

### 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL

#### Week 24, Chapter 15

Absalom is going to be nearly successful in his rebellion against his father, King David. It seems as though much of the nation was behind ***Avishalom***, and so David found himself in a position to either use his few remaining loyalists to resist the usurper in what would have been a bloody and destructive affair or to do what he did: voluntarily abandon the city of Jerusalem and leave with a group of loyal followers.

The plain sense of the narrative makes it clear that this was all part of God's punishment and curse upon David as consequence not only for the Bathsheba matter but also for the general way David had conducted himself as a human politician instead of a divine representative of God on earth.

We read the entirety of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel chapter 15 last week, and we'll do so again this week but in smaller chunks because we're going to dissect chapter 15 very carefully. So open your Bibles to 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15.

#### RE-READ 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL 15:1 – 12

Absalom was currently under the influence of delusions of grandeur. After years of planning and conniving he was finally ready to take that final step into his father's shoes and so began acting as though he was a king. And he did that by making himself popular and highly visible to the masses. Verse 1 explains that he took a royal chariot with its horses, along with a contingent of 50 men (part of the royal guard) and stationed himself at the entry to Jerusalem.

The mention of horses is no doubt to show Absalom's disharmony with the Torah commandment of Deuteronomy 17:16 that Jewish kings are NOT to have very many horses because that is what pagan kings do, and invariably they wind up being used against their own people.

Absalom stationed himself next to the city gate because that is where court was convened. The prince with his entourage would have been quite an impressive sight. People coming to look for justice or coming to create a contract met at the city gates so that there were witnesses. To mentally picture this, imagine a politician standing at the entrance to a shopping mall, stopping to shake hands, kiss the babies, ask people where they were from, and then explaining that the current government administration doesn't care about them as much as he does. Scripture says Absalom would ask what city the visitors lived in, and they would answer according to what tribe they were from. This is a subtle but important piece of information about the mindset of the people at the time: the people identified themselves NOT according to a city or village, but according to a tribe.

In 2010 we live in a time of a very politically divided America and so we tend to align ourselves less on where we're from than according to our political leanings: left, right, center, independent, libertarian, etc. In times past, simply being an American was sufficient to explain our political and social foundation, our allegiance and our vision of the future, and this was because there used to be more unity and common cause; but no longer. This is akin to how things were in Israel at this time. Israel was initially formed as a fundamentally tribal society but was being dragged by King David into a more national-oriented mindset. It worked for a time (especially when the northern tribes that formed King Saul's kingdom saw the worth of joining with the tribes of the south to form a union under King David). But with David's growing indifference towards (and isolation from) the people, the Bathsheba adultery episode and the murder of her husband Uriyah, and the long-simmering dissatisfaction and bitterness of Saul's extended family for the throne having been taken from them and given to David, the nation was deeply fractured. The underlying tribal structure was the natural fallback position, and the 12 tribal chieftains were only too happy to regain the full loyalty of their tribal members; a loyalty that for a time had been directed towards the King of Israel. Thus when Absalom asked the people what city they were from (a question asked from the point of view of nationalism), they responded by telling him what tribe they belonged to (a question answered from the point of view of tribalism).

Absalom especially seized on the apparent current dysfunction of the court system, which must have been chief among the people's complaints. People journeyed to Jerusalem to have their case heard, but David had been lax in appointing judges to hear them. So the citizenry was often turned away frustrated without their case even being addressed because there was no one to deal with it. Thus in verse 4 Absalom assures the disgruntled Israelites that if HE were

king, all of this would be solved since the only thing that matters to him is proper justice and the citizens' welfare.

And of course Absalom, being a prince and son of the king, was treated as a man of his station would be expected; the people would prostrate themselves before him when he approached them. But he would deflect such adoration and instead kiss them with a kiss of friendship. And so verse 6 explains that it was in this manner that he stole the hearts of anyone in Israel who came to Jerusalem for justice. Understand that this does NOT mean that he stole their affections. Again we see the use of the word *lev* (heart), but in those days it did not mean emotion or affection, it meant "mind". That is, Absalom stole their minds; he deceived the people by presenting himself as man of the people, when in fact he was but a man seeking personal power and only needed them to achieve it.

All of this can only make us wonder at how weak and disinterested a king that David had become. Although we do not know how long his son's disloyal politicking went on, there is utterly no possibility that David wasn't fully aware of it (and in fact some Psalms testify to his knowledge of Absalom's ongoing subversion). I can easily picture the king's closest advisors constantly returning to David, pleading and trying to find the words to make him understand what a serious breach of faith was occurring and how dangerous this was soon to become. But, alas, David was too self-absorbed, paralyzed with guilt, and indulgent of his children to take any action whatsoever; we have no mention of even a conversation between David and Absalom about the very public and obvious attempt to subvert that was occurring daily. To the Hebrews David appeared utterly powerless and hapless and so the door for rebellion was thrown wide open.

Verse 7 (in most translations) says that at the end of 40 years **Avishalom** made the decision to declare himself king in Hebron. The number 40 is an obvious copyist error since there is no way that Absalom went to the city gates for 40 years. Some scholars have tried to attribute the number "40" to the amount of time David had reigned, or to Absalom's age at this moment, and to several other possibilities but none really fit. Other ancient versions of the Tanach (such as the Aramaic and Syriac texts) give the number as "4" and not 40, and that is probably correct. Most of the ancient Sages say that it had been 4 years since Absalom had returned from Geshur, and that is most likely the case. If it is true that he had been home from Geshur for 4 years, then it would have been 7 years from the time of Amnon's murder and Absalom's flight to Geshur that Absalom decided to name himself King of Israel in Hebron. That would make the most sense, especially since the number 7 indicates divine completeness. That is, the 7-year timeframe shows that it was Yehoveh's direct hand in the affairs of men that led to this astounding event of David being usurped by his own son, and this in divine retribution for David's sins.

The event of going to Hebron is an interesting one. This place had much significance, especially for David's family. It was the city where David first became king (and so was his capital city) and it was where Absalom was born. But it was also sufficiently far away from Jerusalem and offered fortified facilities, such that if Absalom failed he could retreat there. But it was also a place known in antiquity to Abraham and so it carried with it long term Hebrew tradition and heritage. Apparently an altar to YHWH and a worship center also remained there because even though Absalom was in Jerusalem at the time he still claimed that he needed to go to Hebron in order to pay a vow that he had entered into with God during his self-exile in Geshur. Paying a vow by definition means offering an altar sacrifice.

In fact hidden in the original Hebrew is an expression that needs to be taken literally instead of slightly modified to make more modern sense of it. Where our CJB (and most other translations) say something to the effect of, "Please let me go to Hebron and fulfill the vow I made to YHWH", what it really says is, "Please let me go to YHWH in Hebron and fulfill the vow I made." "YHWH in Hebron" is a standalone phrase; and we'll see other similar phrases in the Biblical Hebrew such as YHWH in Samaria, YHWH in Teman, and so on. It is of the same nature and literary form as Dagon in Ashdod (Dagon was the chief god of the Philistines); and the idea is that a certain god has established a manifestation of himself at a specific place. Thus YHWH in Hebron means a place where YHWH is in Hebron. So the concept that a god was everywhere simultaneously was not fully developed, yet, even among the Israelites. And thus YHWH was only where He had sanctuaries and priests to serve Him (one of which was in Hebron).

Why not just sacrifice in Jerusalem? Well actually, that wouldn't have been expected since the main sanctuary at this time was probably in Gibeon. But since Gibeon was in Benjamite territory (Saul's old tribal territory) it would have been quite politically incorrect for a member of David's family (of the tribe of Judah) to sacrifice there and very likely (in the current nasty political climate of Israel) not very welcomed by the Benjamite people. So Absalom's selection of Hebron seemed a reasonable choice to David considering the old family ties to the place.

But verse 11 explains that despite the excuse of going to Hebron to fulfill a vow, he used the occasion to disperse spies all throughout Israel to tell those loyal to Absalom that the time for rebellion had finally arrived to make him king! The sound of the shofar means a battle cry, because the shofar was a device used to send signals during war (like a bugle). Going to Hebron was very clever, because it gave a false pretense to invite 200 innocent courtiers (here called men of Jerusalem) to go with him to (as far as they knew) participate in Avishalom's vow offering ceremony and as a retinue that provided not only a measure of safety but a proper procession for the crown prince of Israel. Taking the 200 men who were loyal to David

along also allayed any suspicion that David or his advisors might have had (especially considering the daily show Absalom had been putting on at the city gate for some time). Once arrived in Hebron Absalom called for a close advisor of David's to come from his hometown of Giloh on the same pretense of being an honorary member of the witnesses to Absalom's vow fulfillment ceremony. But unlike the 200 men who had journeyed with Absalom from *Yerushalayim* apparently **Achitofel** had been part of the conspiracy all along.

**Achitofel** was a powerful member of David's inner court, renowned for his wisdom and sage advice. As such he was one of David's most trusted councilors. Some say that his betrayal of David is wrapped in mystery; I don't think so. **Achitofel** was Bathsheba's grandfather and would have had intimate knowledge of all that had transpired. One can only imagine how distraught and deceived that he felt when David seduced his granddaughter, and then had her husband eliminated. That David kept her as a wife was a dual edged sword; on the one hand it was probably the best thing that could be done to protect this pregnant young woman and keep her disgrace to a minimum. On the other hand, David had many wives and concubines and she was only his trophy wife. Further a person such as **Achitofel** could argue that if David was sincerely sorry for his abominable behavior towards his granddaughter, he would have made public apology, offered restitution to her family, and cared for her needs instead of making her appear to be an adulteress with equal culpability as David. No doubt for **Achitofel** his support of Avishalom was all about honor and revenge.

### RE-READ 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL 15:13 – 18

Verse 12 tells us that the conspiracy to dethrone David spread like wildfire. This was no narrowly devised scheme only among the leaders; it was a popular uprising that David had well-earned. When some of David's men in the area of Hebron got wind of what was occurring they came to David in the City of David and told him. David's instant reaction was to flee. It is perversely funny to me that the passive king that no longer cared to do any more than enjoy the luxurious trappings of being head of state suddenly loses his passivity and springs into action when he feels his own life is in danger. Everything has come full circle for David: from fugitive in the wilderness, to the palace of the king, and back to wilderness fugitive once again. The following verses make it clear that David knows that this is the hand of God's curse upon him.

OK, time for a mini-sermon as there are some foundational patterns and principles in play here and we need to learn from them. The narrative of the anointed king and his followers fleeing in

haste towards the east, as the evil prince reveals his intentions, cannot help but conjure up for the Believer a New Testament passage that is eerily familiar to many of us:

### **(Mat 24:15-20 CJB)**

***15 "So when you see the abomination that causes devastation spoken about through the prophet Dani'el standing in the Holy Place" (let the reader understand the allusion),***

***16 "that will be the time for those in Y'hudah to escape to the hills.***

***17 If someone is on the roof, he must not go down to gather his belongings from his house;***

***18 if someone is in the field, he must not turn back to get his coat.***

***19 What a terrible time it will be for pregnant women and nursing mothers!***

***20 Pray that you will not have to escape in winter or on Shabbat.***

What we see happening in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15 with those who are faithful to the Lord's chosen king running for their lives as a wicked challenger reveals himself, is a shadow and a pattern for the Matthew 24 event that is future to us (although I think not too far into the future). Many who were at one time loyal to the anointed king switched sides (either through deception or lack of commitment) to the anti-king. And this reminds us of yet another of the famous sayings of Yeshua about a dark time of rebellion and evil in the latter days and what it will mean in a very practical way:

### **(Mat 7:15-23 CJB)**

***15 "Beware of the false prophets! They come to you wearing sheep's clothing, but underneath they are hungry wolves!***

***16 You will recognize them by their fruit. Can people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles?***

***17 Likewise, every healthy tree produces good fruit, but a poor tree produces bad fruit.***

***18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, or a poor tree good fruit.***

***19 Any tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire!***

**<sup>20</sup> So you will recognize them by their fruit.**

**<sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.**

**<sup>22</sup> On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'**

**<sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'**

Please hear me: Christ is speaking about Believers here. And these Believers that Christ is referring to will be fooled and drawn in by deceivers (hungry wolves) who teach a false doctrine; and as a result they will follow the Anti-Christ. They will give up their faith in the true Messiah Yeshua after perhaps a lifetime of following Him, believing that this charismatic false one is God's new anointed. And Christ will then reject them and walk away.

I grieve over the long preached notion in some of the most popular Evangelical circles that there is absolutely no way that a REAL Believer would voluntarily leave the divine sheepfold and attach him or her self to another. Therefore anyone who would succumb to this opportunity to rebel was only a pretender and not ever a Believer. Well that simply doesn't match what the Scriptures, Old and New Testament, warn us against. Such a notion even defies common sense. Why if falling away isn't even possible would we be warned against it over and over again? And the pattern in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15 that those who were at one time loyal-to-the-death for David could be fooled by another leader who is masquerading as a good and righteous king is well established in Holy Scripture. David had tarried for a long time; he went out of the view of the people and didn't seem to be there, visibly, for them as he was for awhile. So a highly visible and attractive false shepherd that promised to address all the people's needs, and to be a champion for the people NOW, was able to win over a huge portion of the congregation by convincing them that he was God's choice representing God's will.

Christ went visibly away almost 2000 years ago and we've been living on faith, and counting on the invisible Holy Spirit inside of us, ever since. Many worshippers have fallen away over the centuries (some almost immediately after His death) because they felt that if He was coming back as He promised that He would have done so by now.

Nothing is more dangerous for any human being, including a Believer, than to come to the conclusion that "this could never happen to me". That somehow I have achieved immunity

from deception, or I have all the truth, or that by walking an aisle I've purchased a permanent and guaranteed hedge against destruction and nothing that I could ever willfully do or decide would change things. Patterns. God-patterns do not change because God does not change.

Verse 15 is a classic case of the Lord dividing, electing, and separating as we hear these marvelous and comforting words of faithfulness spoken to David at his lowest moment: "Here, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides". This is the great divide; a clear division is drawn between those who will continue to stand with the king even in the face of danger and the real possibility of death versus those who will choose what seems to be the popular and winning side. But winning and losing is not the issue for the still faithful; getting on the side that appears will achieve victory for now, doesn't matter. Doing what is right and remaining steadfast and committed to God's king is what is important.

Now might be a good time to make the reality of this situation all the more intimate for us by peering into David's mind by means of the Psalms he wrote as this rebellion unfolded all around him, and everything was spinning out of control. I want you to notice the counterpart to the characters in the Psalms that will happen 1000 years from David's time, in the person of Judas Iscariot who will betray his king and master, Yeshua.

Turn first to Psalm 41 and then to 55. These were written before the rebellion of Absalom actually broke out into the open and just before David thus fled to survive.

### **READ PSALM 41 all**

Here we see that David knew something was up. As isolated as he had made himself within the halls of his palace, he sensed that rebellion was afoot and he was tormented by the knowledge. He overheard the whispers that the people wanted him to die and go away so that they could have the king of their choice (almost like once again choosing Saul). False rumors are spread and many believe them. Even his closest advisor and friend is turning on him. David pleads that his only hope for survival and restoration is the Lord; and yet David also portrays himself as innocent (which is patently not so except in the sense that the Lord has, by grace, given David pardon in the spiritual sphere).

But here is also where we see the foreshadow of Judas, part of Yeshua's most trusted and inner circle of friends, betraying him. And David may see himself as innocent, but Yeshua IS innocent. But interestingly, in both cases, David and Yeshua bear the curse of the Law upon them. David is bearing it for his own iniquities; Yeshua for ours.

### READ PSALM 55

Here David sees the writing on the wall and is panic stricken. David is suffering from anxiety and fears that death could come at any moment. He wants to run. But what truly grieves David is that it was NOT an enemy that has determined to undo him, but a friend. It was one of his "own kind" he says in verse 14. It was someone with whom he shared a common heritage, his innermost thoughts, and was considered a reliable companion.

All day and all night David complains of his situation to the Lord, and although the situation just seems to grow from bad to worse. David is given a measure of peace that belies his current calamitous circumstances.

Again we can see this pattern of betrayal passing forward into the future with Yeshua lamenting his foreknowledge that one of his closest friends, the disciple Judas, will betray him. More than that, Judas is a Jew. If only it were that someone from the people who were naturally hostile to Yeshua and Israel was the one who wanted to kill him; but no, it was a fellow Jew who would do him in.

I also see a discernable pattern that the evil Anti-Christ of the end times will be one of Messiah's kind (a Hebrew) making it all the worse in a sense. But in the end, the only hope is to place full trust in YHWH, God of Israel, and David and Yeshua do exactly that.

What we see from these Psalms is that David is like the person who is watching a loved one die of a long term illness. You see it coming and have time to think about it; it's not really a surprise. You feel you're probably prepared for the inevitable but when it happens all that goes out the window and so you are crushed. David was well aware of his deteriorating status among his people, that rebellion was brewing, that his closest friends and family were involved,

and that many of the people were ready to see him go.

But when in verse 14 it finally happened, the King quickly capitulated and hurriedly fled, devastated. He leaves 10 of his more trusted concubines (note that he doesn't leave any legal wives) to remain in the palace to care for it, knowing that Harems go to the next king and so there is no reason to expect harm to come to them.

As the long parade of David's household, household servants and royal court, and a relatively small group of loyal fighting men reached what is called "the last house", David pauses to assess the size and make-up of the remnant that will go into exile with him. The last house is the outer boundary marker of what is considered Jerusalem, and so it was appropriate to stop there and reflect on how things could have come to this. The ***K'reti and P'leti*** and the ***Gittim*** are his personal bodyguard made up mostly of foreign mercenaries and not Israelites; the bulk were former Philistines who joined David so many years earlier as he lived as an outlaw, avoiding King Saul. And now, once again, David was on the run but this time trying to avoid death at the hand of his own son.

We'll continue next time.