

The Story of Absalom and the Problem of Evil

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[0 : 00] Today, we are going to discuss the story of Absalom, the son of King David. Now, hopefully you're familiar with King David, the boy shepherd who took down Goliath, became king of Israel.

He was known as a man after God's own heart, though not walking in perfection by any means. The story of Absalom involves one of the darker turns in David's story and includes, I suppose you might say, an element of David's own weakness and failure as a father and king.

Absalom was David's third-born son, born to Macha, the daughter of a neighboring king. The Bible doesn't give us a lot of details about his early years, but it does give us one intriguing tidbit in 2 Samuel 14.

It says that in all of Israel, there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him.

And then it adds this quirky detail. His hair was so thick and luxurious that when he cut it once a year because it got too heavy, it weighed five pounds.

[1 : 09] So five pounds of hair. Absalom was essentially a walking spokesman for your favorite shampoo. Absalom's advantages, his handsomeness, his vitality.

I think it's a good representation of the hair detail as a general health and vitality. Some contradiction to as the story unfolds. A terror, Tamar, which is the eye of her half-brother Amnon and in a sickening turn of the hand, assaults her.

You've got to be with these podcasts to make this with your kids in the car, but it was an incredible violation that took place from Amnon on Tamar. Tamar is left in despair.

Her life is shattered. She flees to Absalom's house, her refuge. Likewise, just as an aside, you'll find Amnon following a familiar cycle consistent with lust, where the object of one's lust becomes eventually the object of one's hatred.

He has objectified Tamar both in a sexual way, but then ultimately, because she is now simply an object displaying, in his mind, his own failures, he grows to hate her even more than he once adored her.

[2 : 36] This is where Absalom inserts the picture, of course. He is Tamar's full brother, and he is furious, but he's also calculated and careful. He tells Tamar to stay quiet for now and takes her in, probably because he's already plotting his next move.

Meanwhile, King David does hear about the atrocity, and the Bible says that he is very angry, and yet he doesn't do anything about it. No punishment for Amnon, no justice for Tamar.

Why? Why? Well, we're not told, but some scholars speculate. You can imagine the kind of series of siblings of whom wonder in what their place of kingdom will be, and probably roots at least wives, but also in his own sort of weakness here, where he doesn't do what he ought to do as a king, let alone as a father.

He should punish the wrongdoer. That's what Romans 13 tells us that kings are for. And certainly that's what the whole Bible tells us that fathers are for. So two years pass, and Absalom's stewing and planning and waiting, and then he throws a big party, a big sheep-shearing fest, and invites all of the king's sons, including Amnon.

David is suspicious, and so he doesn't go himself, but Amnon does attend. And during the festivities, when Amnon's guard is down, Absalom gives the signal, and his servants strike Amnon dead.

[3 : 55] Revenge is served, cold and calculated. This is a pivotal moment. Absalom has just killed the heir to the throne, his own half-brother. The other princes scatter in a panic, and Absalom flees to Geshur, his mother's homeland, where he stays in exile for three years.

David, meanwhile, is grieving Amnon's death, but also, the text hints, starting to miss Absalom. It's really just a whole messy thing. Eventually, Joab, David's loyal commander, orchestrates a way to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, and he uses a wise woman to convince David that it's time to reconcile.

David agrees, but it's not a heartwarming homecoming. Absalom returns. He is safe to be in the capital city, but David refuses to see him face-to-face for two more years.

And so, you can just imagine all of the tension and resentment that's building up, as well as all of the opportunities that the world, the flesh, and the devil have to influence Absalom toward his next action.

At this point, you'd think that things are maybe going to settle down. The additions are great, which is sort of the, is available while David is passive, and tells them, if only he's in addition to being approachable in the Bibles of the people of Israel.

[5 : 16] After he finally makes his move, he heads to Hebron, which is a significant city tied to David's early reign, and there declares himself king. He does this because he can see that his attempt at stealing the hearts of Israel has succeeded enough to make him a formidable opponent of viable replacement to David.

And how did he get into that position of viability? Well, on the one hand, he was handsome and charming and looked like a leader, but also this charm, this charm offensive that he engaged in in the city gates was winning various people to his side.

Here we could maybe pause and make an application more broadly toward the gospel, and that would be something like the problem of evil. We could talk about that, where Satan, the world, the flesh, will tempt a person to think less of God because he is, at the time, at the moment, withholding justice in some way or another, or at least it appears that way, to human beings.

And so there's a way in which this story mirrors some of what we see with people's objections regarding the problem of evil. Only in David's case, the passivity was a real problem, but it's not. We ought not be indicative of his softness. Anyone to perish in a perfect way. So the problem of evil kind of in people's mind, where is God? So you can see, and you can also see this in the general problem, corruption within the church and so forth.

[6 : 54] You can see weak leaders encourage a kind of against the church itself and against King Jesus himself. So there's a little bit of side application here.

Okay, so back to Absalom. His rebellion escalates really quickly. He enters Jerusalem. He takes over the palace. And in a shocking power move, he sleeps with David's concubines on the roof, in public view, not only revealing, exposing, I suppose, or highlighting what people already think about David, that he is too passive.

He's too weak. And so Absalom demonstrates his power in this way by sleeping with David's concubines in present, in the public view. But he does that on the roof, which also has a kind of one-two punch to it.

Not only does he reveal David to be weak and powerless, but he also brings in mind one of David's most infamous sins. That is his own kind of encounter with Bathsheba, you know, involving a rooftop and so on and so forth.

This isn't just about lust for Absalom. This is a much more calculated move. He's saying, I'm king now. The old order is done. Look at my strength and look at David's weakness.

[8 : 14] Well, David actually doesn't have the forces, or at least he does not believe he has the forces, to stand up against Absalom. He may have actually made a move, made a decision here that he would simply wait and see if the Lord would deliver him back into the kingship or not.

So anyway, David goes on the run. He's barefoot and he's weeping as he climbs around the Mount of Olives. And it's just this sort of humble shadow of the warrior king he once was.

The tide really only turns because David has some people who are still loyal to him, and they infiltrate Absalom's camp and feed him bad advice.

And so in some respects, the only way that Absalom is actually turned practically is because some people remained loyal to David. Absalom's inner circle becomes divided.

Some want to strike and kill David, but others want to make him wait and gather a bigger enemy, a bigger army rather. The people that are convincing him to wait are actually on David's side, and they win the day.

[9 : 19] And that delay winds up being fatal to Absalom's hopes. That delay allows David to gather enough time to develop a counteroffensive, if you will.

The final showdown comes in the forest of Ephraim. Absalom's forces clash with David's loyalist, led by Joab, and David's explicit orders are clear.

Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake. It's like David still loves his son. And here you see kind of the good and the bad of passivity or the good and the bad of gentleness.

Absalom has seen in his own mind how David's passivity has affected Tamar and robbed the land of justice. But on the other hand, Absalom now is an official receiving.

I wouldn't go so far as to say, but again, I'm also really as a representative of what ends up being brutal. 20,000 in the whole Bible, charging through the four branches of an oak tree in the mu house.

[10 : 24] Joab's orders, Joab takes no chances. He drives through three spears into Absalom's heart and his soldiers finish the job. They toss his body into a pit and cover it with stones, which is kind of a rebel's grave far from the glory that he sought.

When word reaches David, his reaction is gut-wrenching. He says, oh, my son Absalom, oh, my son Absalom, if only I had died instead of you.

Oh, Absalom, my son, my son. It's a raw and unfiltered grief. David wins the battle. He reclaims his throne. But this is a hollow victory for him.

He was not able to preserve his kingship while pardoning Absalom. And so one of the ways that we look for Christ in passages like this is we can see that there are distinctions, like David's a sinner, Jesus is not, and so on and so forth.

But you can also see some of these failures that David had that Jesus does not have. For instance, Jesus is uniquely capable of dying for the rebel and yet remaining on the throne.

[11 : 44] Jesus is uniquely capable of dying for the rebel and yet remaining on the throne. It's really a remarkable truth of the gospel that somehow Jesus is not only able to gain and salvation to the very helpless to pull that off.

Special, but he wasn't that special. All of us who are saying pull that off because Ephesians 2, that we was following the course of this means we were high-handed antagonists wind up leading because it was at the hand of sinful men that killed Jesus and made him an offering in God's plan, made him an offering to pay for the sins of those who killed him.

So that's the story of Absalom. Just thought we'd play around with a little bit of the biblical theological elements within this story. It's a great story in general, but I think when we see Christ peeking through little corners here and there of the story, we see that there's something even more glorious at hand in this story.

All right, well, that's all I've got for you in this conversation. May you continue to see Jesus as the truly unique, special, glorious harmony of diverse excellencies and worship him as your king.