

# BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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## **2 SAMUEL 11-19 DAVID'S SIN AND THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES**



David finds himself at the peak of power, with all the hostile nations subdued. One of those was Edom, which is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 18:11-13, “King David also dedicated these to the Lord, along with the silver and gold that he had brought from all these nations—from Edom...and moreover Abishai the son of Zeruiah killed eighteen thousand Edomites in the valley of Salt. He also put *garrisons* in Edom, and all the Edomites became *David’s servants*. And the Lord preserved David wherever he went.”

Archaeologists have found such a garrison and a huge industrial complex in lowland Edom around the time of David. The garrison, a large fortress, was built to protect the valuable copper minerals being mined. This area is proving to be one of the clearest evidences of the power and sophistication of David’s and Solomon’s empire and refuting the critics.

As one of the archaeologists there, Dr. Thomas Levy, wrote, “Even before the founding of the gatehouse and the fortification [around the time of David and Solomon], significant metallurgical activities took place in the area during the 12<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C...the gatehouse initially comprised a typical four-chamber gate, like those found at many Iron Age sites such as Megiddo, Beersheba and Ashdod in modern Israel...the results lend support [for this activity]...to the tenth century B.C., the time of the kingdoms of David and Solomon...Control of lowland-Edom copper production at the beginning of the Iron Age provided a catalyst for the emergence of Edom as a ‘super-chieftdom,’ [during David’s time]... In this context, the biblical references to the Edomites, especially their conflicts with David and subsequent Judahite kings, garner a new plausibility” (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, pp. 34-35). Such an industrial complex, now controlled and augmented by David, helped bring great prosperity to the Israelite economy and trade, and provided funds to back David’s and Solomon’s large building projects.

But with such power and wealth, David did not heed the biblical principle, “Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

What happened? Archaeologist Alfred Hoerth gives a good summary of David’s sordid episodes in 2 Samuel 11-19. “Shame entered David’s life in 2 Samuel 11. On a spring evening, perhaps unable to sleep, David took a stroll around the flat roof of his

palace. As he looked into an adjoining courtyard, he saw a beautiful woman bathing. That David saw the woman was an accident—but what followed was not. David ordered the woman, Bathsheba, brought into the palace, where he slept with her. There is no information about Bathsheba’s feelings in the affair, whether she resisted his advances or encouraged him. Certainly David was guilty [of adultery].

“Bathsheba was married to a mercenary named Uriah, who was then with Israel’s army besieging Rabbah, the Ammonite capital. (Uriah is mentioned as one of David’s 37 valiant men in 1 Chr. 11:41). Therefore, when Bathsheba found herself pregnant, it was obvious that Uriah was not the father. As soon as Bathsheba informed David of her condition, he set about trying to cover up his guilt. David called Uriah back from Rabbah, ostensibly to give him a report on the war; but really so he would spend time with his wife. After Uriah proved too dedicated a soldier to visit Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:11), David sent him back to Joab carrying, unknowingly, his own death sentence (2 Sam. 11:14-15). In a short time, Uriah died by this plot and Bathsheba became widowed.

“From the human standpoint, David’s sins of adultery and virtual murder were close to a perfect crime. Only David and Bathsheba necessarily knew of their affair, and only David and Joab needed to have known the real cause of Uriah’s death. But David had not reckoned on God’s view of his sin nor of God’s methods of punishment. The prophet Nathan forecast disastrous consequences to David’s family—his son would die and the sword (violence), would not depart from his family (2 Sam:12:10-14).

“Bathsheba’s baby died just as Nathan had prophesied, [after David had fasted seven days, asking God for forgiveness and healing for his son] and David’s sin began to spread into his family. David’s oldest son, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar. Another son, Absalom, [who was Tamar’s full brother, Amnon being only a half-brother] brooded over the act for two years, and then, when he found occasion, killed Amnon. Did Absalom kill Amnon solely for the wrong done to Tamar or were his motives more self-serving? Amnon was the oldest son of David. Since David’s second son, Chileab, is mentioned only once (2 Samuel 3:3), it is assumed that he died at a young age. Absalom was David’s third son. With both Chileab and Amnon dead.

Absalom was next in line for the throne. If Absalom did not think of that consequence before killing Amnon, he did soon after.

“Absalom was forced to flee to Geshur, an area along the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. There was no city of refuge in Geshur, but it was the home of Absalom’s maternal grandfather [Taimai] and that relationship seems to have afforded sufficient security. Whatever feelings David had, Joab plotted to get Absalom back home. Perhaps Joab was trying to do David a favor or perhaps he was trying to do himself a favor; it would not hurt to build a friendship with the heir apparent.

“After three years, Absalom was finally brought back to Jerusalem, but David refused to see him for another two years. Because Jerusalem was so small, there must have been times when it was difficult to avoid each other. Certainly, life became difficult for Absalom, and he began to think that he would have been better off staying in Geshur. Twice Absalom tried to get Joab to intercede for him with David, but Joab would not respond; perhaps when David refused to see the newly returned Absalom, Joab realized that he should not become more involved in their estrangement. Joab interceded for Absalom only after Absalom took extreme action to motivate him [burning Joab’s field] (2 Sam. 14:30-32). His effort was successful, and after five years of separation, Absalom and his father were finally reunited.

“As soon as Absalom was again a part of David’s household, he began to ride around Jerusalem in a chariot accompanied by runners who made way for him. Of more consequence, Absalom began the practice of standing beside Jerusalem’s city gate each day and speaking with people who came to the capital with legal problems. The city gate was still the judicial center of a city, and Jerusalem’s gate probably had a special seat built into it for the king to occupy at designated times. Absalom fawned over the people he met in the gateway, sympathized with their complaints and openly wished that he were king so that he could dispense ‘true’ justice.

“Absalom fostered his own popularity for four years, and by the end of that time he had stolen the hearts of the people. With this base of support, Absalom made his move for the throne. First, he lied to his father about why he wanted to go to Hebron. Then, as Absalom proceeded to his father’s first seat of government where he must have expected strong

Judean support, messengers fanned out into the land announcing, ‘As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron’” (2 Sam. 15:10).

“The trumpet sounded and suddenly the coup was on. Several reasons have been suggested to explain the willingness of the people to revolt against David. Perhaps the affair with Bathsheba had become public knowledge, and respect for David had eroded. Further, some may have suspected that Uriah’s death had been planned. This reasoning would account for Ahithophel (2 Sam. 15:12), one of David’s advisors, joining the revolt. Ahithophel [was] Bathsheba’s grandfather; perhaps he never forgave David for seducing his granddaughter and getting rid of her husband. Absalom’s activity at the gateway must have won over some of the people, and the way he behaved there perhaps implies that David had been neglecting internal affairs. There could also have been dissatisfaction over some of Joab’s actions. Finally, it is obvious from the text that some people still preferred the house of Saul to David and wished for a Benjamite rather than a Judean king.

“Whatever the relative weights to these suggestions, David seems to have been caught off guard and to have panicked [he probably did not want a prolonged fight against his beloved son]. Jerusalem was a strong city, and the first report of trouble might have been overblown. Still, David took his six-hundred man mercenary force and quickly fled Jerusalem. The priests Zadok and Abiathar also left the city and carried the ark out with them, but David sent them back into Jerusalem. He wanted them to remain in the city as spies. David told the priests that he would wait down near the Jordan for news; he must have had total trust in them to tell them where he could be found. David also told a man named Hushai to stay in Jerusalem to be his ‘ears’ and to try to thwart Absalom’s plans. David’s trip to the Jordan River was even more unpleasant; before he had proceeded very far he was lied to (2 Sam. 16:3) and had curses, stones, and dirt thrown at him (2 Sam. 16:13). David and those with him were understandably weary when they finally arrived at the Jordan River.

“Absalom entered Jerusalem. With him was Ahithophel, who advised Absalom to establish himself as the new king by sleeping with the ten concubines David had left behind [his advice was so

wise it was as if it came from God Himself]. Therefore, a tent was pitched on the palace roof and Absalom took the concubines of his father 'in the sight of all Israel.' In so doing Absalom appropriated one of the marks of kingship—his predecessor's women—but he also fulfilled part of Nathan's earlier prophecy (2 Sam. 12:11-12).

"Ahithophel wanted troops to go in hot pursuit of David. Such an action would have been wise, but Hushai, who had quickly worked his way into Absalom's inner circle, appealed to the new king's vanity. He advised Absalom to call a general mobilization and then personally advised Absalom to call a general mobilization and then personally lead an army of thousands against the smaller numbers of this father. Absalom elected to follow Hushai's advice. Ahithophel, apparently recognizing that such delay would be fatal, returned home and committed suicide. Since Ahithophel had been David's advisor, he probably anticipated how David would treat a traitor. Absalom lost his best adviser.

"After David was informed of the events in Jerusalem, he crossed the Jordan and found a welcome in Mahanaim. Because Absalom followed Hushai's advice, David had time to gather help from various parts of Transjordan (2 Sam. 17:27). However many soldiers David specifically mustered, they were probably fewer in number than the force that came against him under Absalom's banner. But at least the core of David's army were probably better fighters than the conscripts gathered for Absalom.

"David divided his forces into three groups led by Joab, Joab's brother, and the mercenary commander who had sworn allegiance to David when the coup began. These commanders and their troops would fight for David, but they refused to let him fight because, as they said, if any of them died, the battle would continue, but if David died, it was finished. David complied with the wishes of this general and watched them march out to battle while he stayed behind to wait and worry. The battle was out of David's hands, but he demanded one thing of the three leaders within the hearing of the soldiers, 'Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.'

"The battle was fought in the vicinity of Mahanaim, and David's soldiers won. Absalom was riding a mule (a mark of royalty), and while he was in the forest his hair was caught in the branches of an oak tree. When Joab heard of Absalom's

predicament, he was incredulous that he had been left alive. While the soldiers respected David's caution about his son, Joab ignored their reminder and murdered Absalom as he hung from the tree. Then Joab blew the trumpet to signal victory.

"David was sitting in the court when news reached him of Absalom's death. David's sorrow put a pall over the returning troops, and when Joab returned to Mahanaim he was incensed at David and spoke sharply to his king (2 Sam. 19:5-7). Joab's remonstrance jarred David into reality, and he agreed to meet with the victorious troops. Soon afterward, however, David replaced Joab with Amasa, the general who had just led the losing army against him! Commentators variously interpret David's appointment of Amasa as a way of ridding himself of Joab's dominance, or as an emotional impulse rather than a rational move. But David, who would never forgive Joab for killing Absalom, could as well have been making a shrewd attempt to heal the wounded country. By placing Amasa over Joab, David could be signaling his forgiveness toward everyone who had sided with Absalom.

"The coup had been put down, but there was now the matter of restoring David to the throne. 2 Sam. 19:9-10 provides a taste of the indecision over his reinstatement, and David was apparently bothered that the groundswell for his return was coming from Israel while nothing was being heard from Judah, his home tribe. Because of the silence, David sent word to the priests in Jerusalem and had them ask the elders of Judah why they were the 'last to bring back the king.' Finally, he got unanimous backing to return to Jerusalem" (*Archaeology & the Old Testament*, pp. 269-273).

We'll continue this fascinating account the next time.