

## How does Dryden use the Biblical and political allusions in “Absalom and Achitophel?”

Writer: John Dryden | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

### How does Dryden use the Biblical and political allusions in “Absalom and Achitophel?”

“Absalom and Achitophel” (1681) is a political satire. John Dryden (1631-1700) uses Biblical stories to mock real politics. He avoids punishment this way. In the poem, King David means King Charles II. His son Absalom means the Duke of Monmouth. Achitophel means the Earl of Shaftesbury. These all are real people in Dryden’s time. The poem talks about the Exclusion Crisis. Let us examine how Dryden blends Bible stories with politics to make his points.

**King and Son:** Dryden shows King David as a good king. David means Charles II. He loves his son Absalom. But Absalom tries to take his crown. This is like the real story of Charles and Monmouth. Charles loved Monmouth. But Monmouth wanted power. Dryden shows Absalom’s ambition in the following line:

*“Desire of greatness is a god-like sin.”*

Dryden uses this Bible story to show pain in the father-son fight. It also shows that love is not enough. A good son should not fight his father. This point helps us feel the truth behind politics.

**Bad Friend:** Achitophel is the worst man in the poem. He means Shaftesbury. In the Bible, Achitophel was wise but tricky. In the poem, he tells Absalom to take the crown. He wants to rule the country himself. He uses Absalom for his own gain. The poet writes that Achitophel is:

*“Resolv'd to ruin or to rule the state.”*

This shows how some men use others to get power. Dryden shows that such leaders are not honest. They do not care for the country. They only want to win.

**Fake Plot:** Dryden discusses a “pageant show” or fake plan. He means the Popish Plot. This was a lie told by Titus Oates. He said that Catholics wanted to kill the king. Many believed him. But Dryden says it was not true. He says it was just to make people fear and hate. This fake fear helped to start the Exclusion Crisis. Dryden refers to this plot as:

*“Bad in itself, but represented worse.”*

### **Bad Helpers:**

Achitophel has many helpers. Some are Balaam, Caleb, Jonas, and Corah. These names mean real men in England. They are members of Parliament. They wanted to stop James from becoming king. Dryden shows them as silly, weak, or evil. He says they talk too much and think too little. They only want power and to fight the king.

**Wise King:** In the end, David speaks with power. He says he is both a father and a king. He will not let Absalom take the crown. He says God is with him. David is ready to fight. But he is also patient. He says,

*“Beware the fury of a patient man.”*

This shows Charles as a wise and strong king. He waits, but can also act. Dryden uses this to show that the true king will win in the end.

In conclusion, Dryden mixes the Bible and politics smartly. He uses old names to discuss new problems. He shows how love, lies, and pride can hurt a country. His words help us see the truth. The poem teaches that kings should rule and sons should obey. It also warns us about bad friends and fake news. Dryden’s poem is more than a story. It is a lesson for people in his time and even now.