

ABSALOM

II Samuel 13-18

In direct disobedience to the law of the Lord, but with the hope that it would strengthen his position, David left Israel and went into Geshur in Syria and married Maachah, the daughter of the heathen king Talmi. He brought her back with him to Hebron, his capital city. There Absalom was born. Absalom was of royal descent on both sides. Before he was very old, the capital was transferred to Jerusalem, whereupon he and his parents moved there.

Absalom's biography contains some of the most graphic word pictures ever painted. The story of his life is one of the most exciting dramas in the Bible, and at the same time one of the saddest tragedies in all human history. The scriptures beautifully describe the extraordinary graces of person with which he was endowed.

I. His Natural Endowments.

1. He was well bred.

His father, David, was the king. His mother, Maachah, was a queen and a princess.

2. He had a striking personal beauty.

"In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty.

(1) The value of beauty.

- a. It is a gift of God.
- b. It is pleasant to see it.
- c. It attracts others.
- d. It makes it easier to influence people.

(2) The peril of beauty.

- a. It tends to excite vanity and pride.
- b. When overvalued it leads to the neglect of higher things.
- c. It frequently attracts flatterers and seducers.

3. He had a perfect physique.

"From the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." Absalom was proud of his perfect body and his handsome appearance.

4. He had great intellectual capacities.

He knew full well how to play on the weaknesses and prejudices and susceptible emotions of men. His intellectual ability was proved by his tact and scheming in outwitting Joab.

In spite of all these natural endowments which he possessed, his life was dominated by evil motives.

II. His Evil Characteristics.

1. He was a willing slave of pride.

He was proud of his personal appearance. He paid much attention to the parting of his hair and the combing of his locks. He was one of a numerous class in the world that pays far more attention to outward adornment than to mental, moral and spiritual culture.

2. He was guilty of treachery.

He adopted the familiar tactics of a pretender. He learned well the arts of an office seeker. He endeavored to instill in the minds of the people a bad opinion of the current administration and a good opinion of his own fitness to rule. He even murdered his own brother Ammon under the pledge of hospitality. Turning traitor to his own father, he found fault with his father's administration, he exposed his father to ridicule, and he crushed his father's hopes for his life work.

3. He was a hypocrite.

When he had finished his plot, he lacked nothing but a cloak of religion to cover up his deeds. He asked his father to let him go back to Hebron to pay a vow that he had made there while in exile. David granted his request readily, thinking that he had a pious son. But, as Absalom left Jerusalem, he went out as a traitor with 200 men in his band.

4. He was ungodly.

He had no thought of a present judge or of a future judgment. He lacked humility, reverence, faith, affection for men, love of God, tenderness, pity, and a guide for his life.

5. He was selfish.

He had little or no thought for anyone except himself. He used his fellows as tools to build up his own fortune. His one thought was to exalt and to gratify himself at the expense and by the aid of others. He did not care how much suffering he caused, or what wrong he did, if he could only gain his ends and come out on top. He was prepared to use any means, fair or foul, to gain his desired ends. The object of his thought and creed was self.

III. His Wicked Activities.

1. The punishment of Ammon's crime.

Ammon had brought disgrace upon his half-sister, Tamar, who was the blood sister of Absalom. David let this heinous crime go unpunished. He had been guilty of a similar sin with Bathsheba, and therefore felt a hesitancy in punishing his eldest son for something in which he himself was guilty. Absalom concealed his resentment and feigned indifference for two years. Then, the occasion of the shearing of Absalom's sheep near Ephraim afforded an opportunity to get the permission of his father to let Ammon attend the feast which always accompanied sheep shearing.

In broad daylight, in the presence of all his guests including all the brothers of Ammon, while the walls were resounding with the voice of mirth and each face was radiant with festive excitement, Absalom violated all rules of hospitality by having a murder take place. Out from a place of concealment rushed the assassins with their deadly weapons, and the next moment the life blood of Ammon spurted on the table and his lifeless body fell heavily to the ground. Before the excitement and horror of the assembled guests had subsided, Absalom had made his escape, and before any step could be taken to pursue him he was beyond reach in Geshur in Syria.

Then someone took an exaggerated report of the crime to King David, telling him that Absalom had slain all of his sons and not one of them was left. David arose, rent his clothes, and cast himself upon the ground. That impression of a wholesale massacre was not removed from his mind until Jonadab, his cousin, assured him that only Ammon was murdered.

David's grief was the bitter fruit of his own sins, but still how could he but be filled with anguish when he thought of his son? His son had been hurried into the presence of God, and without any hope for his soul. He had to think of all three of them. Amnon was murdered, Tamar was disgraced, and Absalom was a murderer and a fugitive. It baffles us to think of how David was able to carry such grief. This all proves that there were some terrible faults in David's upbringing of his family of his family or such results would never have been. What were some of these faults?

(1) Polygamy -- a number of wives.

This afforded a splendid source of jealousy and discord among the wives and their children, especially when he was absent for some time as was often the case.

(2) A bad example.

He was so careless before them. He sinned openly. However, there was very little brightness in his life after his terrible sin with Bathsheba.

(3) He allowed them to do as they pleased.

He could not bear to disappoint them. He petted and spoiled them, and overlooked their faults entirely.

Although David failed to do his duty by his son, now that he was a criminal in exile his heart pined for the boy. Joab, his shrewd and faithful servant, perceived the mind of David, and by a clever scheme obtained permission to bring Absalom home. However, when he came to Jerusalem, David did not see his face but remained in retirement in his own house for two long years. The restless spirit of Absalom rebelled at this confinement. Twice he sent for Joab that he might be reconciled to the king, and have fellowship with him. Both times Joab refused to see him.

2. The destruction of Joab's barley.

Absalom commanded his servants to set fire to the fields of barley which belonged to Joab. This action obtained the desired results, Joab came to him in a rage and demanded an explanation for this deed. Absalom told him that the matter of the barley would be easily settled, but he wanted Joab to understand that one of two things must happen; David must either pardon him or punish him. Thoroughly convinced, Joab carried the message to the king who yielded and called for Absalom. When Absalom came to him and bowed before him, David kissed him as a token of reconciliation and friendship.

3. The conspiracy against David his father.

From his father Absalom obtained the position of judge, which he had desired. As he sat at the gate of the city, he was accessible to everybody. The people came to him with their tales of woe, and they expressed their desires to him. Grasping their hands, he expressed his regret at the negligence of his father and gave a verdict in favor of everyone. Thus he was reputed as "a man above all others in the kingdom who had the peoples' welfare at heart." That went on for four years without the king knowing about it, because he had been much withdrawn from public life on account of the humiliating sense of sin.

Absalom also had access to a large sum of money, so he began to drive a magnificent chariot and had fifty men run before him wherever he went. This was quite a contrast to the mode of travel of his father, which was upon a mule. Such magnificence produced the desired effect, captivating the hearts of the people from the beginning.

4. The open revolt at Hebron.

Absalom showed his shrewdness in choosing Hebron as the place to hoist the flag of revolt. It was his birthplace. It was also the former capital, and naturally its citizens were jealous of the new capital. The plot was so widespread that messengers were sent throughout Israel summoning the adherents to Hebron.

Absalom invited two hundred men to accompany him. Unsuspectingly they went. Once at Hebron events moved rapidly. The revolt was organized and they began the march upon Jerusalem. Word was quickly dispatched to David. He fled from the capital at once, taking with him only a few faithful followers, and leaving behind his wives, his children, his capital, and all that was dear to his heart. Like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky the blow had fallen, and Israel which had previously acclaimed him as their hero and king had turned against him, and like a hunted partridge he had to flee with haste across the Jordan River and into the mountains. That was the darkest hour of his life.

Absalom made a triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He took formal possession of his father's harem and royal palace. This destroyed the last chance of reconciliation between father and son. While he remained in David's harem indulging in sin, David was organizing his army and locating in the most strategic places to suppress Absalom when an opportunity afforded itself. Finally, Absalom decided to pursue his father, but he had waited too long. David had already firmly entrenched himself in the hills of Manahaim.

IV. His Shameful Death.

Absalom and his forces pursued David. Their armies met in battle, somewhere in the wooded district of Ephraim. The first onslaught of David's men drove Absalom's army into universal confusion. Panic-stricken, they fled into the neighboring woods and thickets only to become there a more easy prey to their pursuers. As the wretched Absalom, then deserted by all, hurried in terror and flight through some part of the forest, his long and beautiful hair became entangled among the branches of a prickly oak and two of these branches caught him and the mule on which he rode moved from under him and left him suspended in the air.

David had previously commanded his forces to suppress the rebellion but to spare Absalom. But, as soon as Joab was informed by a soldier that Absalom was hanging in a tree, he took three darts and thrust them through his heart. Ten of his soldiers slashed and mutilated his body with a sword until no one could have recognized Absalom.

Absalom had been ambitious for posthumous fame, so he had erected a mausoleum in the King's vale near Jerusalem, thinking that it would be his sepulchre when he passed away. Even that last honor was denied him. He received a hasty burial without solemn funeral rites. He was cast into a nearby pit and stones were piled over him to remind the passers-by that his grave was one of a rebel and a malefactor. Jewish writers tell us that for many years every passer-by was accustomed to throw a stone in the heap which covered Absalom's remains, and as he threw the stone he would say, "Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom, and cursed for ever be all wicked children who rise up in rebellion against their parents."

Cushi, a runner, was commissioned to tell David what had happened. When the king inquired as to the safety of Absalom, his son, Cushi told him the plain truth, even though it broke David's heart. In his grief over his rebellious son David cried, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" II Samuel 18:33.

Absalom had wonderful possibilities and opportunities of making his life really count for something, but instead of making the most of them he left God out of his life, wasted his life, wrecked his career, and came to a disgraceful end. He was disrespectful to his parents, proud, treacherous, hypocritical, selfish, insincere, and ungodly. He was endowed with every grace except the grace of God, yet all we find is a brief, comet-like career, full of folly, mishap, and cruelty, which ended in a shameful death and a dishonored grave, and was lamented by none except his father whom he had most grievously wronged. No one can leave God and Christ out of his life with safety.