

Rebellion

In the 1980s, there was a period known as the Satanic Panic. Everyone was warning the public about supposed Satanism lurking behind rock music, Dungeons and Dragons, certain cartoons. Just about everything innocent was found to have some secret Satanism embedded in it. And yet growing in front of everyone's eyes, completely unrecognised and unaddressed was a kind of Satanism that is in every generation.

The Bible says that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. Rebellion is Satanism without the Pentagrams and supposed rituals. Why would the Word of God compare those two? First, because witchcraft is a direct seeking of Satan and the dark powers, who are themselves rebels. Satan is a rebel angel, one who was created upright, but pride corrupted his wisdom and he chose to rebel against God. He was the first rebel, the first one to strike out against authority and seek independent life. When you rebel, you are not finding a freedom that God ordained. When you rebel, you are following in the footsteps of the first and worst rebel of all. Second, in witchcraft, you are seeking power in an illicit and evil way. You want access to power, to knowledge, to abilities that will not come to you in normal, God-given ways. That's what rebellion is like. You do not want to be a part of God's structured cosmos, with authorities in the home, in the church, and in society. Those three spheres are the way God keeps order in the world: family, church, and government, and when rebellion takes place in any of those three, someone is really seeking a kind power outside of God's normal structures.

To be in rebellion against parents, authorities at school, at church, at work, in the society is no small thing. "Whenever you see confusion, you can be sure that something is wrong. Disorder in the world implies that something is out of place. Usually, at the heart of all disorder you will find man in rebellion against God. It began in the Garden of Eden and continues to this day." - A. W. Tozer

"Because man is born a rebel, he is unaware that he is one. His constant assertion of self, as far as he thinks of it at all, appears to him a perfectly normal thing." That might be you today. You might be living in active or passive defiance or rebellion of your Creator. How would you know? Well, it depends who you side with. Jesus said to a crowd, ⁴⁴"You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do". By contrast, if you know God, and are in Him, and are going to Heaven, then it is not rebellion that characterises you, but meekness. "Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth." Meekness is a mark of those in Christ. "Colossians 3:12

¹²Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;"

In 2 Samuel 15 and 16, we will see rebellion contrasted with meekness. We come to that sad moment in David's life when his sins are now chastened with the rod of his wayward son, Absalom. In Absalom, we will see rebellion, and all the satanic signs of pride, deception, and destruction. In David, we will see meekness: a man accepting God's will for him, at great personal cost. Even though David is here suffering partly for his own sins, he nevertheless gives us a picture of Christlikeness, particularly the meekness of Jesus on the night of his betrayal and suffering in Gethsemane.

I. Rebellion Steal Hearts in Deception

¹After this it happened that Absalom provided himself with chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. ²Now Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way to the gate. So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, that Absalom would call to him and say, "What city are you from?" And he would say, "Your servant is from such and such a tribe of Israel." ³Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you."

⁴Moreover Absalom would say, "Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice." ⁵And so it was, whenever anyone came near to bow

down to him, that he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him. ⁶In this manner Absalom acted toward all Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Absalom had waited two years before murdering Amnon, and now, he was again willing to wait four years to execute his plan to steal the throne of Israel from his father. Some of David's psalms written during this time, such as Psalms 61 through 63, Psalm 41, suggest that David wasn't in the best health during this time, possibly weakened, maybe distracted by all the plans for the Temple, and didn't pay attention to Absalom's manoeuvring and manipulating.

Using chariots and horses and runners is a pretty obvious claim to royal status. These chariots and horses also point to a shadow army that he was building up, a private military force of his own. And give this traitor credit: he wasn't lazy. He would get up early and go to the gate, which was like an ancient city's town hall or town square. Disputes, contracts, agreements were all done at the city gate. Absalom would appear there in all his royal retinue and ask people where they were from and their grievance that had brought them to Jerusalem. Apparently, even in David's kingdom there was bureaucracy and inefficient civil servants, because people were apparently disgruntled. Maybe things being centralised in the monarchy, and new taxes, and military conscription brought some unhappiness.

And there is Absalom to capitalise on it all. As people would recognise that he was the prince and bow to him, Absalom would play the salt of the earth card and lift them up, "Please, no, no, I am one of you. What is your name? What is your story?" And then, "How I wish I could implement all the reforms I have in mind to help people like you! Unfortunately, my father's inefficient system has no one to help the little people. You won't get through to anyone in that stone palace up there. But that would all change if I were king. I'll remember your case, Avi. I'm on your side, Ya'acov.

Pure flattery and promises of a utopian place of perfect justice and welfare for all. This is what we call a demagogue. Someone who preys upon the political desires of the simple. But the result is there in verse 6: So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

Oh, that men would become aware of heart-stealers. The one who promises an upset church member if he were in charge, this church would finally show love to all people, the one who promises a hurting wife, if you were with me, I would care for you and listen to you, the one who promises a nation, if you voted for me, everyone would have money and jobs: these are flatterers and deceivers. Jesus said that the children of the devil do the works of their father. From the first, Satan was a heart-stealer, telling Eve that the authority she was under was hiding things from her and withholding things. If she would just follow him, he would lead her to new heights of freedom, and knowledge, and power. Sowing doubts about authority is as old as the Garden of Eden.

II. Rebellion Steals Authority in Rejection

⁷Now it came to pass after forty years that Absalom said to the king, "Please, let me go to Hebron and pay the vow which I made to the LORD. ⁸For your servant took a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, 'If the LORD indeed brings me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.' " ⁹And the king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. ¹⁰Then Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom reigns in Hebron!' " ¹¹And with Absalom went two hundred men invited from Jerusalem, and they went along innocently and did not know anything. ¹²Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city—from Giloh—while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number.

When the day finally came to start the revolution, Absalom chose the city of Hebron. It was a clever choice. First, he was born there, and had enough family connections. It was where David was made

king. It was originally the capital city when David was king only of Judah, and maybe there were still some disgruntled people unhappy that Hebron had lost its primacy. It was a sacred city, assigned to the priests, with a historical connection to Caleb. And it was a properly walled city with defences, the ideal place to invade Jerusalem, just 36 kilometres to the north-east. Absalom claimed that he had to fulfill a vow, and do so in Hebron, it's unclear whether he'd actually made a vow. Maybe he vowed to overthrow David!

To add to his shrewdness, he invited over 200 people who were not known to be his partisans or part of his conspiracy. It would ward off suspicion about a large gathering, but it would also trap those 200 people, who might just have to turn to his side once caught up in the tide of the insurrection. One important co-conspirator was Ahithophel, David's counselor, like a secretary of state. Ahithophel was actually the father of Eliam, one of David's mighty men, who was the father of Bathsheba. Ahithophel may well have had a deep grudge against David for his sin against his granddaughter. Possibly, Ahithophel had designed the whole revolt.

Once everyone was there, the trumpets were blown, Absalom was declared king in Hebron, and the conspirators with their swords and bows and arrows would have ready for an assault on Jerusalem. Just as Absalom did this, so when Satan tempted Eve, and she and Adam sinned, it was as if the trumpet was blown to say, "Satan is king on Earth" The day that Adam's race ate of that tree, they joined a conspiracy, a conspiracy to remove the Son of God from His rightful throne as king over the Earth, with mankind as His co-regents, ruling and reigning with Him. That's why the Bible calls Satan the god of this world, the prince of this Earth. Rebellion is like witchcraft because like Satan, it lies, deceives, usurps and steals in rejection of God's order. But now our passage turns to David, where we see the opposite of rebellion in the meekness of David.

III. Meekness Relinquishes Its Rights for Others

¹³Now a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." ¹⁴So David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword." ¹⁵And the king's servants said to the king, "We are your servants, ready to do whatever my lord the king commands." ¹⁶Then the king went out with all his household after him. But the king left ten women, concubines, to keep the house.

It seems emergency is what wakes David up from his passivity and slumber, and now we see the old David beginning to emerge. David knows that if Absalom has conspirators from the northern tribes, then Jerusalem will soon be surrounded, and he and his loyalists will be trapped. He knows Absalom will likely kill David and the other sons of David, as well as innocent inhabitants. For the sake of others, and to save lives, David is willing to abandon the throne. He could have stayed, and proudly took on an unwinnable siege, but instead he makes the best move for all. He leaves ten concubines to simply occupy the house, which will be a fatal error, and bring about the fulfillment of one of Nathan's prophesied judgements upon David.

It reminds us of the famous passage we just studied in Philippians 2. Jesus could have hung onto and clung to His royal rights and privileges. who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited.

*He left His Father's throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:*

¹⁷And the king went out with all the people after him, and stopped at the outskirts. ¹⁸Then all his servants

passed before him; and all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had followed him from Gath, passed before the king. ¹⁹Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why are you also going with us? Return and remain with the king. For you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. ²⁰In fact, you came only yesterday. Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you." ²¹But Ittai answered the king and said, "As the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be." ²²So David said to Ittai, "Go, and cross over." Then Ittai the Gittite and all his men and all the little ones who were with him crossed over.

At this point, David nobly seeks to dismiss his bodyguard. The Cherethites, Pelethites and Gittites are actually Philistines loyal to David. David is embracing this moment as possibly God's judgement upon him, and instead of trying to draw people into his judgement, he wants to release as many of them as possible. He says to Ittai, you are the king's bodyguard. Go to Jerusalem and take your place next to the new king who will sit there. Ittai's response ranks up with the confession of Ruth to go where Naomi would go, to die where Naomi would die. Ittai confesses an oath in the name of Yahveh, and swears that he is not a bodyguard to any king, but to King David.

Pride and rebellion wants to hang onto and use others. Meekness can let them go.

On more than one occasion, Jesus was willing to let His loved disciples go. After an unpopular sermon that caused people to start walking out on Jesus, "

⁶⁷Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" ⁶⁸But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."m (John 6:67–68)

⁷Then He asked them again, "Whom are you seeking?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."

⁸Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way," (John 18:7–8)

But David does succeed in dismissing at least a few crucial people.

²³And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people crossed over. The king himself also crossed over the Brook Kidron, and all the people crossed over toward the way of the wilderness. ²⁴There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. ²⁵Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. ²⁶But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him." ²⁷The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. ²⁸See, I will wait in the plains of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." ²⁹Therefore Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem. And they remained there.

The two high priests, Zadok and Abiathar are loyal to David and are following him with all the priests, carrying the Ark. But see the humility of David. He refuses to use the Ark like Saul did, as some kind of superstitious good luck charm. The Ark belongs in Jerusalem. Again, David submits to this event in his life as coming from God's hand. If God brings David back to Jerusalem, then it will happen, but if not, then the Ark should return to Mount Zion. David is impartial when it comes to the glory of God: God must be worshipped in His chosen city, and if David is not to return there, so be it.

Besides, there is a tactical reason. Zadok and Abiathar can remain in Jerusalem and not be killed by Absalom's invading forces: they would obviously spare the priests. Because they are still loyal to David, they can act as spies and insiders for David while still in the capital city. They can send advance warning to David about what is going on.

IV. Meekness Accepts Suffering With Trust

³⁰So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up.

Notice how often the words *crossing over* occur in this passage. David and his party cross over the Brook Kidron which is the valley to the east of the city. After you have crossed that brook, you start to climb the mount of Olives. Now the reality sets in: this is a moment of humiliation, of discipline, of chastening. The king has been dethroned, and must escape. Not only that, but David hears terrible news. This is suffering, and David is accepting it with the signs of humiliation.

³¹Then someone told David, saying, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!"

To hear that David's closest counselor is on Absalom's side is a crushing blow. Many believe that it was Ahithophel that David was speaking about in Psalm 41:

⁹Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me. (Psalm 41:9)

¹²For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. ¹³But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance. ¹⁴We took sweet counsel together, And walked to the house of God in the throng. Psalm 55:12–14

On the night before He died, the Son of David, the Messiah, crossed the very same Kidron river, and entered the Garden of Gethsemane, there to be betrayed by one of his closest associates. The New Testament quotes Psalm 41:9 as a fulfillment of prophecy in respect of Judas. But David prays that God will thwart the counsel of Ahithophel. And in apparent answer to prayer, the next person David sees is the one who will do that.

³²Now it happened when David had come to the top of the mountain, where he worshiped God—there was Hushai the Archite coming to meet him with his robe torn and dust on his head. ³³David said to him, "If you go on with me, then you will become a burden to me. ³⁴But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; as I was your father's servant previously, so I will now also be your servant,' then you may defeat the counsel of Ahithophel for me. ³⁵And do you not have Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? Therefore it will be that whatever you hear from the king's house, you shall tell to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. ³⁶Indeed they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son; and by them you shall send me everything you hear." ³⁷So Hushai, David's friend, went into the city. And Absalom came into Jerusalem.

Hushai is another of David's close friends and advisors. We don't know anything more about him except that he was an Archite, which was one of clans within the tribe of Benjamin. David encourages Hushai to infiltrate Absalom's court, and join David's spy network in the city, alongside the priests. Hushai will be the only one capable of overcoming the counsel of Ahithophel.

In our Lord's deepest moment of trial in the Garden, an angel appeared to strengthen him. But David's trials aren't over. He is now about to be met by two more people, both of them his enemies, one a liar, the other a reviler and slanderer.

¹When David was a little past the top of the mountain, there was Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, who met him with a couple of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred summer fruits, and a skin of wine. ²And the king said to Ziba, "What do you mean to do with these?" So Ziba said, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who are faint in the wilderness to drink." ³Then the king said, "And where is your master's son?" And Ziba said to the king, "Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me.' " ⁴So the king said to Ziba, "Here, all that belongs to Mephibosheth is yours." And Ziba said, "I humbly bow before you, that I may find favor in

your sight, my lord, O king!"

Ziba is that servant of Saul whom David appointed to look after the estate of Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth. He appears with food and provisions to refresh David, so it looks as if he is on the right side of things. But in reality, he is slandering Mephibosheth by claiming that Mephibosheth is on the side of the conspirators, and is hoping to get his throne back. We'll find out in a few chapters that he was lying, but David has no way of knowing, and to prevent an actual conspiracy from taking place, he transfers all of Mephibosheth's property to Ziba.

The next man David meets has not food and provisions for David, only curses and stones.

⁵Now when King David came to Bahurim, there was a man from the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei the son of Gera, coming from there. He came out, cursing continuously as he came. ⁶And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David. And all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. ⁷Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! ⁸The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!"

Shimei, from Benjamin, the tribe of Saul, apparently has borne resentment against David all these years, and blames David for the discipline on the house of Saul. And even though he is cursing and slandering, God Himself agrees that David was a man of bloodshed (1st Chr. 22:8-10).

Now David's cousin Abishai, brother of Joab, want to murder this man. Compare their response to David's response.

⁹Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" ¹⁰But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' " ¹¹And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. ¹²It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day." ¹³And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust. ¹⁴Now the king and all the people who were with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there.

Once again, look at the difference between David and Absalom. David is submitting to God's discipline for him, accepting that Shimei is part of the trial, part of the suffering for the day. In fact, he is a small part, given that David's own son is trying to murder him. David says, I need to accept everything that God gives me this day, and not fight against it.

Jesus faced multiples Shimeis, cursing, spitting, hitting, falsely accusing. And Jesus also had some companions like Abishai. Peter cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant, and Jesus had to heal it while telling Peter

⁵²But Jesus said to him, "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

⁵³Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?" (Matthew 26:52-54)

But above all, the greatest statement of meekness was when Jesus accepted His suffering with trust. "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." ⁴³Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. (Luke 22:42-43)

Whose approach to life seems nearer and dearer to you? Absalom or David? Does the self-assertion of Absalom seem natural to you? Know that Satanism is not mainly Ouija boards, seances, altars and weird rituals. Its rebellion against God's visible and invisible authority. And does the meekness

of David seem weak to you? Then you need to have the experience that Jonathan Edwards had when walking out one day in his father's field.

“And as I was walking there and looking upon the sky and clouds, there came into my mind so sweet a sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God as I know not how to express. I seemed to see them both in a sweet conjunction; majesty and meekness joined together: it was a sweet, and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awesome sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness...The soul of a true Christian, as I then wrote my meditations, appeared like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the year; low and humble on the ground, opening its bosom to receive the pleasant beams of the sun's glory; rejoicing as it were in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragrance; standing peacefully and lovingly in the midst of other flowers round about; ... to drink in the light of the sun. Of all parts of a creature-holiness, [none seemed as beautiful] as humility, brokenness of heart, and poverty of spirit; and there was nothing that I so earnestly longed for. My heart panted after this—to lie low before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and that God might be All; that I might become as a little child.”

His Majesty Messiah is meek. So are His people.