

## How to Pray in Perilous Times

2 Samuel 15:31

Two hundred men of Issachar were among those who followed David when he fled from murderous King Saul. About these men, 1 Chronicles 12:32 says, **“And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do;”** In this urgent hour in American history, there is a great need for us to learn to be like those men of Issachar. We need the discernment and determination that God can give us through His Word. It is now clear that there are well-funded, well-informed and sometimes secret groups at work in our country, seeking its overthrow. The dangers are real. How should we respond? In 2 Samuel 11-18, we find many parallels to the present state of our nation. And in 2 Samuel 15:30-32, we see one of the most important skills that we need to learn. Let us learn to be like David and the men of Issachar who followed him, understanding the times. Let us learn how to pray in perilous times.

**“<sup>30</sup> And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up. <sup>31</sup> And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. <sup>32</sup> And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head:”** (2 Samuel 15:30-32)

By these obvious signs of grief, we can see that God’s people knew that they were in serious trouble. Our own times are causing us grief. What can we learn from this story?

All of us need to learn how to pray in perilous times. Older adults who are listening to this message are watching the freedoms that they fought for beginning to ebb away. For the future of their country, they need to learn how to pray in perilous times. Parents and grandparents need to learn to pray about those who have great influence in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Teens and children must learn how to face the serious challenges ahead of them. They must learn how to pray in perilous times.

### **“Weeping As They Went”**

Verse 30 of our text describes David and his followers ascending the Mount of Olives, **“weeping as they went.”** The Mount of Olives is east and slightly north of the city of David. Why were they weeping? What had caused their eyes to brim up with tears as they climbed the Mount of Olives?

Undoubtedly, David “wept as he went up” because he felt a heavy responsibility for the events described in 2 Samuel chapters 11 through 18. These chapters relate episodes describing the tragic way that people treated other people. But these stories become even darker when you remember that these incidents involved God’s chosen people. You expect pagans to act like pagans. But this part of the human race had known the glories of God’s grace. These were

God's chosen people. Yet these chapters in 2 Samuel read like a modern day soap opera. Think of all the tragic events that provoked such heart-wrenching emotions welling up in King David and his followers who were **"weeping as they went."**

- Leisurely adultery<sup>i</sup>, 11:1-5  
Remember, sin always sends you down a painful way, costs you more than you wanted pay, and keeps you longer than you wanted to stay.
- Murderous, violent cover-up, 11:6-27 (leading to the death of Uriah)
- God's prophet gave careful attention to God's Word with practical, relevant applications to sinful behavior, 12:1-14. This passage includes
  - Emphasis on the Glory of God, 12:14
  - Confession of sin, 12:13 (See *Psalms 32 and 51.*)
  - God's forgiveness of sin, 12:13
- God's chastening hand continued because of sinful behavior, 12:15-23<sup>ii</sup>
- God continued to fulfill His promise by blessing the nation with victories 12:24-31
- None of these blessings changed the fact that God would continue to chasten and correct the house of David, 12:10, 14. (This illustrates the principle of "sowing and reaping.")
- Lust was confused with genuine love, 13:1-2<sup>iii</sup>
- Hypocritical manipulation by a trusted friend, 13:3-5, 32-35<sup>iv</sup>
- Fraud, manipulation, and sexual abuse, 13:4-14
- Intense hatred, rejection and shame, 13:15-19
- Simmering hatred and hostility, masked by indifference, 13:20-22
- A careful plot for murderous revenge, 13:23-29
- Heart-wrenching news, vs. 30-36 (which undoubtedly reminded David of his part in all of this, according to the truth of Nathan's prophecy, 12:10)
- Alienation within the family, 13:37-39
- A contrived reconciliation of the family, without dealing with the real issues, 14:1-33
- Absalom began to manipulate and use national grievances to his own advantage – stealing the hearts of the people. 15:1-6.
- Treasonous conspiracy, disguised as a religious moral obligation, 15:7-12
- This national conspiracy was carefully planned, well advised, and designed to capture the popular attention, 15:12-13
- The news of the conspiracy caused David and many of his loyal followers to flee, 15:14-29.<sup>v</sup>

Is it any wonder that David and his followers were weeping as they went? But what happened next is remarkable for its simplicity and brevity. King David showed us how to pray in perilous times. David was mindful that the Lord was correcting him. But he was also fully aware that God had forgiven him. So rather than wallow in self-pity or self-recrimination, David chose to pray. With the enemy on his heels, this was no time for the sweet song singer of Israel to compose a new psalm. His prayer was brief and went directly to the point.

### **A Prayer for Perilous Times**

<sup>31</sup> And *one* told David, saying, Ahithophel *is* among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.

### **What prompted the prayer? Who was Ahithophel?**

Ahithophel (whose name meant “my brother is folly”) was one of David’s valued counselors. He was a Gilonite – from the city of Giloh which was about 6 miles south of Jerusalem, and slightly west of Bethlehem. (David grew up near Bethlehem.) Even with the conspiracy growing stronger and his enemies on his heels, David stopped to pray about the influence of Ahithophel. Why was this prayer so important?

#### **○ The counsel of Ahithophel was highly valued. 16:23**

*“And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.”*

Apparently, Ahithophel was so well-spoken that listening to him was like listening to the Word of God. Judging by the way that people paid attention, he was very influential. Which “Ahithophels” are you thinking about right now who are very influential in our nation? Which politicians, journalists, attorneys or scientists come to mind? Who is acting in a conspiratorial fashion? Whose counsel do people turn to on a local, state or national level? But perhaps you are thinking much closer to home. Who is influencing your children or grandchildren? Who is like the pied piper<sup>vi</sup> leading your children away from you?

#### **○ The counsel of Ahithophel was very wicked. 16:20-22**

Though he spoke with such authority, he promoted immorality. Doesn’t this sound familiar today? His counsel was designed to enlarge the following of his chosen leader, Absalom. Political advisors like this are alive and well today. They show leaders and candidates how to advance in the polls. They give their advice without regard for morality. In this case, Ahithophel counseled that wickedness could give Absalom a greater popular following.

#### **○ The counsel of Ahithophel was designed to destroy David. 17:1-4**

Ahithophel asked Absalom for twelve thousand men to lead in a “search and destroy mission.” His goal was to kill David and bring his followers back to Absalom. Why did Ahithophel want to destroy David? We can only speculate about his motives, but we have some clues in the Scriptures. According to 2 Samuel 23:34, Ahithophel had a son named “Eliam” (who, along with Uriah the Hittite, was one of David’s mighty men – 2 Samuel 23:8, 39). According to 2 Samuel 11:3, Bathsheba’s father was named “Eliam.” This leads us to the conclusion that Bathsheba may have been Ahithophel’s granddaughter. We can only speculate, but he may have harbored a secret rage against David. Many a man has harbored such a rage when his daughter or granddaughter was abused.

### **The Prayer**

#### **■ O LORD**

Brief though it was, David’s prayer was addressed to the Lord – using the personal name of God. Yes, the Lord was chastening David for his sins. But David knew that he had been forgiven, and that he was “on praying ground.” So, he prayed. He worshiped as he wept. The psalm

writer who had so frequently written theological poems about the LORD, now called out to Him. This kind of prayer (to overturn the counsel of the wicked) can be found frequently in the psalms. For instance, Psalm 33:9-10 **"The LORD brings the counsel of the heathen to naught: [to nothing] he makes the devices of the people of none effect. <sup>11</sup> The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."**

David acted on the basis of the forgiveness that God had promised. And God fulfilled His promise when He sent His Son to this earth. When you consider the horrid sins listed above, you begin to realize the power of God's promise in Matthew 1:21: **"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save his people from their sins."** (For more about this text, [click here](#).) According to Galatians 4:4-6, **"<sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, <sup>5</sup> To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. <sup>6</sup> And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."** God offers us forgiveness based on the horrible death, burial and glorious resurrection of His Son. He redeems those who place their faith in Him. And those who depend upon Him in saving faith can pray crying "Abba, Father!"

#### ■ I PRAY

It would have been so easy for David to have been discouraged and defeated. After all, hadn't the sword come because of his disobedience? Hadn't his leisurely adultery and murderous violence begun the opening chapter in this sad saga? But David knew that God had forgiven him. He knew God's remarkable lovingkindness. And he knew that the Lord alone could bring forth victory over this conspiracy. This brief prayer is similar to Nehemiah's brief prayer in Nehemiah 2:4, **"so I prayed to the God of heaven."** There simply wasn't time for a longer prayer. But God hears and answers brief prayers too. Even when you have made serious mistakes, you can confess your sin to the Lord and act upon the power of that forgiveness. Don't make the foolish mistake of thinking that your children can blame all their bad choices on your mistakes. With the knowledge of your right standing before God, you can rightly respond to situations like this one. And your children and your nation are depending upon you to do so!

#### ■ TURN THE COUNSEL OF AHITHOPHEL INTO FOOLISHNESS

As a seasoned military man, David knew the importance of intelligence and good advice. The moment he heard the name of Ahithophel, David knew there would be trouble. And in a bold, militant strike, David prayed without lifting a finger against his foe. David understood the importance of his mighty men (see the last words of David in 2 Samuel 23, especially verse 8 and following). But David understood the supreme importance of the Mighty God. So he asked the Lord to turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. Perhaps David was thinking about this conspiracy when he wrote, **" . . . fear *was* on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life"** (Psalm 31:13). But though Ahithophel's counsel was like hearing the Word of God, David prayed that God would turn that counsel into foolishness.

To learn more about David's approach, read Psalm 64, especially verses 1-9. And if you will consult Psalm 71:7-13, you can see how another psalmist approached the same situation.

### **God's Answer to the Prayer**

How did God answer this simple prayer of David, who was weeping as he went?

- ✓ God placed Hushai, David's counselor, in a place where he could overturn the counsel of Ahithophel. 2 Samuel 15:32; 16:15-19; 17:5-14
- ✓ God gave David the wisdom to organize his followers, though he was weeping with grief.
- ✓ God placed other men in strategic locations to obtain information and communicate that information to David. 17:15-21
- ✓ God allowed David to escape from the hands of the conspirators. 17:22
- ✓ When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not being followed, he committed suicide. 17:23<sup>vii</sup> This led to the ultimate defeat of the conspiracy.

As a congregation, we put this passage into practice after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Using the FBI's list of terrorists, we prayed that the Lord would turn the counsel of their advisors into foolishness. There were names on that list that some of our folks couldn't even pronounce. But with their fingers placed firmly on those names or pictures, our people prayed and God answered. When I studied the notes from that message, I realized that the vast majority had been killed or captured. The main leader of the group was killed recently, but his assistant remains at large. Would you be willing to enlist to pray that these remaining terrorists would also be defeated?

### **Applications: How to Pray in Perilous Times**

In closing, think about the ways that you could use this simple prayer.

- When the child you love begins to go astray, led along by unknown influences
- When the child you love is being heavily influenced by people you know who would turn your child's heart away from you
- When your governmental leaders are being led along by influential, intelligent "Ahithophels"
- When your leaders are being taught how to grow more popular by means of that which is wicked
- When wicked people are manipulating the people you love to try to gain a following for themselves

In all these things, let us learn how to pray in perilous times. "O Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

<sup>i</sup> As the story continues, we will look back on this leisurely adultery as a lethal iniquity. David's story is a warning to all of us about how to use our discretionary (or leisure) time. It's important to use this time for the Lord, and not to play with lusts. David's uses of leisure time give us an important study in contrasts. See "Your Heart This Holiday" accessed at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1417858162>

<sup>ii</sup> One wonders if David, when his son was dying, thought about the passing of hard-hearted Pharaoh's firstborn during the plagues of Egypt.

<sup>iii</sup> These are like the words of the strange woman in Proverbs 7:18. See also, Tom Farrell, "A Scriptural Look at Lust" Frontline Magazine (FBFI), November-December 2010, p. 6 accessed at <https://fbfi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2010.12.FrontLine.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Amnon's "friend" and cousin, Jonadab. This man was crafty and sneaky, v. 3. He pressured Amnon to share the secrets of his heart, v. 4. He suggested ways for Amnon to fulfill his lusts, v. 5. Jonadab shared the news of Amnon's death with King David before the news broke, vs. 32. (This implies that he had prior knowledge of the secret plot.) Ever the crafty self-promoter, Jonadab reminded the king about who had given him the news v. 35. Of course, he made no mention of his own wicked part in this devastating tragedy. With "friends" like these, who needs enemies? But this ought to cause every reader to stop to consider this question, especially in the age of social media: "Who is having this kind of influence on me?"

<sup>v</sup> Note the reference to "the edge of the sword" (15:14) – another painful reminder of the prophecy in 12:10 that the sword would not depart from David's house. Yet, even as they were fleeing, God providentially placed David's men in such a way that they would be instrumental in overturning the conspiracy. (See 15:24-29 and 17:15-21.)

<sup>vi</sup> The legend of The Pied Piper of Hamelin accessed at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pied\\_Piper\\_of\\_Hamelin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pied_Piper_of_Hamelin)

<sup>vii</sup> This verse is considered a classic in the study of suicide. Modern mental health studies corroborate that the steps that Ahithophel took are classic warning signs that someone is preparing to commit suicide.