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## **ABSALOM'S SHAMEFUL DISLOYALTY.**

– 2 SAM. 15:1-12. – NOVEMBER 1. –

GOLDEN TEXT: – "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

– Ex. 20:12.

THE closing years of King David's life included a series of very trying experiences, which, however, under the Lord's providential care, apparently worked out for him a ripeness of heart and character exhibited to us in the Psalms of his later writing. These disastrous experiences date from the time of his sin, and to a considerable extent they were used of the Lord as punishments for that sin. Although in the case of Absalom's rebellion we may trace the evil which there culminated to circumstances which occurred long previous to David's sin, we are also to remember that it was quite in the Lord's power to have shielded the King so as to have prevented the success of Absalom's deceitful machinations. Amongst these earlier influences may be mentioned David's marriage to Absalom's mother, who was not a Jewess but a foreigner, the daughter of a heathen king. The counsel of the Lord is to the effect that his people should not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, and this counsel applied to the typical Israelite as it still applies to spiritual Israel. This disregard of the divine wisdom was [R3262 : page 397] sure to produce unfavorable results in some manner at some time. Children born to such a mismated marriage are sure to inherit certain elements of character and disposition from the unbelieving parent which will eventually show themselves. In the story of Absalom we see an illustration of this. His vanity, insubordination, disloyalty, went hand in hand with an ambition which seemed to hesitate at nothing. It killed a half-brother who stood between himself and the throne, and later on stimulated a usurpation of his father's throne, and the seeking of his father's life.

Absalom is a distinguished example of dishonor to a father, and the resultant cutting off in the prime of life. The story of his unfilial conduct is told in this lesson. For the murder of his half-brother under provocation he fled from his father's dominions, and was three years an exile in the king's (his grandfather's) [R3262 : page 398] country. Then in intrigues in official circles his father's love for him prevailed upon to such an extent as permitted his return to his home land, and eventually to all the privileges of the heir apparent to the throne. It is at this time that our lesson opens. The young man, remarkable for his handsome appearance, introduced a custom from his grandfather's court, a custom which still prevails in Egypt, namely, that a prince should have a special chariot and a bodyguard of fifty trained men. King David seems to have had so much love for his son that he practically let him have his own way in these matters. The people were pleased with the display, etc., of royalty in the person of their prince, and for several years a great and sobering change had come over the King, who was also advancing in years and who no longer showed himself amongst his people as much as formerly.

The vain young prince was quick to see that his spectacular course pleased the people, and quite probably he heard that his young brother Solomon was David's choice for his successor in the kingdom, and he concluded to make a bid for the royal honors of his father. His method was a crafty one: he would steal the hearts of the people from his father to himself. He had no filial affection; only selfish ambition is manifested in his course. He would use his father's indulgence, which had shielded him from the penalty of his crime, to undermine his father's influence. Surely, if it is wrong to render evil for evil, it is a despicable crime to render evil for good – to a father or a friend or to anyone.

The King in these days acted as a superior court, so that cases not satisfactorily adjudicated before the regular judges were appealed to him. As the nation grew these cases of appeal became more and more numerous, and doubtless the King's advancing age and his

greater attention to religious things, writing of Psalms, etc., interfered to some extent with his conduct of this court business. Absalom perceived all this and turned it to his own account. Meeting those persons who had appeals and who were delayed, he expressed sympathy for them, assuring them that if he were a judge in their case justice would be speedily meted out – of course implying that his hearer had justice on his side and would therefore be pleased with the results. As a prince it was the order of that day that he should receive homage from the people of the realm, and feigning a love and humility which he evidently did not really feel, he lifted up and kissed these people. A royal kiss would be a matter to be boasted of. To have the fellowship, nay the affection, of a prince would mean to many a complete perversion of their judgment and a binding of them to him as his obedient servants.

Not only was this conduct unfilial, dishonoring to his parent, but it would have been disloyal to any ruler, ignoble toward any benefactor. Indeed the word "stole" is none too strong. In stealing the hearts of the people the theft was not less, but even greater, than if he had stolen money or merchandise. There is a point of morality here which is but faintly discerned by many in our day. We regret to be forced to believe that quite a good many are very willing to steal the affections of another and to misrepresent another to their own advantage. The Lord's people of the New Creation need continually to be on their guard against any such tendency in their flesh, which might disguise itself so that its real character would not be discerned readily by the new mind. The Golden Rule should be applied by the saints to all the affairs of life every day. It is a safe rule, and those who use it freely and are obedient to it will assuredly grow in the fruits of the Spirit, all of which are branches of the one great spirit of Love.

This conspiracy against his father may be considered as having begun immediately on Absalom's return from exile, or as dating from his full acceptance back to fellowship with his father and a princely position. In the latter case it was four years in progress, in the former

case six years. When he considered that matters were properly ripe for action, in order not to excite the suspicion of the King or others he asked of the King permission to go to Hebron, there to offer a great sacrifice unto the Lord in harmony with a vow made years before, and the occasion was thus made so important that the taking with him of many of the chief men of the army and of the city would not be considered remarkable, but rather an honor to the King through his son.

Meantime spies had been sent throughout the twelve tribes, and trumpeters were posted in various quarters, so that when the appropriate time would come and Absalom should proclaim himself king at Hebron, these trumpeters, being heard by others, the whole line of trumpeters throughout the twelve tribes would sound almost simultaneously, and the spies in Absalom's secret service as well as the trumpeters would explain the meaning of this to be that Absalom was now king. The people, who had learned to love Absalom because of his mock meekness, would thus gain the impression that the revolution of the kingdom was complete; that King David was certainly thoroughly vanquished, and that their personal prosperity with the new king would depend upon the prompt manifestation of their loyalty to his cause. The matter worked remarkably well, and as a result practically the entire nation was turned to Absalom in a day.

Some of those who went from Jerusalem to Hebron were totally ignorant of the use that was being made [R3262 : page 399] of them, yet their influential names being associated with Absalom would affect the populace; and they in turn, being with him and favored by him as his friends, and their future being dependent upon his grace, had everything to gain by adherence to his cause and everything to lose by its repudiation.

The conspiracy was successful to a degree that could scarcely have been anticipated. Practically the whole nation gave allegiance to Absalom, and that in so outward and marked a manner that it was

necessary for them subsequently, after his defeat and death, to publicly request the King to return to the head of the government of all the tribes. If we wonder that a nation should so quickly forget the valuable services of so eminent a ruler, to whom it owed so much of its prosperity, let us remember that the King's confession would not be viewed by the populace as it is now viewed by God's holy ones. Doubtless some appreciated him in a measure, but more would disesteem him for "showing the white feather," and many would be inclined to consider him an "old hypocrite." His seclusion during those eleven years and his accumulation of treasure for the building of the Temple – perhaps involving taxes upon the people – could all have been viewed from an evil standpoint and have assisted in his unpopularity. It is the fortune of all of the Lord's people to be misunderstood by the worldly, even when conduct and words and intentions are the very best. How careful, then, we all should be to walk circumspectly, and to avoid every appearance of evil!

Here, too, we may have an illustration of how God is able to *overrule* the affairs of the world in such a manner as to execute his designs without interfering with the free agency of any. Had it not been for David's sin and the penalty prescribed for it, Absalom might have had the same evil designs upon the kingdom, – might have made the same effort to accomplish his designs; but the Lord would not have permitted the matter to reach so successful a climax. An example of this is found in the subsequent attempt by a younger brother of Absalom to take the throne. He proceeded in many respects as Absalom did and under more favorable conditions, in that at that time the King had grown quite feeble with age and was unable to administer the interests of the kingdom personally or to take the field in battle. However, in due time the Lord brought the matter to the attention of David, so that the revolt was nipped in the bud before it had time to take effect, and Solomon instead of Adonijah was anointed king.

Just so it is with the Lord's people today. Conspiracies may arise to threaten the interests of the Truth, but the Lord is at the helm, and will permit these to go no further than in his judgment is wise – only so far as they will work for the Lord's glory and the accomplishment of his plans, for the instruction and disciplining of his people, and for the sifting out of those who at heart are enemies of the cause. The general lesson for us is confidence in the great King of kings and Lord of lords; implicit obedience to him and loyalty to the principles of his government; the law of love in our dealings with all the true Israel of God and with mankind in general. The Lord is able and willing to make the things which would seem to harm us work out for our everlasting good and work disastrously to those who essay the injury of his people and his cause.

The Golden Text is well illustrated in our lesson. Absalom, the disrespectful, ungrateful, disobedient son, **[R3263 : page 399]** selfish, avaricious and grasping, came to a disgraceful end in the prime of life, and marks a lesson to his kind. On the other hand Solomon, the peaceful, the good, the wise son, attained to the kingdom, and attained to it, too, with his father's blessing and the divine favor.

