission accomplished.

#### **4. Return of the Murderer (24-27)**

But a streak of lightning now flashes across that darkening horizon of the book of Samuel that we described earlier, and in verses 24-27 the **Return of the Murderer** is full of foreboding. Evil days are ahead for David and his throne, just as Nathan had forewarned, and his poor decisions have all been part of God’s overarching purpose to fulfill his Word. Verse 24 reports that even though Absalom has returned to the city, he is still not allowed to enter David’s presence, suggesting that David is at least still conflicted about his return.

But in verse 25 the scene shifts to Absalom himself, and the camera zooms in menacingly, as though to give a teasing glimpse of the villain who will feature in the next episode. “Now there was *no one* so much to be praised for his handsome *appearance* as Absalom,” the narrator reveals. From head to foot Absalom was physically impressive and personally charming. His hair was long and “heavy”—using a word that can also mean “glorious”. To top it off, the narrator reveals in verse 27 that Absalom has named his daughter Tamar—and so in her, his grudge against his murdered brother literally lives on.

#### **5. Absence of Justice (28-33)**

At last, in our final section of verses 28-33, with Absalom back in Jerusalem but not yet fully reconciled to his father, the murderer takes matters into his own hands so that we see in full clarity the **Absence of Justice**.

Two years pass, and nothing changes due to the **King’s Inaction** in verse 28. Still he is not permitted to enter David’s presence. But it is not enough for Absalom that he has avoided the



death penalty that he rightly deserves for the murder of his brother. It's not even enough that he's been allowed to live in the royal city. He craves the status and recognition of a full restoration to the throne room and the royal court. And so we see in verse 29 the **Rebel's Impatience**. Twice he sends for Joab, to argue his case before the king, and both times he's ignored. Joab's purposes for Absalom are apparently finished.

So the rebel's impatience becomes the **Rebel's Insolence** in verses 30-32, as Absalom proceeds to burn the property of the man who has just facilitated his return from exile and insists on having an audience with the king even, as he says in verse 32, "*if there is guilt in me*". In all probability Absalom *knew* that there was guilt in him, but he also knew his father, and he knew that if he could look him in the eyes and plead, much as the woman of Tekoa had done two years earlier, his father's leniency would get the better of him, as it always did.

Children are often more perceptive of their parents' weaknesses than anyone else, and clearly Absalom was no exception. The last sentence of our chapter simply reports that "he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom." In this entire account there is not a hint of remorse or repentance on the part of Absalom, not the slightest recognition of the severity of his crime or the pain that it caused to his father and others. Rather, it appears that he engaged in the brief show of groveling that he knew was needed to persuade the king to welcome him back into his good graces with open arms. From there, his position was primed to set his eyes on his *true* prize: a takeover of his father's kingdom, with all the honor and glory and status and power that it represented.

### III. Application

Well, what do we take away from such a disheartening and overall depressing picture of David's failure in this story? We remember, as always, that the purpose of this passage is to point us not to David but to Jesus Christ. And in fact our passage has done that at each step of the way by illustrating the need for a true covenant-king, who would not fail where David did.

**1. In the Scheme of the Soldier**, we saw the ability of Joab to manipulate David. He put a plan in motion that he knew would convince his king to do something that served Joab's own purposes. But our Covenant-King is not like that. On the contrary, our Covenant-King *does* the manipulating of his enemies, in the sense that he guides their steps, numbers their days, and ultimately controls their destinies in the perfect fulfillment of his perfect will. David was manipulated by his enemy for his purposes, but Jesus sovereignly reigns over all his enemies to accomplish his. **In response, we trust in his sovereignty, and we don't live in fear of the enemies of God and his people.**

**2. In the Deception of the Woman**, David the King forgot God's Word and believed in a half-truth. But Jesus the King is the fulfillment of all God's Word and is himself the Truth incarnate. The lies of the world are often packaged in an appearance of truth, and it's possible to misunderstand God's truth and God's Word by failing to know it fully and thoroughly. **In response, we avoid this error by faithfully immersing ourselves in his Word and thus sitting at the feet of *the* Word, Jesus Christ himself.**

**3. In the Ruling of the King,** David the King tried to show mercy by ignoring justice, but Jesus the King embodied mercy by embracing injustice on the cross. This is the heart of the contrast that we should draw between David and Jesus in our passage. The “mercy” that David extended to Absalom was not mercy. It was “cheap grace” that cost him nothing. The crime of murder was not punished and justice was not done. This is *not* the kind of mercy that God has poured upon us in Christ. *That* mercy cost him everything: it cost Jesus his life, and worse than that, it cost him the agony of enduring the totality of God’s righteous, just wrath against sin, *despite* his perfect innocence. But he triumphed over the death penalty that he did not deserve, and now he freely and graciously extends eternal life to those of us who do deserve it. This is the hope of the gospel. **In response, we repent of our own injustices and cast ourselves daily on the mercy he has purchased.**

**4. In the Return of the Murderer,** David the King failed to discipline his children in love and they rebelled against him, but Jesus the King disciplines his followers in love so that they become more like him through the power of the Spirit. **In response, we embrace the difficult challenges and trials that he brings into our lives because we recognize them as the gentle but stern hand of our perfectly good and wise Father, correcting us and guiding us more closely to himself.**

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In closing tonight, I just want to invite you to rejoice together with me that we do *have* such a good and wise and perfectly righteous Covenant King. We actually do. One who cannot be thwarted or deceived by his enemies. One who is himself the Word of God in the flesh and can *never* be overcome by the lies of this world, no matter how enticing they may seem. One who offers infinite mercy to us at the cost of infinite injustice to himself. And One who lovingly and wisely disciplines his children according to his perfect will and perfect plan. What more could we want?

And if you’re sitting here tonight and you *don’t* know that King--if you’re the rebel of this story, whose sins are worthy of judgment--then bow your knee to him even tonight, and receive the costly mercy that he offers through his blood.

Join me as we come before him now in prayer.

