

2 Samuel 17 - Absalom's Pursuit of David; Ahithophel's Suicide; Hushai's Warns David of Absalom's Plans

III. David's foes (13:1—20:26)

(1) Turmoil in David's immediate family (13:1—18:33)

(B) Absalom's rebellion (14:1—18:33)

(c) Absalom's reign (16:15—17:29)

2 Samuel 17

(c) Absalom's reign (16:15—17:29)

1 Furthermore, Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Please let me choose twelve thousand men and let me set out and pursue David tonight.

1 Furthermore, Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Please let me choose 12,000 men that I may arise and pursue David tonight.

1 "Give me 12,000 men! I'll leave tonight and pursue David," Ahithophel advised Absalom.

1 Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night:

- Absalom also advised Absalom in a strategy to murder his father

2 And I will attack him while he is weary and exhausted and startle him, so that all the people who are with him will flee. Then I will strike and kill the king *when he is alone*,

2 I will come upon him while he is weary and exhausted and terrify him, so that all the people who are with him will flee. Then I will strike down the king alone,

2 "I'll catch him while he is still tired and weak. I'll frighten him so all his people with him desert him. But I'll only kill the king.

2 And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only:

3 and I will bring all the people back to you. The return of everyone depends on the man whom you are seeking; *then* all the people will be at peace."

3 and I will bring back all the people to you. The return of everyone depends on the man you seek; *then* all the people will be at peace."

3 Then I'll bring everybody else back to you. When the man you're looking for is dead, all the rest of the people will return quietly."

3 And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace.

- 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

— Apparently Ahithophel's plan was to quickly surround the forces of David and create such a panic that all would flee, making it possible to slay only David. This would make it easier to win over the remnant of David's cohorts.

4 And the plan pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

4 So the plan pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

4 Even though this plan seemed like a good idea to Absalom and to all of the elders of Israel,

4 And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel.

- Absalom thought the advice of Ahithophel was excellent

— If David had been attacked that very night, he would have been but twelve or fifteen miles from the capital, without food and ammunition, and with his forces in a serious state of disorganization

— The rebellion of Absalom would have secured its objective and David would have met with certain defeat

5 Nevertheless, Absalom said, "Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let's hear what he has to say."

5 Then Absalom said, "Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say."

5 Absalom replied, "Call in Hushai the Archite so I can hear what he has to say, too!"

5 Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith.

- Eager for a second opinion, Absalom called for Hushai and asked him if Ahithophel's counsel was wise

6 When Hushai had come to Absalom, Absalom said to him, "Ahithophel has proposed this plan. Should we carry out his plan? If not, say so yourself."

6 When Hushai had come to Absalom, Absalom said to him, "Ahithophel has spoken thus. Shall we carry out his plan? If not, you speak."

6 When Hushai approached Absalom, Absalom asked him, "Here's what Ahithophel had to advise. Should we do what he says? Or if not, say so!"

6 And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not; speak thou.

7 So Hushai said to Absalom, "This time the advice that Ahithophel has given is not good."

7 So Hushai said to Absalom, "This time the advice that Ahithophel has given is not good."

7 "Ahithophel's advice is not best at this time," Hushai suggested to Absalom.

7 And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time.

8 Then Hushai said, "You yourself know your father and his men, that they are warriors and they are fierce, like a bear deprived of her cubs in the field. And your father is an expert in warfare, and he will not spend the night with the people.

8 Moreover, Hushai said, "You know your father and his men, that they are mighty men and they are fierce, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. And your father is an expert in warfare, and will not spend the night with the people.

8 "You know how strong your father and his men are. They're as mad as a bear robbed of her cubs! Furthermore, your father is a skilled warrior. He won't stay with his army at night.

8 For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people.

- Hushai told Absalom that David and his men, far from being exhausted, would be more courageous and fearsome than ever

— Hushai's argument was that David's men would fight like a cornered bear: like a wild bear whose cubs have been stolen, the king would be enraged over the loss of his kingdom. To move against him now would be foolish.

9 Behold, he has now hidden himself in one of the ravines, or in another place; and it will be that when he falls on them at the first *attack*, whoever hears *it* will say, 'There has been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom!'

9 Behold, he has now hidden himself in one of the caves or in another place; and it will be when he falls on them at the first attack, that whoever hears *it* will say, 'There has been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.'

9 Look! He's probably already hiding in a cave or someplace like that. If the first attack fails, people will hear about it and think, 'Absalom's army is losing!'

9 Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom.

- Hushai warned that if only a small group of Absalom's men pursued David, and David defeated them, the news would spread that Absalom had lost the battle; the people would then side with David.

10 And even the one who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will completely despair; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and those who are with him are valiant men.

10 And even the one who is valiant, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will completely lose heart; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man and those who are with him are valiant men.

10 Then even men who would otherwise be as brave as lions will be scared, because every Israeli knows your father is a mighty man, and they know his men are valiant!

10 And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men.

- Initial casualties, which were certain to occur, would cause Absalom's men to despair of victory and thus his cause would be defeated

11 But I advise that all Israel be fully gathered to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, like the sand that is by the sea in abundance; and that you personally go into battle.

11 But I counsel that all Israel be surely gathered to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea in abundance, and that you personally go into battle.

11 So here's my advice: Muster everybody from one end of the country to the other! You'll have an army in number like the sand on the seashore! Then you'll go into battle!

11 Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person.

- It would be far better, Hushai continued, for Absalom to wait until he could amass a huge army and then attack

12 Then we will come to him in one of the places where he can be found, and we will **fall on him** just as the dew falls on the ground; and of him and of all the men who are with him, not even one will be left.

12 So we shall come to him in one of the places where he can be found, and we will fall on him as the dew falls on the ground; and of him and of all the men who are with him, not even one will be left.

12 We'll go find David wherever he's hiding. We'll fall on him like dew on the ground! We'll kill him and all of his men, and we won't leave even one man alive!

12 So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one.

- "...fall on him" - used of swarms of locusts (Ex 10:14) or flies and bees settling down (Is 7:18-19)

13 And if he withdraws into a city, then all Israel shall **bring ropes** to that city, and **we will drag it into the valley** until not even a pebble is found there."

13 If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it into the valley until not even a small stone is found there."

13 If he escapes into a city, we'll bring ropes to that city and tear it down! We won't leave a single stone left in the valley!"

13 Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there.

- "...bring ropes" - in besieging a town, hooks or cranes were often thrown upon the walls or turrets, by which, with ropes attached to them, the besiegers, uniting all their force, pulled down the fortifications in a mass of ruins

- "...we will drag it into the valley" - Hushai said that the city in which David might hide would be completely destroyed

— Most cities were built on hills, and the penalty of a conquered city was to be treated as is expressed in the words of Micah 1:6: "I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley."

— David and his host could then be destroyed even if it meant dragging their place of refuge into the valley

Ahithophel's advice was better, so why would Absalom choose to heed Hushai? David had prayed that God would "turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness" (15:31). God now answered that prayer.

14 Then 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 ordained to foil the good advice of Ahithophel, in order for the LORD to bring disaster on Absalom.

14 Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel." For the LORD had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring calamity on Absalom.

14 Absalom and all of the Israelis replied, "The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than Ahithophel's!"

But the LORD had planned to circumvent the sound advice of Ahithophel so the LORD could bring Absalom to destruction.

14 And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.

- 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, who was out to kill the Lord's anointed

15 Then Hushai said to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, "This is what Ahithophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel *to do*, and this is what I have advised.

15 Then Hushai said to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, "This is what Ahithophel counseled Absalom and the elders of Israel, and this is what I have counseled.

15 So Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, what Ahithophel had suggested to Absalom and the elders of Israel. He also reported what he himself had proposed. Hushai said,

15 Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counselled.

16 Now then, send *a messenger* quickly and tell David, saying, 'Do not spend the night at the river crossing places of the wilderness, but by all means cross over, or else the king and all the people who are with him will be destroyed.'

16 Now therefore, send quickly and tell David, saying, 'Do not spend the night at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means cross over, or else the king and all the people who are with him will be destroyed.'

16 "Quick! Get word to David! Tell him not to spend the night at the crossings that lead to the desert. Instead, he must cross the Jordan River immediately. That way, if he crosses the river, the king and his entourage will survive."

16 Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him.

- 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) to David with the message that he must hasten his flight

17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En-rogel, and **a female servant** would go and inform them, and they would go and inform King David, for they could not allow themselves to be seen entering the city.

17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En-rogel, and a maidservant would go and tell them, and they would go and tell King David, for they could not be seen entering the

city.

17 Meanwhile, since they could not risk being seen entering the city, Jonathan and Ahimaaz had been waiting at En-rogel, where a young servant woman was to go to inform them and they would then go brief King David.

17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by Enrogel; for they might not be seen to come into the city: and a wench went and told them; and they went and told king David.

- "...a female servant" - a maidservant; the definite article in the Hebrew may denote simply the maid chosen for the task, or it may denote a particular servant—taken from the household of one of the priests—who could be entrusted with the mission

— She could go to the fountain for water without exciting suspicion, since the drawing of water was carried on mainly by women

18 But a boy did see them, and he told Absalom; so the two of them left quickly and came to the house of a man in Bahurim, who had a well in his courtyard, and they went down into it.

18 But a lad did see them and told Absalom; so the two of them departed quickly and came to the house of a man in Bahurim, who had a well in his courtyard, and they went down into it.

18 But a young man observed Jonathan and Ahimaaz and informed Absalom, so they left in a hurry, arrived at the home of a man who lived at Bahurim, and hid inside a well that was in his courtyard.

18 Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court; whither they went down.

- The young men were spotted and their errand was reported to Absalom

19 And the woman took a cover and spread it over the well's mouth and scattered **barley meal** on it, so that nothing was known.

19 And the woman took a covering and spread it over the well's mouth and scattered grain on it, so that nothing was known.

19 The man's wife grabbed a sheet, covered the mouth of the well with it, and spread some dried grain over it. As a result, nobody could tell it was a hiding place.

19 And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known.

- "...barley meal" - this was bruised or husked wheat or barley, which the people prepared by pounding it in a mortar

— 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

20 Then Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house and said, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" And the woman said to them, "They have crossed the brook of water." And when they searched and did not find *them*, they returned to Jerusalem.

20 Then Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house and said, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" And the woman said to them, "They have crossed the brook of water." And when they searched and could not find *them*, they returned to Jerusalem.

20 When Absalom's servants approached the woman of the house, they asked her, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" "They've already crossed the brook," the woman answered. So Absalom's servants went away in search of Jonathan and Ahimaaz, but they couldn't find them, so they returned to Jerusalem.

20 And when Absalom's servants came to the woman to the house, they said, Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan? And the woman said unto them, They be gone over the brook of water. And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.

21 It came about after they had departed, that they came up out of the well and went and reported to King David; and they said to David, "Set out and cross over the water quickly, because this is what Ahithophel has advised against you."

21 It came about after they had departed that they came up out of the well and went and told King David; and they said to David, "Arise and cross over the water quickly for thus Ahithophel has counseled against you."

21 A little while later, the men crawled up out of the well and went off to talk to King David. They told David, "Get up! Cross the water quickly, because this is what Ahithophel advised about you..."

21 And it came to pass, after they were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David, and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counselled against you.

- After the coast was clear, they made their way to David, who by now was at the Jordan

22 Then David and all the people who *were* with him set out and crossed the Jordan; by dawn not even one remained who had not crossed the Jordan.

22 Then David and all the people who *were* with him arose and crossed the Jordan; and by dawn not even one remained who had not crossed the Jordan.

22 So David got up and all of his entourage crossed the Jordan River. Everyone had crossed the Jordan River by dawn's first light.

22 Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan.

- Without delay David and his followers crossed the river where they sought refuge at Mahanaim

23 Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled *his* donkey and set out and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and hanged himself; so he died and was buried in his father's grave.

23 Now when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled *his* donkey and arose and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order, and strangled himself; thus he died and was buried in the grave of his father.

23 Meanwhile, when Ahithophel observed that his counsel was not being acted upon, he saddled his donkey, got up, and left for his hometown. Leaving behind a set of orders for his household, he hanged himself. After his death he was buried in his father's tomb.

23 And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

- Back at Jerusalem, Ahithophel, crushed because his counsel to Absalom had been spurned, committed suicide in his hometown by hanging himself

— Ahithophel had worked himself into a difficult predicament: if Absalom had been victorious, Ahithophel would have had to give way to Hushai; if David had been victorious, Ahithophel would have been called to account for his advice concerning the proposed capture of David.

— Perhaps he knew Absalom's defeat would come, and chose to kill himself over counseling surrender, repentance, seeking mercy, or accepting justice

It may be noted that the suicide of Ahithophel did not exclude him from regular burial in the family sepulchre. The care with which Ahithophel prepared himself and his family and the burial in the family plot suggest that this suicide was not frowned upon. The number of suicides in the Bible is extremely few (see note on 1 Sam 31:5).

24 Then David came to **Mahanaim**. And Absalom crossed the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.

24 Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.

24 Later, David arrived at Mahanaim. Absalom and all of the Israelis who supported him crossed the Jordan River.

24 Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.

- While the tribal allotments in ancient Israel included land on both sides of the Jordan River, there was always an emotional understanding that the "real" land of Israel was west

of the Jordan

— Later, David's enemies would charge him for fleeing the land (19:9)

- "...Mahanaim" - on the Jabbok River, east of the Jordan; it had been Ish-bosheth's capital (2:8)

- Probably David chose to go to Mahanaim because it was fortified; there could have also been a residue of good feeling there toward David because of his past favors to Saul's family, especially to Mephibosheth (9:10-13)

— This city was significant in patriarchal days and was the scene of one of Jacob's stops on his return to Palestine to meet with his brother Esau

— It was here that Jacob saw in a vision the divine messengers encircling and protecting his camp, and he named it Mahanaim (Twin Camps)

25 Absalom put Amasa in command of the army in place of Joab. Now Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Ithra the Israelite, who had relations with Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother.

25 Absalom set Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Now Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Ithra the Israelite, who went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother.

25 Absalom had installed Amasa in place of Joab over the army. (Amasa was the son of a man named Jether the Ishmaelite. His mother was Abigail, a daughter of Nahash and a sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother.)

25 And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother.

- Amasa was David's half-nephew, the same relation to David as Joab

— Amasa was Absalom's cousin, and though himself an Israelite, his father was an Ishmaelite (1 Chr 2:17)

26 And Israel and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.

26 And Israel and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.

26 Absalom and the Israelis with him camped in the territory of Gilead.

26 So Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead.

27 Now when David had come to Mahanaim, **Shobi** the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, **Machir** the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and **Barzillai** the Gileadite from Rogelim,

27 Now when David had come to Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from

Rogelim,

27 When David arrived at Mahanaim, Shobi (Nahash's son from the Ammonite town of Rabbah), Makir (Ammiel's son from Lo-debar), and Barzillai (from Rogelim in Gilead) were already there.

27 And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim,

- "...Shobi" - must have been a brother of Hanun. Disapproving, probably, of that young king's outrage upon the Israelite ambassadors, he had been made governor of Ammon by David on the conquest of that country

- "...Machir" - son of Ammiel, dwelling in Lo-debar (9:4-5), a wealthy landowner who protected Mephibosheth, until assured of the friendly intentions of David

— He may have been a brother of Bathsheba as Ammiel was the father of Bathsheba

- "...Barzillai" - a Gileadite of Rogelim (25 miles north of Mahanaim) conducted David over Jordan, but being an old man of 80 years of age, he declined David's invitation to come to live in the capital, and instead sent his son Chimham (19:31-39)

— David, before his death, charged Solomon to "show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai" (1 Kings 2:7)

28 brought beds, basins, pottery, wheat, barley, flour, roasted *grain*, beans, lentils, roasted *seeds*,

28 brought beds, basins, pottery, wheat, barley, flour, parched *grain*, beans, lentils, parched *seeds*,

28 They brought along bedding, bowls, clay basins, wheat, barley, flour, roasted grains, beans, peas,

28 Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse,

29 honey, 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 exhausted and thirsty in the wilderness."

29 honey, curds, sheep, and cheese of the herd, for David and for the people who *were* with him, to eat; for they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."

29 honey, cheeses, sheep, and cheese made from cow's milk for David and his entourage because they had been reasoning, "The people are hungry, tired, and thirsty there in the wilderness."

29 And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

- Shobi, Machir and Barzillai demonstrate characteristics of true friends: they initiated help for David, and supplied him abundantly with his needs and wants