

The Mourning Father and the Pierced Son: David and Absalom (2 Sam 15–19) in Jewish and Christian Interpretations

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1. Introduction

The biblical narrative describes some of the most agonizing moments of King David's life when he mourns his son Absalom (2 Sam 19:1 MT), whose disgraceful demise is rooted in David's own shortcomings. Unlike other nemeses of David, the figure of Absalom presents a peculiar self-portrait of David's folly in disobeying the LORD on account of Uriah and his wife Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:9). Confirming the foreboding rebuke of Nathan the prophet (2 Sam 12:10–12), the bloody episodes of sexual violence and political intrigue in the narrative that follows are catalyzed by none other than Absalom, whose unresolved anger is aptly captured in the demand, "Now let me see the king's face. And if there is any iniquity in me, let him kill me!" (2 Sam 14:32)¹ For centuries, Absalom's attempted coup, Joab's piercing of Absalom's body as it dangles by his hair on a tree, and David's plaintive outbursts—"If only I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Sam 18:33)—have prompted impassioned responses in Jewish and Christian interpretative traditions. Despite these interpretive reactions to one of the most unnerving scenes of David's struggles

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1) All translations in the paper are mine unless otherwise noted.

with Absalom, biblical scholars still little attend to the task of evaluating and integrating such invaluable reflections.²⁾ This article traces the reception history of the account of David and Absalom (2 Sam 15–19) in the interpretative literatures and observes the similarities and differences in their retelling of the shared canon.

In the case of the Jewish literature, the investigation will be confined to the midrashic and talmudic material of the Second Temple Period that constitutes the bulk of ancient Jewish lore about David and Absalom. These rabbinic sage narratives are not just an assemblage of idiosyncratic imaginings; they are a wealth of ancient exegesis meriting consideration in their own right,³⁾ providing fresh insights into uncharted literary terrains

2) Some recent contributions touch on various aspects of David's story in tradition, even if they do not primarily focus on the reception exegesis of David's mourning of Absalom. See, for example, M. Zawanowska, M. Wilk, eds., *The Character of David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: Warrior, Poet, Prophet and King* (Leiden: Brill, 2021); R. M. Karras, *Thou Art the Man: The Masculinity of David in the Christian and Jewish Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), esp. Chapter 5; S. Bar-Efrat, "From History to Story: The Development of the Figure of David in Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature," *For and against David: Story and History in the Books of Samuel*, eds. G. A. Auld, E. Eynikel, BETL 232 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 47–56; K. E. Pomykala, "Images of David in Early Judaism," *Of Scribes and Sages: Early Jewish Interpretation and Transmission of Scripture*, vol. 1: *Ancient Versions and Traditions*, ed. C. A. Evans, LSTS 50 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 33–46; D. Pedersen, "Portraits of David: Canonical or Otherwise," *IliffRev* 42 (1985), 2–21.

3) For related discussions, refer to D. Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997); C. Bakhos, ed., *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash* (SJSJ 106; Leiden: Brill, 2006); Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg, *Sustaining Fictions: Intertextuality, Midrash, Translation, and the Literary Afterlife of the Bible* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008); C. Cordoni, G. Langer, eds., *Narratology, Hermeneutics, and Midrash: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Narratives from the Late Antique Period through to Modern Times* (Göttingen: Vienna University Press, 2014).

surrounding the stories of David and Absalom. Some distinguished Jewish commentators from much later periods, such as Rashi (1040–1105) and David Altschuler of Prague (1687–1769), also mention Absalom’s account in their exegetical midrash. But since most of their comments are annotative glosses or reiterations of the earlier tradition, we will not examine their works here.⁴⁾ We also exclude the works of landmark Protestant commentators like Martin Luther and Jean Calvin because their reading of David’s conflict with Absalom is beyond the scope of this limited case study.⁵⁾ On the other hand, we will mostly consider the pastoral writings of lesser-known figures from post-Reformation England, which, surprisingly, preserve vibrant interpretations of the relevant biblical text. The Christian corpus contains much more exegetic data on the account of David and Absalom than the Jewish corpus does, so we will look at interpreters whose engagement with the biblical figures is relevant to the present discussion. The Christian texts we consider will cover the expository and homiletic literature attributed to the early Church Fathers (Pseudo-Ignatius, Augustine of Hippo, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, and Ambrose of Milan) and the Protestant Reformers of the later periods, especially those of the late-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries (Lucas Osiander, Andrew Willet, Thomas Jackson, and Joseph Hall).⁶⁾

4) See, for example, A. J. Rosenberg, trans., *The Book of Samuel 2: A New English Translation of the Text, Rashi and a Commentary Digest* (JBP 4; Brooklyn, NY: The Judaica Press, 1986).

5) For example, M. Luther (1483–1546) mentions Absalom many times across his vast corpus of commentaries, but Luther’s extended comments are mostly found in his exposition of Genesis and Psalms. In contrast, J. Calvin (1509–1564) makes sparse and curt references to Absalom.

6) For a general overview of the related topics, see C. Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis: The Bible in Ancient Christianity, Volume 1* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); D. K. McKim, ed., *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007); P. M. Blowers, P. W. Martens, eds., *The*

This paper aims to enrich modern readers' appreciation of the Scripture by comparing interpretive legacies of both religious traditions and thereby demonstrating the value of interfacing with exegetes of the past.

2. Absalom in Jewish Tradition

2.1. Talmudic and Midrashic Literature

According to early Jewish tradition, Absalom is portrayed as the rebellious son who occasions the most distressful trial of David's life.⁷⁾ Like Esau, Absalom is one whose name is fair (it means "father of peace") but whose life turns out to be loathsome (*Tanh. Bub. Shem. 1:3*; cf. *Tanh. Shem. 2:2*).⁸⁾ The brevity of the account of Absalom's gradual stealing of the hearts of the Israelites, which ferments Absalom's military coup (2 Sam 15:1–13), inspired the ancient Jewish interpreters to offer various gap-filling conjectures. Some rabbinic interpretations seem rather apologetic insofar as they blame others for the waywardness of Absalom.⁹⁾ One tradition highlights Ahithophel's conspiracy to seize the throne of David through Absalom's rebellion.¹⁰⁾ A man

Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Biblical Interpretation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); K. Parry, ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Patristics* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015); U. Rublack, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Protestant Reformations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); M. F. Bird, S. D. Harrower, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

7) L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 2 vols, trans. H. Szold, P. Radin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 2:931.

8) Cf. L. M. Maciá et al., "Absalom (Son of David)" *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, eds. H.-J. Klauch et al.; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 1:236.

9) Maciá et al., "Absalom (Son of David)," 1:236.

of wisdom whose advice was regarded as divine because it even corresponded with the verdict of Urim and Thumim (cf. *b. Ned.* 37b:9; *y. Sanh.* 10:2:20; *Tehil.* 3:4),¹¹⁾ Ahithophel was misled by various omens into believing that the kingship would eventually be his; one of these misleading omens affirmed the royal destiny of his granddaughter Bathsheba (*Yal. Shim'oni* Sam 151:5).¹²⁾ Motivated by royal ambition, Ahithophel encouraged Absalom to perpetrate “an unheard-of crime” of patricide to wrest the throne from David, knowing that Absalom would be put to death for the “violation of family purity” (2 Sam 16:21–22).¹³⁾ Others point out that David did not discipline his wicked son properly, the consequences of which are much more unbearable than those of the eschatological battle of Gog and Magog (*b. Ber.* 7b:11; *Shem. Rab.* 1:1).¹⁴⁾ But most interpreters condemn Absalom for his outright defiance of paternal authority in usurping the throne. Pretending to have David’s approval, Absalom enlists the support of nearly two hundred tribal representatives.¹⁵⁾ Because of his actions, Absalom, along with all of Israel’s evil kings, is without a “share in the world to come” (*'Abot R. Nat.* 36:6; *b. Sanh.* 103b:5).¹⁶⁾

David’s traumatic response to his son’s revolt is well captured in the rabbinic tale describing him as trying to engage in idolatry out of fear that God will be blasphemed if his son’s patricidal campaign prevails (*b. Sanh.* 107a:12–13).¹⁷⁾ David reasons that if he worships the idol, the people will regard his affliction as

10) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:922.

11) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:923 fn 62.

12) Cf. 2 Sam 23:34. Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:922; See also M. A. Collins et al., “Ahithophel,” *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, 1:665–66.

13) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:922.

14) Maciá et al., “Absalom (Son of David),” 1:236–37.

15) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:932.

16) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:908 fn 100.

17) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:933 fn 101.

a just consequence of his evil deed. Another passage explains that the agonizing gestures of David—covering his head while barefoot as he flees from Absalom across the Kidron Valley—are the result of the Sanhedrin’s decision to excommunicate him for his transgression (cf. 2 Sam 15:30).¹⁸⁾ Yet David is described emphatically as the LORD’s chosen one (*Bamid. Rab.* 3:2) and is reinstated by his rabbinic teacher, Eira Hayairi (עִירָא הַיָּאִירִי), whose name recalls Uriah (אֲרִיָּה).¹⁹⁾

Rabbi Yudan said, “Eira Hayairi, the teacher of David, brought him close. This is what David says (Psalms 119:79), ‘Let those that fear You (yeirecha) return to me, and they that know Your testimonies’—[‘they that know’] is written as ‘he that knows,’ [meaning that] Eira Hayairi was his teacher and brought [David] close.”...Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi, “There are six that were chosen: the priesthood; the order of Levi; Israel; the monarchy of the house of David; Jerusalem; [and] the Temple. ...From where [do we know this about] the monarchy of the house of David? As it is stated (Psalms 78:70), ‘And He chose David, His servant.’”²⁰⁾

David’s urge to commit idolatry is dovetailed with the intervention of Hushai the Archite, who blames him for not having followed the law regarding a captive woman; in Hushai’s view, Absalom’s wicked propensity is a byproduct of David’s wrong choice of woman.²¹⁾ Here, the sage’s association of

18) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:933 fn 101.

19) Here is an example of a literary strategy intentionally employed by the sages. See J. A. Diamond, “King David of the Sages: Rabbinic Rehabilitation or Ironic Parody?” *Prooftexts* 27.3 (2007), 390; M. Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. P. Hackett (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1991), 78–83.

20) “Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 3.2,” Sefaria Community Translation, n.p. [cited 7 August 2022]. Online: https://www.sefaria.org/Bamidbar_Rabbah.3.2?lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en.

Absalom's mother with a captive woman underlies the literary arrangement of the legal sections in the later part of Deuteronomy 21 (cf. *b. Sanh.* 107a:14). In the chapter, the requirements that must be obeyed when marrying a captive woman (vv. 10–14) are followed by laws concerning the rights of the firstborn (vv. 15–17), rebellious children (vv. 18–21), and a person hanging on a tree (vv. 22–23). After assassinating Amnon, the heir apparent to David's throne, Absalom claimed his firstborn rights by dint of audacious political maneuvering, culminating in unsuccessful rebellion against his father. The scene of Absalom's death eerily coincides with the image conjured by the Mosaic instructions regarding a person hanged on a tree who is dubbed "accursed of God" (Deut 21:22–23). Absalom's hair, the physical trait that symbolizes his hubris (cf. *m. Sotah* 1:8:3; *t. Sotah* 3:4; *Bamid. Rab.* 9:24; *Pirque R. El.* 53:9),²² is caught in an oak, and as he is hanging on the tree by his hair, his heart is thrust by Joab's three spears (2 Sam 18:14; cf. *Yal. Shim'oni* 151:9). According to the rabbinic tradition, Absalom is one of several biblical characters whose admirable physical qualities occasioned their unfortunate demise (cf. *b. Sotah* 10a:10; *Pirque R. El.* 53:8):

Samson's extraordinary strength caused his death; Saul killed himself by cutting his neck with his own sword; while speeding swiftly, Asahel was pierced by Abner's spear; Absalom was caught up by his hair in an oak, and thus suspended met his death; Uzziah was smitten with leprosy upon his forehead; the darts that killed Josiah entered through his nostrils, and Zedekiah's eyes were blinded.²³

The midrashic legend further elaborates the story of

21) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:932.

22) Maciá et al., "Absalom (Son of David)," 1:236.

23) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:58–59 (fn 23).

Absalom's violent death by spotlighting his final moment. Because he saw "hell yawning beneath him" and refused to descend into the abyss (*b. Soṭah* 10b:14), Absalom stopped short of severing his entangled hair from the tree.²⁴⁾ The horrifying description of Absalom's penultimate scene of resistance converges with another tradition that ranks him with the likes of Korah and of Dathan and Abiram, the rebels whom the LORD punished by opening the earth and sending them alive to Sheol.²⁵⁾ Absalom and these others come before the Messiah and in much anguish demand to know when they will be brought out of the abyss. The Messiah responds, "Go to your fathers and ask them,"²⁶⁾ alluding to their ignoble sin of mounting a revolt against patriarchal authority (*b. Soṭah* 10b:15).

Absalom is nonetheless spared the worst of hell and is appointed to rule over the ten Gentile nations as a king because of David's heartfelt plea, punctuated by the eightfold entreaty of "my son" (2 Sam 19:1 MT (5x), 19:5 (3x); cf. *Pirque R. El.* 53.10).²⁷⁾ The LORD's stern declaration restrains the punitive angels from inflicting further pain on Absalom, and Absalom's head is restored to his body in response to David's eighth petition (*b. Soṭah* 10b:15): "Do not chastise him, do not burn him. He is an Israelite, the son of My servant David."²⁸⁾ That David's groaning prayer for Absalom induces a gracious response from God that includes the emphatic reference to "the son of My servant David"—recalling the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:5, 8, "My servant David")—underscores the enduring divine allegiance to the Davidic dynasty. By contrast, the interpretation of another tradition is that David's petition allowed Absalom to enter heaven

24) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:932 (fn 104).

25) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:20.

26) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:20.

27) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:932.

28) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:932 fn 106. Per Rabbi Joshua ben Levi.

but with a cost incurred by David's misguided love for his insubordinate son, a cost suffered by his posterity (b. Sotah 10b:15).²⁹⁾ For instance, eight of David's sons, including the first son David had with Bathsheba, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah died. The tradition also attributes the tragic death of the eight Judean rulers—Joram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Jehoash, Amaziah, Amnon, Josiah, and Jehoiakim—to David's intercession.³⁰⁾ But an anonymous midrash attributes the death of David's sons and the Judean monarchs to the fact that he passively retreated from the battle with Absalom's army as his loyal subordinates risked their lives fighting it.³¹⁾

3. Absalom in Christian Tradition

3.1. Patristic Literature

In the Christian tradition, Absalom's rebellion is often cited to stress the deplorableness of disrespecting the authority figure of a community of faith. Featuring a pastoral exhortation to revere a young bishop, the long recension of the epistle of Ignatius³²⁾ cites the biblical figures who were punished for rebelling against their seniors, deemed to be a form of rebellion against the LORD.³³⁾ Invoking Paul's admonition to Timothy, the writer warns that those who disregard such youthful leadership will end up like Dathan, Abirahm, and Korah and his 250 followers, who perished for challenging divinely ordained authority. The

29) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:933 fn 107.

30) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:933 fn 107.

31) Ginzberg, *Legends*, 2:933 fn 107.

32) Also, Ignatius of Antioch or Ignatius Theophorus (?-c. 110 AD.)

33) Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians* 3 (longer version) (PG 5:757-62; ANF 1:60).

author regards the primary sin of Absalom to be not that of defying his father but of defying the authority of Amnon, his older brother, by killing him.³⁴⁾ In the same vein, the anonymous author of *The Apostolic Constitutions* (ca. 375 to 380) argues that to rebel against priests is much worse than to rebel against kings, since the priesthood deals with matters of soul.³⁵⁾ He gives the examples of Absalom and of Korah and Dathan; in each case, the rebels revolt against the supreme authority of their predecessors, David and Moses, respectively, and malign the leadership of their superiors. For his part, Absalom accused his father David of being “an unjust judge” to sway the hearts of the Israelites and promote himself as the ideal ruler of justice (cf. 2 Sam 15:1–6).³⁶⁾

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) is noteworthy for incorporating the biblical account of the dysfunction of David’s family in his apologetic works.³⁷⁾ In arguing against the Donatists, for instance, Augustine appeals to the example of David’s paternal compassion for the insubordinate Absalom to defend the Catholic Church’s rejection of the separatist views of the Donatists, who staunchly bolster their *status qualitatis*.³⁸⁾ In Augustine’s view, David gave his army officials stern instructions to safeguard Absalom out of a desire to forgive Absalom should he repent for his rebellion. Instead, David ended up grieving Absalom’s death, and his only consolation was that his dynasty finally attained peace. In the same way, in her motherlike concern the

34) Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians* 3 (longer version) (PG 5:761–62; ANF 1:60).

35) *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 6.1.2 (ANF 7:450); P. A. de Lagarde, ed., *Constitutiones Apostolorum* (Lipsiae: B. G. Teubner, 1862), 156–58.

36) *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 6.1.2 (ANF 7:450); Lagarde, ed., *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, 157.

37) Augustine, *The Correction of the Donatists* 2.8.32 (PL 33:807–8; NPNF¹ 4:645–46).

38) R. Toczko, *Crimen Obicere: Forensic Rhetoric and Augustine’s anti-Donatist Correspondence* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 110.

Catholic Church seeks to embrace the belligerent Donatists, “[the] little branch in Africa [that] is broken off,” so that they may “return to the root” of the “great tree” that is the Church in its global reach.³⁹⁾ But Absalom got killed in the battle, whereas the downfall of the Donatists is self-inflicted. Augustine apparently engages in subtle word play with the name Absalom (“father of peace”) when he discusses the peace that David acquires for the kingdom of Israel at the cost of Absalom’s death in relation to “the peace of Christ” that the Catholic Church attains for penitent saints at the expense of a schismatic sect.⁴⁰⁾

In a treatise against the Pelagian heresy, Augustine addresses the dialectical tension between human free will and divine determinism.⁴¹⁾ In part, Augustine argues that God’s allowance of the freedom to make rational choices does not prevent him from directing the course of events.⁴²⁾ Augustine cites the example of Shimei, son of Gera (2 Sam 16:5), who curses David for fleeing Jerusalem with his army; pursuing his own inscrutable purpose, God has “inclined” the will of the wicked Benjaminite to engage in such misconduct.⁴³⁾ Shimei’s insulting words and action cannot be commended, for God did not command them. But David’s words to Abishai, the loyal army officer who wants to behead Shimei, show that God ordained the cursing for “assistance of the good” in favor of David.⁴⁴⁾ Augustine further reasons that God used Judas Iscariot and the Jews who handed

39) Augustine, *The Correction of the Donatists* 2.8.32 (PL 33:807–8; *NPNF*¹ 4:645–46).

40) Augustine, *The Correction of the Donatists* 2.8.32 (PL 33:807–8; *NPNF*¹ 4:645–46).

41) T. A. Stratton, *Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism: A Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Philosophical Analysis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 55–58.

42) Stratton, *Human Freedom*, 58.

43) Augustine, *A Treatise on Grace and Free Will* 2.41[20] (PL 44:905–7; *NPNF*¹ 5:461–62).

44) Cf. 2 Sam 16:5–12; Augustine, *A Treatise on Grace and Free Will* 2.41[20] (PL 44:906; *NPNF*¹ 5:461).

over Jesus Christ to be crucified in ways that would benefit all of humanity although wrong and punishable as these actions were. God uses even the devil, “our worst enemy,” to discipline the saints so that they will refine their faith.⁴⁵⁾ Despite his evil intent, Absalom’s decision to side with the counsel of Hushai over that of Ahithophel turned out to be well-advised—but only because of the way the LORD was answering David’s prayer:

Did not Absalom choose by his own will the counsel which was detrimental to him? And yet the reason of his doing so was that the Lord had heard his father’s prayer that it might be so. Wherefore the Scripture says that “the Lord appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring all evils upon Absalom.”⁴⁶⁾

This stress on God’s sovereignty—even over the affairs of evildoers—seems to override if not contradict Augustine’s earlier discussion of God’s grace and free will.⁴⁷⁾ As T. A. Stratton suggests, such a rhetorical shift may be indebted to Augustine’s denunciation of the heretical claims of Pelagius, which erroneously emphasize human agency over divine providence.⁴⁸⁾

David’s conflict with Absalom, especially his flight from Jerusalem and mourning of Absalom’s death, elicited Christological interpretations in contexts ranging from the passion and resurrection of the Son of God to the internal turmoil of the heavenly Father. Augustine’s other mention of Absalom, in his exposition of Psalm 3, deserves consideration in this respect.⁴⁹⁾ Augustine maintains that Psalm 3:5 (“I laid me down and

45) Augustine, *A Treatise on Grace and Free Will* 2.41[20] (PL 44:907; *NPNF*¹ 5:461).

46) Augustine, *A Treatise on Grace and Free Will* 2.41[20] (PL 44:907; *NPNF*¹ 5:462).

47) Stratton, *Human Freedom*, 58–59.

48) Stratton, *Human Freedom*, 58–59.

slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me.” KJV) is to be interpreted messianically as referring to the suffering and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, Augustine compares David with Jesus Christ; on the other, he compares “undutiful” Absalom with the “undutiful” disciples of Jesus, especially Judas Iscariot.⁵⁰⁾

After realizing that Absalom is in rebellion, David flees from Jerusalem with his attendants, crossing the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives. This is analogous to Christ’s quick withdrawal from the presence of Judas Iscariot as the devil entered the mind of Judas and prompted him to betray Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane at the base of the Mount of Olives (cf. John 13:27 KJV).⁵¹⁾ In fact, Absalom’s name, “father’s peace” (*Patris pax*), in this context ironically alludes to the peace that both David and Christ displayed in the face of betrayers who had no such peace in mind.⁵²⁾ Even as his son was battling him, David was “at peace” with him, as shown by his bitter weeping when Absalom was killed.⁵³⁾ Just as David had done with Absalom, so Christ demonstrated his peace toward the disciples with his long suffering.⁵⁴⁾ Augustine observes that despite his foreknowledge that his disciples will betray him, Christ invited them to the Last Supper and dispensed the elements of his body and blood—a demonstration of peace to Judas Iscariot contradicted by “the kiss of peace” that Christ received from the murderous betrayer.⁵⁵⁾ Although Augustine does not say so explicitly, his reference to the “kiss of peace” by Judas Iscariot also alludes to Absalom’s “kiss” of peace to David. When Absalom

49) Augustine, *St. Augustin on the Psalms* 3 (PL 36:72–78; *NPNF*¹ 8:4–8).

50) Augustine, *St. Augustin on the Psalms* 3 (PL 36:72–73; *NPNF*¹ 8:4).

51) Augustine, *St. Augustin on the Psalms* 3 (PL 36:73; *NPNF*¹ 8:4).

52) Augustine, *St. Augustin on the Psalms* 3 (PL 36:73; *NPNF*¹ 8:4).

53) Augustine, *St. Augustin on the Psalms* 3 (PL 36:73; *NPNF*¹ 8:4).

54) Augustine, *St. Augustin on the Psalms* 3 (PL 36:73; *NPNF*¹ 8:4–5).

55) Augustine, *St. Augustin on the Psalms* 3 (PL 36:73; *NPNF*¹ 8:5).

finally confronts David from exile (2 Sam 14:33), he quickly acts on his ambition to usurp David's throne (2 Sam 15–19).⁵⁶⁾

In his homiletic exhortation on penance, Cyril of Jerusalem (313–386) urges the baptismal candidates to recall David's immediate repentance when Nathan castigated him for his affair with Bathsheba.⁵⁷⁾ Cyril's rhetorical strategy is to invite his listeners to identify themselves with David, using the logical construct of "how much more so" (קל וחומר): "If a king made his confession in this way, ought not you, a private individual, to confess?"⁵⁸⁾ With a Christological lens, Cyril elucidates the degree to which David became humble through the trials caused by Absalom's rebellion. According to Cyril, David was "prophetically" inspired in his humiliated state to flee from Absalom by choosing among many alternatives a route over the Mount of Olives, the very place from which Jesus Christ would one day ascend into heaven.⁵⁹⁾

56) Reminiscent of Augustine, Cassiodorus Senator (c. 480–575) regards Psalm 3 as the resurrection psalm that is of greatest messianic significance among all other psalms. Also, Chrysostom's commentary on Psalm 7 devotes considerable attention to David's trial regarding Absalom, much like Augustine's characterization of Absalom. R. C. Hill, trans., *St. John Chrysostom: Commentary on the Psalms* (2 vols.; Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 1:111–53 (PG 55:35–39); Cassiodorus, *Explanation of the Psalms* 3 (PL 70:43–47; ACW 51:68–71). An overview of the reception history of Psalm 3 can be found in S. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries: A Reception History Commentary on Psalms 1–72* (2 vols.; Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 2:47–53.

57) Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures of St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem* 2.12 (PG 33:397–400; NPNF² 7:11).

58) Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures of St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem* 2.12 (PG 33:400; NPNF² 7:11); L. Jacobs, "The Qal Va-Homer Argument in the Old Testament," *BSOAS* 35:2 (1972), 221–27; P. Jackson, "Cyril of Jerusalem's Use of Scripture in Catechesis," *TheolStud* 52 (1991), 444–45.

59) Cyril, *The Catechetical Lectures of St. Cyril, Archbishop of Jerusalem* 2.12 (PG 33:400; NPNF² 7:11). See the English translation in St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 2.12 (FC 61:103) ("... as though his prophetic spirit invoked the

John Chrysostom (347–407) links the affliction of David caused by his census of the Israelite militia and Absalom’s rebellion to illustrate Paul’s pastoral affection for the Romans (Rom 15:24). Chrysostom notes the emphatic “shepherd” language in the Septuagint (LXX) and points out that David saw himself as the shepherd over the flock of God’s hand. David had such self-denying compassion for God’s people that he asked that he and his household bear the blame for the illegitimate census (v. 17) when a deadly plague among the Israelites continued unabated (2 Sam 24).⁶⁰ In Chrysostom’s view, David’s wailing for Absalom suggests the quintessential heart of an “indulgent father” whose “bowels are ... more torn than before” because of his son’s death.⁶¹

In a homiletic oration about death and resurrection,⁶² Ambrose of Milan (339–397) explains the difference between David’s mourning for Amnon and Absalom and his calmer response to the death of the sick infant that Bathsheba had borne him.⁶³ The apparent discrepancy between his intense mourning for his wicked sons but quick regaining of composure after the death of the infant can only be explained by the fact that David had hoped for the resurrection of Amnon and Absalom. For Ambrose, resurrection of the believers is a necessary corollary of the holistic redemption of God’s created humankind, a redemption that comprises both soul and body.⁶⁴

Redeemer...”).

60) Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* 29.24 (PG 60:657–59; NPNF¹ 11:545–46).

61) Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* 29.24 (PG 60:657–59; NPNF¹ 11:545–46).

62) J. W. Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue: The Theological Foundation of Ambrose’s Ethics* (OSHT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 130.

63) Ambrose, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus (Book II On the Belief in the Resurrection)* 2.25, 28 (PL 16:1321–322; NPNF² 10:177–78).

64) Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*, 129–32.

3.2. Writings from the Reformation and Post-Reformation Eras: the Late-sixteenth to Mid-seventeenth Centuries

Christian interpreters under the shadow of Protestant Reformation often adopted a typological reading—albeit in favor of literal over mystical sense—of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, which they saw as prefiguring the New Testament.⁶⁵⁾ Their writings typically rely on the Lutheran view that Scripture can be allowed to interpret itself (*scriptura sui ipsius intrepres*), interwoven with the Christocentric assumption of synchronic continuity between the two testaments. Echoing Augustine's take on the narrative of David, the Anglican theologian and clergyman Thomas Jackson (1579–1640) explains that Ahithophel prefigures Judas Iscariot just as David prefigures Jesus Christ.⁶⁶⁾ Of course, Judas Iscariot is much viler than Ahithophel in the way that he betrayed the trust of his Lord. Reflecting his knowledge of the Jewish material, Jackson maintains that Ahithophel had at least some valid reasons for defying the authority of David: David had violated Bathsheba, who in Jewish tradition is identified as Ahithophel's niece (cf. *Midr. Tehil.* 119:50).⁶⁷⁾ When Ahithophel saw that his counsel had not been chosen over Hushai's, he retreated to his hometown and hanged himself. Similarly, when Judas Iscariot realized that the religious leaders had gotten the upper hand and shed the innocent blood of the Lord, he too hanged himself. Moreover, just as David, upon learning of Absalom's treason, fled with his entourage to the Mount of Olives and ascended it with bare feet, weeping,

65) See, for example, K. Killeen. *The Political Bible in Early Modern England* (CSEMBH; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 22–52, esp. 33–42.

66) D. Cooper and M. J. Lohrmann, eds., *1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles* (RCS 5; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 232; T. Jackson, *The Works of the Reverend and Learned Divine* (London: J. Martyn, R. Chiswell, and J. Clarke, 1673), 874–75, 705.

67) Collins et al., “Ahithophel,” 1:665.

so Jesus, “the Son of David,” took his disciples to the same area.⁶⁸⁾ But Jesus proceeded with greater confidence, for he had the “true ark of the Lord in his breast”; whereas David, being only a “type or shadow” of the reality, had to send back priests to safeguard the ark in Jerusalem.⁶⁹⁾ Jackson asserts that although David commanded forces to withstand Absalom’s army that Jesus lacked, David moved farther away from the Mount of Olives. Jesus stood his ground on a “garden, near the Mount of Olives” and was about to confront “the arch-Ahithophel, Satan, who had vanquished the first Adam in a garden.”⁷⁰⁾

Unlike their Jewish counterparts, Protestant exegetes did not perceive that Absalom’s fate in the afterlife could be influenced by David’s tearful petition. Rather, they connected David’s paternal wailing for Absalom to the irrevocable condition of fallen humankind after death without true repentance in Christ. Andrew Willet (1562–1621), an English Anglican clergyman, remarks that David’s instructions to save Absalom in the ensuing battle were inspired by the keen recognition that David “was raised up as an instrument of God’s judgment on [Absalom] for his sin.”⁷¹⁾ According to Willet, what genuinely concerned David was that his son would have no chance to repent for his sin if he were killed during the war. In this way, David’s tender feeling for his rebellious son foreshadows Jesus Christ’s merciful prayer of forgiveness for his own opponents.

Like the Jewish interpreters, Willet also draws attention to the paradoxical nexus between Absalom’s hair, the emblem of his arrogance, and how entanglement of his hair in an oak causes his death.⁷²⁾ He concludes that God’s judgment of Absalom’s

68) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 232.

69) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 232.

70) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 232.

71) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 235; A. Willet, *Harmony on the Second Book of Samuel* (Cambridge: Cantrell Legge, 1614), 110, 724.

presumptuousness justly dispensed; for even members of the nature, that is, the oak above and the mule below, cooperated in his ruination. Then Willet's Christological interpretation takes an intriguing twist: he assumes that the imagery in the account of the near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22) of a substitute ram caught in the thicket overlaps with the imagery of Absalom caught in the branches of the oak.⁷³⁾ Willet also contends that Absalom took on the form of a cursed one hanging on the tree, implying the relation of Deuteronomic law to the law regarding the rebellious son (Deut 21:22–23): “Absalom hanged between heaven and earth, as accursed by God. For this kind of death was accursed by the law of God. The same shameful death came to Ahithophel for his similar sin of rebellion and disobedience.”⁷⁴⁾ Willet adds that Judas Iscariot, following in the footsteps of Ahithophel, suffered the same fate for betraying Christ.

According to Lucas Osiander (1534–1604), a Protestant German preacher of the Evangelical-Lutheran church, David bitterly mourned for Absalom not only out of paternal affection but also because of the irreversible nature of his son's disgrace.⁷⁵⁾ As a man of piety, David reasoned that it would have been better if he had died instead of his son, since there was no recourse for those who died in a sinful state without having repented. The worst lot of humankind is reserved for Absalom, who faces eternal suffering with no further chance of redemption. Resonating the Lutheran doctrine that, in opposition to Roman

72) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 236; Willet, *Harmony on the Second Book of Samuel*, 110–11.

73) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 236. Willet asserts that there is a lexical linkage between the two narratives despite the lack of evidence in the original language.

74) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 236.

75) Derek, Lohrmann, *1–2 Samuel*, 237; O. Lucas, *Liber Iosue, Iudicum, Ruth, Primus et Secundus Samuelis, Primus et Secundus Regum, Primus et Secundus Paralipomenon: Iuxta Veterem Seu Vulgatam Translationem* (Tübingen: Georg Gruppenback, 1574), 588, 712.

Catholic practice, prohibits praying for the dead, Osiander notes that David's petition that he dies in place of Absalom went unheard, which is consistent with the fact that nowhere in the Scripture do we find a justification for praying for the deceased.

The extensive commentary of Joseph Hall (1574–1656), an English bishop of Anglican Calvinist pedigree, on David's encounter of Absalom's rebellion is marked by rhetorical finesse in attending to the literary details of the Old Testament.⁷⁶⁾ David's plea to spare Absalom, the traitor par excellence, points to "that unmeasurable mercy of the true King," Jesus Christ, who prayed on the cross to the Father for the forgiveness of his own wretched enemies (cf. Luke 23:34)—to whom such loving-kindness is still extended today.⁷⁷⁾ Hall's comments feature interplay of the metaphor of devouring sword⁷⁸⁾ and the metaphor of king as father, which heightens the dramatic tenor of his treatise.

Unnatural ambition drawes the sword of Absalom; Davids, a necessary and a just defense. They that in simplicity of heart followed Absalom, cannot in malice of heart, persecute that father of Absalom: with what courage could any Israelite draw his sword against a David? or on the other side, who can want courage to fight for a righteous Sovereign, and father, against the conspiracy of a wicked son?...The sword devours twenty thousand of them, & the wood devours more

76) J. Hall, *Contemplations, Fifteenth Booke* (London, 1640), 1112–1115, in *Contemplations upon the principall passages of the holy storie. The first Volume, in Foure Books* (London: R. H., 1642). See also M. W. Dewar, "Bishop Joseph Hall, 1574–1656: An Ecumenical Calvinist Churchman," *Churchman* 80:3 (1966), 194–200.

77) Hall, *Contemplations, Sixteenth Booke*, 1129, in *Contemplations upon the principall passages of the holy storie. The fifth Volume, in Two Books* (London: R. H., 1644).

78) This metaphor is quite common in the Bible, except for the one used in the context of Absalom's death. See S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, JSOTSup 17 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989 [1st edition in Hebrew, 1979]), 194.

then the sword; It must needs be a very universal rebellion,
wherein so many perished.⁷⁹⁾

In light of the fact that the metaphor of devouring sword is a distinctive element of the story of rise and downfall of the Davidic dynasty, especially in the account of Absalom, Hall's deployment of the imagery is striking. The devouring sword is first mentioned in Abner's warning to Joab during David's reign in Hebron in the context of the waning reign of Ishbaal (2 Sam 2:26). Then it appears in the earlier account of David's attempt to murder Uriah in order to hide his affair with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:25), which is followed by Nathan's report of the verdict of God, which will be partly fulfilled by Absalom (2 Sam 12:10–11).⁸⁰⁾ The metaphor generates a climactic force by giving the “devouring forest” more credit for destroying people than the “devouring sword” (2 Sam 18:8), suggesting divine intervention on behalf of David's army.⁸¹⁾ Hall says that “a fatal oak” of the forest becomes his “hangman and gallows.” Like other traitors, including Ahithophel and Judas Iscariot, who “dare lift up their hand against God's anointed,” Absalom is “abandoned” by both “earth and heaven.”⁸²⁾

Even civilly, the King is our common father, our Country
our common mother; Nature hath no private relations which
should not gladly give place to these. He is neither father,
nor son, nor brother, nor friend, that conspires against the

79) Hall, *Contemplations, Sixteenth Booke*, 1129.

80) See further discussion of the sword imagery that can be traced from the battle between David's army (Judah) and that of Ishbaal (Israel) (2 Sam 2) to the schism between Israel and Judah following Absalom's revolt (2 Sam 20) in H. An, “Intertribal Strife along David's Route to Jerusalem: A Narrative Reading of the Judah-Benjamin Détente and Conflict (2 Sam 2:1–5:5; 19–20),” *Canon&Culture* 14:1 (2020), 37–75 (In Korean).

81) Hall, *Contemplations, Sixteenth Booke*, 1129.

82) Hall, *Contemplations, Sixteenth Booke*, 1130.

common parent: Well doth he who spake parables for his Masters son, now speake darts to his Kings enemy; and pierces that heart which was false to so great a father: Those darts are seconded by Joabs followers; each man tries his weapon upon so faire a marke.⁸³⁾

Hall's emphasis on equating the king as "our common father" and the country as "our mother" and denunciation of the rebellion against "the common parent" as the most heinous form of treason are imbued with Anglican sentiment characteristic of the political milieu of the seventeenth-century England.⁸⁴⁾ Notwithstanding the politically charged nature of his exegesis, though, in what was then a rare exegetical move Hall's interpretation offers profound insights into the heavenly Father's heart by way of David's example—an example that ultimately connects Absalom's piercing-to-death with Christ's sacrificial death on the cross (cf. Zech 12:10; Gal 3:13). Absalom's brutal death was well-deserved for one "who had pierced his father's heart with so many sorrows."⁸⁵⁾ But from David's mourning for Absalom—"Would God I had died for thee; O Absalom my son, my son!" (2 Sam 18:33 KJV)—we learn of the radical love of God the heavenly Father as tangibly expressed through the death of the Savior: "But what shall we say to that love of thine, O Saviour, who hast said of us wretched traitors, not, Would God I had died for you; But I will die, I do die, I have died for you?"⁸⁶⁾ Hall concludes the section with a quote

83) Hall, *Contemplations, Sixteenth Booke*, 1130. Compare the English translation with J. Hall, *Contemplations upon the Principal Passages on the Old and New Testaments, A New Edition in Two Volumes*, ed. J. Pratt, 2 vols (London: C. Whittingham, 1808), 404.

84) For more information, see F. L. Huntley, *Bishop Joseph Hall 1574-1656: A Biographical and Critical Study* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1978).

85) Hall, *Contemplations, Sixteenth Booke*, 1130.

86) Hall, *Contemplations, Sixteenth Booke*, 1131.

from Song of Solomon (6:5) to illustrate the “infinite, incomprehensible” love of God for the believers, a love that even the heavenly angels are eager to know (1 Peter 1:12).

4. Summary Analysis

This study yields a kaleidoscope of theological reflections in response to David’s troubles with Absalom. In both the Jewish and Christian traditions, Absalom is depicted as one of the biblical figures who suffer tragic demise because of their betrayal of the paradigmatic leader of a community of faith. In early rabbinic literature,⁸⁷⁾ Absalom is comparable to such tribal or priestly leaders as Dathan, Abiram, and Korah and his descendants, whom God executed publicly for defying Moses. Other Jewish sources compare Absalom with the biblical figures whose destruction involves loss of or is precipitated by praiseworthy physical traits: Samson (hair), Saul (neck), Asahel (feet), Uzziah (forehead), Josiah (nostril), Zedekiah (eyes).

Among Christian interpreters, Absalom is often discussed in ecclesial contexts as a major example of a traitor. In warnings against disrespecting church leadership in the patristic literature (the epistle of Ignatius and *The Apostolic Constitutions*), Absalom is regarded as being on a par with Dathan, Abiram, and the company of Korah. In the polemical work of Augustine of Hippo, David’s longing for Absalom is employed against the Donatists, and a parallel is drawn between the Catholic Church and David on the one hand and, on the other, the Donatists and Absalom in order to emphasize the Church’s forbearing stance toward dissenters. In another apologetic commentary that rejects Pelagian claims, Augustine cites God’s answer to David’s prayer regarding

87) Refer to the talmudic and midrashic references made in the previous section (2.1).

the counsel of Ahithophel to corroborate that God's sovereignty reigns over all human decisions, good or bad. Absalom was free to make his own bad decisions, but his fate was sealed by God's orchestration behind the scenes. Other patristic authors consult the biblical account of David's lamenting the death of his son to articulate the self-effacing attitude of a compassionate leader of the church (Chrysostom) or the believer's hope for corporeal resurrection (Ambrose).

In other writings, Christian exegetes cast Judas Iscariot as a sort of Absalom redivivus. Augustine of Hippo engages in wordplay with Absalom's name, Hebrew for "father's peace," and notes that David and Jesus Christ held their peace with betrayers (i.e., Absalom and Judas Iscariot) who were hardly peaceful in their malicious undertakings. Andrew Willet and Joseph Hall perceive a grotesque similarity in the deaths of Absalom, Ahithophel, and Judas Iscariot, all of whom died hanging in the air. In his work on repentance, Cyril of Jerusalem states that David, fleeing from Absalom over the Mount of Olives in a state of utter humiliation, was led to the site on which Jesus Christ, as the Son of David, will ascend into heaven. Thomas Jackson observes that in its initial stage, the route of David's flight from Absalom roughly coincides with that of Jesus' encounter with Judas Iscariot and his armed attendants at the Mount of Olives. David hastily left the region; whereas Jesus Christ, the last Adam, confronted the "arch-Ahithophel" or Satan who had deceived the first Adam.

More significant is how David is understood in each interpretive tradition given his manifest paternal affection for Absalom. The Jewish texts diverge in depicting David's plight. Although some interpreters blame David's inadequate knowledge of the Torah for having decided to marry a captive woman or his failure to properly discipline Absalom, others highlight David's piety by describing his futile attempt, through willful

idolatry, to prevent God's honor from being desecrated. We also find disagreement about the eightfold petition in David's lament for his dead son. In one tradition, David's plea does alleviate Absalom's painful lot in hell; listening to him, God restrains the attack of the avenging angels and appoints Absalom ruler over a subunit of the Gentile nations. In another tradition, despite his son's entrance into heaven, David is punished for unwarranted love for Absalom. The midrashic tale relates that David's eightfold entreaty is responsible for the violent death of David's eight sons and eight Judean kings. What unites the varying interpretations is the outstanding biblical concept as outlined in the LORD's promissory oath to David: He is Israel's chosen king in whom God delights (2 Sam 7). God's merciful rehabilitation of David from his transgression concerning the wife of Uriah and answer to David's gut-wrenching cry for Absalom is a concrete affirmation of the divine favor pledged in the Davidic covenant.

Unlike Jewish counterparts, Christian texts influenced by the Protestant Reformation do not condone intercessions for the dead. So in these texts, a marked deviation from the Jewish interpretation is evident in regard to David's mournful utterance for his deceased son. Andrew Willet and Lucas Osiander agree that David's heartbreak largely has to do with Absalom's state of unrepentance. Willet acknowledges his indebtedness to some Jewish material on a number of points, such as his elucidation of Absalom's downfall and its relationship to the Deuteronomic law (Deut 21:22–23). The amalgam of midrashic and Christocentric readings in his biblical exegesis produces a unique interpretation, that is, its linkage of the substitute ram in Aqedah (Gen 22) with Absalom's ensnarement in the oak.

Hall's running commentary on David's story dwells on the metaphorical links between the account of David's mourning for Absalom's death and the passion of Christ. Although

occasionally marred by political undertones, the metaphor of king as father casts into stark relief the heavenly Father's pierced heart for the fallen world (cf. Zech 12:10), which is epitomized by the crucifixion of Christ (cf. Gal 3:13). In the Christian interpretations, David's lamentation for Absalom does not result in divine intervention to reverse or ease the purgatorial state of Absalom. It rather serves to express the Savior's love for unrepentant sinners and reveals the heavenly Father's providence in converting David's plea into a saving reality through the pierced Son of David. This theological reading illuminates the decisive fulfillment of the eternal Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7) through Jesus Christ, which in turn affirms God's covenantal commitment to the House of David.

5. Conclusion

Comparing Jewish and Christian interpretations reveals the rich reception history of a heartrending account of King David and his rebellious son Absalom. In each community of faith, the characters in David's story, including Absalom, Ahithophel, and Hushai, are elaborately interpreted in ways ranging from polemical apology to homiletic exhortation that are appropriate to the contexts of the interpreters. In the Jewish texts, seemingly tangential and even conflicting comments are subsumed by the theme of God's covenantal faithfulness to the House of David, a point that the Christian texts, too, accept in terms of their own theological perspective. In the Christian interpretations, elements of the narrative tend to confirm a Christocentric exegesis of David's role in relation to the revolt of Absalom; these interpretations focus on the salvific role that Jesus Christ, the Son of David, plays in the redemption history in the light of God's pierced heart for the lost humankind. The result is a

varied interpretative vista that encompasses such intense and fundamental human experiences as love and hatred, trust and betrayal, and life and death, experiences that both Jews and Christians can identify with. Although this comparative study of an interpretative legacy in Jewish and Christian texts is by no means exhaustive, perhaps its selective and provisional sampling of the texts will open a fruitful avenue for more in-depth inquiry.

<Keywords>

David, Absalom, Ahithophel, 2 Samuel 15–19, Reception History

<주요어>

다윗, 압살롬, 아히도벨, 삼하 15–19장, 해석의 수용사

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<Abstract>

**The Mourning Father and the Pierced Son:
David and Absalom (2 Sam 15–19)
in Jewish and Christian Interpretations**

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After King David's debacle with Uriah and his wife Bathsheba, David's rebellious son Absalom looms large in the biblical narrative (2 Sam 15–19). His fate having been foreshadowed in the verdict of God as mediated by Nathan the prophet (2 Sam 12:10–12), Absalom emerges as an unfortunate agent of divine vengeance for wrongdoing committed by David. Absalom is killed during his attempted coup, and the visceral images of Joab's piercing of Absalom as he hangs from a tree by his hair and David's wailing for his dead son have evoked profound theological reflections for generations. Focusing on the midrashic and talmudic tales of the Second Temple Period, the works of the early Church Fathers, and the works of Protestant commentators of the late-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, the article traces and compares interpretive responses to David's ordeal in Jewish and Christian textual traditions. Both traditions consider Absalom to be representative of those who betray the archetypal leader, whether Moses or Jesus Christ, and their interpretations provide an admonitory lesson to those who would threaten the integrity of their community of faith. In some Jewish texts, David's petition evokes God's mercy for Absalom's condition after his death. In some Christian texts, David's unreciprocated love for Absalom

is eclipsed by the pierced heart of the heavenly Father and linked to the passion and resurrection of Christ. Both the Jewish and Christian texts, albeit differing in how they interpret paternal suffering for the lost son, point to God's election of the House of David.

<초록>

통곡하는 아버지와 찢른 바 된 아들:

유대교와 기독교 해석사의 다윗과 압살롬

(삼하 15-19장)

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다윗 왕의 아들 압살롬의 암울한 그림자는 우리아와 그의 아내 밋세바로 인한 다윗의 몰락 이후 역사적 내러티브(삼하 15-19장)에서 깊게 드리운다. 선지자 나단을 통해 선포된 하나님의 판결에서 예고된 바와 같이(삼하 12:10-12), 압살롬은 그 이후 아버지 다윗의 죄로 기인한 신적 심판의 대리인으로 불행한 역할을 감당하며 쿠데타 시도 가운데 그의 삶이 종결된다. 요압이 나무에 머리카락이 매달린 압살롬을 찢러 죽인 장면이나 다윗이 죽은 아들을 위해 통곡하며 애도하는 모습은, 여러 세대에 걸쳐 독자들에게 심오한 신학적 성찰을 불러일으켰다. 본 논문은 다윗이 압살롬으로 인해 겪은 시련에 대한 해석적 반응을 유대교와 기독교의 정경 외의 문헌에서 추적하고 이를 비교하여 성경이 척박한 현대의 세상에 던지는 구원의 메시지에 대한 이해를 돕는 것을 목표로 한다. 단 지면의 한계상 제2 성전 시대의 아가덕 미드라시와 초기 교부의 저서 및 종교 개혁의 영향 아래 16세기 말에서 17세기 중반 사이에 출간된 개신교의 목양적 문헌에 중점을 둘 것이다. 고대의 다양한 주해적 설명을 살펴보면 유대교와 기독교 본문 모두 압살롬이란 인물에 각 전통의 전형적인 리더인 모세나 예수 그리스도의 배신자와 연결해 해당 신앙 공동체에 위협을 주는 세력에 대해 경계를 하고 있다는 것을 알 수 있다. 특이하게도 일부 유대교 본문에서는 다윗이 쏜아낸 애통의 간구는

하나님을 감동시켜 압살롬 사후의 지위에 영향을 미치지만, 일부 기독교 본문에서는 다윗의 통곡에서 드러난 일방적이고도 애절한 부성애(父性愛)가 성부의 찌르는 듯한 고통으로 연결되어 예수 그리스도의 수난과 부활로 설명된다. 결론적으로 유대교와 기독교 전통에서는 아들을 잃은 아버지의 고통이 다른 각도에서 부각이 되지만 다윗 자손에게 향한 하나님의 언약적 선택이라는 공통분모가 암시적으로 드러나 있음을 볼 수 있다.