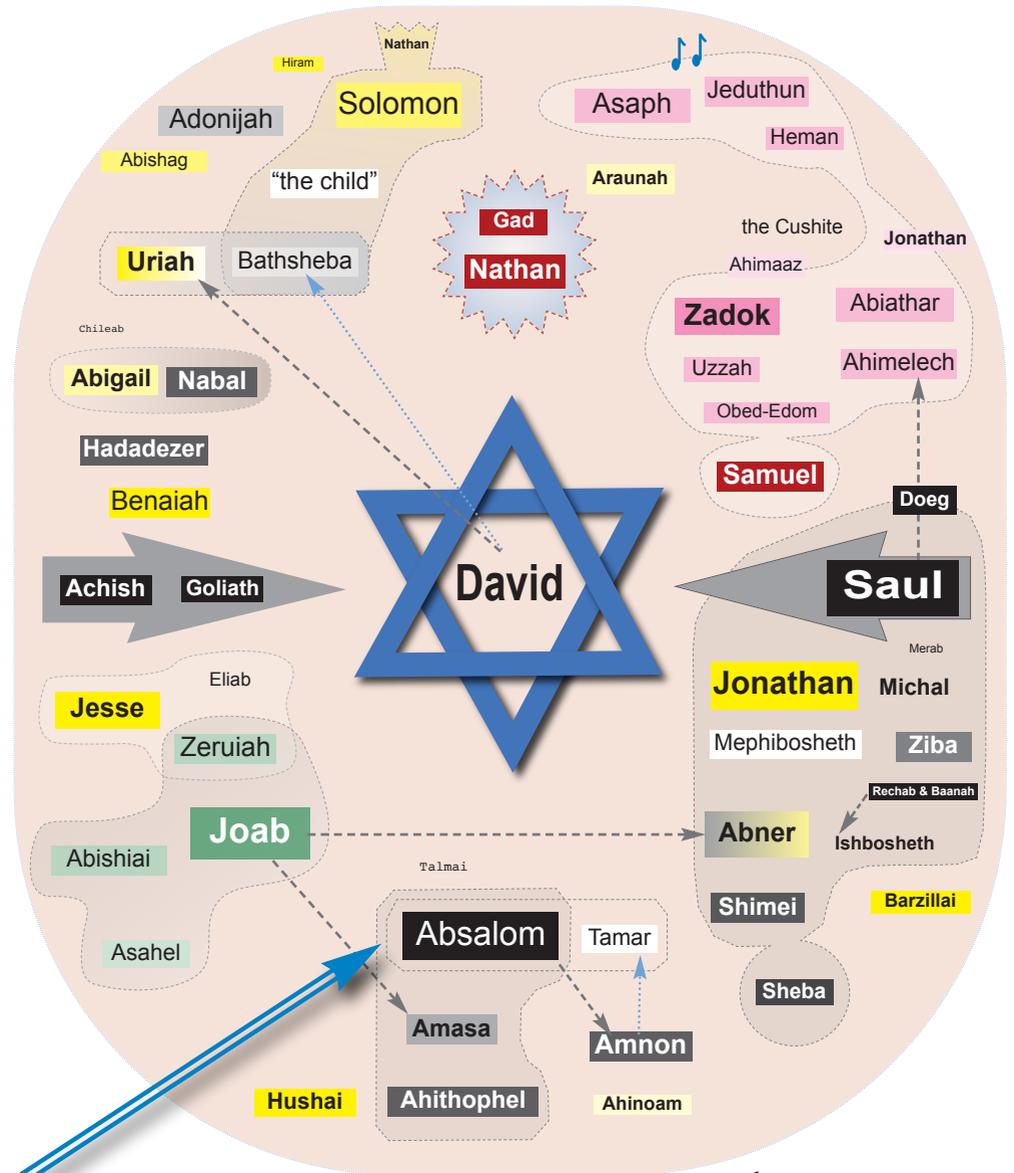


surrounded



people in the life of David

about Absalom

1.) David's third son, Absalom (3:3), is mentioned more in Samuel than any of the others, even more than Solomon who came to prominence later in First Kings. Only David, Saul, Jonathan, and Joab are mentioned more in Samuel than Absalom. Most of Second Samuel chs. 13-19 concern him and his rebellion against his father.

2.) Absalom seemed to be concerned and zealous for his beautiful sister Tamar (13:20-22) who was raped (13:1-14) and then rejected (13:15-19) by their older half-brother, Amnon. However, killing Amnon (13:23-33) also served Absalom's purpose by eliminating his chief rival for the throne (3:3). — His only other older brother, Chileab, probably died earlier since he's not mentioned in genealogies.

3.) Absalom's mother was the daughter of the king of Geshur in Syria (3:3), to which he fled after killing Amnon (13:37). It's reasonable to assume that Absalom's philosophy of life was influenced by this Gentile connection, since the marriage of his mother to David was probably for political purposes. It's not surprising that the son born of this union was likewise interested in politics and power.

4.) The rebellion of Absalom and his sexual union with his father's concubines (16:21-22) was prophesied by Nathan in 12:11-12 as part of God's judgment upon David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah. Absalom was still responsible for his sins, however.

5.) Political interaction is everywhere in Second Samuel chs. 14 and 15. In fact, there is probably more such in these two chapters than in any others in the entire Bible. To see what politics is really like, there are no better chapters to study than these, with the possible exceptions of Matthew 27-28 and John 18-19.

6.) Why was Absalom so popular? The simple answer is because he was more active politically than his Father in chs. 13 through 15. David neglected his duties as judge at that time which gave Absalom an easy opening to criticize him (15:2-6). His failure to take action against Amnon in ch. 13 apparently wasn't an isolated example. Having fallen into sin himself (ch. 11), David failed to judge others as he should.

7.) It's interesting to compare Absalom's actions in 15:1-6 with those of modern politicians. Apparently greeting people in prominent public places, expressing interest in the particular concerns of various groups, and holding campaign rallies are nothing new (15:2-4). Being handsome and rich, of course, still helps, as well. And finally let's not forget how effective a few pious-sounding lies can be (15:7-8).

8.) Absalom was successful at first. Everything seemed to go as planned in chs. 13 through 15. One bad decision in 17:14, however, led to Absalom's defeat and death in 18:14-15. Humanly speaking he followed the wrong advice, but it was the Lord who brought him to a disastrous end.

What should we learn from Absalom?

TO NOT SEEK POPULARITY?

Absalom was like a skillful modern politician who finally gains a high political position after years of effort only to be publically disgraced and put out of office a short time later because of his sinful ways. One can learn a lot about effective political manipulation from Absalom in Second Samuel chs. 14 and 15, but that is not the point of chs. 13 through 19 as a whole. His life shows the vanity of being primarily political, of seeking after worldly popularity and success, while neglecting God.

TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT ADVISORS?

Absalom seems to have come to his disastrous end in ch. 18 because he followed the wrong advice in ch. 17. So there was a need for practical wisdom and good advisors. Politicians would certainly agree with this point.

However, Absalom's real need was for godly wisdom and, more importantly, for the will to follow it. Though he told David in 15:7-8 that he had made a vow to serve the Lord, that was a lie. The real lesson from Absalom along this line is that one needs to be careful about his or her own heart (Pro. 4:23).

TO BE A BETTER FATHER?

Was Absalom wicked because David had been a bad father? In part, the answer is probably yes, for David should not have married Absalom's mother for political reasons and he should not have neglected his children as he apparently did. First and Second Samuel are full of parental failure, from Eli to Samuel and from Saul to David.

That said, there are no perfect parents and Absalom was responsible for his own sins. Thus, he was personally judged by God. He should have been and could have been a better son, despite his father's various faults.

TO BE AMBITIOUS FOR GOD?

Finally some may say that the main lesson to be learned from Absalom's life and death is to not be overly ambitious, arguing that if he had been satisfied with lesser things he would not have clashed with his father. This is partly true, yet God does not wish for his people to be passive and lacking in ambition. Rather we are to do whatever we do *heartily* for the Lord rather than to please people (Col. 3:23) or ourselves.

Absalom is the chief villain in Second Samuel, as Saul was in First Samuel, because he was ambitious for the wrong things and in the wrong way. If only he had been ambitious for the Lord rather than for himself!