SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 15

*Absalom’s Conspiracy*

**In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. 2 He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. 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?” He would answer, “Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel.” 3 Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you.” 4 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 and I would see that he gets justice.” 5 Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. 6 Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the men of Israel. 7 At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, “Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the Lord. 8 While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: ‘If the Lord takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron.’ ” 9 The king said to him, “Go in peace.” So he went to Hebron. 10 Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.’ ” 11 Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. 12 While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom’s following kept on 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)

 *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)

**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)

**15:4** *If only I were appointed 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)

**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)

 *Hebron.* Where David was first proclaimed king (see notes on 2:1, 4; 5:3, 5) 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)

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

**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)

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

*David Flees*

**13 A messenger came and told David, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.” 14 Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, “Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us and put the city to the sword.” 15 The king’s officials answered him, “Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses.” 16 The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace. 17 So the king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at a place some distance away. 18 All his men marched past him, along with all the Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath marched before the king. 19 The king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. 20 You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you.” 21 But Ittai replied to the king, “As surely as the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.” 22 David said to Ittai, “Go ahead, march on.” So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him. 23 The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert. 24 Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city. 25 Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. 26 But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.” 27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Aren’t you a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your son Ahimaaz and Jonathan son of Abiathar. You and Abiathar take your two sons with you. 28 I will wait at the fords in the desert until word comes from you to inform me.” 29 So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there. 30 But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up. 31 Now David had been told, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” So David prayed, “O Lord, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness.” 32 When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head. 33 David said to him, “If you go 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; I was your father’s servant in the past, but now I will be your servant,’ then you can help me by frustrating Ahithophel’s advice. 35 Won’t the priests Zadok and Abiathar be there with you? Tell them anything you hear in the king’s palace. 36 Their two sons, Ahimaaz son of Zadok and Jonathan son of Abiathar, are there with them. Send them to me with anything you hear.” 37 So David’s friend Hushai arrived at Jerusalem as Absalom was entering the city.**

**15:14** *none of us will escape 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 take care of the palace.* See 5:13; see also note on 3:2. David unknowingly arranges for the fulfillment of one of Nathan’s prophecies (see note on 12:11; see also 20:3). (CSB)

**15:18** *Kerethites and Pelethites.* See note on 8:18. (CSB)

 *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)

**15:19** *Go back and stay with King Absalom.* David releases the Philistine contingent from further obligations to him. (CSB)

**15:21** *As surely as the Lord lives.* An oath of loyalty and devotion taken in the name of Israel’s God (see note on 1Sa 14:39). For a similar oath see Ru 1:16–17. (CSB)

**15:24** *Zadok.* See note on 8:17. (CSB)

 *Abiathar.* See note on 8:17; see also 1Sa 22:20–23. (CSB)

**15:25** *Take 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 (see notes on 1Sa 4:3, 21). He also recognizes that the ark belongs in the capital city as a symbol of the Lord’s rule over the nation (see note on 6:2), no matter who the king might be. (CSB)

**15:26** *let him do to me whatever 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). See also note on 1Sa 9:9. (CSB)

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

**15:30** *his head was covered.* A sign of sorrow (see Est 6:12; Jer 14:3–4). *he was barefoot.* Another sign of sorrow (see Isa 20:2, 4; Eze 24:17; Mic 1:8). (CSB)

**15:31** *Ahithophel.* See note on v. 12. (CSB)

**15:32** *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 (see note on v. 37), his appearance was the beginning of an answer to David’s prayer (v. 31). (CSB)

**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)