

# Ahithophel is Described in Glowing Terms

## Second Samuel 16:15 to 17:4

**DIG:** When Hushai says: Long live the king, who was he really taking about? What does lying with the king's concubines . . . in the sight of all Isra'el symbolize (Second Samuel 12:8-12)? What advice did Ahithophel offer? Was it good? For whom? What might have happened if Absalom had followed Ahithophel's advice?

**REFLECT:** What are some reasons why adults today sometimes resent their parents? Is being ambiguous appropriate here for Hushai? Why? Why not? Can you think of a time in your life when you have been ambiguous to further the kingdom of God like Hushai did? When have you had to be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16b NASB)? How can you distinguish between godly and worldly advice?

### 977 BC

This is part of a 24-hour period starting at 15:13 and extending all the way to 17:23. The scene now shifts to Tziyon, where Absalom is in the process of installing himself as king, with the help of Ahithophel, who had already joined him (Second Samuel 15:14).

Thanks to David's speedy departure, Absalom's rebellion was a bloodless coup, and he took Yerushalayim unopposed, which was just what David wanted (Second Samuel 15:14). Unlike Absalom, David was a man with a shepherd's heart who thought first about the welfare of his people (Second Samuel 24:17; Psalm 78:70-72).<sup>414</sup>

**Absalom's Arrival:** Meanwhile, Absalom and the main Israelite army came to Tziyon, and Ahithophel was with him setting the stage for the advisors' duel. Then Hushai the Arkite, David's confidant, caught Absalom by surprise. Secretly a spy for David, Hushai spoke to Absalom in words that were an exercise in studied ambiguity. Hushai gave the usual respectful greeting: "Long live the king! Long live the king!" In his heart, Hushai was referring to David (notice that the king was not named). But being a proud man, Absalom interpreted Hushai's words to apply to himself. Hushai was a master of deception.<sup>415</sup>

Then, as a test of Hushai, Absalom reprimanded him, saying: So this is the love you show your friend? (Absalom knew of the close friendship of his father and Hushai). If he's your friend, why didn't you go with him. Why did you betray your friend? Hushai ignored the sarcastic remark and spoke respectfully to him, saying: No, the one chosen by

ADONAI, by these people, and by all the men of Isra'el - his I will be, and I will remain with him. Again, Hushai's response was ambiguous, for he asserted that he will be loyal to the chosen one, which was actually David! Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you" (2 Sam 16:15-19). Hushai had kept his integrity, Absalom had been blinded by his own egotism, and the reader is permitted to see one example of the outworking of God's providence.<sup>416</sup> Hushai's point is that there is no disloyalty in transferring his loyalty from father to son who would be a natural successor. There was no dynastic change, so there was no disloyalty.

**Absalom and David's Concubines:** Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give us your advice." That's what he was famous for. "What should we do?" Ahithophel answered: Sleep with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. While it may have been customary in the ancient Near East for the king of a new dynasty to take the harem of the previous monarch, it was certainly not acceptable that a son should break the taboo against intercourse with his father's wives and concubines. Ahithophel reasoned that the act would publically demonstrate that Absalom was burning his bridges behind him, there was turning back and he was beyond hope of pardon and reconciliation, to the course of the rebellion. His friends would thereby be strengthened in their allegiance, and those on the fence would be won over to his side. At the same time, the act would be a public affirmation of his sovereignty and his exercise of the rights of succession. Then all Isra'el will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute (Second Samuel 16:20-21).

So they pitched a bridal tent for Absalom on the roof so it would be visible, and he slept with his father's concubines in the sight of all Isra'el (doubtless the very same roof on which his father had committed an equally sinful act). This same prince who was full of righteous indignation at his brother's sexual violence (see Dh - Amnon and Tamar) perpetrates a sexual crime against his own father. This was a violation of Leviticus 18:8: do not have sexual relations with your father's wife, that would dishonor your father, but it was also the fulfillment of God's judgment through Nathan's earlier prophecy in Second Samuel 12:11-12: Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Isra'el. Now in those days the advice of Ahithophel gave was like that on one who inquires of God. His advice had a reputation for being infallible, being almost equal to a prophecy from YHVH Himself. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel's advice (Second Samuel 16:22-23). How then was Hushai going to compete successfully against him?

**Ahithophel's Advice:** Ahithophel is the Judas Iscariot of the TaNaKh. Some may think that is a bit harsh. After all, doesn't a fellow have the right to work for whomever he wants? Can't he, if he wants to, swing his loyalty from David to Absalom? The answers are: no and no. David is not one of the many employers but God's chosen king! Ahithophel has no more right to forsake David than a true disciple has to forsake David's Son Yeshua (Yochanan. 6:66-71).<sup>417</sup>

Having achieved his first purpose and taken over the royal authority Absalom now had to deal with the second matter and make sure that David and his followers didn't return and take back the Kingdom. The solution was simple but drastic: He had to find his father and kill him. Unlike his father, who sought the mind of ADONAI through the Urim and Thummim (see commentary on Exodus 6b - The Urim and Thummim: The Means of Making Decisions) or from a prophet, Absalom turned to his two counselors for guidance.<sup>418</sup>

Ahithophel said to Absalom, "I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight (the very night that David had fled) in pursuit of him." Ahithophel would lead the raid and attack David while he is weary and weak, discouraged and disheartened. I would strike him with terror, and then, unprepared to make a stand, all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only "the king" (probably a slip of the tongue) and bring all the people back with you. By attacking immediately, David would not be prepared to make a stand. The death of the man you seek (David) will mean that all the people will return and submit. In the confusion, the king might be slain with little loss of life among his men. Ahithophel argued that, with the death of David, Absalom would win the undivided allegiance of the people and peace would be restored. All those who were with David would be unharmed and the civil war would end immediately. In Ahithophel's mind there was no time to lose, the only course of action was to hit David hard before he had time to regroup his forces.<sup>419</sup> This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Isra'el (Second Samuel 17:1-4). Ahithophel was a capable and effective traitor. And nothing could better illustrate the depth of moral callousness to which the misguided prince had fallen than his approval of this cold-blooded proposal to take the life of his father. Nevertheless Absalom, realized that whatever plan he adopted needed to be as nearly foolproof as possible. So he decided to get a second opinion.