

SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 15

Absalom's Conspiracy

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. 2 And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," 3 Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." 4 Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." 5 And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. 6 Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. 7 And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. 8 For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.'" 9 The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. 10 But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'" 11 With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. 12 And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.

15:1 *chariot and horses.* As far as is known, Absalom was the first Israelite leader to acquire a chariot and horses (cf. Dt 17:16). (CSB)

Vehicle of war. Absalom was acting like a military commander. (TLSB)

fifty men. They probably functioned as bodyguards and provided a display of royal pomp that appealed to the masses. Adonijah later followed Absalom's example (1Ki 1:5). (CSB)

Not only as a royal entourage, but potentially as a bodyguard and special forces unit. (TLSB)

15:2 *the way of the gate.* Where judicial cases were presented and heard (cf. Jsh 20:4). (TLSB)

before the king for judgment. The king could not personally hear every case, but he was responsible for the administration of justice. Cf. Ex 18:13–26; 1Sm 8:4–5; 1Ch 18:14. (TLSB)

15:3 *your claims are valid.* Absalom seeks to ingratiate himself with the people by endorsing their grievances apart from any investigation into their legitimacy. (CSB)

no man designated by the king. Unfounded accusation. Cf. 14:4; 1Ch 18:14. (TLSB)

15:4 *If only I were the judge in the land!* Absalom presents himself as the solution to the people's legal grievances. In the case of Amnon, he had taken matters into his own hands because of his father's laxity.

He has found, he believes, the weakness in his father's reign, and he capitalizes on it with political astuteness. (CSB)

By criticizing the king and wishing to be made a judge, Absalom subtly implied he should take the king's position. (TLSB)

15:5 *take hold of him and kiss him.* Absalom first put himself in a royal position of judgment, and then he won the people's allegiance by giving them a sign of friendship. Thus, Absalom made himself popular with his father's subjects. (TLSB)

15:6 *to all of Israel who came to the king.* Absalom placed himself between the people and their king so that David had no opportunity to hear their cases. By circumventing the system, Absalom fulfilled his own criticisms of the system. (TLSB)

stole the hearts. Won their loyalty by evil deceit. (TLSB)

15:7 *four years.* After his return to the court (14:33). By this time Absalom must have been about 30 years old, so his revolt must be dated early in the last decade of David's reign. (CSB)

Could be 40 years after David's first anointing. David was 20 when first anointed; he suffered for 10 years and was confirmed as king at age 30. Thus, Absalom's revolt occurred when David was about 60. (TLSB)

vow. Absalom pretended this vow as an excuse to depart from Jerusalem without raising suspicion. Cf 1Sm 16:1–13. (TLSB)

Hebron. Where David was first proclaimed king and where Absalom was born (3:2–3). Absalom may have had reason to believe that he could count on some local resentment over David's transfer of the capital to Jerusalem. Hebron was also the site of an important sanctuary. (CSB)

Cf Gn 13:18. David was anointed king at Hebron (2:1–4; 5:1–3). Cf 1Ch 3:1–2. (TLSB)

15:8 *Geshur.* See 13:37. (CSB)

15:9 *Go in peace.* The last words David spoke to Absalom, whose name means "father of peace." (TLSB)

15:11 *two hundred men from Jerusalem.* This impressive contingent lent credence to Absalom and also removed these people from Jerusalem so they would not be able to support or counsel David. (TLSB)

invited guests. For a feast in connection with the sacrifice. (TLSB)

15:12 *Ahithophel.* Bathsheba's grandfather (see 11:3; 23:34) and a wise and respected counselor (16:23). He appears to have secretly aligned himself with Absalom's rebellion in its planning stage, perhaps in retaliation against David for his treatment of Bathsheba and Uriah. This unsuspected betrayal by a trusted friend may have prompted David's statements in Ps 41:9; 55:12–14. (CSB)

Possibly grandfather of Bathsheba (cf 23:34; 11:3). In view of his later counsel to Absalom (16:20–17:4), it is likely that Ahithophel had helped to mastermind the rebellion from the beginning. (TLSB)

Gilonite. Giloh was near Hebron (see Jos 15:51). (CSB)

15:1–12 Once Absalom has officially been reconciled to the king, he begins to campaign for the throne. Soon he is no longer content to steal hearts, so he plots to steal the throne. Coveting what God has not given, and scheming sinfully to get it for ourselves, leads not to life but to death. Yet Christ, who is truly righteous, has righteously coveted our life and voluntarily laid down His life on our behalf. We are justified by His grace alone, through faith in His forgiveness. • “Almighty God, You are the only and supreme happiness of the soul of man, without the enjoyment of whom the soul must ever dwell in disquietude and trouble. Fix all the thoughts and affections of my soul upon You, who alone can satisfy all its desires, and give it a peace that passes all understanding. You shall be all in all and the sight of You and Your glory be her great and endless happiness to all eternity. Amen.” (Ger, *TLWA*, p 160). (TLSB)

David Flees Jerusalem

13 And a messenger came to David, saying, “The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.” **14** Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, “Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword.” **15** And the king’s servants said to the king, “Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides.” **16** So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. **17** And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house. **18** And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king. **19** Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. **20** You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the LORD show[d] steadfast love and faithfulness to you.” **21** But Ittai answered the king, “As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.” **22** And David said to Ittai, “Go then, pass on.” So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. **23** And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness. **24** And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the city. **25** Then the king said to Zadok, “Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. **26** But if he says, ‘I have no pleasure in you,’ behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him.” **27** The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Are you not a seer? Go back[e] to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. **28** See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.” **29** So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there. **30** But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went. **31** And it was told David, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” And David said, “O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.” **32** While David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head. **33** David said to him, “If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. **34** But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father’s servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,’ then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel. **35** Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So whatever you hear from the king’s house, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. **36** Behold, their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok’s son, and Jonathan, Abiathar’s son, and by them you shall send to me everything you hear.” **37** So Hushai, David’s friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

15:14 *let us flee.* By leaving the city, David could choose where, when, and how he would fight. In addition, he could determine who his true servants and loyal supporters were. The innocent would be spared a siege. (TLSB)

will be no escape for us from Absalom. Uncertain of the extent of Absalom's support (see v. 13), David fears being trapped in Jerusalem, and he wants to spare the city a bloodbath. (CSB)

15:16 *he left ten concubines to keep the house.* David unknowingly arranges for the fulfillment of one of Nathan's prophecies. (CSB)

Being nonmilitary personnel, the concubines should have been allowed to carry out their duties in peace. Regrettably, this did not happen (16:20–22). (TLSB)

15:17 *the last house.* Probably the most outlying house within the suburbs of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

15:18 *Kerethites and Pelethites.* Military units made up of non-Israelites. During his years on the run from King Saul, David fought for the Philistines (1Sm 27; 29–30) but later defeated them (2Sm 5:17–25). David may have enlisted some of his former Philistine comrades and received their loyal service. Cf Ezk 25:16; Zep 2:5. "Cherethite" is perhaps related to "Cretan." (TLSB)

six hundred Gittites. Philistine soldiers from Gath under the command of Ittai who for some unknown reason had joined David's personal military force (see 18:2). (CSB)

Apparently David's personal forces that followed him in his flight from Saul. Ironically, men from the land of Goliath ended up serving the man who had killed their great champion (1Sm 17:4, 48–54). (TLSB)

15:19 David tested the loyalty of Ittai and his men. (TLSB)

Go back and stay with the king. David releases the Philistine contingent from further obligations to him. (CSB)

With Absalom, who had wrongfully been anointed as king (cf 19:10). (TLSB)

an exile from your home. From the land of the Philistines. (TLSB)

15:21 *As surely as the LORD lives.* An oath of loyalty and devotion taken in the name of Israel's God or a similar oath see Ru 1:16–17. (CSB)

15:23 *all ... all ... all.* Hyperbole. David's many supporters and immediate loyal circle mourn the king's retreat. (TLSB)

Kidron. Eastern boundary of Jerusalem. In the NT, the Lord's crossing of the Kidron marked the beginning of His Passion (Jn 18:1). Here, the purification of David's house begins when he crosses the brook Kidron. (TLSB)

15:13–23 David is forced to flee Jerusalem and cross the brook Kidron. While his own son and countrymen conspire against him, he receives fierce loyalty from foreigners. In suffering, we, like David, should humble ourselves under God's hand and commit ourselves and our paths into His keeping. David's Son, Christ Jesus, was rejected by many of His own (Jn 1:10–11), but He called for disciples from all nations (Mt 28:19–20) to take up the cross and follow Him (Mt 10:16–39). It was He who

crossed the brook Kidron, bearing our sin, on the way to the cross. • Lord Jesus, sustain me in suffering, and grant that I may walk in the way of Your cross. Amen. (TLSB)

15:24 *bearing the ark.* Shows that the Lord is with David. David brought the ark to Jerusalem (6:1–17), and it was where the Lord was present for His people (Ex 40:18–21, 34–35), so the priests thought it should follow David away from Absalom. (TLSB)

15:25 *carry the ark of God back into the city.* David reveals a true understanding of the connection between the ark and God’s presence with his people. He knows that possession of the ark does not guarantee God’s blessing. He also recognizes that the ark belongs in the capital city as a symbol of the Lord’s rule over the nation, no matter who the king might be. (CSB)

15:26 *let him do to me what seems good to him.* David confesses that he has no exclusive claim to the throne and that Israel’s divine King is free to confer the kingship on whomever he chooses. (CSB)

15:27 *Aren’t you a seer?* Perhaps an allusion to the high priest’s custody of the Urim and Thummim as a means of divine revelation (see notes on Ex 28:30; 1Sa 2:28). (CSB)

David asked Zadok to be his “eyes” in Jerusalem. Or, Zadok was a prophet and could give divine guidance (TLSB)

15:28 *fords in the wilderness.* Fords across the Jordan in the vicinity of Gilgal. (CSB)

The Jordan River crossing, leading to the wilderness. Location uncertain. (TLSB)

inform me. Priests would be David’s spies. (TLSB)

15:30 *Mount of Olives.* Cf Mk 11:1; 14:26. (TLSB)

covered their heads. A sign of sorrow (see Est 6:12; Jer 14:3–4). (CSB)

barefoot. Another sign of sorrow (see Isa 20:2, 4; Eze 24:17; Mic 1:8). (CSB)

15:32 *where God was worshiped.* Apparently, the Mount of Olives (v 30) was a “high place.” Here God answered David’s prayer by providing the man who would thwart Ahithophel’s counsel. (TLSB)

Hushai the Arkite. The Arkites were a clan (some think non-Israelite) that inhabited an area southwest of Bethel (Jos 16:2). Since Hushai was a trusted member of David’s court his appearance was the beginning of an answer to David’s prayer (v. 31). (CSB)

Non-Israelite member of David’s cabinet, a royal counselor. In contrast to Ahithophel, he was the king’s friend (16:17). (TLSB)

his coat torn and dirt on his head. Signs of grief and mourning showing he was on David’s side. (TLSB)

15:37 *David’s friend Hushai.* 1Ch 27:33 calls him the “king’s friend,” which seems to be an official title for the king’s most trusted adviser (see 1Ki 4:5, where the Hebrew for “king’s friend” is translated “personal adviser to the king”). (CSB)

15:24–37 Though he must depart from Jerusalem, David puts his fate into the Lord's hands. Yet his allies will be his eyes and ears in Jerusalem, bringing word to him at the Jordan River. Life here in this world is often a wilderness journey of weeping and the expectation of death. This is due to our sin against God. But Christ has gone the way of sorrows on our behalf, that we might cross the Jordan with Him, through the waters of Holy Baptism, out of the wilderness into the promised land of heaven. • O Lord Jesus Christ, by the blood of Your eternal covenant, preserve our faith and bring us at last into Your Jerusalem above. Amen. (TLSB)