

Absalom

The Third Son of David



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Overview

A father's mistakes are often reflected in the lives of his children. In Absalom, David saw a bitter replay and amplification of many of his own past sins.

God had predicted that David's family would suffer because of his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. David was broken as he realized that God's predictions were coming true.

David was horrified as he saw his son's strengths run wild without the controls God had built into his own life.

Absalom sinned and kept on sinning. He lacked the inner character to he needed to live a life of personal integrity.

Absalom was unable to say, "I am sorry, I have done wrong. God offers forgiveness, but we will not receive forgiveness until we admit our sins.

You may be able to relate to Absalom's problems, but forgiveness is for those who repent of their sins and turn to the Christ of the Cross.

ABSALOM, the third son of David

2 Samuel 3:3

And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur;

The length of this war tried the faith and patience of David, and made his settlement at last the more welcome. The contest between grace and corruption in the hearts of believers, may fitly be compared to this warfare.

There is a long war between them, the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; but as the work of holiness is carried on, corruption, like the house of Saul, grows weaker and weaker; while grace, like the house of David, grows stronger and stronger

1 Chron. 3:2

The third, Absalom the son of Maachah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur: the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith:

Of all the families of Israel, none were so illustrious as the family of David: here we have a full account of it. From this family, as concerning the flesh, Christ came. The attentive observer will perceive that the children of the righteous enjoy many advantages.

Beauty of Absalom

2 Samuel 14:25

But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.

Nothing is said of Absalom's wisdom and piety. All here said of him is, that he was very handsome. A poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable. Many a polluted, deformed soul dwells in a fair and comely body.

And we read that he had a very fine head of hair. It was a burden to him, but he would not cut it as long as he could bear the weight. That which feeds and gratifies pride, is not complained of, though uneasy. May the Lord grant us the beauty of holiness, and the adorning of a meek and quiet spirit! Only those who fear God are truly happy.

Absalom kills Amnon

2 Samuel 13:22-29

And Absalom spake unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.

And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazer, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons.

And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant. And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him: howbeit he would not go, but blessed him.

Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, why should he go with thee? But Absalom pressed him that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.

Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you?

Be courageous and be valiant. And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled.

Observe the aggravations of Absalom's sin: he would have Amnon slain, when least fit to go out of the world. He engaged his servants in the guilt. Those servants are ill-taught who obey wicked masters, against God's commands. Indulged children always prove crosses to godly parents, whose foolish love leads them to neglect their duty to God.

Absalom flees to Geshur

2 Samuel 13:27

But Absalom pressed him that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.

2 Samuel 13:28

Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? Be courageous and be valiant.

Observe the aggravations of Absalom's sin: he would have Amnon slain, when least fit to go out of the world. He engaged his servants in the guilt. Those servants are ill-taught who obey wicked masters, against God's commands. Indulged children always prove crosses to godly parents, whose foolish love leads them to neglect their duty to God.

Absalom is permitted by David to return to Jerusalem

2 Samuel 14:1-24

Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom.

And Joab sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead:

And come to the king, and speak on this manner unto him. So Joab put the words in her mouth.

And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king.

And the king said unto her, what aileth thee? And she answered, I am indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead.

And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him.

And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth.

And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee. And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, my lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house: and the king and his throne be guiltless

And the king said, whosoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the Lord thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth.

Then the woman said, let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on.

And the woman said, wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? For the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished.

For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.

Now therefore that I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, it is because the people have made me afraid: and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid.

For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man that would destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God.

Then thine handmaid said, the word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the Lord thy God will be with thee. Then the king answered and said unto the woman, Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak.

And the king said, Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, As thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid: To fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth.

And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again.

And Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king: and Joab said, Today thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant.

So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face.

Joab Procures Absalom's Recall

We may notice here, how this widow pleads God's mercy, and his clemency toward poor guilty sinners. The state of sinners is a state of banishment from God. God pardons none to the dishonour of his law and justice, nor any who are impenitent; nor to the encouragement of crimes, or the hurt of others.

Absalom Recalled

David was inclined to favour Absalom, yet, for the honour of his justice, he could not do it but upon application made for him, which may show the methods of Divine grace. It is true that God has thoughts of compassion toward poor sinners, not willing that any should perish; yet he is only reconciled to them through a Mediator, who pleads on their behalf. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and Christ came to this land of our banishment, to bring us to God.

Absalom's demagogism

2 Samuel 15:2-6

And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside 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 of one of the tribes of Israel.

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

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!

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

Absalom's Ambition

David allows Absalom's pomp. Those parents know not what they do, who indulge a proud humour in their children: many young people are ruined by pride. And those commonly are most eager for authority who least understand its duties.

Absalom seeks the throne.

2 Samuel 15:13

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

David Leaves Jerusalem

David determined to quit Jerusalem. He took this resolve, as a penitent submitting to the rod. Before unrighteous Absalom he could justify himself, and stand out; but before the righteous God he must condemn himself, and yield to his judgments. Thus he accepts the punishment of his sin.

And good men, when they themselves suffer, are anxious that others should not be led to suffer with them. He compelled none; those whose hearts were with Absalom, to Absalom let them go, and so shall their doom be.

Thus Christ enlists none but willing followers. David cannot bear to think that Ittai, a stranger and an exile, a proselyte and a new convert, who ought to be encouraged and made easy, should meet with hard usage.

But such value has Ittai for David's wisdom and goodness that he will not leave him. He is a friend indeed, who loves at all times, and will adhere to us in adversity. Let us cleave to the Son of David, with full purpose of heart, and neither life nor death shall separate us from his love.

Death and burial of Absalom

2 Samuel 18:9-17

And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away.

And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak. And Joab said unto the man that told him, and, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? And I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle.

And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.

Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me.

Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak.

And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him. And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people.

And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent.

Absalom's Army Defeated

How does David render good for evil! Absalom would have only David smitten; David would have only Absalom spared. This seems to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God, and God's mercy to man. Now the Israelites see what it is to take counsel against the Lord and his anointed.

Absalom is slain

Let young people look upon Absalom, hanging on a tree, accursed, forsaken of heaven and earth; there let them read the Lord's abhorrence of rebellion against parents. Nothing can preserve men from misery and contempt, but heavenly wisdom and the grace of God.

David's mourning for Absalom

2 Samuel 18:33

And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

David's Over-Sorrow

By directing David to give God thanks for his victory, Ahimaaz prepared him for the news of his son's death. The more our hearts are fixed and enlarged, in thanksgiving to God for our mercies, the better disposed we shall be to bear with patience the afflictions mixed with them.

Some think David's wish arose from concern about Absalom's everlasting state; but he rather seems to have spoken without due thought.

He is to be blamed for showing so great fondness for a graceless son. Also for quarrelling with Divine justice. And for opposing the justice of the nation, which, as king, he had to administer, and which ought to be preferred before natural affection.

The best men are not always in a good frame; we are apt to over-grieve for what we over-loved. But while we learn from this example to watch and pray against sinful indulgence, or neglect of our children, may we not, in David, perceive a shadow of the Saviour's love, who wept over, prayed for, and even suffered death for mankind, though vile rebels and enemies.

2 Samuel 19:1-8

And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son.

And the people gat those by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!

And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines;

In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hates thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regard neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.

Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now.

Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent.

Joab Causes David to Cease Mourning

To continue to lament for so bad a son as Absalom, was very unwise, and very unworthy. Joab censures David, but not with proper respect and deference to his sovereign.

A plain case may be fairly pleaded with those above us, and they may be reprov'd for what they do amiss, but it must not be with rudeness and insolence. Yet David took the reproof and the counsel, prudently and mildly.

Timely giving way, usually prevents the ill effects of mistaken measures.

Children of Absalom

2 Samuel 14:27

And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance.

Nothing is said of Absalom's wisdom and piety. All here said of him is, that he was very handsome.

May the Lord grant us the beauty of holiness, and the adorning of a meek and quiet spirit! Only those who fear God are truly happy. Poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable.

Absalom make for himself a pillar.

2 Samuel 18:18

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.

Let young people look upon Absalom, hanging on a tree, accursed, forsaken of heaven and earth; there let them read the Lord's abhorrence of rebellion against parents. Nothing can preserve men from misery and contempt, but heavenly wisdom and the grace of God.

Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Today, it appears that many people worship the creature rather than the creator.

For forgiveness, all people must look the Christ of the cross.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Verse Concept: Matthew Henry's Concept Bible Commentary.

