

Bible Study August 21, 2024

2 SAMUEL 15 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

A TEST OF LOYALTY

2 Samuel 12:10-15 (ESV)

¹⁰ Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' ¹¹ 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. ¹² For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.' ¹³ David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die." ¹⁵ Then Nathan went to his house.

Exodus 20:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Absalom's Conspiracy

¹ After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. ² And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute 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,"

The city gate was like city hall and a shopping center combined. Because Jerusalem was the nation's capital, both local and national leaders met there daily to transact business and conduct government affairs. The city gate was the perfect spot for this because government and business transactions needed witnesses to be legitimate, and anyone entering or leaving the city had to pass through the gate. Merchants set up their tent-shops near the gate for the same reason. Absalom, therefore, went to the city gate to win the hearts of Israel's leaders as well as those of the common people.

³ Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." ⁴ Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." ⁵ And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶ Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Absalom's political strategy was to steal the hearts of the people with his good looks, grand entrances, apparent concern for justice, and friendly embraces. Many were fooled and switched their allegiance. Later, however, Absalom proved to be an evil ruler.

We need to evaluate our leaders to make sure their charisma is not a mask covering greed, deception, or hunger for power. Make sure that underneath their style and charm, they are able to make good decisions and handle people wisely.

7 And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the Lord, in Hebron. 8 For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the Lord will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the Lord.'" 9 The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron.

Absalom went to Hebron because it was his hometown (3:2-3). Hebron was David's first capital as well, and there Absalom could expect to find loyal friends who would be proud of him.

10 But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'" 11 With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. 12 And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.

David Flees Jerusalem

13 And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." 14 Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."

Why couldn't David just crush this rebellion? There were several reasons he chose to flee: (1) The rebellion was widespread (15:10-13) and would not have been easily suppressed, possibly leading to civil war; (2) David did not want the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed; and (3) David still cared for his son and did not want to hurt him.

Had David not escaped from Jerusalem, the ensuing fight might have killed not only him but also many innocent inhabitants of the city. Some fights that we think are necessary can be costly and destructive to those around us. In such cases, it may be wise to back down and save the fight for another day—even if doing so hurts our pride. It takes courage to stand and fight, but it also takes courage to back down for the sake of others.

15 And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides." 16 So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. 17 And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house.

18 And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king.

David had many loyal non-Israelites in his armed forces. The men from the Philistine city of Gath were apparently friends David had acquired while hiding from Saul. God had a purpose in David's time spent there. "The king's bodyguard" (in Hebrew, "the Kerethites and Pelethites") also came from Philistine territory. Although Israel was supposed to destroy wicked enemies, the people were to welcome foreigners who came on friendly terms (Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 10:19) and try to show them the importance of obeying God.

19 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. 20 You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you." 21 But Ittai answered the king, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be." 22 And David said to Ittai, "Go then, pass on." So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. 23 And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.

24 And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the city. 25 Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place.

The priests and Levites were also loyal to David.

26 But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him." 27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. 28 See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." 29 So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.

30 But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went. 31 And it was told David, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

32 While David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head. 33 David said to him, "If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. 34 But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,' then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel. 35 Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So whatever you hear from the king's house, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. 36 Behold, their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son, and by them you shall send to me everything you hear." 37 So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

David wrote several psalms during the days of Absalom's rebellion.

Psalm 3:1-4 (ESV) – A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

1 O Lord, how many are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

2 many are saying of my soul,

“There is no salvation for him in God.” Selah

3 But you, O Lord, are a shield about me,

my glory, and the lifter of my head.

4 I cried aloud to the Lord,

and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah

David needed spies in Absalom's court to inform him of Absalom's decisions. By serving Absalom as a supposed traitor to David, Hushai could offer advice contradictory to Ahithophel's advice. Ahithophel was Absalom's adviser (and also Bathsheba's grandfather).