

Absalom and Achitophel Character

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David

Biblical role: King of Israel.

Political meaning: Represents King Charles II of England.

Description: A wise and peaceful ruler who loves his people and his illegitimate son Absalom. He forgives and protects, but finally takes a firm stand to save the kingdom.

Absalom

Biblical role: David's handsome and beloved son who rebels against his father.

Political meaning: Represents James, Duke of Monmouth, the illegitimate son of Charles II.

Description: Popular among people, but full of pride. At first unwilling to rebel, he is finally tricked by Achitophel and becomes the symbol of rebellion.

Achitophel

Biblical role: David's counselor who betrays him.

Political meaning: Represents Anthony Ashley Cooper, the 1st Earl of Shaftesbury.

Description: The main villain. Clever, ambitious, and dangerous. He manipulates Absalom and spreads rebellion in the name of religion and liberty.

Annabel

Biblical role: Not in the Bible.

Political meaning: Represents Anne Scott, wife of the Duke of Monmouth.

Description: The noble woman whom David allows Absalom to marry.

Michal

Biblical role: Daughter of Saul and wife of David.

Political meaning: Represents Catherine of Braganza, the wife of Charles II.

Description: The official queen, but she has no children with David. This makes Absalom, born of another woman, an illegitimate heir.

Bathsheba

Biblical role: Woman with whom David committed adultery; later became his wife.

Political meaning: Represents Louise de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth, a mistress of Charles II.

Description: A sign of the king's moral weakness, which his enemies use to criticize him.

Amnon

Biblical role: David's son who raped his half-sister.

Political meaning: Represents one of Charles's illegitimate sons.

Description: Killed by Absalom for his crime. This act shows Absalom's boldness and desire for justice or power.

Saul

Biblical role: The first King of Israel before David.

Political meaning: Represents Oliver Cromwell, ruler of England after Charles I's execution.

Description: A symbol of the past dictatorship. Dryden blames him for disturbing peace and order.

Corah

Biblical role: Rebel against Moses.

Political meaning: Represents Titus Oates, creator of the Popish Plot.

Description: A false priest who spreads lies and causes national chaos by accusing Catholics of conspiracy.

Shimei

Biblical role: A man who cursed David.

Political meaning: Represents Slingsby Bethel, sheriff of London and Middlesex.

Description: A corrupt and bold enemy of David. He misuses his position to free traitors and punish loyalists.

Zimri

Biblical role: A rebel and murderer in the Bible.

Political meaning: Represents George Villiers, the 2nd Duke of Buckingham.

Description: A foolish, unstable nobleman who tries many things but succeeds in none. Dryden mocks him heavily.

Jotham

Biblical role: Son of Gideon, who spoke wisely.

Political meaning: Represents George Savile, Marquis of Halifax.

Description: A wise speaker. He first supported the rebels but later helped defeat the Exclusion Bill with his speech in the House of Lords.

Hushai

Biblical role: David's loyal friend.

Political meaning: Represents Lawrence Hyde, Earl of Rochester.

Description: Loyal to David. He speaks against the Exclusion Bill and supports the king's right to rule.

Barzillai

Biblical role: An old friend who helped David during his exile.

Political meaning: Represents the Duke of Ormonde, Dryden's patron.

Description: A faithful and respected supporter who stood by the king in both good and bad times.

Zadok

Biblical role: Priest who stayed loyal to David.

Political meaning: Represents William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Description: A spiritual and loyal guide who serves David and supports lawful rule.

Sagan of Jerusalem

Biblical role: A religious official.

Political meaning: Represents the Bishop of London.

Description: Another church figure loyal to David and the established church.

Amiel

Biblical role: One who brought supplies to David in exile.

Political meaning: Represents Edward Seymour, Speaker of the House of Commons.

Description: Works inside the government to protect the king's interests.

Adriel

Biblical role: Son-in-law of Saul.

Political meaning: Represents John Sheffield, 3rd Earl of Mulgrave.

Description: A supporter of Dryden who stands against Monmouth and stays loyal to Charles.

Caleb

Biblical role: Faithful follower of Moses who entered the Promised Land.

Political meaning: Represents Arthur Capel, Earl of Essex.

Description: A once-loyal man, now portrayed as weak and easily used in the rebellion.

Balaam

Biblical role: A prophet who went against God's command.

Political meaning: Represents Theophilus Hastings.

Description: A selfish leader who ignored the truth and chose profit and personal gain.

Nadab

Biblical role: Son of Aaron, who made religious mistakes.

Political meaning: Represents William, Lord Howard of Esrick, a Puritan preacher.

Description: A religious extremist who supported rebellion in the name of purity and reform.

Jonas (Jonah)

Biblical role: Prophet who tried to escape God's call.

Political meaning: Represents Sir William Jones, attorney general.

Description: A government official who supported the Exclusion Bill and helped start early actions against Catholics.

Agag

Biblical role: King of the Amalekites spared by Saul.

Political meaning: Represents Lord Stafford, a Catholic falsely accused by Titus Oates.

Description: A symbol of Dryden's sympathy toward some wrongly accused Catholics.

Issachar

Biblical role: One of Jacob's sons, described as greedy.

Political meaning: Represents Thomas Thynne, a friend of Monmouth.

Description: Rich and selfish, he supports rebellion for his own gain.

Key Notes

Exclusion Crisis: The Exclusion Crisis happened in England between 1679 and 1681. It was a political conflict about who would become the next king after Charles II.

Charles II had no legal children. His younger brother James, Duke of York, was the next in line. But James was a Catholic, and many people in England feared that a Catholic king would destroy their Protestant religion and freedom.

So, some members of Parliament wanted to exclude James from becoming king. This idea was called the Exclusion Bill. It led to big arguments between two groups:

- **The Whigs:** They supported the Exclusion Bill and wanted to stop James.
- **The Tories:** They supported the king and the legal line of succession.

In the end, the Exclusion Bill was rejected in the House of Lords in 1681. However, the crisis led to England becoming politically divided. It also gave Dryden the idea to write his poem "Absalom and Achitophel," in which he supported Charles II and attacked the rebels.

Popish Plot: The Popish Plot was a false Catholic conspiracy that shocked England in 1678. It was created by a man named Titus Oates.

He claimed that the Catholics planned to kill King Charles II, take over the government, and make England a Catholic country again. People were already afraid of Catholics, so many believed the lie. Because of this plot:

- Many innocent Catholics were arrested or killed.
- The public became more afraid of James, the king's Catholic brother.
- It increased support for the Exclusion Bill.

Later, it was proved that the Popish Plot was completely false. But the damage was already done. It created fear, division, and helped start the Exclusion Crisis. Dryden refers to this event in "Absalom and Achitophel" to show how false plots can lead to real political danger.