

2 Samuel 17
March 17, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: How can we discern when to follow certain advice or reject it? [Let people engage]

Transition: You will recall that Ahithophel was the former counselor to David, who was disloyal to him and sided with Absalom. You will also recall that David “planted” Hushai as “boots on the ground” or a “spy” to protect David. So today’s storyline is about Absalom seeking the advice of Ahithophel, then getting a second opinion from Hushai regarding his desire to attack his father, David and his army. Ahithophel’s advice might be characterized as “Strike while the iron’s hot,” while Hushai’s advice might be characterized as “Look before you leap.” Let’s see how Absalom evaluates the two pieces of advice he received and the result that followed. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

17 Ahithophel said to Absalom, “I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. ²I would attack him while he is weary and weak. I would strike him with terror, and then all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only the king ³ and bring all the people back to you. The death of the man you seek will mean the return of all; all the people will be unharmed.” ⁴This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

⁵But Absalom said, “Summon also Hushai the Arkite, so we can hear what he has to say.” ⁶When Hushai came to him, Absalom said, “Ahithophel has given this advice. Should we do what he says? If not, give us your opinion.”

⁷Hushai replied to Absalom, “The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time. ⁸You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops. ⁹Even now, he is hidden in a cave or some other place. If he should attack your troops first, whoever hears about it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.’ ¹⁰Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave.

¹¹“So I advise you: Let all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba—as numerous as the sand on the seashore—be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle. ¹²Then we will attack him wherever he may be found, and we will fall on him as dew settles on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. ¹³If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley until not even a piece of it can be found.”

¹⁴Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel.” For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.

¹⁵Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, “Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the elders of Israel to do such and such, but I have advised them to do so and so. ¹⁶Now send a message immediately and tell David, ‘Do not spend the night at the fords in the desert; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up.’ ”

¹⁷ Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel. A servant girl was to go and inform them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they could not risk being seen entering the city. ¹⁸ But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So the two of them left quickly and went to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. ¹⁹ His wife took a covering and spread it out over the opening of the well and scattered grain over it. No one knew anything about it.

²⁰ When Absalom's men came to the woman at the house, they asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"

The woman answered them, "They crossed over the brook." The men searched but found no one, so they returned to Jerusalem.

²¹ After the men had gone, the two climbed out of the well and went to inform King David. They said to him, "Set out and cross the river at once; Ahithophel has advised such and such against you." ²² So David and all the people with him set out and crossed the Jordan. By daybreak, no one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

²³ When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

²⁴ David went to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. ²⁵ Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Jether, an Israelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruah the mother of Joab. ²⁶ The Israelites and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.

²⁷ When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim ²⁸ brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, ²⁹ honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, "The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert."

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about God in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

There is no question that Ahithophel's plan was the better of the two, but God in His providence saw to it that Absalom rejected it. Note Hushai's psychological approach to suggesting that Absalom himself lead the army in battle. This appealed to the man's vanity, but that vanity only led ultimately to his death.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (2 Sam 17)*. Victor Books.

III. The Reckoning of the Lord (17)

God permitted this rebellion as a part of the price David was to pay for the sins he committed in connection with Uriah and Bathsheba. God also overruled the events so as to purge David's kingdom and separate the loyal from the disloyal. A day of reckoning finally arrived. Sometimes God's judgments fall swiftly, while at other times He waits and acts slowly.

A. Ahithophel dies (chap. 17).

There is no question that Ahithophel's plan was the better of the two, but God saw to it that Absalom rejected it. Note Hushai's psychological approach to suggesting that Absalom himself lead the army in battle. This appealed to the man's vanity, but, alas, that vanity only led ultimately to his death. When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was rejected, he took his own life. This is another parallel with Christ's experience in the NT, for Judas went out and hanged himself.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). *2 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 472-474) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

3. ABSALOM'S PURSUIT OF DAVID (CHAP. 17)

17:1–14. The second bit of advice which **Ahithophel** gave **Absalom** was that he, Ahithophel, should be delegated to pursue **David** in order to kill him and **return** everyone else. With their king dead his followers would certainly capitulate and return to Jerusalem peacefully.

Eager for a second opinion, **Absalom** called for **Hushai** and asked him if Ahithophel's counsel was wise. **Hushai** told **Absalom** that David and his men, far from being exhausted, would be more courageous and fearsome than ever. Like a **wild bear** whose **cubs** have been stolen, the king, Hushai said, would be enraged over the loss of his kingdom. To move against him now would be foolish. Initial casualties, which were certain to occur, would cause Absalom's men to despair of victory and thus his cause would be defeated. It would be far better, Hushai continued, for Absalom to wait until he could amass a huge army and then **attack**. David and his host could then be destroyed even if it meant dragging their place of refuge into **the Valley**. **Absalom** was at once struck with Hushai's sagacity and decided to follow his instruction and reject **that of Ahithophel**. Obviously this was the Lord's doing, to **frustrate** Ahithophel's **advice** and **bring disaster on Absalom**.

17:15–23. **Hushai** immediately communicated Ahithophel's advice and his own to **Zadok and Abiathar**, who then sent their sons **Jonathan and Ahimaaz** from **En Rogel** (south of Jerusalem; see the map "Jerusalem in the Time of the Kings," near 1 Kings 9:15) to **David** with the message that he must hasten his flight. But the young men were spotted and their errand was reported to **Absalom**. Thanks to the boldness and kindness of a **woman** in the village of **Bahurim** east of the Mount of Olives (cf. 16:5), they escaped detection by hiding in a dry **well**. Then they made their way to **David**, who by now was at **the Jordan**. Without delay **David** and

his followers **crossed the** river where they sought refuge at Mahanaim. Back at Jerusalem, **Ahithophel**, crushed because his counsel to Absalom had been spurned, committed suicide **in his hometown** by hanging himself.

17:24–29. Probably **David** chose to go **to Mahanaim** because it was fortified and also had served as the capital of Israel under Ish-Bosheth (2:8). There could well have been a residue of good feeling there toward **David** because of David’s past favors to Saul’s family, especially to Mephibosheth (9:10–13). While he was there, his meager provisions of food and supplies were augmented by **Shobi son of Nahash** (and brother of Hanun, 10:1), **Makir of Lo Debar** (see comments on 9:4), and **Barzillai of Rogelim**, 25 miles north of Mahanaim. They brought such items as **bedding ... bowls ... pottery**, and extensive food supplies including **wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey, curds, and sheep, and cheese**. These three men were chieftains tributary to **David**, bound to him by ties of loyalty and obligation. (Barzillai was old and wealthy, 19:32.) Besides, they may have preferred to cast their lot with David, a known quantity, as opposed to Absalom, an unknown.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 129). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Ahithophel’s Advice (17:1–29). Hushai’s task was a formidable one. Ahithophel advised Absalom to attack David while his troops were in disarray. This time Absalom heard the second opinion of Hushai, who argued that such a tactic would fail because of David’s wily experience in warfare. Absalom postponed his attack, which meant that David had the opportunity to withdraw. The Lord “determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel” and thereby doomed Absalom (see 15:34). The outcome of the war was decided before the first blow was struck.

Absalom’s strategy was relayed to David’s camp at the river fords through Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the sons of Zadok and Abiathar (see 15:35–36). Meanwhile, the wicked Ahithophel took his own life because he knew that Hushai’s plan meant the end of Absalom’s kingdom (15:15–23).

David in exile set up his provisional base in Mahanaim across the Jordan (see 2:8). Absalom established his military command by giving Amasa, Joab’s relative, charge of the army. While Absalom organized for battle, David’s friends—Shobi, Makir, and Barzilli—refreshed his fatigued army.

Tatum, S. L. (1972). 2 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (p. 189). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

David Is Saved by His Underground (2 Sam. 17:1–29)

The passage—Ahithophel, Absalom’s advisor, pointed out that it was David, and David alone who was the problem in Israel. He suggested gathering twelve thousand men to set out to kill David. He said all of Israel would return to Jerusalem like a bride for Absalom. At first Absalom thought the idea was a good one.

Absalom checked with Hushai. He said Ahithophel’s advice was not good. He spoke of David’s wisdom. He said he was angry and dangerous, like a bear robbed of her cubs. He was too wise to be caught with his soldiers, but would be well hidden. Hushai advised Absalom to

wait until all Israel was behind him and then for him to go into the battle personally as the leader. Absalom accepted the advice of Hushai.

Verse 14 explains that God was watching over David. “For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom.”

How the underground worked to keep David informed is shown in verses 15–20. Hushai worked through Zadok and Abiathar, the priests. They sent messages by a maidservant to David. On one occasion they were almost caught, but were saved when a woman hid them in a well and covered it and spread grain over it to disguise their whereabouts.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

© 2024 Lee Ann Penick