

# II Samuel – Part 6

## Absalom's Downfall – II Samuel 16-19

While he had always loved the Lord, when his son Absalom threatened to take the kingdom from him and rule in his place, David appeared as a giant of faith. He has grown spiritually during the testing and judgment of God. Now, he relies on God's power and lovingkindness. David courageously faces the truth that it might indeed be God's will to punish him with death for the terrible sins that marred his life, and he willingly submits if that should be God's will. "Let him do to me what seems good to Him" (II Sam. 15:26). He fearlessly trusts God's plan with the outcome of Absalom's rebellion.

### ***I. Exile***

From the time that the trumpet sounded and the shout came that "Absalom reigneth in Hebron," David was on the run again. (II Sam. 15:10-14). This time, it wasn't a deranged king, but his own flesh and blood. God's prophecy, spoken through Nathan, continued to be fulfilled: "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house" (II Sam. 12:11). David immediately started packing his household. His servants were told to "make speed to depart, lest he [Absalom] overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword."

As David was leaving Jerusalem with his family, servants, and bodyguards, Ittai and 600 Gittites joined him, pledging "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be" (II Sam. 15:21). Did you notice that this non-Israelite Philistine acknowledged that the Lord lives? David must have been a good influence, as Ittai claimed the Lord rather than the idols of Philistia.

As the people passed over the Kidron Brook, the entire country wept. Zadok the priest, with the Levites, brought the Ark so David could inquire of God when he needed to. It was important to Israel because it signified that God's presence was with them. But it was not a talisman, a good luck charm, or a "rabbit's foot." It had no special miracle-performing properties. It was, however, a visible sign of God's presence.

But, as important as the Ark was to him, David chose to send it and the priests back to Jerusalem. His decision was not only a spiritual reason, but a practical one. He wanted to maintain God's chosen center for worship, unify the nation, and assert his position as the anointed king. David did not want God's presence to be compromised, even in times of political crisis. Practically speaking, by the Ark remaining in Jerusalem, its Levitical attendants would also remain there and be his source of accurate and confidential information on Absalom's movements and developments in the rebellion. He could trust their information.

When Hushai came to meet him, David also asked him to return and turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness. Hushai would become part of his spy network. Willingly, he put himself in jeopardy to defend David in the presence of his enemies.

Because of his heart for God, which expressed itself in lovingkindness for his people, in contrast to Absalom's arrogance, the people loved David. In return for his kindness, his servants modeled true service by offering to do what David needed them to do.

With the support of all who came, his rule would still be surrounded by the supporters who remained in Jerusalem. In the meantime, David is committing himself totally to God's hands and the judgment that has been brought upon him.

## **II. False Assumptions**

After worshipping God at the top of the Mount of Olives, David saw Ziba, Saul's grandson Mephibosheth's servant, coming toward him with a couple of donkeys loaded with food. (II Sam. 16). Was he friend or foe? If Absalom is rebelling against his own father, who else is among the terrorists? He wouldn't be surprised if Ziba were coming to help Absalom take away his kingdom!

When Ziba approached, he brought food for the young men to eat and wine so they wouldn't faint in the wilderness. This was gladly received; they would need sustenance to evade Absalom, but where was Mephibosheth? Ziba was supporting David, but he was also using this time of trouble for his own selfish purposes. He led David to believe that Mephibosheth was plotting to take the kingdom from him. What!!!! It was as David suspected!

In his depression over Absalom's treachery, David's perception of Mephibosheth is distorted, causing him to be suspicious. Mephibosheth had never shown any political ambition and had always been loyal and humble. In fact, he had labeled himself as "thy servant" and a "dead dog" (II Sam. 9) to David. He had been given everything that had belonged to his grandfather, been treated like an honored guest, and even ate at David's table as one of his sons. Mephibosheth was physically incapable of leading armies or performing duties expected of a king. Would he really turn against him and attempt to take the crown?

His timely gift and cunning words deceived David, and because he had no time to consider the truth of Ziba's statement and make a calm and impartial judgment, he acted rashly. In the same way that he had returned his inheritance to Mephibosheth, he now took it away and gave it to Ziba, buying his loyalty. This pleased Ziba immensely. He had achieved his purpose completely.

David continued to Bahurim, a tiny highway village north of Jerusalem in the tribe of Benjamin. (II Sam. 16:5). Bahurim seems to have been on a ridge, separated from the road by a narrow ravine. Here, David was confronted by Shimei, another descendant of Saul. He was out of easy reach, though within hearing and within a stone's throw. While Ziba's reaction to David had been fawning and submissive, Shimei demonstrated an aggressive reaction. He began cursing David, casting stones, and throwing dust at David and those who were with him. Talk about kicking someone when they are down! That's what Shimei does as he calls the king a "man of blood" and charges him with being a violent and wicked man.

What is this man's problem? The Lord rejected Saul and allowed David to inherit the throne. Did he live in fear of King David? Could this have been a reaction from all the anger, bitterness, and jealousy he had allowed to build in his heart over the years? Had he finally rebelled after thinking so often, "It's just not fair?"

Since Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin, his feelings were probably like those of others in the area who blamed David for the deaths of Saul and his sons on Mount Gilboa. He was pleased that David had been humiliated and removed from the throne. David, however, chose to ignore him all the way to the crossing of the Jordan River. Naturally,

the mighty men who surrounded and protected David were filled with indignation and anger and offered to kill Shimei; David showed quiet patience during these rantings and would not allow it. He felt it was part of God's judgment: "Maybe God told him to say that...Maybe God is cursing me."

Again, we see David's depression. This time, his perception isn't about another person, but of God. As God's anointed, David knew how God treated him. He had often sung of God's goodness, His mercy, His lovingkindness...If he had thought about it, he would have known it wasn't God who was being cruel; God isn't vindictive. He would have realized that the accusations being thrown at him were lies!

David's depression also caused him to distort his view of himself. God had forgiven him, but he did not forgive himself. He felt that he deserved this treatment. If he thought he was being humble by this attitude, he was wrong; he was having a pity party. He didn't want anyone reminding him of what God had done for him. His depression caused him to forget that God knows best and had stopped trusting Him. David lost sight of God's purpose for him and forgot his value in God's sight.

Meanwhile, Absalom came to Jerusalem with Ahithophel and seized the power. Hushai, David's friend, came to Absalom and saluted him, "God save the king, God save the king!" Absalom was surprised that Hushai would turn on David so quickly! Hushai assured him, "Whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide" (II Sam. 16:18). So, Hushai was able to gain entrance into Absalom's circle of advisers.

Hushai apparently wasn't consulted when Absalom consulted Ahithophel about the best way to demonstrate to all that he was now the king. Ahithophel, whose word had always seemed to be the very words of God, now seems to take a complete about-face. He counseled him to sleep with his father's concubines, fulfilling another prophecy for David's sin. "I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun" (II Sam. 12:11-12).

While this was all carefully planned by Ahithophel, Absalom's immediate compliance with this counsel regarding his father's harem shows his utter contempt for his father. For the revolt to succeed, there had to be no possible chance of a reconciliation between him and his father. This action entirely suited Absalom's wicked and perverse mind. He went even further than Ahithophel counseled by performing the act under a tent on top of the palace, the most conspicuous place in Jerusalem, so that "all Israel would see it." (II Sam. 16:20-23).

Ravishing the ten concubines of David was a political action that corresponded to the ancient pagan practice, which stated that a succeeding king was entitled to the harem of his predecessor. That, however, didn't excuse Absalom's lust. When "Israel shall hear that you have made yourself odious to your father," it would take away all possibilities for reconciliation. It also prevented Ahithophel from being prosecuted and executed for his part in the rebellion if Absalom pleaded forgiveness.

### ***III. Counsel Turned to Foolishness***

To further assure that Absalom's place on the throne, Ahithophel counsels Absalom to let him pursue his father with 12,000 men and take him by surprise when he is weary and weak; he would only kill David and bring the rest back to him. But Hushai gave

another counsel: Wait, because going immediately, while they are angry over what has happened, would be dangerous. Take time to draw your forces together so David will be overwhelmed by your numbers. Then, lead the army yourself to show the people you can lead an army. His counsel allowed David to put a greater distance between them and prepare for the battle.

This counsel appealed to Absalom's pride, and he followed Hushai's advice. (II Sam. 17). Had Ahithophel's counsel been followed, David and his little troop of 600 or so, in their totally unprepared state, would soon have been destroyed. Only God's intervention that turned Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness saved them. As Absalom prepared for war, he appointed Amasa, another of David's nephews and Joab's cousin, to be the new captain, instead of Joab.

Hushai quickly informed Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, to send word to David that he shouldn't stay the night in the plains of the wilderness but pass quickly over the Jordan and get out of harm's way. When Ahithophel finds that his counsel is overturned, he goes home, sets his house in order, and hangs himself. This gave David valuable time to move on to Mahanaim, where his friends met him with refreshments and provisions, and allowed his men to rest and plan their strategy. (II Sam. 17:27).

After counting the number of troops available to him, David divided them into thirds under the leadership of Joab, his brother Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite. David had expected to fight with them, but his military leaders suggested he stay back so he wouldn't be killed. This would have left the nation without God's anointed leader. David agreed but warned all his commanders in no uncertain terms that they were not to kill Absalom. All the people heard him say this. (II Sam. 18).

David's experienced warriors knew better than Absalom's men how to fight in the difficult conditions of the thick forest of Ephraim. Absalom's army suffered a crushing defeat, with 20,000 dying, although, in their inexperience, more died by falling into pits, getting trapped in the swamps, or being killed by wild animals than being killed by David's soldiers.

Since his men had scattered from him, Absalom wasn't sure which way to run! David's men were everywhere! He fled into the heavy forest as fast as his mule could carry him...but that became his downfall. The mule ran at full speed toward a great oak tree. Absalom couldn't guide him, nor stop him, nor make it go around the tree, and he ran right at it.

Scripture says, "his head caught hold of the oak." Many think that Absalom's hair, which he was so proud of, got entangled. But since the Bible says, "his head," it seems to indicate that the mule, running with such force into the tree on the uneven ground, caused Absalom's head to become stuck in the fork of the tree branch, and he lost consciousness. No mention is made of him trying to dislodge himself. Feeling the weight of its rider change, the mule kept right on running, leaving Absalom suspended there. Those who saw him did not stop to kill him or even stop him from his wild run. They let him pass by; they knew David's charge concerning him.

One man saw Absalom in the tree and told Joab. Joab was upset that he hadn't killed him. In fact, he said he would have rewarded him with ten shekels of silver and a girdle for doing the deed! This would have been a substantial amount of money, an amount customarily given in payment for service or as a reward. The girdle was a

military belt, a costly, valuable item that symbolized honor and status. Jonathan had given David a girdle as a mark of friendship and respect. (I Sam. 18:4). But the man was loyal and said he wouldn't have killed Absalom if Joab had offered him 1,000 shekels, "for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.'" (II Sam. 18:12). He knew Joab would have blamed him because nothing was ever hidden from the king.

Joab, however, chose not to heed David's command, went to Absalom, and thrust three darts into his heart while he was still alive. These darts were just wooden stakes sharpened in the fire, and they didn't kill Joab. But Joab had his ten armor bearers gather around and finish the job. He didn't want David to spare his life if he had captured him. But it wasn't Joab's call to make; he was not the king and had no right to make this decision.

After Absalom's death, Joab blew the trumpet, and the conflict was over. There was no need to continue; David would remain king. They took Absalom and cast him into a great pit, covering it with a "very great heap of stones," and those of Israel who had followed him fled to their tents.

Joab sent Cushai, an African slave, to tell David that Absalom was dead, but Ahimaaz wanted to tell him first. Finally, Joab gave in to his whining and sent him. He was a faster runner than Cushai and passed him along the way, but he really didn't have any message for David. He told him that he had only seen a great tumult but didn't know what was happening. Finally, Cushai came huffing and puffing to David and told him Absalom was dead. David was heartbroken and went to his chambers and wept.

Joab was upset that David was weeping and mourning for Absalom's death. (II Sam. 19). What should have been a day of celebration for the putting down of an uprising was now turned into mourning. David's uncontrolled grief created dissatisfaction and confusion among those who had risked their lives for him. Joab spoke harshly to David. He told him to stop mourning and show some appreciation for what his troops had done for him. If not, he might lose their support entirely. So, the king arose and sat at the gate with the people who had supported him.

But David wanted peace and unity with all, so he sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar, and asked them to speak to the elders of Judah. Would they bring him back and restore him to his rightful place as king since they had been Absalom's strongest supporters? They agreed that he should come.

#### **IV. *Forgiveness***

So, the king returned. Those of Judah came to meet him and escort him over the Jordan. (II Sam. 19:11-12). David began to restore the relationships that had been divided. He did not want them to think that by supporting Absalom, they had become his enemies. He pardoned them and informed them that he still regarded them as his closest kin. This wise political move helped to begin unifying the nation again.

One thousand men of Benjamin, who had hoped for David's downfall after taking Saul's place on the throne, were also forgiven. (II Sam. 19:16-30). By forgiving them, he secured the support of this difficult tribe. A generation later, when the kingdom splits, Benjamin will remain attached to Judah. Shimei was also there, cowering before the returning king. He gave a token apology for actively opposing David. Abishai, Joab's brother, still wants to kill him for his disrespect to the Lord's anointed,

but David wants no more bloodshed. Later, he will urge Solomon to execute him. (II Ki. 2).

Ziba is also there with his 15 sons and 20 servants. Mephibosheth comes to greet David as well...but he is a mess! As an expression of his grief, he has not trimmed his toenails or his beard or even washed his clothes since David went into exile. This resulted in his remaining ceremonially unclean (Ex. 19:10, 14). Obviously, Ziba had misled David into believing Mephibosheth had turned against him. David is now confronted with a dilemma. He had already given “all of Saul’s property” to Mephibosheth, then taken it away to give to Ziba when he thought he had become a traitor. Now what does he do? He decided to divide the property between them since both appeared to be loyal to him, but Mephibosheth offered it all to Ziba.

Barzillai had provided support for the king the entire time that he had been living in Mahanaim. (II Sam. 17:27). David wanted to honor this aged, caring man and his representative (maybe son), Chimham, for his loyalty and generosity by bringing him to Jerusalem to live at the king’s court and provide for him in his old age. Barzillai, at eighty years old, declined, saying he was too old to enjoy such a life and would only be a burden. Instead, he asked David to allow Chimham to go in his place. This cemented good relations with the tribes across the Jordan.

Watching David’s care and forgiveness for those who had wronged him, the other Israelites all rallied behind David again. The rift that had been straining relations between the tribes of the north and the tribe of Judah since the beginning of David’s reign has now been healed. Israel is united behind the Lord’s anointed, and God has restored David after his discipline because he had a heart for God.

### **Conclusion:**

The third of the four judgments on David’s sin has now been completed. At some point in Absalom’s lifetime, he had made a pillar, a monument of sorts, that he had called “Absalom’s place” because “he had no son to keep my name in remembrance.” This is interesting because in II Samuel 14:27, we read that Absalom had 3 sons and a daughter, whom he had named after his sister Tamar. We don’t know if these sons had all died when they were young, or if they were born after the monument was constructed, but at the time of his death, it appears he had no sons to carry on his name.

In the ancient world, if the father were famous when he died, his son would erect a memorial to him. The people would also expect the son to imitate his father, becoming a living memorial to his name. Absalom failed to receive either of these honors. He had lived like Eli’s sons and Saul, and he died as they did. His burial was in keeping with what the Mosaic Law prescribed for a rebellious son. (Deut. 21:20-21). God cut him off, rather than giving him a blessing, because he rebelled against the Lord’s anointed. Instead of kings succeeding him as the prince elect, all he left behind was a stone monument that he had erected himself.

How will you be remembered? Have you forgiven those who have done wrong to you? God requires that we live our lives as holy, and “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:31-32).



## Doing Things My Way (II Samuel Part 7)

**1)** Read II Samuel 20-24. What things occur that cause sin and judgment to come into Israel? How could it have been avoided?

**2)** After David returns as king, Amasa is made captain in place of Joab. Give 2 reasons why he may have chosen to do that.

**3)** Who stirred up trouble in II Samuel 20. What was his problem? How was it solved?

**4)** What caused the problem with the Gibeonites? How did David solve it without hurting Mephibosheth?

**5)** What is the central theme of David's prayer/song in II Samuel 22? How does God respond to a call of distress? Highlight words that describe God, then reread those words and write a descriptive picture of the God David is picturing for us.

**6)** In II Samuel 22:31, highlight this in the same way you have done other key verses. Do a word study of the descriptions found there and then rewrite the verse in a way that is easily and completely understood.

**7)** How does God use David in II Samuel 24 to accomplish judgment? What choices does God give for the punishment, and what is chosen?

### **Conclusion:**

As we come to the conclusion of yet another book of Scripture, one primarily centered on King David, we see that the “man after God’s own heart” still commits sin. Even though he is a picture of Christ, he can never be our savior because of that very sin. Even with his sin, though, God blesses David and Israel because of his faithfulness to God.

In this final chapter, things are pretty peaceful in the nation of Israel, and yet David decides to take a census of their military might. This angered God because it revealed that David was more interested in his own power and military success than he was in placing complete trust in the Lord.

Satan uses times when life is hectic and feeling out of control to discourage us, but he can also use times of peace and quiet to get into our head and take us away from trusting the Lord because we aren’t prepared for a problem. We think everything is going smoothly, so what can we do to make our lives better for the rough times. David may have been thinking that having a better army prepared to fight, you know, being “pro-active,” would be a good thing. It’s better to be prepared for these sort of things.

Instead, Satan turned it around and started puffing up his ego. Let’s make it better so that I look good to the rest of the nations. Israel will be the most powerful because of our might. A better way would have been to draw closer to God in His Word and in prayer that He would protect them from the necessity of even needing military!

What are you doing that is keeping your eyes from focusing on God’s provision and onto what benefits you? Confess that sin today so that God doesn’t have to discipline you!

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).