

Is Absalom the One?

Text: 2 Samuel 14

Introduction: We are now 44 chapters and 120 years into our study of Samuel. No, it hasn't been that long since we started our study. That's approximately how much of Israel's history is covered from the beginning of 1 Samuel 1 to the end of 2 Samuel 13.

And a lot has transpired over that time. When we started our study in 1 Samuel 1, Israel didn't yet have a king. Samuel became the last of the judges, and as his health began to decline, and his sons were deemed unfit to succeed him, the people wanted a king. They wanted a king like all the other nations. They wanted a king who would go before them and fight their battles.

So, God gave them a king. His name was Saul. Things started out okay, but eventually, God's warning to the people concerning a king who TAKES proved true. Saul rebelled against God and became a paranoid power-hungry man who tried on a number of occasions to kill David, the Lord's anointed.

When Saul died in battle on Mount Gilboa, there was a brief period of uncertainty concerning the throne in Israel. But ultimately, David ascended to the throne that God had promised him. David wanted to build a house for God, but God told David that He would make David a house. What God meant was that He would establish a royal dynasty from David's offspring. God said, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

There was much to like and appreciate about David's reign as king. He defeated Israel's enemies. And he was a king who "administered justice and equity to all his people." But then in chapter 11, David's downfall began when he sinned grievously against a woman named Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. David repented of his sin and was forgiven by the Lord, but he was never the same after that. The consequences of his sin endured and wreaked havoc in his family.

But still, the promise of God endured. God would raise up David's offspring and establish his kingdom forever. The promises of God are not dependent on the faithfulness of man. They are only dependent on the faithfulness of God. And God is always faithful. He always keeps His promises. He always does exactly what He says He's going to do.

That brings us this morning to 2 Samuel 14. Go ahead and turn there in your Bible if you haven't already. It begins on page 247 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we encourage you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read 2 Samuel 14...Pray)

We know that **despite the dysfunction of David's house, God will raise up David's offspring and establish his kingdom forever.**

But there's a tension in 2 Samuel 14 that rests on the answer to a very important question: **Is Absalom the one?**

Amnon was David's firstborn son, but he's dead. David's second-born son was Chileab, but it appears that he must have died young because there's no mention of him after 2 Samuel 3. So, traditionally, next in line to the throne would be David's third-born son Absalom.

But is Absalom the one? Is Absalom the one whom the Lord will raise up and establish his kingdom forever? Is Absalom the one who will build a house for the Lord? Is God going to establish the throne of Absalom's kingdom forever? Is Absalom the one?

The most likely answer to that question shifts back and forth like a pendulum throughout the narrative of 2 Samuel 14. But as the chapter begins, the answer appears to be...

I. No, it doesn't seem like it – He's in Geshur, and he's a murderer (2 Samuel 14:1-20).

A. See, as chapter 14 begins, what we find is that Absalom is in Geshur.

1. You remember from last week how he got to Geshur, don't you?

2. His brother Amnon sinned grievously against his sister Tamar. Absalom didn't do anything immediately, but two years later, Absalom got revenge against his brother Amnon and killed him.
3. So, Absalom fled to Geshur where his maternal great-grandfather was king.
4. And that's where Absalom is as chapter 14 begins. In Geshur. A significant distance away from Jerusalem, the seat of Israel's government.
5. And to top it off, he's now a murderer as well. Known to have killed the king of Israel's firstborn son and heir apparent to the throne.
6. So, as chapter 14 begins, it doesn't seem like Absalom can be the son of the promise. It doesn't seem as if Absalom will ever reign as Israel's king.

B. But Joab has a plan.

1. Doesn't it seem like someone always had a plan in 1 and 2 Samuel? That's probably not much unlike today. People are always planning or scheming. Trying to move the needle. Trying to get things to go in a particular direction. Sometimes with the best of intentions. Other times not so much. Sometimes it works. Other times it doesn't.
2. I can't help but contrast that with the way God works in the world. Just like man often has a plan, God always has a plan. But unlike man's plan, God's plan is always good. And God's plan always comes to pass. God doesn't scheme. He just does what He intends to do. Because He's the omnipotent God of the universe. He's sovereign over everything. Everything is under His control.
3. But back to Joab's plan. The text says... (Read vs. 1)
4. We haven't seen Joab since chapter 11 when he carried out the king's order to place Uriah on the front line so that he would be killed in battle. But Joab was the commander of the king's army. Joab was David's nephew. He's been with David a long time. Even back when Saul was still king. Joab knows David well.

5. David trusts Joab. And the text says that "Joab...knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom."
6. Now, there's some debate about the English translation of the Hebrew text here. The ESV translation indicates that the problem was that David longed to have Absalom back, but for some reason, David had not made any effort to bring Absalom back. It's possible, however, that the Hebrew text should actually be translated with the opposite meaning, such that Joab knew that David did not want to bring Absalom back. That would seem to make the most sense of the context, but we can't be certain which is intended.
7. Either way, Absalom is in Geshur and Joab wants to figure out a way to facilitate his return to Jerusalem. Probably because he was concerned about Israel's line of succession should something happen to David. He probably also felt that it was in David's best interest for he and his son Absalom to be fully reconciled.
8. So, Joab has a plan.

C. And his plan involves a wise woman from Tekoa.

1. She is to pretend to be a mourner who has been mourning for many days for the dead (vs. 2).
2. The story is that she is a widow. And she had two sons, but they got into an argument with one another in the field and one struck the other and killed him. Now, everyone in the village wants to enact justice on the son who killed his brother. The problem for her is that he is her only remaining son. He is the only remaining heir. If he is executed for killing his brother, she will be left with no remaining family members to care for her and carry on the family name and legacy (vs. 4-7).
3. Now, this is a completely fabricated story, but it's the story that Joab sends her to share with David. The point of the story is to get David thinking about his own family and the situation between his two sons, Amnon and Absalom.

4. But David doesn't know any of that at first. He assumes that this woman has come to him for him to administer justice and equity. And in this case, what she really wants is mercy for her son.
5. So, David first says, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you" (vs. 8).
6. Well, that wasn't good enough. So, she responds, "On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be guiltless" (vs. 9). What she means is that if someone has to be punished for the wrong that her son committed in killing his brother, let it be her.
7. David responds by promising her the protection of the king (vs. 10).
8. To which she boldly makes her plea, "Please let the king invoke the LORD your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more, and my son be not destroyed" (vs. 11a).
9. David then promises, "As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground" (vs. 11b).
10. Now, as we've said, this is a fabricated story intended to illustrate a point. So, the woman gets right to the point in verse 13 where she asks, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again" (vs. 13). She argues that David had shown more compassion for her son than he had for his own son Absalom.
11. The woman makes an interesting statement in verse 14 where she says that "God...devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast" (vs. 14b).
 - a. I think that she likely spoke better than she even knew.
 - b. Because we know that God has devised a means of restoring outcast sinners. He does in fact restore the banished.
- c. And what means has God provided for restoring outcast sinners like you and me? He has given His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Who left His throne in heaven. Came to earth as a man. Lived a sinless life. And then went to the cross to die to pay for our sin.
- d. We were banished from God's presence because of our sin. We were enemies of God. But Jesus came to reconcile us to God. To restore us to right relationship with our Creator. Through turning from our sin and placing our trust in Jesus, we are brought into a right relationship with God. That's the good news of the gospel to which this woman pointed with her words, even though she was almost certainly unaware of the full meaning of the truth she proclaimed.
12. After her direct confrontation of David, she went back to her act as a mourning widow, pleading for mercy and protection for her son (vs. 15-17).
13. But now it becomes evident that David sees through her charade. It's not clear what helped David realize what was going on, but he asked her in verse 19, "Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?" (vs. 19a).
14. To which she responded... (Read vs. 19b-20).
15. Perhaps Joab had raised the matter of Absalom with David over the past three years, so David knew Joab's view of the matter.
16. In fact, it was probably Joab's intent for David eventually to realize that he was behind the woman from Tekoa and her appeal.
17. The woman makes clear at the beginning of verse 20 Joab's intention in sending her to David. It was "to change the course of things." Joab thought it right for Absalom to return to Jerusalem and right relationship with his father, so he set out to motivate David to do what he believed was right.

But how will David respond?

That brings us to the next swing of the pendulum beginning in verse 20. Remember, the question is: **Is Absalom the one?** The answer seemed to be NO at the beginning of the chapter. Now, the answer seems to be...

II. OK, maybe so – David brings Absalom home to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 14:21-23).

A. Because David decides to bring Absalom home to Jerusalem.

- 1. In response to Joab's appeal to him through the woman of Tekoa, David said to Joab in verse 21, "Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom."**
- 2. It's interesting that David apparently expressed no displeasure with Joab's scheme. Perhaps that's because, as the ESV says in verse 1, David's heart did go out to Absalom.**

B. Joab is delighted with David's decision.

- 1. The text says that Joab "fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king" (vs. 22a).**
- 2. Joab said to David, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant" (vs. 22b).**
- 3. Joab wasted no time in doing what David instructed him to do. He went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem (vs. 23).**
- 4. Perhaps this is the start of a wonderful reunion between father and son. Absalom has been away in Geshur and has had time to consider his sin against his family and the nation in killing Amnon. Perhaps his first order of business when he gets back to Jerusalem will be to go to his father in repentance and seek his forgiveness. After all, Absalom had followed his father's example in murder. Perhaps now he will follow his father's example in repentance. Perhaps he too will seek and receive the forgiveness of God for his sin. Maybe Absalom will be the one to receive God's promise to David after all. Maybe he will have his kingdom established by God.**

- 5. After all, remember verse 14 of 2 Samuel 7? Where God said to David, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you" (7:14-15).**
- 6. What a wonderful story of redemption and restoration this could be!**

But as we keep reading, we're left thinking...

III. Well, I guess not – Absalom is prohibited from entering the king's presence (2 Samuel 14:24-32).

A. Look at what David says to Joab in verse 24 when he returns to Jerusalem with Absalom.

- 1. He says, "Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence" (vs. 24a).**
- 2. Isn't that a picture of what sin does? In this case, Absalom's sin separated him from the presence of his father. But we know that our sin separates us from the presence of God. The only way for us to be reconciled to God is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We also know that our sin often creates distance in our relationships with other people. This whole narrative is a reminder to us of the pain that sin causes. It takes us farther than we want to go, keeps us longer than we want to stay, and costs us more than we want to pay.**
- 3. That was certainly true for David and Absalom. "So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king's presence" (vs. 24b).**
- 4. This is not a positive development in Absalom's aspiration to rule as king of Israel. How can Absalom become king when he can't even enter the presence of the king?**

B. There's a little excursus about Absalom in verses 25-27. (Read vs. 25-27)

1. **Highlighting Absalom's appearance here should certainly remind us of some things.**
 2. **Perhaps you remember what was said of King Saul all the way back in 1 Samuel 9: "And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (1 Sam. 9:2). Of course, it's not a good thing that Absalom here reminds us of Saul.**
 3. **We also see here that Absalom was quite proud of his hair. Perhaps that reminds you of another person in the Bible. One of the judges. Samson. Again, it's probably not a good thing for Absalom to be reminding people of Samson.**
 4. **Sadly, while Absalom was apparently exceedingly handsome on the outside, on the inside, his heart was full of sin. He was a prideful man. As we saw last week, he was given to anger and hatred and vengeance.**
 5. **The problem for Absalom was that while "man looks on the outward appearance,...the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).**
 6. **Absalom's three sons are mentioned in verse 27, but they aren't even named, and it appears that they must have died young because by the time of Absalom's death in chapter 18, we are told that he had no son.**
 7. **But notice that he named his daughter after his sister Tamar. This is a reminder to us of the tragic violence that stands behind the story that is about to unfold. Absalom never forgot Tamar (Woodhouse, 373).**
- C. Absalom is in Jerusalem, the holy city, the seat of Israel's government, but he is still outside the presence of his father, David the king.**
1. **In fact, the text says in verse 28... (Read vs. 28)**
 2. **That's a long time to be estranged from your father. That's a long time to feel like an outcast in your own city among your own people. And Absalom grew impatient.**
 3. **Absalom called for Joab. Perhaps Joab could again appeal to his father on his behalf. But the text says that "Joab would not come to him" (vs. 29).**
 4. **So, Absalom devised a plan. He had his servants set fire to Joab's field. In doing so, he reminds us again of Samson. Samson captured the attention of the Philistines with a similar trick in Judges 15.**
 5. **Absalom's act wasn't necessarily an act of revenge. It wasn't a secret act. It was intended to get Joab's attention.**
 6. **And it worked. Verse 31 says... (Read vs. 31)**
 7. **Absalom responded... (Read vs. 32)**
 8. **The current situation was not acceptable to Absalom. If this was the way he was going to be treated in Israel, he would have been better off still in Geshur. Why had David brought him to Jerusalem if he was going to continue to refuse to allow him to enter his presence?**
- Remember, our question. Is Absalom the one? It sure doesn't seem like it through the end of verse 32 does it? But as we look at the final verse of 2 Samuel 14, we have a glimmer of hope. We're left thinking...
- IV. Again, maybe so – Absalom bows before David, and David kisses him (2 Samuel 14:33).**
- A. Absalom's plan worked. He was brought into the presence of the king.**
1. **Look at verse 33. (Read vs. 33)**
 2. **But notice that the meeting seems somewhat cold and formal. Absalom is brought before the king. David is not referred to as his father. And Absalom approaches David as a servant rather than as a son. He bows before him. Even the kiss that David gives Absalom looks more royal and official than paternal. There's no weeping. No words are spoken. This doesn't necessarily seem to be the kind of reconciliation we might hope for.**
 3. **But still, perhaps this is progress. Absalom is in the presence of the king. Things are not yet right between Absalom and David. But perhaps they still can be. Perhaps this is the start of a glorious reconciliation.**

B. If you know the rest of the story, you know that is not to be. But we'll have to leave that for next time and allow the suspense of a royal summons and kiss to remain hanging for now.

Conclusion: The last four chapters of 2 Samuel have taken us through approximately ten years of David's life and reign as king. It has been two years since Absalom was brought back to Jerusalem. It has been five years since Absalom killed Amnon. It has been seven years since Amnon's grievous sin against his sister Tamar. And it has been ten years since David's sin against Bathsheba and Uriah.

These ten years have not been kind to David and his family. One commentator says that sin embroiled David's family and kingdom in more trouble than they ever faced from external enemies (Woodhouse, 374-375). Sin brings consequences. And David's family certainly experienced the consequences of his grievous sin.

We might wonder if God would give up on David and his family.

After all, God told Saul after his sin, "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you" (1 Sam. 13:14).

Perhaps the Lord would forsake David as He had forsaken Saul.

The difference is that God made a covenant with David. God promised, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (7:12-13).

God would not forsake David and his family. The fulfillment of God's covenant was not dependent on the righteousness of David or his family. It was dependent on God and His righteousness and faithfulness. God always keeps His promises. God always does exactly what He says He is going to do.

That's good news for us, isn't it? Because like David, we are not righteous either. We do not deserve God's goodness to us. But God has been gracious to us. He has given us His Son. He has saved us from our sin and brought us into right relationship with Him. He has established His covenant with us by the blood of His Son. And we who are in Christ will remain His forevermore.