

The Best Made Plans...

2 Samuel 17:1-14

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 12-1-2013

Introduction – “The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men, Gang aft agley” (Robert Burns,)

This past Monday, as I kept reading and re-reading the first fourteen verses, and asking God for wisdom on what to preach, there was a poem that kept coming back to my mind. It's a poem that my mother read me when I was a little kid. It's a very moving and melancholy piece that captures the feeling and spirit of at least one of the themes of these first fourteen verses. Even if you have never read the poem, you've probably heard it quoted as, “The best laid plans of mice and men,” or the more cryptic, “The best laid plans....”, meaning that, “While planning is essential, anybody's plans can be spoiled.” And the plans of pagans can either be prospered or go awry as well, depending on what God intends to do in the lives of His people. Anyway, that phrase came from Robert Burns' famous poem, “To A Mouse,” written in 1785.

What had happened is that Robert Burns grew up as a poverty stricken ploughboy. It was a very tough and discouraging life. And he was constantly making plans to escape from that lifestyle. He refused to do anything unethical to get ahead in life, but his good plans kept getting dashed to the ground. He was jilted by his first love, cheated by the man who was training him to be a flax dresser (a profession through which he hoped to gain some economic independence), he then had his house burn down, only to have to retreat to the life of a poor ploughboy again. And perhaps at the end of the sermon I will explain why it may have actually been a good thing that this happened. Anyway, in 1785, as he was plowing a field on a cold Autumn day, his plowshare tore through the nest of a mouse, and he saw the mouse shivering in the cold, its food supply for the winter scattered, and its warm nest totally destroyed. And it so emotionally connected with him in terms of his own dashed plans that he wrote a poem about the mouse as a parable of how God had dashed his own best-laid schemes. It's starts off by saying,

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Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
Wi' bickering brattle!
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

And it goes on to talk about how easily our own world is turned upside down in an instant. It's a poem that shows that at this point in his life Burns was very discouraged and had little or no faith in the goodness of God's providence. Though he will keep fighting on, and though he will keep making plans, he is not so sure that his plans will not be once again dashed to the ground. And though I much prefer the hauntingly beautiful (but admittedly archaic) Scottish English that he wrote in, let me read you the poem in modern English so that you can get a bit of feel for the sadness that was overwhelming Burns.

Tiny, sleek, cowering, fearful mouse,
O, what a panic is in your breast!
You need not start away so hasty,
With pattering noises!
I would be loath to run and chase you,
With my murdering spade!

I'm truly sorry that my world,
Has broken into your world,
And justifies your ill opinion of men,
Which makes you startle
At me, you poor, earth-born companion,
And fellow mortal!

I doubt not that at times you may steal;
What then? Poor little animal, you must live!
An occasional ear of corn out of twenty-four sheaves
Is a small request;
I'll be blest with the rest of the corn,
And never miss the ear you took!

Your tiny house, too, in ruin!
Its fragile walls the winds are strewing!
And nothing, now, to build a new one,
Out of densely growing grass!
And bleak December's winds are following,
Both harsh and keen!

You saw the fields were bare and desolate,
And weary winter coming fast,
And cozy here, beneath the wind,
You thought to dwell—
Till crash! the cruel plowshare passed
Right through your cell.

That little heap of leaves and stubble,
Has cost you many a weary nibble!
Now you are turned out, for all your trouble,
Of house and home,
To endure the winter's sleety dribble,
And hoarfrost cold!

But, Mousie, you are not alone,
In proving foresight may be vain;
The best-laid schemes of mice and men
Go often astray,
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,
For promised joy!

Still you are blest, compared with me
The *present* only touches you:
But, Oh! I backward cast my eye,
On prospects dreary!
And forward, though I cannot see,
I guess and fear!

It's not a very Christian perspective of the future, but it's a perspective many Christians have. The first fourteen verses of our chapter are the best laid plans that Ahithophel and Hushai can come up with – of course, both in opposition to each other. At this point only God knows the future, and if you were in David's shoes, or Hushai's shoes, it would have been very easy to respond to the future like Burns did. Most of us have at one time or another had our cozy mouse nest sliced through by a plowshare despite the careful plans – yes, even the awesome plans that we have made. And we feel disheartened. We wonder what's the use? What's the point? But hopefully, by the end of the sermon you will trade in Burns' perspective on providence for David's total trust in providence.

I'm sure Trevor could teach for hours on military strategy from the points in my outline. And this chapter gives a pretty cool insight into two military plans that are being laid out before Absalom. It's a wonderful window into his life. We know that Ahithophel's plan is by far the better plan. In fact, it is an essential plan if Absalom is to succeed. And I praise

God that He not only dashes our plans to the ground on occasion, but that He even more often dashes the plans of tyrants to the ground. I am not going to spend a lot of time on these first two points. I'm going to emphasize point III. But let's at least introduce you to the main ideas in the first fourteen verses.

I. The wisdom of Ahithophel's military plan – The “Strike while the iron is hot” plan

A. Immediate action (v. 1a – “moreover...tonight” – “waw consecutive”)

The first thing that I see in verse 1 is that Ahithophel's plan calls for immediate action.

2Sam. 17:1 Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, “Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight.

The first Hebrew word indicates that this suggestion is the very next thing that happened, and the word “tonight” shows that he did not want to wait till morning. He wanted to strike while the iron was hot, so to speak. He knew that this would be the time that David would be at his most vulnerable, so immediate action would capitalize on that fact. Of course, Hushai is going to do the exact opposite. He is going to try to buy his friend David more time.

B. Risk management for Absalom (v. 1a – “let me... and I will arise”)

The second thing that makes Ahithophel's advice very wise is that he is volunteering to do the dangerous job himself. And the reason that's a good thing at this juncture is that he is seeking to minimize risk to Absalom during the beginning (and most vulnerable) time of the coup. You see, if Absalom is killed during this first action, the whole coup will fall apart. It's better if an experienced person like Ahithophel leads. Absalom is the uniting feature to the whole coup, and initially he needs to be protected. Otherwise, Ahithophel is in trouble.

Now as we will see, Hushai will seek to accomplish the exact opposite, but in order to keep it from looking like he is putting Absalom in harm's way, Hushai will appeal to pride and to Absalom's manhood and will give the illusion of offsetting the risk of harm with caution.

C. Select troops (v. 1b – “let me choose...”)

The third critical thing that verse one mentions is hand picked troops. The last thing that Ahithophel wants at this juncture is inexperienced men who might flee if something goes wrong. This battle will require men of steady nerve.

And of course Hushai will want the opposite. He will want a huge army filled with inexperienced men, because he hopes that if some flee, the flight will demoralize others and lead to mass flight.

D. Overwhelming force (v. 1c – “twelve thousands men”)

But it’s not as if Ahithophel is going to take a small army himself. He wants to take twelve thousand men, and if they strike immediately, that will be an overwhelming strike force against David’s exhausted group. It will be at least a six-to-one ratio. And besides, David is burdened with non-warriors, women, and children that he has to protect. Commentators guesstimate that on this first day of flight, David has a maximum of 2000 soldiers, but probably less. So this quick use of overwhelming force (six times more soldiers) at a point of vulnerability makes success very, very likely. Hushai is going to stall for time, and by doing that, he enables tens of thousands of soldiers to defect to David by the time we get to chapter 18.

E. Element of surprise (v. 1d) – “tonight”)

But back to Ahithophel, the word “tonight” speaks of darkness, which will give them the element of surprise. When we get down to verses 21-22 we get a hint that David had not anticipated such an immediate attack at night. He was going to camp on the west side of the Jordan, but when he heard the news, they quickly crossed over that night. So again it indicates that Ahithophel was pretty smart. If they had followed his plan, David would likely have been history.

F. Taking advantage of vulnerabilities (v. 2a)

Verse 2 says,

2Sam. 17:2 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.

That verse speaks about taking advantage of David’s vulnerabilities. And he was extremely vulnerable at this point. David needs to get the women and children to safety so that his troops can concentrate on their own objective.

G. Narrowly focused objective (v. 2b – “I will strike only the king”)

And that verse also speaks of a very narrow and very focused objective that Ahithophel had – to kill the king. Once the king is dead, there will be no more threat to Absalom’s power. So that is another brilliant part of his plan. It will be a very focused, quick, laser strike.

H. The swiftness of the plan would avoid alienating the populace needlessly (v. 3)

And then verse 3 speaks of the final goal of this plan – to make sure there is no time for people to take sides or to defect to David. If it is done speedily, even the soldiers who are with David can be reconciled with Absalom and be peacefully assimilated. And he will be the stronger for it. Verse 3:

2Sam. 17:3 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.”

Now, purely from a military perspective, this plan is a fantastic way to go. It’s so convincing that verse 4 says,

2Sam. 17:4 And the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

There is nothing *not* to like about the plan. If Absalom had not bothered to consult Hushai, it may have been all over for David, from a human point of view. But that is the amazing thing about God’s providence. It can frustrate the most brilliant conspiracies, the cleverest plans, and the most powerful armies, and the brightest of men. As Psalm 33:10 says, “The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect.” And if the church of America would only repent, we could anticipate God overturning even such brilliant plans as are concocted by modern Ahithophels. They are no match for God’s providence.

II. The wisdom of Hushai’s counter-revolutionary strategy – The “Look before you leap” plan

Roman numeral II. I am sure that if Hushai had heard any of that advice from where he was, he would have been sweating bullets and praying up a storm. It sort of seems like he is not in the room, but thankfully God makes Absalom curious about Hushai’s perspective. It reflects a bit of insecurity that springs from his own inexperience as a military commander. So he calls for Hushai. Verse 5:

2Sam. 17:5 Then Absalom said, “Now call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he says too.”

And this gives an opportunity for Hushai to try to totally discredit Ahithophel's plan and to suggest something that will stall for time. That's what David needs, is time.

A. Try to discredit Ahithophel's plan

1. Discredit Ahithophel's overall plan (v. 7)

Verses 6-7:

2Sam. 17:6 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."
2Sam. 17:7 So Hushai said to Absalom: "The advice that Ahithophel has given *is* not good at this time.

He's not saying it is never good, but he is claiming that this normally sound advice is definitely not good in this specific situation.

2. Remind of David's past prowess (v. 8a)

Verse 8:

2Sam. 17:8 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.

He is going to try to shake Absalom's confidence in Ahithophel's advice, first of all by reminding Absalom of who his father was. Even an established man like Saul had never been able to capture him, and David's mighty men were famous for the unbelievable exploits that they had done against all odds. In effect he is claiming that a six-to-one advantage over David is no advantage at all – not for a brilliant military leader like David. Everybody knew those stories. How many times had he been outnumbered far more than that? The battles of David's mighty men had been recounted so much, that this little reminder of who David and his men really were, might put a bit of fear and anxiety into Absalom and these other leaders. That's what Hushai hopes.

3. Claim that David's strength & military tactics have been severely misjudged and that hasty confrontation will bring ruin (v. 8b)

Third, in that same verse Hushai claims that David's strength and military tactics have been severely misjudged. He claims it would be just as foolhardy to send troops against David in the dark as it would be to tangle with a mother bear whose cubs have just been robbed. That's a pretty powerful word image. Nobody wants to tangle with an enraged mother bear.

4. Discredit the possibility of a narrowly focused objective (vv. 8c-9a)

He also puts doubt into Absalom's mind as to the feasibility of achieving the narrow objective of killing only David. That's at the core of Ahithophel's plan. And if David is not killed, then he will be able to foment trouble in the future. And secondly, it wouldn't look good to have the first military encounter with David to be a total failure. That would be demoralizing to his army. So he says in the last phrase of verse 8,

...and [David] will not camp with the people.

That would be a scary thought, that they would have wasted their first effort with David not even being present. They would have taken a lot of losses, and not even have gotten David. Verse 9 continues:

...Surely by now he is hidden in some pit, or in some *other* place.

This is really good counter-intelligence. This is designed to put doubts about Ahithophel's plan into everyone's minds, and to get Absalom to be willing to listen to another plan. And it shows that Hushai is a pretty quick thinker as well.

5. Magnify Absalom's worst fears (v. 9b-10)

In the rest of verse 9 and into verse 10, Hushai seeks to magnify Absalom's worst fears.

2Sam. 17:9 ...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."

2Sam. 17:10 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.

And this is especially likely to happen if some of Absalom's troops are killed in the darkness. It may only be a slaughter of a few hundred, but if people started to flee, and others start to get nervous, it could lead to disaster.

6. Speed without a careful plan could lose the confidence of the people (v. 10)

And the last phrase of verse 10 implies that it could lead to Absalom's entire army fleeing. Propaganda doesn't have to be true to shake confidence. All it has to do is to put doubts into people's minds and perhaps a bit of caution and fear. In any case, Hushai has to discredit Ahithophel's plan

before anyone will be willing to listen to Hushai's alternative. So in verses 7 through 10 he has been discrediting Ahithophel's plan.

B. Come up with a plan that will buy time for David

Now in verses 11-13 he is going on to give an alternative. Where Ahithophel's plan can be summarized in the words, "Strike while the iron is hot," Hushai's plan can be summarized in the words, "Look before you leap." And both plans have some plausibility, though of course we know from the narrator that Ahithophel's plan was the wise one. In any case, let's quickly look at Hushai's plan, and then we will get to point III.

1. Gather a massive army (v. 11a)

Verse 11 says,

2Sam. 17:11 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.

Hushai is recommending two things here: First, gather a massive army. Make it so massive that a manhunt for David will not fail to find him. He is trying to make Absalom feel secure in numerical strength.

2. Have Absalom personally lead it (11b)

Secondly, he asks Absalom to personally lead the army. This would appeal to Absalom's pride and sense of manhood. But it is designed to make it possible, should God prosper, to kill Absalom. Of course, he doesn't talk about risk to Absalom. That would be counterproductive to what he is trying to achieve. Instead he seeks to give the illusion of minimizing such risk by speaking of caution.

3. Cover enough geography that David can't escape (v. 12a)

Verse 12:

2Sam. 17:12 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...

What he is recommending here is that the army be vast enough that a manhunt will be successful, the geographical spread of the search will completely cover the ground, and it will be impossible for anyone to escape. He is recommending a huge dragnet operation.

4. Completely destroy all potential opposition to Absalom with no survivors (v. 12b)

Then in the second sentence in verse 12 he recommends that they not allow a single survivor.

...And of him and all the men who *are* with him there shall not be left so much as one.

Hushai's somewhat credible reasoning is that David is not Absalom's only enemy. If people were willing to *leave* with him, they are enemies too. You see, Hushai has to convince Absalom that he is on his side, and he is going overboard here. He is calling for the death of anyone who sides with David. If Absalom let's a single one escape, they could be a continuing danger to Absalom. That's the claim. So, where Ahithophel's strategy was tactical, Hushai's was use of overwhelming force. Where Ahithophel wants to have the minimum loss of life, Hushai is recommending a total mop-up operation that will result in huge loss of life. Now, keep in mind that Hushai doesn't really want either plan. But it's the best he can do to buy David time.

5. If he has reached a city, siege the city (v. 13)

Finally, Hushai pronounces woe on any city that should harbor resistance to Absalom. Verse 13:

2Sam. 17:13 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."

He is calling for a policy of fighting under a black flag, which basically means, giving no quarter, taking no survivors, all out war. All resistance must be put down. This plan would make cities think twice before harboring David. And to an inexperienced person like Absalom who had probably never fought a battle in his life, this may have seemed reasonable. He may have thought that this would start the kingdom out with no enemies and no potential competitors. "If we are scary enough to start with, no city will dare to side with David." With the fears that Hushai had put into Absalom's mind, this plan was designed to put those fears to rest.

III. Though wit is matched against wit to the best of their abilities, ultimately it is only the Lord who decides the outcome (v. 14)

So verse 14 says,

2Sam. 17:14 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.

Wow! What a change in 70 seconds that it took Hushai to give that speech! Apart from the narrator's inspired commentary, we might not have known the reason for this change of mind. But the narrator makes it clear that it was God's doing. So that is the general meaning. You can ask one of our military guys, or John Obermiller (who is a history buff on military tactics) to give you more details and stories on how the military side of this chapter has worked in actual history. It really is wonderful stuff. But I want to end by giving you seven applications that are relevant to every one us, whether you are in the military or not.

A. Providence & planning

I started this sermon with the frustration that Robert Burns expressed over plans that had been repeatedly dashed to the ground. You can see in his poem the lack of confidence that this had produced in him. He was fearful of planning once again. And yet it would be a big mistake to come to the conclusion that planning is a waste of time. Of course it is true that God's providence can overrule our plans. But think of what would have happened to the mouse if it had made no preparations for winter because of the fear that the nest might get ruined. Well, it would have starved for sure. While it is true that plans can be dashed to the ground, lack of plans will guarantee disaster. So that's not an option.

So here is the point – never pit planning against God's providence. Hushai was doing everything in his power to give David time to plan, strategize, and regroup. He himself was given a plan by God's grace. Don't think of providence as being in any way like Islamic fatalism – that what will be will be and there is nothing we can do about it. No. Verse 14 calls Ahithophel's plans good plans. God Himself says that they were good plans. Absalom's forces weren't destroyed because Ahithophel's plans were bad. They were destroyed because they didn't follow Ahithophel's good plans, and that in turn was because God despised Absalom and had disaster planned for him.

Every one of us should plan for the future. We should plan for retirement, plan for our children's weddings, plan for potential job-loss and what alternative sources of income we could have, plan to save up for a replacement automobile, plan how to save up for a side of beef, map out our week, and map out our day. Planning is very Biblical. Proverbs tells us to be like that mouse – planning and preparing for potential disaster, yet trusting

God all time. It's not providence *or* planning, but it is planning *while* we trust God's providence. We should submit our plans to God and ask Him to bless them, if and only if they will glorify His name. So planning is not contrary to providence.

The apostle Paul trusted God's providence implicitly, yet he planned as if it depended upon him. Romans 1:13 says, "Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles." And when you study Paul's life, you can see that he was constantly planning. Yet he also submitted to God when God blue-penciled Paul's plans. Of course, Paul always had backup plans if one plan was providentially hindered. And it is also obvious that if we are living in rebellion to God, that we can count on God blasting our plans and making them shipwrecked. But there must be this balance between trust in God *and* aggressive planning. Have I harped on that enough?

B. Providence & wisdom

The second application is that you must not pit providence against wisdom. God doesn't want us to passively wait for providence to bail us out. He wants us to use our heads and to ask Him for wisdom. And of course, He is the giver of wisdom to every man, woman, and child on planet earth. That's why 1 John 1:9 says that Jesus enlightens every man who comes into the world. If not for God's providence, no farmer could function, no mathematician could calculate the safest trajectory to a returning spacecraft into the atmosphere, no engineer could build a skyscraper, and no military leader could have the faintest idea of how to win a battle. Wisdom and Providence are not in opposition. On the contrary, there could be no wisdom without Providence. Isaiah 28 says of every farmer who plows, sows seed in the right field, and in other ways figures out how to increase his yield, that "God instructs him in right judgment... This also comes from the LORD of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom" (Is. 28:23-29). Isaiah 28 says that every wise thing a farmer does, comes from God, whether that farmer is a pagan or a Christian.

You see, the reason Ahithophel's advice was good was because God's providence had *given* him wisdom. Was he an enemy of God? Yes. But God still gave him wisdom. And the reason Ahithophel's wisdom was ignored was because God chose to frustrate it. So the bottom line is that the enemies of the church in our nation could not so much as think, cough, or spit without God's Providence. God gave the engineers the wisdom to prepare an

Obamacare website (and it took a lot of wisdom, actually), and God's providence was the thing that frustrate their good wisdom. God can handle them, and God can frustrate their wisdom. But He can do the same to you and me if we get proud or arrogant about our own wisdom. So the balance is to seek for wisdom from the Lord, strive with all your might to grow in wisdom, and yoke your wisdom to the Lord's purposes to serve Him, and to realize that His providence alone can prosper your wisdom. But it's not wisdom *or* providence; it is wisdom *in submission* to providence.

C. Providence & the mind, will, and emotions of man

The third application is related. There was a complete switch around of mind, will, and emotions that occurred between verse 4 and verse 14. It's amazing. It took 69 or 70 seconds, by my last reading that I timed. And we might chalk that up to chance. But there is no such thing as chance. Verse 14 makes it clear that their minds were changed because of God's providence – because He wanted to bring disaster on Absalom. Their emotional confidence in verse 4 was changed to fear and then changed to emotional confidence in Hushai's plan because of God's providence. Their will was changed from putting one thing into practice to putting a different thing into practice because of God's providence.

And we can have the same confidence today. God's hand is not so short that it cannot save from the conspiracies all around us. No, God can change their minds, their wills, and their emotions within minutes, just as He did in this chapter. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." And if God can turn the king's heart wherever he wants, He can turn anyone's heart wherever He wants. And of course, the heart is the seat of the mind, will, and emotions. Let me read that again: "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." And of course, He does that every time He converts somebody, doesn't He? Acts 16:14 says that God opened Lydia's heart so that she would pay attention to the things spoken by Paul. On the other hand, God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would refuse to listen to Moses. Why? Because God had already determined to destroy Pharaoh. Don't think that God's providence cannot handle the depraved minds, wills, and emotions of pagans. He can. Though God hardened the Pharaoh's heart, Exodus said that God turned the hearts of the Egyptian citizens to favor the Israelites and to gladly give them money, jewelry, or anything else desired to the Israelites.

And today, God can harden the heart of a Pharaoh, if it brings greater glory to His name and greater holiness to His church. But He can regenerate hard hearts and given them a new mind, a new will, and new affections. Consider the following three verses:

Psa. 110:3 Your people *shall be* volunteers in the day of Your power...

Phil. 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

Deut. 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Of course God does all of that in a way that leaves men as free agents and not robots. Though God's providence governs it, it is still their decisions. The more you study the doctrine of providence, the more amazing it is. If you can come away from this sermon adoring God the more because of His awesome providence, that will be good.

D. Providence & change

And I don't need to belabor the fact that verse 14 means that Providence and change are perfectly consistent together. Think of the providences that led to Nineveh's overnight change for the better. On the other hand, the fact that America has changed for the worse is not an indication that God's providence is not at work. On the contrary, the revolutionary changes that have happened in the last fifty years in America are God's judgment on a wicked church. For devotions on Wednesday, I was in 2 Chronicles 28, reading about the life of King Ahaz. And its amazing how he never repents. He gets blasted by God's providence time after time after time because of his Baal worship, but he never learns. And he never learns because it wasn't God's purpose to save Ahaz. It was God's purpose to use Ahaz to wake up a backslidden church. And God succeeded in doing that. He brought profound change to culture through the lack of change in king Ahaz.

But the changes that happen in culture (whether for good or for bad) are providentially designed for God's glory and the church's good. I am convinced that when the church learns its lessons, repents, and turns back to the *solas* of the Reformation, that God's providence will bring about changes for the good. But in the meantime, the changes that are happening for the bad also flow from God's providential guarantee that the Lord is not mocked, but whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

E. Providence & mistakes

What about providence and mistakes? Can those really go together? Well, let's think about it. Was it a huge mistake for Absalom and all the elders to choose the advice of Hushai? Absolutely. Verse 23 says that Ahithophel immediately knew that it was all over when they made that huge mistake. Take a look at that. Verse 23:

2Sam. 17:23 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.

He was smart enough to know that this was a fatal mistake. Not everybody has that big-picture perspective, but he did. He could see the chess game ten moves ahead and he conceded defeat long before anybody else could see that it was a defeat. They thought they were making a good move. Ahithophel knew better. And I think Hushai could see ten chess moves down the road as well. Sometimes it is a burden to be that wise because you see all the foolish mistakes that others make, and you try to warn them about it, and they won't listen, and it grieves you.

Well, verse 14 says that *this fatal mistake was of the Lord*. He is the one that got them to make that mistake. When it is time for God's enemies to be punished, they too will make fatal mistakes. My point in bringing all of these things up is to give us a firmer reliance upon divine providence. Yes the enemy is strong. Yes the enemy's forces are gaining momentum and threaten to overturn everything good that our founding fathers stood for. It's important that when we affirm providence that we not deny the danger of potentially losing everything that generations past have built up in America. We could lose it all. We are in that danger. Humanism is a horrendous danger. But it is a danger within the scope of providence. I like that balance in Psalm 93. In fact, go ahead and flip over to Psalm 93. This is a fabulous Psalm on providence. The providence that brings the waves of God's enemies as a discipline can calm the waves of those same enemies. This Psalm first of all describes God's ruling providence. Psalm 93, beginning to read at verse 1.

Psa. 93:1 The LORD reigns, He is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed, He has girded Himself with strength. Surely the world is established, so that it cannot be moved.

Psa. 93:2 Your throne *is* established from of old; You *are* from everlasting.

There is God's rule of providence. It rules over everything. Then he looks at the incredible opposition of the Satanic forces, using the analogy of a perfect

storm. And the question comes, “Is God’s providence in that?”

Psa. 93:3 The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.

If you have ever been in a storm on the ocean, you know that it can be scary. The waves can come at the ship like mountains. In the same way, God’s enemies threaten to undo and destroy the church. That’s the imagery he is using. Just like a ship seems no match for those mighty waves, the church seems no match against Satanic opposition. But instead of freaking out, the Psalmist says,

Psa. 93:4 The LORD on high *is* mightier than the noise of many waters, *than* the mighty waves of the sea.

Psa. 93:5 Your testimonies are very sure; holiness adorns Your house, O LORD, forever.

And in the same way, 2 Samuel 17 does not deny the danger that Absalom’s forces posed for David. They were towering mountainous waves threatening to engulf David and his men. And David took that threat seriously. He did not ignore it. He was not fatalistic. So, though their adrenalin was running (and your adrenalin should be running if your ship is on those waves), David was still able to trust that God is mightier than the waves of the sea. What an incredible balance David had. He had both realism about danger and trust in God’s power.

F. Providence & disaster

Just two more applications from our passage in 2 Samuel 17. The first is that providence and disaster are not in opposition to each other. We tend to think of disaster as if God was absent, but this passage says that the reason Ahithophel’s advice was defeated was “to the intent that the LORD might bring *disaster* on Absalom.” Who brought the disaster? The LORD brought the disaster. In the previous chapter, the disaster of David having to flee was also from God. Where it was loving discipline for David, it was intended to destroy Absalom. But the key point is that Providence produced that disaster.

And what was true of *that* disaster is true of all disasters. Amos 3:6 asks the rhetorical question, “Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?” (ESV). And the answer is “No.” That verse indicates that any disaster that has ever hit any city has had the hand of providence behind it. Do not be afraid of disasters that might strike our nation. They come from the hand of a loving, holy, and purposeful God who is working all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

G. Providence & advice

And finally, don't think advice is unnecessary, simply because God's providence controls all things. Instead, realize that God can use your advice to promote His kingdom just as God used Hushai's advice to influence Absalom and all the elders of Israel. It is appropriate to pray that God would frustrate the counsel of the humanistic Ahithophels that are taking over our nation just as David did in chapter 15. God's providence can overturn counsel and it can sustain counsel. But Scripture is quite clear that counsel or advice is absolutely essential and totally consistent with Providence. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed." Proverbs 12:15 says, "he who heeds counsel *is* wise." Proverbs 20:18 says, "Plans are established by counsel; by wise counsel wage war."

And so I never plan to stop giving counsel and advice via Facebook, Twitter, Google groups, our websites, preaching, and my other ministries. It may sometimes seem fruitless because people sometimes seem to be uninterested. But I never pit my counsel against Providence. Instead, I trust Providence so much that I am willing to give counsel and to pray that God bless it. And I would encourage you to do the same.

Conclusion

So if you are a Robert Burns this morning who is tired of having your plans dashed to the ground like the mouse in its nest, do three things: First, remind yourself that providence runs according to God's plans, and God Himself commands us to imitate Him by planning. So don't pit planning against providence.

Second, realize that God sometimes guides us *by* dashing our plans to the ground. Robert Burns may never have become the kind of poet that he was if his earlier plans had not been dashed. The dashing of those plans matured him and guided him. God guided him from certain things and into other things. And the literary world rejoices in the body of literature that he wrote.

Third, remind yourself that Paul did not give up on good plans simply because he was providentially hindered. That would be fatalism. Fatalism and passivity is heresy and is dangerous. The same apostle Paul who said that God foreordains everything in history, also said in Romans 1 that he *often* planned to come to Rome but was providentially hindered. He didn't let one failure make him give up. That was a good plan, so he kept at it. But

until God prospered those plans, he rolled with the punches and came up with backup plans that were still glorifying to God.

If you imitate Paul rather than Robert Burns, you will not face the past with frustration or face the future with fear. Instead you will realize that every change that God has made, is making, or will make, is for His glory and for your good, and you will look at the past and learn from it and look to the future with faith and hope and look upward with love and thanksgiving. This doctrine of Providence will stabilize your life and make it joyful and hopeful to make plans to His glory. May it be so, Lord Jesus. Amen.

The Best Laid Plans...

2 Samuel 17:1-14

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 12-1-2013

Introduction – “The best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men,
Gang aft agley” (Robert Burns,)

- I. The wisdom of Ahithophel’s military plan – The “Strike while the iron is hot” plan
 - A. Immediate action (v. 1a – “moreover...tonight” – “waw consecutive”)
 - B. Risk management for Absalom (v. 1a – “let me... and I will arise”)
 - C. Select troops (v. 1b – “let me choose...”)
 - D. Overwhelming force (v. 1c – “twelve thousands men”)
 - E. Element of surprise (v. 1d) – “tonight”)
 - F. Taking advantage of vulnerabilities (v. 2a)
 - G. Narrowly focused objective (v. 2b – “I will strike only the king”)
 - H. Avoid alienating the populace needlessly (v. 3)

- II. The wisdom of Hushai’s counter-revolutionary strategy – The “Look before you leap” plan
 - A. Try to discredit Ahithophel’s plan
 - 1. Discredit Ahithophel’s overall plan (v. 7)
 - 2. Remind of David’s past prowess (v. 8a)
 - 3. Claim that David’s strength & military tactics have been severely misjudged and that hasty confrontation will bring ruin (v. 8b)
 - 4. Discredit the possibility of a narrowly focused objective (vv. 8c-9a)
 - 5. Magnify Absalom’s worst fears (v. 9b-10)
 - 6. Speed without a careful plan could lose the confidence of the people (v. 10)
 - B. Come up with a plan that will buy time for David
 - 1. Gather a massive army (v. 11a)
 - 2. Have Absalom personally lead it (11b)
 - 3. Cover enough geography that David can’t escape (v. 12a)
 - 4. Completely destroy all potential opposition to Absalom with no survivors (v. 12b)
 - 5. If he has reached a city, siege the city (v. 13)

- III. Though wit is matched against wit to the best of their abilities, ultimately it is only the Lord who decides the outcome (v. 14)
 - A. Providence & planning

 - B. Providence & wisdom

 - C. Providence & the mind, will, and emotions of man

 - D. Providence & change

 - E. Providence & mistakes

 - F. Providence & disaster

 - G. Providence & advice



Conclusion