

File No. 65

II SAMUEL 14:25; 15:1–30; 17:1 — 20:3

PROUD PRINCE ABSALOM / END OF THE PROUD PRINCE

(SBS Bk 2 Story No. 49 & 50)

Story Notes

Background Information

David's natural affections were understandable enough, but they could not control the purpose of God. As always, the child of promise and of grace would be the successor (Rom. 9:6–16; Gal. 4:28–31). The wrath of an Absalom could not fulfil the purpose of God (James 1:20). The heir of David's throne would be a man of peace (I Chron. 22:9), and he would be established by God.

Main Lesson

Chapter 15

Under royal protection, Absalom played the generous prince, building up the idea that he, rather than his father, could administer the realm. After four years of this, he judged that the time was ripe for a coup d'etat.

David already had reason to be suspicious of Absalom (13:24–27), and now, why was he taking two hundred people to share the 'worship' with him? Did he want to leave the impression with his father that, even in Jerusalem, he had loyal supporters? Absalom had virtually signalled what he intended to do, especially by choosing David's former capital for his destination. Absalom had plenty of support, gaining people from disaffected parts of the realm, and particularly from Hebron, since they had been discarded as the capital when David conquered Jerusalem.

News that most of his subjects had joined Absalom's bid for the throne persuaded David that he should leave Zion. The city could not be easily defended in a civil war and he left in haste. (Psalm 3 could have been written at this time.) His personal bodyguard probably consisted largely of foreigners who were less affected by local politics, a common practice among ancient kings. These men had to trust David's judgement.

David left via the Kidron Valley, as Jesus did on his exit from Jerusalem (John 18:1). At various stops in his escape, David was met by loyal people offering assistance. He made his plans in the hope that he would again live in the favour of God. He received the pledged loyalty of a recent foreigner, Ittai (cf. Luke 7:9). He rejected the assumption that the ark had to travel with him; rather, he would wait for God to bring him back to Jerusalem; the loyal priests could act as his secret agents.

He wept, as Jesus, later, would weep, thinking how he would love to have gathered Israel to the true worship of God (Luke 13:34). How bitter it was to lose Ahithophel, supreme among military counsellors, but God would frustrate his advice. (Psalm 41:9 may be a reference to this incident, the same Psalm as is used to describe the treachery of Judas in John 13:18). Then, Hushai met David and he was asked to go back to Jerusalem to foil Ahithophel's counsel. All these plans were a movement of love, and done in faith and hope because David had no power to secure their outcome.

Chapter 17–18

Ahithophel knew the ways of politics and of battle, but not the ways of the kingdom of God. Humanly speaking, his advice could have secured Absalom as king and himself as the power behind the throne. Normally, Hushai could not outwit this man but David asked him to return as a spy, not a counsellor. However, it was God's purpose that his advice brought ruin to Absalom. The faithful friend triumphed over the astute counsellor (I Chron. 27:33). As with Jonathan at an earlier time, the way of friendship or faithful love, was the way in which David's throne would be established.

Friendship has to do with covenant (Ps. 25:14; 55:20). It was a bitter thing for David if ever a friend forsook his covenant (Psalm 55:12–14, 20–21).

In the kingdom of Christ, the apostles were called friends, not servants (John 15:7–17). They heard what the eternal Father revealed to his Son. They knew the way of the kingdom was love, love that would lay down its life for a friend, and that this was what Jesus was about to do. Only in such a manner would the reign of God be established.

Hushai's warnings reached David by other faithful friends and he managed a complete evacuation by morning. Back in Jerusalem, Ahithophel could no longer see any future for Absalom, or for himself. His vision was limited to the extent of his own wisdom. He saw that he would be implicated in the rebellion when Absalom inevitably failed, and chose suicide rather than execution.

The battle began and David's men, aided by the terrain, soon won.

The main story told here is David's care for and sorrow over Absalom. Joab, knowing David would always have problems while Absalom was alive, disobeyed an order and killed the rebel prince. Runners vied for the honour of bringing good news, completely misunderstanding the mind of the king. David was not concerned for vengeance but for Absalom, even to the risking of his own peace. David's behaviour is a mystery. He had failed in many respects to control his own family and had left many people disappointed and confused. His love had lacked wisdom, but still was love.

Chapter 19:1 — 20:3

Joab was disgusted with David's behaviour. The king's love for a rebel son outweighed his love those who had helped him. Joab put to him, that, potentially, he could have another rebellion on his hands if he did not act quickly. David took his place at the Mahanaim city gate, resuming his responsible public life, the place he seems to have abdicated in Jerusalem where his son's rebellion had begun (15:2).

Argument was heard across the whole land about bringing David back as king. Tensions between North and South were still alive, The South were defensive, saying David was their own tribesman. Then, the severity of Judean arguments over the returning David gave Sheba his opportunity to galvanise the loyalty of the North around himself. He denied that they had any inheritance in David. His reasoning arose from what is seen rather than from the promise of God and he did not know what he was doing. God had promised to bless all Israel, and the world, through the Davidic kingship. On the other hand, David had occasion to remember the word of Nathan that the sword would never depart from his house.

David returned to Jerusalem and settled into restoring his hold on the country.