

Absalom and Achitophel
By John Dryden

The poem 'Absalom and Achitophel' is a satirical poem written by John Dryden. This is a political allegory that uses Biblical characters and stories to comment on the political situation in England during the reign of King Charles II. The major themes followed in the poem 'Absalom and Achitophel' are the '*Divine Rights of the King*' and '*History Repeats Itself*'.

The poem starts with the introduction of the biblical character of King David (representation of King Charles II). Dryden provides the description of the time and sets the stage for the Story. He states that in the period of King David, there were fewer or negligible restrictions on marriage and sexual relationships, which allowed Polygamy and taking of concubines.

In such a period, David is described as a ruler "*after Heaven's own heart*" and he spreads his '*vigorous warmth*' by fathering children with multiple women. But Dryden justifies this 'polygamy' performed by David by these lines:

When nature prompted and no law denied
Promiscuous use of concubines and bride

These lines state that it was '*human nature*' and '*natural desire*' that led to polygamy and because there was no law against it, therefore David's deeds were justified.

David is Legally married to Michal (Catherine of Braganza was the Queen of Charles II). But John Dryden describes her with the following line:

A soil ungrateful to the Tiller's Care

This implies that she failed to produce a child for David but we know that he had children with other mistresses. But, unfortunately, because they were the concubines, no child could be a legal heir to the crown.

Among all the children of David, Absalom (Symbolizing the Duke of Monmouth) was the most handsome and brave. Dryden introduced Absalom in detail. He suggests that Absalom is special from birth. His appearance and qualities are destined for greater cause. He gained fame in his kingdom as well as in foreign states because of his active participation in foreign affairs, wars, peace treaties, and allied formations. Absalom was the "hope" in difficult times and was equally loved and admired by the public in peaceful times.

David never refused any of Absalom's wishes. He excused all his faults. Even the Law & ignored all the reckless acts and wrong deeds done by him. Ammon's Murder was also termed as '*just revenge*' by the king and the parliament. Dryden says that his fate wasn't in his favor otherwise his qualities justify his candidature as a successor of David's Throne.

Further, Dryden mentions the People of Israel (England). He states that the Jews (English People) were stubborn, moody, and prone to complaints. These people were not even satisfied with God's Grace. They always tried to find fault in the king's rule. Dryden mentions that these people were given independence and they were restrained by least restrictions. But these *Adam-wits* wanted extreme liberty. They believed that they were enslaved with even a minute restriction. Dryden reminds the reader of Israel's fickle history, mentioning how they abandoned Ishbosheth - the weak son of King Saul, and swiftly brought back David from exile in Hebron. (Charles II was in France during his exile).

He further writes:

*Those very jews who at their very best
Their humor more than loyalty exprest*

These lines tell us that for the people of the states, their personal benefits are their priority, not the loyalty towards the king. Now, they wanted to end the peaceful reign of an '*Idol monarch*'. This rebellion was yet a rumor. It was just a disorganised impulsive idea and not a well planned rebellion. The thought of Rebellion and revolts excited the immature part of the State but the sober and moderate Israelities knew the importance of peaceful conditions and stability under David's rule. Reflecting on the memories and scars of the previous civil war, they cursed those times and situations.

Dryden then mentions that the rule of David was so peaceful that the Devil found no occasion to rebel.

These lines are:

The bad found no occasion to rebel ... The careful devil is still at hand with means...

Now, the rumors of conspiracies were spread in the state. It wasn't yet sure if these were true or false. Then Dryden discussed the Original inhabitants of Jerusalem. They were Jebusites (Roman Catholics in London). It was their right in the state but when chosen people or Israelites (Protestants) came into power, they did wrong with Jebusites (Roman Catholics). They faced discrimination, taxes were doubled on them, their Gods were disgraced, burned down and their beliefs were questioned and opposed. The priests of the community rebelled. Their loyalty to their lord was admired by the enemies as well. They later embraced Egyptian Gods as per their greed of food and materialistic things. They had a dual purpose to worship - food and faith. Their beliefs and practices irritated Jewish priests as they viewed it as the Loss of followers and financial control.

The Jebusite priests mingled with the Jews and even tried to convert people from various social classes, including the court and brothels ("*stews*"). This infuriated the Hebrew priests, because they viewed their flock as not just spiritual but also a source of income (represented by the metaphor of fleece).

Also, some believed that the Jebusite plot even aimed to kill David (God's appointed man) using guns, a technology invented many days before.

(This passage focused on the themes of conspiracy, manipulation, and religious strife, illustrating how plots and propaganda can easily mislead people and cause turmoil. It also reflects on how religious leaders of all kinds will fiercely defend their gods because their own survival is tied to the existence of their deity.)

In the coming lines, Dryden introduced the next major character, i.e, Achitophel (Earl of Shaftesbury). Achitophel is introduced as a major political character or a figure who opposed Charles II's succession plan. He is introduced as a leader of 'conspiracies against the King. His misdeeds are so famous that generations after generations will curse him. He is cunning and skilled at secretive, manipulative plotting. Achitophel is intelligent, bold & disruptive but he is dangerously inclined towards chaos & rebellion. He is never satisfied with his power & reputation. His greed & unrest made it difficult to stick to a single principle.

Dryden also mentions that Achitophel's intense, fiery spirit consumes his frail body (*tenement of clay*). It means that his ambitions and passions are too much for his body to bear (physical form to bear). Achitophel is further compared to a '*reckless pilot*' who is drawn to danger and chaos ("*the Storms*") but is unfit for calm situations.

He sought the storms; but, for calm unfit

He deliberately steers too close to disaster to show off his cleverness. Dryden then mentions that there is a fine line b/w genius and madness.

Dryden mentions that:

*Great wits are sure to madness near allied
And thin partition do their bounds divide;*

These lines reflect the idea that extreme cleverness often leads to reckless behavior as in the case of Shaftesbury. Dryden criticizes that Achitophel refuses to rest in his old age even after being blessed with wealth and honor. He pushes his body beyond its limits, even ruining his health, even after all this he can not find satisfaction. Achitophel works tirelessly to accumulate wealth and powers, only to leave it to his "*Shapeless*" son.

In the line 169-172, Dryden mentions of Achitophel's son mockingly:

*And all to leave what with his toil he won't
To that unfeathered two legged thing, a son,
Got, while his soul did huddled notions try,
And born a shapeless lump, like anarchy.*

Dryden says that his friendships are fake, and his ultimate aim is to destroy or control the state. Dryden accused him that he often uses alliances for his personal gains or desires.

*To compass this the triple bond he broke,
The pillars of the public safety shook*

In the above lines taken from the poem, Dryden mentions that Achitophel even destroyed the Triple Bond or Triple Alliance, which destabilized the kingdom and left people of state prone to insecurity & deaths. Even though Achitophel is driven by fear, he pretends to act in favor of the nation and the people of the state. But his ultimate aim is to bring Political unrest in the country because it is easy to manipulate the public/people in such unstable conditions.

Dryden writes the following lines (line 179-185):

*So easy still it proves in factious times
With public zeal to cancel private crimes.
How safe is treason and how sacred ill,
Where none can sin against the people's will,
Where crowds can wink and no offence be known,
Since in another's guilt they find their own!*

Through these lines, Dryden state that treasons becomes safe and the wrongdoings will become holy when it aligns the will of the I people. People usually overlook crimes if their will, interests or needs are satisfied. In this situation they will happily consider a criminal as their hero.

Dryden appreciates Achitophel (in the line 186 to 191) for his judicial Impartiality and knowledge.

*Yet fame deserved no enemy can grudge;
The statesman we abhor, but praise the judge,
In Israel's courts ne'er sat an Abbethdin
With more discerning eyes or hands more clean,
Unbribed, unsought, the wretched to redress,
Swift of despatch and easy of access.*

He might be a bad politician but was a great judge. He was an uncorrupt judge who helped the needy without being bribed and was efficient and approachable by the poor. This is the reason he was loved and admired by the public.

Dryden reflects on how, if the fertile land had been free from weeds (*symbolic of corruption or obstacles*), David could have focused on creating more songs of praise. Achitophel chose to stir up the peaceful environment and preferred trouble instead of enjoying the golden fruit that was

available for him. He turns against the king, hiding behind the people, he starts the rumor that the king is a Jebusite.

Achitophel very well understood the human tendency of the people of the state to rebel and be dissatisfied with their king and surroundings every couple of decades. He used this as a base of his plotting and conspiracies.

But he still needed a leader to stand in front of this rebellion, he identified Absalom to be a perfect candidate.

*Achitophel still wants a chief, and none
Was found so fit as warlike Absalom.
Not that he wished his greatness to create,
For politicians neither love nor hate*

It was not his personal affection for Absalom but Absalom's questionable claim over his throne and he was dependent on the people or the public for support. Then Achitophel cunningly flatters Absalom, using the words full of venom and manipulation to win him over and to use him further to achieve his own ambitions.

Further, Achitophel starts to manipulate Absalom with flattering words. He says that Absalom is like a figure from heaven, who is destined for greatness. His birth was guided by a royal planet.

*Auspicious prince, at whose nativity,
Some royal planet ruled the southern sky,
Thy longing country's darling and desire,
Their cloudy pillar and their guardian fire. (Line 230-233)*

He calls him '*darling*' and '*desired*' of the nation. He compares him to Moses and he is here to reveal and to lead the people to the promised Land. He said that people have long prayed for his leadership and even young people are fond of him. He urges Absalom to act now because he is depriving the people of their joy by delaying his rise in power. He warns Absalom that if he waits long, his current popularity will fade, just like a fruit if left on a tree for too long, is either rotten or wasted with the passing of time. Achitophel further argues that fate offers a limited window of opportunity, and if Absalom doesn't seize it now, he will miss his chance for greatness. He further says that fortune is presenting him with a *glorious prize* and he must not let it go.

Achitophel then reminds him of David. He says that even his father answered the call of Destiny, if he didn't, then he might still have been in exile. He advises Absalom to be like David in his Younger Age who Boldly rose to power and not to be like older Age David whose power is on decline.

Achitophel portrays David as a fading figure, whose power is weak now and his public is turning their back on him. He argues that David's reign is weak and lacking in both allies and public support. He warns that relying on outside help will anger people. (The outside support for David was considered Egypt and in the case of Charles II it was France.) Achitophel suggests Absalom position himself as a people's champion or leader who is fighting for the public good. He promises that by doing so Absalom could gain not only praise but real power, far more meaningful than a distant hereditary claim to the throne. He also highlights that the claim or greed for Power can be seductive. It can be dangerous yet can be divine at the same time. He concludes that Absalom's own ambition for fame will lend him to the destiny he had.

Now, in the upcoming few lines, Dryden discusses the response of Absalom and the dialogues he delivered. Absalom responded to Achitophel's manipulation with internal conflict. He acknowledges that he has been swayed by flattery and sweet praise, and though tempted he still feels the loyalty towards his father, David. He questions Achitophel as to why should he raise arms in the name of public liberty when his father reigns and governs with rightful authority, justice, and mercy. He highlights David's virtues, noting that he is a defender of faith and mankind, and even God himself supports him in a number of ways (David is considered to be the chosen one). He then reflects on the king's fairness, asking, who has been or denied justice under David's rule. He further praises David's mild, humble & merciful nature and his dislike for bloodshed. Absalom with pride states that if David's fault is what I mentioned before then even God is not free of all these mistakes and faults. He also questions what David will gain by betraying his own people.

*If mildness I'll with stubborn Israel suit,
His crime is God's beloved attribute.*

He suggests that any problem with David's rule is the madness of the public. If David was a bad king then we must have a reason to rebel but because he is a just and ideal king, therefore there is no reason to rebel. There are no real grievances or desires unmet. Absalom says that his every wish is granted but he cannot be given the crown because he is not his legal heir. Absalom hesitates before acknowledging that the crown is meant for someone more deserving, expressing his deep-seated ambition and yearning for power. Absalom anticipates a time when David will no longer rule, suggesting that he will eventually die and join the blessed in heaven.

Absalom recognizes that either David's direct descendants or his collateral relatives will take the throne after David's death. Therefore, the crown shall be passed to one who is a legal heir or relative of the king. In his case, David's brother James is the legal heir hence he gets the crown Legally. Absalom then praises James as a worthy candidate, a man of royal principles, courage, loyalty, and mercy. Absalom recognizes that he has no claim on the throne by birth. He says that he should not complain that he is not the legal heir as it is the decision of the divine but he still wishes that fate is a bit inclined towards him and he gets the status of the legitimate heir. It is a pity that he has all the qualities to succeed but a curse of illegitimacy is attached.

Achitophel notices a stir in his ambitions and realizes that a part of him believes that he is meant for the throne. So, he like a devil captures the opportunity and replies that such gifts (qualities) are a kind of blessing of the almighty himself and this gift is not without a purpose; this is meant to guide him to the throne.

Such virtue is only given to guide a throne.

Achitophel argues that he fulfilled all the wishes of his subjects and gives more than asked but this generosity is a symbol of weakness rather than wisdom. This is a reference to Achitophel wrongly depicting David's kindness as a lack of strength. Achitophel then lays out a manipulative plan to undermine King David and weaken the monarchy. He argues that they should continually burden the king with new plots and expensive and unexpected wars, forcing him to spend his resources. After being empty of treasure, he will be weaker and more vulnerable. As David's treasury depletes, he will be compelled to trade away parts of his royal authority (his "*prerogative*") in exchange for money, leaving him weaker and more vulnerable.

Achitophel suggests labeling David's loyal supporters as enemies of the people, calling them "Jebusites" (referring to non-Israelite enemies) and "*Pharaoh's pensioners*" (suggesting they are corrupt or foreign-influenced). Once David is stripped of his faithful allies, he will be left humiliated and exposed to public ridicule.

Then he mentions his fear and hate for David's legitimate heir. Achitophel mentions that after David, they will target James. They will create situations in which James won't be able to take the throne. By engineering this downfall, Achitophel intends to sell the heir's rightful claim to the throne for financial gain, ultimately leaving David with no choice but to pass the crown under unfavorable terms.

In the final lines, Achitophel declares that if all else fails, the people can claim the right to choose their king, implying that rulers exist to serve the will of the people and can be replaced when they fail to meet expectations. This plan reflects a cynical strategy of weakening the monarchy to seize control and reshape the political order.

Achitophel continues his manipulative counsel, making a series of arguments that justify rebellion against David. He claims that all royal power is essentially a trust given by the people and, if that trust is broken, the people have the right to reclaim it. Succession, while designed for the general good, cannot bind the nation if it causes harm. Achitophel argues that it's better for one person (David or the heir) to suffer than for the entire nation to grieve under poor leadership.

He then dismisses traditional arguments about loyalty, piety, and the sanctity of fatherly authority, claiming that even God's love for David is no excuse to preserve his reign or ensure his dynasty. Achitophel criticizes David's decision to pass the throne to his brother (referring to a different heir) rather than his son, presenting it as a betrayal and accusing David of cheating his rightful successor.

Achitophel further paints the next heir (Amnon) as a calculating and vengeful figure, who is already suspicious of Absalom's growing influence among the people. He suggests that while the heir may seem composed, he is secretly plotting revenge, waiting for the perfect moment to strike, comparing him to a lion lying in wait for its prey.

The argument is designed to appeal to Absalom's ambitions and emotions, encouraging him to act against both David and his successor, implying that if he doesn't take power now, he will eventually be overtaken by the heir's growing strength and ruthlessness.

In the respective passage, Achitophel continues advising Absalom to take bold and decisive action against his father, King David. He argues that Absalom's situation requires drastic measures, either conquering or risking death, as there is no middle ground for him. Achitophel urges Absalom to act swiftly, not allowing the people time to reconsider their rebellion, as hesitation could make their cause seem treasonous.

To justify his rebellion, Achitophel suggests that Absalom should claim he is acting in defense of the king, asserting that David's life is constantly at risk from secret plots by both friends and enemies. He insinuates that David himself might secretly desire to be overthrown, likening his potential resistance to the way people often feign reluctance in situations they actually desire.

Achitophel advises Absalom to take control of David's power and position by force, comparing it to a "*pleasing rape*" of the crown, implying that once Absalom seizes power, David will not be able to resist. Achitophel concludes that those who control the king ultimately control the laws.

The below-mentioned lines from the text reflect on Absalom's character, acknowledging his mild and virtuous nature but lamenting that his ambition and desire for greatness have led him to this treacherous path. If fate had placed him differently- either in a higher or lower position- he might have been a great and just king elsewhere, but his ambition now drives him to lead a rebellion and seek power in his own land. Achitophel sees Absalom's charm and popularity as essential for gaining public support and leading the faction in this plot.

*With Absalom's mild nature suited best;
Unblamed of life (ambition set aside),
Not stained with cruelty nor puffed with pride,
How happy had he been, if Destiny
Had higher placed his birth or not so high!
His kingly virtues might have claimed a throne
And blessed all other countries but his own;*

Achitophel is portrayed as a mastermind who skillfully unites various discontented groups of Israelites, despite their differing motivations and objectives, in order to advance Absalom's cause. The passage highlights several factions that, though divergent in their reasons, come together under a common goal of weakening the monarchy.

The first group consists of well-meaning patriots, including some of the best individuals and even certain princes, who sincerely believe that the monarchy holds too much power. These are "*mistaken men*" who, though not inherently evil, are seduced by the deceptive arts of Achitophel and others who seek to manipulate their good intentions.

*Mistaken men and Patriots in hearts,
Not wicked, but seduced by impious arts;*

The second group is motivated by self-interest. The members of this group were aiming to "*embroil the state*" and profit from the instability by selling their loyalty at a higher price. They disguise their personal agendas as a pursuit of public good but are, in fact, seeking to use the throne for their own gain.

Some critics of the monarchy see the king as an unnecessary burden, arguing that the monarchy is expensive and provides little benefit. These individuals, under the guise of promoting "pure good husbandry" (efficient management of resources), advocate for stripping King David of his power.

A further group consists of eloquent haranguers; people who seek to rise through rhetoric and public speaking, hoping to gain favor and preferment by using their tongues. They not only harbor resentment toward David but also despise the institution of kingship itself.

Following this, a "Solyman Rout" (a crowd of zealots; *London Mob in England*) emerges. It is referred to as *Double Danger* by Dryden. These people are rooted in a history of godly rebellion. These individuals, having previously quaked before a conqueror's sword, disdain the current ethnic conflicts in Israel. These people neither admired the king nor the parliament. They scorn the idea of being overrun by Jebusites (David's supporters) and are led by Levites, religious leaders who seek to reestablish a theocracy. They cling to the past, recalling the days when priests and the Sanhedrin (the ancient Jewish council) held sway over the people, using religion as a justification for political power.

The next group, driven by religious zealotry, calls for a return to a divine system of governance, where the authority rests with priests rather than kings. They claim divine inspiration to justify their ambitions, asserting that only the lineage of Aaron, the high priest, is fit to rule.

The final faction is of Visionary Priests who talk too much and think too little. These Visionary Priests were brought up in accordance with their old religious beliefs. They were very disciplined but blind-sighted. Their mentality was of destructive trait. They worshipped the Gods of their forefathers and properties but never knew why. They hated David and Jebusites.

These various groups, though different in their motivations, are united by their opposition to David's rule. Led by Achitophel, they form a powerful coalition that threatens the stability of the monarchy.

In the next few lines, Dryden describes a colorful character, Zimri (Duke of Buckingham), who is emblematic of a chaotic, inconsistent personality. He's portrayed as someone who constantly shifts his interests and pursuits, from alchemy to fiddling, statesmanship, and buffoonery. His extremes in behavior - either excessively praising or harshly criticizing - show his lack of balance and consistency in judgment. His life seems to be a whirlwind of changing passions, with wealth squandered on fleeting whims, while true merit often goes unrewarded. In his talks, he either bad-mouthed or praised a person and to prove that he is a man of sound judgment, he went to the extremes in both cases. He is highly skilled in wasting money and therefore, he was reduced to poverty by the fools whose real motives were discovered too late by him.

Dryden then mocks different types of people in the state. It begins by dividing people into the best- like witty men, warriors, and public figures- and the rest, who are merely kind husbands or noble by title. The poem then targets specific individuals: Balaam (Earl of Huntingdon) and Caleb (Lord Grey of Wark), who represent vanity and coldness, and Nadab (Howard of Escrick), who is condemned for his hypocrisy in religious matters.

Then Dryden mentions Jonas (Sir William Jones) who is described to have bull-like features and highly encouraged the revolt against the king. Although Jonas was a bad man, he was followed by the worse, Shimei (Slingsby Bethel).

Shimei is depicted as a man who had never cursed or used oaths except when attacking the government, highlighting his selective and hypocritical morality. His wealth was accumulated not through honest means but by deceit, hidden under a false show of piety. This represents his duplicitous nature: publicly religious and righteous, but privately immoral and disloyal to the King. His position as a sheriff of London is not a reward for virtue or competence but rather for his hatred of the monarchy, which many in London shared at the time. This hatred of the King is presented as his defining feature, justifying his actions in his own mind.

As sheriff, Shimei wields authority (symbolized by the staff and gold chain) but uses it to advance treachery and undermine the King. Under his tenure, betrayal of the monarch is not treated as a crime, and the enemies of the monarchy (referred to as the "descendants of the devil") are allowed to thrive. This creates an environment where loyalty to the King is punished, and those who oppose the monarchy are protected and even celebrated.

Shimei is portrayed as an anti-Royalist hypocrite by Dryden. Though known for being miserly, his frugality is directed at maintaining his loyalty to London's anti-monarchist sentiment rather than any real personal virtue. He is frequently found among gatherings of people denouncing the King, and he enthusiastically joins in with their cursing of the monarch. His behavior exemplifies his unwavering dedication to the anti-Royalist cause, even at the expense of his judicial duties.

Bethel's handling of legal matters is deeply corrupt: whenever someone brings an accusation against his anti-Royalist allies, he appoints a biased jury sympathetic to the accused. These

jurors, due to their own loyalty to the anti-monarchist cause, often sentence the accuser to death, illustrating how Bethel manipulates the law to protect his political allies while punishing those loyal to the King. This distortion of justice shows that, under Bethel's authority, the law serves to protect those opposed to the monarchy and to oppress those who support it.

Bethel is also a writer, using his spare time to compose pamphlets and articles promoting his belief that kings are unnecessary and that they hinder trade. His writing is described as highly moralistic, but his actions are driven by political motives rather than genuine ethics. His abstention from wine and luxury, often seen as a mark of self-discipline, is shown to be hypocritical. While he avoids the excesses of food and drink, he is driven by a much greater vice: his hatred for the King.

John Dryden emphasizes the infamous role of Corah (Titus Oates) in the Popish Plot, portraying him as a disreputable figure whose claims should not be forgotten. Dryden uses the metaphor of a brass monument to suggest that Corah, despite his low birth, has managed to elevate himself through his deceitful testimony, much like the serpent of brass that Moses raised to heal the Israelites. He reflects on how Corah, a self-proclaimed priest, believes he serves the public good, drawing a parallel to Saint Stephen, whose false accusers were also of lowly origin. He is depicted with exaggerated physical traits, such as sunken eyes and a long chin, symbolizing his supposed wisdom and sanctity, while Dryden ironically critiques the absurdity of his prophetic claims and dubious educational credentials.

Dryden makes a reference to the Biblical story where the prophet Samuel ordered King Saul to execute Agag, the Amalekite king (1 Samuel 15). Dryden mocks Corah, suggesting that, like Samuel, he could demand extreme actions (like murder) and use coarse language to justify it. This reinforces the hypocrisy in his religious zeal. Here, Dryden reveals that others joined in Corah's fabricated evidence, motivated either by affection (love) or bribery (coin). This suggests that Corah's accomplices were either loyal followers or corrupt individuals paid to support his false testimony. Dryden cynically observes that others who helped with his false testimony will find themselves in the same situation as Corah. "Witness" is a title that anyone could take on, implying that the position is cheapened by its association with lies and corruption.

Further, Dryden describes the scene when Absalom meets all the groups of people collected and brought under one roof by Achitophel. Absalom (the Duke of Monmouth) is shown as being surrounded by a variety of false friends and advisors (like Corah). These people deceive him, leading him to abandon the royal court and his father, King David. Dryden paints Absalom as a tragic but misguided figure.

Absalom is impatient, full of ambition, and driven by the hope of gaining the crown. His desire for fame ("renown") and power blinds him to the manipulation of those around him. This reflects Absalom's own desire to become king.

The crowd is captivated by Absalom's appearance and charm. They are "dazzled" by his physical presence and good looks, which Dryden suggests make him a popular figure despite

his lack of substance or true leadership. Although Absalom is secretly thrilled by the people's admiration, he hides his excitement and performs for the crowd, bowing and acting humble. Dryden mocks his calculated effort to appear as a man of the people, using this charm for political gain.

Absalom carefully crafts his appearance, gestures, and words to appeal to the people. He even remembers their names, making him seem relatable and approachable. Dryden uses this to show how politicians manipulate the masses by presenting a false sense of familiarity. Absalom is naturally charismatic and physically attractive ("*formed by nature*"), but his charm is enhanced by the artifice of his calculated behavior and rhetoric ("*furnished out with arts*"). Dryden suggests that Absalom's appeal is both natural and cultivated, but ultimately deceptive.

At this point in the poem, Absalom (Monmouth) is attempting to win the hearts of the people by portraying himself as a victim of his father's (King David's) neglect and tyranny. He positions himself as a selfless leader who is willing to suffer for the greater good of the nation. Absalom laments the current state of affairs in Israel (England), accusing his father of being seduced by foreign powers and neglecting his responsibilities as king. This is a highly manipulative speech where Absalom uses pathos, aiming to win popular support for his cause by playing the role of a martyr.

Absalom subtly wins over the people's emotions without them even realizing it. Dryden describes Absalom's ability to manipulate the crowd, insinuating himself into their affections and thoughts almost imperceptibly. Before speaking, Absalom gives the appearance of deep compassion, using his body language and sighs to convey sorrow and sympathy. Dryden highlights how he manipulates the crowd's emotions even before uttering a word.

Absalom speaks carefully chosen words, delivered slowly and sweetly, more melodious than the honey from Mount Hybla (a reference to famous Sicilian honey). His speech is charming and measured, designed to appeal to the people's emotions. Absalom claims to share in the people's sorrow over their "lost estate" (i.e., their deteriorating state), though he pretends to be powerless to stop it. This is an insincere declaration, designed to stir their sympathy.

Absalom presents himself as a victim, claiming he has been exiled and made a target of unjust laws because he stands up for the people's cause. This is a manipulative attempt to make himself appear as a martyr fighting for justice. He wishes that only he, and not the people, could suffer the consequences of his father's actions. He laments that his connection to the throne and his father is severed, framing himself as a selfless figure.

Absalom warns the people that their freedoms are being stolen, and their trade with foreign nations (Egypt and Tyre) is being disrupted. This reflects the people's economic concerns and plays on their fear of foreign influence. The Jebusites (symbolizing Catholics) are described as interfering with the people's sacred religious practices. This references the anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent at the time in England, and Absalom uses it to stoke fear of religious

corruption. Absalom refers to his father with "reverence" but is clearly being ironic. He subtly critiques his father's failure as a ruler, even as he pretends to show respect.

He accuses his father of being lulled into complacency ("charmed into ease") and no longer caring about his reputation or responsibilities as king. Then he accuses the king of being bribed with "*petty sums of foreign gold*," implying that he is corrupted by foreign powers. Dryden mocks the idea that the king has sold out the interests of the nation for personal gain. Absalom suggests that his father has grown old and weak in the embrace of Bathsheba (a reference to King David's concubine, symbolizing sensual pleasure and distraction). This implies that the king has been led astray by personal indulgence.

Absalom accuses his father of promoting enemies and destroying loyal friends, effectively using his royal power against his own interests. This serves to paint the king as incompetent and self-sabotaging. He then expresses frustration that his father has given away his (Absalom's) right to the throne, but even worse, he accuses the king of betraying the people's rights and freedoms as well. Absalom claims that only the king has the power to harm the nation, and ironically, despite his feelings of anger, only the king is spared from Absalom's vengeance due to familial bonds.

Absalom dramatically wipes his eyes, offering his tears as a symbol of the only help he can provide for the people. This act is theatrical and insincere, designed to win their sympathy. Absalom suggests that while no one can accuse him of treason (since he has done nothing yet), he could, if necessary, lead a rebellion ("*sons against their fathers*"). This hints at his willingness to rise against his father, King David.

Absalom expresses his hope that when the next ruler takes power, no other Israelites (the people of England) will have cause to complain. He implies that a change in leadership is necessary for the well-being of the nation. Dryden acknowledges that youth, beauty, and charisma often succeed in swaying people, but ultimately, common interests—like economic stability and political security—are what truly win over the masses.

Dryden observes that the public will always show pity to a leader who aligns himself with their grievances, as Absalom does here by presenting himself as their champion. The crowd, who believe that kings (like King David) oppress them, eagerly bless Absalom, seeing him as their "*young Messiah*" or savior. This underscores the people's gullibility and their willingness to see Absalom as a deliverer.

Absalom is now beginning to organize his rebellion, and the people, who support him, see this as the beginning of a new era. He is portrayed as ready to move forward with his plan to seize power. Absalom parades through the country with a grand procession of chariots, horsemen, and a large following, showcasing his wealth and power. He travels across the land ("from east to west") to display his grandeur and win over the people.

"And, like the sun, the promised land surveys."

Absalom is compared to the sun, a metaphor for his central role in the people's eyes. He surveys the land like a god-like figure, with his eyes set on the "promised land"—symbolically referring to the kingdom he aspires to rule (England). His fame precedes him, just as the morning star (often a reference to Venus) rises before the sun. The people shout in joy as Absalom approaches, eager to see him. This highlights his popularity and the excitement his presence generates. Everywhere he goes, the people welcome him as if he were a guardian deity, and they treat the places where he stays with reverence, as though they were holy. This shows the extreme adoration the people have for Absalom.

Among all his supporters, Issachar (representing a wealthy landowner or political ally) stands out for his generosity and hospitality. Issachar represents those who support Absalom for personal or financial reasons, rather than loyalty to the kingdom. Absalom's grand tour, which appears to be a simple display of wealth and pageantry, is actually a cover for deeper political intentions. The lavish display is meant to distract from his true goals of rebellion and power.

The mastermind behind this procession is Achitophel, who has planned it with the intention of gauging the people's feelings. He wants to "*sound the depths*" of public opinion and see how much support Absalom has. Achitophel uses this tour to determine who among the people are friends (supporters of the rebellion) and who are foes (loyal to King David). He also wants to assess the strength of their potential allies before starting a full-scale conflict.

Despite their true intentions, Absalom and Achitophel disguise their actions with a false show of love and duty toward King David. They pretend that everything they do is out of loyalty to the king, masking their treachery.

Dryden cynically comments that religion and grievances (complaints about injustice) are often used as tools to manipulate the people. These are causes that "cheat" (deceive) the public, as they always seem to resonate with the masses. These grievances are frequently invoked, putting King David's (King Charles II's) life in danger. The mention of a "brother" (possibly James, Duke of York) and "wife" indicates how close family members, motivated by self-interest, are part of the conspiracy.

Dryden reveals the irony that what appears to be a peaceful pageant is, in fact, a covert political plot. The show of peace is merely a disguise for the brewing rebellion—war is hiding beneath the surface. Dryden laments how easily the people (Israel, representing England) are deceived. They never learn from past mistakes, always falling for the same "bait" (deception) and being outwitted by the same political tricks.

Dryden criticizes how people, even when they are content and healthy, are so easily led to believe that they are suffering from some imaginary "disease" or crisis. This reflects how the people, although not oppressed, are convinced by Absalom's rhetoric that they need to rebel. He questions why people would go to such lengths to imagine future dangers (like a tyrannical monarch) and to appoint heirs and rulers when it is not their place to do so. Dryden criticizes the

people's eagerness to interfere in matters of succession and governance, which should be left to God and the king. Dryden asks whether the people really have the right to give up their own freedom ("native sway") and that of future generations. He implies that by supporting Absalom's rebellion, they are giving away their own liberties.

If the people give away their freedom, they will be left defenseless against the arbitrary power of any future tyrant or lord. This is a warning about the dangers of undermining lawful authority and leaving the nation vulnerable to tyranny. Dryden concludes that if the people surrender their freedom, the laws that protect their rights will become meaningless. Without the stability of lawful government, the people's rights cannot be secured.

If the people who first gave the kings their power could not bind future generations to that decision, then it would mean that no law or covenant could hold beyond the present generation. Dryden uses the biblical figure of Adam to make a point about the inheritance of sin and authority. If Adam's actions (the Fall) could bind all of humanity to a state of original sin, then similarly, early generations could bind their descendants to the authority of kings. Dryden extends this theological argument by asking how divine justice could condemn all of humanity for Adam's sin, even though future generations did not directly consent to it. He implies that, just as we are bound by Adam's actions, we are similarly bound by the decisions made by earlier generations regarding kingship.

If kings derive their authority solely from the people, they are reduced to mere "slaves" of their subjects, existing only to fulfill the will of the masses. This reduces kingship to a form of tenancy, where the king holds his position only as long as the people allow. Dryden argues that placing the power to determine rights, especially property rights, in the hands of the crowd is dangerous. The masses are not equipped to make sound judgments on such matters, and this power can be easily misused.

The speaker laments that King David, though righteous and just, is in a difficult position. The phrase "*too good a king*" suggests that David's virtue and mercy have left him vulnerable, perhaps because he is too lenient or too trusting, making his situation perilous. David's allies are few because the rebellion has grown so strong ("*the madness grows*"). To be a true friend of the king is now a dangerous position, as it would mean going against the popular movement, thereby becoming an enemy of the people.

Despite the overwhelming rebellion, the speaker notes that there are still a few loyal supporters of King David. Naming these loyalists is itself an act of praise, showing their bravery and dedication.

The speaker introduces Barzillai (Duke of Ormonde), a key figure in David's support, who is distinguished by both his honor and his age. Barzillai is an elder statesman, and his loyalty to David is rooted in his wisdom and experience. Barzillai stood firm against the rebels from the very beginning, even in remote and difficult regions ("regions waste beyond the Jordan's flood"). This highlights his bravery and steadfastness in the face of rebellion. Barzillai is described as

"unfortunately brave," meaning that his courage, while admirable, could not ultimately prevent the decline of the state. He remained loyal to David, but he was unable to save his king from his misfortunes.

Barzillai mourned with David during the king's exile and shared in his suffering. He was one of the few who remained with David in his darkest times, and he returned with him once the period of exile ended. Barzillai is praised for practicing at court without becoming a typical courtier. He did not engage in the flattery and manipulation often associated with courtiers. Although he was wealthy, his generosity and moral integrity ("his heart") were even greater than his wealth.

Barzillai's noble heart knew how to choose the most worthy causes. He supported both the warrior in battle and the "recording Muse," indicating his appreciation for both bravery and the arts, suggesting he valued both strength and wisdom. Barzillai once had children ("fruitful issue"), but now he has lost more than half of them, implying that many of his children have died. This adds to the portrayal of Barzillai as a figure of personal tragedy, further deepening the sense of his sacrifice and loyalty.

Barzillai's eldest son, his "hope," was adorned with every grace, meaning he was a fine and virtuous man. The speaker (likely King David) mourns for him continually, as he has been lost, either through death or some other tragedy. The speaker mourns the death of Barzillai's son, who was taken ("snatched") prematurely, in the prime of his life. "Unequal fates" and "Providence's crime" suggest that it was an unjust, untimely death, hinting at the cruel randomness of fate.

Although the son died young, he had already achieved great honor and fulfilled his duties both as a loyal subject and as a son. This suggests that he accomplished much in his short life, winning the admiration of others and fulfilling his roles in life. The son's life was like a race that he ran quickly, but the time allotted to him was short. This reinforces the idea that his achievements were remarkable, despite the brevity of his life.

The son's reputation for bravery and valor was widely known, both "by sea" and "by land." His love for warfare and his prowess in battle defined him ("war was all thy own"), indicating his martial strength. His strength reinvigorated the "fainting Tyrians," suggesting that he helped bolster the morale and strength of the people of Tyre. Even the proud Pharaoh, likely representing an enemy of Israel, found his power thwarted by this young warrior.

The young man's soul is now free from the burdens of the physical world ("disencumbered"), rising up beyond the clouds and stars. This imagery suggests that his soul has ascended to Heaven, leaving behind earthly troubles. From his place in the afterlife, the speaker imagines that the young man may bring "kindred legions" (souls of fellow warriors) to aid the guardian angel who protects King David. This implies that even in death, the son could continue to support his king.

The speaker introduces Zadoc (Archbishop of Canterbury), a priest known for avoiding positions of power and authority. This suggests that Zadoc, like Barzillai, is loyal to David but is motivated by virtue rather than ambition, setting up a comparison between the two figures. This introduces a figure of humble disposition ("lowly mind") who has been elevated to a position of favor with King David due to his virtuous qualities. It highlights the idea that humility and merit, rather than ambition, can earn royal favor. "Sagan" refers to a high-ranking religious official in ancient Israel, suggesting that this character holds an important position in the religious hierarchy of Jerusalem. This emphasizes the role of spiritual leadership in supporting the king.

This figure is described as having a generous and welcoming spirit ("hospitable soul") and being of noble lineage ("noble stem"). Nobility in this context is not just about birthright but also about moral and spiritual excellence. This person, perhaps representing a prominent church figure or scholar, is known for their deep understanding ("weighty sense") and skill in communicating their thoughts with eloquence and wisdom. The "western dome" could symbolize a significant institution, possibly Westminster Abbey or another notable center of learning or religion.

Following the scholars, Dryden praises the legal experts ("pillars of the laws"), who are skilled both in arguing cases ("plead") and delivering fair judgments ("judge a cause"). These legal figures are essential for maintaining justice and order. After the legal authorities, a group of loyal nobles ("peers") is mentioned, beginning with Adriel, who is both a sharp and discerning judge ("sharp judging") and a patron of the arts ("the Muses' friend"). This continues the theme of balancing intellect, culture, and loyalty. Adriel is portrayed not only as a supporter of the arts but as an embodiment of the Muses themselves, meaning he is deeply connected to creativity and intellect. In political debate ("Sanhedrin's debate"), he is loyal to King David but not blindly obedient ("not a slave of state"), indicating a balance of loyalty and independent thought.

King David bestowed honors upon Adriel, likely in recognition of his loyalty and service. These honors may have once belonged to Absalom (David's rebellious son), implying that they were stripped from the traitor and given to someone deserving.

Jotham (George Savile) is described as a man of sharp intellect ("piercing wit") and profound thought ("pregnant thought"), who possesses both natural intelligence and the benefits of education. Jotham has the ability to sway political and social assemblies ("to move assemblies") with his rhetoric. Although he may have briefly supported the wrong side ("the worse a while"), he ultimately chose to support the righteous cause, demonstrating both discernment and integrity. Jotham didn't just switch sides; his decision had a significant impact ("turned the balance"), underscoring the influence one brave and principled man can have on the outcome of events.

Hushai (Laurance Hyde, Earl of Rochester) is introduced as a loyal friend to David during times of difficulty and danger ("in distress"). His "manly steadfastness" suggests that he remained firm and unwavering in his support for David, even in challenging public crises ("public storms"). Hushai gained wisdom in his younger years through involvement in foreign diplomacy ("foreign treaties"), combining this experience with his natural integrity and loyalty ("native truth"). Hushai

managed the kingdom's finances with careful frugality, ensuring the throne's needs were met despite limited resources. While he was frugal with the kingdom's finances, he was generous with his own wealth ("bounteous of his own").

It is easy to govern when resources are abundant ("when exchequers flow"), but Hushai's real skill lay in managing the kingdom's finances effectively during times of scarcity ("the low"). Dryden reflects on the dangers of extremes in governance: sovereign power becomes either too weak or too dominant when kings are forced to sell their authority (through financial deals) or when the populace exerts undue influence ("crowds to buy").

The speaker asks for one more effort from his "weary Muse" (inspiration) to praise another loyalist, Amiel (Edward Seymour), and rhetorically asks who could refuse to praise him, signaling Amiel's universally acknowledged virtues. Amiel is described as being from an old and respected family ("ancient race"), but his nobility is not merely inherited; it is also a reflection of his own personal virtues ("noble yet").

Dryden continues to praise of King David's loyal followers, focusing on a number of virtuous individuals who stood by the king during difficult times. These characters are depicted as embodying the values of wisdom, loyalty, eloquence, and justice. They include scholars, religious leaders, legal experts, and peers who bring stability and counsel to the throne. Among them are Adriel, Jotham, Hushai, and Amiel, each contributing in their own way to the maintenance of the kingdom and to the service of the king. The passage underscores the importance of loyalty, wisdom, and virtue in times of political unrest and rebellion.

This individual is praised for his personal qualities ("his own worth") rather than relying on any formal titles or noble status ("without title great"). He is esteemed for his merit alone. The man served as the head ("chief") of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish council. He led for a long time, using his reason and wisdom to guide others and calm their passions, thus maintaining stability and order in a difficult political environment.

He was skilled ("dexterous") in defending the monarchy ("Crown"), and his eloquence made him a voice for the people who remained loyal to the king. His speech was in alignment with the sentiments of the nation's loyalists. Just as the Sanhedrin represented a smaller version of Israel's tribes, this individual was perfectly suited to represent the entirety of the nation in its loyalty and wisdom.

Dryden introduces a "small but faithful" group of loyalists ("worthies") who bravely stood against the forces that threatened the kingdom ("in the breach"). Despite being few in number, they remained steadfast in their defense of the rightful king. These loyalists faced the combined wrath ("united fury") of the rebellious faction and the populace, who were stirred up against the government. They watched with sorrow ("grief") as the rebels deployed significant resources ("powerful engines") to destroy the legitimate government.

The loyalists recognized these dangers and, as loyal subjects, felt it was their duty to inform the king about the threats to his reign, likening the rebellion to a dangerous wound that required urgent attention. They warned the king that making concessions or compromises ("*lenitives*") would not satisfy the rebels but would actually worsen the situation ("*fomented the disease*"). The loyalists recognized that Absalom's ambition for the throne ("*ambitious of the crown*") was being used to attract and manipulate the masses into rebellion ("*lure to draw the people down*").

Achitophel, the scheming advisor, had used his malicious hatred ("*pernicious hate*") to turn the rebellion into a plot aimed at destroying both the religious institutions ("*Church*") and the political order ("*State*"). The rebellion's council was filled with violent advisors, and the unruly masses ("*rabble*") were even worse. Shimei, another biblical figure, is said to have incited the people of Jerusalem to curse and oppose the king.

David is described as being overwhelmed ("*opprest*") by the numerous injuries and wrongs inflicted upon him. He carefully considers ("*revolving in his careful breast*") the gravity of the situation. After patiently enduring and reflecting on these wrongs, David's patience finally runs out. Feeling divinely inspired ("*by Heaven inspired*"), King David, portrayed as "godlike" in his wisdom and leadership, prepares to speak. His words will carry a sense of awe and authority, reflecting both the gravity of the situation and his rightful rule. David's followers hear the voice of God through their king, suggesting that David is divinely guided in his rule.

David reflects on how his natural inclination towards mercy has led him to hide his personal grievances ("*dissembled my wrongs*") and delay seeking revenge against those who have wronged him. He was eager to forgive the rebellious generation ("*offending age*"), and his fatherly love often tempered his actions as a king, showing more leniency than a monarch might otherwise demonstrate. David laments that his mercy has been so underestimated that the rebels now challenge his very right to forgive them.

The rebels argue that the king is meant to serve the people ("*one was made for many*"), but David asserts that the purpose of a king is to rule, not simply to serve or be subject to the will of the masses. The rebels mistake David's mercy ("*tenderness of blood*") for cowardice, but David insists that a true man's strength lies in his ability to endure and be patient.

Since the rebels have provoked his natural disposition to be lenient, David now feels compelled to demonstrate that his goodness is not out of weakness or fear ("*not good by force*"). The disrespect and insults heaped upon him by his arrogant subjects are too heavy to bear; they might weigh down a camel, but not a king. David asserts that kings are the pillars upholding the entire state, responsible for bearing the burdens of the nation. Absalom is then likened to the biblical figure Samson, who brought down the pillars of the temple. David says that if Absalom seeks to "shake the column" of the state, he will share in its collapse and his own downfall. David, despite his anger, expresses a deep paternal desire for Absalom to repent. He notes how easy it is for a parent to forgive their child, especially if they show remorse.

A simple display of genuine sorrow could easily win Absalom's forgiveness, as the natural bond between father and son ("nature") would urge David to forgive. David reflects on how he has raised Absalom with care, lifting him to the highest status his abilities and position could allow. David laments that if Absalom had been destined by God for kingship, he would have had a different character, one more suited for rule. Absalom has been misled by the term "patriot," which, in its modern usage, has come to mean someone who seeks to overthrow their ruler under the guise of legality. David critiques the idea of "patriots," calling them tools of manipulative politicians and asserting that true patriots are often misguided or foolish.

King David agrees that it is true that the state had requested him to approve their choice of the successor of the crown but in response to this, he mentions the biblical story of Esau and Jacob. Jacob deceived his blind father and got his blessings by presenting himself as Esau. He compares this story with the current situation in the state. People might look loyal to the crown and their king but their true intentions are harmful to the state.

David further mentions that the people want to ensure my safety but want to deprive me of power as well. This depicts the hypocrisy of the people of Israel. He then prays to God to not only protect him from the rebellious groups of the state but from those specifically who act loyal to the state, to the king and kingship but are the ones planning the most dangerous conspiracies under the table. These masked or double-faced individuals are the biggest enemy of the state.

David also points out the tendency of the people of the state. He says that they can neither be satisfied by the king nor by the God himself. David also accepts that he needs to be a little more cautious as his power is being challenged and his control is getting weaker. David claims that despite these challenges, he will continue to rule according to the law, and maintain peace and now the rules will be strict to bring obedience among those who rebel against his rule and justice will be served through legal means.

He states that Parliament won't take or counter his decisions on the basis of votes. This was because the votes can be influenced. Further, he adds that punishments will be given if proven guilty, not because the crowd is against the suspect.

Then David puts forward a comparison between God and King. He comments that as a God always protects his followers, a king must also protect his Loyal subjects. Also, David is known for his soft heart and mercifulness, he proving it comments that he wished that his power was limited to act merciful but the bitter truth is he needs to punish his enemies and do justice. He is distressed by the necessity of presenting harsh examples of those who go against him and challenge his rule as it will be a hurdle in his desire for peace. and he will ultimately regret the use of weapons to maintain peace and law in the state. He agrees that maintaining peace and justice is not easy and needs strictness and harshness. He then reflects on how his enemies misinterpreted his mercy as his fear and weakness.

*How ill my fear they by my mercy scan!
Beware the fury of a patient man.*

In the above lines, he highlights that a patient man can become a dangerous being if pushed beyond his limits. Then David says that if they (Rebels) demand of justice then they will get it with full force. He also comments that this first face of law will be terrible and will be without mercy. He further adds that those who planned the conspiracy and death of the king will face the consequences of their action. He also says that the false witnesses of the Popish Plot will betray them such as Viper might kill his own mother.

David then tells his supporters that the rebels will fight among themselves and invite their destruction. He mentions that their internal conflict will benefit the king as they will fight among themselves just like Belial and Beelzebub (2 Demons). He then suggests them to stay patient and let them continue their struggle and attack when they would have lost all their energy. He suggests that the lawful power may be pushed back for a temporary phase but it will always prevail. With this message, the Speech of King David ends and at this moment a thunder from the sky appears. This thunder symbolises the approval of the almighty (God) for the plan. The heaven and God both are in support of David and with this a new era begins.

*Henceforth a series of new time began,
The mighty years in long procession ran:
Once more the god-like David was restor'd,
And willing nations knew their lawful lord.*

These lines signify the start of a new era, one where David's rightful rule is restored, and the rebellion has been quelled. It marks a return to stability and peace under the rightful king. The closing lines emphasize David's divine right to rule and his ultimate restoration to power. His return to the throne is welcomed by the people, and his legitimacy is recognized.