

**Preparation for an Assassination, 2 Samuel 13:23-25**

Absalom is already a self-absorbed person, admired by all the ladies of the realm because of his physical beauty.

**2 Samuel 14:25** - Now in all Israel there was no one as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no defect in him.

Absalom's personality is summed up very well by:

**Lockyer, Herbert. All the Men of the Bible. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958, p. 30:**

*His handsome appearance was accented by his aristocratic poise, his commanding presence, his natural dignity, his extraordinary graces all of which worked together to make him a person of charm, eloquence, and persuasiveness which won him the hearts of all Israel.*

While displaying the impeccable deportment of a statesman, Absalom was in the interlocking system of arrogance including iconoclastic, conspiratorial, and criminal arrogance. Quietly and un-reluctantly he plotted the demise of Amnon behind a facade of good manners.

Already self-absorbed, David's failure to execute justice enables Absalom to self-justify the murder of Amnon. He also is in self-deception since he rationalizes that he is justified in organizing a conspiracy to perform the assassination. Hatred for Amnon got it started following the emergence of the feet of clay syndrome. Now he functions under revenge motivation and is obsessed with destroying Amnon in order to discredit David. In so doing he will accomplish two objectives, (1) avenge his sister Tamar, and (2) push David off his pedestal as icon of Israel.

**2 Samuel 13:23** - Two years later when Absalom's sheep-shearers were at Baal-hazor, Absalom invited to a party all the sons of the king.

After two years of minding his manners and thus creating the impression that he had adjusted to Tamar's rape and David's jurisprudence, Absalom begins to put his conspiracy plot into action.

Some 90 miles north of Jerusalem beyond the Sea of Galilee (known then as the Sea of Chinnereth) and to the west of the Jordan River is a city named Hazor, on the outskirts of which was a temple to the Phoenician god, Baal.

To the east of the Jordan was the country of Geshur whose king was Absalom's grandfather, Talmai.

It was at Baal-hazor that Absalom owned a sheep ranch where each year following the annual shearing, it was customary to have a big party. It was at this customary outing that Absalom decided would be the setting for his assassination of his brother Amnon.

In order not to arouse any suspicions, Absalom first invited all of his brothers. The guest list is found in 2 Samuel 3:2, 2 Samuel 3:3, 2 Samuel 3:4, 2 Samuel 3:5 and included Amnon, Chileab, Adonijah, Shephatiah [Chef-a-TIE-ah], and Ithream [Ith-ree-um]. In addition, Absalom decided to invite David and his entire cabinet.

**2 Samuel 13:24** - Absalom went to the king and said, "Your servant has had shearers come. Will the king and his cabinet please join me."

Sheep were sheared annually in the spring either by the owners or by professional shearers. It was a big operation requiring expert craftsmanship since the fleece were more profitable if kept whole. The conclusion of the shearing became a time of great festivals as the year's labor was celebrated by owners, laborers, and friends.

It is to this event that Absalom refers when he says to his father, "Your servant has had shearers come."

The invitation to join him at his Baal-hazor ranch for the shearing refers to the big party associated with it. The invitation looks innocent enough since all the brothers are invited and David is given a special invitation that includes the entire cabinet.

Absalom hides his intrigue through good manners. He knows that David is not about to abandon Jerusalem for a party. He knows David won't accept but by inviting him it helps remove any doubts David might have about Absalom's real intentions.

All successful conspiracies have a legitimate smoke screen so the intentions of the conspiracy will not be evident. This is a principle we noted on several occasions during our study of Civil Disobedience, the principle of the rhetorical veil: A rhetorical veil conceals while it advances a hidden agenda.

Absalom's rhetorical veil is his good manners including his open invitation to David. His hidden agenda is the assassination of Amnon. His good manners conceal while at the same time advance his hidden agenda.

David is forced to express his regrets in:

**2 Samuel 13:25** - But the king said to Absalom, “No, my son, all of us should not go as we would be too burdensome to you.” Although Absalom kept urging him to attend, David kept refusing to go but offered his blessings.

Sun Tzu, 6th century B.C. author of **The Art of War**, lists the following as the five essentials for victory:

1. He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight.
2. He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces.
3. He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks.
4. He will win who, prepared himself, waits to take the enemy unprepared.
5. He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign.

Principle: If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.

Although these are guidelines on how to manage armies in battle some of them apply to this context since conspiratorial plots to assassinate political leaders is a form of clandestine warfare.

Absalom knew he could not assassinate Amnon and hope to escape if he performed the deed in Jerusalem. He chooses his own battleground, so to speak, at his sheep ranch in Baal-hazor. He knows how to handle David, the superior force, and Amnon, the inferior force.

We will note in an upcoming verse how Absalom motivated his “*troops*” so that all were committed to carrying off the assassination. Absalom spent two years plotting details for the murder. He uses his knowledge of Amnon’s behavior patterns to set him up in a compromising situation.

In a sense, the sovereign, King David, is neutralized when he declines the invitation to the party and thus cannot interfere.

Absalom knows his father David well, a man whom he considers his role model, but, because of iconoclastic arrogance, he now considers his enemy.

Absalom’s manipulation of David can be seen in 2 Samuel 13:25 where we see David’s rationale for offering his regrets.

David refuses because he does not want such a large guest list to be a burden on Absalom. This not only shows David’s thoughtfulness but also shows an unstated reason which comes from David's sense of responsibility. He cannot allow the cabinet to go and leave Jerusalem ungoverned and he cannot go and leave the army without leadership.

This is circa 1000 B.C. It would take several days to complete the 180-mile circuit from Jerusalem to Baal-hazor and back.

Absalom knows that David simply will not permit so many important people to leave the government unattended with no way of recalling them on short notice. In order to sell his deception, Absalom continues to plead with his father to come to his party. In this way he conceals while he advances his hidden agenda: to keep David away from Baal-hazor.

By offering an invitation Absalom knows David will not accept but insisting continually that he do so, helps remove any suspicion his father might be having about his motives. In the end David declines the invitation but wishes his son well on his trip to Baal-hazor.

After it becomes clear that David will not attend, Absalom is then free to play his “*brotherhood*” card. He convinces David that he at least can let the Crown Prince attend since all the other brothers will be there.