

STUDIES IN SAMUEL

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 15

- Vv. 1-13 *Absalom's conspiracy.* Absalom stole the hearts of the people by sitting in the gate in the capital city and indicating that he was sympathetic to their causes. When he had gained sufficient support, he went to Hebron, where his father had first ruled. His trip to Hebron was under the pretense of paying a vow, but in reality he went there to assemble his forces and begin his rebellion.
- Vv. 14-28 *David's flight.* David did not choose to stay in Jerusalem and defend the capital city. It is doubtful that he wanted to meet his son on the field of battle. He also would be reluctant to see street fighting in the city of the great king. His decision was to flee across the Jordan into Gilead.
- Vv. 29-37 *David's counterplot.* David sent some of his faithful friends back into Jerusalem to act as spies. He especially instructed Hushai to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *The fickleness of multitudes.* Men and women who had been soundly in support of the government of David suddenly turned to support the cause of his rebellious son. Some of them went along with the revolt without really knowing what was happening. Absalom was a demagogue, and many of the people were deceived into following him. Those who want to please God must be careful lest they follow along with the crowd.
2. "*Let him do to me as seemeth good*" (v. 26). David was willing to let God discipline him as it seemed good

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to Him. He was resting his case in the hands of the righteous judge. He knew that he had sinned against God, and he was willing to pay whatever penalty should be exacted. This surrender of life is commendable.

IV. ABSALOM'S REVOLT, 15:1—19:43.

1. The Rebellion's Beginning, 15:1-37.

Absalom's Conspiracy. 15:1-13

And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

2 And Absalom rose up early, and stood by the way of the gate: and it was *so*, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city *art* thou? And he said, Thy servant *is* one of the tribes of Israel.

3 And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters *are* good and right; but *there is* no man *deputed* of the king to hear thee.

4 Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!

5 And it was *so*, that when any man came nigh *to him* do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him.

6 And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

7 And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray the, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron.

8 For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord.

9 And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron.

10 But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.

11 And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, *that were* called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing.

12 And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city, *even* from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.

13 And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.

1. *Why did Absalom have fifty men run before him? 15:1*

The Eastern way of calling attention to the position of a man included having men to run before him as he proceeded through the streets. Absalom was not nearly as democratic in spirit as David. There was more showmanship in his makeup. He was promoting his own personal ambitions. Absalom's personal appearance was very striking, his beautiful hair being explicitly mentioned in the Scripture.

There may have been something of personal satisfaction in his naming his daughter Tamar (14:27). It would be natural for her to be so named inasmuch as they were of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 38:6), but the name may have had a deeper significance to Absalom and those who knew the events causing Absalom's exile. Many of those things done by Absalom were to attract the attention and win the love of the people.

2. *What was Absalom's campaign plan? 15:2-6*

Absalom set out to steal the hearts of the men of Israel. His main effort was to win the confidence of those who had had cases to be brought to the attention of the king.

Absalom was very energetic and industrious in this as he arose early in the morning and stood by the gate so that he could meet any man who came up to Jerusalem to present a case. He made specific inquiry into each man's background finding out all he could about his home, city, and tribe. He made every effort to agree with each man and express his wish that he were made a judge in the land so that he could render decisions in the cases. He did not allow the man to do obeisance to him, but rather stretched forth his hand and drew the man to him and kissed him. This demeanor was very pleasing to the people, and he did win the favor of many of the men of Israel.

3. *How was the rebellion begun?* 15:7-12

The text reads that the rebellion began after a period of forty years, but it is hard to understand the point from which the time is counted. Absalom may have revolted when he was forty years old, but it could hardly be forty years after his return from Geshur.

Absalom was dishonest in asking to go to Hebron. He wanted to go for the purpose of instigating a rebellion, not to make a vow or pay a vow. Absalom knew that he had to get away from Jerusalem, and he knew that David would consent under such a pretext. A signal was given whereby the men of every tribe would know when the time to arise had come.

One wonders why Ahithophel would consent to such a plot. His son was Bathsheba's father, and he may have keenly felt the insult that David had put on his family (11:3; 23:34).

4. *Why did Absalom go to Hebron to begin his revolt?*
15:9

David began his rule in Hebron; and it would be in the tribe of Judah, where David's family had its origins. The city would be filled with men who were loyal to any good son of a man of Judah. Furthermore, it was far enough away from Jerusalem to be out of immediate

danger of reprisal from David. Ahithophel's home was southwest of Hebron (Joshua 15:51). Ahithophel may have been able to arouse a great deal of sympathy for him and his cause as he opposed David on account of his taking Bathsheba as his wife.

5. *How did some of them go in their simplicity? 15:11*

They had gone along not knowing Absalom's full intentions, not knowing that he intended to make an armed rebellion against his father. They knew that he was rallying men to support him and his cause. They knew that the sound of the trumpet was a signal for his saying that he was the ruler of Judah and that he was establishing a kingdom in Hebron. With such a group assembled the conspiracy was described as being very strong, and the people increased continually with Absalom. He had made them very attractive promises, and this allured many to follow him.

6. *Why did David flee from Jerusalem? 15:13*

David was not prepared for a siege. His company included some of the former residents of Gath, who may not have been ready to fight. They had come to him soon after his capture of that city. Even with all the faithful followers he had, he was still not in a position to defend the city. The steadfastness of men like Ittai would be useless against the hordes with Absalom. The priests were with David, but he would not allow them to take the Ark from its resting place. Some of the Israelites may still have been holding the idea held by some of the older Israelites who believed that where the Ark was, there God was. David knew this was not true. David forced the priests themselves to turn back. They stayed in the city as spies. Beyond all these reasons was the fact that David would not want to subject his capital city to a siege. The shock to David must have been great, and he was willing at almost any price to avoid a direct confrontation in battle with Absalom.

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David's Flight. 15:14-28

14 And David said unto all his servants that *were* with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not *else* escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.

15 And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants *are ready to do* whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.

16 And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, *which were* concubines, to keep the house.

17 And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off.

18 And all his servants passed on beside him; all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.

19 Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou *art* a stranger, and also an exile.

20 Whereas thou camest *but* yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth *be* with thee.

21 And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and *as* my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

22 And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that *were* with him.

23 And all the country wept with a loud voice, and the people passed over: the king also himself passed over

the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.

24 And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites *were* with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city.

25 And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me *both* it, and his habitation:

26 But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, *here am* I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.

27 The king said also unto Zadok the priest, *Art not* thou a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar.

28 See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me.

7. *Why did David leave ten women behind? 15:16*

David left ten women of the concubines to keep his house in Jerusalem. He could hardly have known that Absalom would misuse these women and take them as a part of his household. Absalom was advised to do this by Ahithophel, who knew this would show all Israel that Absalom had completely severed his relations with his father. Absalom spread a tent on the top of his house and went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel (II Samuel 16:22). David must have thought he would be able to return to the city, or else he would hardly have been willing to leave these women behind.

8. *Why did David stop Ittai? 15:19*

Ittai, the Gittite, was one of David's soldiers and a former resident of Gath, as the name indicates. Gath was a Philistine city, and such a civil war as the conflict between Absalom and David would have no real meaning

to a foreigner. David instructed him to go back and to serve with Absalom, since he was in the position of a mercenary anyway. The man was loyal to David, however; and David allowed him to go with him.

9. *Who were Ittai's brethren? 15:20*

Ittai's brethren were the Cherethites, Pelethites, and the other Gittites, six hundred men of which had come to David from Gath. They had passed in review before the king, and David was reluctant to subject them to the fortunes of a vagabond and fugitive. His action, at this point, was similar to the action of the Philistine lords who had stopped David and his men from going into the final battle with Saul (I Samuel 29:4). The Cherethites and Pelethites were hired soldiers from Philistia who had been serving as David's bodyguard. These men made excellent personal attendants for the king, since they had no political axes to grind and would hardly be a party to court intrigues and vendettas. Their situation would be different as they were fleeing in the midst of civil strife; but when David saw their determined purpose, he allowed them to go with him. Ittai assured David of his loyalty as well as the loyalty of his men, and David allowed them to go before him (verse 21).

10. *What was the attitude of the people? 15:23*

Israel was in deep distress; the people that were with David were weeping with a loud voice as they journeyed on towards the valley of the Jordan, and crossed the brook Kidron. They made their way towards the wilderness which lay around the Dead Sea. The affairs of the nation had turned from the prosperity and peace which they had known under David and were brought again to times similar to those in the early days of Saul when the people had to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, in high places, and in pits (I Samuel 13:6).

11. Where was the brook Kidron? 15:23 b

The brook Kidron runs along the eastern side of the ancient wall of the city of Jerusalem. The valley begins about a mile north of the city as a mere depression in the surface. It turns southward just northeast of the city and becomes a smooth, broad valley covered with green fields and olive orchards. As it reaches a point opposite the northeastern corner of the city, it becomes quite narrow. The sides are steep, and the depth beneath the wall is as great as attained at any point farther along. The bed continues to descend, but the surface along the edge of the city also descends equally rapidly. Walls have been built across it at intervals to check the rush of the water and to accumulate some soil. After the brook Kidron passes Ophel, it widens again and makes room for additional building sites and vegetable gardens. A company leaving Jerusalem would have to cross this brook some place in order to go to a point east of the city. David and his followers made their sad journey down into this brook and up over the mount of Olives which lies just east of Jerusalem.

12. What plan did David formulate? 15:28

David asked Zadok, the priest, to take the Ark back into the city. He believed that if God blessed him in his flight from Absalom, he would have the opportunity to return and worship Him in Jerusalem. If God were not favorable to him, then he was willing that God's will be done in his life. He asked Zadok to help him in his campaign by observing the movements of Absalom. Zadok, in turn was to report these to his son Ahimaaz and to Jonathan, the son of the other priest, Abiathar. These young men would serve as couriers to bring news to David. David planned to wait in the Jordan valley until he could find out what was happening in Jerusalem under Absalom.

David's Counterplot. 15:29-37

29 Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there.

30 And David went up by the ascent of *mount Olivet*, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that *was* with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.

31 And *one* told David, saying, Ahithophel *is* among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.

32 And it came to pass, that *when* David was come to the top of *the mount*, where he worshiped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head:

33 Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me:

34 But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; *as I have been* thy father's servant hitherto, so *will* I now also *be* thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.

35 And *hast thou* not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, *that* what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell *it* to Zadok and Abiathar the priests.

36 Behold, *they have* there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's *son*, and Jonathan Abiathar's *son*; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear.

37 So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

13. *Trace David's journey out of the city. 15:30*

David went with his head covered and his feet bare. Such actions were signs of sorrow. David knew of Ahithophel's going with Absalom. He feared his actions, for he

was a wise man and could foresee very well how the rebellion would turn out.

Hushai, the Archite, met the company. Gladly would he have gone with David. David constrained him to turn back and enter into the city of Jerusalem. He was of much more help to David as a spy in Jerusalem than he would have been as a member of David's company in flight.

The company went over the mount of Olives in the direction of Jericho. The road, after it passes Bethany, leads down the slope of a hill. A valley comes between it and the opposite hill. Both hills are very steep and difficult to climb.

This route of the journey made it possible for Shimei to be above the company and cast stones at David. At the same time, he was out of reach of the company.

David took this humiliation as a punishment from the Lord. At the same time, he expected a blessing.

14. What instructions did David give to Hushai? 15:33

Since Absalom had the services of Ahithophel, a trusted counselor, David suggested that Hushai, an Archite, go back to Jerusalem and pretend to be loyal to Absalom. No town of Arka is known in Palestine. One by this name is found north of Tripoli in Phoenicia. A mention of the borders of Archi, near Bethel and Luz, is made in Joshua 16:2. David recognized Hushai as a trusted counselor, and the fact that he would be a burden to him in his flight indicated that he was a man of some years, unable to undergo the rigors of the life of a fugitive. David trusted him to find a way to outwit Ahithophel and defeat his counsels. These three men—Zadok, Abiathar, and Hushai were to do their best to undermine Absalom's plans. Jonathan, Abiathar's son, and Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, were to carry messages back and forth. This was David's scheme for putting down Absalom's rebellion.

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CHAPTER 15 IN REVIEW

1. How many men ran before Absalom? _____
2. To what city did Absalom go to start his revolt? _____
3. What instrument did Absalom use to signal the beginning of his revolt? _____
4. How many men went with Absalom? _____
5. What councilor of David joined Absalom? _____
6. From what town was he? _____
7. How many Philistine men went with David? _____
8. What was the name of the man from Gath? _____
9. What two priests took care of the Ark? _____
10. What was the name of the councilor whom David left in Jerusalem? _____