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## Israel and Judah: 9. Rape and Murder

by David Sielaff, May 2015

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for May 2015](#)

### Israel and Judah: 9

### Rape and Murder

A new story arc begins in the book of Second Samuel. It involves Absalom, King David's son. This entire narrative is the fulfillment of the punishment promised by God because of David's adultery and murder of Uriah the Hittite. The story arc begins with an incident involving David's first-born son, Amnon, and his daughter by another wife, Tamar.<sup>a</sup> She was Amnon's half-sister, and Absalom's full sister. Amnon rapes Tamar; David's response is interesting, as is Absalom's response. Then things turn worse for David and his kingdom.

Recall that King David had God's 5-fold punishment put upon him, his family, and his kingdom. It was presented in 2 Samuel 12:10–12:<sup>b</sup>

- [1] David's descendants (not just those on the throne) will be under threat of the sword **"for the eon."**
- [2] Evil shall strike at David from his own house, meaning his own family.
- [3] David's own "wives" will be seized and sexually violated — in public.
- [4] David's secret sins regarding his affair with Bathsheba will become public knowledge immediately.
- [5] The son to be born (that very day) shall die.

God's punishments began immediately: first came [5], then [4]. Then punishment [2] began, but it continues throughout David's life. Punishment [3] will occur later. Punishment number [1] continues to the future,

<sup>a</sup> Tamar means "Palm" as in palm tree. Much earlier, the patriarch Judah had a daughter named Tamar. She also is involved in a sexual encounter of incest with her father (Genesis chapter 38).

<sup>b</sup> See the narrative of the war and battles in "[Israel and Judah: 8. Bathsheba and Rabbah](#)." This series of articles begins with the death of Saul and the enthronement of David as God's anointed king of Judah in "[Israel and Judah: 1. Saul and David](#)."

past the destruction of the Kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians, even to the time when King Herod kills all children under two years old attempting to kill the Messiah, son of David. The Absalom story arc is part of David's punishment. It begins with an incident involving Absalom's natural sister, and his half-brother.

### ***TEXT: David's Children: Amnon and Tamar***

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#### **2 Samuel 13:1–14**

<sup>1</sup> This happened some time afterward: David's son Absalom had a lovely sister; her name was Tamar, and David's son Amnon became infatuated with her. <sup>2</sup> Yet Amnon was distressed so that he made himself ill for the sake of his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin, and in Amnon's eyes it was too difficult to do anything to her.

<sup>3</sup> Now Amnon had an associate; his name was Jonadab, son of David's brother Shimeah; Jonadab was a very shrewd man. <sup>4</sup> He said to him, **"For what reason are you, the king's son, so weak as this, morning after morning? Will you not tell me?"**

Amnon replied to him, **"I am in love with my brother Absalom's sister Tamar."** <sup>5</sup> Then Jonadab said to him,

**"Lie down on your bed and feign yourself ill. When your father comes to see you, then you say to him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and give me a repast of bread. She should prepare the repast before my eyes, that I may see it and eat from her hand.'"**

<sup>6</sup> So Amnon lay down and feigned himself ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, **"Please let my sister Tamar come and make heart-shaped cakes before my eyes, that I may have a repast of a couple heart-shaped cakes from her hand."**

<sup>7</sup> So David sent word to Tamar in the palace, saying, **"Go now to your brother Amnon's home and prepare a repast for him."** <sup>c</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Tamar went to her brother Amnon's home while he was lying down. She took dough and kneaded it. Then she shaped it into hearts before his eyes and cooked the heart-shaped cakes. <sup>9</sup> She took the griddle and poured them before him; yet he refused to eat. Amnon said, **"Have every one go forth from me. So every one went forth from him."**

<sup>10</sup> Now Amnon said to Tamar, **"Bring the repast toward the bedchamber that I may eat the repast from your hand."** Tamar took the heart-shaped cakes she had made and brought them toward the bedchamber to her brother Amnon. <sup>11</sup> When she brought them close to him to eat, he held her fast and said to her, **"Come, lie down with me, my sister."** <sup>12</sup> Yet she replied to him,

**"Do not, my brother, do not humiliate me, for such a thing should not be done in Israel! Do not commit this decadent [foolish] thing! <sup>13</sup> And I, whither should I carry my reproach? And you, you would become like one of the decadent [foolish] men in Israel. So now I pray, speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you."**

<sup>14</sup> But he would not hearken to her voice; he was more unyielding than she; **he humiliated her and lay with her.** [end text]

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**Verse 1.** Amnon's encounter with Tamar happened **"some time afterward."** After what? It begins immediately after the birth of Solomon to David and Bathsheba (after Uriah the Hittite and the death of David and Bathsheba's first son), as told in 2 Samuel chapters 11–12 and Psalm 51, with the siege of the Ammonite city of Rabbah briefly mentioned in 1 Chronicles 20:1.

**"David's son Absalom"** is the first person mentioned, giving us a clue that he is a major character in the story arc. Absalom was David's third son born at Hebron. Absalom and Tamar's mother was Maacah. Her

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<sup>c</sup> Remember, this was not just a suggestion to his daughter Tamar, this was likely understood by her to be a command from her father the King to care for the presumed heir to the throne.

father (Absalom and Tamar's grandfather) was King Talmai of Geshur (who was not an Israelite), a small Aramean kingdom in Syria (2 Samuel 3:3; 1 Chronicles 3:2).

Amnon was David's firstborn son **"by Ahinoam the Jesreelite"** (2 Samuel 3:2; 1 Chronicles 3:1). Ahinoam was probably from the tribe of Judah.<sup>d</sup> Amnon was the presumed heir to the throne of Israel. The concept of primogeniture was an ideal in most kingdoms, including Israel and later Judah. Ultimately, succession to the throne was determined by the king and his nobles. After the division of the united kingdom into separate kingdoms of Judah and Israel, all kings of Judah were descended from King David. Succession of the firstborn was the expectation unless the firstborn son did something to offend the king or the law. A major reason for disinheriting a firstborn son was needed; the most egregious was rebellion.

**Verse 3.** Amnon's cousin and friend, Jonadab, will figure later in this story. While he is labeled as **"a very shrewd man,"** this is irony because his advice leads to subsequent rape, murder, and general disaster. We will read that several supposed "wise" ones fail with their human wisdom.

**Verses 5–7.** Amnon's deception progresses from planning to implementation of the plan. (The word "shaped" in "heart-shaped" is not in the Hebrew, see verses 6, 8 & 10).

**Verses 8–10.** Tamar innocently does as her father the king desires.

**Verse 11.** **"He held her fast,"** means he seized her and made his intentions clear.

**Verse 12.** Tamar says "no," repeatedly demanding, **"do not" ... "do not" ... "should not" ... "do not ..."** She quickly says his intentions are a gross evil. While seizing women is done among other people, **"it should not be done in Israel."** According to Leviticus 18:9, 11 and Deuteronomy 27:22, such a union would be illegal, incestuous, as we would term the relationship today. Note Leviticus 20:17:

**"As for a man who takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, this is a base thing, and they will be cut off before the eyes of the sons of their people. The nakedness of his sister has he exposed; his depravity shall he bear."**

**Verse 13.** Tamar offers him a way out. She would suffer major social shame by his act. It might mean his ruin as heir to the throne because of his **"decadent"** or foolish behavior. It is unclear what she meant by her statement **"I pray, speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you."** Perhaps she was trying to divert him. Both of them must have been aware of the incest passages noted above. Tamar's arguments fail.

**Verse 14.** Tamar not only resists verbally, but physically. Amnon first **"humiliated her"** by overpowering her, then he **"lay with her."** In modern phrasing, he forcibly raped Tamar, his half-sister. In this instance, the Concordant Version rendering lacks force, dependent too much upon the Greek LXX text. Modern translations reflect what was happening and stronger language is used than in the King James Version. For example, the New American Standard has a very explicit and powerful English translation:

**"But she answered him, 'No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful thing!' ... However, he would not listen to her; since he was stronger than she, he violated her and lay with her."**

• 2 Samuel 13:12–14

## ***TEXT: Reactions to Amnon's Rape of Tamar***

### **2 Samuel 13:15–21**

<sup>15</sup> Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; for greater was the hatred with which he hated her than the love with which he had loved her. So Amnon said to her, **"Get up! Go away!"**

<sup>16</sup> She replied to him, **"This must not be, my brother; concerning this evil of sending me away, it is greater**

<sup>d</sup> Remember that Ahinoam was not David's first wife. That woman was Michal, but **"As for Saul's daughter Michal, to her came no child until the day of her death."** David put her away after she publicly ridiculed David (2 Samuel 6:20–23). In 2 Samuel 21:8 she was said to have "borne" five sons, but they were apparently her sister's sons, which Michal raised.

than the other one that you have done to me.” Yet he would not hearken to her.<sup>17</sup> He called his young attendant who was ministering to him and said, **“Now send this woman out, away from me to the outside, and latch the door after her!”**

<sup>18</sup> She had a distinctive tunic on her, for the virgin daughters of the king put on such robes. When his ministering attendant put her forth to the outside and latched the door after her,<sup>19</sup> then Tamar took ashes and put them on her head; she tore the distinctive tunic that she had on her and placed her hands on her head. Thus, she went walking away, and she cried out.

<sup>20</sup> Her brother Absalom said to her, **“Your brother Amnon, has he been with you? Now be silent, my sister; he is your brother. You must not set your heart on this matter.”** So Tamar dwelt in desolation in her brother Absalom’s home.

<sup>21</sup> As for king David, when he heard of all these things, he was very angry with him [Amnon]; *yet he did not grieve his son Amnon’s spirit, for he loved him **because he was his firstborn.*** [end text]

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**Verse 15.** Amnon’s sudden rejection of Tamar is not explained.

**Verse 16.** Tamar is stunned. Amnon’s public sending her away was worse than the rape. After taking her virginity, the Law of Moses demanded he marry her (Exodus 22:16–17; Deuteronomy 22:28–29).

**Verse 17.** As we read later, the servants are instructed to do the dirty work, essentially Amnon commands, “Throw her out and bolt the door.”

**Verses 18–19.** The King James translation of **“diverse colors”** is not in the Hebrew. Tamar’s distinctive tunic is a cultural relic of that time, without biblical mandate. Apparently there were cultural actions for such violated women so they could attract attention and gain support for justice. She found none.

**Verse 20.** Absalom gives little comfort to Tamar, telling her in effect to stop fretting about this. But, Absalom himself did the opposite. He harbored hatred and waited for a proper time to wreak revenge on Amnon for Tamar’s abasement.

**Verse 21.** David was torn by these crimes. His virgin daughter was under his protection (Deuteronomy 22:13–21). He hated what Amnon did, yet it says, **“he loved him because he was his firstborn.”** (*The words in italics are from the Greek LXX and are not in the Hebrew.*) Was David thinking about God’s punishments in [1] and [2] above? Apparently, rape of a virgin half-sister was not reason to remove David’s firstborn son from continuing as heir-apparent to David’s throne. Yet King David of Israel did nothing about this rape, as far as we know — other than being **“very angry”** with Amnon.

David unwittingly had some responsibility. He was tricked into putting them together. Remember also, David’s sin with Bathsheba was sexual in nature, and punishable by death, and it led to murder.

**“As for a man who commits adultery with another man’s wife — one who commits adultery with his associate’s wife — the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death, yea death.”**

• *Leviticus 20:10*

Although David was legally required to take action against Amnon’s criminal act, he had almost no moral justification to do so due to his own crimes. In fact, David’s actions were worthy of death, but because he was the king, nothing was done by any Israelite legal authority.

## **TEXT: Absalom’s Revenge for Amnon’s Crime**

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### **2 Samuel 13:22–39**

<sup>22</sup> Absalom did not speak with Amnon either evil or good, for Absalom hated Amnon for this matter where he had humiliated his sister Tamar.

<sup>23</sup> It was after the days of two years that Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor near Ephraim. Absalom invited all the king’s sons.<sup>24</sup> So Absalom came to the king and said, **“Behold, I pray, your servant**

has sheepshearers. Now may the king come with his servants to your servant!”

<sup>25</sup> But the king replied to Absalom, “Oh no, my son! Let not all of us go, so that we may not be burdensome to you.” **He urged him**, but he would not go; yet he blessed him.

<sup>26</sup> Then Absalom said, “**If not you, I pray, let my brother Amnon go with us!**” The king replied to him, “**Why should he go with you?**” <sup>27</sup> **Again Absalom urged him**; so he sent with him Amnon and all the other sons of the king. *Then Absalom prepared a feast like the feast of a king.*

<sup>28</sup> Absalom instructed his lads, saying,

**“Now watch. When Amnon’s heart is cheerful with wine, and when I say to you, ‘Smite Amnon,’ then you will put him to death. You must not fear; did not I myself instruct you? Be steadfast and be sons of valor!”**

<sup>29</sup> So Absalom’s lads did to Amnon just as Absalom had instructed them.

Then all the other sons of the king arose and fled, each one riding on his mule. <sup>30</sup> It came to pass while they were on the road, that the report came to David, saying, “**Absalom has smitten all the king’s sons, and not one of them is left.**” <sup>31</sup> At this, the king arose, tore his garments **and lay down on the earth**; and all his courtiers were standing by with their clothes torn. <sup>32</sup> Then Jonadab, the son of David’s brother Shimeah, responded and said,

**“My lord the king must not think it is all the lads, the king’s sons, whom they have put to death; for it is Amnon, he alone, who is dead. For at Absalom’s bidding it was determined since the day he humiliated his sister Tamar.”** <sup>33</sup> **So now my lord the king must not take to his heart the report, to think that all the king’s sons are dead; but it is rather Amnon, he alone, who is dead.”**

<sup>34</sup> While Absalom was running away, the lad who was the watchman lifted his eyes and stared, and behold, there were many people walking on the road of Horonaim, on the descent. So the watchman came and told the king about it. He said, “**I have seen men coming down from the road of Horonaim from the side of the mountain.**”

<sup>35</sup> Now Jonadab said to the king, “**Behold, the king’s sons! They have come! According to the report of your servant, thus it has come to be.**” <sup>36</sup> It was as he had finished speaking, that the king’s sons themselves came. They lifted their voice and lamented, and so did the king and all his courtiers; they lamented with a very great lamentation.

<sup>37</sup> As for Absalom, he had run away; he went to Talmi son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. King David mourned all the days over his son Amnon.

<sup>38</sup> As for Absalom, he had run away and had gone to Geshur; he stayed there three years. <sup>39</sup> Then king David’s spirit of anger to go forth after Absalom was vanishing, for he was consoled over Amnon that he had died.

[end text]

**Verse 23.** We are told that two years have passed since the rape. David has done nothing to punish Amnon. Absalom will wait no longer. He murdered Amnon for justice that David did not provide for Tamar. Sheepshearers cut the hair (or wool) off the sheep. Hair figures greatly later in Absalom’s death.

**Verse 25.** “**He urged him, but he would not go.**” Did Absalom have evil motives toward David then?

**Verse 26.** David suspiciously asked Absalom about Amnon, “**Why should he go with you?**”

**Verse 27.** Absalom does not answer David, but “**Again Absalom urged him.**” David agreed and all his grown sons were present. (Younger sons, such as Solomon, presumably did not attend.) One wonders, if Amnon died, would Absalom be heir to David’s throne in the event of his death. Suspiciously Absalom prepares “**a feast like the feast of a king,**” a royal-style feast, fit for a king to give. Absalom’s true motives are first hinted at here. (*This italics portion is only found in a Dead Sea Scrolls text, 4QSam<sup>d</sup>.*)

**Verses 28–29.** Like Amnon in verse 17 above, Absalom commands his servants to act, in this case to do the murder. He takes responsibility, “**did not I myself instruct you?**” Absalom does something similar later.

David's sons all rode on mules, a sign of royalty (2 Samuel 18:9; 1 Kings 1:33, 38, 44).

**Verses 30–31.** A false report reaches David. He leaves his throne and laments the murder of all his sons. David mourns as he did for his firstborn son of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:16–18). Clearly, David likely felt God's punishment coming upon him, per punishments [1] and [2] on page 1 above.

**Verses 32–33.** Amnon's cousin, Jonadab, enters the story for the last time. He knew what happened and why; it was **“at Absalom's bidding it was determined since the day he humiliated his sister Tamar.”**

**Verse 34.** Absalom was not a fool and fled from the crime. The sons of David arrive back in Jerusalem.

**Verses 35–36.** How did Jonadab know? He says they are coming before they can be seen. Did he have foreknowledge of Absalom's plan? Jonadab, David's nephew, is not mentioned again.

**Verse 37.** Repeat of the information in verse 34, with the addition that he went into exile to his maternal grandfather's small kingdom of Geshur.

**Verse 38.** This passage repeats the information in the prior verse, but adds that he stayed three years.

**Verse 39.** David was angry, but he did not pursue Absalom. In fact, David's anger toward Absalom decreased over time. Why did David not pursue Absalom? As mentioned, David must have understood this entire episode of Amnon/Tamar/Absalom as God's punishment upon him. David himself had been guilty of a sexual crime (adultery) and murder (of a member of his military “family”). Both were punishable by death: Leviticus 20:10 for adultery, and Leviticus 24:17 for murder. David could not impose that penalty of death for murder upon Absalom without exposing again his own very real guilt. The events of Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom brought again King David's sins of a few years back to everyone's mind.

David knew the ache of exile from when he was on the run from King Saul. Joab, David's leading general of the army of Israel, recognizing David's agony over Absalom, secretly schemes to intervene to bring Absalom back into David's good graces as the story continues.

### *TEXT: Joab Intervenes on Absalom's Behalf*

#### 2 Samuel 14:1–24

<sup>1</sup> Joab<sup>e</sup> son of Zeruiah got to know that the king's mind was on Absalom. <sup>2</sup> So Joab sent to Tekoa and had a wise woman taken along from there. He said to her,

**“Feign yourself [pretend] to be in mourning now! Do put on mourning garments! You must not rub yourself with oil, but you will behave now like a woman who has been mourning the dead for many days. <sup>3</sup> You will come to the king and speak to him in this manner; then Joab put the words in her mouth.”**

<sup>4</sup> When the Tekoite woman came to the king, she fell on her nostrils to the earth, prostrated herself and said, **“Do grant a salvation, O king!”** <sup>5</sup> The king replied to her, **“What is your trouble?”**

She said,

**“Verily, I am a widowed woman; my husband is dead. <sup>6</sup> Your maidservant had two sons. The two of them strove [struggled] in the field; yet there was no rescuer to part them. Then the one smote the other and put him to death.**

**<sup>7</sup> And now the whole family has risen up against your maidservant, demanding, ‘Give up the one who smote his brother that we may put him to death for the soul of his brother whom he killed, even though we do exterminate the tenant.’ Thus they would quench my last ember which remains, so as to leave to my husband no name or remnant on the surface of the ground.”**

<sup>8</sup> Then the king said to the woman, **“Go to your home, and I myself shall give instructions on your behalf.”**

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<sup>e</sup> The name Joab means “Yah-Ab” or “Yah is Father.” This may be a subtle indication to the audience that Joab, although a born killer as a man, and now a deceiver (seemingly for the king's benefit), he is used to work God's punishment upon David through Absalom.

<sup>9</sup> Also the Tekoite woman said to the king, “On me, my lord the king, be the depravity and on my father’s house. Yet the king and his throne be innocent.” <sup>10</sup> The king replied, “If anyone is uttering anything to you, then you bring him to me, and he shall not continue to touch you further.”

<sup>11</sup> She replied,

“Please let the king be mindful of Yahweh your Elohim that the redeemer of blood may not multiply his efforts to cause ruin and that they do not exterminate my son.”

And he [King David] said, “As Yahweh lives, assuredly **not one hair of your son shall fall to the earth.**”

<sup>12</sup> Now the woman said, “Please let your maidservant speak another word to my lord the king.” He replied, “Speak!”

<sup>13</sup> So the woman said,

“Why then have you devised like this against people of Elohim? While the king is pronouncing this decree, the king is just as guilty for failing to let his own expelled one return. <sup>14</sup> For we all shall die, yea die and be like water spilled to the earth that cannot be gathered up again. Elohim shall not carry away the soul of him who devises devices so as not to keep expelled from him one who has been expelled. <sup>15</sup> And now I have come to speak this word to the king my lord, for the people have made me fearful.

So your maidservant thought, ‘Please let me speak to the king. Perhaps the king may act on the request of his maidservant, <sup>16</sup> for the king hearkened to rescue his maidservant from the palm of the man who is seeking to exterminate me and my son together from the allotment of Elohim.’

<sup>17</sup> Your maidservant thought, ‘Now let the word of my lord the king be final; for like a messenger [angel] of the One, Elohim, so is my lord the king, to summon the good and the evil. And Yahweh, your Elohim, may He come to be with you.’”

<sup>18</sup> Then the king answered and said to the woman, “Now you must not suppress from me anything that I am asking you.”

The woman replied, “Please let my lord the king speak.” <sup>19</sup> So the king asked, “Is the hand of Joab with you in all of this?”

The woman answered and said,

“As your soul lives, my lord the king, assuredly no man can go to the right or go to the left from all that my lord the king has spoken; for your servant Joab, he instructed me, and he put in the mouth of your handmaid all these words.

<sup>20</sup> It was in order to turn about the face of the matter that your servant Joab did this thing. Yet my lord is wise with the wisdom of a messenger [angel] of the One, Elohim, so as to know all that goes on in the land.”

<sup>21</sup> Then the king said to Joab, “Behold, I will act now according to this word of yours. Go! Bring back the lad Absalom!”

<sup>22</sup> Now Joab fell on his face to the earth; he prostrated himself and blessed the king. And Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found grace in your eyes, my lord the king because the king has acted on the word of his servant.” <sup>23</sup> So Joab arose, went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem.

<sup>24</sup> But the king said, “Let him turn about to his own house, and he shall not see my face. So Absalom turned about to his own house, and he did not see the king’s face.”

[end text]

**Verses 1–3.** Termed a “wise woman,” she is in fact an actress telling a story. Joab gives her precise instructions and she plays her part perfectly.

**Verses 4–7.** At the palace, dialogue ensues between the woman and her king, beginning with her prostration. She informs the king, and then asks questions. He replies and assures her. She has the initiative in the conversation. David does not recognize the woman’s tale as having any reference to his situation.

**Verses 8–11.** The King promises her safety. He is willing to pardon a murderer, just like Absalom. God, in His mercy (Exodus 34:5–7), spared Cain and He spared David. Both were worthy of death.

**Verse 11.** David says, “**not one hair of your son shall fall to the earth.**” Unwittingly, this mention of hair also describes the situation of what will happen to David’s son Absalom, and leading directly to his death.<sup>f</sup>

**Verse 12.** She asks another question, but addresses Absalom’s situation, invoking God’s justice.

**Verse 13.** Then she accuses David of being guilty, just as Nathan the prophet did (2 Samuel 12:7). She even says that by not pardoning Absalom, David is going against the wishes of the people of God!

**Verses 13–17.** In verse 15 she says “**the people have made her fearful.**” Twice she repeats the phrase “**Your maidservant thought**” (verses 15, 17), but it was not her at all. David now understands she was set up to ask the questions, and for whom she asked them.

**Verses 18–20.** David asks a question; she answers. He knows Joab put her up to do all this. She admits it, but says Joab controlled everything. She was just “following orders.”

**Verses 21–24.** We are not told if Joab was with David when the woman from Tekoa performed.

**“Joab carried out his scheme in part to help David find an adequate justification for doing what his heart had been urging him to do (cf. 13:39). With Joab’s help David had come to realize that reconciliation with his son was both consistent with the Torah and in the nation’s best interests; thus, he agreed to ‘do it’ (v. 21).”**

• **Robert D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel, 392**

David allows Joab to bring Absalom from Geshur back to Jerusalem (verse 23), but David qualifies his permission. He will not meet Absalom face-to-face, meaning he will not be admitted to the royal court or be in David’s presence. This means Absalom is no longer David’s heir apparent. But Absalom has a plan.

### ***TEXT: Absalom Gets Joab’s Attention***

#### **2 Samuel 14:25–33**

<sup>25</sup> There was no man in all Israel like Absalom who was so exceedingly praised for his well-favored appearance. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish on him. <sup>26</sup> When he shaved his head — it was at the end of days to days [meaning, every year] that he would shave it; when it was heavy on him, he shaved it — he would weigh the hair of his head, **two hundred shekels by the royal standard weight.**

<sup>27</sup> To Absalom were born three sons and one daughter; her name was Tamar, and she became a woman of lovely appearance. <sup>28</sup> **Absalom dwelt the days of two years in Jerusalem;** yet he did not see the king’s face.

<sup>29</sup> So Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king; yet Joab would not come to him. When he sent again, the second time, he still would not come. <sup>30</sup> Then **Absalom said to his servants, “See, Joab’s apportionment is at the side of mine, and he has barley there. Go and ravage it with fire!”** So **Absalom’s servants ravaged the apportionment with fire.**

<sup>31</sup> Then Joab arose; he came to Absalom at the house and said to him, **“Why have your servants ravaged the apportionment that is mine with fire?”**

<sup>32</sup> So Absalom replied to Joab, **“Behold, I sent to you, saying, ‘Come here and let me send you to the king to ask, Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there.’ So now let me see the king’s face, and if there is depravity in me, let him put me to death.”**

<sup>33</sup> Joab went in to the king and told him. Then he called Absalom who now came to the king and prostrated himself before him. He fell on his nostrils to the earth before the king; and **the king kissed Absalom.**

[end text]

<sup>f</sup> Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), p. 391.

**Verse 25.** Absalom was said to be a man among men, superlative in physical appearance, without flaw.

**Verse 26.** Again, Absalom's hair is mentioned. It grew thick and fast, so that he needed to shear it regularly, just like sheep. What happens if their hair is not shortened? It becomes matted and gets gnarled. **"Two hundred shekels by the royal standard weight"** is about 5 pounds.<sup>g</sup>

**Verse 27.** Absalom named his only daughter after his sister Tamar. The same Hebrew word "lovely" describes both of them (compare verse 27 with 2 Samuel 13:1). No further mention is made of Absalom's daughter Tamar, just as no mention is made of Tamar, his sister. Later, 2 Samuel 18:18 says no sons survived Absalom. All three must have died before Absalom did, perhaps in the war.

**Verse 28.** A time indication is given here, in addition to earlier time indicators:

- **"It was after the days of two years ..."** This means two years after Amnon's rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:23).
- **"As for Absalom, he had run away and had gone to Geshur; he stayed there three years."** (after Absalom's murder of Amnon, 2 Samuel 13:38).
- **"Absalom dwelt the days of two years in Jerusalem; yet he did not see the king's face,"** after Absalom returned from Geshur (2 Samuel 14:28).

This means that 7 years transpired since Amnon raped Tamar. Nothing more is mention in Scripture about David's daughter and Absalom's sister. Did she marry, have children? When did she die? She is the true victim in this story. However, this story arc is about Absalom, his relations with David, and his downfall.

**Verse 29.** Absalom was a man of action who did not wait for events to happen, nor did he like waiting for others to act, whatever their exalted station. Two times Joab did not answer when Absalom summoned him. We see later how Joab deals with Absalom. The word "barley" has the same Hebrew root as "hair."

**Verse 30.** Again Absalom, a commanding personality, ordered his servants to commit a crime, just as he commanded them to commit the murder of Amnon (2 Samuel 13:28).

**Verse 31.** Joab rose up and confronted Absalom. Joab helped Absalom and now he is very angry.

**Verse 32–33.** Absalom imperiously demanded Joab come to him, commanding as a ruler to a subject: **"I sent to you, saying, 'Come here and let ME send YOU to the king ..."** Absalom's arrogance toward Joab is intense. Absalom gets his way by playing on David's love. He is admitted to the royal court. David kisses his son as a public announcement that Absalom is back into David's presence. He is heir apparent once again. Absalom, however, begins to devise treason ...

### ***TEXT: Absalom Prepares a Conspiracy***

#### **2 Samuel 15:1–12**

<sup>1</sup> It came to be **some time afterward** that Absalom provided himself with a chariot, horses, and fifty men running before him. <sup>2</sup> **Absalom would rise early** and stand at the side of the road to the gate. Whenever there was any man who came with his contested [legal] matter to bring it before the king for judgment, then Absalom would call to him and say, **"From what city are you?"** And he would reply, **"From one of the tribes of Israel is your servant."**

<sup>3</sup> Then Absalom would say to him, **"See, your matters are good and correct; yet there is no one assigned to you from the king to hear them."** <sup>4</sup> And Absalom would add, **"O that I were appointed judge in the land, and every man who had his contested matter or plea would come to me, and I would grant justice to him!"**

<sup>5</sup> So it came to be, whenever a man approached **to prostrate himself** before him, that he would stretch forth his hand, take fast hold of him and kiss him. <sup>6</sup> Absalom acted in this manner for all of Israel who came

<sup>g</sup> Roger L. Omanson and John Ellington, *A Handbook on the Second Book of Samuel*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001), p. 919.

for judgment to the king. Thus Absalom stole the heart of the men of Israel.

<sup>7</sup> **It came to be at the end of four years** that Absalom said to the king,

**“Please, let me go and pay my vow that I vowed to Yahweh, in Hebron. <sup>8</sup> For your servant vowed a vow when I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, ‘If Yahweh should restore, yea restore me to Jerusalem, then I will serve Yahweh.’”**

<sup>9</sup> The king replied to him, **“Go in peace!”**

So he arose and went to Hebron. <sup>10</sup> But Absalom sent spies through all the tribes of Israel, saying, **“As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, you will announce, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.’”**

<sup>11</sup> Two hundred men from Jerusalem had gone with Absalom; **they were invited** and **had gone in their sincerity** and **had no knowledge of the entire matter**. <sup>12</sup> Absalom sent and called Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, from his city, from Giloh, while he was sacrificing the sacrifices. The conspiracy became resolute [became stronger], and the people going along with Absalom were many. [end text]

**Verse 1.** **“Some time afterward”** means after Absalom’s reconciliation with David.

**Verse 2–6.** Absalom’s rising early indicates high motivation to pursue his goal, soon to be revealed. Today we would recognize him acting like a politician to gain public support. In ancient Israel Absalom did not kiss babies, but he kissed the petitioners with claims in law.

**Verse 7–8.** Absalom did this for four years,<sup>h</sup> traveling around with a chariot, horses, and fifty men. When his preparations were ready, he lied to King David so he could leave Jerusalem. He lied about doing so to **“serve Yahweh.”** Absalom lied just as he lied to David regarding the feast of sheepshearing, which led to Amnon’s murder. It is also clear that Absalom was under some kind of constraint and had to ask permission to leave Jerusalem. Absalom was born in Hebron, a fortress (2 Samuel 3:2–3).

The four years can be presumed to begin after Absalom reconciled with David (2 Samuel 14:33–15:1). The chronology is relevant only to the Absalom story arc and is only marginally relevant to the chronology of David’s kingdom. Therefore, in total this would be a minimum of 11 years after Amnon’s rape of Tamar to Absalom’s rebellion. Solomon, son of Bathsheba and future successor to David, would be about 12 or 13 years old at this time, perhaps a year older.

**Verse 9–10.** Although not stated, the command was given and Absalom was proclaimed king throughout Israel. Absalom crowned himself king at Hebron which was where David began his rule of Judah and then all Israel. **“Absalom is king in Hebron”** was a call to arms for Absalom’s supporters.

**Verse 11.** The 200 men were lied to, yet they went with Absalom. They may have been made hostages.

**Verse 12.** Who was Ahithophel the Gilonite? He was an important counselor to David, yet he betrayed his king. How important was his counsel? The text of Samuel tells us in the next chapter:

**“In those days, the counsel which Ahithophel gave was regarded just as if one had consulted the oracle of the One, Elohim. In this way all the counsel of Ahithophel was esteemed both by David and Absalom.”**

• 2 Samuel 16:23

The statement at the end of verse 12 indicates that this conspiracy was extremely dangerous. The word “conspiracy” is used in most all English translations. In the King James Version it variously means “conspiracy,” “treason,” and “alliance,” but an unlawful alliance. So, Absalom went from revenge, to murder, to conspiracy, to treasonous rebellion. He now makes his move to gain power.

All of Absalom’s posturing in public was going on while a coup d’état was being organized outside of

<sup>h</sup> The King James Version and other texts and translations follow the Masoretic Hebrew text which has “4 years.” The Greek LXX text has “40 years” in verse 7. If this is true, then this likely refers to Absalom’s age, not how long he worked to seduce Israel from David. The translation of “4 years” matches the context of the narrative.

Jerusalem. King David did not see it coming. Neither did Joab or David's other advisors. Absalom's strategy of asking to go to Hebron succeeded in removing him from Jerusalem. This prevented David's extremely loyal bodyguards, mighty men, guard troops, and mercenaries — deadly warriors all — from seizing Absalom and destroying the growing rebellion. Only outside Jerusalem could Absalom gather an army to seize, hold, and defend the capital.

David needed to consider, would his many followers support and fight for him? Or, would they support a younger, more vigorous Absalom? What would Joab do? Joab helped Absalom return to David in Jerusalem and later to be brought back to David's embrace. What would Saul's supporters do? They were still in the north in large numbers. Many of them felt that David usurped the kingship from Saul's family. David needs to act ... and he does so.

### ***TEXT: King David Learns of Absalom's Conspiracy ... and Takes Action***

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#### **2 Samuel 15:13–37**

<sup>13</sup> Then a message-bearer came to David, saying, "**The heart of the men of Israel is following after Absalom.**" <sup>14</sup> Now David said to all his courtiers who were with him in Jerusalem,

**"Arise and let us run away, for there shall be no deliverance for us from before Absalom. Make haste to go, lest he hastens and overtakes us. Then he would hurtle evil on us and smite the city with the edge of the sword."**

<sup>15</sup> The king's courtiers replied to the king, "**As to all that my lord the king may choose, behold, we are your servants.**" <sup>16</sup> **So the king went forth with his entire household in his footsteps; but the king left ten wives, concubines, to be in charge of the palace.** <sup>17</sup> **Thus the king went forth with all the people in his footsteps;** and they stayed at a house far off. <sup>18</sup> All his courtiers were passing at his side; all the Kerethite and all the Pelethite and all the Gittites, six hundred men who came in his footsteps from Gath, passed on before the king.

<sup>19</sup> Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite,

**"Why should you too go with us? Turn back and stay with the new king, for you are a foreigner, and you were also deported from your place.** <sup>20</sup> **You came only yesterday; should I make you rove [wander] with us today, to go as I am going, wherever I can go? Return and take back your kinsmen with you! And may Yahweh deal with you in benignity and faithfulness."**

<sup>21</sup> But Ittai answered the king saying, "**As Yahweh lives and as my lord the king lives, but rather in the place where my lord the king may come to be, whether for death or for life, there your servant shall come to be.**"

<sup>22</sup> So David replied to Ittai, "**Go ahead and march by!**" Then Ittai the Gittite marched by with all his men and **all the little ones** who were with him.

<sup>23</sup> All in the land were lamenting with a loud voice as the whole force was marching by. The king was standing in Wadi Kidron, while the whole force was passing before his face along the olive way in the wilderness.

<sup>24</sup> Zadok also was there, and all the Levites with him carrying the coffer [ark] of the covenant of the One, Elohim. They stood by the coffer [ark] of the One, Elohim, and Abiathar came up until the crossing over from the city had come to end for the whole force. <sup>25</sup> Then the king said to Zadok,

**"Restore the coffer [ark] of the One, Elohim, to the city! If I should find grace in the eyes of Yahweh, then He will bring me back and let me see it and its homestead.** <sup>26</sup> **Yet if He should say thus, 'I have no delight in you, here I am'; let Him do with me just as it is good in His eyes."**

<sup>27</sup> The king also said to Zadok the priest,

**"Look, you and Abiathar, do return to the city in peace, Ahimaaz your son and Jonathan son of Abiathar, your two sons, with you.** <sup>28</sup> **Look, I shall be dallying in the gorges of the wilderness until word comes from you men to tell me."**

<sup>29</sup> So Zadok and Abiathar brought the coffer [ark] of the One, Elohim, back to Jerusalem, and they stayed there.

<sup>30</sup> David was going up the ascent of Olivet, **ascending and weeping**; his head was hooded, and he was walking barefoot. And all the people who were with him hooded each man his head; thus they went up **ascending and weeping**. <sup>31</sup> When David was told saying, **“Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom,”** then David said, **“I pray, O Yahweh, make Ahithophel’s counsel look unwise!”**

<sup>32</sup> Now it happened when David came to the summit **where people would prostrate themselves to Elohim**, there to meet him was the long time associate Hushai with his tunic torn and dust from the ground on his head. <sup>33</sup> David said to him,

**“If you march on with me, you will become a load [a burden] on me. <sup>34</sup> But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘Your brothers have crossed over, and the king, your father, crossed over after me, and now I am your servant, O king; grant me life; I became your father’s servant, and I have been hitherto, but now I am your servant too,’ then you can annul Ahithophel’s counsel for me.**

<sup>35</sup> **And are not Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, there with you? So it will come to be: Every word that you may hear from the king’s palace, you shall tell to Zadok and to Abiathar, the priests. <sup>36</sup> Behold, there with them are their two sons, Zadok’s son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan; by means of them you will send to me every word that you may hear.”**

<sup>37</sup> So David’s associate **Hushai came to the city as Absalom was entering Jerusalem**, and Ahithophel was with him. [end text]

**Verse 13.** King David learns of the outbreak of the rebellion from a courier. There is no indication of shock or surprise. **“The men of Israel”** means an army. Absalom began his conquest at Hebron, where David was first crowned king of Judah and later king of Israel.

**Verse 14.** David flees. It seems to acknowledge that Absalom is king, as he does later in verse 19. Actually, David’s supporters move slowly to the east, first to the Mount of Olives, then to the Jordan River to cross it. He fully understands he will be killed immediately if Absalom or his followers capture him. He is also worried about the city of Jerusalem. If David built up Jerusalem, then it should have been very defensible, as in the days of the Jebusites.

**“Then he built up the city round about, from the Millo bulwark to the surrounding wall, while Joab himself revived the remainder of the city.”**

• 1 Chronicles 11:8

But David chooses to leave Jerusalem. He likely understood that he and his supporters could not have withstood a long-term siege. David was a superb strategist, and no one questioned his decisions. He needed to gather a professional army. David does not once attribute this calamity to God, even though he must have considered the situation a punishment from God. He places the blame at this moment on Absalom.

**Verse 15.** Then the narrative goes into matters of personnel. Who will go with David, who will stay? We are told David has great support among his “courtiers” as they are called, and most of them insist on staying with him. This loyalty is important because it diminishes the threat of informers within David’s supporters.

**Verse 16.** David leaves ten of his concubines in Jerusalem, thinking they would be safe. We shall see this to be a mistake, but who could have foreseen Absalom’s future act of defilement? [It will be presented next time.] It may be presumed that David’s wives traveled with him, along with their children, including the future king, Solomon, as Hushai said to Absalom: **“Your brothers have crossed over”** (2 Samuel 15:34).

**Verses 16–17.** Note that the first part of verse 16 is repeated in verse 17. This may be a pagination marker. In old books (I have a photocopy of a 1789 German book) the last sentence of one page is repeated in the first line of the next page so the audience knows the pages fit together properly. This practice was

done with ancient tablets, and likely with parchment and papyrus.

**Verse 18. “The Kerethite and all the Pelethite and all the Gittites”:** The Kerethites were the foreign mercenary soldiers of David, their name means “executioners,” whose name is related to Crete. They may have been of the Philistine race from the island of Crete. The Pelethites (“couriers”) were guardsmen of some kind. The Gittites (“belonging to Gath”) were Philistines in service to King David, a personal guard.

**Verse 19. Who Was Ittai?** Ittai was a Philistine from Gath. Like Uriah the Hittite he was a foreign soldier and a mercenary, one of King David’s “mighty men,” one of the first “Thirty” of David’s chosen warriors (2 Samuel 23:29). Was David testing Ittai by suggesting he turn back, or was David saying, “You are new to your service, whoever the king will be, serve the kingdom”? Ittai is an example of loyalty. These experienced warriors can train an army, which is exactly what they do.

**Verse 23.** David has considerable popular support as the army and courtiers pass through to the east up the slope of the Mount of Olives. David stands at the bottom of the Wadi Kidron. This is the Kidron Valley today.

**Verses 14–29.** David discusses with the high priest and Abiathar (son of the high priest Ahimelech, murdered by King Saul), who brought the Ark of the Covenant for it to go with David. Privately, David tells them to return to Jerusalem. Zadok’s son and Abiathar’s son will be useful in communicating Absalom’s activities and movements to David.

**Verse 30. “David was going up the ascent of Olivet, ascending and weeping ...”** Those with him were doing the same. David is in despair, and his only hope is in God. “The ascent of Olivet” is the Mount of Olives.

**Verse 31.** More bad news. A trusted advisor, Ahithophel, has sided with Absalom. His advice was so good, that he was a threat that needed to be neutralized. Absalom’s ruthless nature combined with Ahithophel’s wise counsel was a particularly dangerous combination.

**Verse 32–36.** Note the phrase “**where people would prostrate themselves to Elohim.**” This may refer to a tradition predating construction of Solomon’s Temple and was probably the location of the red heifer altar, or it may have been a later identification of David’s meeting with Hushai so readers would know the location. This would have been directly east of the Gihon Springs on the Mount of Olives.

David enlists Hushai’s help to nullify Ahithophel’s strategic wisdom on behalf of Absalom. Hushai was old because David said Hushai would slow them up. David wanted Hushai to pretend to be Absalom’s supporter, and gave Hushai the words to say (verse 34), to cancel Ahithophel’s sage advice to Absalom. Hushai is to tell Zadok and Abiathar’s the information he learns from Absalom. The priests’ sons were to carry messages to David. All that is known about Hushai is that he was an useful ally of David and father of one of Solomon’s governmental leaders, and that he defeated Ahithophel in wisdom (as we will read later).

**Verse 37.** Hushai and David parted. Hushai returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, an hour’s walk for an older man. When Hushai arrived, Absalom was just entering Jerusalem from the west. David left just in time to escape. God was still with David.

### *A Psalm of David’s Flight from Absalom*

David composed a psalm of his thoughts, expressing the difficulty of that dark time. It is the third Psalm of David. In 2 Samuel 15:13–37 we read about those who were loyal to David, but many others were not loyal. Psalm 3 expresses his anguish of being under threat of death from those who claimed to love him and those who he thought loyal to him.

David composed this psalm knowing that these events of Absalom’s rebellion were part of God’s punishment he must endure because of his sins, as told in 2 Samuel 12:10–12. With all his troubles, David did not despair, even when he ordered a retreat from Jerusalem. He trusted God, come what may. Each verse of Psalm 3 is a complete thought, filled with meaning.

*TEXT: King David's Prayer to God*

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**Psalm 3***When he ran away from the face of Absalom his son.*

<sup>1</sup> O Yahweh, how my foes do multiply!  
    Many are those rising against me.

<sup>2</sup> Many are those saying to my soul,  
    There is no salvation for him in his Elohim.

*Selah* [Interlude]

<sup>3</sup> Yet You, O Yahweh, have been a shield about me,  
    My Glory, and the One raising up my head.

<sup>4</sup> I called to Yahweh with my voice,  
    And He answered me from His holy mountain.

*Selah* [Interlude]

<sup>5</sup> As for me, I will lie down that I may sleep;  
    I will awake, for Yahweh, He shall support me.

<sup>6</sup> I shall not fear myriads [ten thousands] of people  
    Who are set against me, round about.

<sup>7</sup> Do arise, O Yahweh! Save me, my Elohim!  
    For You will smite all my enemies on the cheek;  
    The teeth of the wicked You will break.

<sup>8</sup> To Yahweh belongs the salvation;  
    On Your people be Your blessing!

*Selah* [Interlude]

*Permanent, With Accompaniments A Davidic Psalm*

[end text]

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Psalm 3 was written shortly after the war with Absalom. He remembers his thoughts during the retreat and writes in the present as if he knows YHWH will shield him and answer him. This psalm, like most, was sung or performed before an audience.

**Verses 1–2.** The enemies of David are many, not few. In fact, they are multiplying. Everything has fallen apart. His enemies say that God will not save David, God's anointed King.

**Verses 3–4.** David knows God will protect him, in spite of God's punishment. Verse 4 refers to his repentance for his sins as he looked across the Kidron toward "**His Holy Mountain,**" Mount Zion (Psalm 2:6).

**"He was now suffering for his sin in the matter of Uriah; this was the evil which, for that sin, God threatened to raise up against him out of his own house (2 Sa. 12:11), which, no doubt, he observed, and took occasion thence to renew his repentance for it."**

• *Matthew Henry's Commentary, Psalm 3*

Remember, the prophet Nathan told David he would not die from God's punishments regarding his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 12:13).

**Verses 5–8.** David is content to sleep knowing he will awake and that YHWH supports him as King of Israel. He is without fear. He calls upon YHWH to actively save him now and defeat his enemies to their great loss. All this will be to God's glory. In verse 8 the salvation David was praising was a physical salvation from evil and that the people would be blessed. It was not about spiritual salvation.

David Sielaff, May 2015