

Lesson 84

Absalom Rebels

Absalom tried to take the kingdom from his father, David.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Conflict came to David's family as a result of his sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. His son Absalom committed murder and led an army of his own supporters against David to steal the throne. God protected David and gave him victory over Absalom.

Key Passages

2 Samuel 14:25, 18:6–9

Memory Verse

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

After David's sin with Bathsheba, God told him through the prophet Nathan that the sword would never depart from his house and evil would come against him from his own house. David's sin was done in secret but his punishment would be public (2 Samuel 12:10–14). David's child with Bathsheba also died as a consequence of his sin. David comforted Bathsheba after the loss of their child, and she had another son named Solomon, whom God loved (2 Samuel 12:24–25).

2 Samuel 13 begins the sordid account of David's adult children. It began with David's oldest son Amnon lusting after his beautiful half-sister Tamar. Tamar was the daughter of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (2 Samuel 3:3) and the full sister of David's third son Absalom. Amnon plotted to get Tamar alone with him in his home and cruelly raped her then sent her away. Absalom took his disgraced sister into his home and hated Amnon for what he'd done. David was furious when he heard what happened, but he failed to punish Amnon (2 Samuel 13:20–22). Two years later Absalom got his revenge when he hosted all his brothers then ordered his servants to kill Amnon, which they did. Fearing punishment for his premeditated murder, Absalom escaped to his mother's relatives in Geshur.

David was eventually persuaded to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem and forgive him. But Absalom used his father's mercy to steal the hearts of the people. Absalom was handsome, proud, and persuasive, and he used his good looks and popularity to gain supporters (2 Samuel 15:1–6). Absalom made his

move for the throne in Hebron. He invited men from Jerusalem and gathered supporters from across Israel. Even David's close counselor Ahithophel supported Absalom. When David heard of Absalom's pending attack, he chose to flee with his household and guards rather than see war come to Jerusalem. David wept and prayed as he went, and God answered his prayer to thwart Absalom's counselors. David's friend Hushai and the priests stayed in Jerusalem to report to David and give bad advice to Absalom. Due to their intervention, David was able to make it safely across the Jordan River to Mahanaim. Meanwhile, in fulfillment of God's judgment (2 Samuel 12:11–12), Absalom slept with the concubines David left in Jerusalem in full view of the people.

Absalom gathered an army and came to fight his father. The battle between the supporters of David and of Absalom took place in the forest of Ephraim, a dense forest that claimed more lives than the sword (2 Samuel 18:6–8). Absalom's neck or his long hair, of which he was so proud, got caught in the branches of an oak tree while his mule ran out from under him—leaving him dangling helplessly. David's commander Joab and his armor-bearers came to the rebellious son as he hung there and killed him (2 Samuel 18:14–15). David grieved for his son and struggled to reunite the divided tribes. God did restore David to the throne, but he endured another short-lived rebellion from a Benjamite named Sheba (2 Samuel 20).

The account of David's sinful decision to count the fighting men of Israel is given in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. Joab was ordered to go throughout the land and bring back the numbers to David. Then David recognized his sin and repented. God sent the prophet Gad to David with three choices for his punishment: 1) three years of famine; 2) three months of fleeing from enemies; 3) three days of pestilence. David chose the pestilence from God. The plague killed hundreds of thousands of Israelite men, and David asked God to punish him instead of the people. God stopped the plague, and David offered sacrifices at a threshing floor just outside Jerusalem.

Historical/Apologetics Background

One question that arises from David's census of Israel is who incited him to do it? 2 Samuel 24:1 says that the Lord incited David to number the people while 1 Chronicles 21:1 names Satan as the inciter. How do we reconcile these two accounts of the same event? First, we know that God is not the author of sin and tempts no one to sin (James 1:13). Second, we know that Satan must have God's permission to act against God's people (see Job 1–2). Third, we know that God is sovereign and controlling all events to accomplish his purposes. This apparent conflict is resolved when we understand that all temptation is permitted but not caused by God. Satan provoked David to number the people, and God allowed him to do so. David gave in to the temptation and chose to sin.

Moses had recorded instructions for how a census was to be taken (Exodus 30:12–16), so the census itself was not a sin. However, God allowed the census to punish Israel for some unspecified sins. The people at this time were ungrateful for the leadership of King David and were quick to join in Absalom's and then Sheba's rebellion. The armies of Israel and Judah were often in

conflict with each other, and so were their commanders. David may also have been guilty of wrong motives in ordering the census, such as trust in the size of his army rather than God or ambition to take over more territory.

God often used famine, enemies, and plagues to punish his people with the goal of leading them to repent and obey. The three-day plague that God brought as punishment for the census was intended to purge the sin from his people. The author of 2 Samuel chose to view the census from God's perspective in control of all things while the author of 1 Chronicles ascribes the census temptation to Satan, the enemy of God and his people. What Satan intended for evil for David and the Israelites God meant for good in the future of the nation. They needed to learn to recognize divine punishment and repent and seek the Lord. And the Lord showed mercy and stopped the plague before it reached Jerusalem (2 Samuel 14:16 & 25). Where the plague stopped, David bought the threshing floor and built an altar and offered sacrifices (2 Samuel 24:24-25; 1 Chronicles 21:25-26). This land David purchased on Mount Moriah would become the site for Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 3:1).

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