

The Life of David

David Saved by Hushai

2 Samuel 17:1-29

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Scripture

King David was on the run from his son, Absalom, who was staging a coup to overthrow his father as king over all Israel. One of David's closest advisors, Ahithophel, had betrayed David and was now giving advice to Absalom. But God had wonderfully provided Hushai, another friend of David, to return to the city of Jerusalem to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. Hushai did indeed thwart the counsel of Ahithophel, thereby saving David.

Let's read about David being saved by Hushai in 2 Samuel 17:1-29:

¹Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. ²I 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, ³and 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." ⁴And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

⁵Then Absalom said, "Call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say." ⁶And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, "Thus has Ahithophel spoken; shall we do as he says? If not, you speak." ⁷Then Hushai said to Absalom, "This time the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good." ⁸Hushai 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. ⁹Behold, 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.’ ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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.” 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 ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom.

¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ 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.’ ” ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And the woman took and spread a covering over the well’s mouth and scattered grain on it, and nothing was known of it. ²⁰ 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.

²¹ 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.”²² 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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. ²⁵ 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 Zeruah, Joab’s mother. ²⁶ And Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead.

²⁷ 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, ²⁸ brought beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans and lentils, ²⁹ 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 17:1-29)

Introduction

One of my heroes is the 1924 Olympian, Eric Liddell, whose story is told in the 1981 movie, *Chariots of Fire*. After the Olympics, Liddell became a missionary in China. He died (of a brain tumor) in a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp just five months before the end of World War II. To help Christians grow in their faith, he wrote a manual for Christian living. Forty years after his death, it was published under the title, *The Disciplines of the Christian Life*. Regarding our circumstances and God’s plans, Liddell wrote:

Circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God's plans, but God is not helpless among the ruins. Our broken lives are not lost or useless. God's love is still working. He comes in and takes the calamity and uses it victoriously, working out his wonderful plan of love.¹

David's circumstances certainly appeared dire. Moreover, God's plan to have David serve as his anointed king on earth seemed to be falling apart. But, God's plan can never fail. Although people may rebel against his plan, God's plan will always prevail.

Lesson

Second Samuel 17:1-29 shows us how God's plan prevailed as he preserved his anointed king.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Plan to Destroy God's King (17:1-4)
2. The Plan to Protect God's King (17:5-14a)
3. The Plan to Alert God's King (17:15-29)
4. The Plan Behind the Plans (17:14b)

I. The Plan to Destroy God's King (17:1-4)

First, note the plan to destroy God's king.

After David and his loyal supporters fled Jerusalem, his son Absalom entered Jerusalem without encountering any opposition at all. David's friend Hushai (who was now acting as David's spy) met Absalom and managed to convince him that he was no longer loyal to David but would instead be loyal to Absalom.

Perhaps surprised that he experienced no resistance from his father, Absalom asked Ahithophel what they should do. Ahithophel counseled Absalom to violate David's concubines. That

¹ Eric Liddell, *The Disciplines of the Christian Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), n. p.

would make him a stench to his father and strengthen the resolve of all who were committed to Absalom. Sadly, Absalom followed the counsel of Ahithophel.

Then we read in 2 Samuel 17:1-3:

¹Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, “Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. ²I 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, ³and 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.”

Before becoming a pastor and Bible commentator, Richard Phillips commanded tank units as an officer in the U.S. Army and later served as an assistant professor of leadership at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He writes, “Ahithophel’s plan would have received high marks in today’s military academies.”² There are three reasons for this assertion.

First, Ahithophel’s strategy applied overpowering force at the point of attack. Bible commentators believe that David may have had as many as two thousand men under his command. Ahithophel would have outnumbered David by six to one.

Second, Ahithophel’s strategy included the element of surprise. He would pursue David that night and attack him while he was weary and least expecting an attack.

And third, Ahithophel’s strategy involved a surgical strike. He would strike down only the king, David. That was the real objective. With David’s demise and minimal loss of life, the people would quickly submit to Absalom, and all the people would be at peace.

² Richard D. Phillips, *2 Samuel*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 304–305.

I am currently listening to the audiobook on the life of General Douglas MacArthur by William Manchester titled, *American Caesar*. After North Korea invaded South Korea, General MacArthur planned an attack against the North Koreans by landing a large military force at Inchon, deep behind North Korean lines. Days before the invasion, representatives from the USA's Joint Chiefs of Staff came to try and dissuade General MacArthur from pursuing his attack. After several military leaders spoke for 80 minutes about the inadvisability of such an attack, the General spoke. The main element in his strategy was surprise, but it also included overwhelming force. When he was finished speaking, the leaders agreed that his plan would work. And it did!

I think that General MacArthur would have approved of Ahithophel's plan too. It *was* a brilliant plan. This plan had every element for success. It had the elements of power, surprise, and precision. And so we read in verse 4, **“And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel.”**

II. The Plan to Protect God's King (17:5-14a)

Second, let's see the plan to protect God's king.

With Ahithophel's brilliant plan on the table, we are surprised to read that **Absalom said, “Call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say”** (17:5). Perhaps Absalom thought that since Hushai was David's friend, he could confirm the viability of the plan that Ahithophel put forward.

Apparently, time had elapsed between Ahithophel setting forth his plan and Hushai's arrival before Absalom and the elders. It is also likely that Ahithophel was no longer in the room because he did not defend his plan. When Hushai arrived, Absalom told him about Ahithophel's plan. Now this is why Hushai was in Jerusalem. He was to defeat for David the counsel of Ahithophel (*cf.* 15:34). With astonishing boldness, Hushai said to Absalom, **“This**

time the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good” (15:7). He wisely said that Ahithophel’s counsel was not good **“this time.”** In doing so, he acknowledged what everyone knew, that is, that “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” (16:23).

Hushai gave Absalom several reasons why attacking David quickly was a bad plan. He proposed an alternative plan that included mustering a much larger force, and that Absalom lead them against David. Hushai’s proposal was designed to defeat Ahithophel’s plan. Commentator John Woodhouse notes, “Ahithophel’s *plan* was brilliant. Hushai’s *speech* was brilliant.”³ And commentator Robert Bergen writes, “The speech is masterful in its construction and powerful in its effect: it simultaneously discredits Ahithophel, undermines Absalom’s confidence, magnifies the king’s worst fears, and buys David precious time to escape and regroup.”⁴

Buying “David precious time to escape and regroup” seems to have been Hushai’s primary goal. And he was successful, as we read in verse 14a, **“And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, ‘The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.’ ”**

III. The Plan to Alert God’s King (17:15-29)

Third, let’s observe the plan to alert God’s king.

Hushai left Absalom and all the men of Israel. The rest of chapter 17 reads like a very tense spy drama.

Hushai immediately went to Zadok and Abiathar the priests who had also returned to Jerusalem at David’s request to provide David with information. Hushai told them about Ahithophel’s and

³ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 425.

⁴ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 412.

his plan. Moreover, he told them to tell David not to spend the night at the fords of the wilderness but to pass over so as to avoid being confronted by Absalom's forces. Zadok and Abiathar passed this message on to their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, who dramatically escaped capture because a woman hid them in a well. They were able to hurry to David and give him the message. Having being alerted by Hushai's message, David and all his loyal supporters crossed over the Jordan river.

David and his supporters soon came to Mahanaim, where they were met by three prominent men of Transjordan who brought them much-needed supplies. This indicated that there were still many people loyal to David and must have been an encouragement to him.

Not long after this, Absalom, having mustered all the fighting men of Israel, crossed the Jordan river in pursuit of his father and encamped in the land of Gilead.

Meanwhile, we read in verse 23, **“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.”** Ahithophel is regarded as the Judas of the Old Testament. Like Judas who betrayed Jesus, God's anointed king, Ahithophel betrayed David, God's anointed king. And like Judas who hung himself, Ahithophel hung himself. Some commentators think that Ahithophel hung himself because he was so proud that he would rather die than have his plan not followed. More likely, however, Ahithophel realized that Hushai's plan would allow David to escape and regroup. David had never lost a battle in his entire military career and, given time, he would repel Absalom's revolt and return to his throne in Jerusalem. Ahithophel would then have to face David, most likely be charged with treason, and suffer the consequences of that judgment. That was too much for Ahithophel. So, he set his house in order and hanged himself. Dale

Ralph Davis astutely notes, “This is the man who lifted up his hand against Yahweh’s appointed king. His end is a sign of what will happen to all the enemies of that King and kingdom. You cannot attack the kingdom of God without—sooner or later—being crushed by the power of God.”⁵

IV. The Plan Behind the Plans (17:14b)

Finally, that brings us to look at the plan behind the plans.

The circumstances of this story seemed to be wrecking David’s life and God’s plans, but as Eric Liddell wrote, “God is not helpless among the ruins.” In fact, the explanation for the whole story is given to us in verse 14b, **“For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom.”** Now some of you may struggle with this explanation. A number of questions may come to your mind. But as Davis writes, “Yahweh’s sovereignty is not meant to give you philosophical problems but spiritual comfort.”⁶

Friends, unless you experientially come to believe and embrace God’s sovereignty over everything in life, you will struggle with fear and despair. It is true that God was punishing David for his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, fulfilling his earlier word to David (in 2 Samuel 12:11-12). But, God was also sovereign over the entire revolt of Absalom. God set a boundary on Absalom’s plot to overthrow his father because God was preserving the promise he had made earlier to David that he would establish his kingdom forever (in 2 Samuel 7:12-16).

It would be good for us to memorize Proverbs 21:1, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” “What a consolation there is here for us!” writes commentator Roger Ellsworth. “The evil of our day seems

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 219.

⁶ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 215.

quite as invincible as Ahithophel's counsel, but the same God who sovereignly set the boundaries for Ahithophel does the same with evil today."⁷

By the way, let us not forget that when David was fleeing from Jerusalem, he prayed, "O Lord, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (15:31). God sovereignly answered David's prayer, just as he hears the prayers of all who call on him in the name of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed David being saved by Hushai in 2 Samuel 17:1-29, let us not reject the anointed King whom God has provided.

God had promised David that he was his anointed king on earth and that he would establish his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). David rightly notes about today's text, "One must not focus on character studies or personal tragedies here; the chapter reports a threat to the kingdom of God and to God's appointed king."⁸ Friends, God will preserve his anointed king, as 2 Samuel 17 shows us in dramatic fashion.

Today's text points us to David's Greater Son, Jesus Christ. He too is God's anointed king. He is the one who sits and rules on David's throne forever and ever. Let us not reject *the* anointed King whom God has provided. For to do so is to our eternal peril. Amen.

⁷ Roger Ellsworth, *The Shepherd King* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1998), 259.

⁸ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 211.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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