

Absalom Rejects Ahithophel's Counsel; David Prepares for Battle

2 Samuel 17

2 Samuel 17 - *"Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. ² I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king. ³ Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace." ⁴ And the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.*

⁵ *Then Absalom said, "Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he says too." ⁶ And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom spoke to him, saying, "Ahithophel has spoken in this manner. Shall we do as he says? If not, speak up."*

⁷ *So Hushai said to Absalom: "The advice that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time. ⁸ For," said Hushai, "you know your father and his men, that they are mighty men, and they are enraged in their minds, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field; and your father is a man of war, and will not camp with the people. ⁹ Surely by now he is hidden in some pit, or in some other place. And it will be, when some of them are overthrown at the first, that whoever hears it will say, 'There is a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.' ¹⁰ And even he who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt completely. For all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and those who are with him are valiant men. ¹¹ Therefore I advise that all Israel be fully gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, like the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. ¹² So we will come upon him in some place where he may be found, and we will fall on him as the dew falls on the ground. And of him and all the men who are with him there shall not be left so much as one. ¹³ Moreover, if he has withdrawn into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city; and we will pull it into the river, until there is not one small stone found there."*

¹⁴ *So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel." For the LORD had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring disaster on Absalom.*

¹⁵ *Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, "Thus and so Ahithophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and so I have advised. ¹⁶ Now therefore, send quickly and tell David, saying, 'Do not spend this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily cross over, lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up.'" ¹⁷ Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed at En Rogel, for they dared not be seen coming into the city; so a female servant would come and tell them, and they would go and tell King David. ¹⁸ Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom. But both of them went away quickly and came to a man's house in Bahurim, who had a well in his court; and they went down into it. ¹⁹ Then the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground grain on it; and the thing was not known. ²⁰ And when Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" So the woman said to them, "They have gone over the water brook." And when they had searched and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem*

.²¹ Now it came to pass, after they had departed, that they came up out of the well and went and told King David, and said to David, "Arise and cross over the water quickly. For thus has Ahithophel advised against you."²² So David and all the people who were with him arose and crossed over the Jordan. By morning light not one of them was left who had not gone over the Jordan.

²³ Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb.

²⁴ Then David went to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed over the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.²⁵ And Absalom made Amasa captain of the army instead of Joab. This Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Jithra, an Israelite, who had gone in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother.²⁶ So Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead.

²⁷ Now it happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the people of Ammon, Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim,²⁸ brought beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds,²⁹ honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd, for David and the people who were with him to eat. For they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."

Background Notes

Absalom entered Jerusalem and set himself up as king in the capital city (2Samuel 16). Meanwhile, David and his faithful company made their way through the Judean wilderness to the Jordan Valley where they rested briefly at the Jordan River before crossing over to the east. Back in Jerusalem, Ahithophel, the counselor who had betrayed David, was ready to counsel Absalom on the best way to defeat David and eliminate any possibility of David's return to the throne. But Hushai, David's faithful spy, was also in Jerusalem. Hushai was ready to counsel Absalom, buy time for David, and send word of Absalom's plans to David.

In 2 Samuel 17, Ahithophel counseled Absalom to immediately pursue David and defeat him and his company while they were still exhausted, but Hushai dared to say that Ahithophel's counsel was bad advice. "Absalom," said Hushai, "you should know that David is a man of war and could easily outwit a superior force in the Judean wilderness, especially at a time like this. What you should do to ensure victory is to wait until you can gather a vast army from all of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and surround David so that there is no possibility of any escape – whether it is in a field or in a city."

Absalom favored Hushai's counsel, and when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was rejected, he went home and hung himself (v23). Here Ahithophel is a picture of Judas Iscariot. Ahithophel betrayed King David and took his own life by hanging, so Judas betrayed our Lord the King and ended his life by hanging himself.

Doctrinal Points

1. God has ways to thwart the counsel of the wicked.

God was at work in Absalom's rejection of Ahithophel's counsel in favor of Hushai's counsel, and in the fact that Hushai was able to get word to David of Absalom's plans. God's hand was at work in protecting the messengers, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, from being captured. God provided just the right woman and courtyard and well for hiding and escaping detection. All of this was part of God's sovereign plan to thwart the plans of wicked Absalom.

Can God still thwart the counsel of the wicked? Of course He can! Listen to the words of Psalm 64, a Psalm of David:

*"Hear my voice, O God, in my meditation;
Preserve my life from fear of the enemy.
2 Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
From the rebellion of the workers of iniquity,
3 Who sharpen their tongue like a sword,
And bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words,
4 That they may shoot in secret at the blameless;
Suddenly they shoot at him and do not fear.*

*5 They encourage themselves in an evil matter;
They talk of laying snares secretly;
They say, "Who will see them?"
6 They devise iniquities:
"We have perfected a shrewd scheme."
Both the inward thought and the heart of man are deep.*

*7 But God shall shoot at them with an arrow;
Suddenly they shall be wounded.
8 So He will make them stumble over their own tongue;
All who see them shall flee away.
9 All men shall fear,
And shall declare the work of God;
For they shall wisely consider His doing.*

*10 The righteous shall be glad in the LORD, and trust in Him.
And all the upright in heart shall glory."*

As God answered David's prayer and thwarted the counsel of Ahithophel, so God can answer our prayers and overthrow the plans of the opposition of those who would try to undermine us. This is especially true if you're a believer with an outspoken testimony. Those who are opposed to the Lord and His Word will try to silence us, but remember that God has ways to thwart the counsel of the wicked!

2. God has ways to prepare the path of the righteous.

Verses 27-29: *Now it happened, when David had come to Mahanaim, that... people... brought beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd, for David and the people who were with him to eat. For they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."*

God has ways to prepare the path of the righteous. When we use the word "righteous" in connection with David, we don't mean that David was righteous in all his doings. No, far from it! In fact, David's desperate flight from Jerusalem and escape across the Jordan River was all part of God's discipline for David's sins of adultery and murder (2 Samuel 12). But David had confessed his sin, and his heart was now right before the Lord. Absalom was definitely in the wrong for usurping the throne of Israel.

Notice how God prepared the way for David. He not only provided David with information about Absalom's plans through Jonathan and Ahimaaz, but He also provided David and his faithful company with supplies - even beds (v28)! David was now on the east side of the Jordan River at Mahanaim. Mahanaim was the capital of Israel for a short time after King Saul's death, under his son Ishbosheth, so it must have been a reasonably well-fortified city. It was certainly part of God's care and provision for David at this point.

The fact that God moved the hearts of the men in verse 27, including the leader of the Ammonites, to support David rather than Absalom was also part of God's provision for David. Absalom and his army had also crossed over the Jordan and was camped in Gilead, but the Lord had given time, rest, supplies, and a fortified city for David and his faithful company to plan and prepare for the coming battle. God has ways to prepare the path of the righteous. The Lord said in Matthew 6:33 *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* In the context, "all these things" includes all that we need. God has ways to prepare the path of the righteous.

Practical Application

Don't stop praying just because God has ordained everything.

"So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel." For the LORD had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring disaster on Absalom." This was God's answer to David's prayer back in 2 Samuel 15:31 *"Then someone told David, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!"*

Now wait a minute! If God had already "planned" or "ordained" to thwart the counsel of Ahithophel, why did David need to pray? Answer: Because God answers prayer! This is a mystery for sure – but it is not a contradiction, because the Bible teaches both. Ephesians 1:11 says *"In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will..."* And yet, in Jeremiah 33:3 the Lord says, *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."* It's beyond our finite comprehension to understand how God works our prayer and His preordained plan together, but both are true. So, don't stop praying just because God has ordained everything!