

LESSON 12

MURDER AND INTRIGUE (2 SAMUEL 17–20)



Introduction

We find it hard to comprehend David’s life while living in exile, his whole world turned topsy-turvy. We wonder what thoughts must have run through his mind when he heard the atrocities his beloved son had committed with his concubines “in the sight of all Israel” (2 Samuel 16:22). Absalom—“father of peace”—his name no longer seems appropriate. Had David looked into Absalom’s eyes, he would not have found any peace there. Only hate and anger ruled his soul.

At the time of his rebellion, Absalom was David’s third son. He was extraordinarily handsome: “from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him” (2 Samuel 14:25). Absalom’s hair was thick and dark. Absalom believed he most certainly would inherit David’s kingdom, but then a new rival appeared. An infant son whom the prophet Nathan heralded with the name God gave the child—Jedidiah, “beloved of God.” This child, a late arrival, was God’s choice to succeed David (2 Samuel 12:24–25). Absalom coveted everything his father possessed. This man without blemish had a blemish: a heart turned away from God, a heart confused by the fire of envy—and “envy slays itself with its own arrows.”

The Bible calls David a man after God’s own heart (see Acts 13:22). He does not pray for the death of Absalom. Instead, he prays that Absalom’s advisors might give him poor advice (2 Samuel 15:31).

Absalom’s Advisors

Read 2 Samuel 17. David epitomizes the joy—even in times of great angst—of knowing what it means to receive God’s forgiveness. David’s adulterous relationship with Bathsheba brought him face-to-face with God’s forgiveness. How he longed to offer this forgiveness to Absalom. Perhaps this explains why David waited two years before giving Absalom an audience: he waited in hope that Absalom might come seeking God’s forgiveness for the murder of his half brother. Absalom’s soul hung in the balance between an eternity in heaven or hell.

149. Ahithophel’s plan called for a surprise attack on David using twelve thousand men.

Hushai’s plan called for a mass army with Absalom at its head. What plan might appeal most to someone like Absalom? Why?

150. Do you see God at work answering David’s prayer? If so, how?

151. What did David learn about prayer that applies to you?



The Death of Absalom

Read 2 Samuel 18:1–18. While Absalom gathered his forces to implement Hushai’s plan, David took refreshment at Mahanaim, northeast of Jerusalem on the east side of the Jordan River. David sent his troops off to war saying, “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.”

- 152.** How would you have dealt with Absalom’s uprising?
- 153.** How do the words “Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom” demonstrate David’s love for God? for his son?
- 154.** God granted David victory. While fleeing David’s forces, Absalom’s hair ensnared him in an oak tree. Who disobeyed David’s orders?
- 155.** In your mind, what is the significance of Absalom’s death prior to his receiving forgiveness from David? from God?

David Mourns

Read 2 Samuel 18:19–19:40. Joab ordered Absalom’s body tossed in a pit and marked only by a pile of rocks. David’s mourning finds words in 2 Samuel 18:33—“Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” Most likely, Absalom died without knowing God’s forgiveness.

- 156.** With this thought in mind, why might David have desired to take Absalom’s place?
- 157.** Do you think that the salvation of others is a priority for most Christians? Why or why not?

More Rebellion

Read 2 Samuel 19:41–20:26. David’s return to Jerusalem deteriorated into more fighting among the Israelites. A troublemaker named Sheba led a rebellion.

- 158.** Whom did David send to quell the revolt and what happened to him?
- 159.** Sheba fled to Abel of Beth-maacah, some twenty miles north of the Sea of Galilee. There Joab found him. What did the citizens of Abel of Beth-maacah do to prevent Joab from laying siege to their city?

God’s Word for Today

David loved and trusted in God. Indeed, David was a sinner, as we are, but he sought the Lord’s forgiveness and desired the salvation of souls—even those who turned against him—including his own son Absalom.

- 160.** Christ summed up God’s attitude toward forgiveness in Luke 23:34. How did David model God’s forgiveness?
- 161.** Do you know people—family, friends, co-workers, neighbors—who need to hear the Good News of God’s forgiveness? What might you do to bring this Good News to them?



In Closing

- Relate David's pardoning of his enemies to Christ's pardon from the cross.
- Think about how you might apply Matthew 5:43–44 to your life.
- Read 2 Samuel 21–24 to prepare for the next session.

Pray: Everlasting Father, Your Holy Word teaches us of Your forgiving love. Through Baptism, You rescued us from our sin; Your Holy Supper nourishes us. Now, teach us to carry Your Good News to many others. Amen.

