

Catechism Story 6

*The Fourth and Tenth Commandments
Memory Verse and Catechism Prayers from Congregation at Prayer*

BIBLE STORY: THE REBELLION OF ABSALOM

2 Samuel 15:2-15; 18:1, 5-15; 18:33-19:6

Central Thoughts

- Absalom transgressed the Fourth and Tenth Commandments by dishonoring his father the king, despising him, and scheming to take David's office and turn the people against him.
- David understood that his previous sins with Bathsheba had contributed to Absalom's downfall.
- David desired to be merciful to Absalom because he believed in the Gospel of God's love in Christ.
- The promise of the Fourth Commandment is long life, but because Absalom dishonored his father his life was cut short and he fell under God's judgment.
- Obedience to the Fourth Commandment is based upon God's command to honor our father and mother; it is not based upon the worthiness of our parents.

Discussion Questions

BACKGROUND TO THE STORY: Absalom was the third son of King David. He had killed his brother Amnon because Amnon had raped Absalom's sister Tamar. Tamar was Amnon's half-sister. Absalom spent three years in Geshur for his crime. In love for his son, David brought Absalom back from exile and forgave him. Absalom is described in the Scriptures as a handsome and vain man. Though David extended mercy to Absalom, he did not receive it in repentant faith but sought to overthrow the reign of his father and become king in his place. Ironically, the name "Absalom" means, "my father is peace."

Describe what Absalom did at the city gate in Jerusalem?

He greeted people coming into the city to receive a judgment from the king but would undermine David's authority by flattering the citizens he met and accusing his father of not being able to render a fair judgment in their cases. Further, he campaigned to replace his father as king by saying that if he were in office instead of his father things would be far better, and the citizens would receive a fair and favorable judgment. By this action, Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" and began to gather a following who would support him in overthrowing his father.

How did Absalom transgress the Tenth Commandment?

He coveted his father's office and "enticed" the citizens of Israel and "turned them against David" to obtain the office of king for himself. He did not "urge them to stay and do their duty" as citizens.

After four years in Jerusalem, what was the reason Absalom requested permission to go to Hebron?

To fulfill a vow that he said he had made to the Lord. (Note: the NKJV reference to 40 years is incorrect).

What was the real reason Absalom went to Hebron?

To begin to assemble an army to overthrow King David by sending spies throughout the land to plant the seeds that Absalom was now the king. He also sent for Ahithophel, David's counselor, to use Ahithophel against David.

What were the two hundred men "innocent of"?

They did not know that Absalom had planned a coup against David.

What does the prophet tell us about Absalom's conspiracy to overthrow his father's reign?

It grew stronger and the number of people with Absalom increased.

What did David do when he heard the report of the conspiracy against him?

He ordered his loyal servants in Jerusalem to flee from the city lest they be targets for Absalom's insurrection.

How did Absalom sin against the Fourth Commandment?

He did not "honor, serve and obey, love and cherish" his father and king. Instead, he despised him and, therefore, despised and angered God who had commanded Absalom to honor his father and the civil authority.

What motivated Absalom to try to steal the office of his father?

Sinful, self-centered pride.

What happened during the battle in the woods between Absalom's army and David's army?

There was a great slaughter of 20,000, David's Army defeated the rebel army of Israel, and Absalom became suspended by the hair of his head in a terebinth tree.

What had David commanded his officers concerning Absalom?

He wanted them to deal gently with him and to spare his life.

What did Joab do?

He disobeyed the King's orders and killed Absalom.

Why did David want to show mercy to his son?

David believed in the Gospel. He loved his son and wanted to save him. He also realized that his own sin of adultery with Bathsheba (See 2 Samuel 11 and 12) and the Lord's judgment against him (that he would experience strife in his own household because of it) made him partially responsible for Absalom's rebellion.

When David heard of Absalom's death, how does he express his love for Absalom and give us a picture of Jesus?

He laments his son's death and wishes that he could have died in Absalom's place, just as Jesus would die in our place.

Was Joab right to be embittered against David for mourning the death of his son Absalom?

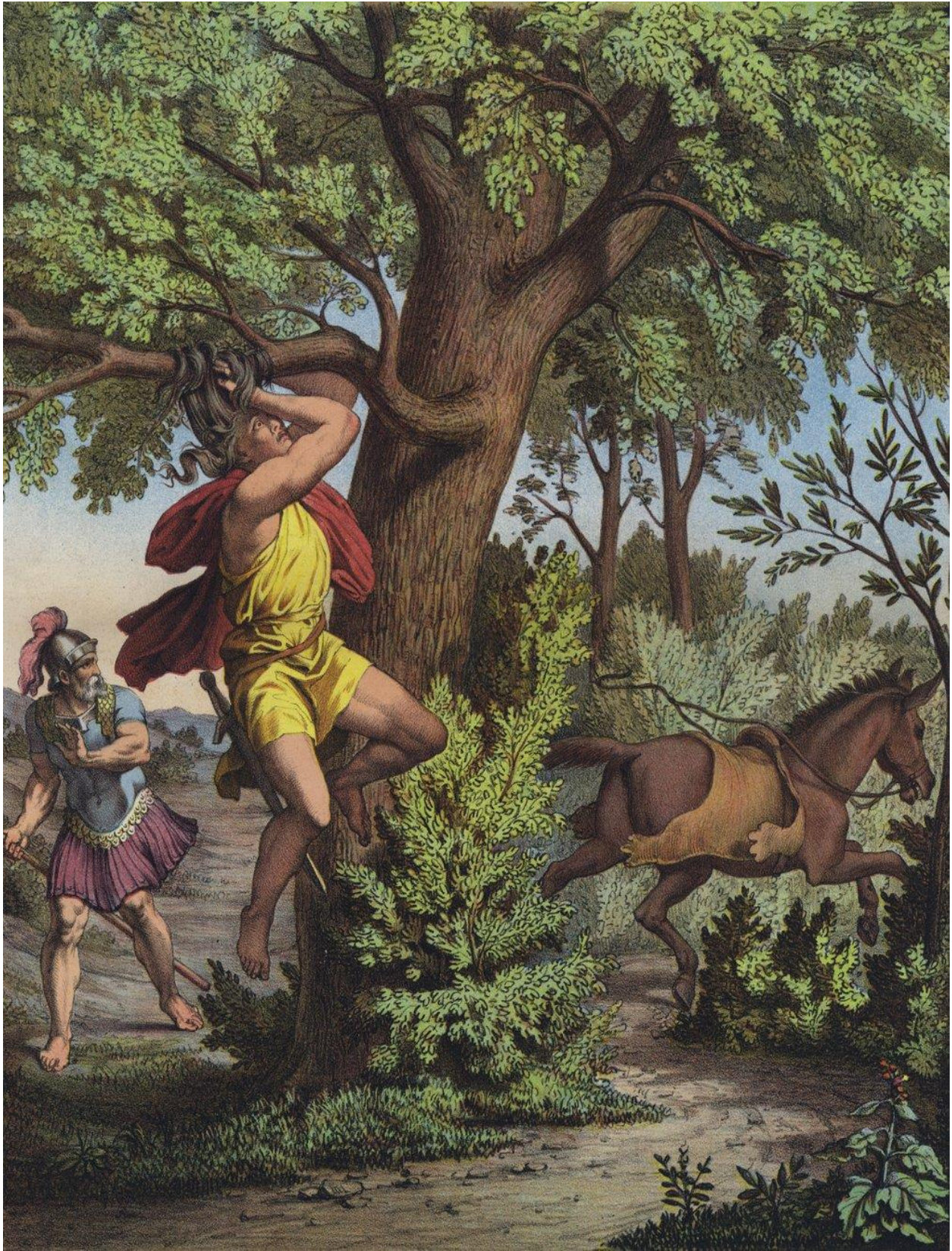
No, Joab did not understand the Gospel nor did he speak as one who believes in God's mercy.

Meditation on the Bible Story

Absalom was a wayward son. He had, many times, taken matters into his own hands, despising every earthly authority that was over him. He was handsome and had many talents. But instead of using these gifts in service to others and in obedience to the earthly authorities, he despised his own father, coveted his throne, and used his gifts to steal honor, glory, and power for himself. God promises those who honor their father and their mother that it will go well with them and that they will enjoy long life on the earth (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:3). This does not mean that every child who dies young is under God's judgment and has transgressed the Fourth Commandment, but it does mean that there is the blessing of life and contentment that comes from obedience to one's parents. David rightly understood that his own sins had contributed to Absalom's rebellion. Yet, it is in David's outpouring of grief, affection, and desire for Absalom's salvation that we see a picture of Jesus' desire to save the prodigal son. The Fourth Commandment promises God's blessing for those who honor their father and their mother, and it is the undeserved forgiveness and grace of Jesus that gives us the strength to begin to do it.

Prayer on the Bible Story

Most merciful God and Father, teach us to learn the lesson of Absalom. He despised his father, sought his father's throne, and suffered death because of it. Give us faith to honor our father and mother, and every earthly authority, not because they deserve it, but because Your commandment is good and because it is given to us for our welfare, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



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