

Exegetical Notes – 2 Samuel 15:1-12

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kyllies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

2 Samuel 15:1-12

(For more information about Absalom, David's son and Israel's Crown Prince after Amnon's murder, read 2 Samuel 13:1 – 14:24 and the exegetical notes prepared for those passages.)

Verses 1-6

¹ *In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. ² 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."* ³ *Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you."* ⁴ *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 they receive justice."* ⁵ *Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶ 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 people of Israel.*

- Time passed. David assumed that he and Israel's crown prince, David's son, Absalom, were restored. But, in truth, Absalom had not forgiven his father. Though he acted as if things were restored between him and David, he resented his father and worked to undermine him.
- Absalom surrounded himself with the trappings of his office, crown prince. He had a large entourage of men which accompanied him wherever he went. He made himself look important.
- Absalom would often go and stand at the gate to Jerusalem early in the morning before the judges/elders of the kingdom had arrived there. This was the place where the elders would meet to settle problems between the

people of Israel. Absalom appeared to be one of the judges/elders, but he was not. At the gate, he would call out to those who came there with a matter to be resolved. If he discovered that they were from one of the tribes of Israel, which almost all of them would be, he would take that person aside and listen to their case. He would then side with them, saying that if he was one of the judges/elders of Israel, he would rule in their favor. He would point out to them that the representatives of the king, the judges/elders had not arrived there yet. But if he was one of them it would be different and that those who came would receive justice.

- When someone approached Absalom to pay him homage as crown prince, he would pretend to be good friends with that person. He would raise them up from bowing down to him and kiss them (see 2 Samuel 14:33).
- Absalom did all of this to gain the people's affection.

Verses 7-9

⁷ 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. ⁸ 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.'"

⁹ The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he went to Hebron.

- Absalom behaved this way for four years. Then he asked his father for permission to go to Hebron. Some ancient texts do not include the name Hebron. Absalom asked to go somewhere other than Jerusalem to fulfill a vow he had made to the Lord. Hebron was the place where David had been crowned king (see 2 Samuel 2:1, 4, 5:3, 5). And it was the place of Absalom's birth (see 2 Samuel 3:2-3). It would, therefore, be a special place and a likely place for these events to happen. Hebron had also been the capitol city before David moved it to Jerusalem. Perhaps Absalom knew that there was still some resentment against David there because David had moved the capitol. He claims that he had promised YHWH that if he was brought back to Jerusalem, he would go to this place to worship God in thanksgiving for his return.
- Suspecting nothing, but assuming that he and Absalom were at peace, David gave his permission for Absalom to go. David assumed that all was well between him and Absalom.

Verses 10-12

¹⁰ 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.’” ¹¹ Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. ¹² 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.

- While Absalom was at this place, he did offer sacrifices to YHWH. But, he also sent secret messages to the leaders of Israel’s tribes inviting them to join him in revolt against his father, David.
- Absalom had invited 200 men to join him at these sacrifices. They went with him without knowing his intention to rebel against David. But, in appearance, they would all appear to be co-conspirators.
- Absalom also sent for Ahithophel, Bathsheba’s grandfather (see 2 Samuel 11:3. Her father was Eliam who was the son of Ahithophel). Ahithophel was one of David’s trusted advisors. He appears to have joined Absalom in the early stages of Absalom’s rebellion against David, but this may not have been the case. Remember that the two hundred men that went with Absalom to the place of sacrifice knew nothing about the intended rebellion. But Ahithophel’s presence would add strength to Absalom’s cause.
- Absalom’s cause gained strength as others joined him.

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