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David Flees from Absalom

Second Samuel 15: 13-37

David flees from Absalom DIG: What was the reaction of Absalom's revolt? Why are David's concubines mentioned here? Why do the Levites follow David with the ark of YHVH? What does that do for David's sense of well-being? How submissive is David to God's judgment in this matter between himself and his son? How was Ittai an island of faithfulness in a sea of treachery? How would you describe the roles of Zadok and Abiathar in the struggle between David and Absalom? How would you describe David's ascent up the Mount of Olives? Why did he weep? What answers do you see for his prayer? How was Hushai, David's friend and adviser, part of the prayer's answer?

REFLECT: Have you made Ittai's promise of "wherever and whether it means life or death" to your Master? Or have you qualified your allegiance somewhat? How so? What would it take for that to change? David said: Let God do to me whatever seems good to Him. If you could bring yourself to say that, what are you afraid might happen? Where do you need to put "legs to your prayers" as David does in sending Hushai to confound the counsel of Ahithophel?

977 BC

This is the beginning of a 24-hour period that starts here at 15:13 and extends all the way to 17:23.

For the second time in **his** life, **David** was forced to flee into the wilderness to save **his** life. As a young man, **he** fled the jealous rage of **King Sha'ul**, and now **he** was seeking refuge from the hypocritical deceptions of **his son Absalom** and **his** former counselor **Ahithophel**.

A summary of the preparations for and beginning of David's flight from Absalom: A loyal messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the men of Isra'el are with Absalom." Obviously, David was caught completely off guard, and with Ahithophel as his personal advisor (who had secretly abandoned David in favor of Absalom), the conspiracy

was a well-kept secret. **Then David said to all his loyal officials who were** unaware of the conspiracy, **“Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom** (Hebrew: my father is peace). **He** was in no position to defend it. **We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the City to the sword. The king’s officials answered him, “Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses” (Second Samuel 15:13-15).** David had the support of the old political establishment, but **Absalom had the hearts of the men of Isra’el.** It was a matter of **the heart . . . and the hearts of Isra’el** had shifted. So **David** abandoned **Jerusalem** for two reasons: first, to avoid a bloodbath, and secondly, to allow time for **him** to mobilize forces for **his** defense.



The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace. So the king set out, with his loyal family members and court officials following him, and they halted at the edge of the City before the ascent up the Mount of Olives. Those loyal to him marched past him, along with all the Philistine Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Philistine Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath marched before the king (Second Samuel 15:16-18). Once **David** defeated these **Philistines**, they became **his** loyal subjects and became **his** royal bodyguards. The day of **David’s** departure is the most detailed day of **his** life in the Scriptures. It is a 24-hour period that extends all the way from **15:13** to **17:22**. It is filled with events, both good and bad, with both short-term and long-term results.³⁸⁵ **The summary is followed by David’s specific instructions to three of his supporters:**

First, Ittai the Gittite: The king asked Ittai, leader of the **Philistine** mercenaries: **Why should you come along with us?** There is no need. **David** would not pressure **Ittai** into following **him**. The **Philistine** had everything to lose and nothing to gain. **David** graciously released **Ittai** to serve the new regime and enjoy a normal life: **Go back and stay with**

King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. You came only recently and joined David's service. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take the Philistines under your command with you. May the LORD show you kindness (Hebrew: *chesed*) and faithfulness. From the words *chesed* (see commentary on [Ruth](#), to see link click [Af - The Concept of Chesed](#)) and **faithfulness**, Ittai revealed **himself** to be a believer, for whom *chesed* and **faithfulness** were vitally important.

But Ittai would have none of it, and **replied to the king**, "As surely as ADONAI lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be." This Gentile's testimony of loyalty to **David** is one of the greatest confessions of **faith** and **faithfulness** found in the Bible and equals that of **Ruth (Ruth 1:16)** and the **Roman centurion (Mattityahu 8:5-13)**. Whatever **David's** fate, he was going to share it. Although **his** back was against the wall and **his** own **people** were rebelling against **him**, they refused to desert **him**. So the **Philistine's** loyalty was greater than **David's** own son. **David said to Ittai**, "Go ahead, and pass over the **Kidron Valley**." So **Ittai** marched on with all his men and the families that were with him.

Whatever problems certain citizens of **Jerusalem** and other towns may have had with **David**, people living in the countryside saw him in a different light. **The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by.** And foreshadowing the passion of another anointed **King** centuries later (**John 18:1**), **David also crossed the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. All the people** who accompanied **David**, and the loyal **Philistine** troops **moved on toward the wilderness of Judah (Second Samuel 15:19-23).**

Second, Zadok the priest: Sharing priestly duties during at least some of **David's** reign, **Zadok** and **Abiathar** decided to accompany **him** on **his** flight from **Jerusalem**. **Zadok and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the City.** A makeshift altar, a small fire, and grain offerings would be possible in the emergency, as an accompaniment to prayer for **the king's** protection and ultimate victory.³⁸⁶ **Then the king said to Zadok**, "Take the ark of God back to the **City**." On the one hand, **David** would not use **the ark** as a good-luck charm because **his** faith was in **ADONAI** (see [Dq - ADONAI, You are a Shield Around Me, the Lifter of My Head](#)). On the other hand, **the presence of God** would be of no use to **Absalom**. "If I find favor in YHVH's eyes, He will bring me back to Tziyon and let me see it and His dwelling place again. But if God says: I am not pleased with you, then I am ready;

let Him do to me whatever seems good to Him” (Second Samuel 15:24-26). David was totally yielding to **the LORD** and saying, “Not my will but **Your** will be done.”

The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Do you understand? Go back to Yerushalayim with my blessing. Take your son Ahimaaz with you, and also Abiathar’s son Jonathan. You and Abiathar return with your two sons. I will wait at the fords of the west bank of the Jordan River until word comes from you to inform me.” So Zadok and Abiathar were to act as spies on David’s behalf. Whatever Absalom might do to the king’s officials, he wasn’t likely to lay his hands on ADONAI’s priests and Levites, and they could go about their business unnoticed. So they took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there (Second Samuel 15:27-29). Absalom’s followers must have interpreted their action as a submission to the new king.³⁸⁷

But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot to symbolize the shameful exile on which he was then starting. **All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.** A further blow was delivered with the news of **Ahithophel’s** defection. **Now David had been told, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.”** It was clear that **Ahithophel** as counselor of **the king** not only held one of the highest court positions of confidence, but **his** counsel was so valued that whoever had the benefit of **his** advice was sure to be successful.³⁸⁸ **He** would later write: **Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me (Psalm 41:9).** What do you do when one of your closest confidants betrays you? You do what **David** did. **So David** immediately turned to **God** and **prayed, “ADONAI, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness” (2 Sam 15:30-31).** And like **Dani’el’s** prayer (**Dani’el 9:20-23**), **YHVH** answered **him** immediately.

Third, his friend and advisor Hushai the Arkite: And as providence would have it, **when David arrived at the summit of the Mount of Olives, where the people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him. He** was a high-ranking official on par with **Ahithophel** and was loyal to **David. His robe torn and dust on his head. David said to him, “If you go with me, you will be a burden to me because of your age and the rigors of a fugitive life. But if you return to the City and say to Absalom, ‘Your Majesty, I will be your servant; I was your father’s servant in the past, but now I will be your servant,’ then you can help me by frustrating Ahithophel’s advice. Won’t the priests Zadok and Abiathar be there with you? Tell them anything you hear in the king’s palace. Their two sons, Ahimaaz son of Zadok and Jonathan son of Abiathar, are there with them. Send them to me with anything you hear.”** All five

men were risking their lives for the sake of **YHVH** and the kingdom, but they considered it an honor to serve their king and restore him to the throne. **So Hushai, David's confidant, arrived at Jerusalem just as Absalom was entering the City** and the people's excitement at greeting their new **king** probably enabled **Hushai** to enter without being noticed (**Second Samuel 15:32-37**). Therefore, **Hushai** served a double function. **He** could counter **Ahithophel's** advice to **Absalom** and **he** could keep **David** informed about **Absalom's** plans from the information gleaned from **Ahimaaz** and **Jonathan**. **Hushai** was the answer to **David's** prayer.

David was developing a plan of defense. When **he** met those who were loyal to **him**, **he** deployed **them** in various ways to be most useful for **his** general strategy. **He** developed a network of military and intelligence agents to outflank **Absalom** at every turn. **David** used loyal soldiers, diplomats and priests. In the wilderness **he** needed soldiers. **His priests** and **confidants** were more useful to **him** back in **Yerushalayim**.

When the going got tough, **David** found out who was loyal to **him** and who was not. These **three men** unquestionably surrendered to the will of **the king**; a yielding that was not slavery, but joyful and a blessed liberty. It was not forced upon **them**; it arose freely from hearts that were tender, hearts from which the hardness had disappeared. Therefore, as **David** left **the City**, these **three men** committed **themselves to the king's** cause and to **his** will, while **David's** lukewarm supporters had gone over to the popular candidate.

As believers, **Jesus** is only **King** when your will and **His** will agree. Where **His** will and yours coincide there is strength and streams of blessing. Where they differ, there is weakness. Life in **Messiah** is so simple: **His** will is your will. Let **Him** take hold of the steering wheel of your life. Surrender to **His** will. If you think this is slavery, you are wrong, it's really freedom. **The Lord** once said, with a coin in **His** hand: **Whose image is this? And whose inscription?** To whom did it belong? **Yeshua** answered **His** critics, saying: **So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's (Mattityahu 22:21).**

To whom do you belong? Just as plainly as the emperor's head was stamped on that coin, so the image of **Christ** is stamped on your life and therefore you belong to **Him**. Your heart can only rest in a love that is perfect, a will that is absolute, and a holiness that is complete. Frustration is the inevitable result if you surrender your will to the world, to what seems most popular at the time. Don't build your house on sand (see commentary on **The Life of Christ Dy - The Wise and Foolish Builders**). **David** would write: **My salvation and my honor depend on God; He is my rock, my refuge (Psalm 62:7).** **YHVH** comes to your life in the person of **Yeshua Messiah**, who gave **Himself** completely for you on the cross,

and **He** asks you to yield yourself completely to **Him**, saying: **whoever loses their life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:39).**

These **three men** had felt the warmth of **David's** presence, **they** had seen **his** patience in the time of suffering, **they** had walked with **him** in the days of **his** rejection, **they** were close to **David** and **they** loved **him**. Living so close to **him** made **them** conscious of **his** greatness, and **his** love broke up the hardness of **their** hearts. So in that day of crisis, while others were only fair-weather followers and deserted **him**, the three of **them** followed **him** and shared in the fellowship of **his** sufferings.

Are you a fair-weather follower of **Christ**? There was never a time in all history when a clear identity with **the Lord** is more needed in this world that has rejected **Him**. But **His** service would be slavery and pure legalism unless your devotion springs from a life that walks with **Him** and talks with **Him**, and a heart that loves **Him**. Therefore, the surrender to the will of **the King** is not a forced obligation, but a joyful devotion of the heart.³⁸⁹