



Studies in the Life of David

Text

Second Samuel 13:20-39

Topic

Absalom gets his brother Amnon drunk at a banquet then orders his sheep shearers to murder him

Title

"A Shear Death Experience"

Introduction

- On 29 November 1979, Air New Zealand flight 901 crashed into Mt Erebus in Antarctica killing all 257 people that took the sight-seeing flight.
- In 1983 Korean Air Lines Flight 007 wandered into Russian airspace and was shot down by a Russian MiG fighter over the Sea of Japan. The airliner was en route to Seoul from New York City via Anchorage, Alaska. All 269 lives were lost.

The two air disasters have in common that in both cases the flight coordinates were off **by two degrees or less**.

Even a small error in a course setting can lead to disaster.

You see where I'm going with this. You and I are on a journey, a spiritual journey. We are on the earth but headed for Heaven. We are on a path, sometimes described as 'the narrow road,' and must stay on course. Errors in our course setting can lead to problems.

In Colossians 3:2 we read, “**set** your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” It is up to us where we “set” our mind while on the journey home. We can and should set it on Heaven, but we can, if we choose, set it on the earth.

Our text in Second Samuel illustrates how mind-set determines destination. Amnon had sexually assaulted his half-sister, Tamar. Her brother, Absalom, set his mind on murdering Amnon. Two years later he arrived at the destination he had set.

Setting our minds and our mind-set is what we want to discuss. I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Free To Set Your Mind, and #2 You Are A Slave To Your Mind-Set.

#1 You Are Free To Set Your Mind (v20-22)

We’re told that after Amnon raped Tamar, Absalom “hated” him. I think it’s a mistake, however, to believe that what Amnon did to his sister was his primary motive for killing his brother.

As the story unfolds Absalom will eventually rebel against David and seize the throne for a time. We see that Absalom had his mind set on the throne and that ‘setting’ was what directed him in his actions. I think it directed him in how he dealt with the rape of his sister.

Amnon was David’s firstborn and heir apparent. A second son, Daniel (also known as Chiliab) is never really mentioned in these contentions. He may have died young. Absalom was David’s third son and apparently second in line after Amnon to succeed his father.

From the natural, earthly point of view, Absalom would only become king after David if something happened to Amnon. When Amnon violated his sister, Absalom had the opportunity he needed to make something happen to Amnon.

2 Samuel 13:20 And Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this thing to heart." So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.

This verse is as full of intrigue as it is sadness. Let's first think about Absalom's advice to his lovely sister. It might seem he was the protective older brother, but that's just a facade. **A protective older brother would have taken some immediate action.**

The spirit of God's law specified what ought to have taken place. In the case of the rape of an innocent girl the perpetrator was to take her as his wife. It sounds strange and abusive to our way of thinking but in the tribal culture of Israel it preserved the girl's honor and provided for her.

Tamar herself had suggested to Amnon, before the assault, that he ask her hand in marriage. Even after being violated she understood that the right thing to do under the law was to remain with Amnon.

Amnon refused but he could have been forced to marry Tamar. Absalom ignored the godly alternative. He didn't go to his dad on Tamar's behalf. Instead he suggested she keep quiet and live in shame the rest of her life. "Don't think about it," is what he told her.

It doesn't sound like a caring big brother to me. It sounds like someone who wants to eliminate his competition and now has an excuse to do so.

Absalom plotted to kill Amnon. We know that this was his intent from the beginning because of what Jonadab says in verse thirty-two, "for by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar."

Absalom had "determined" to kill Amnon "from the day" he raped Tamar. We might think his killing Amnon was justified. After all, any decent movie or TV show in which someone gets assaulted ends with the perpetrator being violently killed and with us cheering because he had it coming.

He patiently waited for two years until he could carry out the murder, eliminate the heir standing in his way, and have some hope of masking it under the guise of honoring his sister.

2 Samuel 13:21 But when King David heard of all these things, he was very angry.

There is a lot of speculation as to why David remained passive in the midst of these family and kingdom tragedies. Of course he ought to have been more proactive. Let him be a witness to parents and leaders that inaction can make things much worse.

2 Samuel 13:22 And Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.

Absalom genuinely “hated” Amnon for what he had done. Who wouldn’t? But his indifference in handling the situation belies the fact that there was more going on in his mind than concern for his sister.

Absalom “set his mind... on things on the earth.” It’s clear looking back over his entire story that he desired to be king. He set his heart on it and it determined a course of action that lacked compassion for his sister, murdered his brother, and overthrew his father.

Anytime I set my mind “on things on the earth” I am determining that I want to be ‘king,’ ruling my own life, rather than submitting to the plans and purposes of God for my life.

When we set our minds on things on the earth, it’s usually more subtle and less obvious than Absalom. But it’s no less destructive in the long run.

What is my mind really set upon? Well, to a certain extent what I’ve set my mind to is revealed in what or who I am really living for. It is revealed by what or who I am thinking about most of the time.

If that doesn’t help you to discover your mind-set, then just ask the Lord to show you, in His love, what it is or who it is that you’ve set your mind on. If

it's something or someone other than Him, change the setting, dial-in 'Jesus,' and get back on course towards Heaven.

#2 You Are A Slave To Your Mind-Set (v23-39)

What Absalom determined to do, he did. It isn't something he should be commended for. He became a slave to his mind-set. His desire to be king instead of Amnon saw the opportunity and waited to take advantage of it.

2 Samuel 13:23 And it came to pass, after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baal Hazor, which is near Ephraim; so Absalom invited all the king's sons.

2 Samuel 13:24 Then Absalom came to the king and said, "Kindly note, your servant has sheepshearers; please, let the king and his servants go with your servant."

2 Samuel 13:25 But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go now, lest we be a burden to you." Then he urged him, but he would not go; and he blessed him.

2 Samuel 13:26 Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." And the king said to him, "Why should he go with you?"

2 Samuel 13:27 But Absalom urged him; so he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.

It wouldn't be easy to kill the king's son and heir to the throne and get away with it. But it could be done. As Michael Corleone once said, "If anything in this life is certain, if history has taught us anything, it is that you can kill anyone."

He made his move by inviting David and "all the king's sons" to the annual sheepshearing. I'm guessing that Absalom knew his dad, for some reason, would not be able to attend. But inviting him put David off a little. Even though it seems by David's response he had some concerns about Amnon's safety, he was put off his guard by Absalom.

Plus, it had been two years since Tamar was raped. Certainly Absalom would have acted by now if he was going to. Wouldn't he have?

2 Samuel 13:28 Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, "Watch now, when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon!' then kill him. Do not be afraid. Have I not commanded you? Be courageous and valiant."

I can hear *The Godfather* theme playing in the background! It's always when you least expect it that the hit occurs.

There was nothing "courageous and valiant" about killing a weaponless drunken man as he feasted. Absalom portrayed their actions as if they were in a battle. In his mind, they were - a battle for the throne of Israel.

2 Samuel 13:29 So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and each one got on his mule and fled.

Mules can run! Did you know that there was an American Mule Racing Association (AMRA) formed to promote the racing of mules at recognized distances?

I only mention that because, growing up watching *Gunsmoke*, when I think of riding a mule I get an image of Festus, Marshall Dillon's loyal deputy, and his mule, Ruth. Not exactly the image of a prince on his steed!

2 Samuel 13:30 And it came to pass, while they were on the way, that news came to David, saying, "Absalom has killed all the king's sons, and not one of them is left!"

It's not unusual to receive erroneous reports about an incident. People tend to assume things and then report them as factual. Or things get exaggerated in their retelling.

In this case I would not rule out a disinformation strategy in which Absalom wanted David initially to think all his sons had been killed so that when he heard it was only Amnon he would be strangely comforted. Then David would think, "After all, something ought to have been done to Amnon for his crime of assaulting Tamar and refusing to make it right." He could hardly blame Absalom for taking action.

2 Samuel 13:31 So the king arose and tore his garments and lay on the ground, and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn.

They must have had big wardrobe budgets in those days! There was a lot of clothes tearing in response to tragedy.

2 Samuel 13:32 Then Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David's brother, answered and said, "Let not my lord suppose they have killed all the young men, the king's sons, for only Amnon is dead. For by the command of Absalom this has been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar.

2 Samuel 13:33 Now therefore, let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead. For only Amnon is dead."

Jonadab had good news but **he** was bad news. He's the crafty "friend" of Amnon's who had suggested how Amnon might seduce Tamar in the first place. Now he was hanging around David. Of course, as a relative it was hard to ignore him. But by now it ought to be obvious he was trouble.

He seemed to know more about this than he should. He knew that Absalom had determined to kill Amnon for the past two years. And he knew details of the plot because he could say with confidence that only Amnon was dead. I can't help but wonder if he had a bigger role in this than we're told.

2 Samuel 13:34 Then Absalom fled. And the young man who was keeping watch lifted his eyes and looked, and there, many people were coming from the road on the hillside behind him.

2 Samuel 13:35 And Jonadab said to the king, "Look, the king's sons are coming; as your servant said, so it is."

2 Samuel 13:36 So it was, as soon as he had finished speaking, that the king's sons indeed came, and they lifted up their voice and wept. Also the king and all his servants wept very bitterly.

Jonadab never missed an opportunity to promote himself. Again I suggest he knew a little too much and seemed to be trying to get David on board with the thought that Amnon's death wasn't so bad after all.

What a dark day this was in David's family. I wonder if David felt a sense of *deja vu*? Some years earlier he had tried to get Uriah merry with wine to cover his adultery with Bathsheba. When that failed David ordered his servants to have Uriah killed in battle.

2 Samuel 13:37 But Absalom fled and went to Talmi the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day.

Absalom's mom was a Geshurite. He fled to his grandpa's to be kept safe from any retribution. He didn't flee to a city of refuge in Israel because what he had done was premeditated murder and there was no refuge for him.

Killing Amnon was a bold move. But I think Absalom had some idea that his father would not come after him. He seemed to know, or at least was willing to gamble, that he could bide his time and return.

After all, David had done nothing to Amnon after the incident with Tamar. It looked as though he was still the heir to the throne. Absalom would only rule if Amnon was eliminated.

"David mourned for his son every day." I wonder if this was some regular act of mourning, or just the feeling in his heart?

2 Samuel 13:38 So Absalom fled and went to Geshur, and was there three years.

"Three years" isn't really that long to be in exile when you consider the stakes. Everything was on schedule for Absalom to at least attempt to return. Then he'd have the option of waiting for dad to die, since he was now next in succession to be king. Or he might just overthrow his dad - which, in fact, he will do.

2 Samuel 13:39 And King David longed to go to Absalom. For he had been comforted concerning Amnon, because he was dead.

At some point David's mourning for Amnon came to an end. He began to long for Absalom. I mean, why not? David could easily blame himself for his inaction towards Amnon leading Absalom to take action. He'd lost Amnon; why lose Absalom?

He didn't seem to understand, or maybe didn't want to understand, that Absalom's mind was set on the throne and that he, David, was another obstacle to be overcome.

Absalom was a slave to his mind-set. His theme song was, *I Just Can't Wait to be King*. It caused him to leave his sister in a devastated condition for the rest of her life. It led him to plot a murder and then a coup. He was willing to live in exile, as a fugitive, in order to attain what he's set his mind upon.

It's important we determine what or who our mind is set upon because it will be our master.

- If our mind-set is earthly, we will set out to accomplish our earthly goals and we will do so using earthly, carnal methods. We'll convince ourselves that the end justifies the means, but they do not because God is more interested in my heart than in my achievements.
- When our mind is set on Heaven, on seeing Jesus and being with Him where He is, we will be free to be His slaves and accomplish His will for our lives. It may not bring us earthly success or position but it will fill our lives with joy.

There's an Absalom within each of us. A determination to rule over the kingdom of our lives. If we set our course by it even a little, we'll be way off in our destination.

Set your mind on Heaven. Setting our sights on the realities of Heaven means striving to put Heaven's priorities into daily practice. Letting Heaven fill our thoughts means concentrating on the eternal rather than the temporal.

Let me suggest an example. Let's say you're planning a big vacation. You go to work, you go through your daily routines at home, but you're all the while getting ready for the trip. Especially as the days tick by. Your mind is set on vacation. You strive to get your work caught-up, to get your house ready and in order, so you can go where you really want to be.

Heaven is much more than a vacation destination! But I think you get the idea. You can set your mind by Heaven and let it determine your course as you journey homeward.

Realize, too, that you could be there today! The rapture is imminent... Or your own departure may be at hand.

Get your work done for the glory of God. Set your house in order for the glory of God. You are Heaven-bound. Set your mind on things above.

