

## 17. The rebels and the friends

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The incredible irony of his whole life is that at one time Josef Stalin, the famous murderous dictator of the former Soviet Union around WWII, had been a seminary student, preparing for the ministry. But being influenced by the late German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, he made a decisive break from his belief in God. This dramatic and complete reversal of conviction that resulted in his hatred for all religions is why Lenin had earlier chosen Stalin and positioned him in authority – although Lenin later regretted that decision. The name Stalin, which means “steel,” was not his real name, but was given to him by his contemporaries who fell under the steel-like determination of his will. And as Stalin lay dying, his last gesture was a clenched fist toward God – his heart as cold and hard as steel.

To our God, rebellion is nothing unfamiliar. At the Garden of Eden, the first couple of mankind displayed their sin of pride and rebellion against God.

All of us are born with rebellion in our hearts. From an innocent looking infant baby to the most notorious rebels around the world, we all have a rebellion within. The only difference is how much we express it to God and the authority God has over us. Rebellion does not happen only in political, social, and domestic levels, but also it happens on the spiritual level and in the church. As long as there are humans, there are rebellions.

### A. I AM YOUR MAN

*2 Samuel 15:1-6 After this it happened that Absalom provided himself with chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. 2 Now Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way to the gate. So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him and say, “What city are you from?” And he would say, “Your servant is from such and such a tribe of Israel.” 3 Then Absalom would say to him, “Look, your case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you.” 4 Moreover Absalom would say, “Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice.” 5 And so it was, whenever anyone came near to bow down to him, that he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him. 6 In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*

Absalom’s self-appointed royal procession with 50 men, chariots, and horses were intended to attract attention to himself and to remind the people of his relationship to David as heir to the throne. This was nothing more than a self-exaltation.

*1 Peter 5:5-6 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,*

This is Absalom the politician, sensing what the people want and knowing how to provide them with the image of what they want.

In v3, the implication of Absalom’s remark was that David was too busy to hear the case, yet too jealous of his own authority to delegate someone to deal with the concern.

This is the way many men get elected to office today. They have no qualifications other than the fact that they are good at handshaking and backslapping. There are many preachers who use this method today. They cannot preach, and they cannot teach, but they sure can kiss babies, shake hands, and slap backs. Unfortunately, that is exactly what appeals to us. As far as I can tell from the Word of God, that is the way that the antichrist will come to power. He is going to be the greatest backslapper that the world has ever seen.

Absalom stirred up dissatisfaction within David's government and campaigned against David by promising to provide justice that David denied the people. Absalom had a good reason to be disillusioned with David's administration of justice. When his half brother Amnon raped his own sister Tamar, David did nothing, absolutely nothing.

Once the people in Israel welcomed David as their king. But now they want a new good looking king. Once the people in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus as the Son of David and their Messiah. Within a few days, the same crowd who shouted, "Hosanna, the Son of David," screamed at the top of their lungs, "Crucify Him." The same people who accepted you and praised you before can turn against you. Often we get hurt by other people's fickle hearts. But our God is faithful. We always can trust Him.

## **B. SOUNDS SO SPIRITUAL**

*2 Samuel 15:7-12 Now it came to pass after forty years that Absalom said to the king, "Please, let me go to Hebron and pay the vow which I made to the Lord. 8 For your servant took a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, 'If the Lord indeed brings me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord.' " 9 And the king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. 10 Then Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom reigns in Hebron!' " 11 And with Absalom went two hundred men invited from Jerusalem, and they went along innocently and did not know anything. 12 Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city—from Giloh—while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number.*

Absalom committed treason under the guise of worship. He knew that the appearance of spirituality could work in his favor.

Divisive people rarely see themselves as divisive. They see themselves as crusaders for God's righteous cause and often believe or hope God's hand is upon them.

David said to Absalom, "Go in peace." These are David's last words to Absalom. Upon hearing these, Absalom went to carry on the plot to overthrow David's kingdom.

Absalom sought David's permission to move to Hebron, about 20 miles south of Jerusalem, where he would have more freedom to start a rebellion. Since Absalom was born in Hebron, it would probably not seem unusual to David that he would want to fulfill his vow there. In Hebron, David started his dynasty after Saul. Absalom counted on the hope that most of Israel would see this as succession, not treason.

Absalom was smart enough to know that he needed others to endorse – or at least appear to endorse – his government. He counted on these 200 men, who were not against David, to at least be silent – and give the impression that they were for Absalom. When the innocent and unknowing are among the divisive, their silence is always received as agreement.

### **C. AN ESCAPE WITHOUT A FIGHT**

*2 Samuel 15:13-18 Now a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." 14 So David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee; or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword."*

*15 And the king's servants said to the king, "We are your servants, ready to do whatever my lord the king commands." 16 Then the king went out with all his household after him. But the king left ten women, concubines, to keep the house. 17 And the king went out with all the people after him, and stopped at the outskirts. 18 Then all his servants passed before him; and all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had followed him from Gath, passed before the king.*

David knew well that Absalom was a ruthless man who valued power over principle. He didn't want the city of Jerusalem to become a battleground, so he fled the city. Besides, David wanted to avoid another occasion to have his son get killed.

So how do you deal with these divisive people? Do nothing. If you try to stop them from making a division by going after them, you are making them be martyrs. And the people who don't know will side with them for the sake of pity.

I find the comments made by David's servant are so refreshing. The loyalty of David's servants must have been a real encouragement in a time of such disloyalty from David's own family. I remember the time when I was down and out, you guys have been such encouragers from the Lord. I thank you.

I asked you to underline v16. Without knowing, David was setting himself up for fulfilling the prophecy that was given by God through Nathan in chapter 12:11.

These Cherethites and Pelethites men comprised David's personal bodyguard. The Gittites faithfully followed him from the time he lived among the Philistines. These men who were faithful to David before he became successful also stick with him when his success seems to be fading away.

It is remarkable that in this defining moment foreigners rallied around David. It is more remarkable and tragic that his own countrymen and his own family are nowhere to be found.

During this difficult time, David wrote several Psalms that we have in the Book of Psalms. They are Psalm 3, 41, 55, 61, 62, and 63.

### **D. THE PEOPLE WHO STOOD NEAR**

In a magazine cartoon, a thief was wearing one of those "Lone Ranger" masks. His gun was pointed toward his frightened victim as he yelled: "Okay, put all your valuables into my sack!" The victim began stuffing into the sack all his friends.

To meet David's needs, God provided him not just one friend but several faithful supporters and friends:

### 1) Ittai

*2 Samuel 15:19-23 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also going with us? Return and remain with the king. For you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. 20 In fact, you came only yesterday. Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you." 21 And Ittai answered the king and said, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be." 22 So David said to Ittai, "Go, and cross over." Then Ittai the Gittite and all his men and all the little ones who were with him crossed over. 23 And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over. The king himself also crossed over the Brook Kidron, and all the people crossed over toward the way of the wilderness.*

Ittai was a Philistine official from Gath who had recently defected to Israel. He was already a displaced person. Why would he involve his family and his men in more uncertainty by following David? The king urged him to return.

In contrast to David's own countrymen, Ittai vowed his loyalty to the king. Now that's a true friend. When everyone else has turned away, there will be a few who will say, "I'm with you. Count on me. I'm here to the end." One might even be a person from Gath – a person who had been once our enemy, but who has come full circle to become our friend. Blood ties don't always guarantee friendship. Actually, when the family member goes against us, it is nastier than the situation with strangers. While David's son became an enemy, ironically, a Philistine proved to be his friend.

### 2) Zadok and Abiathar

*2 Samuel 15:24-29 There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. 25 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 show me both it and His dwelling place. 26 But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him." 27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. 28 See, I will wait in the plains of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." 29 Therefore Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem. And they remained there.*

Following Ittai and his men were the priests Zadok and Abiathar and a company of Levites carrying the ark of the covenant. The ark symbolized God's presence and favor, which was with David and not Absalom. David, however, wasn't comfortable making that assumption. He asked Zadok and Abiathar to return the ark and wait for God to act on behalf of him.

Once again, David showed himself a man after God's heart by surrendering himself completely to God's will. Whether under the hand of discipline or blessing, David determined to let God have His way with him.

### 3) Hushai

*2 Samuel 15:30-37 So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up. 31 Then someone told David, saying, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O Lord, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!" 32 Now it happened when David had come to the top of the mountain, where he worshiped God—there was Hushai the Archite coming to meet him with his robe torn and dust on his head. 33 David said to him, "If you go on with me, then you will become a burden to me. 34 But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; as I was your father's servant previously, so I will now also be your servant,' then you may defeat the counsel of Ahithophel for me. 35 And do you not have Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? Therefore it will be that whatever you hear from the king's house, you shall tell to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. 36 Indeed they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son; and by them you shall send me everything you hear." 37 So Hushai, David's friend, went into the city. And Absalom came into Jerusalem.*

When Jesus went from the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, He essentially traced David's steps. Both David and Jesus suffered for sin, but Jesus suffered for our sins and David suffered for his own.

This wasn't a pity-party or soreness merely over the consequences of sin. King David is crushed by the consciousness that his punishment is deserved – the bitter fruit of the sin that filled all his later life with darkness. His courage has left him.

David knew that Ahithophel was usually a good advisor, but he prayed that the counsel he gave to Absalom would be foolish. It will turn out to be exactly as David asked.

Speaking of friends, here are 4 important things we must know about friends:

- **Friends are essential.**

There is no substitute for a friend – someone to care, to listen, to comfort, and even to reprove.

- **Friends must be cultivated.**

As British writer Samuel Johnson has written, "If a man does not make new acquaintances as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, sir, should keep his friendship in a constant repair." I agree.

- **Friends impact our lives.**

Those we are close to rub off on us, change us. Their morals and philosophies, convictions and character eventually become our own. Choose your friends carefully.

- **Friends can be one of four types.**

They can be an acquaintance, a casual friend, a close friend, or an intimate friend – which is the closest of all. You have the fewest number of intimate friends, but you also enjoy the highest level of honesty with them. These are the people with whom you have regular contact and a deep commitment to mutual character development. With them, you share the freedom to criticize and correct, encourage and embrace.

## **E. APPLICATIONS**

1) When a person tries to establish his or her righteousness rather than submitting to God's, it is nothing more than a total defiance to God.

2) A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

*Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

3) Friend is someone who comes to you when the whole world has gone out.