

Revolutions, Revolutionaries, and Counterrevolutionaries

2 Samuel 16:15-23

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-24-2013

Introduction

At the time of the American War for Independence there were loyalists who thought God wanted them to side with England and there were patriots who thought God wanted them to side with the colonies. And there were puzzled people who were caught in a tug of war between both groups – sometimes in the same family. Both sides accused the other side of being in rebellion against God. The loyalists said that resistance to the king was obviously disobedience to God (and they appealed to Romans 13 as a descriptive statement), and the patriots said, “No. Resistance to tyrants is obedience to God” (and they appealed to Romans 13 as a prescriptive statement; in other words, what a government is *supposed* to look like, not what Rome actually was). There were people on both sides who thought that the other side had engaged in a revolution overthrowing the law.

And I am convinced that there were many Israelites living during this brief reign of Absalom who were similarly puzzled over which government they ought to submit to. There were people who had elected and ordained Absalom to be king, and yet there were others who claimed that his reign was not legitimate. And even with hindsight there are commentators today who disagree on some questions. For example, were both Absalom and David revolutionaries? Based on some definitions, they were. After all, in chapter 18, David will be fighting against an elected government, that though evil in some ways, was no more evil than Rome. And so they will say that it was David who was engaging in rebellion and guerilla warfare. Some people have actually described him as the original guerilla revolutionary. Is it true? I don't believe so, but the term “revolution” can be ambiguous.

Some Christians in African countries have had to face these questions because their country has gone through one revolution after another. Are they supposed to submit to those currently in power and to fight against the guerilla revolutionaries who will be the next ones in power, or are they supposed to join that new revolutionary movement? And on what basis could you make such scary judgments? How do you relate to a usurper who has illegitimately gained civil power without having fired a shot? In many

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ways America is in that boat just as Israel was taken over by Absalom without his having to have fired a shot. Absalom was elected. Now it is true that it was an irregular and illegitimate election, but he was elected. These are the kinds of questions that can make our relationship to civil government rather confusing sometimes.

Today's sermon is titled "Revolutions, Revolutionaries, and Counterrevolutionaries." And immediately we have a problem. And the problem is that the term "revolution" is defined in different ways even in the good literature. And that's OK, so long as we know how you are defining the terms. Sometimes the same author (like a Rushdoony) will use the term positively and negatively in the same article. In fact, I will be giving you a couple quotes from others who use the term "revolution" with two different meanings in the same sentence. So it can be confusing reading the literature. But I have stuck with the confusing term "revolution" because it has some of the same ambiguities that our passage does.

Sometimes the terms "revolution" and "revolutionary" simply mean a radical change or a person committed to a radical change. In that sense, every Christian is a revolutionary since we are seeking to convert the world and bring the blessing and the renewal of God's grace to every area of life. That's revolutionary, right? That would be a revolution in one dictionary sense of the term. But this morning, I will not be using the term "revolution" in that positive sense. Instead, I am defining "revolution" as the unlawful overthrow of God's lawful order through unlawful means. There are three parts to that definition (and any one of those parts can make something revolutionary): the unlawful overthrow of God's lawful order through unlawful means. America's founding fathers would say that they were not overthrowing anything; they were trying to preserve something; that it was King George and Parliament who had overthrown longstanding law. They would certainly claim that they were not overthrowing God's law order. And they would also say that they were not using unlawful means, but appealed to the Bible and English Constitutional history for the very means of interposition that they were using. So in their eyes, it was the British who were the revolutionaries.

I think David Chilton is absolutely right when he says, "...Christianity has always been staunchly anti-revolutionary..."¹ And it is in this sense of the term that Rushdoony opposes all revolutions and all revolutionary

¹ David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 584.

tactics, and says that they are humanistic to the core. And yet he defends the American Revolution (which he prefers to call the first American War for Independence) and says that it was not really a revolution, but was a lawful Christian resistance to tyranny. John W. Whitehead, the head of the Rutherford Institute, which is a wonderful organization that Christians need to support and become aware of, sums up the standard Reformed view when he says this:

...the American Revolution was [actually] a conservative *counter*-revolution. The colonists saw the *British* as the revolutionaries trying to overthrow the colonial governments. If not seen in this light, the American Revolution does not make sense.”²

I think he is right. But you probably noticed that he is using the term “revolution” in two different ways. Because the lawful war for independence is often called a revolution, he continues to call it that, but he insists that it was actually the British government that had engaged in a radical revolution to 1) first of all, put the colonies directly under the rule of British Parliament for the first time (which was illegal), and 2) secondly, to overthrow the contracts that the king had written with those colonies, 3) thirdly, to unilaterally change American laws, which Parliament had no jurisdiction to do, 4) fourthly to kidnap people away from American courts and to take them to the secret Star Chamber, etc., etc., etc. And actually, the Declaration of Independence lists 27 such lawless acts that constituted a radical revolution. It was a radical revolution on the part of the Brits, and it had happened without firing a shot.

I know that has been a long introduction, but hopefully with that picture in your mind, we can more easily answer the question in your outlines: “Who were the true revolutionaries: David and his followers or Absalom and his followers?” Another way of asking the same question is this: “Now that Absalom is in power, is he the legitimate king and is David the one who is the rebel?”

² John W. Whitehead, “Christian Resistance in the Face of State Interference,” in *Theology of Christian Resistance*, (Tyler, TX: Geneva Divinity School Press, 1983), p. 11-12. Emphasis mine.

I. Who are the true revolutionaries: David or Absalom? (v. 15)

A. Hints from the concurrent context of verses 1-14 (cf. “meanwhile” in v. 15) that Absalom was the revolutionary, not David:

1. God calls David “the king” nine times (v. 2,3,4,5,6,9,10,14) and thus God does not consider Absalom’s coup to be legitimate.

And of course, God does not leave us in any doubt. The first word in verse 15 is “meanwhile.” It’s a time indicator that is very important to properly interpreting this passage. The Hebrew grammar indicates that the events he is about to describe took place at the same time as the events in verses 1-14. Just to set the context, if you look at the last verse of chapter 15 you will see that it says, “Absalom came into Jerusalem” – exactly the same thing that our verse says. So in chapter 16, verse 15, we are backing up to the time frame of verse one, and that word “meanwhile” is encouraging us to interpret the rest of this chapter in light of the first fourteen verses. So, let’s do that.

To those who say that David is now the guerilla rebel, and that Absalom is the legitimate king, I would respond by saying that God has declared David to still be the king nine times in the first fourteen verses. Look at verse 2: “And the king said to Ziba.” This is God speaking. He is the narrator speaking His words through the prophet, and God is telling us that David is still the legitimate king. Look at verse 3. “Then the king said...” Verse 4, “So the king said...” Verse 5: “Now when King David came to Bahurim...” And you can see similar references in verses 6,9,10, and 14. So God clearly considers Absalom to be illegitimate and David to still be the true king.

2. Since this coup is the fulfillment of God’s prophecy (11:of discipline (cf. vv. 10-11 with 11:1-15), and since that prophecy describes the coup as being just as unlawful as David’s sin (11:10-12), the implication is that the coup itself is not lawful.

And there are two other hints that supplement those clear statements. I won’t amplify them because I think they should be fairly obvious. Sub-point 2 uses some simple logic to show that way back in chapter 11, God had prophesied about this coup, and He considered Absalom’s future takeover to be just as sinful and rebellious as David’s adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. The implication is that Absalom is the law-breaker, the

rebel, and the revolutionary. He is the one who is illegitimately in office. No wonder God emphasizes the fact that David is still king nine times. We will see in a moment why that is the case even though David had sinned as well.

3. The prophet Zadok (15:27) and apparently Nathan (cf. 1 Kings 1:8-45) sided with David

But in any case, it should therefore be no surprise to find that the verses that are mentioned in sub-point 3 show that Zadok and Nathan supported David. If those two prophets sided with David, it implies that God was siding with David as well – especially since in chapter 15 David asked Zadok to confirm as a seer (as a prophet) whether this was not indeed God’s plan. So, with those three sub-points, I think it is pretty clear that Absalom is the rebel, the revolutionary, and the illegitimate usurper, and it is David who is the counter-revolutionary patriot. If you see it in that light, the whole chapter takes on new significance, and it gives us some important guidance on how to relate to the ups and downs of civil government, no matter where we live in the world.

B. Thus, this passage teaches that:

1. Majorities (“all the people”) do not automatically legitimize a government (v. 15) – that would be democracy, and ignorant men (cf. 15:11) can approve tyranny.

We are at point B. Verse 15 says, “Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him.” That first phrase, “and all the people” seems to indicate that the vast majority of Israel had gone along with Absalom’s coup. It may have been ignorantly, but they had gone along with it. Look at chapter 15:12-13.

2Sam. 15:12 Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, from his city—from Giloh—while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number.

2Sam. 15:13 Now a messenger came to David, saying, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.”

So those three phrases, “all the people,” “the people,” and “the men of Israel,” indicate at least a majority. And that is so significant. What it means is that a majority vote does not necessarily legitimize a government or a ruler. Remember that God said nine times that David was still the king. That means that God does not recognize this election. It is an illegal election.

Now, this may be a little bit confusing, but let me give you an example of how this would work even in our own country. Since our country

(like Israel) is a Constitutional Republic, and since even government officials must conform to the Constitution, it wouldn't matter if a majority of the people chose an 18 year old to be president or to serve in Congress or in the Senate, no one would have to consider such an election valid because the Constitution is quite clear that "no person shall be a representative who shall not have attained to the age of twenty five years." And it is quite clear that our highest law requires that "No Person shall be a Senator who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty Years." And it is quite clear concerning a president that it says, "neither shall any Person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty five years." That's pretty clear. So even if a majority has elected a president who is eighteen years old or thirty years old, since we are not a Democracy that is subject to the will of the people, but instead (like Israel) we are a Republic ruled by law, that means that even majorities cannot override the Constitution without amending it. There is a process for amending the Constitution, but if the majority ignores it, the actions of that majority can be ignored. And in fact, I will be citing a court case that overturned such an election in America. We are not talking about anything weird here. This is standard, Christian, Western civics.

But if what we have said is true of the election of an 18 year old to the presidency, what about an election that violated other provisions of the Constitution? It would be exactly the same problem. I've already mentioned several months ago that for the first time in US history there are a growing number of citizens, sheriffs, and other elected officials who believe (and who are providing huge stacks of documentation) that we have a man in the White House who is not lawfully the president because he is purportedly not a naturally born citizen. And I won't get into all the arguments pro and con, but I would just hasten to say that Senator Ted Cruz (however wonderful he is – and I do like him on some many levels) is just as unqualified to be a president because his father was Cuban at the time of his birth in Canada. Now, the Constitution says that he is quite qualified to be a Senator, but he is unqualified to be a president. So conservatives need to be consistent and oppose Cruz for Prez as well unless it can be clearly demonstrated that he is a natural born citizen in terms of original intent. And so, just to be even handed, I am going to apply our passage by criticizing someone whom I like, if he intends to run for president.

And there has been a lot of ink spilled on this question. How do we know original intent? I have read academic essays that claim that we simply

can't know the meaning of the phrase "natural born citizen,"³ which of course is the Constitutional phrase being discussed all over the USA today with respect to three potential Republican candidates. Interestingly, these essays that say you can't know all ignore the crystal clear definition of the term in Vattel's book, *The Law of Nations*,⁴ a book that was written in 1758 and according to Benjamin Franklin was in constant use by all of our founding fathers during the Constitutional debates.⁵ They were thoroughly familiar with the book. So it is odd that these essays completely ignore Vattel's book. That book defined a natural born citizen as a citizen who had the following four additional characteristics: 1) First, he could not have dual citizenship, which would make him share loyalty with another country, 2) Second, both of his parents had to be citizens at the time of birth, 3) Third, a natural born citizenship had to have his citizenship conferred by the father (not just the mother), and 4) Fourth, the person had to be born on American soil.⁶ Now, special action was taken to change that last provision, and to allow a natural born citizen to be born abroad. In the Naturalization Act of 1790, the Congress took special measures to (from that time forward) allow citizens born abroad to be able to be natural born citizens so long as the other provisions were present, and an additional one was added – that the citizen father (and again it was the father mentioned,⁷ not the mother – provided that the citizen father) was a resident of the USA.⁸ In other words, the baby was born to resident parents when they were on a trip. It's a pretty tight definition. And as late as the 1814 Supreme Court case of "The Venus," the provision is clearly stated that the father must be a citizen. And there is plenty more evidence that rules out not just Obama and Cruz, but also some other potential candidates. And if we are not to be revolutionaries,

³ One particularly well-written article that takes this position is "The Origins and Interpretation of the Presidential Eligibility Clause in the U.S. Constitution," by John Yinger:

<http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/jyinger/Citizenship/history.htm> Interestingly, he completely ignores all the evidence concerning Vattel's influence on this phrase's origin in the Constitution.

⁴ For the text of this book, see <http://www.constitution.org/vattel/vattel.htm>

⁵ On December 9th of 1775, Franklin wrote to Vattel's editor, C.G.F. Dumas, "*I am much obliged by the kind present you have made us of your edition of Vattel. It came to us in good season, when the circumstances of a rising state make it necessary frequently to consult the Law of Nations. It has been continually in the hands of the members of our congress, now sitting. Accordingly, that copy which I kept has been continually in the hands of the members of our congress, now sitting, who are much pleased with your notes and preface, and have entertained a high and just esteem for their author.*" See <http://birthers.org/USC/Vattel.html>

⁶ For some interesting discussion of the issues involved, see <http://www.birthers.org/USC/Vattel.html> and http://www.constitution.org/vattel/vattel_01.htm and

⁷ See also the citation of Vattel in the following Supreme Court case, where it speaks of "...the children of the citizens, those children naturally follow the condition of their fathers, and succeed to all their rights."

<http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/12/253/case.html>

⁸ Congress declared, "And the children of citizens of the United States, that may be born beyond the sea, or out of the limits of the United States, shall be considered as natural born citizens; *Provided*, that the right of citizenship shall not descend to persons whose fathers have never been resident of the United States."

we need to take these facts into consideration when we vote for a presidential candidate in 2016. So I don't think that the fact that Senator Cruz was born outside the USA should be an obstacle, though the birther movement seems to contest that. But the fact that his father was Cuban, and did not become an American until 2005, completely disqualifies him, Senator Rand Paul, notwithstanding. The research I have read on this seems too overwhelming.

But why do I bring this up? To illustrate the principle of Absalom's illegitimacy. The whole controversy about Obama and Cruz illustrates that if indeed an election is proved to be illegal a couple of months or a few years after the election, the person would be deemed to not have been the president from the time of his being sworn into office, not simply from the time that the court deemed him unqualified. It would be just like the author treats Absalom here. This is why it is such a sticky issue. It would mean that all of his actions would be deemed null and void – a rather fascinating scenario, given the actions of our current White House occupant. Well, it's a similar situation with Absalom.

Chapter 15:11 says that there were a lot of people who were duped into supporting Absalom. They didn't even know that it was a conspiracy. They didn't know that Absalom was deposing David or that his reign was illegitimate. The text says that they were innocent. They did not know. How could that be? Well, according to Psalms 39-41, the citizens had been told that David was dying from a disease and this was a peaceful transition. Why would anyone suspect anything different? So here was a majority that had been duped into putting a lying tyrant into power. And yet nine times in the previous 14 verses God says that Absalom is not king; David is. Everybody is treating him as the king; he calls himself the king; and as we will see shortly, his court calls him king. But according to God's infallible word, he was not the king because he was not constitutionally qualified. Since his mother was the daughter of Ammihud, the king of Geshur, he had dual loyalties, and in the previous chapter Absalom used those loyalties to seek asylum with his grandfather. What kind of king is going to have dual loyalties? That dual loyalty by itself would have disqualified him. And there were other disqualifications as well. The process of election was irregular; the current king was not removed by constitutional provisions of impeachment, etc. So it is quite clear that Absalom was the revolutionary even though a majority had supported him.

2. A successful coup (“the people of Israel, came to Jerusalem”) does not automatically legitimize a government (v. 15) – that could legitimize any revolution

The second principle is that a successful *coup* does not automatically legitimize a government. Winning a war does not legitimize a government. Verse 15 says that the people of Israel came to Jerusalem. There was a successful coup. Because David didn't stay and fight, Absalom's army took over Jerusalem without firing a shot. When Hitler took over Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, France, and other countries, did Romans 13 require that the citizens submit to Hitler's rule? Or was his rule illegitimate? Well, this phrase indicates that a successful coup does not automatically mean that you have to submit to that government. You have to examine other principles and issues that we looked at in 1 Samuel. And like David, many in Israel did not submit to Absalom. In fact, by chapter 18 it has become a huge growing movement of tens of thousands of people. We don't know exactly how many, but it's a lot more than the few who left Jerusalem in this chapter.

3. De facto ruler does not make someone a de jure ruler or automatically legitimize a government (v. 15 - “Absalom... came to Jerusalem”) – that could justify any tyranny

The third point indicates that becoming a de facto ruler does not make someone a de jure ruler. We need to understand the difference between those two terms. A de facto ruler is one who is in fact in power. A de jure ruler is one who is lawfully in power. Absalom came into Jerusalem to sit on the throne. He became the de facto ruler. But God did not consider him to be the lawful ruler or the de jure ruler. Nor did David. I am convinced that David would not have fought against him if he had been installed properly as the lawful ruler. When we get to chapter 18, hopefully I will demonstrate that fact.

But an immediate objection that might come to your mind is the case of king Saul. If Absalom is not the lawful ruler, why was Saul treated as the lawful ruler even after God rejected him and said that he was not morally qualified? And the answer is that the people had never impeached Saul, as the Bible mandated that they do. Until Saul was lawfully impeached and until David was voted in according to lawful procedures, Saul was still both the de facto and the de jure ruler. He wasn't a good one, and he was morally disqualified and should have been impeached, but until that could happen he was still lawfully in office. Well, the same is true of David. No one had gone through the required procedures of impeaching David, and they had used

secret means of taking over, not lawful public elections. So there really is no inconsistency.

David treated Saul as the ruler and as God's anointed. That did not let the lower magistrates off the hook; they should have impeached Saul. But until they did, the earlier David modeled how citizens should continue to treat him as ruler. We saw earlier that it didn't mean that David had to submit to his tyranny, but David never went so far as to declare Saul's kingship illegitimate. And in the same way, I consider some of America's tyrannical rulers to be both *de facto* and *de jure* rulers, but that doesn't make their every rule constitutional. But Absalom was not a *de jure* ruler, and therefore David did not consider his position to be legitimate. Absalom had no lawful authority over the citizens of Israel, even though he was a *de facto* king. God Himself still calls David the king and Absalom is therefore a usurper. I know I am spending a lot of time on this, but to properly understand even our own Independence from Britain, you have got to understand these key issues. Otherwise we can fall into the ditch of revolution on the one hand or into the ditch of slavery on the other. These issues help us to walk the straight and narrow even in America today.

4. Defections of key officials (“Ahithophel was with him”) does not automatically legitimize a government (v. 15)

OK, sub-point 4. Verse 15 says that Ahithophel was with him, and chapter 15 indicated that there were other leaders who were with Absalom, but even *that* did not legitimize his government. I don't care how many public officials would support a hypothetical 18 year old president in the USA (just to take one example of his qualifications), no one would have to recognize such a person since the Constitution trumps public officials. And remember, this is *God's* interpretation because nine times in the previous 14 verses God still calls David the king. And even the Supreme Court of the United States has said the same thing about *de facto* rulers and laws and *de jure* rulers and laws. Listen to this reasoning from the Supreme Court case of *Norton v. Shelby County*, in the year 1886. (And they were actually ruling on an Absalom kind of an issue on the county level, deeming a board of commissioners to have no legal existence.) The Supreme Court said,

While acts of a *de facto* incumbent of an office lawfully created by law and existing are often held to be binding from reasons of public policy, the acts of a person assuming to fill and perform the duties of an office which does not exist *de jure* can have no validity whatever in law.

An unconstitutional act is not a law; it confers no rights; it imposes no duties; it affords no protection; it creates no office; it is in legal contemplation as inoperative as though it had never been passed.⁹

That's a great summary of the Biblical view of what was going on in this chapter. David's followers didn't need to feel any guilt in ignoring Absalom's decrees. He had no authority to command them to do anything. Though public officials had officially declared Absalom's election to be legal and David to be an outlaw, since it was a revolutionary action against Israel's constitution, any citizen could have ignored it lawfully and could have sided with David. Why? Because the highest authority in Israel was the law, not the king. That's why America's founding fathers said that the law is the king of American, not a man.

American Jurisprudence (which is the compendium of our American laws) reaffirms this understanding. It says, "No one is bound to obey an unconstitutional law and no courts are bound to enforce it."¹⁰ This is what the nullification movement is all about. People who don't have this understanding criticize South Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and other states that have either already nullified Obamacare or are in process of doing so. And they say that these States are engaging in revolutionary action; they claim that their nullification is illegal because the Congress, Senate, President, and Supreme Court have all approved it. The claim is that those states shouldn't rebel; they should submit. But the proper response is given in this chapter. Just because government officials have officially approved the illegal action of Absalom does not make it legal. Absalom is the revolutionary and David the counter-revolutionary. And in the same way, it is Obamacare that is an unconstitutional, rebellious, revolutionary action and these States that are nullifying the act as being unconstitutional are the counter-revolutionaries heroes trying to stand up for a lawful order. Can you see that?

This concept is so important that I want to read the whole context of that last quote I gave from America's current laws. This is from 16 American Jurisprudence. It says,

The general misconception is that any statute passed by legislators bearing the appearance of law constitutes the law of the land. The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and any statute, to be valid, must be in agreement. It is impossible for both the Constitution and a law violating it to be valid; one must prevail. This is succinctly stated as follows:

⁹ <http://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/118/425/>

¹⁰ 16 Am Jur 2d, Sec 177 late 2d, Sec 256. See discussion at <http://www.constitution.org/uslaw/16amjur2nd.htm>

The General rule is that an unconstitutional statute, though having the form and name of law is in reality no law, but is wholly void, and ineffective for any purpose; since unconstitutionality dates from the time of its enactment and not merely from the date of the decision so branding it. An unconstitutional law, in legal contemplation, is as inoperative as if it had never been passed. Such a statute leaves the question that it purports to settle just as it would be had the statute not been enacted.

Since an unconstitutional law is void, the general principles follow that it imposes no duties, confers no rights, creates no office, bestows no power or authority on anyone, affords no protection, and justifies no acts performed under it.....

A void act cannot be legally consistent with a valid one. An unconstitutional law cannot operate to supersede any existing valid law. Indeed, insofar as a statute runs counter to the fundamental law of the land, it is superseded thereby.

[and here comes the part I quoted earlier:] No one is bound to obey an unconstitutional law and no courts are bound to enforce it.¹¹

In today's culture wars it is imperative that we find out who the revolutionaries are and who the counter-revolutionaries are, and begin supporting the counter-revolutionaries. If you go to the Tenth Amendment Center you will find all kinds of encouraging acts and laws being passed in States to protect against the Absaloms of this world. It's very encouraging. *But they cannot do it alone.* Citizens need to stand behind the States to give them the moral courage to stand strong. These Davids need to know that there are citizens willing to stand behind them. Now it is true that there are so many issues that it is hard to keep track of, but just follow the Tenth Amendment Center and you will see one organization that is counter-revolutionary, and if you go to Downsize DC, you will see another organization that is acting as a David. And there are many other organizations out there. But Christians must get educated in Biblical civics and do what they can to oppose the revolutionaries of our society.

C. Our previous investigation of lawful resistance to tyranny shows that the change of government must follow the Reformed principles laid out in such documents as Lex Rex, A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants, The Declaration of Independence, etc.

The question often comes up, "How do you go about it?" Since this passage mainly deals with the lawfulness of resistance and not much with the "how," I won't spend a lot of time on it. We are going to skim through the rest of this chapter fairly quickly. But it is possible to be very foolish and to go off half-cocked with this kind of information. And so I would say that

¹¹ <http://www.constitution.org/uslaw/16amjur2nd.htm>

there are checks and balances, and there are boundaries that the Scripture gives. I have preached on those in 1 Samuel. But historically there are a lot of great exegetical treatments that can help people to not respond to revolutionary governments with their own revolutionary actions. That's the mistake that too many people make. I highly recommend Samuel Rutherford's masterful book, *Lex Rex*, (which means, *The Law is King*), which was written in 1644 to help Christians understand how to avoid both revolution and abject slavery. It is a tremendous exegetical treatment that America's founding father's studied a great deal before declaring independence. Another book that our founding fathers studied and were influenced by was Junius Brutus' masterful book, *A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants*. You can download that book for free from Biblical Blueprints. That book shows the limits and the extent of our powers to resist tyrants and usurpers such as Absalom. You don't want to answer revolution with revolution, like Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson were advocating. That book keeps us in the happy middle that avoids humanistic revolution and that avoids humanistic slave-mentality – or what some people call sheeple people.

But back to our definition, revolution is the unlawful overthrow of God's lawful order through unlawful means. We will look at a few of those unlawful means in a bit, but let me end Roman numeral I with two quotes that I think sum up the issues rather well. The first is a quote from James Jordan. He said,

Calvin advocated resistance to preserve the existing constitutional, customary, and godly order, against centralization, abuses of power, and violation of rights and liberties by a tyrannical central power, when initiated and led by lesser "powers that be," by lesser magistrates. Calvin's pervasive concern was for legitimacy and the rule of law, a concern which led him to qualify and limit the Christian's duty of obedience to God's appointed civil authorities. Like the later American colonists, the goal of Calvin and his followers was not the revolutionary overthrow of the existing order, but rather the preservation of revealed and historically given law against the usurpations of tyrants.¹²

Very well said. The second quote is from Tom Rose. He said,

The American Revolution, as I stated above, was *not* a lawless rebellion against authority, as some historians claim. Rather, it was a legal *interposition* of one lawfully elected level of government (the colonial legislatures) against a king who insisted in obdurately breaking his feudal contract with the colonies. Even a cursory reading of the Declaration of Independence shows 27 specific points

¹² James Jordan, "Pacifism and the Old Testament," in *Theology of Christian Resistance*, p. 108.

which the colonies claimed King George III broke in his feudal contract with them, thus negating his right of rule.¹³

So the first fifteen verses are designed to help us to recognize the difference between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries. Revolutionaries are condemned in Scripture; counter-revolutionaries are praised as patriots. So this passage gives the legal basis for resistance.

II. The lawful subterfuge of the counter-revolutionary, Hushai (vv. 16-19)

A. Pledged to David (“David’s friend”) while acting like he is loyal to Absalom (v. 16-17)

Well, let’s continue reading in verses 16-19 to see what kinds of resistance Hushai engaged in. And we are going to have to rush through this material. Even though Hushai was not fighting with swords, slings, and spears, he was a member of the resistance, and he was at war as a spy. Are spies legitimate? Yes they are. The law of God authorized the work of spies or espionage in Numbers 13, Numbers 14, Numbers 21, and Deuteronomy 1. And it is clear from those passages that spies do not owe the enemy the truth. So we find Hushai pretending loyalty to Absalom just like many in the Nazi-era resistance were judges, police, mayors, legislators, and spies within the Nazi system. Verse 16:

2Sam. 16:16 And so it was, when Hushai the Archite, David’s friend, came to Absalom, that Hushai said to Absalom, “*Long live the king! Long live the king!*”

Robert Bergen, in his commentary says,

Hushai... began carrying out one of the most successful acts of deceit and subterfuge recorded in Israelite history. The greatness of Hushai’s performance can only be appreciated as one understands that Hushai was a master of double entendre... [Then after quoting Hushai’s words, “Long live the king!” he asks,] Did these words refer to Absalom, as the social context would indicate, or were they in fact a wish that the king-in-exile be granted life? The careful reader suspects the latter.¹⁴

Hushai was pledged to be David’s friend, and God Himself says that he really was David’s friend, but here he pretends to be loyal to Absalom, without actually lying. But it was intended to deceive, as a good spy must.

Absalom appears to be somewhat suspicious initially. Verse 17:

¹³ Tom Rose, “On Reconstruction and the American Republic,” in *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

¹⁴ Robert D. Bergen, *The New American Commentary, 1 & 2 Samuel* (Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002), p. 410.

2Sam. 16:17 So Absalom said to Hushai, “*Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?*”

What a hypocrite to accuse Hushai of lack of loyalty to David. One commentator noted that Hushai could have asked Absalom the same question. “Is this the way you show loyalty to your dad, after all he has done for you?” But though Hushai is too smart to say that, it does highlight the fact that revolutionary rulers (because they are in revolt against God’s law order) are often blinded to such inconsistencies. Rushdoony has pointed out that Congress has repeatedly (and hypocritically) berated officers in the president’s office for doing exactly the same unethical things that Congress has done. Such hypocrisy is common to man.

B. Clever double entendre throughout (vv. 16-19)

In any case, Hushai continues with an amazingly deceptive series of double entendres in verses 18 and 19.

2Sam. 16:18 And Hushai said to Absalom, “No, [What’s he saying “No” to? That he is disloyal to David or that he will not be loyal to Absalom? “No”] but whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with him I will remain.

Absalom thinks that Hushai is speaking about him, but since 1 and 2 Samuel have repeatedly said that God had chosen David, and since the people had used the lawful procedures of electing David, it could just as easily have referred to Hushai’s loyalty to David. As Bergen says, “Thus, for Hushai to declare his loyalty to an unnamed individual chosen by the Lord and Israel was to take his stand with David.”¹⁵ Hushai continues:

2Sam. 16:19 “Furthermore, whom should I serve? *Should I not serve* in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father’s presence, so will I be in your presence.”

How had Hushai served David? As David’s loyal friend. So if he is going to serve in Absalom’s presence in exactly the same way as he had served in David’s presence, he was going to serve in Absalom’s presence as David’s friend. It’s a masterful deception. We should never do this kind of thing normally, but in times of warfare (and only in times of warfare) such subterfuge is allowed by the law of God. You don’t have to tell the enemy the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And if you do think you need to do so, then I would suggest that you put a sign on your doors telling burglars that you are absent rather than leaving the lights on.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Anyway, Absalom seems to have totally missed the fact that Hushai's words could be taken in two different ways, and so Hushai is admitted into the inner council of Absalom, where he will use his position to undermine. It's a risky business, but being a spy will prove to be an absolutely critical business for David's survival.

So these few verses justify the work of counter-revolutionaries in fighting to restore law, order, and legitimacy to government. It justifies working outside the system and working inside the system. And we need such counter-revolutionaries when the Marxist revolutionaries have pretty much taken over this country. Let's take a look at the lawless revolutionary, Ahithophel.

III. The lawlessness of the revolutionary, Ahithophel (vv. 20-23)

Verse 20 introduces us to him:

2Sam. 16:20 Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give advice as to what we should do."

Ahithophel is in this with Absalom up to his neck, so surely Ahithophel can be trusted! But as we will see, Ahithophel's advice cannot be trusted. Is there really honor among thieves and liars? No. They are just as likely to steal from you and to lie to you. Revolutionary societies either fall apart or lead to an even greater tyranny, because only force can hold liars and thieves together. How do you trust a person who has been lying about David for the last three years? You can't. Anyway Absalom apparently does.

A. His advice was lawless:

1. He was advocating an act of incest and adultery, both of which called for capital punishment (Lev. 20:10-11; etc)

Look at Ahithophel's advice in verse 21:

2Sam. 16:21 And 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 are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong."

The first thing to see is that Ahithophel is pushing Absalom to do something not only unlawful, but something so heinous that it calls for the death penalty. It is a breath taking suggestion. Leviticus 20:10-11 is just one of many passages that show this to be an abomination on two levels: adultery and incest. It says,

Lev. 20:10 "The man who commits adultery with *another* man's wife, *he* who

commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death.

Lev. 20:11 The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood *shall be* upon them.

In a moment we will look at why Absalom would even go along with such a plan, but the point I want to highlight here is that the unlawful revolution immediately establishes in the most public way possible the fact that it is not subject to the law of God. And in this, it stands hand-in-hand with every revolution in history. Revolutions have always overthrown law and order, the American Revolution being the exception, because it really wasn't a revolution. And the reason David couldn't just let this go was that it would establish Israel as a lawless nation. It would destroy Israel. We will see in chapter 18 that David would rather not have fought against Absalom, but he had to do so to be a legitimate king. It was his sworn duty to defend God's law order. Michael Gilstrap says,

“The point therefore, at which resistance becomes legitimate is, according to Calvin, always a question of actual law-breaking. What is common in every actual case of resistance is that illegitimacy is determined by departure from the legitimate order. Resistance is, therefore, really a means of bringing the legitimate order back to its rightful place... Resistance is carried out against the particular magistrate in office, and not against the office itself. Although it is a fine line, it spells the difference between revolution and an act of Christian resistance.”¹⁶

It all revolves around the law. Why do Democrats force a litmus test on judge appointees that they be pro homosexual and pro abortion rather than judges who hold to strict construction of the Constitution? It's because they are revolutionaries. Intuitively they are committed to it, even though it will eventually backfire on them. David's engagement in counter-revolution was an engagement to uphold God's law order. This is why most of our founding fathers spoke of the war as lawful resistance and Thomas Paine spoke of it as a revolution. They were subject to the law of God; Paine was not, though occasionally he gave some lip service. Don't follow Paine's little book that is being passed around in Conservative circles.

2. He was using a pagan policy of kingship succession

So the first sub-point is that Ahithophel's advice is clearly contrary to the law. Yet Absalom does it without any hesitation. Verse 22:

¹⁶ Michael Gilstrap, “John Calvin's Theology of Resistance,” in *Theology of Christian Resistance*, Pp. 211-212.

2Sam. 16:22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

There were no witnesses to prosecute David's adultery, but all Israel was a witness to this act of adultery and incest. Now, even if this had not been adultery or incest, it would still be wrong. The source of this idea is thoroughly pagan.

But of course, anything that is not Biblical is pagan, isn't it? There is no neutrality. Your political actions are either Biblical or they are revolutionary. Most of what goes on in American politics today has become revolutionary. Our founding fathers would roll over in their graves at how the Bible and God are excluded from the courts and from most public actions. Our courts routinely forbid the Bible from being introduced into the courtroom. And they think this is being religiously neutral. It is not. There is always a religion that governs a nation's actions, and the religion of humanism has been ruling for a long time. There is no neutrality.

And unfortunately, too many Christians have been siding with the revolutionaries on this issue of law rather than siding with David. They are either afraid to bring Scripture to bear in the political arena, or they are philosophically opposed to it. But Christ said, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. 12:30). And that includes politicians. Joe Morecraft said,

"Religious neutrality in politics, then, is a subversive, revolutionary, and anti-Christian principle!"¹⁷

And I say, "Amen!" But the fact that most Christians think you are a nutcase to say that, shows how far the humanistic revolution in America has progressed. Through government re-education programs, humanism has taken over Christianity, and Christians are shocked when they hear anyone preaching like I am preaching today. Well, back in the 1700's, almost all the preachers preached like I am preaching today. It was expected that they preach the whole counsel of God. Alliance Defending Freedom is trying to get pastors to once again apply the Bible to all of life, including politics. But the church has lost the nerve to have such a prophetic voice.

But the point is that all political actions are either Biblical or anti-Biblical. There can be no neutrality. We still have, "In God we trust" on our money, but it's a lie, and even most *Christians* have rejected God's laws in civics even more thoroughly than Absalom did. Let me give you a couple quotes just to show you the radical and revolutionary change that has

¹⁷ Joseph Morecraft, "The Counterproductivity of Not Linking Christianity and Politics," in *Ibid*, p. 155.

occurred in the last sixty to seventy years. I've got a big fat book put together by a Jewish author who quotes from people in every branch of State and Federal government from the 1600's to the 1900s and shows how all branches on all levels have had quite a few people who have made official statements unashamedly committed to the civil laws of the Bible and to the fact that this is a Christian nation. He cites numerous statements from the Supreme Court. One is the case of the Holy Trinity, which gives extensive proofs that this was a Christian nation completely committed to the authority of Christ and of His Word. I've given that book to quite a number of politicians who have been blown away by it; they had no idea. And they had no idea because the secret work of Ahithophel and Absalom has been brainwashing people for the last sixty years.

For most of our founding fathers, Thomas Paine's idea of neutrality or secularism was revolutionary. They called it Jacobite, which was their disparaging term for supporters of the secularist French Revolution. You know, Paine almost got guillotined by the Revolutionary French, but he still supported them. He's an anomaly. In contrast to him, our founding fathers, with very few exceptions, were anti-revolutionary because they supported the Scriptures. Our first president, George Washington said, "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." [p. 660] He said, "impossible." He knew that there is no neutrality. When Judge Nathaniel Freeman instructed a grand Jury in 1802 he said this (and try to imagine the outcry if any modern judge said this): "the laws of the Christian system, as embraced in the bible, must be respected as of high authority in all our courts and it cannot be thought improper for the officers of such a government to acknowledge their *obligation to be governed by its rule.*" [p. 430-431, emphasis mine). People would be stupefied if a judge said that today. In fact, he would probably be evicted from the court. Andrew Jackson, on June 8, 1845, said in reference to the Bible, "That book, Sir, is the Rock upon which our republic rests." I'm no fan of Harry S. Truman, but even as late as his presidency (from 1945-1953), he could say with an absolutely straight face,

The fundamental basis of this nation's laws was given to Moses on the Mount. The fundamental basis of our Bill of Rights comes from the teachings we get from Exodus and St. Matthew, from Isaiah and St. Paul. I don't think we emphasize that enough these days. If we don't have a proper fundamental moral background, we will finally end up with a totalitarian government which does not believe in the

*rights for anybody except the State.*¹⁸

And he wasn't just talking to a friend when he said that. That was given as part of his speech to the Attorney General's Conference, February 1950. Quotes from hundreds of public officials in that book have convinced me that most public officers prior to the 1960s would consider our current public officials as revolutionaries who are unlawfully overthrowing a lawful order with unlawful means. We need a new generation of counter-revolutionaries to stand against the pagan Absaloms of our day.

3. It was in part “tit for tat” revenge over David’s adultery with his granddaughter.

The third thing that made this lawless was that it was revenge. At least, most commentators assume that it was revenge. One commentator said,

For Ahithophel personally, the scheme must have seemed like a particularly satisfying application of the Torah's *lex talionis* (“eye for eye, tooth for tooth...”). David had had unlawful sexual relations with Ahithophel's granddaughter at the royal palace in Jerusalem, though she was married to another; so now, unlawful sexual relations with David's harem would take place at the same palace – only in this case the retributive act would be ten times greater than the original offense, and in public!¹⁹

This was not justice. This was personal revenge that contradicted the Bible. But how many political actions today are actions that punish non-supporters and that reward supporters? Why should unions get exemptions from Obamacare that others don't? Why has the current administration tried to destroy companies like Hobby Lobby or Chick Filet? It's really the same spirit at work.

4. It protected Ahithophel by making sure that Absalom could never be reconciled with David

Anyway, commentators point out that Ahithophel's strange advice was designed to make sure that Absalom could never again be reconciled with David. Ahithophel was not going to be the fall-guy if things didn't work out. Once Absalom did this lawless act, he would be committed. And every revolution down through history has had to do that. Revolutions and lawlessness are logically wrapped up in each other. And anyone who gets queasy and wants to return to the old law order will become an enemy of the state.

¹⁸ As quoted by David Crowe in <http://restoreamerica.org/2012/02/23/santorum-satan-and-the-secularists/>

¹⁹ Bergen, p. 411.

B. His advice was followed because

1. It demonstrated to the fearful in Israel that Absalom was committed

Very, very quickly: the outline points out that Ahithophel's advice was followed because it would demonstrate to the fearful in Israel that Absalom was committed all the way. So there is a certain logic to it.

2. It showed a radical burning of all bridges

It showed that he was willing to radically burn all bridges of escape, and that would help others to be willing to do so as well. If Absalom is willing to stick his neck out like this, it will make others ready to do so as well.

3. Absalom and others trusted Ahithophel's advice as if it was 100% accurate (v. 23 – “as if... both with David and with Absalom”; other translations have: “was valued as highly as if” (BBE), or “such was the regard that both David and Absalom had for Ahithophel's advice,” (HCSB), or “That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel's advice” (NIV), or “so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom” (ESV); see also NRSV, NASB, JPS)

But the main reason given in verse 23 is astonishing – it is that Absalom and others in their circle treated Ahithophel's advice on a par with Scripture. Verse 23 says,

2Sam. 16:23 Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, *was* [and most translations say something to the effect “was treated”] as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. So *was* all the advice of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

Now his advice was absolute stupidity on one level, but it was treated as being as wise as Scripture. In other words, any time Ahithophel advised David or Absalom the people thought, “Yeah. Sounds good. Let's do it.” He had become an authority equal to the Bible. *That's astonishing! That's revolutionary!* And you might wonder, “How could they treat *anybody's* opinion as equal with Scripture?” Good question. That's a question I ask Christians all the time. People do it all the time in every area of life – parenting, science, sociology, women's issues, men's issues, you name it. They treat the wisdom of this world with high regard, and it is often shown as a lust for academic respectability. And when it comes to politics, things are actually worse today than they were in Absalom's time. Ahithophels are often treated as being smarter than the Bible and are certainly given more

respect than the wisdom of the Bible is. But it makes sense. The revolution had just started three years before in the propaganda stage, whereas the revolution in America (at least the propaganda stage) has been going on for a long, long time. So we are further down the road than they were. No wonder things are worse.

C. The fly in the ointment:

The fly in the ointment for Absalom was that this horrific act of incest and adultery mandated the death penalty in the law. To begin his kingdom with such an unlawful act was to commit the kingdom to the overthrow of God's law order. It had to, because otherwise Absalom would always be in danger of impeachment and execution. The sword of God's justice would always be hanging over his head. Prior to this public act of adultery and incest, most Jews probably had no idea that Absalom was a revolutionary. This act made that quite clear. And from this point on, Israelites had to choose to side with Absalom or to side with God's law. Would they be revolutionaries, or would they fight to re-establish God's law order? And many who might otherwise have been loyal subjects of Absalom switched sides and in chapter 18 we find that there were tens of thousands who defected to David. They became the counter-revolutionaries, seeking to re-establish God's law order.

And it may take something this shocking and this in-your-face by our modern revolutionaries before Christians wake up to the fact that they cannot embrace the compromised incrementalism of either major party. Too many Christians are drifting with the revolutionaries (perhaps with an occasional complaint, but they are drifting with them) rather than standing firm with the counter-revolutionaries.

Conclusion – resistance yes; revolution no.

So the question comes this morning: "Which side are you on?" When a revolution against God's law order happens in a society, its citizens have to choose sides. To do nothing is automatically to support the revolution. It's easier to do nothing. It is easier to let our country slide faster and faster into apostasy. But if you do that, you are part of the problem. I call upon all Christians to do what they can stem that slide and to reverse it.

Some will become counter-revolutionaries by getting involved within the system, just like Hushai did. Others will have a prophetic voice against it and risk Absalom's wrath, just like Zadok, Abiathar, and their sons did. Others will provide finances and moral support for the counter-revolutionaries. Some will only be able to pray. In fact, we are shortly going

to end by singing a prayer; singing an imprecatory Psalm, and that is an awesome thing that can be done in faith by the churches. David himself wrote several during this period. As far as I am concerned, those are the nuclear weapons of the spiritual realm, so to speak. Those kinds of prayers can turn the tide, just as the prayers of Moses helped Israel win against the Amalekites.

In fact, that is a marvelous image to keep in mind. As long as Moses kept his arms up, Israel won against the revolutionary Amalekites. And I say revolutionary because Exodus 17 portrays Amalek as seizing God's throne or trying to overthrow God's throne. Anyway, when Moses' arms got weary and they came down, the Israelites started losing, and when they went up in prayer, they were winning. There was such a direct connection between the prayers of Moses and the victory of the counter-revolutionaries, that Aaron and Hur noticed, and they held his arms up for the duration, guaranteeing the victory of the counter-revolutionaries.

Praise God that we still have some counter-revolutionaries within the civil government! And they desperately need your prayers, your moral encouragement, and your financial and political support. So my final exhortation to you is to not be active or passive revolutionaries. And the only way to avoid that is by committing yourselves unreservedly to God's law order and to doing what you can to restore the Constitutional and Biblical foundations of our country. Don't say it is impossible; because really, when you think about it, what David was committing himself to in this next chapter could also have been considered impossible. But he knew that nothing is impossible with God. Instead of defeatism, commit yourself to God and to the Scriptures, and trust God for the victory. As the next two chapters will show, God can bless the counter-revolutionaries against enormous odds. May it be so, Lord Jesus! Amen.

Revolutions, Revolutionaries, and Counterrevolutionaries

2 Samuel 16:15-23

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 11-24-2013

Introduction

- I. Who are the true revolutionaries: the followers of David or the followers of Absalom? (v. 15)
 - A. Hints from the concurrent context of verses 1-14 (cf. “meanwhile” in v. 15) that Absalom was the revolutionary, not David:
 1. God calls David “the king” nine times (v. 2,3,4,5,6,9,10,14) and thus God does not consider Absalom’s coup to be legitimate.
 2. Since this coup is the fulfillment of God’s prophecy (11:of discipline (cf. vv. 10-11 with 11:1-15), and since that prophecy describes the coup as being just as unlawful as David’s sin (11:10-12), the implication is that the coup itself is not lawful.
 3. The prophet Zadok (15:27) and apparently Nathan (cf. 1 Kings 1:8-45) sided with David
 - B. Thus, this passage teaches that:
 1. Majorities (“all the people”) do not automatically legitimize a government (v. 15) – that would be democracy; note that ignorant men (cf. 15:11) can approve tyranny.
 2. A successful coup (“the people of Israel, came to Jerusalem”) does not automatically legitimize a government (v. 15) – that could legitimize any revolution
 3. De facto ruler does not make someone a de jure ruler or automatically legitimize a government (v. 15 - “Absalom... came to Jerusalem”) – that could justify any tyranny
 4. Defections of key officials (“Ahithophel was with him”) does not automatically legitimize a government (v. 15) - that could legitimize unconstitutional oligarchy
 - C. Our previous investigation of lawful resistance to tyranny shows that the change of government must follow the Reformed principles laid out in such documents as Lex Rex, A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants, The Declaration of Independence, etc.
 - II. The lawful subterfuge of the counter-revolutionary, Hushai (vv. 16-19)
 - A. Pledged to David (“David’s friend”) while acting like he is loyal to Absalom (v. 16-17)
 - B. Clever double entendre throughout (vv. 16-19)
 - III. The lawlessness of the revolutionary, Ahithophel (vv. 20-23)
 - A. His advice was lawless:
 1. He was advocating an act of incest and adultery, both of which called for capital punishment (Lev. 20:10-11; etc)
 2. He was using a pagan policy of kingship succession; human wisdom trumps Scripture
 3. It was in part “tit for tat” revenge over David’s adultery with his granddaughter.
 4. It protected Ahithophel by making sure that Absalom could never be reconciled with David
 - B. His advice was followed because
 1. It demonstrated to the fearful in Israel that Absalom was committed
 2. It showed a radical burning of all bridges
 3. Absalom and others trusted Ahithophel’s advice as if it was 100% accurate (v. 23 – “as if... both with David and with Absalom”; other translations have: “was valued as highly as if” (BBE), or “such was the regard” (HCSB), or “[they] regarded all of Ahithophel’s advice” (NIV), or “so was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed” (ESV); see also NRSV, NASB, JPS)
 - C. The fly in the ointment:
- Conclusion – resistance yes; revolution no.