

1  **IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELORS**

2 Samuel 16-17

2  **WARRIORS & POETS**

- A verse-by-verse study through the united kingdom period of Israel, and the lives of its three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon.
- David is on the run from his son Absalom, who has spent the last several years undermining David's rule, culminating in an overwhelming *coup d'état*.
- It is part of God's judgment upon David for his sin with Bathsheba that someone will take his own wives from him in a very public fashion, just as he took Uriah's wife in a private way.

3  **HUSHAI COMES TO ABSALOM**

- *Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. And when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"* (2 Samuel 16:15-16)

4  **HUSHAI COMES TO ABSALOM**

- *And Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, for whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you."* (2 Samuel 16:17-19)

5  **DOUBLETALK**

- Hushai's entire conversation with Absalom is a study in double entendre. He comes to Absalom proclaiming "long live the king!" He leaves it completely ambiguous as to which king he is cheering for – David or Absalom.
- Absalom is reasonably suspicious and questions Hushai's loyalty. Hushai responds that he will stay with the one whom "the LORD... and the people of Israel... have chosen."
- He reiterates: He will serve Absalom "...as I have served your father." But Hushai had served his father as David's "loyal friend" (1 Chronicles 27:33).

6  **AHITHOPHEL'S DANGEROUS COUNSEL**

- *Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give your counsel. What shall we do?" Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.* (2 Samuel 16:20-22)

7  **AHITHOPHEL'S DANGEROUS COUNSEL**

- Ahithophel had a reputation for being one of the very wisest men in the kingdom. People considered hearing the words of Ahithophel to be like hearing the voice of God.
- But Ahithophel's counsel here is not wisdom. It is a counsel of bitter revenge, lending credence to the idea that Ahithophel has some kind of standing grudge against David.
- Although Ahithophel certainly had justifications for why Absalom should do this, they show the foolishness of human wisdom as compared to divine revelation.

8  **AHITHOPHEL'S DANGEROUS COUNSEL**

- David's sin – the one for which he is being judged – is that he took another man's wife in secret.
- Now, Ahithophel is recommending that Absalom take the wives/concubines that David has left to tend the household and violate them in a very public fashion, so that everyone can see David being humiliated.
- From a political perspective, Ahithophel's advice makes a lot of sense. This brazen act would unambiguously demonstrate Absalom's claim to the throne, while at the same time, energizing those who had participated in the coup.

#### 9 **AHITHOPHEL'S DANGEROUS COUNSEL**

- This counsel of punishing adultery with greater adultery is some of the worst advice Ahithophel gives.
- But the penalty for the sin that Absalom has committed is death – a death which will eventually be inflicted by the hand of Joab.
- What Absalom is doing is also part of a very specific judgment pronounced on David by God through Nathan the Prophet:

#### 10 **PROMISED JUDGMENT**

- *Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'* (2 Samuel 12:11-12)

#### 11 **THE COUNSEL OF AHITHOPHEL**

- *Now in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom.* (2 Samuel 16:23)
- Both David and Absalom in their time greatly esteemed the counsel of Ahithophel. He was so wise that at times he seemed to be almost divinely inspired.
- The problem, of course, is that human wisdom – even the greatest of human wisdom – is finite and will ultimately fail.

#### 12 **WISDOM CANNOT SAVE YOU**

- *For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.* (1 Corinthians 1:18-21)

#### 13 **WHO ARE YOU LISTENING TO?**

- Nearly every time David is faced with an important decision, we see him inquiring about the will of God, either through the Aaronic line or through a prophet.
- Nearly every time we see Absalom faced with an important decision, we see him asking counsel of those around him.
- A "multitude of counselors" should never be a substitute for cultivating a relationship with God that enables you to hear the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

14  **DECISIVE ACTION**

- *Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged and throw him into a panic, and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down only the king, and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace." (2 Samuel 17:1-3)*

15  **DECISIVE ACTION**

- In dealing with David militarily, Ahithophel conquers decisive action: they should immediately raise a force and go after David, overtaking him and destroying him by night.
- This is a militarily sound plan. It utilizes the three classic elements of successful ancient warfare: overwhelming force, surprise, and a narrowly focused objective.
- "The day was theirs had there been anyone among them to take it." – Julius Caesar

16  **STRATEGICALLY SOUND**

- Overwhelming force – although twelve thousand men was hardly a large army by typical biblical standards, it easily surpassed the personal bodyguard that David has taken with him out of the city.
- Element of surprise – night attacks were uncommon in the ancient world due to their logistical difficulties, and thus usually unexpected.
- Narrowly focused objective – Ahithophel focuses in on David. Capturing or killing him is the only important thing.

17  **IN THE MULTITUDE OF COUNSELLORS**

- *And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel. Then Absalom said, "Call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say." And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, "Thus has Ahithophel spoken; shall we do as he says? If not, you speak." (2 Samuel 17:4-6)*
- If there is safety in the "multitude of counsellors", it is only true when all of the counsellors are loyal to you.

18  **HUSHAI'S COUNSEL**

- *Then Hushai said to Absalom, "This time the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good." Hushai said, "You know that your father and his men are mighty men, and that they are enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert in war; he will not spend the night with the people. Behold, even now he has hidden himself in one of the pits or in some other place. And as soon as some of the people fall at the first attack, whoever hears it will say, 'There has been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.'" (2 Samuel 17:7-9)*

19  **HUSHAI'S COUNSEL**

- *Then even the valiant man, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and that those who are with him are valiant men. But my counsel is that all Israel be gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, as the sand by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. (2 Samuel 17:10-11)*

20  **HUSHAI'S COUNSEL**

- *So we shall come upon him in some place where he is to be found, and we shall light upon him as the dew falls on the ground, and of him and all the men with him not one will be left. If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we shall drag it into the valley, until not even a pebble is to be found there.*" (2 Samuel 17:12-13)

21  **HUSHAI'S COUNSEL**

- Hushai's speech is masterful in its construction and powerful in its effect:
- It discredits Ahithophel, undermines Absalom's confidence, magnifies his worst fears, and buys David precious time to escape and regroup.
- In the end, it lays the foundation for David's return to Jerusalem.

22  **HUSHAI'S COUNSEL**

- On the face of it, Hushai's counsel seems reasonable – even wise. But it will ultimately lead to Absalom's downfall.
- *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 ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring harm upon Absalom.* (2 Samuel 17:14)

23  **SENDING WORD TO DAVID**

- *Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, "Thus and so did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and so have I counseled. Now therefore send quickly and tell David, 'Do not stay tonight at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means pass over, lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up.'"* (2 Samuel 17:15-16)

24  **SENDING WORD TO DAVID**

- By frustrating Ahithophel's counsel, Hushai had accomplished the first mandate David had given him (15:34).
- To fulfill his royal mission, however, Hushai had to perform one more task—convey to David the intimate details of Absalom's plan of action.
- Hushai gets in touch with Zadok and Abiathar and requests they send word to David of Ahithophel's counsels, just in case Absalom decides to change his mind or Ahithophel decides to take initiative.

25  **A DANGEROUS MISSION**

- *Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at En-rogel. A female servant was to go and tell them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they were not to be seen entering the city. But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So both of them went away quickly and came to the house of a man at Bahurim, who had a well in his courtyard. And they went down into it. And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth and scattered grain on it, and nothing was known of it. When Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" And the woman said to them, "They have gone over the brook of water." And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.* (2 Samuel 17:17-20)

26  **A DANGEROUS MISSION**

- *After they had gone, the men came up out of the well, and went and told King David. They said to David, "Arise, and go quickly over the water, for thus and so has Ahithophel counseled*

*against you." Then David arose, and all the people who were with him, and they crossed the Jordan. By daybreak not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan. (2 Samuel 17:21-22)*

27  **A DANGEROUS MISSION**

- Jonathan and Ahimaaz, sons of Zadok and Abiathar, leave to bring word to David of what has transpired. But someone sees this and reports it to Absalom.
- Right then and there, the whole scheme is dangerously close to being outed.
- The sons of the priest have a hair's breadth escape when they hide in a well. The woman of the house lies to hide them, and they are eventually able to proceed with their mission.

28  **A DANGEROUS MISSION**

- Jonathan and Ahimaaz are able to bring word to David as David had planned, and the whole of David's host crosses to the other side of the river, where they will be safe from night assaults.
- The implication is that the information was communicated to Jonathan and Ahimaaz third or fourth-hand. Thus, even if Absalom did know that David had spies, it does not seem as though any connection was traced back to Hushai.
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29  **AHITHOPHEL'S END**

- *When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order and hanged himself, and he died and was buried in the tomb of his father. (2 Samuel 17:23)*
- Humiliated that no one is taking his counsel, and realizing exactly how this is all going to end, Ahithophel heads home, puts his affairs in order, and hangs himself.
- No amount of human "wisdom" will spare us from the despair that comes with rebellion and disobedience.

30  **AHITHOPHEL'S END**

- In many ways, Ahithophel serves as a type of Judas Iscariot for us in the same way that David serves as a type of Christ.
- Both were close members of their kings' circle of friends and counsellors.
- Both proved ultimately untrustworthy and betrayed their master into the hands of his enemies.
- *And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:5)*
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31  **DAVID COMES TO MAHANAIM**

- *Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. Now Absalom had set Amasa over the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra the Ishmaelite, who had married Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. And Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead. (2 Samuel 17:24-26)*
- Amasa is one of Absalom's cousins and has been set over the head of his forces, which cross the Jordan and array themselves for battle.

32  **DAVID COMES TO MAHANAIM**

- *When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, brought beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds and sheep and cheese from the herd, for David and the people with him to eat, for they said, "The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."* (2 Samuel 17:27-29)

33  **DAVID COMES TO MAHANAIM**

- Shobi, the son of Nahash, had been king of the Ammonites since David had deposed his brother Hanun (Hanun had insulted David's ambassadors and begun a war with Israel). Shobi remained a loyal vassal of David from that day forward.
- When David arrives, his whole host weary from traveling, Shobi brings them critical supplies – even as Absalom's army is bearing down upon them.
- *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.* (Psalms 23:5)

34  **JESUS IS A BETTER KING**

- Jesus is a better king, because while David and Absalom are both betrayed by their counsellors, Jesus is a "wonderful counsellor."
- *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* (Isaiah 9:6)
- Human wisdom, knowledge, and learning will eventually fail you, because it proceeds from humans who will eventually let you down.

35  **JESUS IS A BETTER KING**

- Jesus is a counsellor, and that corresponds to our need for wisdom and guidance.
- But that's not all: His counsel is wonderful. He has better advice for our lives than anyone. It is amazingly and wonderfully different from the advice of the world.
- Do not make an idol of human wisdom (yours, or anyone else's).
- Seek, like David, the face and will of God.