

## *Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories*

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study.

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### **19 - Highlights from 2 Samuel 12-19, "King David & Absalom"**

Having been called out over his sin with Bathsheba, David's heart was turned to repentance and he wrote in Psalm 51, *"For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean... Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."*

Although King David sought after the Lord, to walk in a righteous way, some of his sons had little concern for the will of God. His son Amnon was so taken with his half-sister, Tamar, that he forced himself upon her and then mistreated her even more by casting her into the street weeping (2Sam 13). When Tamar's brother, Absalom, discovered what happened, he plotted to kill Amnon for what he had done. Waiting for two years to avenge his sister, Absalom invited his brothers to celebrate the sheep-shearing he was hosting, which was typically a joyful fellowship. But as Amnon became merry with wine, Absalom ordered his servants to kill him. Fearing the king's reprisal, Absalom fled the country for three years as King David mourned.

General Joab knew that King David missed Absalom, so he intervened and convinced the king to have Absalom return to Jerusalem (2Sam 14). However, even though Absalom had returned, for two years he had not been brought into his father's presence. Joab was reluctant to intervene a second time, but Absalom finally convinced him after setting the general's barley field on fire. With general Joab's intervention, King David summoned his son and received him with a kiss.

Absalom began to conspire against his father, subtly undermining the king as he lifted himself up in the eyes of the people. Leaving Jerusalem, Absalom gathered his supporters and had himself declared king. Amassing a small army, he planned to return to Jerusalem and unseat his father (2Sam 15). Seeking to avoid bloodshed in the city, King David fled before Absalom could arrive. The king's "Mighty Men" loyally gathered around him in this strategic retreat. King David left a few of his loyal agents behind to inform on Absalom and to give Absalom bad advice. While there were many who greatly mourned the king's retreat from Jerusalem, one of the former servants of Saul, a man named Shimei, mocked him instead, cursing him and even flinging dust at him. Yet, the king refused to let one of his mighty men kill Shimei over his

mockery of the king. The humble King David said, *"It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today"* (2Sam 16:12).

As Absalom laid plans to pursue and attack his father's forces, one of David's secret agents, Hushai, dissuaded Absalom from launching a swift attack, and bought David time to prepare (2Sam 17). Hushai sent Zadok and Abiathar the priests to warn David of Absalom's strategy and to cross the Jordan River before Absalom's forces could reach him. As David prepared to engage his son's forces, he ordered his own commanders to capture, but not kill, Absalom. The king prepared to lead in the battle, but his men begged him not to, for fear of his life. So David stayed behind, relying on the leadership of his commanders (2Sam 18).

The battle raged in the midst of a forest, and Absalom's forces were soundly defeated by David's Mighty Men and the soldiers that were with them. As Absalom rode a mule during the battle, his famous long hair became entangled in the thick branches of a great oak tree. When it was reported to general Joab that Absalom was dangling by his hair, Joab ignored the order of the king, and thrust three javelins into Absalom's chest. The general's armor-bearers followed his example and struck Absalom until he was dead.

Messengers carried the news of the victory to King David. But, when the king was told of the death of his son, he was filled with grief and wept inconsolably. David's grief was so great that his forces returned to him without celebrating their victory (2Sam 19). Joab rebuked the king, telling him that his grief dishonored those who fought for him and those rescued from Absalom's coup attempt because of the David's victory. Taking Joab's words to heart, King David pulled himself together and went to be with his loyal supporters.

In the wake of King David's victory, those who had followed Absalom fled from Jerusalem. King David returned, pardoning those who had participated in Absalom's uprising. He promised to make Absalom's general, Amasa, leader of his own army, replacing Joab. When Shimei begged his forgiveness, King David prevented his soldiers from killing him for having mocked and cursed the king during his earlier retreat. Mephibosheth, whose servant Ziba had left him in Jerusalem saying he had turned to Absalom, presented himself to the king stating that he had been slandered and was always loyal. David, thinking he had turned against him, had given Mephibosheth's property to Ziba. After hearing Mephibosheth's testimony, the king divided the land between him and Ziba. But, Mephibosheth told him that Ziba could have it all, because his only desire was the safe return of King David to Jerusalem.

Tension between the northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah rose as the northern tribes complained that they were not included as Judah gathered and brought the king back to Jerusalem. The men of Judah rejected their complaint, increasing the tension.