

## LESSON 15

# Stealing the Hearts of the People

## 2 Samuel 15

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*“So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel,” 2 Samuel 15:6.*

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**Class Overview:** Second Samuel 15 records the rise of Absalom’s rebellion against his father, King David. What began as unresolved sin and unchecked pride now turns into calculated treason. Absalom patiently undermines David’s authority, presents himself as a better alternative, and quietly wins the loyalty of the people. The chapter shows how rebellion often grows slowly, wrapped in charm, sympathy, and half-truths.

When the moment is right, Absalom declares himself king. David, rather than fighting in Jerusalem, chooses to flee. The king who once conquered cities now leaves his own capital barefoot and weeping. Yet even in humiliation, David shows spiritual maturity. He refuses to manipulate God, entrusts the ark to the Lord, accepts God’s will, and places his hope in God’s mercy rather than his position. This chapter contrasts two hearts: (1) Absalom’s heart of ambition, manipulation, and pride, and (2) David’s heart of humility, trust, and submission to God. Rebellion thrives where leadership is weakened, but faith is refined in seasons of loss.

### Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain how Absalom gained support and undermined David’s authority.
  2. Recognize the subtle nature of rebellion and manipulation.
  3. Describe David’s response to betrayal and crisis.
  4. Understand the spiritual significance of David leaving the ark behind.
  5. Apply lessons about humility, trust, and faith when facing loss or opposition.
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### Introduction:

Second Samuel 15 shows what happens when unresolved sin meets unchecked ambition. Absalom does not seize the throne by force at first. He waits. He listens. He flatters. He positions himself as compassionate and accessible while subtly portraying David as distant and ineffective. For four years, Absalom stands at the city gate, sympathizing with grievances and offering empty promises. He never attacks David directly. He simply suggests that things would be better if he were in charge. Slowly, the hearts of the people drift away from the king.

When the rebellion is ready, Absalom declares himself king in Hebron, the same city where David’s reign began. The symbolism is intentional. David learns of the betrayal and chooses to leave Jerusalem rather than turn the city into a battlefield. As David flees, the chapter reveals his true character. He weeps, prays, submits to God’s will, and entrusts the future to the Lord. This is not weakness. It is faith refined by suffering.

In this lesson we'll learn that power gained through manipulation never honors God, and leadership tested by loss reveals what truly matters. When the throne is shaken, David clings not to position, but to God.

## **Absalom's Campaign of Deception (15:1-6)**

Absalom's rebellion did not begin with swords. It began with image, attention, and slow manipulation. He "provided" himself with chariots, horses, and fifty men to run in front of him. That is political theater. It is a public display meant to communicate importance and authority. Absalom is acting like a king before he ever becomes one. Pride always reaches for the appearance of power first.

Then Absalom positions himself strategically. He gets up early and stands beside the road leading to the city gate, where legal cases were brought and judgments were made. He meets people before they ever reach David's officials. He becomes a filter between the people and the king. His method is subtle but effective:

- He asks where they are from, building rapport.
- He listens to their complaint, appearing compassionate.
- He tells them, "Your claims are good and right."
- Then he adds the poison: "But no one is listening to you."
- And finally he offers himself: "If only I were judge... I would give you justice."

Absalom is not actually solving problems. He is *using* problems. He flatters people and stirs dissatisfaction, not to serve them, but to win them.

The final detail is especially revealing: when someone came to pay him respect, Absalom would reach out, take him, and kiss him. He uses warmth, touch, and friendliness to create loyalty. It's counterfeit shepherding. He acts like he cares, but the goal is control. And then we read:

***So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.***

He didn't win their hearts through righteousness. He stole them through deceit. He presented himself as the answer while undermining God's appointed king. Rebellion often comes dressed in compassion. It sounds like concern for justice. It feels like someone finally "listens." But underneath it is ambition and pride.

Absalom's rise warns us to be discerning. Not everyone who speaks kindly is faithful. Not everyone who flatters is true. And not every appeal to "justice" is rooted in righteousness.

## **Absalom's Plot and Declaration in Hebron (15:7-12)**

After years of quiet manipulation, Absalom moves from influence to action. He goes to David with a request that sounds spiritual and harmless: permission to go to Hebron to fulfill a vow he claims to have made to the Lord. David agrees. He sees no threat. That alone shows how thoroughly Absalom's deception has worked. But Hebron is not a random choice. It is where David was first anointed king. Absalom is reclaiming the symbolism of legitimacy. He is saying, without saying it outright, *This is where kings begin.*

Absalom sends secret messengers throughout Israel with a clear plan. When the trumpet sounds in Hebron, the people are to proclaim, ***Absalom has become king!*** This is coordinated, intentional rebellion. What looked like a religious act is actually a political coup. Two details deepen the betrayal.

First, Absalom takes ***two hundred men from Jerusalem*** who “went innocently.” They do not know the plan. They are used as props. Their presence gives Absalom credibility and the appearance of broad support. Rebellion often advances by exploiting the ignorance of good people. Second, Absalom summons ***Ahithophel***, David’s trusted counselor. This is a devastating blow. Ahithophel’s wisdom carried enormous weight. His defection signals that this rebellion is serious and dangerous. Scripture notes, *“The conspiracy grew strong.”*

Here we learn how rebellion matures:

- It hides behind religious language.
- It uses symbolism to claim legitimacy.
- It exploits the uninformed.
- It draws in influential voices to gain momentum.

Absalom does not confront David. He replaces him. He does not appeal to God’s will. He manufactures consensus. And once the declaration is made, there is no turning back. This moment fulfills everything that has been building since chapter 13. Pride that went unchecked becomes treason. Manipulation becomes open revolt. Silence gives way to crisis.

## **David’s Flight and Humble Submission (15:13-23)**

The news reaches David suddenly: *The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.* There is no debate, no denial, and no attempt to save face. David immediately understands the danger. If he stays in Jerusalem, the city will become a battlefield, and innocent people will suffer. So the king makes a painful decision — ***he leaves.***

This is a turning point in David’s story.

The man who once took Jerusalem by force now walks out of it in weakness. David does not rally troops. He does not cling to the throne. He chooses humility over pride and mercy over self-preservation. As David leaves, a procession follows him — loyal servants, officials, and foreigners who had pledged their lives to him. One moment stands out. ***Ittai the Gittite***, a recent arrival from Gath, insists on going with David. David tries to release him, saying, in effect, *You don’t owe me this.* But Ittai responds with one of the strongest statements of loyalty in the Old Testament: *Wherever my lord the king is — whether it means life or death — your servant will be there.*

This is covenant loyalty in the face of collapse. While Israel’s hearts are being stolen by Absalom, faithful devotion is still found — and strikingly, in a foreigner. Verse 23 vividly paints the scene. The people weep loudly. The king crosses the Kidron Valley. He heads toward the wilderness. It is a picture of sorrow, exile, and loss. David leaves the city barefoot and broken, but not bitter.

He we see a changed David. Earlier in his life, he would have fought to hold position. Now he entrusts himself to God. He does not claim entitlement. He accepts that this may be God's discipline and chooses submission over resistance. David's flight is not cowardice. It is faith. He refuses to secure the kingdom by bloodshed. He trusts that if God still desires him as king, God will restore him. And if not, David is willing to accept the Lord's will. This moment echoes everything David learned in chapters 11 and 12. The crown no longer defines him. God does.

## Trusting God with the Ark and the Future (15:24-37)

As David flees Jerusalem, the priests bring the *ark of the covenant* with them. This is a critical moment. The ark symbolized God's presence and favor. Taking it could have been framed as a spiritual necessity — "*God must go with the rightful king.*" But David refuses. He tells Zadok to take the ark back to the city. David's words reveal deep spiritual maturity:

If I find favor with the Lord, he will bring me back and allow me to see both it and its dwelling place. But if he says, 'I do not delight in you,' then here I am — let him do to me whatever seems good to him.

This is not resignation. It is surrender. David will not use God as a prop to legitimize his position. He will not manipulate religious symbols to secure power. He leaves the ark where it belongs and entrusts the outcome entirely to the Lord. If God wants him restored, God will do it. If not, David will submit. This is a stark contrast to earlier moments in David's life — and to Absalom. Absalom used religious language to seize power. David refuses religious leverage to keep it.

David also shows wisdom. He sends Zadok and Abiathar back as informants, and he asks *Hushai the Archite* to return to Jerusalem and frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel. David prays, "*Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.*" God will answer that prayer.

Here we can learn that:

- *Faith submits the future to God without conditions.*
- *True worship refuses to manipulate God for advantage.*
- *Humility trusts God more than position.*
- *Wisdom and prayer work together.*

David does not panic. He prays, plans, and submits. That balance is the mark of mature faith. Second Samuel 15 ends with a king in exile — not clinging to symbols, not grasping for control, but resting in the sovereignty of God. Absalom may have the throne, but David has something better: a heart fully surrendered to the Lord.

## Practical Application

### *Practical Application — Lesson 15 (2 Samuel 15)*

*Rebellion often grows quietly before it becomes public.* Absalom did not seize the throne overnight. He slowly undermined trust, flattered discontent, and positioned himself as the answer. Spiritual rebellion often works the same way — subtle, patient, and disguised as concern.

***Charm is not the same as character.*** Absalom looked impressive and sounded compassionate, but his heart was driven by pride. God’s people must learn to discern between outward appeal and inward faithfulness.

***Leadership weakened by avoidance invites takeover.*** David’s earlier failure to confront sin created space for Absalom’s rise. When leaders refuse to act decisively, others will fill the vacuum — often with selfish motives.

***Faith chooses humility over self-preservation.*** David’s decision to flee Jerusalem was not weakness. It was a refusal to shed innocent blood and a willingness to trust God with the outcome. True faith does not cling to position.

***God should never be used to secure our agenda.*** David refused to take the ark with him. He would not use sacred things to legitimize his claim. Mature faith submits to God rather than leveraging Him.

***Trust in God does not cancel wisdom.*** David prayed, but he also planned. He trusted God’s sovereignty while making wise, faithful decisions. Prayer and action are not opposites; they work together.

***Loss can refine faith rather than destroy it.*** David lost the city, the throne, and public support — but he did not lose God. In suffering, his faith deepened. God often does His greatest shaping work in moments of loss.

## Conclusion

Second Samuel 15 shows how easily leadership can be undermined when truth is avoided and accountability is delayed. Absalom did not overthrow David by force at first. He stole hearts quietly — through flattery, half-truths, and manufactured concern. What David failed to address earlier now rises openly against him.

Yet this chapter is not only about Absalom’s rebellion. It is also about David’s transformation. The king who once grasped control now releases it. He leaves Jerusalem without bitterness. He refuses to turn the city into a battlefield. He entrusts the ark, the throne, and his future to the Lord. David no longer clings to position; he clings to God.

Absalom has the appearance of power, but David has the posture of faith. One manipulates people to gain control. The other submits himself to God and waits on His mercy. This chapter reminds us that God’s favor is not proven by popularity or position, but by humility, obedience, and trust in the Lord’s will. Second Samuel 15 teaches that rebellion may rise quickly, but faith endures quietly. And when everything familiar is stripped away, what remains reveals where our true confidence lies.

## For Discussion

1. How did Absalom successfully “steal the hearts” of the people without openly attacking David?

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2. In what ways did David's earlier leadership failures contribute to this moment of rebellion?

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3. Why was David's decision to leave Jerusalem an act of faith rather than weakness?

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4. What does David's refusal to take the ark with him teach us about trusting God?

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5. How can this chapter help us to respond faithfully when we experience betrayal, loss, or opposition?

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