

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)

Absalom's Rebellion

Readings: *2 Samuel 14:28-16:14, Psalm 3*

Reflections:

- Absalom is given lots of time to grow angry as two years pass with no resolution. As we begin a spiraling journey into the world of hatred and conspiracy, we discover that Absalom was incredibly good looking. Notice the characteristics of the kings that are in focus:
 - Saul - Taller than everyone else, by his size a natural leader and yet ends up demonized and obsessed.
 - David - A man after God's heart, yet ends up committing adultery and murder.
 - Absalom - Most handsome and popular man because of his good looks and yet ends up a sick rebel.
 - Solomon - The wisest man to have lived and yet ends up falling into lust and compromised with his pursuit of many women.

Just as God was carefully walking Israel through the process of discovery that no set of laws can change them from the inside out, no king or special leader could change them either. The whole thing about Absalom's hair weighing five pounds seems a bit extreme but I guess having lots of hair was a good thing!

- Absalom shows his loyalty to his sister who was raped. He names his daughter Tamar and she becomes a beautiful woman. This goes beyond simply her having good genetics with her dad's good looks. It is most likely a contrast to how his sister ended in such a sad and broken state. He named his daughter Tamar as a way to honor his sister and his daughter models what his sister should have been. Again, this in the text may help us remember why Absalom is so full of anger about what happened to his sister.
- Absalom shows his brutality as Joab refuses to meet with him and so he sets his field on fire. This is obviously letting the reader know that things are going to get bad with this guy.
- Absalom's arrogance is extreme. He appears before David bowing to the ground. David kisses him as a sign of blessing. Absalom immediately sets up a strategy to completely undermine David and set himself up as the real champion of those who feel like they are

victims. This is a common approach for weak leaders who have self-centered and seeking to subvert existing leadership: go around and try to find people who are upset with the existing leadership and sell yourself as someone who can help them if they switch loyalties. Absalom kissing everyone shows that he is “sucking up” to everyone he can. It does work and Absalom steals the hearts of the people of Israel. By this point the reader is becoming disgusted with Absalom.

- Under the guise of worshipping God, Absalom launches his conspiracy after 4 years. His popularity is on the rise and we see even David’s own counselor join Absalom’s conspiracy. David is now back in familiar territory as he has to go into exile. First it was Saul and now it is his own son.
- David shows his grace again by trying to release and bless Ittai, but Ittai remains loyal to David.
- The Ark returns to Jerusalem even as David is leaving, weeping as he goes. David prays for Absalom’s counsel to be frustrated and then sends his own undercover agent to work on his behalf. It almost reads like an ancient spy thriller.
- Ziba’s offer of a generous gift and potential refreshing for David and his men again shows David’s trust in God and desire to bless. He continues to bless the line of Jonathan and does not accept the generous offer of this gift.
- Shimei, one of Saul’s descendents now appears to curse and insult David and his men. David will not fight back just like he would not fight back against Saul in his younger days. David continues to trust God as his provider and defender. He sees this as an opportunity to move the heart of God. If he defends himself, God does not need to act on his behalf. Although David is a man of blood, he at strategic times shows complete restraint and willingly accepts suffering so as to honor God and allow God to be his defender.
- In the end David and his men reach their destination exhausted but then are able to be refreshed. Psalm 3 captures well David’s complete trust in God even in the midst of all of his enemies.
- David remains a fascinating study. It seems that he has this capacity for incredible trust in God and yet also at times a passive or weak part of his personality that sets him up for failure. He is a great example in one way of a leader who deeply loves God and is willing to suffer greatly rather than dishonor God. Yet at the same time, we also see how he falls so far short of truly being a King who can save Israel. And so like in other times in the story of Israel we catch a glimpse of what could be, a life transformed by God’s grace, but are also faced with the cold reality of what is, a human heart that is so broken and messed up that nothing external will ultimately change it.