

Conspiracy Theory

2 Samuel 15:1-37

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me if you would to 2 Samuel chapter 15, 2 Samuel chapter 15. I wrote down what Mark Windham said in his prayer, that "sin will take you further than you planned to go and keep you there longer than you planned to stay and cost you more than you intended to pay," and that is so very true of David. David is in a downward spiral. His son, Absalom, has murdered his half-brother. He has been in exile in his grandfather's house for a few years. He has now come back to Jerusalem but David has not received him. There has been a silence between David and Absalom for two years as Absalom has lived in his own house in Jerusalem. And we pick up the story now in chapter 15.

Let's pray together.

Father, again we thank You for the Scriptures, for the holy, infallible, inerrant Word of God. We ask now for Your blessing as we read it, that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

This is God's Word:

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.'" The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to

Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'" With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing.

And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword." And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides." So the king went out, and all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house.

And all his servants passed by him, and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king. Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take our brothers with you, and may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you." But Ittai answered the king, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be." And David said to Ittai, "Go then, pass on." So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. And all the land wept aloud as all the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on toward the wilderness.

And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the city. Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. But if he says, 'I have no pleasure with you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him." The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.

But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went. And it was told David, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

While David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat torn and dirt on his head. David said to him, "If you go on with me, you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant in time past, so now I will be your servant,' then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel. Are not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? So whatever you hear from the king's house, tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, their two sons are with them there, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son, and by them you shall send to me everything you hear." So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

And so far God's holy and inerrant Word.

Now David at this time personally is still, I think, enmeshed with guilt over his own actions with Bathsheba and her husband. Domestically, his home is in disarray. Politically, he has lost the respect of the people. He writes in a psalm, Psalm 3, written at this time when Absalom rode up against him. It's a morning psalm. Psalms 3 and 4 are morning and evening psalms. And he tells us in that psalm, "Many are rising against me, saying of my soul, 'There is no salvation for him in God.'" This is a dark time for David. Betrayal, conspiracy, rebellion, insurrection, led by his own son, Absalom, the firstborn, the heir apparent to David's throne.

As the writer tells this tale, he tells first of all the tale of Absalom and his rebellion. Two years have passed. David had not seen Absalom. Absalom had been barred from the court. He has been in his own house and for a number of years, upwards of four years now have passed by. Once Absalom says he wants to meet with David and that meeting takes place at the end of chapter 14. And he bows himself, the last verse of chapter 14, "he bows himself on his face to the ground before the king and the king kissed Absalom." And now that meeting has taken place but there is no fellowship. There is no contact. There is no father-son relationship between David and Absalom. And something in the region of four years will pass by, and slowly but surely, the rift between David and Absalom grows bigger and bigger.

We're told in chapter 14 and verse 25 that Absalom had the appearance of a film star. His handsome appearance, from the soul of his foot to the crown of his

head, there was no blemish in him. In the first verse of chapter 15 we see him now with chariots and horses and fifty men running before him. He gets up early in the morning. He goes to the gates of the city. This is where justice, if you had need for justice - if you had some issue financial issue, some marital issue, some issue dealing with property, some issue dealing with fiscal matters - you came to the city gates where the judges would be. And there he is, early in the morning, perhaps before anyone else is there. And slowly but surely, well, he plays the opposition card. When you're in opposition you can promise anything. You can promise the earth. You can promise wealth and you can promise justice and a better life for all. That's what he's doing. He'll interject all the time — "The king can't see you, but now if I was in power, if I had the rule, I'd give you justice. I'd provide for you. Your cause is good and just and right." He can carp and criticize David and promise the earth but he doesn't have to deliver anything. He has no power.

And slowly but surely he steals the hearts of the people — shakes their hand, kisses them. It's the equivalent of a photo-op. You know, he puts a baseball cap on and he eats burgers and drinks Coke and he's one of the people. He's one of them. David, where is David? David is in the palace. David is secluded. He's surrounded by an entourage of people who are protecting him and guarding him. He's isolated now from the people. But Absalom, he's one of the people. He's with them. Sympathizing with them, urging them on, winning their hearts. He's approachable; he's handsome; he's agreeable; he listens to you; he agrees with you.

And then he plays the religious card. He's the "born-again Absalom." He's the "member of First Baptist Church Absalom." Four years have gone by but suddenly he remembers a vow that he made, that if he was brought back to Jerusalem he would offer a vow. It's taken him four years. And all of a sudden he needs to go to Hebron. Hebron, you understand, is home. This is where he grew up. This is where David's family is from. These are his uncles and aunts and cousins and nephews and nieces and people that owe him. He wants to go to Hebron because that's going to be his home base.

And it just gets worse and worse and worse for David because unknown to David at this point, Ahithophel, David's chief of staff, David's chief political advisor, his speech writer, Ahithophel, his right-hand man, has gone over, has joined the conspiracy — defected from David's camp and gone with Absalom! David has fallen asleep at the wheel. He's failed to keep in touch with the people. He's lost all of his support. He's isolated in Jerusalem in the palace. And somebody comes and says, "Absalom has proclaimed himself king in Hebron and they're coming. They're coming!" Now David does a very wise thing, a very magnanimous thing — he leaves the city. You know if he hadn't left the city, what would have been the outcome? A siege perhaps? Siege mentality meant starvation. Innocent people would suffer. Perhaps there would be a battle, perhaps there would be swords and death and mutilation. So David spares the city that and he leaves.

Let's look at David. We'll see more about Absalom next week. This is conspiracy; this is rebellion; this is civil war. This is like the 1860's for you, the 1640's for England, when a nation is at civil war within itself. God is teaching David something. Mark Windham tonight in the prayer just nailed that. God is teaching David something. You know I don't know when David wrote Psalm 51. I don't know. I just don't think it was immediately after the event. I'm not even sure that he's written it yet, chronologically. I think God brought David right down to rock bottom and then he wrote Psalm 51. And you know God will do this because God loves David. He's going to humble him. You know David's son — not Absalom but Solomon — will teach David a lesson. "Keep your heart with all diligence because out of it are the issues of life."

And this is a bad time for David. Where's David heart? In these chapters, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, where's David's heart? Something beautiful happens here. Something extraordinarily attractive happens right here in David's life and it happens when David is under fire, when David is being brought down. Something of true piety, something of true godliness emerges in David's life when he's brought down. When Absalom is advancing towards Jerusalem, David decides to leave the city and all of a sudden you see resolve and focus and commitment and prayer. You see, Absalom and his cronies, they assumed that since David had let God down, God was going to let David down. You know that's always how a religion based on works thinks. If you let God down, God's going to let you down. God's going to teach David a lesson but He's never, ever, ever going to forsake him. God's going to bring him back. God's going to draw him into His bosom. David is beginning here to understand something about grace and the way it operates. He's understanding something about Gospel and the way it operates. David may look finished but he's not.

Three things happen. First — you know I love it. These aren't planned, but I love it when Ligon's preaching a sermon in the morning that's just perfect for the evening sermon. What was he preaching on this morning? A leper, a Samaritan, a foreigner who gives thanks to Jesus. We have a character here who's a foreigner. He's a Gittite — Ittai the Gittite. It's a name you'll never forget — Ittai the Gittite. It's a beautiful little cameo. This is all you ever hear about him. It's like Onesiphorus in the Pastoral Epistles. Paul mentions this guy, Onesiphorus, and he's a little cameo of just faithfulness. Ittai the Gittite is a cameo. David is heading for the Mount of Olives, he's leaving the city, and at the last house of the city, as the Gittites are passing by, he tries to persuade Ittai the Gittite to return. It's not his fight; it's not his battle. "Save yourself! Why come with me because I don't even know where I'm going?" And he makes an oath. He swears an oath to David that he will follow him to the very bitter end. I think, you know if Ittai was playing the politics card he should have gone with Absalom, because politically and strategically it looks as though it was over for David. I think Ittai the Gittite saw something of David and he saw something of grace and he saw something of Christ and he saw something of Gospel and he saw something of truth. And he

said, "Whatever it is you've got, I'm willing to lay down my life for it." He's an island in a sea of treachery. Ittai the Gittite. What a wonderful encouragement this was to David. God sent him to him in His providence — a Barnabas in the midst of a storm. Thank God for the Ittais and the Onisiphoruses and the Barnabases of Scripture.

And then Zadok the priest, he comes with the ark of the covenant. He's going to schlep this ark of the covenant — the presence of God — with David into the wilderness. And all of you are saying as you read this, "Don't do it!" because that's precisely what Saul had done - taken the ark of the covenant and lost it to the Philistines. Using the ark of the covenant as though it was some kind of talisman. And David, do you see his faith emerging? Do you see something of the power of the Holy Spirit reemerging in the life of David? David sends him back and sends the ark back and he says, "You know, God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm." You know the doctrine of providence does not guarantee that we shall live. The doctrine of providence might say to us that we're going to die but God is never going to forsake us. If we die it's part of His providence. And David sees that. He makes this astonishing statement — "If God wills me to live or if God wills me to die, the place for the ark of the covenant is in Jerusalem and in the temple."

And then in verse 30, another person, Hushai, Hushai the Archite, and he's described as a friend. David is now going up the Mount of Olives, on the other side of the city of Jerusalem, he's crossed the Kidron Valley, he's ascending the Mount of Olives — they're weeping as they go. This is one of the lowest points for David and this man Hushai, he's a friend, but the Hebrews, a little difficult it may mean, but it's a title — he's the human resources director in David's government perhaps, some have suggested. Whatever; David asks of him an extraordinary thing. He's to go back and be a spy. He's to be a spy in Absalom's court. He's to go to Absalom and swear allegiance to Absalom and pass on everything that he hears through the priests and the priests' sons to David.

And then, look at verse 31. "David said, 'O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.'" Now God wasn't going to answer that prayer in exactly the way that David prayed it, but you know, this is the first time you've heard David praying in years. As you go back through the chapters, you have to go back before the story of Bathsheba for the write to say anything about David doing anything remotely spiritual. He's praying. God has brought him down and down and down and when he's at this low point, there emerges this prayer.

You know I mentioned Psalm 3, so if you have your Bibles just turn for a second to Psalm 3. It's the psalm David wrote when he fled from Absalom, his son. I just want to read a couple of verses from this psalm. Verses 5 and 6 — "I lay down and slept; I woke again for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me, all around." "I lay

down and slept.” Do you know what that is? That's called “Gospel sleep,” when you know with a certainty that you're walking in the very center of God's will now. When you're walking in the very center of God's will you can go to sleep at night and know that you are surrounded by the providence of God. “Arise O LORD, save me, O my God, for You strike all my enemies on the cheek, You break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD. Your blessing be on Your people.”

You know, what's motivating David in this hour of real crisis? His absolute trust in the Lord. He can go to sleep at night, surrounded as he is by a civil war that's impending, because God is with him. “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” You see, no matter what David has done, and David has done terrible things, there is forgiveness with God. There is forgiveness with God that He may be feared. That's the Gospel my friends. No matter how badly you may have failed, there is forgiveness with Him. And David I think in this narrative is sensing that. May we, yes may we sense it too.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You tonight again for the life of David who we see so many things in it are worthy of emulation and so many things that are not. Help us in the midst of it all to see Christ and the Gospel and grace and forgiveness and a way back into fellowship and communion with You. So draw near to us tonight. Pour out Your Spirit upon us afresh. We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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