

The Conspiracy of Absalom

Lesson Scope: 2 Samuel 13 through 18

Lesson Focus

Nathan the prophet had predicted the rise of violence in the house of David (12:11). This was not so much a pronouncement of judgment on David as it was a statement of the results of certain choices David and his house had made.

David's own failure to deal with Amnon (13:21) and Absalom (13:33-39) fostered the treasonous action in chapter 15. Absalom had been undermining David's authority for some time already by his show of assumed royalty and criticism of David's system of justice. King David would find that appeasing the demands of the self-willed leads to chaos. Absalom made plenty of wrong choices because of his hatred and pride. But he still had the opportunity to make right decisions.

Rebellion sets individuals in opposition to God-established authority. Without repentance, rebellion leads to a tragic end.

The issue of rebellion in this lesson is relevant to our times because it is an inherent part of our fallen nature. Insisting upon receiving one's "rights" and engaging in alternate lifestyles are bringing confusion to our society.

Absalom illustrates the pomp, pride, and self-advancement that are so highly regarded in worldly society. Set this in contrast to the peace, joy, and order in life that we enjoy by allowing the beauty of Jesus to be seen in us. Truly, like the man who dyed clothes for a living, we can say, "We live to dye, and dye to live. The more we live, the more we dye, and the more we dye, the more we live."

Lesson Aim: To see the traits and the tragedy of rebellion.

Theme Verse: 1 Samuel 15:23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Lesson Text

"So Absalom Stole the Hearts"

2 Samuel 14:28-33 ²⁸ So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face. ²⁹ Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come. ³⁰ Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. ³¹ Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto *his* house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire? ³² And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? *it had been* good for me *to have been* there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be *any* iniquity in me, let him kill me. ³³ So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

2 Samuel 15:1-12 ¹ And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. ² 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. ³ And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters *are* good and right; but *there is* no man *deputed* of the king to hear thee. ⁴ 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! ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. ⁸ For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. ⁹ And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. ¹⁰ But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of

Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. ¹¹ And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, *that were* called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. ¹² And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, *even* from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.

"O Absalom, My Son, My Son!"

2 Samuel 17:14 ¹⁴ And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite *is* better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom. 2 Samuel 18:6-10 ⁶ So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim; ⁷ Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand *men*. ⁸ For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And a certain man saw *it*, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak.

2 Samuel 18:15 ¹⁵ And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.

2 Samuel 18:33 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!

Questions for Study

"So Absalom Stole the Hearts"

1. What means did Absalom use to get his own way?
2. What did Absalom do to increase his following?
3. What happens when the rebellious receive what they demand?
4. How does rebellion grow in our hearts? in a group?
5. What can we do to help stop a spirit of rebellion?

"O Absalom, My Son, My Son!"

6. What assured the defeat of Absalom's armies?
7. Why do the rebellious cause so much sorrow?
8. How do the rebellious today reap for their actions?

Analyzing the Passage

Through the good graces of his father, David, Absalom returned by stages from exile. He had fled to his mother's people in Geshur after having Amnon killed. Absalom was the only son of Maacah, daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur. (Compare 2 Samuel 3:3 and 13:37-38.)

Absalom's ingratitude and treachery stand in stark contrast to his father's love for him. Joab had contrived to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem (14:1-21), but as our lesson begins, he had not yet been allowed to see the king. When Absalom had Joab's grain field burned, he quickly gained what he wanted—Joab's attention, and with that he demanded to see David for his pardon or his execution. David pardoned him with a kiss.

Absalom's display of chariots, horses, and footmen (15:1) was an ancient practice of dignitaries. By this he showed that he was assuming the state of a prince, which David evidently was willing to tolerate. Ambition, in addition to revenge, may have figured in, in the killing of his elder brother, Amnon.

For some reason, David was not providing adequate personnel to receive those who came to him for judgment (15:2-5), or so Absalom thought. He took advantage of this to promote himself as a hero in charge of an alternate jurisdiction. Ultimately, he also proposed and aspired to an alternate kingdom (15:7-12).

God's sovereignty is evident in the defeat of Ahithophel's counsel through Hushai's influence (15:31 17:14).

Principles and Applications

"So Absalom Stole the Hearts"

1. A rebellious person refuses to accept responsibility for his own actions and circumstances (14:28-30). He does not see that his unethical behavior is displeasing to God, and he uses excuses to justify it. "Someone else said or did something that made me respond as I did." "I didn't have a fair chance." "My parents did this," or "My church leaders did

that." So run the excuses. But God views it differently.

2. A rebellious person ruthlessly pursues his own agenda (14:30). He challenges others, and his radical actions intimidate others into granting his wishes because they fear reprisal. He views other people as puppets he can manipulate to serve his own selfish interests.

3. A pretense of loyalty and humility often accompanies rebellion (14:33). A person who is concealing a rebellious heart may learn to say and do the right things, but in a spiritual church, this is difficult to do for long. In contrast, a true Christian is transparent; he is not a good "performer." He is willing to acknowledge publicly both his failings and his dependence on God.

4. Pride and a lust for power mark the rebellious (15:1-4). As a former exile and murderer, Absalom had no legitimate right to live like a prince and dream of being a judge in Israel. His inexperience and inconsistencies disqualified him. A godly man recognizes the responsibility and accountability that go with leadership. He does not want a position unless God places him there.

5. The rebellious seek the support of other dissatisfied people (15:5-6). When individuals refuse to fit into a Scriptural church setting, they rally around others who have grievances. They convince each other that their cause is right, often reflecting against God-ordained leadership for their supposed lack of understanding.

6. The rebellious sometimes cloak their evil intentions with religious pretense (15:7-9). The lack of godly fear that goes with rebellion allows a person to lie and deceive. A rebellious person may use a good thing, like going to church, to hide his real intentions. His only hope is a changed heart through repentance.

7. The illicit program of the rebellious presents a corrupting appeal both to the unwitting and to the dissatisfied (15:10-12). Those involved in illicit movements usually have varying degrees of commitment. Some do not know any better; others are self-deceived and indifferent to what is right. Our defense against becoming caught unwittingly in a movement of rebellion is to be thoroughly grounded in the Word and fully satisfied in the love of God.

"O Absalom, My Son, My Son!"

8. The rebellious become unable to distinguish between truth and error (17:14). A rebellious person becomes so caught up with himself and his

activities that he cannot see his way clearly. Right and wrong become gray instead of black and white. Therefore, he forgets to inquire of the Lord.

9. Rebellion causes much grief and shame and ends in destruction and death (18:15, 33). The rebellious often attack those who could help them most. They leave behind them a trail of pain and heartache. Finally, they prove themselves "unworthy of everlasting life" (Acts 13:46) and are cut off eternally from the righteous. "He, that being often re-proved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1).

Important Teachings

1. A rebellious person refuses to accept responsibility for his own actions and circumstances (14:28-30).
2. A rebellious person ruthlessly pursues his own agenda (14:30).
3. A pretense of loyalty and humility often accompanies rebellion (14:33).
4. Pride and a lust for power mark the rebellious (15:1-4).
5. The rebellious seek the support of other dissatisfied people (15:5-6).
6. The rebellious sometimes cloak their evil intentions with religious pretense (15:7-9).
7. The illicit program of the rebellious presents a corrupting appeal both to the unwitting and to the dissatisfied (15:10-12).
8. The rebellious become unable to distinguish between truth and error (17:14).
9. Rebellion causes much grief and shame and ends in destruction and death (18:15, 33).

Answers to Questions

1. What means did Absalom use to get his own way?

Absalom used intimidation by burning Joab's field. He pretended humility when he bowed on his face to the ground before the king. He used flattery to win the hearts of the people. He feigned spiritual interest by claiming that his purpose for going to Hebron was to fulfill a vow.

2. What did Absalom do to increase his following?

First, he stole the hearts of the people by flattery, leading them to believe that he had more interest in their welfare than their rightful king

did. He organized support throughout the land, including innocent people who did not know what it was all about. He solicited influential people like Ahithophel.

3. What happens when the rebellious receive what they demand?

Usually, when rebellion is rewarded, the rebels demand more. They respect only force, and they despise the weakness of those who yield to them. Continual appeasement is a road to anarchy.

4. How does rebellion grow in our hearts? in a group?

Rebellion grows in our hearts if we do not check the pride of life that is so native to our carnal nature. Rebellion will grow in our hearts if we do not properly respect authority.

A rebellious person spreads an attitude and spirit of rebellion to others. Soon they aggressively promote the cause, and more are influenced to sympathize with it.

5. What can we do to help stop a spirit of rebellion?

If we hear unjust criticism of the church or its leaders, we should rebuke the critic. If administration is lacking, we should give our concerns to the leaders with the attitude that we want to help them build the church.

6. What assured the defeat of Absalom's armies?

The Lord was against him. Although Absalom had many times more men, the natural elements (the woods) destroyed more than did David's men.

7. Why do the rebellious cause so much sorrow?

The rebellious spurn the opportunities God gives them to repent. They fall far short of what their parents, leaders, and God want for them. They are lost and doomed to hell.

8. How do the rebellious today reap for their actions?

The Lord departs from them. The Spirit's conviction is quenched in them, and they are lost to God and the church. Even in this life, they often reap the consequences of living after the passions of the flesh. They experience confusion, discontent, and a "fearful looking for of judgment" (Hebrews 10:27).

Summarizing the Lesson

"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft." It is choosing to side with Satan. People who resist godly authority seldom see it that way, but God does. Although rebellion may be tolerated for a while, none can resist God

successfully. God is sovereign, and all His enemies will finally be dashed in pieces (Psalm 2:9).

Research Guide

1. Read the entire lesson scope to better understand the movements behind the lesson.
2. History reports the strength of Absalom's conspiracy as tens of thousands against about four thousand with David.
3. Many Scriptures show the course and effects of rebellion—Israel's response to the spies' report (Numbers 13:26-14:45); Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16); King Saul (1 Samuel 15:1-23); and King Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:18-25:7).