

2 Samuel 15:13-37 & Psalm 3 • Dealing with Betrayal

Introduction

There is much more to be presented in Scripture concerning this betrayal by Absalom; this is essentially just the beginning. But how we deal with such crises in the early stages often dictates the outcome. Ideally, a right response from the outset prevents difficult and even painful necessary corrections when we are much deeper in the situation. After looking at the literal historical event, we will study what was provided by the Holy Spirit through David as essentially a commentary on this event shedding light on what transpired spiritually. It is most important to note, however, that once again the way the world would typically advocate dealing with a problem is not the way God so dictates through His Word. Even when we are absolutely in the right from a legal and perhaps even moral point of view, we must still behave as new creations in Christ who no longer embrace the world's ways.

¹³Then a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom."

¹⁴David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise and let us flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."

¹⁵Then the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king chooses."

¹⁶So the king went out and all his household with him. But the king left ten concubines to keep the house. ¹⁷The king went out and all the people with him, and they stopped at the last house.

¹⁸Now all his servants passed on beside him, all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come with him from Gath, passed on before the king.

[Read 15:13-18]

Q: Why should this report about "the hearts of the men of Israel" be important in the way that it is phrased?

A: The beginning of this chapter documents Absalom's method of creating opposition to David and support for himself. It is an indication that he has succeeded in stealing something which did not belong to him.

*In this manner Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom **stole away the hearts** of the men of Israel. — 2 Samuel 15:6*

Q: What was Absalom's overall approach according to the preceding v.1-12?

A: Absalom assumed the outward appearance of a king, and instead of winning over others by his own deeds and accomplishments, sows deception in order to reap division. He uses external appearances to leverage an alternative interpretation of the truth to glorify himself.

Q: Is David only concerned with what Absalom will do to him personally?

A: David expresses equal concern for those supporting him and the whole city of Jerusalem regardless of who does or does not still follow him.

Application: How well do we take into consideration the collateral damage of our spiritual battles? Does our response to a personal attack take into consideration the effect it will inevitably have on others?

Q: What, exactly, is a "concubine" and what was the purpose in leaving ten of them behind?

A: At that time, a concubine is best thought of as wives who have a kind of second-class status, but are nonetheless devoted to the king alone. They remain at his instruction to take care of the palace and possessions left behind.

Application: A true spiritual leader, even in times of personal attacks, does not completely abandon the ministry in a kind of "scorched earth" maneuver. As much as possible, he protects what God set in place.

Q: In v.17, why did they stop "at the last house"?

A: This appears to be a place where David can stage—that is, properly organize all those accompanying him as they proceed to leave Jerusalem in a structured flight, rather than as a panicked mob. It indicates applying order to an otherwise confusing situation.

Q: What is special about the six hundred listed as David's core accompaniment?

A: These had been with David since his refuge with Achish the king of Gath (1 Sam. 27:2; 30:9) who formed under David in desperate times (1 Sam. 22:2) and already proved themselves in this kind of situation.

Application: *Biblical spiritual leaders are always concerned for others even when they are the main target. They do not enlist everyone to join them in the fight, but only those who have a proven track record of similar faithfulness to others and the ministry.*

¹⁹Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why will you also go with us? Return and remain with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile; return to your own place. ²⁰You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander with us, while I go where I will? Return and take back your brothers; mercy and truth be with you."

²¹But Ittai answered the king and said, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be."

²²Therefore David said to Ittai, "Go and pass over." So Ittai the Gittite passed over with all his men and all the little ones who were with him.

²³While all the country was weeping with a loud voice, all the people passed over. The king also passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over toward the way of the wilderness.

²⁴Now behold, Zadok also came, and all the Levites with him carrying the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar came up until all the people had finished passing from the city. ²⁵The king said to Zadok, "Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back again and show me both it and His habitation."

[Read 15:19-23]

Q: Is there something special about the name "Ittai"?

A: Especially considered in the context of this exchange, it appears that "Ittai" as meaning "nearness of the Lord" may also be a wordplay with the Hebrew words meaning "with us".

Q: What is highlighted about Ittai's status and situation?

A: More than his not being ethnically Jewish, he is politically alone in being "an exile". David can neither provide him a place in his now crumbling administration, nor provide the protection of asylum a political refugee would normally be seeking.

Q: If we peek at future references to Ittai in Scripture, why might he be someone important to David's situation?

A: He has military expertise. In 2 Samuel 18 David will place a third of all his troops under Ittai's command.

Q: How do we know that Ittai is also a very spiritual individual?

A: His oath in v.21 is made in the name of God, not by either his own or even David's name.

Application: *Ittai can be seen as a type of Christian in his commitment to David, the ultimate Old Testament representation of Christ: "whether for death or life, there also your servant will be".*

Q: Why might this flight from Jerusalem taking a route "over the brook Kidron" sound familiar to us?

A: After being betrayed by Judas, Christ takes this route with His followers out of Jerusalem, across the Kidron, and to Gethsemane.

Application: *Biblical spiritual followers are always concerned for their leaders even when they may become the main target. They are drawn near because of their faithfulness to God's Word and ways.*

[Read 15:24-29]

Q: How might this relate to what took place in the not too distant past?

A: David is not repeated the mistake made by Eli and his sons (1 Sam. 4-5) when they rashly took the Ark of the Covenant into battle and subsequently lost it.

Q: How does this especially set David apart spiritually from what took place previously?

A: They had previously taken out the Ark with the thought that this would guarantee victory in spite of their current spiritual condition or even taking into

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²⁶But if He should say thus, 'I have no delight in you,' behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him."

²⁷The king said also to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace and your two sons with you, your son Ahimaaz and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. ²⁸See, I am going to wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me."

²⁹Therefore Zadok and Abiathar returned the ark of God to Jerusalem and remained there.

³⁰And David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot. Then all the people who were with him each covered his head and went up weeping as they went.

³¹Now someone told David, saying, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom."

And David said, "O LORD, I pray, make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness."

³²It happened as David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, that behold, Hushai the Archite met him with his coat torn and dust on his head.

³³David said to him, "If you pass over with me, then you will be a burden to me. ³⁴But 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 I will now be your servant,' then you can thwart the

consideration God's will. David's reasons stated in v.25-26 shows that David understands that the outcome depends entirely on God's will and consideration of David's spiritual condition.

Application: *It is never about the things of God but always the condition of one's own heart acting according to God's will.*

Q: How is this further affirmed by David's assertion, "If I find favor in the sight of the Lord"?

A: He refuses to treat the Ark as some kind of good luck talisman or some kind of external approval in the eyes of men by their seeing this physically co-located symbol of God's authority. It is actually a greater statement of faith in God.

Q: Why might the return of Zadok, Abiathar, Ahimaaz and Jonathan probably be unquestioningly received by Absalom and those following him in Jerusalem?

A: They were all Levite Kohathite priests who were specifically charged with the care and transport of the Ark. (Num. 4:4-6)

Q: What might be noteworthy about David's plan at this point?

A: Just as the evacuation was orderly and organized, he likewise sets things up so he can be in the best possible situation to obtain further critical information about this situation.

Application: *A spiritual crisis does not warrant crisis behavior, and especially does not repeat unlearned lessons from the past.*

[Read 15:30-31]

Q: From a worldly point of view, how might David's public reaction be seen as weak or lacking perceived leadership?

A: David's mourning and weeping is the opposite of the world's view of needing a strong, hard-hearted response more in the character of retribution.

Q: How does David's godly request contrast to the way he has dealt with this situation to this point?

A: Whereas David strives to keep things orderly and organized so as to be in the best position to act when he has clear directions from God, he requests confusion for the opposition.

Application: *Spiritual leaders are always most concerned for the spiritual consequences both for the moment and for what is anticipated to come.*

[Read 15:32-37]

Q: How do we know the spiritual condition of Hushai?

A: He not only has the same attitude of mourning and grief as David as he "met him with his coat torn and dust on his head" (v.32), but he meets David at a place of worship.

Application: *True spiritual followers do not mimic their leaders, but authentically join in the same spiritual approach to their shared situation.*

Q: What is David's dual goal?

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counsel of Ahithophel for me. ³⁵Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So it shall be that whatever you hear from the king's house, you shall report to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. ³⁶Behold their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son and Jonathan, Abiathar's son; and by them you shall send me everything that you hear."

³⁷So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

A: To gather as much good information as possible going forward while at the same time sowing confusion among the opposition.

Q: So what took place between v.1 and v.37 of this chapter?

A: David, being warned of what was coming, acted in a coordinated, organized manner so that by the time he had withdrawn from Jerusalem, he was organized around a proactive plan and organization in the best possible position to deal with the problem, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem to effect his takeover.

Application: *Biblical spiritual leaders understand when and where to make a stand for the Lord, and it is not always require a no compromise stand to the death. This is because they are more concerned spiritually for all parties involved than for their own personal standing.*

Overall Application

Q: How has David ultimately responded to the overall situation?

1. He recognized he could only survive by leaving because of the influence of the betrayer over the people's hearts.
2. He left a contingent to maintain order as much as possible; he did not attempt to damage or destroy anything just because he was leaving.
3. His escape was orderly effectively administered, not rooted in panic.
4. His public and personal response maintained the right spiritual demeanor and priorities.
5. He did not repeat the same mistakes of those in the past.
6. He put himself in the best position possible to be further informed, seeking not just God's ways to deal with this, but God's will.

Application: Even in times of crisis, a true shepherd never forgets he is first and foremost a shepherd, someone more concerned for the sheep than himself.

A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

¹O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!

Many are rising up against me.

²Many are saying of my soul,

"There is no deliverance for him in God." Selah.

[Read Ps. 3:1-2]

Q: What is the context for which David wrote this Psalm?

A: This is the Psalm David wrote which gives insight into his character during this crisis and serves as a scriptural commentary on the historical event.

Q: What is David the most concerned about in this situation?

A: He is most concerned about his soul—that is, his spiritual condition.

Q: Why was this a literal issue raised directly to David at that time?

A: In the course of his flight, Shimei cursed David, attributing this situation as coming about directly by the hand of God. The popular opinion that David had experienced a falling out with God was a real accusation and not something simply a product of David's imagination.

⁷Thus Shimei said when he cursed, "Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! ⁸The LORD has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!" — 2 Samuel 16:7–8

³But You, O LORD, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my
head.
⁴I was crying to the LORD with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy
mountain. Selah.
⁵I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.
⁶I will not be afraid of ten thousands of
people
Who have set themselves against me
round about.

Q: How does this reveal something special about David's priorities?

A: He is not so much concerned for his present life being delivered, but rather in the end whether he will be spiritually delivered—that is, that God will rescue his eternal soul. David is more concerned about the mind of God than the actions of man.

Application: *In every circumstance, the most important outcome has to do with our soul, that we see the completion of the work of God's salvation.*

[Read v.3-6]

Q: How do these verses answer the question of David's spiritual state?

A: This is confirmation that he is still in a right relationship with God; it's more about the Lord than about David personally.

Q: List the ways in which David found assurance from God:

1. "...You...are a shield about me..." (v.3) Protection from God, in spite of the circumstances.
2. "...You...are...My glory..." (v.3) Not relying on one's self and reputation, but still working exclusively for God's glory alone in spite of the circumstances.
3. "...You...are...the One who lifts my head". (v.3) Spiritual encouragement sets everything in its right perspective in spite of the circumstances.
4. "...He answered me..." (v.4) God's response in contrast to man's accusations which are attempting to define the circumstances..
5. "...the LORD sustains me". (v.5) Not rescued yet, but faithful in spite of the circumstances.

Application: *How should each of these attributes be applied to any crisis in our own life? How have they occurred in such past situations for you personally?*

Q: Why is David's mention of sleep significant where his personal situation is concerned?

A: Absalom was pursuing David with 12,000 men (1 Sam. 17:1), and had even sent David a message concerning this very issue in a threat boasting of his pursuit.

¹⁶"Now therefore, send quickly and tell David, saying, 'Do not spend the night at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means cross over, or else the king and all the people who are with him will be destroyed.'" — 2 Samuel 17:16

Application: *David's confidence in God is so great that he never takes matters into his own hands, nor takes reciprocal actions based on what man says.*

Q: What is the spiritual result David experienced as a result of God's response? How does it contrast with his initial concern?

A: Initially those who have come out publicly against David claim that he is in spiritual trouble where God is concerned. Having been reassured by God, "*I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people*". (v.6) David's faith in God remains unwavering in spite of the opinions of man.

Application: *God's first response in even the most dire of earthly situations is often spiritual in order to reinforce what is most important on our part: faith in Him.*

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⁷Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!
For You have smitten all my enemies
on the cheek;
You have shattered the teeth of the
wicked.
⁸Salvation belongs to the LORD;
Your blessing be upon Your people!
Selah.

[Read v.7-8]

Q: How does this contrast with the opening of this Psalm?

A: It began with man's accusation, "There is no deliverance for him in God" (v.2), and ends with the reinforcement of David's faith so he can declare, "Salvation belongs to the LORD". (v.8)

Application: *Man's word must never be allowed to undermine the reality of God's Word.*

Q: How does David characterize God's response to the others pursuing him?

A: God has "smitten all my enemies" and "shattered the teeth of the wicked". (v.7)

Q: How is God dealing with the various factions which have come against David?

A: Those who have taken direct action, characterized as "enemies", have been dealt with by God directly; those who have taken spiritual action—that is, "the wicked" who because they attack verbally, have experienced a divine response in direct proportion to their character and actions in having their teeth shattered.

Application: *That which the unaided eye sees is far afield from the reality which is revealed by faith.*

¹⁵Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" ¹⁶So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." — 2 Kings 6:15–16

Application: *Trusting in God always results in the appropriate resolution because it a proportional response meted out by Him rather than our own flesh-based reaction.*

Overall Application

Although David was literally fleeing from a real, earthly threat to his life, he was even more focused on fleeing to God spiritually. He knew that in spite of the physical circumstances, the resolution would be spiritually determined. His enemies attempted to make additional claims that what David was experiencing was coming about by the hand of God in order to attack his faith when he needed it most.

- *What is our first response, even when the earthly circumstances are the most overwhelming?*
- *How long does it take us before we realize that such is a spiritual issue needing to be addressed spiritually?*
- *How well do we recognize that others, especially those aligned against us, do not actually speak for God but would have us falsely believe so?*
- *How well do our actions and faith affirm that salvation is actually from the Lord and cannot come about by other means, even our own self?*