

# Choices Have Consequences [Absalom's Rebellion]

By Pastor Matthew Black

**Text:** 2 Samuel 15

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**Series:** Life of David

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**Introduction:** Open your Bibles to **2 Samuel 15**. The title of tonight's message is: "Choices Have Consequences". My burden tonight is to confront you with your own personal responsibility for every action you take.

**Illustration:** Something we think is insignificant can cause major damage. Alaska officials, for example, recently revealed that a computer technician accidentally deleted data on a hard drive. Seemingly no trouble, the case took a bad turn when, attempting to recover the data from a backup tape, the state found the media unreadable. Recovery costs are estimated to exceed \$200,000.<sup>1</sup>

The consequences in the moral realm are just as significant. Unfortunately, the consequences of our choices are not always clear to us. Because we still have a sinful nature, you and I have an ability to close our eyes to the consequences of our choices. We can easily deny their existence. We can tell ourselves when we are doing wrong that "it will be ok" or "it will turn out alright" or "we ought not worry". We have an important opportunity this evening to see that choices have consequences.

This evening we are looking at one of the saddest sagas written in the Old Testament. Turn with me if you would as we read from **2 Samuel 15:1-37**. Before we begin tonight, let's pray.

[Prayer for Guidance]

**Background:** David's reign was preceded by approximately 10 years of chaos in the wilderness being hunted by Saul. He planted a lot of good choices during that time that he later reaped. His reign as King is known as the "Golden Age of Israel". We are going to see tonight that the last year of David's life, the last year of his reign is utterly chaotic because of a terrible choice he made one day. That choice is what cost David his kingdom in the very last year of his life.

David reigned 40 years total. We learn in **2 Samuel 15:7** that it was in the 40<sup>th</sup> year of David's reign, his last year in office, that Absalom's rebellion occurred. So David is now 70 years old, and is beginning the last year of his earthly journey.

Absalom would have been born when David was in Hebron, in the first year of David's reign. We know that because **2 Samuel 15:7** says, "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". The forty years are referring to David's. According to **2 Samuel 3:2-3**, Absalom was born to David during his time at Hebron.

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Eckel. "10 Things to Know about Automated Backup", ZDNet Asia, Thursday, April 26, 2007.

The overall chronology of David's reign is something like this:<sup>2</sup>

Event	Year of Reign	David's Age
Hebron	Years 1-7	30-37
Jerusalem (before sin)	Years 8-19	38-49
David's sin with Bathsheba	Year 19	49 <sup>3</sup>
Mephibosheth brought to David	Year 20	50
Amnon rapes Tamar	Year 31	61
Absalom kills Amnon	Year 33	63
Absalom in exile	Years 33-35	63-65
Absalom returns to Jerusalem	Year 36	66
Absalom reconciled to David	Year 38	68
Absalom's conspiracy	Year 40	70
Sheba's conspiracy	Year 40	70
Adonijah's conspiracy (1 Kings)	Year 40	70

If this is correct, the last year of David's life was a chaotic one. David's life comes to complete unraveling in the final year of his reign. But it did not begin there. First, we see the unraveling of David's integrity with Bathsheba (age 49), then his family comes apart, and finally his kingdom falls into the hands of his rebel son Absalom.

How did all this happen? Rebellion gives birth to rebellion.

- I. First I want us to see the **Root** of sin. The seeds of David's sin are sown in Absalom. It is in this chapter that we see the groundwork for **Absalom's** rebellion. The Bible says that those who "sow to the wind" will "reap the whirlwind" (**Hosea 8:7**). The seeds of David's sin with Bathsheba were sown in Absalom's heart. Absalom is the quintessential rebel in the Bible. He does his own thing regardless. He is out of control! Let's find out how this plays out.

**Explanation:** Absalom was a child that every parent fears. This was a selfish, self-centered, vengeful, young man without a conscience. He was filled with self ambition. We come to Absalom in 2 Samuel 15, and he has already murdered his own brother, Amnon. He put a contract on his head and made sure he was murdered. He comes back to Jerusalem after two years of exile, and it seems that he's going to reconcile with his father. If you didn't know the rest of the story, you would think this would be the beginning of good things in Absalom's life. David must have thought this was a turning point for Absalom. But this is just a façade for Absalom! You see that right away as we look at **2 Samuel 15:1-6**. Absalom has his heart set on something, and he will not relent until he gets it. He craves his father's throne. It seems that Absalom is willing to do whatever it takes to acquire power from his father. Keep in mind, that

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<sup>2</sup> Peter J. Leithart. *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 240.

<sup>3</sup> This is only an estimation, but it represents the latest realistic date for David's adultery.

everything Absalom is doing is under the radar. All the good will he has for others is really just a smoke screen. He is really in love with himself, and everyone else becomes a pawn in Absalom's world.

So Absalom begins his conspiracy for the throne. His primary tool is Revolution, but he is going to cover his utter rebellion and insurrection with Reverence.

A. Let's look at the **Rebellion** of the rebel heart. The rebel always has himself in mind. He is willing to comply. All around him think he's doing right. He's often popular and well-accepted and liked. Absalom uses his popularity to lay the foundation of taking his father's throne.

1. The first thing he did was to give himself a radical **makeover** as a Great King. He took on the trappings of a king, like the kings of the pagan nations. Look at **verse 1**, "And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him". Absalom wanted to make sure that everywhere he went he would have a show of force. He created the aura of power and royalty around him. Neither David nor Saul multiplied horses or chariots because the law had warnings against that practice (**Deuteronomy 17:16**). This is what the pagan kings did, and Absalom followed in their footsteps. All of this was done with malice and self-promotion at the expense of all others.
2. The second thing Absalom did was **manipulate** the hearts of the people. **Verse 2**, "And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate". Absalom went directly to the people. Absalom was a politician. Everything was crafted. We saw first that Absalom had 50 men run ahead of him to praise and applaud him wherever he went. Now that he's created an "untouchable" aura of royalty, he goes to where the people are with his entourage of soldiers and greets people at the gate of the city where people from all over Israel would gather to get an audience with the king.
  - a. So, Absalom manipulated the people by acting as if he were one of them. When he greeted the people, he did something unusual. We read in **verse 5**, "When any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him". Instead of keeping his distance, he would engage them in common conversation and ask them what city they were from. In ancient near eastern custom, a subject would bow before a prince or a king. "Instead of treating these people as subjects, he embraced them as brothers. When they bowed, he raised up to kiss them. Absalom presented himself as a man of the people...who treated everyone with respect".<sup>4</sup>
  - b. Absalom then began to try and crack the foundation of trust the people had in his father the king. He came against his father by portraying him as aloof and uninterested in their lives. Notice the words of **verse 3**. Absalom would say, "See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man designated of the king to hear thee." He'd say, "You have a wonderful case, but you'll never get justice in it. The king's just too busy for you. What a shame you won't get justice from this king". One of the primary duties of the king on the domestic side, was to be the chief justice and magistrate of the people.

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<sup>4</sup> Leithart. *A Son to Me*, 241-42.

David was a judge, and he would hear people's cases, and with the help of his legal aids, the king would render his judgments.

- c. Finally Absalom presents himself as the answer. **Verse 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!"

So with his trappings of royalty and fake praises and footmen, with his hypocritical humility, **verse 6** says: "so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel". Absalom was a loyalty thief. Absalom was after their loyalty not to help them, but simply so that he could rule over them. He craved his father's throne.

You may wonder where was David during this time. The Bible doesn't tell us. There are several possibilities.

- Like most parents, David probably wanted to think best of his children. He wanted to believe that the reconciliation they experienced is real.
- It's also likely that David in his old age is slowing down. He doesn't have the vigor he once had.

- B. Now look at the (false) **Reverence** of a rebel's heart. Absalom is now going to use the Worship of God to cover for his rebellion. Rebels have no problem covering the real state of their heart with false piety.

Listen to Absalom's pious lies. He's willing to blaspheme the Lord's name and use the Lord's name to cover for his own rebellion. Look at **verse 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". After forty years of David ruling, Absalom tells David: I'm going to Hebron to worship. It sounds like a wonderful thing. It sounds like a man whose heart is changed and transformed. But it was nothing but a ROUSE—it was a huge SMOKE SCREEN. What he was actually doing was taking his insurrection to the next stage.

1. First, we see that instead of worshipping we see Absalom stages his own coronation. Absalom goes to Hebron (the place of David's coronation) in order to be crowned himself. He sends spies throughout Israel to "stir up support for him".<sup>5</sup> Look at **verses 9-10**, "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". So these people were carefully placed in every tribe in Israel, so that when their trumpets sounded, they would stand up and scream, "Absalom is KING in HEBRON!!!"
2. Then, Absalom deprives David of 200 of his closest friends and brings them from Jerusalem to Hebron. **Verse 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". Though the text does not say, very likely, these were some of David's closest allies, and when word spread that Absalom has been crowned king in Hebron, David will think these 200 took part in it, even though as the text says: "they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing" (**verse 11**).

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<sup>5</sup> Leihart, 243.

3. Third, we see one of David's closest and most trusted counselors becomes a conspirator. Look at **Verse 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". **Ahithophel** is actually *Bathsheba's father*. See how David's family is literally being TORN APART!
  4. Finally, David is told of Absalom's rebellion in **verse 13**, "And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom." David is now an old man. He is a weakened man in a weakened kingdom. He decides he cannot endure a battle with his son.
- II. Now I want you to see the **Fruit** of sin. Absalom now breaks his father's heart. In **verse 14** we see **David's** departure. Remember the Bible says that those who "sow to the wind" will "reap the whirlwind" (**Hosea 8:7**).

**Verse 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 overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword." So David plans his escape from Jerusalem. He gathers a small army and brings his family and friends together. He "left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house" (**verse 16**).

A. So David begins his **procession**. We have this sad scene captured in **verse 23**, "And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness". One commentator said this: "To the loud wails of the country people who watched (verse 23) a somber band of commanders in their armor walked in formation. They were surrounding the King of Israel now deposed by a rebellious son, driven from his throne, banished from his city, fleeing for his life."<sup>6</sup>

Look at **verse 30**, one of the saddest scenes in this account. "And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up."

**Explanation:** David is now clothed as a mourner. His head is covered. His feet are bare. He is travelling near what would later be a Garden. The Garden of Gethsemane where our Lord would suffer. Now THIS is something to weep about!!! It is unthinkable what Absalom is doing. Get the full implication of this. This is a monarchy. In order to take this throne, the king must die!

Just as sad as all that, think of a 19 year old, Solomon with his father. Look at all that is being affected!

B. But look at David's **process** of thinking in all of this. One Psalm which is directly linked to this time of insurrection is **Psalm 3**. It reflects what was going on in David's heart. This Psalm, written in the midst of the rebellion, trumpets God's

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<sup>6</sup> Dr. John Barnett. "The Consequence Engine Means God is NOT Mocked!" Available online at: <http://media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/1240715139.pdf>.

sovereign control. David's help was in God. God had delivered David so many times before. He knows that He has God's blessing, so he is not afraid. He is able to rest, and even sleep during this time. Let's read this very insightful Psalm.

**Psalm 3:1-8**, A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

"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 great message David has to give to us during this time is that God is **faithful**. He had "smitten all" David's enemies. God is in control, and truly, as David says, God's "blessing is upon" His people. Even in my sin, God you are faithful!

If you are a child of God tonight, then you have nothing to fear. No matter how chaotic your life might become, you are secure in your Father's hand. **Psalm 55:22**, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved". God's blessing is upon because of Jesus Christ, and it can never be removed.

III. The **Way** to making Good Decisions in the first place. How did this happen to David? This is the great hero of Israel. This was a celebrated warrior and king. Now he's weakened and broken with a small band of followers, escaping into exile as his throne is being stolen by his son. And David is weeping for his people. But I believe there is another reason for David's weeping. David is weeping because he understands what is going on in this moment. This is one of the clearest accounts of the **far reaching consequences of sin**. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (**Numbers 32:23**).

A. Sin begins with one unguarded moment. One day on the roof of David's palace he saw a beautiful woman bathing. At that moment, he should have planted a NO choice instead of a YES choice. Because David chose to go against God's way, he was told he would have to pay the consequences later on.

B. Your decision to sin may be momentary, but the consequences can be for a **lifetime**. What were the consequences David had to face?

1. Bathsheba's first child would die.

The immediate consequence to David's sin is found in **2 Samuel 12:14**. His son with Bathsheba would die. Nathan said, "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *that is* born unto thee shall surely die."

2. David's first four sons in line for the throne would die.

God previously said in **verse 10**, "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house". This is true. We are going to see that **Amnon** was just the beginning of sorrows for David's family. In the next chapters, we are going to see **Absalom** and **Adonijah**, sons of David, revolt and be executed. The one son we know nothing about is David's second son, Chileab, who was also known as

**Daniel** (cf. **2 Samuel 3:1-3**; **1 Chronicles 3:1-3**). It is presumed that he died, but the Scripture does not say.

- C. Remember the law of sowing and reaping! **Galatians 6:7**, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap".
- D. Remember that "the way of the transgressor is hard"! Sin truly is a mess! God can allow you to sometimes have lesser consequences because of his grace, but there is still damage with sin that will not be undone until Jesus comes.

***Conclusion: Let me close with a Warning: Sin has consequences!***

David himself laid the groundwork for Absalom's rebellion. You see, Absalom's mother was a heathen princess, the daughter of the king of Geshur. Geshur, you will remember, is the place Absalom fled for refuge after he murdered Amnon his brother.

If you make excuses for your children, that will turn into rebellion later. Don't give them excuses today. Excuses today will be the places to hide tomorrow.

Remember that God is holy and unchangeable. When we make a choice we are planting tomorrow's reality. Make sure you seek God in every moment.