

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Faith Amidst Flight II Samuel 15

**Intro:** Our text begins the story of Absalom's rebellion & it will go on for 4 chapters more. Absalom's name means "my father is peace" but he proves to be David's greatest source of trouble. The sword that was prophesied to come against David's house had so far been limited to his children but now it begins to be drawn against him. Adding to David's danger is the aggravation that he has no one but himself to thank for this for if he had executed justice on Absalom the murderer he would have prevented the rise of Absalom the usurper. Wisely, David recognized **Yahweh's** loving hand of discipline & he knew he deserved every blow but he also believed that **Yahweh's** gracious hand of power was still at work in his life & that the Lord hadn't forsaken him as He had Saul. In fact, **Yahweh** was still working out His perfect will in David's life. David **never** rose to greater heights of faith & submission than when he was forced to leave Jerusalem & flee for his life into the wilderness to escape from Absalom's rebellion.

Like any common thief, Absalom sets about seizing what does not belong to him. Of course, he's not picking a pocket or pilfering a purse; he's trying to steal a kingdom, so it will take some time to lay out all the preparations. But, Absalom has finesse & flair & he knows how to build a positive public image & he knows how to work a crowd.

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**1-6-** We already know Absalom was good looking but now he had the Cadillac Escalade & an entourage to boot! He's presenting himself as the poster boy for Israel's "now" generation. All this wouldn't necessarily cause suspicion; it could just be chalked up to the flashy pretensions of a coddled crown prince. But Absalom's not just showing off, he's projecting an image that appeals to the masses, those who aren't too concerned about things like **character**, **morality** or **honor**. As we know, most people will follow anybody who tells them what they want to hear & promises to give them what they want to possess. But Absalom wasn't just putting on a show; he was also working the crowd.

Absalom made a point to be up early, standing at the gate (courthouse) to meet with anyone with a legal case for the king. He'd find out where they were from, listen to their case & automatically support their side of the story.

You could say that Absalom never met a plaintiff he didn't agree with. After he established empathy with them, he'd insert some tragedy: "unfortunately" there's no one to hear your case! This wasn't necessarily so, govt. processes are notoriously slow but David did receive the woman from Tekoa. Absalom's stirring up dissatisfaction with David's govt. by insinuating a false reason for the hold up. "Of course, there is a simple way around this backlog..." Oddly enough, Absalom's solution to their newly discovered problem was himself! "Oh, that I was made judge..." He didn't have to actually make any of those hard & often unpopular judgments; he only had to claim that he would.

He also perfected his common-man routine. When someone tried to show normal respect, Absalom would stop them from bowing, pull them up & greet them with a handshake & a kiss. He treated them with equality & affection like any good politician would. He projected a "man of the people" image but by his actions he showed that he believed he was better looking, better connected, better off & better suited. Laws didn't apply to him like they did everyone else.

For all his effort, Absalom's plan worked: he stole the hearts of the men of Israel! That idiom refers to duping the mind not capturing the affections. Absalom deceived the men of Israel, not by coercion but compliance: he gave them what they wanted! And, like any good politician, he added a little religious veneer for a nice finishing touch.

**7-9- peace-** Absalom is committing treason under the guise of worship. He had to get out of town & he knew that the appearance of spirituality would work in his favor; especially with his Bible-thumping father. Permission was granted.

These are the last words David ever spoke to Absalom who immediately set about overthrowing David's kingdom.

**10-12-** Absalom had his plan in place, all he needed was a little more image to tip the scale. He invited 200 government officials to attend his feast & they went willingly & innocently. They were still loyal to David but their absence from Jerusalem & appearance in Hebron would give credence to Absalom's claim & he could force them to stay there.

Absalom's greatest move was in getting Ahithophel to join his rebellion. He

was one of David's top advisors who were renowned for his wisdom & wise counsel. His presence would bring legitimacy & added prestige to Absalom's govt. If Ahithophel is so wise, why did he defect from David? Hard to say, but Bible says he's Bathsheba's grandfather.

What are we to make of all this? Clearly, **Yahweh's word of judgment against David's sin** in **ch12** is being fulfilled but at the same time, Absalom's committing a **despicable act of treason** against **Yahweh's** kingdom & has no qualms against striking the Lord's anointed. Together we have the truthfulness of God's word & the wickedness of Absalom's act & the 2<sup>nd</sup> fulfils the 1<sup>st</sup>! How do we reconcile this? We don't. It's as much a mystery as what Peter mentioned in his Pentecost sermon (**Acts 2:23**). God ordained it but you're guilty for doing it. How to explain it? No need, a mystery is such because it's unsolvable not because it's irrational. We're not called to explain it, just to adore it.

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**13-17-** Absalom may be young & Ahithophel may be wise but David was a man of action & he always did his best in a crisis. Upon hearing the word, David started working his contingency plan. He figured Absalom for a ruthless man who valued power over principle so he knew his life was in danger. He also didn't want Jerusalem to become a battleground so he made plans to flee the city. David was willing to risk his own life & abandon his own throne to protect **Yahweh's** people. The response of David's servants in the face of danger & the threat of death should be the response of every faithful believer to the Lord, in every circumstance of life: "**we are ready to do...whatever.**" They bailed out leaving 10 concubines behind & David stopped at the last house to watch the loyalists pass in review.

**17-23- Ittai-** Cherithites, Pelethites, Gittites? The 1<sup>st</sup> two are David's personal bodyguards but the Gittites were a mercenary group from the Philistine city of Gath under the command of Ittai. When David sees him, he stops him & tells him to take his men & go back into the city. Maybe David was testing him or maybe he was just being magnanimous but it's clear that David doesn't want Ittai to act under any sense of compulsion. He'd only just recently arrived, why should he share in David's sudden disaster? David releases him to serve the new king & enjoy life.

Ittai's response, "**I guess not!**" actually, Ittai gives a double oath to emphasize the seriousness of his words. David had urged him to **return &**

**remain with the king** but Ittai insists that **David** is the **only king** (21). He holds nothing back from David; even his kids will share the danger of David's questionable future. He is an island of faithfulness in a sea of treachery. Note the irony: David's own son, upon whom he showered undeserved kindness, was trying to kill him while this foreigner, who owed David nothing, was willing to risk everything for his cause. We have Ittai the faithful Philistine up against Absalom & Ahithophel the treacherous Israelites. The text doesn't say what affect this had on David but it must have impressed him & strengthened his faith. One way God supports us in our darkest hours is to give us friends who refuse to leave us to our fate. Men like Ittai are God's gift to His hurting children.

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**24-30**- Not only did David enjoy the support of the Philistine proselytes, he also had the support of the priests. Zadok & Abiathar were ready to share David's exile & not just them! The Levites also came bearing the Ark of the Covenant. Absalom may have the city but he won't have the priest or the **sign** of **Yahweh's** presence. David's having none of it.

David didn't fall into the trap of treating the ark like a good luck charm. He knew his restoration didn't depend on him having **Yahweh's** furniture but on having **Yahweh's** favor (25b). David's willing to let everything rest on **Yahweh's** grace & from this came great **liberty!** David wholly submits to **Yahweh's** sovereign will: either He will show grace or He will not delight in me. If that's the case, here I am, let Him do what He thinks is best. No gimmicks, no superstition, no rabbit foot religion, no conning God by taking His stuff. This isn't **weak resignation** (Eli **I Sam 3:18**) but **hardy submission**. This is the freedom that comes by having faith in the good will of God. David doesn't have to figure it all out – that's God's problem now. David mustn't **use Yahweh**, he could only **submit** to Him & He will do as He pleases!

Some people say this level of trust will cause one to sit on their hands & do nothing. Not true! David's understanding & faith in **Yahweh's** sovereignty didn't stifle his action, it released his resourceful ingenuity. He sends the priests back into the city to establish a spy network. Complete submission to God's sovereignty still allows you to use your head & to work decisively, just without the idolatry; without the inevitable anxiety of trying to play God. You still do what only you can do but allow God the freedom to do what only He can do. Trusting in God's good will is truly liberating!

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**31-37-** David gets the bad news concerning Ahithophel & what does he do? He immediately prays! David had good reason to be concerned: Ahithophel was the best at what he did (**Jordan, Gretzky, Ruth**). He was **sharp, savvy & successful**; thus David responded to this disheartening news with instant **prayer**. Then he **worshipped** (**32**). Note: while David was worshipping, the answer to his prayer arrived on 2 feet with torn clothes & dusty hair. Hushai was a special friend & confidant of David's who clearly was distraught over the recent turn of events & came to follow the king into exile but David rightly perceived he would be of better use elsewhere. David needed him for espionage!

Here's **Yahweh**'s providence once again. How it must've encouraged David. He prayed in desperation & immediately, **Yahweh** answers his prayer – tho not in a way he could have guessed. Our prayers deal with the “what” but God's answers deal with the what, how & when. In fact, **Yahweh** didn't answer David's prayer precisely: He didn't turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness but He made Absalom foolish enough to reject it & He did that thru Hushai! It was all so natural & unguessable. God's providence encourages our faith when we take time to look back & see it.

God's gifts, God's will, God's providence – each of these things conspire to strengthen our faith during difficult circumstances if we, like David, chose to rely on them & not on our own strength, abilities or understanding.

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Previous chapters, David is compromising & coerced, reticent & reactionary but here, finally, he's **decisive** in his actions & **firm** in his faith. Why? I'd say this change came about not in spite of the judgment of God but because of it! **Do not despise the chastening of the Lord** (**Heb 12:5-6, 11**), it was **Yahweh**'s chastening hand that brought David out of his spiritual complacency & put him back on the path of trusting in the Lord's will & following His word.

**Vs23** says David crossed the Brook Kidron & **vs30** says he went up the Mount of Olives. Despite all the hints of faith, it is still a dark day in Israel. David is suffering for his sins but he is still the rightful king of Israel. But the rightful king has been rejected & climb up the Mount of Olives weeping. This scene will be repeated. When Jesus went from the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, he retraced David's footsteps. Both David & Jesus suffered for sin: David for his own sins but Jesus for ours. When

David's greatest Descendent, **the** rightful king of Israel was on the Mount of Olives & He was also weeping; not for being rejected but for the destruction of those who had rejected him. Ahithophel rejected & betrayed the rightful king (David) & in the end, went out & hung himself. Judas likewise. Thus is the fate of all who reject the rightful king of their heart – to refuse Jesus is to invite eternal destruction. 😊