

The Wise Woman of Tekoa

Second Samuel 14: 1-20

DIG: Is Joab acting here in the best interests of Absalom, David or himself? Why do you think so? What acting role does he ask this wise woman to assume? How well does she play the part? What aspects of the woman's clever story appeal to David? How does the story relate to David and Absalom? What aspects of God's truth did she accurately portray in verses 13-17? What biblical teaching did she distort to influence Absalom's safe return? Once David exposes the true source of her story as being Joab, why did he still agree to bring Absalom back? What was the difference between Nathan's parable and the parable of the woman of Tekoa.

REFLECT: Are you deadlocked in a relationship right now? How do you usually respond when you are alienated from another person? Or from YHVH? What corrective measures right now does this story suggest you take for restoration to occur? How very important is it to be able to discern the difference between the wisdom of ADONAI and the various types of human wisdom? Are there tests we can apply? Can manipulation ever really serve the purposes of the LORD? Is your place of worship exempt?

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The action here in **Chapter 14** is set **three years** after that of **Chapter 13**. The time span between the two chapters is the time between **Absalom's** flight away from Jerusalem (**Second Samuel 13:37**) and the return to Tziyon (**Second Samuel 14:23-24**). At the moment of his flight (see Dk - **Absalom Flees**), it is not known if there will be a return at all. Even after **three years**, even when circumstances are more favorable, it is still not known and far from certain that there will be a return.³⁶⁷

The question of whether the narrator pictures **wisdom** as residing in **the woman from Tekoa** or in **Joab** has been hotly debated. It seems best, however, to admit that the dispute between the two views is not a matter of either/or but of both/and: **Joab** was **wise** in knowing whom to delegate to approach **David** and in knowing what to tell **her** and say, and **the woman from Tekoa** was **wise** in knowing how to implement **Joab's** instructions in the midst of a delicate situation. If the scales must be tipped in one direction or the other, **the woman** gets the nod. **She** is, after all, the one who is called **wise!**³⁶⁸

Joab's Plan: Joab, the commander of David's army, knew that the king's heart was against Absalom (2 Samuel 14:1). The Hebrew verb *al* simply states that Joab knew that the king was either *thinking about him*, or was *against him*. The same verb is used in Daniel 11:28, *against the holy covenant*. If David were really longing to see Absalom, Joab's whole strategy would have been unnecessary. Why all the subtle maneuvering if all David required was a little nudge to send him off doing what he already wanted to do? But if the king was *against Absalom*, then we can understand Joab's actions. Joab understood father and son were hopelessly deadlocked (see Dk - [Absalom Flees](#)). David was reluctant to take up arms and capture his son (ironically the time would come when the son would take up arms against his father), and Absalom was unwilling to throw himself on the mercy of the king. Hence, Joab developed a plan so that David could recall Absalom. What was Joab's motivation? He may have been thinking politically about his own future after David finished reigning and wanted to position himself in the best possible place in the next kingship.

Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman, whom he obviously knew, brought from there. He said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any cosmetic lotions. Act like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead to play on the sympathies of the king. Then go to the king and speak these words to him." And Joab put the words in her mouth. He gave her the basic outline of what she was to say, but not a detailed script (Second Samuel 14:2-3). She was to employ a judicial parable, like the one Nathan had used (see Dd - [Nathan Rebukes David](#)). The presentation was to be of two conflicting issues, hence her need to appeal to a higher authority. The two conflicting issues were, first, should there be an execution for murder, and second, should there be a preservation of the family line?

Joab's advice enabled the king to see the situation objectively, and thus, with a new slant on the matter, come to a decision. Tekoa was only five miles from Beit-Lechem. Joab evidently knew both the place and this wise woman, who had the skill to act a part and persist even with the king himself until he had understood her point. Though General Joab told her how to dress and what to say, she needed all her wit and hutzpah to deflect the response of the king, which could not have been foreseen.³⁶⁹

The Problem Posed: The woman came to present her case directly to the king, who was accessible to citizens whose complaint had not been settled to their satisfaction by the local judges. When the woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she said: Help me, Your Majesty! Pretending to have no defender, she cried out for protection. The king asked her, "What is troubling you?" She said: I am a widow; my husband is dead. I, your servant, had two sons. They got into a

fight with each other in the field, and no one was there to separate them. One struck the other and killed him. The parallel case in his own family (see Dj - [Absalom Kills Amnon](#)) could not have failed to remind David of his own sorrows. Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant. They say: Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed (Numbers 35:21). Then we will get rid of her as well. She presents this as being part of the family's intent. Thus, she insinuates that the motivation of the family is not merely justice, but a desire to claim the family property and put an end to any heir. They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth (Second Samuel 14:4-7).

The Ruse Continued: The king said to the woman, "Go home, and I will issue an order on your behalf." David would issue an order of royal protection to overrule the principle of the avenger of the blood. But the woman from Tekoa said to him, "Let my lord the king pardon me and my family, and let the king and this throne be without guilt." If there was any guilt in allowing the death of her son to go unpunished, she would be willing to bear it. The insinuation was that the king was merely putting her off with a promise. The king replied: If anyone says anything to you, bring them to me, and they will not bother you again. David then gave more specific guarantees that no one would harm her or her son. Then she requested that he make his promise of protection an oath. Then let the king invoke YHVH his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed. "As surely as ADONAI lives," he said, "not one hair of your son's head will fall to the ground" (2 Samuel 14:8-11).

The Application: Then the woman said: Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king, because she was ready to apply the situation to Absalom. "Speak," he replied. Then she mentions David's sin against Isra'el. The woman said: Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? David must have been shocked! In other words, David was doing to Isra'el what the family in her ruse was trying to do to her. David was depriving Isra'el to the heir to the throne. Amnon, the firstborn was dead; Kileab, the second born, probably died young because he is never mentioned, and Absalom was next in line. When the king says this, does he not convict himself, (and the proof is) for the king has not brought back his banished son? The point is, by promising protection for her son, David had declared himself guilty in his conduct toward Absalom. Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But that is not what God desires; rather, He devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from Him (Second Samuel 14:12-14). The woman implied that the LORD would achieve Absalom's return from Geshur. Although David had devised one thing, God devised another.

There were three points of application. First, life is uncertain and once an opportunity is passed, it cannot be recovered. If **David** waited too long, it might be too late to be reconciled with **his son**. Second, **Amnon**, was dead. Leaving **Absalom** in a banished state would not bring **Amnon** back to life. And third, **YHVH's** mercy is contrasted with **David's** refusal to forgive **his son**, and an implied reminder that **God** had forgiven **David** for **his** adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah.³⁷⁰

The Explanation: At this point the woman changed **her** strategy and returned back to **her** own story, and became deferential to **David**. **And now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. Your servant thought, 'I will speak to the king; perhaps he will grant his servant's request. Assuming that she may have offended David, it was the family problem that brought her to the king in the first place. And the parallel with Absalom only occurred to her during her conversation with David (which, of course, was a lie and part of the fabricated story). Perhaps the king will agree to deliver his servant from the hand of the man who is trying to cut off both me and my son from God's inheritance.'** If **her** fictitious son were executed, she pretended, that would have been the end of **her** family line. **And now your servant says: May the word of my lord the king secure my inheritance, for my lord the king is like an angel of god in discerning good and evil. May ADONAI your God be with you (Second Samuel 14:15-17).**

David's Discernment: But **David** slowly, finally, caught on. **He** finally recognized the hand of **Joab** in the elaborate plot. **Then the king answered the woman, "I am going to ask you a question, and please don't hide anything from me."** The woman said: **Let my lord the king now speak.** The king asked, **"Didn't Joab put you up to this?"** The woman was direct and without evasion: **As you live, my lord the king, when my lord speaks, no one can avoid the issue by turning either to the right or to the left. Yes, it was your servant Joab who had me do this, and he put in my mouth every word you have heard your servant say. Your servant Joab did this in order to bring about some change in the situation between you and Absalom. But my lord is wise, he has the wisdom of an angel of God when it comes to understanding anything going on in the land (2 Samuel 14:18-20 CJB).** With a flattering reference to the wisdom of the king, the woman brought her audience to a close. **Her** fictional story had done its work and **she** had achieved **her** purpose.

Both **Nathan** and **the woman of Tekoa** tried to grip **David** by **their** stories. But there was a world of difference between them. **Nathan's** parable was designed to stir **the king's** conscience contrary to **his** feelings; however, **the woman of Tekoa's** parable (as prompted by **Joab**) was designed to move **his** feelings contrary to **David's** conscience.³⁷¹