–Save This Page as a PDF–

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem
Second Samuel 14: 21-33

Absalom returns to Jerusalem DIG: What could David have done better with his family? Why did David refuse to see Absalom upon his return to Zion? What handsome movie star would you cast as Absalom today? Why do you think Absalom named his daughter Tamar? What kind of person would treat Joab the way Absalom did?

REFLECT: How can you know when to be restrained and gentle with your family and when to be tough? How does someone being physically present affect your acceptance of them? Do you have a strained relationship with someone? With a family member? What can you do to mend it? How desperate are you these days to get someone in authority to look favorably at some problem you might have?

980-977 BC Absalom's four-year plot against David

The scheming continued. **Joab** used a crafty **woman from Tekoa**, while **Absalom** hatches **his** own bold plan of conspiring against **the king** (**to see link click Do – Absalom's Conspiracy**). **David** was convinced. **He** acted. **He** addressed **Joab**. **He** announced **his** decision to bring **his son** home. **He** only half acknowledged that **he** was giving in to **Joab**. In **his** conversation with **Joab**, **David** never alluded to the strategy of **the wise woman** (see **DI – The Wise Woman of Tekoa**). **His** words seem to be a grudging surrender to **Joab's** better wisdom. There is, however, really no joy in the text, for it is not the prodigal but the murderer who returns. And a **father's kiss** is not the prelude to celebration, but an ominous sign.[372]

The Fetching of Absalom: Joab, had evidently been standing in the wings to learn the outcome as **the wise woman** made **her** appeal to **the king** in the royal court**.** After being trapped by **his** verdict to **her** fictitious parable and **his** subsequent oath, **the king** relented and called for **his general,** saying: **Very well, I will do it. Go . . . bring back the young man Absalom.** By that time **David** knew that **Joab** had put **the wise woman of Tekoa** up to it, but instead of being

angry, **he** gave **Joab** the responsibility of bringing **Absalom back to Tziyon**. Overjoyed, **Joab fell with his face to the ground to pay him honor, and he blessed the king. Joab** gushed: **Today your servant knows that he has found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, because the king has granted his servant's request. Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. But the king** said: **He must go to his own house; he must not see my face. So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king (Second Samuel 14:21-24).**

The father acted as a **father** wanted, against the demands of the royal office. Kings are in the business of exacting repayment, but **fathers** cannot live that way forever. **Joab** knew that, long before **David** acknowledged it.[373] **The king** was obviously conflicted. But the ultimate paradox was that **David** was indulgent when **he** should have exercised discipline, and now **he** exercises discipline when **he** should have been more forgiving. In any event, **David's** decision worked against **his** best interests because **Absalom** resented **his father's** limited and reserved acceptance of **him** and reacted with hostility.[374] **Their** relationship would just never be the same again.

Absalom's Appearance: The situation was not helped by the physical attractiveness of **Absalom**. **In all Isra'el there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him.** This anticipates why **he** will attract many to revolt against **David**. **He** was totally consumed with **his** appearance – especially **his hair**. **Whenever he cut the hair of his head – he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too heavy for him – he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred Shekels** (or about five pounds) **by the royal standard.** Ironically, it was **his hair** that would cause **his** death. **Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom.** All three of **his sons** died young and are not named, so in **Second Samuel 18:18** we are told that **he** built a memorial pillar because **he** had no surviving **sons**. **His daughter's name was Tamar** after **his** raped sister**, and she became a beautiful woman (Second Samuel 14:25-27).**

The Failed Reconciliation of David and Absalom: Reconciliation between **father** and **son** was slow. Painful. Costly. It could not be rushed . . . and **Joab** knew it. But just as reconciliation could not be rushed, it also could not be put off forever. Once again **Joab** was a catalyst for the necessary action by **David**. **Joab** was the only one who had a chance to move **David** beyond **himself**. **Joab** was the only one

who had the access and the courage to speak frankly to **the king**. For **Absalom**, everything depended on **Joab**.[375]

Although **his** exile was over, **Absalom** was forced to cool **his** heals for **two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face.** For **two years, Absalom** was smoldering. What an insult! **His** narcissistic attitude would be fueled by **his** sense of outrage that **he** had been brought back to **Yerushalayim** only to be snubbed by **his father**, while the public adored **him**. Those two years gave **Absalom** ample opportunity to plan and scheme what **he** would do when **he** was no longer under house arrest.[376] **Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab** ceased to be **his** advocate and even **refused to come to him.** A shrewd man like **Joab** must have realized that **Absalom** had designs on the throne and that **the prince's** growing popularity could provide **him** the support **he** needed to take over the Kingdom. Knowing how volatile the situation was, **the** discerning **general** stayed away from **Absalom** lest **he** give the impression that **the** egotistical **prince** was controlling **him**.[377]

So he sent a second time, but he refused to come. Joab's double refusal to respond to **his** summons was the last straw and **Absalom** decided to take matters into **his** own hands. **Then he said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire.** The blazing **field of barley** symbolized both **Absalom's** rage and brought **Joab** scurrying home demanding an explanation. The loss of an entire crop of **barley** was a tragedy in ancient times **(Exodus 9:28-31; Joel 1:11)**, even in the best of circumstances. **Joab** had every right to demand adequate compensation **(Exodus 22:6)**, especially because **the fire** was set deliberately.[378]

Then Joab went to Absalom's house, and he said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" If **Joab's** indignant reaction was understandable, **Absalom** had a ready answer. **He said to Joab, "Look, I sent word to you and asked you to come here so I can see the king? You** left **me** no alternative; **you** are **my** only hope! **You**, after all, had been the one who brought me back. If nothing changes, **it would be better for me if I were still back in Geshur! Absalom** found **his** situation intolerable. **Now then,** after five years of waiting, **I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything let him put me to death. Absalom** may have convinced **himself** to think that **he** was merely avenging a wrong when **he** killed **Amnon** (see **Dj – Absalom Kills Amnon**), and

that **he** wouldn't have had to kill **his brother** if **his father** had done **his** duty and passed sentence on **his brother**. **Absalom** believed that **the king** should exact the full penalty for killing **Amnon** or forgive **him**. **He** would have rather died than continue living shamefully under house arrest.

The wise woman of Tekoa had put **the king** in a tight spot because of **Joab's** scheme, but now, because of **Absalom's** demands, **Absalom** had put **Joab** in a similar position. After all, it was **Joab** that masterminded **Absalom's** return to **Jerusalem**. **Joab** knew that the people would never permit their favorite **royal prince** to be tried and convicted of a crime, but how could **Joab** guarantee that **the king** would be reconciled to **his son**?



The three main players, **David, Joab** and **Absalom**, in the beginning of the drama **(verse 21)** come together again at its end. **Joab** really had no choice, **so went to the king and told him** what **Absalom** had said**. Then,** as providence would have it, **the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and** as protocol demanded, **bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. The king** granted **Absalom** an audience, but the brief and formal description is telling. Though it ends with **the king** giving **Absalom a kiss,** acting according to royal protocol and not as **his father (Second Samuel 14:28-33)**, there is no attempt made to bridge the gulf between **them**. Each saw the guilt in the other. The deadlock continued and neither had the spiritual incentive to break it. **Absalom** (Hebrew: *my father is peace*) still had **his** hidden agenda and was determined to seize **David's** throne. Now that **the prince** was free, **he** could be visible in **the City** and enjoy the adulation of the crowds, while at the same time quietly organizing **his** sympathizers for the coming rebellion. **David** was about to lose **his** throne and crown, **his**

concubines, **his** trusted adviser Ahithophel, and ultimately **his son Absalom**. It would be the darkest hour in **David's** life . . . just as **Nathan** had prophesied.[379]