

The Spirit of Absalom, part 2

2 Samuel 15:1-6

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-6-2013

Introduction – review

Last week we started looking at the incredible damage that has been done to various churches in America through the same demonic influences evident in the lives of Jezebel, Ahab, and Absalom. And of course, our special emphasis was on Absalom. And several of you came up afterwards and confirmed that you have seen these same principles at work in your business, and in the military, and in your political dealings. And of course, you do see it described in quite a few contexts within the Bible. In the book of Esther, Haman is the Absalom par excellence, and it was difficult to expose his ambitions. Esther risked her life in doing so. But anyway, once you begin to see how the syndrome works, you see it everywhere. With some people it is subtler, and with others it is very obvious.

Some of you are much more visual learners. One movie that I think so graphically illustrates both the Ahab and the Absalom syndrome is Mel Gibson's movie, Braveheart. I recommend that you watch it with Clearplay. But anyway, Edward Longshanks is an Ahab to a "t". He sought to maintain his power through deceit, manipulation, alliances, pitting one faction against another. He was brilliant at it. But Robert the Bruce's leper father was exactly the same. He was an Ahab when dealing with his son Bruce as well as with the other nobles, and was an Absalom when dealing with Longshanks. The Scottish nobles were Absaloms who used treachery, undermining of each other, promises, broken promises, and other Absalom techniques to climb the ladder of influence and power.

And the best movie that I have seen that illustrates the spirit of Jezebel is the Christian movie, Dangerous Calling. Wow! You will be on the edge of your seats. I think it is one of the better Christian made movies that I have seen. So if you tend to be visual, you can keep those movies in the back of your mind.

But before we continue with this passage, since we quit right in the middle of the passage last week, let me give you a bit of review. An Absalom can often be a man or a woman whom the leadership of a church has highly invested in, cares about, and loves. And this makes it much harder to oppose him when he undermines. Secondly, in verse 1 we saw that

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this syndrome is rooted in pride and yet it can be brilliantly masked with appearances of humility. It is self-indulgent, yet very well camouflaged as devotion to God. It is selfish, yet is so well disguised as unselfish service that anyone who would criticize an Absalom would come off looking bad. Absaloms can be snarky, but usually they are affable, fun to be around, able to mix it up in a crowd quite well, and able to draw people into their circle of influence. We saw in verses 1 and following that Absaloms are opportunistic of any hurts, problems, and controversies that might arise, and rather than seeking to bring healing, they use those things to undermine confidence in the leadership. And since sinful humans inhabit politics, business, and church, there will always be hurts, problems, and controversies that any Absalom can take advantage of opportunistically.

Sixth, we saw in verses 3-4 that Absalom didn't complain in order to fix the problem. He complained in a fashion that guaranteed that no fixing would take place. He didn't go to David or to the deputies to see if these wrongs could be righted. Instead, he used the wrongs to undermine David. But he does it so cleverly. While those verses show Absalom's willingness to criticize, to cast accusations, and to be negative, he mixes it up with such displays of being a servant, being loveable, doing this for the good of the kingdom, and being spiritual, and praising others, that it is hard to expose the Absalom. Then in verses 4-6 we saw that Absalom's negative spirit spread like a virus to others. Rarely does an Absalom work alone. He is always recruiting malcontents to join his group. Where earlier chapters seemed to indicate that the whole nation loved David and saw him as a hero, there are more and more being infected with an attitude that tends to see the negative more than the positive. And over time he stole the heart loyalty of the people. And we looked at the implications of that.

- I. Often comes from those that we love the most (v. 1a) returning your good with evil (cf. 13:25-33)
- II. Rooted in pride (v. 1) yet tries to give the illusion of humility (v. 5)
- III. Self-indulgent (v. 1) yet tries to give the illusion that he is completely devoted to God (14:26), a hard worker (v. 2a), and is self-sacrificing (v. 2). So his selfish-ambition is disguised as service.
- IV. A people person – affable, fun to be around, mixing it up, drawing people into his circle (vv. 1b-6)
- V. Opportunistic of any hurts, controversies, problems (v. 2-3) – He acts like he really cares about the people and how they are suffering under the poor leadership.
- VI. Self-advancement comes through tearing down a leader rather than through building up or serving a leader (vv. 3-4)
- VII. Accusatory and undermining (v. 3-4) yet giving the illusion of being very sympathetic (v. 4) and humble (v. 5)
- VIII. Their destructive fault-finding, bitterness, accusatory statements, and critical spirit spreads to others (vv. 4-6)
- IX. He subtly steals the loyalty of people away from the leadership (v. 6)

X. Able to dislodge well-loved men and well-established reputations (v. 7) – Sidenote - what the forty years is and is not:

So now we are up to verse 7, and it presents a puzzler right off the bat. We are going to have to go down a rabbit trail before we can deal with what this point's implications are. Verse 7 says, "Now it came to pass after forty years..." Last week a couple of you wondered how in the world it could be forty years later. You were very observant. It is a puzzle. Chronologically it is absolutely impossible for it to mean that it was forty years after verse 6, or forty years after verse 1, or forty years after Absalom comes back to Israel from Geshur in chapter 14, or even that Absalom was forty years old. He dies at age 25 on conservative chronologies, and no matter how you stretched things, he couldn't have lived beyond age 33. But I am convinced that he died at age 25. And you will see the same conclusion in other conservative chronologies.

But there are other possible solutions that have been proposed. Some have thought that David was forty years old here, and others have suggested that this was the fortieth year of his reign, which would make David 70 years old. You don't find chronologists saying that, because it really is impossible. I can't go into all of the reasons why, but let summarize. Please turn to 1 Kings 2:11. This verse divides his reign up into two parts. 1 Kings 2:11. It says,

1Kings 2:11 The period that David reigned over Israel *was* forty years; seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years.

And the seven years is rounded number. In 2 Samuel 2:11 the same author says that he reigned in Hebron for seven and a half years, to be very precise. But rounding numbers is quite legitimate. But here's the problem. You can't make David's reign more than forty years (or to be very precise, more than forty and a half years, if you don't want to round it). And whether you make the events in this chapter the fortieth year of David's *life* or the fortieth year of his *reign*, you've got major problems. Counting forward David lives another twelve years, which would make him 58 years old in this chapter, and only 28 years into his reign. So if you count forward, it's not forty from his birth or forty from the beginning of his reign. Counting backwards you see the same problems. If David was 40 years old here, then he would have become king 10 years before, and since he reigned 7.5 years in Hebron over the southern tribe of Judah, that would mean that all of chapters 5-15 has to be fit into a two and a half year period. Everybody who

has worked with the chronology thinks that is absolutely impossible. Chapters 5-15 span a twenty-year period, not a two and a half year period.

So it is a real puzzler - so much so that some people think that there is no solution and that the Hebrew must be wrong. Now, for us Bible believers, that is not an option. Both the Old and the New Testaments promises that every jot and tittle (those are Hebrew letters) of the Old Testament would be preserved in every age. Not one Hebrew word would be lost or corrupted; not one. But liberals and neo-evangelicals substitute something that you will not find in a single Hebrew manuscript. They say that it must mean “four years,” not “forty years, and so the NIV and the ESV translate it “after four years.” Sometimes the ESV does this textual emendation with no basis whatsoever other than prejudice. In this case, they can at least cite some old evidence that other people thought it meant four years too. For example, in the margin it shows that there are Septuagint manuscripts (two to be precise, and they are manuscripts from the Lucianic revision) that say “four years,” and since the Syriac translation written in the second century AD may have been influenced by that, it says four years. And Josephus makes a passing comment to four years. So there is some old evidence for that viewpoint. But all other Septuagint manuscripts of whatever revision, and all other versions whatsoever, says “forty years.” Certainly every Hebrew manuscript does. So that's the first problem that I have with this solution.

Secondly, in Hebrew, no scribe would mistake forty for four. The English words look similar, but not the Hebrew words. So it couldn't have been an accident. It had to be a deliberate change - which, for the Masorettes to do is inconceivable to me. So even on liberal textual critical principles, it doesn't make sense to change this to “four,” as convenient as this might seem. So you've got to explain how that change could have happened. It would be easy to explain why the Septuagint would change it – an attempt at reconciliation. The Septuagint does that all the time, sometimes in rather bizarre ways that nobody (liberal or conservative) believes. The Septuagint is not inspired; the Hebrew was. But the point is that it couldn't be a scribal error. Those words look quite different.

Third, “four years” still brings it into conflict with the Biblical chronology, no matter which event in Absalom's life you make it four years after. It's eight years after the rape of Tamar, six years after he kills Amnon and flees the country, three years after Joab brings him back to Jerusalem. So Biblical chronology only allows a time of one-year period of sitting in the gate. In other words, verses 1-6 spans a period of one year. Now, he could have influenced Israel during the additional two years mentioned in 14:28

when he was sort of under house arrest and not in the gate. But that would still make it three, not four. So any way you slice them, they amount to two, three, five, six, and eight. So it's really not the solution that people make it out to be.

I know this is a long rabbit trail, but some of you were curious, and it really is important in terms of the integrity of Scripture. So for the conservative Bible believer, as tempting as it might be to change forty to four (and there have been evangelical commentaries that have done that), if we take inspiration and preservation of the text even remotely seriously, we have no option but to say that the text means "after forty years" or "forty years later." One ironclad rule of interpretation that I have is that if the Hebrew says something, we should follow it no matter how difficult the exegesis becomes. But as we have already seen in this book, exciting things are opened up if you trust God's Word and work with it. Some of those textual issues have become keys to understanding chronology.

- A. Not 40 yrs into David's reign (see 2 Sam. 5:4-5; 1 Kings 2:11; 21:1; 1 Chron. 22; etc)*
- B. Not Absalom's age, as he died somewhere between 25 and 33 years old (2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chron. 3:1-4)*
- C. Not David's age, which would force all of chapters 5-15 into a 2.5 year period – a chronological impossibility*
- D. Not the number of years Absalom was stealing the hearts of the people in the gate, as Absalom died somewhere between 25 years old and 33 years old*
- E. Instead, the hearts of the men are stolen from David 40 years after he killed Goliath and through battles won the hearts of the men of Israel (1 Sam. 18:1-7,16,30)*

So what is the solution? Floyd Nolan Jones points out something very interesting. It is exactly 40 years from David's slaying of Goliath and becoming a captain in the armies of Saul to the date of Absalom's rebellion. And the reason that is significant is that it fits the context here so well. Look at verse 6. The second part of verse 6 says, "So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." When did David get those hearts? Forty years before. As a direct result of his slaying of Goliath and the other exploits that he did as a captain in Saul's army during that same year, 1 Samuel 18 says that he won the hearts of all the people and God gave him favor in the sight of the people. In that year, even Saul's son Jonathan acknowledged that David was to be the next king and gave his heart in steadfast loyalty to David. Since the immediate context in verse 6 is stealing hearts that had been given to David, and since those hearts were given to David forty years before, it makes perfect sense to say, "forty years after David was given those hearts, Absalom stole those hearts." And I think it fits the grammar of the Hebrew very well too, though it is not as obvious in our translation.

But there is more. This phrase is also making a theological statement: God had rejected Saul, had given the kingdom to David, and the people had

given their heart loyalty to David as well. David had not stolen those hearts. God had given those hearts to David as a stewardship trust. So the Hebrew reader of that day would immediately connect the theological points being made by the writer of 1 Samuel 18 with what is now happening in Absalom's life in this chapter. Remember that 1 and 2 Samuel are all one self-contained book for the Hebrews, written by the same author. When a Jew read, "Now it came to pass after forty years," he would count back forty years and come to David, Goliath, Saul's demonic activity, and immediately see numerous correlations in the text.

While not everyone may be convinced by Floyd Nolan Jones' reconciliation, I believe that it is the only reconciliation of the text that I have read that takes the Hebrew at all seriously. And it has the advantage of thematically tying this whole passage together in a marvelous way. Consider the following evidence:

Just as the Absalom Syndrome is demonic in its origin, so too was Saul's. Exactly forty years before, Saul had a demon that moved him to jealousy, fear, manipulation, and attempts to destroy David, who was God's appointed leader. Maybe it was the same demon; who knows? Rather than stepping down from office and respecting God's chain of command, Saul sought to operate in the wisdom of the world. Since Saul could no longer claim the hearts of the men of Israel by *God's* authority, he had to use human means to maintain authority. Since God had already rejected Saul and chosen David, Saul had to steal the hearts of the men of Israel away from David through promises, bribery, slander, manipulation, deceit, etc. And if we took the time to trace through the earlier chapters once again (which we are not going to do), we would see that both Saul and Absalom share the same characteristics that are found in verses 1-12. It was politics the world's way, not God's way.

So this phrase in verse 7 was preparing the reader to realize that while the Absalom syndrome may seem like wisdom to some, it will not be prospered by God any more than Saul was. It is always self-defeating. And lastly, just as Saul sought to make a well-loved man to be despised, so did Absalom. Just as Saul slandered the well-established reputation of David, so did Absalom. This first phrase of verse 7 is tying Absalom tightly to Saul's rebellion – and to the demon that worked behind Saul forty years before.

Now, that's a lot of background, but with it I think you can see the tenth characteristic of an Absalom. An Absalom is so skilled with his methods, that even the most well loved leaders can be vilified. Even the

Goliath killers can be toppled. Even the most well established reputations can be trashed very quickly.

Peter Hammond and Brian Abshire wrote an incredible book documenting this problem and giving counsel to leaders who have been on the receiving end of this abuse, not to respond in like manner and not to get bitter, but to follow the attitude of David. It's titled, *Character Assassins: Dealing with Ecclesiastical Tyrants and Terrorists*. In other words, it is dealing with both the Ahab tyrants and the Absalom terrorists in the church. And that title is not hype. Read the book, and you will see that it is a pretty straightforward description of many American churches. It's must reading. They document example after example of elders or sessions that have functioned sacrificially and faithfully for decades, and have been loved by the people, suddenly finding themselves mysteriously being vilified, slandered, criticized, undermined, and the brunt of anger. They haven't changed anything or done anything different that would warrant the vitriol, but it is there. It's one of the signs that the demonic is at work behind the scenes. Let's quickly go through eight more characteristics. We looked at nine last week.

XI. Using truth to deceive (v. 7b-9)

The eleventh thing that you see happening is that these Absaloms don't have to tell lies in order to deceive. They might do that too, but they can deceive using the truth. Look at verses 7-9

2Sam. 15:7 Now it came to pass after forty years that Absalom said to the king, "Please, let me go to Hebron and pay the vow which I made to the LORD.

Does he pay a vow in Hebron? We will see that he does. It's the truth. But was that the main reason he was going there? No. That's a cover. He is telling the truth, yet hiding the main point because he doesn't want David knowing. It's the truth, but not the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Keep in mind parents, that children can deceive by telling half the story about the fight they were in with their sibling. It wasn't a lie, but the careful concealing of certain information is designed to deceive you into siding with them. It's the Absalom spirit at work in your own family. And we need to keep in mind that truth used to deceive is still deception, and it should be punished as deception. Verse 8:

2Sam. 15:8 For your servant took a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, "If the LORD indeed brings me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.' "

Did he make a vow while in Geshur? No doubt he did. We can't verify it, but he probably did. It wouldn't be fun to be exiled, and you've got to keep

in mind that Absalom did see himself as a believer. In fact, I am convinced that he thought that he was doing a good thing and that he is the one getting the bum rap. He was convinced that his dad's leadership was sliding, and for the good of the nation, he needed to do something about it. Years before, when he killed Amnon, he was taking justice into his own hands. He saw himself as doing a good thing. So he may indeed have taken this vow while in Geshur. But commentators ask, "Why wait so long to fulfill it?" There is something more strategic about this that makes commentators wonder why David did not find it odd himself. "Why did you wait all this time? Scripture calls us not to delay in paying our vows." His excuse is fishy. Anyway, verse 9:

2Sam. 15:9 And the king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron.

The king sees nothing wrong. I believe that he was probably somewhat distracted by the sickness that Psalms 39-41 say that he had during this time. And we will deal with that in the next point. But the main thing I wanted you to see under point XI is this tendency to use truth in order to deceive. It is one of the things that make it so difficult to confront an Absalom. He always has an alibi. He is skilled at using truth to deceive. And even in those rare occasions when he can be proved to have been wrong, he can always demonstrate a legitimate reason why he believed that mistaken idea. You won't get very far in an argument with him. He is a master at using truth (usually partial truth) to deceive.

XII. Takes advantage of weakness and gaps in the leader's service (v. 9b??; Psalm 39-41; especially 41:3-5,8)

A twelfth thing that is hinted at here, but is quite clear in the Psalms, is that Absalom was taking advantage of a weakness in David's leadership and a gap in David's service. And Absaloms will often strike when a leader is so preoccupied with counseling crises, family troubles, personal illness, or when he is absent on a sabbatical that it leaves a gap that can be taken advantage of. (I always worry when pastors go on a one-year sabbatical and wonder if they will be back in the pulpit).

I put question marks behind verse 9 because the fact that Absalom arose may simply mean that he had bowed down prior to this. But it implies getting up from a sitting or a kneeling position, not just a bowing position. Since we know from the Psalms that David was sick in bed at this juncture, it may also indicate that David was lying down, and Absalom was showing the humility of not standing higher than the king. So he may have sat down

or knelt next to the bed. But the text says that he stood up, or arose. Since he's the king's son, he is probably not bowing. So it may be a hint of David being low.

But even if that is not the intended implication of that word, David's lack of suspicion may still be due to his preoccupation with an illness that he had. Each of Psalms 39-41 make mention of this, and each of these Psalms was written some time during this Absalom revolt and are describing this day. Most people are agreed on that. Let me quickly summarize the evidence from the Psalms: Psalm 39 speaks of how frail he felt at this juncture (v. 4), and it speaks of him wondering if he had long to live (vv. 5-6 – so it must have been a fairly serious illness), and it says that he had some kind of plague (v. 10), and that he didn't look very good (v. 11), and that he had very little strength left (v. 13). Psalm 40 says that he felt like he was in a miry pit (v. 2), and he felt very needy (v. 16). Psalm 41 says that he was lying on his bed with some kind of sickness (v. 3), needed healing (v. 4), his enemies thought that he was about to die (v. 5 – again indicating that it is a pretty serious illness), and they were actually reporting to everyone that he was about to die (vv. 7-8), and that his disease was a judgment from God (v. 8).

There are other problems that he had been facing as well that may have been a distraction. But the point is that Absaloms strike when a leader is down; when he is at his weakest and most vulnerable. And Psalm 41 especially speaks of how his enemies had taken advantage of his severe illness. Some commentators believe that this may explain why David was not taking care of business in the court. Do you remember in verse 3 that Absalom is claiming that there is no one to help? Absalom had complained about that. But that's an assumption. We don't know that he was sick for that whole year, and Absalom was certainly claiming this for the whole year. But what is clear is that at *this* point David was deathly sick, and that Absalom took advantage of that.

XIII. Doesn't complain directly to the leadership being undermined (vv. 7-9)

The thirteenth characteristic is that verses 7-9 show a man who isn't interested in complaining to David about what is wrong in the kingdom and what needs fixing. He will complain to others about it. But notice that there is not the slightest hint of any discontentment in verses 7-9. You would think that he was the happiest, most satisfied member of that kingdom.

2Sam. 15:7 Now it came to pass after forty years that Absalom said to the king,

“Please, let me go to Hebron and pay the vow which I made to the LORD.

2Sam. 15:8 For your servant took a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, “If the LORD indeed brings me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.’ ”

2Sam. 15:9 And the king said to him, “Go in peace.” So he arose and went to Hebron.

This is often a key of the Absalom Syndrome – make sure you complain to people who can’t do anything about the problem. That sows discord without anyone coming in and fixing the problem and being a hero. Act like there is no trouble when you are around the leaders. David can’t fix anything because Absalom has never directly complained to him. The fires spring up without David knowing where they come from – and the Psalms speak of the frustration that he has in knowing that there are rumors out there, but not quite knowing where those rumors are coming from. He's probably hearing reports like, "Well, the people aren't happy." "Which people?" "Well, I can't say, but I do hear rumors." So he is hearing something, but he can't put his fingers on it. He speaks of them as the enemies whispering. And that ties in with the next point:

XIV. Meetings and agendas are set and plans are crafted without the awareness of the leadership (v. 10; Ps. 40:4b, 10; 41:6-9)

In verse 10 we see evidence of prior meetings, plans, and agendas that have been crafted secretly without the awareness of the leadership.

2Sam. 15:10 Then Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, ‘Absalom reigns in Hebron!’ ”

The word “spies” indicates that this was done in secrecy. The fact that no further explanation was needed, shows that those to whom the spies were sent already knew what the agenda and plans were. They were just waiting for the final word. That meant that they had been meeting prior to this.

And Absaloms today use secret caucusing. It was one of the things that really troubled me in the PCA when we were a part of it. Things were being discussed at the General Assembly level in secret that they wouldn’t dare to discuss in an open sunshine way. Good churchmen avoid that. Statesmen rise above such secrecy as well and they refuse to be part of a shadow government. There was the temptation for some of the conservatives in the PCA to use the same kind of secret caucuses to try to figure out how to oppose the progressives, and I strongly resisted that. It’s a strategy of the world, not of God’s kingdom. It especially should not exist between

believers. Discuss things openly and vote them up or down. I can respect losing a vote and moving on. That doesn't bother me at all. I can never respect subterfuge, deceit, secrecy, undermining, and an Absalom spirit. And its not just in churches. The people who are manipulating Congress and Senate from behind the scenes are Absaloms. We've got to pray against this demonic spirit.

XV. Because Absaloms are good leaders, even those who are utterly innocent of any Absalom conspiracy find themselves going along with it (v. 11)

The fifteenth thing that we see in this passage is that Absaloms tend to be good leaders. They wouldn't be effective Absaloms if they were not good leaders. In some ways it is a sad waste of talent. But they are good leaders. In fact, they are so good on the points we looked at last week, that many people follow them without knowing the damage that will be done. Verse 11 says,

2Sam. 15:11 And with Absalom went two hundred men invited from Jerusalem, and they went along innocently and did not know anything.

You might think, "How is that possible?" Believe me, most who help Absaloms have no idea that they are helping a conspiracy. Many of the Obama supporters that I have talked to are not bad people. They were convinced to support Obama because of the horrible things the Republicans have done. And when I have talked to some of these people they don't have a clue at all of the unconstitutional things that Obama is doing. We shouldn't assume that just because some people join the wrong side a nasty church split that they are bad people. They may not know the history, the undermining, the rebellious attitudes, or any of the negative things of the leader whose leadership they are following. As we saw last week, Absaloms in politics, in business, and in church masquerade their treachery so well with spirituality, kindness, humility, and other good things that they can go undetected by at least some of the people.

XVI. Absalom had the kind of influence to be able to alienate even David's closest friends (v. 12a; Ps. 41:9)

The sixteenth principle that we see is that Absaloms have the power to alienate even David's closest friends. Because Joab was hard to get along with, Absalom didn't even try to include him in the conspiracy – though Adonijah, his brother, later did. Because of Hushai's integrity, Absalom didn't dare try to influence him. It wouldn't have worked. Hushai could not

be bought, blackmailed, flattered, or manipulated into joining. Instead, Hushai would have rebuked him and instantly exposed him.

It reminds me of the First Duke of Wellington. He is best remembered as the general who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815. But he had a long and distinguished career before that. He was around many Absaloms, but generally refused to act like one. For example, during his earlier service in India, Wellington was in charge of negotiations after the battle of Assaye. One of the Indian rulers was anxious to know what territories would be ceded to him, and sent an emissary to Wellington, and pestered him for information that would have been wrong for Wellington to give. The emissary even offered him a huge sum of money to find out this information. It would have made him rich. Wellington immediately asked him, "Can you keep a secret?" The man said, "Yes, indeed." To which Wellington replied, "So can I."¹ In other words, leave me alone; you know what you are asking me to do is not right. I can imagine Hushai scuttling any of Absalom's attempts to include his services because he was totally loyal to David. But Ahithophel was a different story. Ahithophel discussed things with Absalom that he should not have. It is my guess that he was one of the first to join Absalom's group of malcontents. Verse 10:

2Sam. 15:12 Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city—from Giloh—while he offered sacrifices...

Psalm 41:7-8 shows that the rumor being spread was that David's sickness was a sickness unto death, and that would give Absalom good cover to say, "Hey, I'm the next in line, and it is important for us to have continuity in the kingdom. My dad is dying, and we are going to have the coronation service today to ensure the safety of the kingdom. I'm going to be the king anyway, so let's go ahead and do this." It sounds like a pretty good story. The fact that Ahithophel was part of that false rumor and that strategy is recorded for us in Psalm 41, and then verse 9 ends by saying,

Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up *his* heel against me.

The fact that the New Testament applies this to Judas shows that Ahithophel was a Judas, and Judas was an Ahithophel. He was David's closest friend, was totally trusted by David, ate regularly with David, and yet he lifted up his heel against him. To put a heel on an enemy is to declare victory and dominion over that enemy. So in effect it is an indication of

¹ As reported in *Today in the Word*, July, 1990, p. 35.

treachery – treating David like an enemy and seeking to overthrow his kingdom. So Ahithophel falls into the same Absalom spirit of undermining. Could an overthrow like that happen in America? It wouldn't surprise me. Certainly the Absalom syndrome has been strongly at work. Certainly the Constitution has been dethroned - and it's treason.

XVII. Gives evidence of loving the church and loving God (v. 12)

Point XVII – during this whole time Absalom has been portraying himself as a man who dearly loved God; a man who loved the church and was devoted to both God and church. Look at verse 12:

2Sam. 15:12 Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city—from Giloh—*while he offered sacrifices*. [And commentators point out that since no sacrifices were authorized in Giloh, but they had been in Hebron, that it is Absalom offering the sacrifices. That's showing his love for God. Treachery planned right in the midst of worship. It goes on:] And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number.

How people can plot to undermine or destroy a godly man and still pretend to love God and to love God's people is a mystery to me, but it happens all the time. For example, I heard about a man in Long Beach, California, who went into a fried chicken place to order two take-out dinners – one for himself and one for his date. The young woman at the counter accidentally gave him the wrong bag. When he got to the park, instead of finding chicken, he found \$800. It was the entire income of the day that the manager was going to take to the bank, but so that people wouldn't know that he was carrying any money, he had hidden in a food take-out bag. Meanwhile, back at the fast food restaurant, the manager was frantic over the loss. When the young man walked in with the moneybag, he looked the manager in the eye and said, "I want you to know I came by to get a couple of chicken dinners and wound up with all this money. Here." The relieved manager was ecstatic and said, "Oh, great, let me call the newspaper. I'm gonna have your picture put in the local newspaper. You're the most honest man I've heard of." Well, the young guy blanched and said, "Oh no, no, don't do that!" Then he leaned closer and whispered, "You see, the woman I'm with is not my wife...she's uh, somebody else's wife."² So there was incredible honesty over here, and incredible dishonesty over here. How can the two go hand in hand? But they do. Here was a man who would never cheat with money, but he would cheat with somebody else's wife. In an

² As reported by Charles Swindoll, *Growing Deep in the Christian Life*, pp. 159-160.

Absalom, they can go hand in hand. He can look like an indispensable spiritual leader and yet be destroying the church.

XVIII. Once there is sufficient momentum, he acts quickly to destroy (vv. 12bff)

And of course the rest of the chapter shows that once there was sufficient discontent and momentum within the kingdom, Absalom could act quickly to destroy David. There are a lot of leader killers in America. When criticizing church leaders, it is important that we learn to do it as Isaiah the prophet did – one-on-one, to their face, not hiding anything, and not undermining behind their backs; basically following Matthew 18. The Absalom spirit is rife in America, and I would urge you to take a stand against it like Hushai did and like Joab did, and to pray against it. As I mentioned last week, one of the keys for bringing about revival and reformation to the church across America is to pray against the spirits of Ahab, Jezebel, and Absalom. Once momentum has built on behalf of an Absalom, it brings irreparable damage.

Conclusion

I don't know if there are any Absaloms in this congregation. Probably not. But if there were, or if even some of these symptoms are true of you (whether at work or at church, in you or in your children), look at the end results of untold suffering and pain that they bring in the next chapters, and ask God to spare you from that. It's the wisdom of the world, not the wisdom of Christ.

Absaloms have repented in the past. I think Robert the Bruce demonstrates one of the most vivid turn-arounds of an Absalom that I know of in history. He was actually a person who never wanted to be an Absalom, but kept finding himself manipulated into being one by his Ahab-like father. He didn't have the strength to resist that, and so he constantly found himself in muddy compromised waters. Well, in the movie Braveheart, there is a powerful scene where there is an altercation between Bruce senior (the leper) and Bruce junior. Leading up to the scene was a battle where Wallace and his men were fighting the English. Wallace thought that he had the backing of the Scottish nobles, but unknown to him, they had been bought off by the King, and they betrayed him on the battlefield. Robert the Bruce was part of that betrayal, even though he had shaken hands with Wallace. And he took his own act of betrayal particularly hard. He could not get it off his conscience. But at this point in the movie, he resolved to not allow that betrayal to define him any longer.

Bruce senior said, “I’m the one who’s rotting, but I think your face looks graver than mine. Son, we must have alliance with England to prevail here. You achieved that. You saved your family, increased your land. In time, you will have all the power in Scotland.”

Robert the Bruce responded, “Lands, titles, men, power... nothing.”

Bruce Senior: “Nothing?” You can see the startled look on his face that his son would even think that way. He is so used to thinking in this selfish way that he cannot fathom what his son is saying. But his son is heartbroken over this.

Bruce junior said,

“I have nothing. Men fight for me because if they do not, I throw them off my land and I starve their wives and children. Those men who bled the ground red at Falkirk fought for William Wallace. He fights for something that I never had. And I took it from him when I betrayed him. I saw it in his face on the battlefield, and it’s tearing me apart.”

Bruce Senior tries to comfort him by saying, “All men betray. All lose heart.”

And Robert said, “I DON’T WANT TO LOSE HEART!!! I want to believe as he does. I will never be on the wrong side again.”

And though he never does willingly go on the wrong side again, he finds himself once again manipulated by his Ahab-like father. But I think that is such a powerful image. It really is idolatry that drives all Absaloms, all Jezebels, and all Ahabs. And we saw last week that the idolatry leaves them empty; it robs them of the very thing that they wished they had, it leaves them with a leadership that does not inspire and is not respected. And it always backfires on them.

When you see the demonic actions of Absalom, Jezebel, and Ahab in politics, learn to despise it as much as you despise those Scottish nobles in the movie Braveheart. Most of the people in Washington DC disgust me just like those nobles in that movie absolutely disgusted me. And the Absalom spirit should disgust you! It should! When you see those demonic actions at work in the business that you are employed at, don’t get sucked in by it. Don’t join the cause. Learn to despise it.

Absaloms can steal your calling and your kingdom, but they can only steal your heart if you let them. Jezebels may control America in the form of multinational corporations, but don’t let them make you bitter and respond

in kind. Don't fall into the same Syndrome that drove those Scottish nobles. It's so easy to do. Ahabs may fire you from your job for being a principled Naboth. But don't let them capture your heart.

With Robert the Bruce say, "I DON'T WANT TO LOSE HEART. I want to BELIEVE. I will never be on the wrong side again." And as you take that stand, may God receive the glory and may He richly bless you. Amen.

The Spirit of Absalom, part 2 2 Samuel 15:1-6

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-6-2013

Introduction – review of last week

- I. Often comes from those that we love the most (v. 1a) returning your good with evil (cf. 13:25-33)
 - II. Rooted in pride (v. 1) yet tries to give the illusion of humility (v. 5)
 - III. Self-indulgent (v. 1) yet tries to give the illusion that he is completely devoted to God (14:26), a hard worker (v. 2a), and is self-sacrificing (v. 2). So his selfish-ambition is disguised as service.
 - IV. A people person – affable, fun to be around, mixing it up, drawing people into his circle (vv. 1b-6)
 - V. Opportunistic of any hurts, controversies, problems (v. 2-3) – He acts like he really cares about the people and how they are suffering under the poor leadership.
 - VI. Self-advancement comes through tearing down a leader rather than through building up or serving a leader (vv. 3-4)
 - VII. Accusatory and undermining (v. 3-4) yet giving the illusion of being very sympathetic (v. 4) and humble (v. 5)
 - VIII. Their destructive fault-finding, bitterness, accusatory statements, and critical spirit spreads to others (vv. 4-6)
 - IX. He subtly steals the loyalty of people away from the leadership (v. 6)
- X. Able to dislodge well-loved men and well-established reputations (v. 7) – Sidenote - what the forty years is and is not:
- A. Not 40 yrs into David's reign (see 2 Sam. 5:4-5; 1 Kings 2:11; 21:1; 1 Chron. 22; etc)
 - B. Not Absalom's age, as he died somewhere between 25 and 33 years old (2 Sam. 3:3; 1 Chron. 3:1-4)
 - C. Not David's age, which would force all of chapters 5-15 into a 2.5 year period – a chronological impossibility
 - D. Not the number of years Absalom was stealing the hearts of the people in the gate, as Absalom died somewhere between 25 years old and 33 years old
 - E. Instead, the hearts of the men are stolen from David 40 years after he killed Goliath and through battles won the hearts of the men of Israel (1 Sam. 18:1-7,16,30)
- XI. Using truth to deceive (v. 7b-9)
- XII. Takes advantage of weakness and gaps in the leader's service (v. 9b??; Psalm 39-41; especially 41:3-5,8)
- XIII. Doesn't complain directly to the leadership being undermined (vv. 7-9)
- XIV. Meetings and agendas are set and plans are crafted without the awareness of the leadership (v. 10; Ps. 40:4b, 10; 41:6-9)
- XV. Because Absaloms are good leaders, even those who are utterly innocent of any Absalom conspiracy find themselves going along with it (v. 11)
- XVI. Absalom had the kind of influence to be able to alienate even David's closest friends (v. 12a; Ps. 41:9)
- XVII. Gives evidence of loving the church and loving God (v. 12)
- XVIII. Once there is sufficient momentum, he acts quickly to destroy (vv. 12bff)

Conclusion

