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Absalom's Conspiracy

Second Samuel 15: 1-12

Absalom's conspiracy DIG: What do chariots, horses and fifty men signal of Absalom's ambitions (First Samuel 8:11)? As a victim of injustice, what would you make of Absalom's two decrees in verses 3-4 and his greeting in verse 5? Why do you think Absalom waits four years to carry out his conspiracy plot? When else has he shown patience in devising evil plans (Second Samuel 13:23)? How could David be so gullible? What steps did David unknowingly take to consolidate Absalom's power?

REFLECT: When do you feel frustrated in getting an audience with *your King*? Why? What campaigns of dis-information and lies today seek to discredit God's reign or encourage believers to stray from the faith? Do you know a "modern-day Absalom"?

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



These verses provide a general characterization of **Absalom**. As we have seen, **he** is young, handsome . . . and enormously ambitious. In this narrative, **he** enlists **his** youth and attractiveness in the service of **his** goal. **He** developed an entourage of **chariots, horses**

and **runners**, so that **his** every movement seemed to be a royal procession. One has the image of constant street parades in **Yerushalayim**, calling attention to **the prince**. **Tziyon** was not a very big city, but big enough to be filled with royal ambition, drama and excitement.³⁸²

The Conspiracy: In the course of time, after the reunion of **Absalom** and **David**, **Absalom** provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. No longer under house arrest, **Absalom** acted like someone who assumed **he** would be the next king. **He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate** where disaffected citizens expected to be able to bring their complaints for royal adjudication. **Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?"** **Absalom** began by pretending to have a personal interest in them. **He would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Isra'el."** Then **Absalom** convinced the **person** to reveal **his** grievance, and always conveniently concluded that **his claims** were right and just. Then **Absalom** would say to him, **"Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you."** Not only implied that **the king** wouldn't hear **his** case, but **the king** hadn't even appointed anyone to **his** case. This was not true, but **the man** was discouraged from pursuing the matter and would return home angry with **David**. **And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me** (in the emphatic position) **and I would see that they receive justice"** (Second Samuel 15:1-4). The implication was that they would get no **justice** from **King David**. At this point **Absalom** was not claiming to be **king**, only wanting the delegated authority to be **judge** of all **Isra'el**. Thus, hiding **his** real goal and ambition. If someone challenged **him**, **he** could claim that **his** only concern was **justice**.

Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him because of his position as a prince, **Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him**. Treating **him** as an equal and a friend. **Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice**. Over and over again **the people** went home with **their** issues unresolved. The royal system of justice seemed to have become dysfunctional. **The king** had failed in **his** role as **king**. We are not told why. **The disenfranchised**, in turn, told **others** who initially wanted to go see **the king**, but now would not. **They** were told that **the king** would not give **them** an audience. **They** were told, if **Absalom** had the authority, **he** would give **them** justice. **And so he stole the hearts of the men of Isra'el** (Second Samuel 15:5-6).

Beginning the Revolt: At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king. "Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to ADONAI." Hebron was where Absalom was born (to see link click [Ch - Son's Were Born to David in Hebron](#)), and where David began his reign. So it seems that Absalom was trying to imitate his father's journey from Hebron to Jerusalem. And Hebron was the center of the tribe of Judah, formally David's capital. Thus, Absalom robs David of the very tribe most likely to come to his aide. "While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: If the LORD takes me back to Yerushalayim, I will worship YHVH in Hebron." The king said to him, "Go in peace." These were the last words David would ever say to Absalom. The king had no reason to question Absalom's request. So he went to Hebron (Second Samuel 15:7-9).

Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Isra'el. He had made extensive preparations for the revolt and all his co-conspirators in place. They were not only in Hebron, but also all over the country. In the Torah, the penalty for a rebellious son was death by stoning (Deuteronomy 21:20-21). Absalom said: As soon as you hear the sound of the shofars, then say, "Absalom is king in Hebron." He was a disloyal, egotistical, narcissistic, traitor to Isra'el. Two hundred men from Jerusalem, who were the invited guests for the sacrificial feast, accompanied Absalom. They would have included some of the most influential families in Tziyon. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. But Absalom might have hoped they would join the revolt. While Absalom was offering sacrifices as part of the coronation ceremony, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. Hence, he was a traitor to the king. Ahithophel probably served as Absalom's secret advisor during the conspiracy, and was now needed to provide counsel during the revolt itself. He would have helped keep the conspiracy a secret. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's followers kept increasing (Second Samuel 15:10-12).³⁸³

The shape of the conflict shocks us. We are accustomed to David as the one with the initiative. How quickly the roles had changed! Now David is seen as the old establishment figure caught in his bureaucratic posturing, while the masses had snuck up on him and taken him by surprise. All the vigor and momentum seems to be with Absalom (Hebrew: my father is peace) - and against his father. David, however, is not yet helpless.³⁸⁴