

ABSALOM'S REBELLION

BIBLE TEXT: II Samuel 15:1-17; 18:1-33; Psalm 3:1-8

LESSON 241 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the LORD sustained me" (Psalm 3:5).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

2 Samuel 15:1-17

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.

¹³ And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.

¹⁴ And David said unto all his servants that *were* with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not *else* escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

A Handsome Prince

David ruled all the kingdom of Israel with great success for many years, but there were times of sadness during his reign. One great tragedy in his life happened when his own son, Absalom, revolted against him and tried to take the kingdom for himself.

The handsome crown prince had always been admired by the Israelites, so it was not hard for him to win their hearts. He would ride through the streets of Jerusalem with his followers in chariots drawn by fine horses, and many servants running ahead to clear the way and to announce his coming. No doubt great crowds would gather to watch him pass, and would wave their arms and shout to him: "Long live the prince!"

But this popularity was not enough for Absalom. He wanted to be king and to receive all the glory that went with such an office. He was the eldest of David's living children, and next in line of succession to the throne; but he may have felt that God was going to appoint someone else to be the next king, or he may have been impatient while waiting for his father to die. So Absalom began to plan to take the throne from King David.

The Plot

In the early days it had been the custom for the judges and elders of Israel to sit in the gates of their cities and towns to hear all the troubles and problems of their people. In this way they could get acquainted with their subjects, and settle the differences so there would be harmony among them. It was this position that Absalom now took for himself. Whenever people would come to the city to see the king, Absalom would meet them at the gate and ask them to tell him their troubles. He would be very sympathetic, and agree that the complainer was in the right.

Absalom was a real politician and knew how to work on the emotions of the people. He made the Israelites feel that they were being neglected by the king, and he almost wept when he said: "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!" Those who would bow to him, he would even kiss. People love attention, and in this way Absalom won the hearts of the people away from his father to himself.

Revolt

Years went by until the day came that Absalom felt he was strong enough to overthrow his father's government. One day he went to David and told him he must go to Hebron to pay a vow. His father did not suspect his treachery, and told him to go in peace.

When Absalom left Jerusalem he took with him 200 men, and also sent spies throughout all the land of Israel to tell them that the time had come for a revolution. When they would hear the sound of the trumpet they would know that Absalom was ruler in Israel. As an added precaution, Absalom had taken with

overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.

¹⁵ And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants *are ready to do* whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.

¹⁶ And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, *which were* concubines, to keep the house.

¹⁷ And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off.

2 Samuel 18:1-33

¹ And David numbered the people that *were* with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.

² And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also.

³ But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now *thou art* worth ten thousand of us: therefore now *it is* better that thou succour us out of the city.

⁴ And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.

⁵ And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, *Deal* gently for my sake with the young man, *even* with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom.

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.

¹¹ 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

him Ahithophel, King David's chief adviser. Ahithophel had been a man of God, and the words he spoke were God-directed. In spite of Absalom's sinful heart he still wanted God's help in his rebellion. Absalom's plans all seemed to work out just right for him, and a great army gathered to him at Hebron, and prepared to fight against David in Jerusalem.

David's Flight

David was heartbroken when he learned what his beloved son had done. One of his own family had deceived him and turned against him!

David knew he would not be safe in Jerusalem, so he gathered his many servants about him, and prepared to evacuate. And who do you suppose went with him? Not the Israelites for whom he had done so much, but the Pelethites and Cherethites, men of the Philistines; and the Gittites, who had but recently come to Jerusalem. David told their leader, Ittai, that he and his people should not risk their lives to help him, but Ittai answered, "As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be." His words remind us of what Ruth, the Moabitess, told her mother-in-law: "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

The Jews' Rejection

God had called the nation of Israel to be His own peculiar people. But they refused to serve Him, and the Gentiles found that salvation was open also to them. Many of them appreciated it and came to the Lord. Ruth had been a Gentile; so were these Philistines who stood by David. They received the blessing of God for standing by His people.

When the Jews rejected Christ, He wept over Jerusalem. Why had they not accepted the message of salvation He came to bring? If they could only understand the judgment that awaited them, surely they would cry unto Him to be saved! But instead, they crucified Him.

It was at the foot of that same mountain, where David now walked, that Jesus later poured out His soul in agony on that last night, for His faithless people. David and his followers walked barefooted, with heads bowed, weeping as they went. They had been rejected by their own people!

David's Friend

As the exiles continued their journey into the wilderness they found along the way, here and there, a few who had not followed Absalom. Among them was Hushai, who was also a friend and adviser to David. David sent Hushai to the court of Absalom to act as a spy, and also to give false advice to Absalom. The news was to be brought to David by way of the priests who had remained in Jerusalem.

The Levites had wanted to follow David out of the city, and take along the Ark of God. But David had told them to return to the Tabernacle and remain there, for surely God would keep His Ark safe. And if this uprising was not David's fault, God would bring him back in safety, too. But if David had sinned, and this trouble had come as punishment, he did not want the Ark of God to suffer with him.

David's Trust

would have given thee ten *shekels* of silver, and a girdle.

¹² 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.

¹³ 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*.

¹⁴ 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.

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

¹⁶ And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people.

¹⁷ 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.

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.

¹⁹ Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies.

²⁰ And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead.

²¹ Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran.

²² Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?

²³ But howsoever, *said he*, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cush.

²⁴ And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone.

²⁵ And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he *be* alone, *there is* tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near.

²⁶ And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the

Through all these trying times, David kept his faith in God. It was at this time that he wrote Psalm 3. He was not afraid of the thousands who were going to battle against him; and in the midst of all the turmoil, treachery, and intrigue, he could say, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me" (Psalm 3:5).

Absalom in Jerusalem

As soon as Absalom heard that David had left the city, he and his armies moved into Jerusalem. There he made ready to follow his father into battle. Ahithophel advised that David and his men would be tired from the move, and now would be the time to strike and defeat them quickly.

Absalom also asked advice of Hushai. Here was Hushai's opportunity to help his friend David. He reasoned that David and his men would be greatly aroused because of the mischief done them, and they would be fierce as a mother bear whose babies have been taken from her. And Absalom must surely know that his father was still a mighty warrior, and would not easily be defeated. Hushai advised Absalom to wait until David's feelings had cooled, and in the meantime assemble a vast army from all the tribes of Israel to make the battle sure of victory. God had sent this advice to defeat Absalom's armies, but Absalom took it, and did not immediately start out to fight David.

Ahithophel was so angry that his advice had been turned down, that he went home and set his house in order, and then committed suicide. He had been a man who had once listened to the wisdom of God, but after he turned his back upon the righteous cause and sold himself to sin, he became hopeless and went to a suicide's grave. What a warning we should see in that: never to turn from God and backslide. We might never have another opportunity to repent. What a tragedy it would be to have once known the love of God, and then to be forever lost!

The Clash

David was still a skillful warrior, and he soon had his army organized into three companies, and they were ready for Absalom when he came. The field of battle was rugged country with dense forests. In the first day of battle 20,000 men perished, "and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured."

In the midst of battle Absalom became separated from his army, and as he rode along on his mule his head caught fast in the branches of a tree. The mule went on without him.

There was poor Absalom hanging in a tree, and one of the soldiers from David's army saw him. He carried the news to his commander, Joab, and Joab asked why he had not killed Absalom. The soldier said that he had heard David plead with his men to be kind to Absalom, so he would not think of hurting him.

Joab, however, was not so thoughtful. He considered Absalom a revolter against the true government; and whether or not he was the king's son, he should be destroyed. He took three darts and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, and he and his men cut him down and buried him in a pit. They piled a great heap of stones over the body.

Thus ended the revolution against David's government, and the armies went home.

David's Grief

News of the victory was carried to David by two runners.

porter, and said, Behold *another* man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings.

²⁷ And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He *is* a good man, and cometh with good tidings.

²⁸ And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed *be* the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.

²⁹ And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and *me* thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what *it was*.

³⁰ And the king said *unto him*, Turn aside, *and* stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.

³¹ And, behold, Cushie came; and Cushie said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.

³² And the king said unto Cushie, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushie answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do *thee* hurt, be as *that* young man *is*.

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!

Psalm 3:1-8

¹ LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many *are* they that rise up against me.

² Many *there be* which say of my soul, *There is* no help for him in God. Selah.

³ But thou, O LORD, *art* a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

⁴ I cried unto the LORD with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. Selah.

⁵ I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.

⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set *themselves* against me round about.

⁷ Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies *upon* the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

⁸ Salvation *belongeth* unto the LORD: thy blessing *is* upon thy people. Selah.

The first thing David asked was about the safety of Absalom. One of the runners answered: "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." David understood that his son was dead, and he went to his room alone to mourn over him: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The people of Israel who had followed David felt very sad. They thought they were serving David faithfully by defending him against the traitor, and now it seemed they had done the wrong thing. Joab boldly went to David and warned him to show appreciation to the Israelites who had defended him, or they would all turn against him. David realized his responsibility to his people, and he put aside his personal feelings and went to sit in the gate of the city to comfort the people.

Absalom had been the son of the king, with every advantage in life. He had been rich and good-looking. He had known about God, and had had the favor of the people. But rather than use these gracious favors to help others, he selfishly thought only of himself. He dishonored his father, disregarded God, and as a result went to the grave in shame, to be forever lost. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

QUESTIONS

- 1 Who was Absalom?
- 2 Describe his looks and actions which caused people to love him.
- 3 What did Absalom desire?
- 4 How did he work out his scheme?
- 5 What did David do when he heard of the trouble?
- 6 How was Absalom captured and slain?
What are the wages of sin?