

## Week 17, Lecture 45. The Revolt of Absalom

### A Dysfunctional Royal Family

David's oldest son Amnon had the hots for his half-sister Tamar. Eventually he raped her (2 Samuel 13:1-14).

Tamar was the full sister of Absalom. He took her in, and gave her a place to stay (2 Sam 13:20)

Absalom bides his time. After 2 years he invites the family to dinner.

He gives the signal, and his servants slay Amnon (2 Sam 13:28-29).

Absalom fled to live in with the King of Geshur (2 Sam 13:37).

### The Return of Absalom

Through Joab's machinations, David relents, and allows Absalom to come back to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 14).

But this was hardly a "reconciliation."

And the king said, "Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence." So Absalom dwelt apart in his own house, and did not come into the king's presence. . . . So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. (2Sam 14:24, 28 RSV)

### Absalom Was Good-Looking

In all Israel there was no man more praised for his beauty than Absalom, flawless from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. <sup>26</sup> When he shaved his head -- as he used to do at the end of every year, because his hair became too heavy for him -- the hair weighed **two hundred shekels** according to the royal standard. (2Sam 14:25-26 NAB)

This seemingly insignificant detail will be important later in the narrative.

According to the NET note, Absalom shaved off **three pounds** of hair every year.

### Absalom Builds His Power-Base

Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate; and when any man had a suit to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him, and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," <sup>3</sup> Absalom would say to him, "**See, your claims are good and right; but there is no man deputed by the king to hear you.**" <sup>4</sup> Absalom said moreover, "**Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a suit or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.**" <sup>5</sup> And whenever a man came near to do obeisance to him, he would **put out his hand, and take hold of him, and kiss him.** <sup>6</sup> Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. (2Sam 15:2-6)

**Absalom's Revolt.** After 4 more years Absalom goes to Hebron, on the pretense of fulfilling a vow.

From there he sent messengers proclaiming that he was king of Israel (2 Sam 15:10)

Ahithophel, David's wisest counselor, joined the rebellion (2 Sam 15:12)

David has to flee from Jerusalem. He leaves his loyal priests, Abiathar & Zadok, there as spies (2 Sam 15:25-28).

He also leaves his wise counselor, Hushai, to counter the advice of Ahithophel (2 Sam 15:34).

Outside of Jerusalem, on the Mount of Olives, he learns of the betrayal of Ahithophel

### Shimei curses David.

As David flees for his life, a man from the tribe of Benjamin (**Saul's tribe**) throws stones & curses him:

And Shimei said as he cursed, "Begone, begone, you man of blood, you worthless fellow! <sup>8</sup> The LORD has avenged upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your ruin is on you; for you are a man of blood." (2Sam 16:7-8 RSV)

Shimei is not thinking of what David did to Uriah the Hittite (husband of Bathsheba).

Rather he is thinking of how David handed over Saul's descendants to the Gibeonites, who sacrificed them to YHWH.

(See Lecture 43: The Story of Rizpah).

He might also suspect that the tears David shed over the death of Saul & Jonathan "crocodile tears" (2 Sam 1:19-27)

Their deaths, like that of the murder of Ishbaal, Saul's last son, by Joab, served David's political purposes.

### Ahithophel's Advice, Part 1

Set up a tent on top of the palace, in public view. Have relations with the 10 concubines left by your father.

Then all Israel will know that reconciliation is impossible. Absalom does this. (2 Sam 20:20-23)

This fulfills **Nathan's prophecy** to David that the LORD would punish him.

Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. <sup>12</sup> For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." (2 Sam 12:11-12 RSV)

### **Ahithophel's Advice, Part 2**

Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will set out and pursue David tonight. <sup>2</sup> I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged, and throw him into a panic; and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down the king only, <sup>3</sup> and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace. (2 Sam 17:1-3 RSV)

This would have been the end of David, and the end of the war.

The advice pleased Absalom and the rest of his men. But they asked for Hushai's opinion.

### **Hushai's Advice.**

He reminded them that David was a great warrior. When cornered, he will fight ferociously.

Even a minor tactical defeat will be disastrous at this point. People will start returning to David.

Take time to gather a huge army from "all Israel." Then David's defeat will be certain.

### **More Help from Hushai.**

He sent messengers to David.

"Do not lodge tonight at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means pass over; lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up." (2Sam 17:16 RSV)

Hushai did not know whose advice would be taken.

David would stand no chance if Ahithophel's advice was taken, and his rag-tag party was attacked near Jerusalem.

### **Absalom's Decision & Ahithophel's Reaction.**

Absalom erred on the side of caution. He took the advice of Hushai, and ignored Ahithophel.

When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and went off home to his own city. And he set his house in order, and hanged himself; and he died, and was buried in the tomb of his father. (2 Sam 17:23 RSV)

Ahithophel knew that, once given time to regroup, David would not be defeated.

In the NT, Matthew will use Ahithophel's treachery and suicide by hanging as a "template" for his story of Judas.<sup>1</sup>

By contrast, Luke will draw on the account of the death of the wicked king Antiochus for his story of Judas.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Battle.**

David regroups his troops, and puts them under Joab's command.

Joab was no good at politics, but he was the best general in the country.

David ordered his men to "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (2 Sam 18:5).

The battle took place in a forest in Ephraim (northern Israel).

### **Absalom's Death.**

Absalom's forces were defeated. He fled on his mule, but his hair got tangled in the branches of a tree.

Remember the 3 pounds of hair he shaved off at the end of every year? He should have done it before the battle!

Soldiers found him hanging by his hair, and reported it to Joab. Joab ordered one to slay Absalom.

But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not put forth my hand against the king's son; for in our hearing the king commanded you . . . , 'For my sake protect the young man Absalom.'" <sup>13</sup> On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the

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<sup>1</sup> See Matt 27:3-6. Judas **gives back** his blood money; then he **hangs himself**. The priests use the blood money to buy a field, which is called "**Field of Blood**" because the money had been used to buy the **blood of the innocent Jesus**.

<sup>2</sup> See Acts 1:18-19. Judas **keeps** his blood money, and buys a field with it. He has a fall on the field, and dies by **accident -- not suicide**. The field is called "**Field of Blood**" because it has the **blood of the guilty Judas all** over it.

king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." <sup>14</sup> Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak. <sup>15</sup> And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him. (2 Sam 18:12-15 RSV)

### David's Lament

"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!  
Would I had died instead of you,  
O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam 18:33 RSV)

### Joab's Harsh Advice

Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life, and the lives of your sons and your daughters, and the lives of your wives and your concubines, <sup>6</sup> because you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you; for today I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. <sup>7</sup> Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants; for I swear by the LORD, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night; and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now." (2 Sam 19:5-7 RSV)

David knew Joab was right. He pulled himself together to lead his people back to Jerusalem.

### David's Return

He is generous to Saul's son Meribaal, who comes out to meet him.

This cost David nothing -- Meribaal was lame, and could never be king -- but bought him good will.

Barzillai of Gilead -- who had given him supplies for all his people when he fled also came to greet him.

David invites him to come live in the palace.

Barzillai says he is 80 years old -- too old for the wine, women, & song of palace life.

He gives David his son Chimham to serve in the palace. (2 Sam 19:35-41).

David gave the 10 concubines defiled by Absalom room & board, but never slept with them again (2 Sam 20:3)

### David's Promise to Shimei

When David Returned, Shimei, who had cursed him when he departed, came to beg for mercy.

Abishai, Joab's brother, another one of David's nephews, advised David to put Shimei to death.

David realized the political situation was still unstable.

Absalom's army had fled, but was still a force to be reckoned with.

But David said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be as an adversary to me? Shall any one be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?" <sup>23</sup> And the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king gave him his oath. (2 Sam 19:22-23 RSV)

David will "take care of business" at a later date.

That is the topic of the next lecture.

## Week 17, Lecture 46. David the "Godfather" (1 Kings 2:1-10)

### David's Pious Speech to Solomon (1 Kings 2:1-4)

When David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, <sup>2</sup> "I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, <sup>3</sup> and keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; <sup>4</sup> that the LORD may establish his word which he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel.'

### Work of the Deuteronomistic Historian

Ancient Historians used speeches of major characters to get across their editorial point of view.

The DH writes the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria; the final edition is after the fall of Judah to Babylon

He is convinced these disasters resulted from lack of fidelity to YHWH.

Here, through the words of "David," the DH is setting up the reason for these defeats.

The defeats do not demonstrate the weakness of the LORD -- as if he could not defend Israel against other gods. Rather, show the LORD has punished Israel for not following his "statutes, commandments, ordinances, & testimonies." The repetitious use of these synonyms is characteristic of the style of the DH.<sup>3</sup>

### Different Material

The rest of his farewell speech is material of a different sort. There was no stenographer there. But based on Solomon's **actions** after David's death, a historian could have composed this part of the speech. **Post-Lecture question: I wonder if it is from the same source as the pious material, or a different source.**

### Taking care of business: Joab (1 Kings 2:5-6)

Moreover you know also what Joab the son of **Zeruiah** did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he murdered, avenging in time of peace blood which had been shed in war, and putting innocent blood upon the girdle about my loins, and upon the sandals on my feet. <sup>6</sup> Act therefore according to your wisdom, but **do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace.**

**Zeruiah**, was a Daughter of Jesse, i.e., she was King David's sister (1 Chr 2:16). She is called "**Sarvia**" in the old Douay version, following the spelling in Jerome's Vulgate. Zeruiah had three sons: Abishai, Joab, & Asahel. These three are known collectively as the "sons of Zeruiah."<sup>4</sup> Joab is thus a nephew of David, the son of his sister.

### Background Information: The Death of Asahel.

After the death of Saul there was a 7-year war between Ishbaal (Saul's son) and David. Abner, formerly Saul's general, was now general of Ishbaal's army (2 Sam 2:8-11). In a battle, Abner killed Asahel, Joab's baby brother -- twice he tried to get the young man to fight someone else. Abner turned around and said, "Is that you, Asahel?" He replied, "Yes."<sup>21</sup> Abner said to him, "Turn right or left; **seize one of the young men and take what you can strip from him.**" But Asahel would not stop pursuing him. <sup>22</sup> Once more Abner said to Asahel: "**Stop pursuing me! Why must I strike you to the ground? How could I show my face to your brother Joab?**" <sup>23</sup> Still he refused to stop. So Abner struck him in the abdomen with the heel of his spear, and the weapon protruded from his back. He fell there and died on the spot. (2 Sam 2:20-23, NABRE) Abner knew that Joab had a "long memory."

### Background: Abner Betrayed Ishbaal

He became angry with Ishbaal, and offered to hand the Northern Kingdom over to David (2 Sam 3:12) David made a feast for Abner and his 20 associates at Hebron to seal the deal (2 Sam 3:20-21)

### Joab's Reaction

Joab had been away. He arrived after Abner & his men had left, and found out what David had done. He sent a messenger after Abner, calling him to return for a message. And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he smote him in the belly, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. (2 Sam 3:27 RSV)

### David's Twofold Response

1) He composed a dirge to memorialize Abner, and gave a big funeral for Abner. It worked. So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to slay Abner the son of Ner. (2Sam 3:37 RSV) They came and offered David the kingship over the Northern Tribes -- **in spite of** Joab almost ruining the deal! David was very angry with Joab, but he was still "useful" to him. He was a good general.

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<sup>3</sup> "Statutes, commandments, & testimonies" appear in Deut 8:11; 11:1; 26:17; 30:16; 1 Kings 2:3; 6:12; 8:58 in the DH. This combination also appears in Lev 26:15; Neh 1:7; 9:13; 10:29. [Results from searching the RSV with *BibleWorks*].

<sup>4</sup> The phrase appears five times: 2 Sam 2:18; 3:39; 6:10; 19:22; 1 Chr 2:16. Curiously they are referred to by their **mother's name**, not their father's name! Perhaps this is because their mother was the sister of such a famous king.

2) At the end of his life, David tells Solomon to take care of "business."

Act therefore according to your wisdom, but **do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace** (1 Kings 2:6, RSV).

When we remember that Joab was his sister's son, this is particularly cold-blooded.

It reminds me of the scene in the *Godfather* where the new godfather takes care of his brother-in-law.

**Post-lecture note: Solomon puts Joab to death in 2 Kings 2:28-35.**

### **Taking Care of Friends (1 Kings 2:7)**

<sup>7</sup> But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother.

David appreciated loyalty, and rewarded it.

### **Shimei. The last "business" to take care of. (1 Kings 2:8-9)**

<sup>8</sup> And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim; but when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, **I swore to him by the LORD, saying, "I will not put you to death with the sword."** <sup>9</sup> Now therefore hold him not guiltless, for you are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and **you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.**

David has sworn an oath to Shimei.

But Solomon has no oath! **Post lecture note: Solomon puts Shimei to death in 1 Kings 2:36-46.**

### **Death & Burial (1 Kings 2:10)**

Then David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.

**City of David.** This phrase occurs 49 times in the OT. **Every** time it refers to Jerusalem, never to Bethlehem.

The phrase occurs 2x in the NT (Luke 2:4,11). Both times it refers to Bethlehem.

I call this "Lucan sleight of hand!"