


The Saga of Absalom's Envy of David

1. It is important to observe the Davidic chart pedigree:

The Family of David	
Wives of David	Sons of David
Ahínoam	Ámnon (crown prince; assassinated by Ábsalom)
Ábigail	Dániel (aka Chíleab, died in youth)
Máacah	Ábsalom (KIA by Jóab) [& Daughter: Támar]
Hággith	Adōnījāh (executed by Sólomon for coup d'etat)
Ábital	Shephatīah
Églah	Íthream
Bathshéba	Adulterine, Sólomon, Shímea, Shōbab, Nāthan
Concubines: 	Íbhar, Elíshūa, Elíphelet, Nógah, Népheg, Japhía, Elíshama, Elíada, Elíphelet, Jérimoth

2. Amnon was the crown prince of Israel and the son of David and Ahínoam. Amnon's half siblings were Absalom and Tamar by David's wife Máacah.
3. Among these three—Amnon, Támar, and Absalom—a dramatic sequence of events occurred, touched off by Amnon's rape of Támar, David's failure to punish the crown prince for the crime, Absalom's revenge motivation, his disinformation campaign against his father that fomented a rebellion, the decision of David to vacate the palace, and a bloody military engagement in the Battle of Ephraim Forest that led to the death of Absalom.
4. To get a full synopsis of this sequence of events we turn to a source that summarizes this drama. Once done we will then take a close look at Absalom's propaganda campaign against his fathers' regime. We will, by doing so, expose what is occurring in client nation America is again nothing new under the sun nor was it in James's report in chapter 3.
5. We will note for our purposes the development of both jealousy and envy in the soul of Absalom which led to his rebellion against the crown. The details of how Absalom was motivated to declare war on the palace is a subject we have examined in the past.
6. Our purpose on this occasion is to examine the soul of Absalom, his development of mental-attitude sins of jealousy and envy, and his tactics to propagandize the people of Jerusalem against his father, King David.

Absalom was a great favorite of his father and of the people as well. His charming manners, his personal beauty, his insinuating ways, together with his love of pomp and royal pretensions, captivated the hearts of the people from the beginning. He lived in great style, drove in a magnificent chariot and had fifty men run before him. Such magnificence produced the desired effect upon the hearts of the young aristocrats of the royal city. (2 Samuel 15:1 ff)

When Amnon, his half-brother, ravished his sister Tamar, and David shut his eyes to the grave crime and neglected to administer proper punishment, Absalom became justly enraged, and quietly nourished his anger, but after the lapse of two years carried out a successful plan to avenge his sister's wrongs. He made a great feast for the king's sons at Baalhazor,⁵ to which, among others, Amnon came, only to meet his death at the hands of Absalom's servants (2 Samuel 13:1 ff)

To avoid punishment, he now fled to the court of his maternal grandfather in Geshur, where he remained three years, or until David had relented and condoned the murderous act of his impetuous plotting son. At the end of three years (2 Samuel 13:38) we find Absalom once more in Jerusalem. It was, however, two years later before he was admitted to the royal presence (2 Samuel 14:28).

Absalom, again reinstated, lost no opportunity to regain lost prestige, and having his mind made up to succeed his father upon the throne,⁶ he forgot the son in the politician. Full of insinuations and rich in promises, especially to the disgruntled and to those having grievances, imaginary or real, it was but natural that he should have a following.

⁵ About 15 miles north, northeast of Jerusalem.

⁶ This was Absalom's original sin of jealousy which later evolved into the sin of envy.



His purpose was clear, namely, to alienate as many as possible from the king, and thus neutralize his influence in the selection of a successor, for he fully realized that the court party, under the influence of Bathsheba, was intent upon having Solomon as the next ruler. By much flattery Absalom stole the hearts of many men in Israel (2 Samuel 15:6).⁷

7. The verse that closes 2 Samuel 14 reveals that David summoned Absalom to come to the palace and meet with him. As was the custom when having an audience with the king was to bow down before him with one's face toward the ground and David kissed him indicating a royal pardon. However, this did not suppress Absalom's envy since he has already decided to foment a rebellion.
8. The passage we want to examine for our study is Absalom's propaganda campaign in the streets of Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 15:1–6. It is in this passage that we discover Absalom's strategy.

2 Samuel 15:1 And it came to pass after this [**David's forgiveness of Absalom**] that Absalom prepared him a state chariot and horses, as well as fifty men as couriers to run ahead of him. (EXT)

1. This chapter opens with the phrase, "It came to pass after this." It is assumed that this context occurred immediately following the incident just described in chapter 14.
2. However, following his audience with David, Absalom had spent three years in exile in the Aramaean kingdom of Géshur, northeast of the Sea of Galilee.
3. He lived on the estate of his grandfather, Tálmaī, king of Géshur. The king's daughter, Máacah, was David's wife and the mother of Absalom and Támar.
4. During this period, Absalom gave much thought to the influence David's kiss meant to the people of Israel. He decided to capitalize on the gesture to assume he had returned to good standing with his father.
5. He had been living in the household of the King of Géshur and observed the culture of royalty. Those of the royal family rode in a chariot drawn by horses with an entourage.
6. Absalom adopted this grandiloquent image of royal authority and commissioned fifty conspirators to begin fomenting the rebellion.

⁷ W. W. Davies, "Absalom," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 1:23.



7. These men's job was to alert the people of Jerusalem that Absalom was coming back to town to present himself to the people.
8. This was Absalom's rhetorical veil. His strategy was to have the people believe he and David had reconciled. David had forgiven him, but he gave no thought to abdicating the throne.
9. In all his radiant glory and with his usual pomp and circumstance, Absalom rode into Jerusalem with the intent to win the souls of the people with an eye focused on undermining David's reputation.
10. His strategy was to begin a campaign of propagandizing the citizens of Jerusalem by use of his tongue. But what motivated that speech were mental attitude sins.
11. Through the initial aftermath of David's mishandling Amnon's rape of Tamar, Absalom nurtured a silent hatred of his brother. His sister had been violated and David's response was to, in essence, ignore it.
12. For two years, David did nothing to avenge Tamar's rape. During this time, Absalom allowed his hatred to evolve into murder lust. His target was Amnon. His trap was a family reunion at his sheep ranch located at Bāal Hāzor about 15 miles north of Jerusalem.
13. It was sheepshearing time and to have a party with his ranchers was typical. This provided a place to pull off his plot to murder his brother. He went to David to invite him to the affair which the king, expectedly, declined.
14. Absalom then asked David to allow all his brothers to attend which included all the royal sons: Adonijah, Shephatiah, Íthrēam, and Sólomon.
15. The entire male bloodline to the throne would be eyewitness to the assassination of the crown prince.
16. Absalom instructed his sheep herdsman to keep offering Amnon wine until he was intoxicated, at which point Absalom would give them these instructions, "... when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then put him to death" (2 Samuel 13:28).
17. At this point, all the king's sons mounted up and rode to Jerusalem. Jonadab reported to David that Amnon was dead which caused David to mourn.
18. Incidentally, David was the seventh and youngest son of Jesse. One of David's older brothers was Shímea, the third son of Jesse. Jónadab was Shimea's son. Jónadab's view was that he really should be third in line to be considered king of Israel rather than David, way down below at number seven.

(End JAS3-47. See JAS3-48 for continuation of study at p. 471.)



19. Therefore, Jonadab was envious of the entire Davidic line and was thus motivated by jealousy and envy to stir up conflict whenever possible.
20. Consequently, within the families of Jesse and David the common mental-attitude sins were jealousy and envy. These were certainly true in the soul of Absalom. He was the brains and the motivation for the rebellion brewing in Priest Nation Israel.
21. Following the assassination, Absalom fled to G^éshur, a small kingdom to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee where his father-in-law, Tálmai, was king. Absalom remained sequestered there for three years.
22. It is during this time that Absalom began to develop his strategy. He had sedition on his mind. His objective was to undermine David's authority motivated by envy.

Principle: Jealousy is directed toward another person's asset which he wishes to acquire, while envy is directed toward the individual person. In the latter case, he wishes to rob David of his power.

2 Samuel 15:2 Now Absalom would habitually rise up early in the morning, and stand by the side of the Castle Gate Road so that when anyone had a grievance and came to the king for a judicial decision, then Absalom called out to him and said, "Of what city are you?" And he would reply, "Your loyal subject is from one of the tribes of Israel." (EXT)

1. As far as the people of Israel and Jerusalem are concerned, Absalom and David are back on cordial terms with each other.
2. Absalom is brilliant, handsome, engaging, famous, cordial, well-liked by the people and is accepted as someone who can be trusted to hear the grievances of the people.
3. This encounter in verse 2 is not a situation that Absalom conducted for just a few days. It was his habitual practice day in and day out. The issues that concerned the citizens who appeared at the Castle Gate Road were legal ones that required a judicial decision from the king.
4. Prior to Saul becoming king of Israel, the Jews judicial issues were decided by the judges. The Book of Judges¹ covers this period. Once the people opted for a king, Saul and later David held the high office of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Israel.

¹ "The judges were military and civil leaders ruling during the time when the nation was a loose confederacy. Historically, the book serves to link the conquest of Palestine and the monarchy" (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* [Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1995], 372).

5. Notice in verse 2 that the reason these people were consistently arriving at the Castle Gate Road was because they “had a grievance and came to the king for a judicial decision.”
6. The word “grievance” is the masculine noun, רִיב (*riv*): “The word is used in a legal sense to refer to an argument or case made in one’s defense.”
7. What the people sought was a “judicial decision,” indicated by the masculine noun, מִשְׁפָּט (*mishpat*).

**Jurisprudence. One comes before the king or judge for a judicial decision (2 Samuel 15:2,6).
Legal Case. In 2 Samuel 15:4, this sense of *mishpat* is defined more precisely by association with רִיב *riv*, “lawsuit.”²**

8. The person who adjudicated these complaints was no longer a judge but the king who on this occasion was officially David. However, he was ignoring the legitimate complaints of the citizens of Israel.
9. David allows this because he is out of fellowship. He has made a series of poor decisions. He allowed the crown prince, Amnon, to get away with raping his daughter, Tamar. How disrespectful, how thoughtless, how irresponsible to let that pass! Yet he did.
10. Because of that failure, David allowed Absalom’s anger to metastasize into murder lust resulting in the assassination of Amnon. David again did nothing.
11. Unbelievably, David wrongly tried to make up with Absalom with an official kiss on his head, an act that communicated to the people that Absalom had been forgiven and his good standing with the king was restored.
12. As time passed, Absalom’s mental-attitude sins have evolved from resentment over to revenge motivation energized by the sins of jealousy and envy. His plot was designed to take down David.
13. At first, he was jealous of the fact that David was still king. His strategy was to become accepted by the people of Israel. David made another mistake by ignoring Absalom’s personal propaganda campaign at the castle gate.
14. Over a period of about seven years, David had systematically made a sequence of poor decisions that resulted in giving Absalom the power to foment rebellion.

² B. Johnson, “מִשְׁפָּט,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 9:89.



15. Every time Absalom met one of the men who appeared before him on the Castle Gate Road, he conducted an interview. Three examples are given: **(1)** “What city are you from?” (2 Samuel 15:2), **(2)** “Your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king” (2 Samuel 15:3), and **(3)** “Oh, that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit could come to me and I would give him justice” (2 Samuel 15:4).
16. The second question Absalom poses is designed to create doubt about David’s integrity and that of his administration. Absalom makes a comment that supports the man’s claims but in doing so he asserts that he is not getting the kind of attention from the king that he should.
17. These are typical tactics used by those out of power. Absalom is envious of David because of his many failures over the past seven years. His strategy is to engage in systematically using David’s failures as king to undermine his regime.
18. One of his initial tactics is to capitalize on the breakdown of administering justice. He has already started organizing what we refer to in the twenty-first century as a “mailing list.”
19. He didn’t have such a system that he could employ, but he opts for the best thing available . He finds out where each man lives. He establishes the fact he is a Jew; he learns from him which tribe he is a member, and the name of the community where he lives.
20. Over time he develops a contact list from which he can recruit campaign managers in each city and tribe. The tactic he uses to lure them in is noted in:
2 Samuel 15:3 Furthermore, Absalom would say to the man, “Look, your grievances are valid and legitimate, but you have no man representing you before the king to judge the case. (EXT)
1. Absalom plants the seed that David’s judicial system is not fair, the people’s rights are not being addressed, and their complaints are therefore being ignored.
2. He plants the seed that if Absalom was free to function as his ombudsman things would be different.
3. All that Absalom tells these fellow Israelites are legitimate observations. In my lifetime, I have observed the playing out of obviously unjust, unconstitutional, and therefore illegal acts by those in power in our national government.