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## **The Absalom Spirit**

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**A Biblical Resource Prepared By Thomas T. Hale, M.Th.**

# The Absalom Spirit

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## THE BIRTH OF THE ABSALOM SPIRIT (SECOND SAMUEL 13—18)

Many times you can discover the strengths and weaknesses of leaders by examining their interactions with the other people in their lives.

The world learned more about Great Britain's royal family through the life and death of the late Princess Diana than the family ever wanted to reveal. The true depth of character in Mother Teresa was revealed not by the rich and powerful individuals who knew her, but by the untold thousands of utterly forsaken, broken, and destitute people she loved, clothed, fed, and comforted—even as many of them entered death's door.

One man illuminates David's extremely human weaknesses more than any other in this king's storied life. Absalom's role in his father's legacy was so important that the Holy Spirit devoted six chapters to his tragic life!

What vital lessons does Absalom's life contain for leaders in God's kingdom? His life frames one spiritual principle that we must understand above all:

**Abused, misused or mismanaged ANOINTING will  
destroy the one who carries it!**

Absalom was one of six sons born to David while he was King of Judah and based in Hebron. It is clear that this royal son had a marvelous anointing. Unfortunately, he would also become history's classic picture of an individual who was destroyed by his own anointing! He was undone by his own charisma through his own extraordinary gifts.

Imagine the pilot of a fully loaded Boeing 747 airliner "going to sleep at the wheel" as the plane screams toward the earth for a disastrous landing. Blockbuster movies have been made portraying the drama when the captain of the nuclear attack submarine decides independently to go over "to the other side" or to launch a nuclear strike.

On a simpler and even more personal level, the idea of a drunk driver clumsily directing tons of steel toward innocent loved ones can strike terror in the calmest of hearts.

This is why we focus on Absalom. There is a vital balance between a person's character and his or her gifts or anointing. This is especially true for anyone who feels called to the five-fold ministry (see Ephesians 4) or to leadership in society, commerce, or government.

All of us are made up or composed of a "gift cluster." While no one is "good at everything," most, if not all, of us, tend to be good or most gifted in some specific things. Success and deep life satisfaction seem to be centered on our ability to find our calling and focus on it with all of our ability and character.

The Apostle Paul named a "gift cluster" of five key gifts in Ephesians that Jesus has given the Church as "building" or construction and perfection gifts. He said Jesus "...gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11-12, NIV).

- Apostles are fathers and generals. They like to oversee things and govern things.
- Teachers explain.
- Prophets clarify. They see things.
- Evangelists, they multiply. They are the only ones in the "five-fold gifts" that aren't into church growth by addition. They are into exponential multiplication.
- Pastors are, of course, the shepherds. They are the long-term caregivers who patiently tend the flock of God as under-shepherds of the Lord's crown jewel, the Church.

Since the body of Christ is still imperfect and in great need of being built up, it should be obvious that all five gifts are still needed and are still being given to the Church. This five-segment cluster mirrors the ancient Hebrew concept of the "yad" of God—the hand or the scepter of His power. The Lord said, "I have engraved you on the palms [yad] of my hands..." (Isaiah 49:16, NIV). He was saying in part, "You are an extension of My hand..."

Some people erroneously believe a person operates in one of these *doma*, (New Testament Greek for gift, building/construction) gifts exclusively or not at all. It has been my experience that God imparts portions of all of these gifts in differing measures to each anointed leader He plants in the Church. Most tend to favor one gift over the others, with the other gifts arising in different measures as well.

In my life, for instance, I've discovered a clear gift cluster emerging over the years. My first and most dominant gift is the function of apostle, then of teacher, and finally of pastor. My life and ministry demonstrate significantly lesser anointings of the evangelist and prophet.

These leadership gift clusters don't seem to be limited to operations solely within the Body of Christ. Some Christian leaders appear to function as Christ-centered apostles of real estate, for instance. Teachers and pastors are operating to the glory of God in virtually every realm of legitimate human society and endeavor. These people are gifts of God planted in the kingdoms of man to establish and reveal the Kingdom of God in their midst.

This leads us to the main point of this chapter:

**When you operate or function outside of the calling God has given  
you, things tend to go terribly wrong!**

Anytime you try to operate outside your "core" gifting, you won't operate at your greatest efficiency and ability. It is important to find, develop and center around the primary gifting God has given you.

A second truth is that when you focus on your gifts and abilities but discard godly character and obedience to God, your life can become a ticking time bomb moving relentlessly toward a frightening end.

As we noted earlier, Absalom was one of six sons born to David in Hebron—Amnon, Chileab, Absalom, Adonijah, Shephatiah, and Ithream (see 2 Samuel 3:2). We know nothing of Chileab (it is presumed that he died in infancy). Still, we know that Absalom killed his half-brother, Amnon, for violating his full-blood sister, Tamar (see 2 Samuel 13).

David had many children, but they were born to many different mothers. Each of these offspring claimed King David as father while clinging to personal loyalties to his or her individual mother. This also included their respective families, ethnic or national group, and culture.

Effectively, Absalom stepped into the place of David's firstborn heir to the throne when he arranged the murder of David's oldest son. The king seemingly always knew Absalom was the most gifted of his offspring.

Absalom was the only son of King David who was royalty on both sides. Absalom's mother, Maccah, was the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur. This princess bride gave birth to Absalom and Tamar as David's wife.

Geshur was a small, independent kingdom adjacent to Israel. This independence sovereignty came in handy after Absalom directed the assassination of Amnon. He simply crossed into his grandfather's kingdom and claimed refuge from Jewish law and David's soldiers.

Absalom was a remarkably charismatic young man. He was a "born leader" who liked to be followed, watched, and honored. There are at least seven reasons or pieces of evidence that he was uniquely positioned to captivate hearts in Israel.

1. He moved to Jerusalem, the capital city of the newly unified nation, early in life with his father.
2. He Grew up in the king's palace, thoroughly exposed to power and politics.
3. He was David's favorite son.
4. He was also a favorite of the people.
5. He was charming and personally attractive, and unfortunately, he had the ability and the will to ingratiate himself with people.
6. He also loved pomp and royal pretense—he provided for himself fifty men to run before his chariot.
7. His long, black hair was a sign of his special favor, his anointing, and of his pride, much like Joseph's coat of many colors. It would later betray him and become the primary instrument of his undoing.

One of the most important "reality checks" a Christian can experience is this: Life is rarely simple, and the "reasons" for a person's descent into sin or failure are never totally "black and white." For instance, it is a fact that Absalom had good reason to hate his father.

Today we see David as "a man after God's own heart," but he was also a flawed man who sinned terribly while pursuing a perfect and loving God. The sins of a father can't help but cause serious problems in his sons and daughters—especially if numerous poor decisions in his life reinforce them.

## **ABSALOM HAD GOOD REASON TO HATE HIS FATHER, DAVID**

King David's first reaction when he learned that Amnon had raped Tamar seemed natural and expected. He was angry (see 2 Samuel 13:21). But everything stopped there.

Absolutely nothing happened beyond David's passing show of anger. Those nearby must have felt as if they were watching an actor deliver the required emotion before walking off stage. Sadly, David's actions made it clear he felt no further responsibility to "live out" the script of a righteous father and king executing justice and protecting a victim.

Tamar may have been "only one of many" daughters born to David, but she was Absalom's only sibling. He was enraged that his sister was violated, but it is logical to assume he would have allowed justice to handle the problem if justice had ever been offered! The problem was that David—the victim's father, the family's patriarch, and Israel's chief lawgiver and sovereign king—essentially washed his hands of the affair and did nothing about it!

This is why Absalom felt he had good reason to hate his father. David's unwillingness to step in to right this wrong revealed his lack of genuine concern. This must have doubled Absalom's fury over Tamar's humiliation and violation. He came to hate and disrespect David, but his anger quickly took a cold, cruel, and calculating turn. Absalom waited and planned for the right time while Amnon continued on with what he thought would be a long life. Just two years later, wily Absalom took matters into his own hands.

## **THE RISE OF THE ABSALOM SPIRIT**

In a real sense, David created this "Rebel Spirit" through his own insensitivity and failure! The respected scholar F.B. Meyer believed that Absalom's fratricide (brother-murder) would never have occurred if David had taken instant measures to punish Amnon.

How often do you and I do this as leaders? You can count on it at virtually every leadership level: Unresolved conflict produces the Absalom Spirit!

Some say that David became ill and was preoccupied with a disease at about this time. In other words, it was the disease of adultery with Bathsheba's followed by the arranged killing of her husband.

Many of the Psalms written by David are literally his transparent prayer journal, a supernatural window into his intimate walk with our invisible God. When you read these words from Psalm 41, it is easy to see David's anguish over sin and the physical impact of it all that confined him to bed.

*The LORD will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness. I said, "O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you." My enemies say of me in malice, "When will he die and his name perish?" (Psalm 41:3-5, NIV).*

The man we see revealed in Psalm 55 is a person wracked by deep, perhaps even clinical depression, shadowed by a haunting death wish at times. As we shall see, this perfectly matches some of David's bizarre actions during the "Absalom years."

*My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest — I would flee far away and stay in the desert; Selah, I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm." (Psalm 55:4-8, NIV)*

It is clear that David was suffering from a broken heart during those dark years. These chilling narrative prayers should make us even more aware of how strategic Satan can be when stalking and plotting the downfall of a godly person. We have nothing to fear if we are "hiding in Christ," but we must be vigilant and on the alert.

During this dark four-year period of David's life, he seemed to waste away and was unable to do anything, while Absalom undermined his father and stole away the hearts of many of the people. Finally, when Absalom's rebellion reached its pinnacle, and he established his kingdom in Hebron and was proclaimed king (although David was still alive and God's chosen vessel), it was evident that the people had lost their reverence and love for David.

For his part, King David recognized this as God's fiery purging of his own heart for his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah. Absalom saw things differently. To his jaded mind, David's dark night of the soul presented the ideal opportunity to get revenge upon the father he had come to hate!

**The very anointing of Absalom to rule and lead was  
what ultimately destroyed him.**

Absalom's bitter hatred for his father was the root of his own destruction, and it birthed the ungodly desire to destroy David and take his throne from him. This rebellious son was about to

become the “poster child” for this spiritual principle: “When bitterness gives rise to ungodly ambition in the heart of an anointed leader, it will always end in disgrace!”

This is the classic biblical case of the abuse, misuse, and mismanagement of anointing! Why? It is because Absalom used his anointing to attempt to destroy his spiritual father!

If character and integrity are not the keepers of the anointing, then the anointing will break through and destroy everything it touches.

The Anointing of God:

- births the force of purpose...
- brings the focus of power...
- builds the fire of persistence!

However...

If the ANOINTING is not harnessed by character and bridled by integrity, it can destroy as effectively as it can build the kingdom!

Many Christians in the Body of Christ today face this very predicament!

- Full of anointing...and brimming with bitterness!
- They misuse and abuse their anointing to avenge their bitterness!
- Inevitably, they destroy everything they touch—including their marriage, children, and reputation!

This is not a pretty picture! Absalom was literally destroyed by his own anointing! It seems clear that Absalom had the greatest anointing among all of David’s sons. Unfortunately, he felt he had good reason to hate his father David. Because his bitterness was stronger than his character, Absalom ultimately destroyed his family, his followers, and even himself!

Generations later, Peter addressed this brand of bitterness in Simon the Magician, saying, “*I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.*” (Acts 8:23, KJV).

The anointing is no match for bitterness in the human soul. Only godly character can drain the dregs of bitterness out of us. What do you do to steer clear of such a deadly soul disease? Be sure your anointing is harnessed by character and bridled by integrity!

## UNFORGIVENESS AND ITS DEADLY CONSEQUENCES (2 SAMUEL 15:1–12)

“No action, whether foul or fair,  
Is ever done, but it leaves somewhere  
A record written by fingers ghostly,  
As a blessing or a curse and mostly  
In the greater weakness or greater strength  
Of the acts which follow it.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

Long ago, God established a principle of order in our lives that helps us learn spiritual truths from created things. The Bible says, “*The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual*” (1 Corinthians 15:46-47, NIV).

We learn early that a stone tossed into a body of water, such as a pond or a lake, causes a disruption. Rippling circles continue to spread outward in every broadening circle. This principle takes a devastating form when deep-sea volcanic eruptions or earthquakes trigger gigantic tidal waves or a tsunami. These waves may travel thousands of miles before crashing inland, with waves standing 10-to-25 feet above sea level.

Sin always disrupts human life. And it always spreads outward to affect others in its path, sometimes hundreds of years away in the timeline of human existence. Perhaps this is why it is said, “Forgiven men may have to reap the harvest they have sown.”

Although God forgives men and women, that sin must be purged at every appearance to eliminate its deadly effect.

David’s adultery opened the door for disaster to crash on the shores of his life. His affair with Bathsheba was more than a “passing romantic fling” (as modern social and entertainment commentators might call it). There is no such thing as “passing sin.” Sin, at any level, disrupts human life. As F. B. Meyer said, “Sin may be forgiven, as David’s was, yet a long train of sad consequences follows.”

When David seduced Bathsheba and arranged the cruel death of her noble husband Uriah, he disrupted life for himself, for Bathsheba, for his nation, and for his future offspring. Yes, David repented and found forgiveness and personal restoration to God. Yet, two things remained that forgiveness would not remove.

## **AN IMMEDIATE AND PAINFUL CONSEQUENCE**

The first consequence of David's sin was immediate and painful. David's child, born to Bathsheba, died in infancy. For seven days, David fasted and prayed and lay on the ground. It seems he suffered more in that loss than if he had died. Bathsheba suffered as well. Can you imagine what pain her mother's heart endured watching her only child suffer and die—the innocent for the guilty?

The second consequence kicked in immediately, but it would linger in its power and effect for the rest of David's life. The king's open confession of guilt did not satisfy the critics away from God. No, in fact, it provoked them to mockery and scorn.

Why? Only the blood of the guilty can atone for such sin in the eyes of those who do not know God's grace. To speak of the "Blood of the Lamb" as one's substitute sacrifice is foreign to them. The unredeemed soul cries out for "an eye for an eye" and "a tooth for a tooth."

Mercy is a foreign concept, and grace is beyond human comprehension to the lost soul. Only vengeance will do, especially upon someone who in some way claims to live by a higher standard of morality or who seems to walk "closer" to God than they do.

All we need to illustrate this point is the example of an internationally known evangelist's national exposure on videotape as the alleged client of a prostitute—after he criticized another televangelist on national television over accusations of sexual and financial impropriety. Mercy was hard to find in our nation (or in most churches) after the media blitz that followed.

Former President Bill Clinton suffered a great loss of prestige and leadership effectiveness when his sexual activities with a young female assistant were documented in lurid detail on national television. Whether one views it as fair or unfair, this story became the dominant legacy in the nation and worldwide, marking President Bill Clinton's two four-year terms in the White House.

## **THE ABSALOM SPIRIT SPRANG FROM DAVID'S WEAKNESS AS A FATHER**

One of David's most serious and costly flaws was his apparent inability or unwillingness to discipline his house. In the words of F. B. Meyer, "A man never sees the worst of himself until it reappears in his child."

According to the laws and customs of the day, the people thought King David should drown Tamar and destroy Amnon for his act of incest. The king did neither.

Then, after Absalom openly engineered the murder of Amnon, David again failed to act. The people believed that David's weakness in not genuinely punishing Absalom's murderous act of revenge disqualified him as a leader-king.

When David finally commanded that Absalom be captured, he fled to Talmai, King of Geshur—his grandfather on his mother's side. Talmai "hid" Absalom for three years, essentially "in plain sight."

F. B. Meyer said, "How could David allot the penalty for his son's impurity, which he had evaded for himself?" David's pardon of Absalom seemed to be "the last straw" in the eyes of his weary citizens and vocal critics. This indulgent father's heart was clearly conflicted, and the Scriptures confirm it.

*"And the soul of King David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead." (2 Samuel 13:39, KJV).*

Wily Joab, the opportunist, saw all of this unfold, and with uncanny skill, he moved with stealth to take advantage of David's predicament—for his own selfish purposes, as usual. Those purposes included his need to protect himself from complicity in Uriah's murder. He saw a way to do that neatly by arranging the pardon and reconciliation of Absalom with his father, the king.

Secondly, Joab wanted to secure his position just in case Absalom might succeed to the throne. Joab was as dangerous in the throne room political battlefield as he was at the war front. This was never as clear as in this crisis.

The sophistication and skullduggery of Joab's scheme reveal the kind of man David had placed in his Number 2 leadership position. Joab arranged to hire a so-called "wise woman" to approach David. Don't be fooled by the Old English phrase used here. This was no "wise" woman; this was an "artful" and "cunning" woman. She was essentially a professional actress or con woman from Tekoah.

After she heard Joab's proposal, this woman agreed to pretend to be a widow before King David, claiming she had two sons who had fought until one of the sons died (see 2 Samuel 14:2-3). She

came before the king, fell on her face, and asked for help. She told David her entire family wanted to kill her sole living son, leaving her childless.

The Bible says David was moved to compassion and said: *“As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of thy son’s head fall to the ground”* (2 Samuel 14:11b). As soon as she heard the king’s compassionate assurances, she set the “hook” exactly as wily Joab had coached her to do.

The pretender cautiously pointed out to David that he would be guilty of sin against God if he did not call his son back from exile. After delivering a message of moral preaching to the king mixed with liberal amounts of sly flattery and fawning humility, David finally smelled a rat. He commanded the woman to tell him the truth and then asked, *“Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this?”*

### SNARED IN JOAB’S TRAP

He was snared into Joab’s trap, even as Joab stood there during the “wise” woman’s Emmy-award-winning performance. But he knew he was caught, and the bait so closely resembled what he wanted to do anyway that he willingly slipped his head through Joab’s political noose.

King David agreed to pardon Absalom and permitted Joab to bring him home. For all these reasons and more, many in Israel felt David was no longer worthy to be king. The man who had vanquished powerful enemies and armies in battle after battle was suddenly seen as weak, indecisive, immoral in heart, and prone to give preferential treatment to his own (after all, he exempted himself, Bathsheba, and now his sons—first Amnon, then Absalom—from the laws of God).

A majority of David’s subjects in Israel and Judah now openly despised him and loathed his government. This set the stage for the “Gethsemane” of David’s life and reign.

### ABSALOM’S REBELLION

Professional communicators and educators like to say, “You cannot NOT communicate.” I know that statement might sound confusing at first, but it makes more and more sense the longer you think about it. Whether you are shouting from the rooftop or “stonewalling” a friend or spouse with the “silent treatment,” you are communicating. “No answer” is actually a very clear answer.

The same truth applies to your actions. Your actions really do speak louder than words most of the time. And virtually every great “rebel” in the Bible and in our lives has left a tell-tale trail of clues about how they were transformed from lawful to lawless leaders. They basically prepared themselves for failure.

How did Absalom prepare for revolt?

Absalom’s first and greatest step toward failure was his refusal to forgive his father, David, for his failure to discipline Amnon. He refused to embrace forgiveness and chose instead to nurse his anger for years.

Paul the apostle warned us, “*Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil*” (Ephesians 4:26-27, NLT). The King James Version calls it “giving place” to the Devil. The original Greek word used here, *topos*, refers literally to property or real estate. It seems that Absalom’s choice to cling to anger toward his father essentially gave Satan the legal right of access and use to part of his soul.

David continued to contribute to Absalom’s preparation for rebellion as well. When David refused to see Absalom for two more years as a humiliation to him, it drove Absalom’s hatred of David to a new, deeper level.

Unfortunately, anger is a state of mind and soul that quickly leads to action. With the fires of anger fueling his emotions and contaminating his spirit, Absalom immediately laid the groundwork for his rebellion.

He yielded to his consuming ambition and desire for admiration from the people by seizing princely authority and position in the realm. He publicly took on the habits of kings and conquerors when he hired fifty horsemen, horses, and carriages to go before him in public.

It is interesting that the Lord specifically warned us not to put our trust or affections in the strength of war horses and chariots in the Psalms: “*Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God*” (Psalm 20:7).

Absalom also “played to the common people” with pomp and ceremony. With a “trademark” move now associated directly with his name, Israel’s crown prince schemed and connived to seize by craft what would have been his by relationship—and without any additional effort on his part!

This should remind us of Satan's successful attempt in the third chapter of Genesis to talk Adam and Eve into eating the forbidden fruit to "grasp" the "God-likeness" they had already been given freely by God!

Absalom was especially skilled at currying the favor of the vast crowds of Israelites from out of town who came to the capital seeking justice in King David's busy palace.

His "if only" speech was particularly effective:

He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" He would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel."

Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you."

And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me, and I would see that he gets justice."

Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him.

*Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the men of Israel (2 Samuel 15:2-6, NIV, emphasis mine).*

Absalom simply searched out and identified those in leadership who were most likely to join in a rebellion against authority. Virtually everyone interested in or duped into sowing discontent in a local church or region follows in the footsteps of Absalom. This is especially true of leaders who are highly placed or related to the chief leader in some way.

David's dark night of the soul was marked by one of the greatest betrayals of the Old Testament. It happened when Absalom won the loyalty of King David's most trusted and respected counselor, a man named Ahithophel (or "brother of folly").

*Ahithophel's keen insights and wise counsel won such acclaim that the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God (2 Sam 16:23, NKJV).*

Ahithophel's son, Eliam, was one of King David's bodyguards; this son had a daughter named Bathsheba. Many scholars suspect Ahithophel held a secret offense toward David because of his sin against and with Bathsheba, his granddaughter.

Exactly forty years after Samuel anointed David at Bethlehem and four years after Absalom returned from Geshur, the crown prince launched his plot to overthrow his father. It began with a request to David for a royal blessing on Absalom's plan to journey to Hebron to fulfill a vow to God made during his stay (or rebellious self-exile) in Geshur (see Second Samuel 15:8).

*"Absalom sent spies throughout Israel to seek out willing partners in the rebellion plot, and to organize them. His spies said to each new recruit, 'As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, Absalom is king in Hebron'" (2 Samuel 15:10, NIV).*

When Ahithophel received Absalom's personal summons, he cast aside years of service to King David and immediately joined Absalom's political coup (vs. 12). The betrayal broke King David's heart. It also reveals to us just how powerful Absalom had become because Ahithophel didn't have a track record for choosing losing sides.

## THE REVOLT UNLEASHED

When the time was right, and Absalom's anger was at its peak, the revolt within his heart unleashed a revolt that swept through Israel in a tidal wave of popular sentiment.

Absalom's betrayal and Ahithophel's uncanny counsel instantly upended Israel's government in a bloodless coup.

Absalom was in, and David was out. The son-who-would-be-king entered Jerusalem triumphantly with a counselor, royal chariot, and his usual 50 runners. Meanwhile, David—the sweet Psalmist of Israel—quietly escaped under cover of night with a small band of discouraged and heartbroken supporters. Both the famous father and his rebellious son provide proof for the statement:

***"Everything you do strengthens or weakens everything else you do."***

Several things happened immediately after Absalom launched his revolt. The first thing was a "polarization of the land" that showed up in several ways. Absalom chose Hebron (the capital of Judah) as his capital city—retracing the footsteps of his father. His choice also highlighted and

increased the perceived competition and strain between Israel and Judah. It was a decision designed to confuse and complicate loyalties in Israel since Hebron was the burial place of the Patriarchs.

The enemies of David seemed to come out of the underbrush—just like the snakes that they were. If you function as a leader in God's kingdom at any level, then understand that there are always Ahithophels—even in the most peaceful organization!

It seems that Ahithophel hated David for his sin against Bathsheba, his granddaughter. And while you're looking out for challenges and opposition, you are about to meet two other men in the next section who seem to appear in every century and virtually every organization in some form or another. Don't forget them: Shimei and Ziba.

We will also meet the loyal friends and supporters of David who also stepped up to the plate—God always has heroes in waiting to support the people who do His will, even in their darkest hour.

## DAVID'S RESPONSE TO ABSALOM'S REVOLT

*A messenger told David, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us and put the city to the sword" (2 Samuel 15:13–14, NIV, emphasis mine).*

As you read this Bible passage, did it occur to you that David's response seems out of character for such a great warrior of God? King David was not concerned with his safety in physical combat. The only issue that mattered was the safety of Jerusalem, the city God loved so much, and the safety of his people.

David faced a crucial spiritual conflict within the sanctuary of his own soul:

- Would he surrender to God and allow the Most High to resolve this revolution and restore peace to Jerusalem and Israel, or...
- Would he take matters into his own hands and "fight back"?

This is the true core and cause of every conflict in the life and ministry of a true man or woman of God! The Enemy is not them; it is always Him! In this battle, the winner always loses, and the loser always wins!

David understood this truth. The late W. Phillip Keller, celebrated best-selling author of *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23 and David, the Shepherd King, Volume 2*, said of this quality in David, "It was the vein of pure gold in his conglomerate character." In other words, David would pay any price to make things right with God!

The desperate flight from Jerusalem marked David's second darkest hour, his public Gethsemane. Nearly everything of value in his life seemed to be shaken.

- His own son sought to kill him.
- His people turned from him.
- His military prowess was denied to him by God.
- Nathan's prophecy came to pass in public view, exactly as predicted in Second Samuel 12:7–14 (especially verse 11):

*"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight'" (2 Samuel 12:11, NIV).*

David knew this was God's personal purging and divine discipline for him. When Nathan the prophet confronted David with his sin, his response was instant, direct, and clear of any excuses or self-justification: *"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Samuel 12:13, KJV).*

The New Testament echoes the great virtue of such heartfelt repentance in response to God's loving rebuke and correction in the Letter to the Hebrews:

*"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" (Hebrews 12:5-7, KJV).*

David was truly repentant. F.W. Krummacher said David was “prepared from the heart to submit to all the consequences of his sin.” Asaph the Psalmist put words to David’s sorrow over sin’s effect on his relationship with God when he said, “*Whom have I in heaven but Thee? There is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee*” (Psalm 73:25, KJV).

This was David’s hardest battle to lose! He wrote in the Twenty-seventh Psalm, “*Do not hide Your face from me; Do not turn your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation*” (Psalm 27:9 NKJV).

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** This teaching, *The Spirit of Absalom* is taken from Dr. Cottle’s book, *Anointed to Reign II*. If you are interested in the “rest of the story” of Absalom, Dr. Cottle’s book is available in the Amazon bookstore. My goal is this excerpt from the original book is to expose the spirit that Absalom yielded to and ultimately led to his downfall.



# **RIVER VALLEY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

## **The Joab Spirit**

<https://bit.ly/absalomjoab>

**A Biblical Resource Prepared By Thomas T. Hale, M.Th.**

## THE SPIRIT OF DISLOYALTY AND BETRAYAL (1 KINGS 2:1-6)

Nearly every four years in the U.S. presidential term cycle, headlines hit magazine stands, and the talking heads on the Internet and electronic news media outlets alert us to yet another “insider expose.” The source always seems to be some highly placed but deeply dissatisfied White House staffer.

Most of these people claim their former bosses were unethical, ruthless, unfair, or outright foolish and unlawful in their conduct of presidential affairs. Nearly all of these authors are tainted with an obvious credibility problem: If the revelation they share is so dire and unlawful, why did they wait so long to reveal it?

The answer usually isn’t hard to find—there is significant profit to be made by dishing the dirt on any American president, and often there is a revenge factor at work.

The same thing happens in virtually every other relatively free nation. For instance, the royal family in the United Kingdom constantly exposes books, magazine articles, and press conferences, claiming to have “the inside scoop” on the ruling Family.

Sometimes genuine wrongs must come to light, and blatant, willful sins must be exposed (as in Nathan’s confrontation with David and some modern-day scandals in a few prominent American ministries). God is well able to bring hidden things to light.

Anyone who has lived more than three decades will tell you these “hidden” things usually surface despite the best efforts of leaders to stop them, simply because of the vast number of people required to run a large government or church ministry—people who must be included in the inner circle of information flow and the decision-making processes of leadership.

On the other hand, I suspect that on many occasions, there is a spirit operating behind the scenes, driving these dramatic moves to “expose” or generally undermine well-intentioned leaders of key nations, churches, movements, and corporations.

Recently as I taught about the life of David, a seasoned pastor asked about David’s peculiar advice to Solomon. He recommended that his young son make arrangements to dispose of Joab—even though this was Solomon’s uncle and David’s former army captain (see First Kings 2)!

This advice might seem strange and out of character for David until you study the life and work of Joab. It really becomes clear when you realize that Solomon would take over the throne at the tender age of nineteen years.

Why was it so important for Solomon to deal with Joab? As we will see in this document, the Joab Spirit is the “spirit of disloyalty and betrayal.” Its overriding goal is to undermine and control a ministry from within for the sake of self-ambition and personal preeminence.

If you are a leader, then you already understand why an understanding of the Joab Spirit is so crucial to your survival and success. If you aren't, then you should know that this spirit is just as deadly and detrimental to the followers and workers in a church, organization, or nation as it is to the leaders!

By the time you finish this document, you should have a clear understanding of the opposing characteristics of loyalty and the “Joab Spirit.” You will understand the nature of this spirit and how it differs from “The Absalom Spirit” in operation. You will recognize the major characteristics of “The Joab Spirit” and how you can deal with that spirit effectively.

Why is “loyalty” so important to a church, ministry, or nation? Loyalty is the mortar, the binding substance that holds a church or ministry together. Perhaps part of the problem is our definition of loyalty. It is often confused with faithfulness. Joab was actually “faithful” to David most of the time. The problem is that loyalty is different from faithfulness. Faithfulness is action, it is “something we do.” Loyalty is an attitude; it is “something we are.” For example, a man's wife might be “faithful” to her husband because she doesn't commit adultery with another man or flirt with other men. But she might be disloyal to him simultaneously by undermining him among other people with her words or attitudes in public, with the children or inlaws.

Loyalty alone does not qualify you for ministry. But its absence, or the presence of disloyalty, instantly and automatically disqualifies you from ministry. Genuine loyalty is constant and true. It does not undermine but instead supports another by words, acts, and attitudes. Loyalty is tested in times of trouble and stands firm under fire.

## THE JOAB SPIRIT IS THE OPPOSITE OF LOYALTY

More than anything else, the Joab Spirit is an undermining spirit. It operates from within and behind the scenes. It is extremely subtle and covert, all the while appearing to be loyal. It hopes to be and usually is undetected for what it really is.

Christian leaders and students of the Bible often talk about “the Jezebel Spirit” and “the Absalom Spirit.” Many books, magazine articles, and church conferences on leadership and government have focused on these adversarial spiritual forces. But we need to be equally aware of “the Joab Spirit.”

This ancient spirit operated in and influenced the actions of its biblical human namesake, Joab. It is an evil spirit that has influenced human behavior and reinforced evil human attitudes and thought processes since creation. It is possible that this “Joab Spirit” was at work in Cain, influencing and driving him to commit the first murder in human history over jealousy and blind ambition to be first with God.

Compared to the spirits that operated through Jezebel and Absalom, the Joab Spirit is:

- more sophisticated
- more dangerous
- more subtle
- more treacherous
- more enduring

To understand what the Joab Spirit is, we must first understand the man called Joab. He was David’s nephew, the captain of the army, his right-hand man, and part of the king’s inner circle of counselors, confidants, and leaders.

Joab first came to David at the cave Adullam with his two brothers, Abishai and Asahel. All three brothers were part of “David’s Mighty Men.” His name means “Yah is Father” (although he apparently failed to live that way). Joab’s name first appears in the Bible in First Samuel 26:6, and it is in First Chronicles 2:16–17 we learn that Joab’s mother is Zeruah (David’s sister). This would make Joab Solomon’s cousin, not his uncle (above).

It is the nature of the Joab Spirit to infiltrate. It will work through a person to infiltrate a local church or ministry “to help out.” Eventually, this spirit will birth and nurture betrayal, division,

and disloyalty within the ranks—often without anyone realizing who was behind it. The Joab Spirit does all the right things for all the wrong reasons!

Despite appearing to be King David's "right-hand man," Joab (and his brothers) brought David some of the greatest pain of his life! Taken collectively, they hurt him more often than anyone else.

Three behaviors and motivations seem to characterize the Joab Spirit.

1. It is preeminently selfish and ambitious. In practical terms, this spirit always wants to be number one in power, but without a lot of exposure.
2. It is manipulative to an incredible degree. It constantly works behind the scenes to have its way but, at the same time, does not actively seek the spotlight.
3. It has an insatiable desire for power but prefers to exercise it from an unofficial position where it can become known as the true power behind the throne.

A leader under the influence and control of the Joab Spirit will do his or her work quietly as long as he or she is honored and praised and the leader does not cross him. (This may help to explain, in part, why Joab served David nearly five decades before he was confronted.)

The Joab Spirit works actively in three primary ways to win approval, acquire influence, and cement a position in an organization:

1. Currying favor with key people in the organization
2. Cutting off any "rising stars" representing a challenge for preeminence
3. Claiming credit at every opportunity to enhance personal appearance

One of the best ways to understand a thing is to compare and contrast it with similar or competitive persons, places, things, or activities. This process will greatly sharpen your awareness of the dangerous qualities at work in the Joab Spirit.

### **FIVE KEY DIFFERENCES: THE JOAB SPIRIT AND THE ABSALOM SPIRIT**

Although we've already touched on some characteristics of both the Joab spirit and the Absalom spirit, your understanding of their operations and effects will grow exponentially as you examine five key differences between them.

## 1. POSITION OF OPERATION

### **The Absalom spirit:**

- Operates from the “gate,” the place of authority.
- It takes advantage of its authority or position without hesitation or conscience.

A person under its influence thinks nothing of “throwing his or her “official weight” around.

- It will boldly lead an open rebellion.
- It lets you know he is your enemy.

### **The Joab Spirit:**

- Operates within the ranks, in the place of activity rather than authority.
- It acts quietly and in secret, “gnawing away at the inward parts” of the organization, often far from “the palace” or the “leader’s office.”
- It stays covert—or hidden and “under wraps.” It would never lead an open rebellion.
- It makes you think they are your friend.

## 2. UNIQUE THREE-FOLD PURPOSE

### **The Absalom spirit seeks to:**

- Take over kingly authority.
- Depose the reigning king.
- Rule in his place.

### **The Joab Spirit seeks to:**

- Undermine kingly authority.
- Emasculate the reigning king.
- Rule behind the throne.

## 3. PLACE OF BIRTH

### **The Absalom spirit:**

- Is often birthed by an unresolved conflict that erupts into bitterness and hatred.
- Can be cured.
- Is usually caused by an event.

### **The Joab Spirit:**

- Is usually birthed through sheer soulish ambition.
- Sucks the life out of the ministry from within.
- Cannot be cured. (It must be “cast out” and abandoned by its host, just as cancer must be cut out and every trace of the invading organism “rejected or destroyed” in its victim. Spiritual death and rebirth are mandatory.)
- A character trait causes it.

## **4. AGGRESSION TOWARD THE LEADER**

### **The Absalom Spirit:**

- Seeks to break down the leader’s authority through rebellion.
- Openly recruits and uses outside assistance.

### **The Joab Spirit:**

- Seeks to weaken the leader’s authority through subtle undermining.
- Although it is rarely known, this spirit always works to get its agenda.

## **5. ULTIMATE AIM AND METHODOLOGY**

### **The Absalom Spirit:**

- Says, “It is my right to be king...”
- And, “I will take it!”

### **The Joab Spirit:**

- Says, “I’m not king, but I will be in charge...”
- And, “I’ll have my way whatever it takes and whoever it hurts!”

After all of this, you may be thinking, What else? What more could we learn about Joab? Since you asked, there is much more to cover with this dangerous breed of leader and the spirit that inspires and drives them. It is time to remove the comparative “Absalom” lens and look directly at the appealing and deadly characteristics of the Joab Spirit.

## PROFILE OF A JOAB LEADER

Profiling—the practice of developing “characteristic files” for potential criminals, customers, or potential mates—has been a hot topic on talk shows, on Capital Hill, and in civil liberties forums in recent years. In reality, profiling has been a way of life for the human race since Adam first noticed he was different from Eve.

Now it is time to profile a Joab or the leader possibly operating under the influence of a Joab Spirit. These characteristics are not offered as fuel for paranoid suspicion but as information to equip you as a leader.

### **There are Five General Characteristics of “Joabs”:**

1. Joabs tend to be talented and gifted with genuine leadership abilities. However, they often lack the personal charisma, divine calling, or godly character necessary for godly leadership.
2. Joabs are always ready to step forward to assume responsibility.
3. Joabs work to endear themselves to leadership in times of need or crisis.
4. Joabs also work to endear themselves to “the people” once they land “on the inside” with leadership.
5. Joabs do everything for one purpose: to further their agenda and meet their own need for preeminence.

## THE SIX DEADLY CHARACTERISTICS OF A JOAB LEADER

*And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me...  
(2 Samuel 3:39a)*

As if the five general characteristics aren’t enough, there are six more characteristics that you need to know about Joabs, and they are all deadly. We see all six of these characteristics portrayed clearly in the life of the “original” Joab—David’s Joab.

### **1. Overly Ambitious Spirit**

Consuming ambition overtakes human leaders under the influence of the Joab Spirit. It is almost impulsive in nature. A Joab leader constantly wrestles with an overly ambitious spirit that threatens to expose him or her to top leaders if not held in check.

King David made a painful and far-reaching mistake early in his rule when he opened his mouth and committed himself publicly to choose the leader of his army—not by his wisdom, godly counsel, or strategic planning and battle skills—but by his ability to charge into an impossible situation for personal glory blindly.

His nephew, Joab, immediately stepped up to the plate and delivered a home run—leaving Israel’s new king with no choice. David had just placed an unprincipled and ambitious killer at the head of his army—and his loyalty was not guaranteed. He was loyal only to himself.

*Then the Jebusites said to David, You shall not come in here! But David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the City of David. And David said, Whoever smites the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander. Joab, son of Zeruiah [David's half-sister] went up first, and so he was made chief. David dwelt in the stronghold; so it was called the City of David. He built the city from the Millo [a fortification] on around; and Joab repaired and revived the rest of the [old Jebusite] city (1 Chronicles 11:5-8, AMP).*

This driving spirit of ambition in Joab was manifested or revealed in his soul, in his thoughts, emotions, and internal wants and desires. It works the same way in everyone influenced or controlled by the Joab Spirit.

**A person under the influence of the Joab Spirit will quickly grab ministry assignments as opportunities to get into a position to execute his or her agenda.**

If you are a leader, be careful how you delegate responsibilities. As David discovered, “Joabs” will always use assignments as springboards to something else! (And it always has to do with “greater prominence.”)

## 2. A Controlling Spirit

Joab’s track record with King David is a “biblical textbook” on the ways of a controlling spirit operating through people. It is almost as if we are watching a classic “gangster movie” as we watch Joab carefully cultivate a “dirt file” on David. He uses embarrassing information as weapons of silent blackmail without hesitation.

As the tale unfolds through Second Samuel 11, we see Joab entwine himself in David’s predicament with Bathsheba. And each time he “helps” David, the “unspoken obligations” and

fear factor grow. David himself provided Joab with his greatest tool for control of a king when he sent Joab an incriminating letter seeking his help in murdering an innocent man after seducing the man's wife. David foolishly trusted Joab in his hour of desperation, giving him a handwritten letter saying, in essence, in his own words, *"Kill Uriah in battle..."*

The controlling spirit ruling Joab's life would never waste such a valuable document. His loyalty isn't for the king; it is for himself. (NOTE: The Bible does not advocate condoning a leader's sin—it calls for faithful confrontation leading to godly sorrow and repentance, and finally restoration.)

Joab, however, wasn't interested in justice or restoration. He wanted power and control. Therefore, he kept the letter to have "David in his pocket" from that day forward!

Don't be deceived. "Joabs" in every generation love to "get something" on leadership. They will use that embarrassing knowledge to win "immunity" from punishment! You will soon notice by their actions that they feel, "The rules don't apply to me."

As we see in Joab's life, control through blackmail only encourages a Joab to think, "I don't have to obey leadership unless it suits my purposes!" We see proof of that attitude: Joab killed threatening leaders with impunity, including Abner and Amasa. Worst of all, he even defied David's direct command and murdered the king's son in cold blood—in front of witnesses! Beware the Joab Spirit!

### 3. A Manipulative Spirit

Nearly everyone has dabbled with manipulation sometimes in life. Most of us tried to get our way as children, working to manipulate parents, teachers, and other children—until we were caught and reprimanded. Some families have made manipulation an art form and a foundation of family relationships (usually with frightening consequences).

However, very few people in human history set out to purposely manipulate and deceive heads of state! It tends to lead to summary execution or life imprisonment.

None of these matters to the Joab Spirit. The desire for control is all-consuming, and manipulation is its bond slave. Joab plotted to manipulate David time and again in his lifetime. Perhaps the greatest act of manipulation occurred as Joab played a "double agent" to manipulate King David into calling his son, Absalom, out of exile and back to Jerusalem. Joab,

son of Zeruah, knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom. So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there. He told her, *"Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any cosmetic lotions. Act like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead."* (2 Samuel 14:1-2, NIV).

Joab took action based on his perception that "the king's heart longed for Absalom." Some people may be fooled into believing Joab acted out of friendship or compassion for his king, but nothing could be further from the truth. For perhaps the first time in his relationship with his firstborn son, David was saying "No" and enforcing a fixed boundary in his lawless son's life. But he was barely able to overcome his emotions while doing something right. (Yes, Absalom should have been given the death penalty under the law for ordering the execution of his brother, but the exile was at least a small step in the right direction.) Joab saw a fresh soft spot in David's armor, and he again acted immediately to weaken David's authority and position himself above his king as the power broker in charge!

When a leader has a Joab in the White House, the church office, or the family business, that leader should be prepared to fight every battle on two fronts! Most of the attention always seems to go to the challenge, opponent, or threat coming from the front side in full view. Unfortunately for leaders employing or entrusting a Joab, the most deadly fight is forming right behind them under the skilled guidance of their most trusted associate, organizational officer, or family member. And disguise, illusion, pretense, and apparent goodwill are always involved.

Nothing is as it seems, but the motives are all too predictable. His motive was blatant ambition for power and control, but he had no problem painting it any color necessary, dressing it up in mourning clothes, or waving a patriot's flag. The end (or the goal) always justifies any means (or method) necessary for a Joab.

Joab, the master manipulator, thought nothing of plotting to deceive a cousin, a king, or God's anointed—they were all the same to him. David's wishes amounted only to an obstacle to be overcome by any means or a "meal ticket" to greater power.

In this case, Joab set out to create a grand illusion, a sophisticated scam of royal proportions that would directly affect the nation of Israel for generations to come. Many translations of these key Bible passages simply tell us that Joab *"sent to Tekoah and fetched a wise woman"* and stop there. Since we are dealing with a Joab, you should know there is more to this than meets the uncritical eye.

This was no “wise” woman. She was a professional actress who was artful and cunning in her ways. She had such a reputation for her skill in running a “con or confidence game” that wily Joab knew exactly who to call and how to reach her. She was an expert at building “confidence” in her sham identities and manufactured stories. Although she approached David with a make-believe story, just as Nathan had done years earlier, God did not send her, she was not a prophet or prophetess, nor did she have the best interests of David or her nation at heart!

Tekoah was also the home of Ira, one of King David’s 30 mighty men (2 Samuel 23:26), who may have been the unwitting source guiding Joab’s men to this con woman in his wilderness village about twelve miles away from Jerusalem. At a future time, the remote village would redeem itself through another native son, Amos the shepherd-prophet (Amos 1:1). Wow! This is impressive!!

It took a while, but as you read through the 14th chapter of Second Samuel, you come upon the 19th verse where “the light bulb finally came on” for David, and he pinpointed the source of the charade designed to deceive and coerce him.

Joab was pressuring David to do something unethical and unwise that would finally sever the people’s hearts from their king.

*The king asked, "Isn't the hand of Joab with you in all this?" The woman answered, "As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or to the left from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your servant Joab who instructed me to do this and who put all these words into the mouth of your servant. Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God — he knows everything that happens in the land." The king said to Joab, "Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom." Joab fell with his face to the ground to pay him honor, and he blessed the king. Joab said, "Today your servant knows that he has found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, because the king has granted his servant's request" (2 Samuel 14:19-22, NIV).*

There is something incredibly sad about this scene where David capitulates and says in what must have been great weariness of spirit, “Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom.” David had just confirmed his suspicion that the whole affair was a sordid charade meant to deceive him. The paid liar openly confessed that Joab was behind the whole thing! David’s response was basically to sigh and surrender.

Joab only pretended to be a “peace-maker” between David and Absalom. His real motive was to benefit himself using one of several strategies:

- He would show himself to be “wiser” than King David.
- He would move the up-and-coming young would-be king, Absalom, into position for power and benefit by currying his favor since he would probably ascend to the throne soon by force or later by family bloodline
- Using Absalom as a distraction to keep David “off-balance” so Joab could move to consolidate even more power and influence behind the throne.

He did all this to make himself look good at the legitimate king’s expense. He was “playing both sides against the middle” while maneuvering to benefit no matter who came out on top. In the end, Joab intended for Joab to be on top.

By winning this battle of the will with King David and by bringing back the ever-popular Prince Absalom, Joab only strengthened himself in the royal palace for possible future opportunities. And finally, in the familiar pattern later followed by organized crime bosses in countless future cultures and eras, by gathering “blackmail” material and holding it over the leader’s head, he established very real leverage and preeminence in the nation’s political and military power circles.

#### 4. A Jealous Spirit

The Joab Spirit seems to have a built-in “radar” for competition and potential rivals. It will permit no one—no matter how unlikely or how prominent the candidate—to be promoted or honored above their place or position.

After Joab had murdered David’s son, Absalom, in open defiance of his direct command, he then berated David for mourning over his son and offending the men of Israel who had fought for David.

The king listened enough to take his seat of authority and win the hearts of the men to himself, but he had finally had his fill of Joab. He sent a message through two loyal priests to Joab’s cousin, Amasa, telling him he would take Joab’s place:

*“Are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if from now on you are not the commander of my army in place of Joab” (2 Samuel 19:13, NIV).*

Then David sent Amasa to round up David's army on his first assignment. Unfortunately for Amasa, he took longer to do the job than David had given him (see 2 Samuel 20:5). In the next sentence, David turns to somebody who was there, Abishai, Joab's brother.

By the time Amasa finally showed up, Joab and his brother, Abishai, had already raised the army and were at their head. That opened the door for Joab to take care of the "competition" and secure his place in David's government—whether he liked it or not. It had all of the trappings of a modern-day Mafia execution.

*So Joab's men and the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bicri. While they were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. [A leader should never be late.] Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath [on purpose]. Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bicri (2 Samuel 20:6-10, NIV).*

If there are doubts that this was a public execution purposely done in front of the troops, then consider what happened next: "One of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!" (2 Samuel 20:11, NIV). Joab brutally murdered Amasa as a bloody warning to everyone watching the scene— "There is only one leader around here, and that leader is me!"

The Joab Spirit operating in a man or a woman will derail, defame, and destroy anyone and anything that threatens its position of power in an organization. That is why you cannot trust a Joab with new converts who have talent and ability! They will find a way to "neutralize them" to maintain the status quo.

## **5. A Grief to Leadership**

The fifth deadly characteristic of a Joab leader is the willingness and tendency to bring grief to the leader in charge and anyone else associated with leadership. One of the many incidents in David's long association with Joab clearly reveals how Joab grieved King David through his lawless actions of self-preservation, self-promotion, and personal revenge.

Consider David's sad statement concerning Joab and his brothers:

*And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruah [Joab and Abishai] be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness (2 Samuel 3:39, insertion mine).*

David's declaration over his violent cousins came at the end of a long internal war between his men and the followers of Saul's last living son (Ishboseth). Abner was a seasoned warrior who served as general for Ishboseth's army. When he realized he was fighting against God as well as fighting a losing battle, he approached David (who was king only over Judah at the time) to make a peace covenant. David sent him away in peace after Abner agreed to help win over the elders of Israel and unify the nation.

When Joab heard that King David had met privately with Abner, he was enraged because Abner had just killed his younger brother, Abishai, during their last battle. He sent messengers after Abner in the king's name (without telling David) and then called him aside as if to talk to him. Then he stabbed him to death with one blow.

What general kills someone with whom his supreme leader has just negotiated a war-ending, nation-healing covenant? A Joab leader is the kind of leader who thinks nothing of bringing untold grief and pain to his leader as long as it suits his own need for advancement or revenge.

We should notice three things that stand out in David's relationship with Joab in this incident:

First, David did well in that he publicly mourned for Abner, demonstrating his personal love for the murdered leader. This was more than a mere political ploy; David really did love and respect Abner as one of the greatest military leaders and heroes in Israel in his lifetime. However, it also had real political consequences because Abner was also a hero to the majority of Israelites who were under the rule of Saul's son at the time. Joab's reckless act of murder in a family vendetta could have ignited another long round of bloody battles.

Second, David ensured Abner was honored and buried as a national hero. In doing so, he helped unite the people of Judah and those from the other tribes under Israel. He was also making a point to Joab (it didn't work—and it rarely does with a true Joab).

Third, David failed to punish Joab for his lawlessness, disloyalty, and above all, for the premeditated murder of Abner. The king demoted Joab from his chief position over his army,

but everyone (including David) knew he could and would reclaim the position any time he decided to do so.

David also made Joab mourn for Abner, which basically means he made him attend the public funeral. Yet, none of these things really mattered to Joab or even slowed him down. He knew David wouldn't kill him or even fire him.

There are two things about the “Joab Spirit” that brings leaders grief:

1. The Joab Spirit makes people who yield to it think they are “special” and “above the rules.” This is a “must-have” position for Joabs.
2. People operating under the influence of the Joab Spirit think the biblically blessed qualities of tenderheartedness, mercy, and forgiveness are undesirable traits for any leader to have! They only respect leaders who appear to be tough, professional, and ruthless. That would appear to leave out Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, and most if not all of the Twelve Apostles. All of them were tough, but few, if any, were even interested in being “professional.” The work of Jesus on the Cross and His gospel of love totally rules out ruthlessness!

## 6. A Disrespectful Spirit

When the Joab Spirit dominates a human soul, it makes the person disrespectful toward those in authority while demanding that total respect be shown to him or her. We've already discussed Joab's violent and premeditated murder of Absalom while he was suspended, weaponless, and totally helpless from a tree. We revisit that incident to illustrate the royal disrespect demonstrated in Joab's murderous act.

*When one of the men saw this, he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree." Joab said to the man who had told him this, "What! Did you see him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt." But the man replied, "Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lift my hand against the king's son. In our hearing, the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.' [KJV-BEWARE that none touch the young man Absalom.] And if I had put my life in jeopardy—and nothing is hidden from the king — you would have kept your distance from me."*

*Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this for you." So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. And ten of Joab's armorbearers surrounded Absalom, struck him, and killed him (2 Samuel 18:10-15).*

There is no limit to the “Joab Spirit.” It will do anything to further its own agenda! Notice two things this passage reveals about Joab’s nature:

1. The brave but unnamed soldier knew that if he had harmed Absalom, then Joab would have abandoned him to suffer the consequences, or he might even have killed him to pretend he was defending David’s son.
2. Joab rushed off to kill Absalom himself before Absalom could get free from the oak tree.

### **HOW TO DEAL WITH THE “JOAB SPIRIT”**

It is never easy to deal with the Joab Spirit, but it is possible! However, you can only deal effectively with the Joab Spirit when seven things are in place:

#### **1. Make sure your resolve is compelling!**

You must know that you have heard from God! Due to the power and influence wielded by the Joab Spirit, even those closest and dearest to you may be “under the influence” of this person’s persuasive brew. Your chief counselors may be measuring your desk for your successor with the “Joab degree” in Success at Any Cost. Your spouse and children may be wearing Joab stickers and promoting their views over yours! (Never underestimate the power of this spirit to sway the minds of people who aren’t seeking God’s counsel and walking in His power as they should). You must be fully convinced that “it must be done!” And you must be equally sure it must be done now, not later. Later translates into never when Joab is in the picture.

Understand that people will misunderstand. By definition, it takes a leader to take people to a place where they normally won’t go. That goes “double or more” when it comes to confronting a Joab Spirit! People will not understand. Accept it and plan for it. And understand that it also means you will “look bad” to some, if not all, of the people around you, looking to you for leadership.

Know that once you start, there is “no turning back! Don’t weaken; hold your ground. It will only get worse if you do.

Jesus Christ knew He was challenging the authority of the “Father of all Joabs” by taking down Satan, the prince of the power of the air. Perhaps that is why He warned a young volunteer for the War of the Cross, “*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:62, NIV).

## 2. Be sure your life is clean (and blackmail-proof)!

Your life must be free from moral compromise. The Joab Spirit is a master of blackmail, underhanded schemes, and sinister plotting. He thrives the most, where the senior leader's moral and ethical life is cloudy and questionable. That gives him or her "lots to work with."

There must be no "Uriahs" in your history with Joab. If you have used the considerable "strong-arm and forceful manipulation skills" of the Joab Spirit for your gain or advantage, remember that this spirit never forgets and never fails to call upon a "sin-debt" to be paid, usually with even more sin. When you deal with a Joab Spirit, you are dealing with "the original Mafia family" from hell.

If you do have a Uriah favor in your history, you can count on a person operating under a Joab Spirit to choose the worst possible moment to play that "sleeve card" against you—pulling out that "dirty little secret" at the moment most damaging to you and most beneficial for him or her! (If you do have a secret in your moral closet, the best thing to do is to repent immediately, reveal it openly yourself, make amends as you are able, and cast yourself upon the mercy and provision of God—just as David did.)

**The best path is to ensure the Joab Spirit has nothing on you—morally, ethically, or in any other way!**

## 3. Make sure your authority is clear.

Your authority to deal with any major problem in the ministry, organization, or group must be understood by all involved. And you must understand that "only David can deal with Joab!"

Only the senior leader can deal with a high-ranking leader who is in the wrong. This is especially true for one operating with a Joab Spirit! This is one leadership problem that cannot ever be "delegated." (The Joab Spirit is especially lethal to leaders of equal or lower rank who seek to bring correction or resist its influence on their authority.)

All involved must clearly understand that your authority is of legal and proper origin. The authority that is usurped or seized illegally from another or by your own decision, apart from senior leadership, is rooted in rebellion and lawlessness.

Once this is understood, it should be clear that your actions are not being taken for personal revenge. On the contrary, your decisions and actions are being taken “for the good of all” (which is the proper basis for genuine leaders exercising legal authority under God).

#### **4. Your motive must be chaste.**

By “chaste” in this situation, I refer to the quality of purity in thought and deed. Make sure your plans, decisions, and actions are ethical and are made “for the right reason.” Ensure you understand the true issues and are not caught up in the chaos and confusion that often cloud the thinking of many in times of crisis, conflict, or confrontation.

Take time in prayer and meditation to confirm that your attitude is uncontaminated by perceived insults, conflicts, or personal “conflicts of interest” of any kind. Above all, make sure you are not acting out of anger.

Always take precautions to operate and act legally—be legally correct with both God and man. If questioned at any point in the process of dealing with the Joab Spirit, you should be able to answer honestly, “This is for wrongs done to us, not for wrongs done to me.”

(Remember, the original Joab was quick to kill over personal wrongs or offenses while using his official position and influence to help make it happen—he calmly killed General Abner and Amasa, the man David appointed to replace Joab!)

#### **5. Ensure that your timing is correct.**

Don’t underestimate anyone under the influence of the Joab Spirit. David waited 47 years to rein in Joab because of the Uriah incident. Yet there was more at stake than reluctance to “be found out.” In reality, David’s sin with Uriah actually did “come out” and become common knowledge in Israel, costing him dearly. His delay in dealing with Joab was probably rooted in at least three reasons:

Joab was a useful, if deadly, ally for the King of Israel—as long as his lethal tendencies were directed away from David and his fellow Israelites.

Secondly, David was himself a mighty warrior. He may have felt he could deal with Joab himself if necessity demanded it.

Thirdly, and my chief point here, is that Joab was too dangerous to tackle blindly and without careful preparation.

David timed it well. While he managed to function with Joab most of the time, it was clear to him and to the people that young Solomon—a man of wisdom but not of war—was no match for Joab. This dangerous man would have to be removed from power before he could influence the fate of the nation or kill Solomon once King David stepped aside or died.

## **6. Be certain that your methods are kind.**

Your methods of leadership and correction must be sympathetic and not destructive. David's methods reflected his conviction that his responsibility was to serve Israel, not merely to kill or remove Joab.

One of the practical ways to demonstrate kindness in a high-profile demotion or corrective removal of a leader is to conduct the confrontation and administer the consequence quietly without being loud, nervous, or vindictive.

Perhaps you have heard of churches or ministries “demonizing” employees who were laid off or released from their positions. Some unfortunate individuals have been pointedly “escorted” to their desks by security staff, supervised as they cleaned out their desks, and then paraded in public shame all the way to their cars and monitored until they were out of sight of the property.

This is “leadership by paranoia,” and totally opposite from the biblical leadership we see in the lives of Jesus, Paul, Peter, and James.

Rather than publicly humiliate a subordinate leader who has been too harsh or too manipulative to remain in your church staff or ministry, it would be better for your leader and leadership team to talk with them privately and then officially release them from their position “at 4:45 o'clock Friday afternoon in the parking lot (before the other employees and staff get off) with a generous severance check and the best letter of recommendation possible.”

In everything, keep your focus on healing, not on hurting. Even Joab was a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even your worst nightmare of an employee or staff member was included in Jesus Christ's miracle on the cross!

## **7. Godly conduct produces desirable consequences when it is done.**

You can rarely measure the value of your actions and decisions until later when everything has been said and done. A good leader loves everyone, even those they must correct or fire from their positions.

The real test comes afterward. One way we can assess our conduct is by the way people react to the final outcome. It is hard to imagine a herd of sheep experiencing “peace” at the height of a battle between the shepherd and a marauding wolf, coyote, or lion. You must check the sheep later, after the noise of the battle has died down and the “source of danger” has been removed.

I would want to hear people commenting with conviction, “He did what he had to do, but he did not enjoy it.” It helps when you hear people say, “She is a strong but fair leader.”

One of the greatest principles revealed in the comments of higher-level staff members “in the know” after a staffing adjustment may appear in a statement such as, “That hurt him more than it hurt us— or even Joab.” If a good leader loves everyone, including those they must correct or remove from a key position, then that leader hurts and sympathizes with the pain felt by others. Yet, they still do the right thing!

Finally, when a senior leader, such as a pastor, college president, judge, or the President of the United States, takes the right action to remove someone with the Joab Spirit, more than anything else, he or she will probably hear this said quite often: “He could (should) have done that a long time ago, but he did what he had to do, not what he wanted to do.”

Few opponents you will face as a leader in life and ministry will ever match the potential evil and cunning demonstrated by the Joab Spirit. Perhaps it is dangerous precisely because it so closely matches the devious ways and consuming ambition seen in the senior cherub’s astounding aspiration to assume God’s throne—and his ability to persuade a full third of the angels in heaven to join his outlandish plot!

Remember that people under the influence of the Joab Spirit are skilled and driven to undermine authority because a spirit of disloyalty leads them. It is also a spirit of ambition and preeminence, and it is far more dangerous than the Absalom Spirit!

In summary, the deadly characteristics identifying the Joab Spirit are:

- Overly ambitious
- Controlling
- Manipulative
- Jealous of place
- Grief to leadership
- Disrespectful

If you must deal with the Joab Spirit, you should do so only if your:

- Resolve is compelling
- Life is clean
- Authority is clear
- Motive is chaste
- Timing is correct
- Methods are kind
- Godly conduct produces desirable consequences when it is done

If you do things God's way and with God's heart and motives, then when it is over, people will say of you what they said of David: "He did what he had to do, not what he wanted to do."