

# Absalom's Pursuit of David

## 2 Samuel 17

### Lesson Outline

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### Absalom's Decision

#### 2 Samuel 17:1-14

#### **Prompt Attack:** 2 Samuel 17:1-4

#### Ahithophel's Reputation

David's former counselor, whom the people respected, chose to join Absalom. Because of his wisdom he offered more trouble for David than Absalom could. Ahithophel made shrewd thought out decisions, unlike the brash young rebel. After occupying Jerusalem, Absalom looked to his counselors for advice concerning David. As the passage unfolds it becomes evident the young Absalom was overwhelmed with the responsibilities of the king.

1. *Absalom was impatient* – he eagerly wanted to be rid of David. Selfish men often struggle with patience.
2. *Absalom was immoral* – David had done nothing deserving of death but that did not matter to the young ruler.
3. *Absalom was inconsiderate* – David allowed him to flee after a crime without pursuing him but Absalom did not return the favor, though David was innocent in the matter.
4. *Absalom was incompetent* – he wanted David destroyed but did not know how to go about it. He excelled at stealing the throne but struggled when it came to making national decisions.

Absalom sought Ahithophel's counsel. It was a good idea, seeing that Absalom was inexperienced in these matters. Seeking advice before making important decisions is commendable (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22). Absalom's mistake was not seeking instruction but failure to seek after the LORD (Proverbs 19:21). However, Absalom had never proven himself to be devoted to the LORD, so

gaining an office only changed his location not his heart's desire. Instead, this young ruler looked for someone to tell him how to fulfill his lustful passions.

### Ahithophel's Advice

This wise counselor planned for a quick strike, which would take David by surprise. He asked for twelve thousand men so he could pursue immediately. The attack would occur before David had time to organize his followers or gather more troops. The advice being sound was also selfish, in that Ahithophel would act as leader. Apparently the wise counselor hoped to assume the role of commanding general. He proved to be just as ambitious as Absalom. Though his motive may have been wrong he understood the importance of taking advantage of opportunities. Ahithophel knew David was vulnerable so he hoped to strike quickly. As believers we can learn from his diligence and eagerly look for opportunities to serve the LORD (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Ahithophel planned to slay David and retrieve the people. This man would show no mercy to the ousted king. It appears he understood the importance of leadership, knowing if David were slain his followers would be discouraged. Afterwards, he assumed those that followed David would be returned to Absalom, establishing peace in the land. In reality, the problem to peace was the ungodly leadership of Absalom and Ahithophel (Proverbs 29:2). But wicked leaders usually force their form of peace on the people instead of doing what is best for the nation. As far as the attack was concerned, it was good counsel. Absalom was pleased and all the elders of Israel agreed. Had it been followed, they might have been successful.

### Postponed Action: 2 Samuel 17:5-14

#### Hushai Cautioned Absalom

Though he was pleased, Absalom sought more counsel. Perhaps he hoped Hushai's advice would support Ahithophel's plan (Proverbs 11:14, 24:6). Maybe he remained skeptical or his inexperience led to indecision. Whatever the reason, the LORD allowed Absalom to seek further counsel in order to be confused (Proverbs 21:1). Being ready when called upon, Hushai took full advantage of the opportunity. He began by reminding Absalom whom he was dealing with.

1. *David's power* – his father, like those with him, was a proven warrior (1 Samuel 18:7). They were not the type to bow down or run away from a fight, so Absalom should expect a difficult struggle.
2. *David's pride* – he had taken the throne, greatly offending David. The king and his men would be chafed in their minds. Like a mother bear robbed of her cub, they would be fierce.
3. *David's preparation* – he might not surprise David as expected. The experienced king would be ready for an attack.

Hushai warned Absalom of the dangers of losing a fight. If David surprised some of Absalom's men, the people might melt in fear and Absalom's rebellion would be over before it even began. It is true David was retreating but these warnings remained valid. They were possibilities based upon

David's reputation and previous conduct. Hushai provided the caution and allowed Absalom's imagination to take care of the rest.

### Hushai Challenged Absalom

Hushai advised Absalom to delay the attack in order to gather men from Israel. Seeing a large contingent in Jerusalem would gratify Absalom's pride while calming his fears. The wily counselor also encouraged Absalom to lead the army into battle. With this recommendation, Hushai implied two things.

1. *Absalom was a brave warrior* – equal to David.
2. *Absalom was a powerful leader* – superior to Ahithophel.

Obviously this boosted the ego of the bold but inexperienced Absalom. Hushai continued to play on the young man's pride by advising him to pursue David once the troops were gathered, the thought being that David's men would be no match for Absalom's army. If they waited to gather the militia, David would be unable to stand against them. If David and his men found shelter in a city, Absalom's combined forces would simply pull the city into the river with ropes. Perhaps this was a boastful exaggeration of their power but it is the type of talk that encourages proud people like Absalom. The result, Hushai implied, would be the utter defeat of all that opposed him, not just David.

Hushai's plan called for a strong delayed attack, which required time instead of haste. From Absalom's perspective it was a foolish plan because David was vulnerable, however he liked the idea. It sounded grand and was exactly what Absalom desired. He would lead the army, secure the victory, and be recognized as the great conqueror. The LORD appointed Ahithophel to be overruled so that Absalom would be judged (Proverbs 19:21). This is an example of how the LORD works with and through wicked leaders. The LORD allows them to act then brings about His will in spite of their actions. Never forget that the LORD governs the rulers of this world and limits their wickedness (Daniel 4:17).

## David's Departure

2 Samuel 17:15-29

### **Important Report:** 2 Samuel 17:15-21

#### Report Disclosed

Hushai immediately found Zadok and Abiathar so they could relay the information to David. It's likely he acted quickly knowing Absalom might change his mind or was preparing to gather men from Israel. Either way, Hushai knew Absalom would eventually pursue David. The priests were told all that took place concerning the counselors meeting with Absalom.

The priests were to inform David immediately so he could act quickly. Hushai's report encouraged David to leave the plains of the wilderness so the people would be safe while the troops

were assembled. Hushai may have understood that David's followers were tired, hungry, and disorganized. They were not prepared for a fight so he made sure all involved recognized the importance of delivering the message swiftly. Urgency is often required as we live for the LORD. None of us is guaranteed tomorrow so it is wise to live for God today (Matthew 6:34; James 4:14).

### Report Delivered

Jonathan and Ahimaaz were given the message for David. They quickly discovered their mission would be dangerous. As they left on their assignment they were seen and reported to Absalom. The brave men made their way to Bahurim where they were hidden in a covered well. It was probably dry, since wells were often without water in the summertime.<sup>1</sup> In a shrewd maneuver, the well was made to appear as a place for corn to dry out. As they waited below, the woman who hid the men lied to Absalom about their location. It was unnecessary but she did so anyway, perhaps out of fear. Absalom's men followed the false lead and returned to Jerusalem without finding Jonathan and Ahimaaz. This unknown woman did what she could and became a blessing to David and the nation. As is often the case when serving the LORD, it was not about her ability but her availability (Isaiah 6:8). As believers, let's be willing to serve the LORD wherever He places us.

Jonathan and Ahimaaz left as soon as their safety was secure, they found David and delivered the message. These men were trusted with important information and proved themselves faithful. They willingly endured hardship and risked their lives to deliver the report to David. Believers also have an important message to deliver, the gospel of salvation (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 10:10-15). Let's proclaim that wonderful message with the same diligence these men displayed.

### Immediate Responses: 2 Samuel 17:22-29

#### Results of Absalom's Decision

David immediately crossed over the Jordan River. It required much effort to cross the river at night but David diligently worked in order to spare the people. All that followed him made the crossing. There were no deserters and nobody was left behind. This dedicated group continued until they arrived at Mahanaim, which was about fifty miles from Jerusalem. Because Absalom followed Hushai's advice, David was able to escape. His faith was seen by his actions (James 2:18). David believed the LORD would bless so he led the people away from Jerusalem and waited for the LORD to work on their behalf.

While David traveled to Mahanaim Ahithophel went to his home, set his affairs in order, and ended his life. His reaction was opposite of David's. It was a selfish act of pride. It was also a sin – the taking of any life is murder (Exodus 20:13). Absalom had rejected his counsel choosing to listen to David's friend instead. Believing to have been slighted, Ahithophel decided to take his life. It was the result of living for the world instead of looking to the LORD (Proverbs 4:19, 10:27).

1. *Reputation was tarnished* – his wise counsel was rejected, leaving him dejected and upset.

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<sup>1</sup> John Gill, "Gill's Commentary on the Bible: 2 Samuel," (Bible Truth Forum: E-book, 2005) p. 214

2. *Request was denied* – his ambitious desire to lead the attack was refused, leaving him without the power he sought after.
3. *Results were certain* – he would be considered a traitor once David returned to the throne, leaving his future in doubt.

Sadly, his life revolved around his career and when that was gone so was his desire to live. After living for the world, he found it to be worthless (Mark 8:36; 1 John 2:15-17). If our life is yielded to the LORD we will not be let down when things do not go our way (Romans 12:1-2). We will understand that God is in control so we will trust in His power and wisdom (Romans 8:28). Instead of making a selfish decision, like Ahithophel's, we will wait upon the LORD and live by faith.

Meanwhile, Absalom began his pursuit of David. He took his forces over the Jordan River planning to attack the retreating king. He promoted Amasa to captain of the host, Joab's position. Amasa's father was an Ishmaelite and his mother was David's sister Abigail, making him David's nephew (1 Chronicles 2:16-17). Having another one of David's relatives involved made things interesting. To their credit, Joab and Abishai remained faithful to the king.

### Relief

As they fled from Absalom, David's exhausted followers were blessed with assistance from three men. It is encouraging to be the recipient of kindness when times are difficult. A generous act from a friend goes a long way (Galatians 6:2). David quickly found out who his friends were (Proverbs 17:17).

1. *Shobi of Rabbah* – he was the son of Nahash and apparently a brother to Hanun. David's kindness to Hanun was rebuffed but evidently it made an impression on Shobi (2 Samuel 10:2).
2. *Machir the son of Ammiel* – this was the same man that cared for Mephibosheth before David summoned him to Jerusalem. Once again, David's kindness in the past proved to be a blessing later (Proverbs 18:24).
3. *Barzillai the Gileadite* – little is known concerning this older gentleman but he proved to be charitable with his possessions (1 Timothy 6:17-19). He became one of David's friends (2 Samuel 19:31-32).

These men gave generously so the people could be sustained. They offered practical gifts, for sleeping and eating, so their needs would be met. This was done at the risk of their own lives. They must have known that Absalom would alienate anyone that assisted David.

1. *Furniture* – beds, basins, and earthen vessels.
2. *Food* – wheat, barley, flour, parched corn, beans, lentils, parched pulse, honey, butter, sheep, and cheese of kine or cows.

These men noticed a need, recognized their ability to assist, and provided what was required. In the midst of a great trial, David's blessings came from unlikely sources. Once again the LORD proved His faithfulness (1 Corinthians 1:9, 10:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:3). David was chased from his throne and the city he loved but was not alone, the LORD allowed others to assist David in his retreat. The LORD may allow trials into our life but He will never leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).