

SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 14

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

Joab son of Zeruah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom. ² So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman 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. ³ Then go to the king and speak these words to him." And Joab put the words in her mouth. ⁴ 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, O king!" ⁵ The king asked her, "What is troubling you?" She said, "I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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; then we will get rid of the heir as well.' They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth." ⁸ The king said to the woman, "Go home, and I will issue an order in your behalf." ⁹ But the woman from Tekoa said to him, "My lord the king, let the blame rest on me and on my father's family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt." ¹⁰ The king replied, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he will not bother you again." ¹¹ She said, "Then let the king invoke the LORD his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed." "As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "not one hair of your son's head will fall to the ground." ¹² Then the woman said, "Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king." "Speak," he replied. ¹³ The woman said, "Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son? ¹⁴ Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him. ¹⁵ "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 do what his servant asks. ¹⁶ 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 the inheritance God gave us.' ¹⁷ "And now your servant says, 'May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the LORD your God be with you.' " ¹⁸ Then the king said to the woman, "Do not keep from me the answer to what I am going to ask you." "Let my lord the king speak," the woman said. ¹⁹ The king asked, "Isn't the hand of Joab with you in all this?" The woman answered, "As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or to the left from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your servant Joab who instructed me to do this and who put all these words into the mouth of your servant. ²⁰ Your

servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land.”²¹ The king said to Joab, “Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom.”²² Joab fell with his face to the ground to pay him honor, and he blessed the king. Joab said, “Today your servant knows that he has found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, because the king has granted his servant’s request.”²³ Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem.²⁴ But the king said, “He must go to his own house; he must not see my face.” So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king.²⁵ In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him.²⁶ Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair from time to time when it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.²⁷ Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. The daughter’s name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman.²⁸ Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king’s face.²⁹ Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come.³⁰ Then he said to his servants, “Look, 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 did go to Absalom’s house and he said to him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?”³² Absalom said to Joab, “Look, I sent word to you and said, ‘Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, “Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!”’ Now then, I want to see the king’s face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death.”³³ So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.

14:1 *Joab son of Zeruiah.* See note on 2:13. (CSB)

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 (see note on 3:27; see also Nu 35:12; Dt 19:11–13). 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 (see notes on Dt 25:5–6; Ru 2:20). (CSB)

we will get rid of the heir as well. 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)

leaving my husband neither name nor descendant. 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 issue an order in your behalf.* 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 *blame.* 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 (see notes on Ge 42:15; 1Sa 14:39) 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)

does he not convict 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 (see note on Ge 9:6). 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 (see notes on 12:13; 13:21). (CSB)

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

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

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 (TLSB)

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). (TLSB)

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

Or, “messenger of God. (TLSB)

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). (TLSB)

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

14:23 *Joab went to Geshur.* See 13:37. (CSB)

14:24 *he must not see my face.* David still vacillates (see note on v. 1); he does not offer forgiveness and restoration. (CSB)

Absalom was excluded from the royal court. (TLSB)

14:25 *not a man so highly 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)

royal standard. 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. (TLSB)

Tamar. Absalom named his daughter after his sister (13:1). Maacah (1Ki 15:2) was probably a daughter of Tamar, and Absalom’s granddaughter (see note on 2Ch 11:20). (CSB)

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

14:32 *if I am guilty of anything, 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)