

# 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. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you." <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.' " <sup>9</sup> The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he went to Hebron. <sup>10</sup> 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.' " <sup>11</sup> Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. <sup>12</sup> 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)

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 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)

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 (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)

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*

**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.”<sup>21</sup> 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.”<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.”<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> I will wait at the fords in the desert until word comes from you to inform me.”<sup>29</sup> So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> Now David had been told, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” So David prayed, “O LORD, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness.”<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> David said to him, “If you go with me, you will be a burden to me.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> Won’t the priests Zadok and Abiathar be there with you? Tell them anything you hear in the king’s palace.<sup>36</sup> Their two sons, Ahimaaz son of Zadok and Jonathan son of Abiathar, are there with them. Send them to me with anything you hear.”<sup>37</sup> So David’s friend Hushai arrived at Jerusalem as Absalom was entering the city.

**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)

*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)

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*. See note on 8:18. (CSB)

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 King Absalom*. 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 (see note on 1Sa 14:39). For 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** *Zadok*. See note on 8:17. (CSB)

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

Principal priests serving during the reign of David. (TLSB)

*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** *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)

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 desert*. 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)

*his head was covered*. A sign of sorrow (see Est 6:12; Jer 14:3–4). (CSB)

*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)

Cf v 12; 16:23. (TLSB)

**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 (see note on v. 37), 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)