

SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 14

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

Now Joab the son of Zeruah knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom. 2 And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, "Pretend to be a mourner and put on mourning garments. Do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead. 3 Go to the king and speak thus to him." So Joab put the words in her mouth. 4 When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and paid homage and said, "Save me, O king." 5 And the king said to her, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. 6 And your servant had two sons, and they quarreled with one another in the field. There was no one to separate them, and one struck the other and killed him. 7 And now the whole clan has risen against your servant, and they say, 'Give up the man who struck his brother, that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed.' And so they would destroy the heir also. Thus they would quench my coal that is left and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth." 8 Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you." 9 And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be guiltless." 10 The king said, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again." 11 Then she said, "Please let the king invoke the LORD your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more, and my son be not destroyed." He said, "As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground." 12 Then the woman said, "Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king." He said, "Speak." 13 And the woman said, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again. 14 We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast. 15 Now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid, and your servant thought, 'I will speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant. 16 For the king will hear and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the heritage of God.' 17 And your servant thought, 'The word of my lord the king will set me at rest,' for my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil. The LORD your God be with you!" 18 Then the king answered the woman, "Do not hide from me anything I ask you." And the woman said, "Let my lord the king speak." 19 The king said, "Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?" The woman answered and said, "As surely as you live, my lord the king, one cannot turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has said. It was your servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant. 20 In order to change the course of things your servant Joab did this. But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth." 21 Then the king said to Joab, "Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom." 22 And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant." 23 So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. 24 And the king said, "Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence." So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king's presence. 25 Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. 26 And when he cut the hair of his head (for at the end of every year he used to cut it; when it was heavy on him, he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred

shekels by the king's weight. 27 There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar. She was a beautiful woman. 28 So Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. 29 Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. 30 Then he said to his servants, "See, 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. 31 Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" 32 Absalom answered Joab, "Behold, I sent word to you, 'Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.'" Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.'" 33 Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom.

14:1 *the king's heart longed for Absalom.* Torn between anger and love (and perhaps remorse), David again leaves the initiative to others. (CSB)

14:2 *So Joab sent.* Joab appears to have been motivated by a concern for the political implications of the unresolved dispute between David and the son in line for the throne. He attempts to move David to action by means of a story designed to elicit a response clearly applicable, by analogy, to David's own predicament. A similar technique was used by Nathan the prophet (12:1–7; see 1Ki 20:38–43). (CSB)

Tekoa. A town a few miles south of Bethlehem, from which the prophet Amos also came (Am 1:1). (CSB)

wise woman. Probably neither a technical term nor an official position, but simply a talented woman. (TLSB)

Pretend to be a mourner. Joab is staging a "morality play," which he hopes will lead David to reconciliation with Absalom (vv 19–20). (TLSB)

14:4 *paid homage.* Indicates significance of David's office as the Lord's anointed one. As a called and anointed servant of the Lord, King David executed justice and served as the deliverer for God's people. Christ, who was to come from David's family (7:12–16; Ps 89:3–4, 20–21) would save His people from their sin (Mt 1:1–16, 20–21). (TLSB)

Save me, O king. Cf Mt 20:30–31; 21:9. (TLSB)

14:6 *no one to separate them.* Implies David's failure to discipline Amnon after he raped Tamar (13:21). (TLSB)

14:7 *Woman calls on King David to overrule the Law* (Gn 9:5–6; Ex 21:12–14) on account of mitigating circumstances (cf Nu 27:1–7). (TLSB)

the whole clan has risen up against your servant. It was customary in Israel for a murder victim's next of kin to avenge the blood of his relative by putting the murderer to death. In the case presented, however, blood revenge would wipe out the family line, which was something Israelite law and custom tried to avoid if at all possible. (CSB)

destroy the heir also. The woman suggests that the motivation for blood revenge was more a selfish desire to acquire the family inheritance than a desire for justice (see Nu 27:11). (CSB)

Similarly, Amnon and Absalom were the most likely heirs to the throne of David. (TLSB)

quench my coal that is left. Take away my last hope for an heir. Similarly, Tamar had only her brother Absalom to care for her (13:20). (TLSB)

leave to my husband neither name nor remnant. The implication is that it would be a more serious offense to terminate the woman's family line than to permit a murder to go unpunished by blood revenge. Apparently Joab hoped subtly to suggest to David that if he did not restore Absalom, a struggle for the throne would eventually ensue. (CSB)

Similarly, David's legacy was at stake in Absalom's fate. (TLSB)

14:8 *I will give orders concerning you.* David's judicial action may have rested on the legal ground that the murder was not premeditated (see Dt 19:4–6). (CSB)

14:9 *guilt.* For the unpunished crime. (CSB)

Woman suggested some would contest the decision, implying that more than a simple verdict would be needed to protect her son. (TLSB)

14:11 *let the king invoke the LORD his God.* The woman wants David to confirm his promise by an oath in the Lord's name. (CSB)

avenger of blood. Relative of the deceased, charged with the responsibility of vengeance. (TLSB)

As surely as the LORD lives. An oath formula that solemnly binds David to his commitment. (CSB)

14:13 *against the people of God.* The woman's suggestion is that David has done the same thing to Israel that her family members have done to her. The people of Israel want their crown prince returned safely to them. (CSB)

By failing to administer either justice or mercy toward his sons, David jeopardized the welfare of the entire kingdom. (TLSB)

the king convicts himself ... ? The argument is that when David exempted the fictitious murderer from blood revenge, he in effect rendered himself guilty for not doing the same in the case of Absalom. The analogy places David in the position of the blood avenger. (CSB)

Cf 12:5–7. (TLSB)

14:14 *We must all die.* Amnon would have died eventually, and so would Absalom in time. No amount of justice would bring Amnon back from the dead. The notion is sadly fatalistic. (TLSB)

Like water spilled on the ground. Blood revenge will not return the victim of murder to life, just as water spilled on the ground cannot be recovered. (CSB)

God does not take away life. In the suggestion that the avenging of blood is contrary to God's ways of dealing with people, the woman apparently distorts Biblical teaching of God's justice. But she dwells on the mercy of God, who would rather preserve life than take it (see Eze 18:23, 32; 33:11).

David's own guilt and subsequent experience of God's mercy appear to give added weight to the woman's argument. (CSB)

Implies God will act mercifully, in contrast to the enduring banishment imposed by David. (TL SB)

He devises means. Cf Gn 4:14–16. (TL SB)

14:15 *the people have made me afraid.* The woman reverts to her own fabricated story. "The people" are evidently those of her own family who are seeking blood revenge. (CSB)

14:16 *the heritage of God.* The land God gave them and being God's people (TL SB)

14:17 By virtue of his office, King David delivered a Christ-like pronouncement (Jer 23:5–6) for it is Christ who gives the true Sabbath rest (Heb 4:1–11). (TL SB)

like the angel of God to discern good and evil. Possessing superhuman powers of discernment—as a king ideally should (see v. 20; 19:27). (CSB)

Or, "messenger of God. (TL SB)

14:19 *the hand of Joab.* Joab's involvement. Perhaps Joab thought Absalom would be the best successor of David as king. When Absalom later rebelled against his father, Joab remained loyal to David (18:2). Yet thereafter, Joab followed Adonijah's attempt to seize the throne (1Ki 1:5–7). (TL SB)

14:21 *Joab.* He appears to have been present the whole time. (CSB)

14:24 *no one so to come into my presence.* David still vacillates (see note on v. 1); he does not offer forgiveness and restoration. (CSB)

Absalom was excluded from the royal court. (TL SB)

14:25 *not a man so much to be praised.* Absalom's handsomeness brought him attention and popular favor—which he was soon to cultivate. (CSB)

14:26 *hair of his head.* For the people of that time, hair was apparently a sign of vigor. Kings and heroic figures were usually portrayed with abundant locks, while baldness was a disgrace (see 2Ki 2:23). In this, too, Absalom seemed destined for the throne. (CSB)

king's weight. The royal shekel was perhaps heavier than the sanctuary shekel (see Ex 30:13; Lev 5:15; Nu 3:47). (CSB)

14:27 *Three sons.* Their names are unknown; 18:18 suggests that they died in their youth. (CSB)

Cf 18:18. Perhaps they died prematurely. (TL SB)

Tamar. Absalom named his daughter after his sister (13:1). Maacah (1Ki 15:2) was probably a daughter of Tamar, and Absalom's granddaughter. (CSB)

14:30 *go and set it on fire.* To force a meeting with Joab. (TL SB)

14:32 *if there is guilt in me...let him put me to death.* Absalom demands either full pardon and restoration or death, but he still gives no sign of repentance. (CSB)

Instead of death, Absalom expected a full restoration of royal privileges. (TLSB)

14:33 *the king kissed Absalom.* Signifying his forgiveness and Absalom's reconciliation with the royal family. David sidesteps repentance and justice, and in this way he probably contributes to the fulfillment of the prophecy of Nathan (12:10–12). (CSB)

Outwardly, David and Absalom were reconciled, but their hearts remained far apart. With restored privileges, Absalom was now able to campaign for his father's kingship (15:1–6). (TLSB)

Ch 14 With subtlety, Joab moves the king to show mercy instead of administering justice. David is thereby reconciled with his son only outwardly. Although fathers love even evil children, the children should not misuse this love, as Absalom did. For Christ's sake, God desires not to punish but to spare His sinful and rebellious children. • O God, defend us from the rebellious, give us good government to administer justice, and grant that we may rejoice in and rightly use Your great love. Amen. (TLSB)