

Introduction

1. In our study of 15:31-37 last week, we saw David make two requests and both of them have to do with a man named Ahithophel:
 - a. Ahithophel had been one of David's most trusted advisors
 - b. In 16:23 we read that his counsel was so wise and trustworthy that it was accepted as if he was a prophet of God
 - c. We learned in 15:12, however, that he deserted David and was now advising Absalom
 - d. The Bible never tells us why Ahithophel did this, but some commentators suggest that it may have been related to the fact that he was the grandfather of Bathsheba grandfather-in-law of Uriah and may have harbored some bitterness toward David
 - e. So, David is right to be concerned about this man and the help and advice he would provide to Absalom in his plot to dethrone, and kill, David
2. So, David makes two requests:
 - a. The first request is found in v. 31 where David prays to the LORD and asks Him to **"make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness"**—in other words, David asks the LORD to supernaturally make Ahithophel, who was known for giving wise counsel, give foolish or unwise counsel to Absalom
 - b. The second request is found in vs. 32-37 where David asks his close friend and advisor, Hushai, to return to Absalom and offer to serve as one of his advisors so that he can **"thwart the counsel of Ahithophel"** (34)—In other words, Hushai was to circumvent any good counsel Ahithophel might give
3. In our passage today we see a fulfillment of both of these requests and it begins when Hushai returns to Jerusalem

A. Hushai serves David as a double-agent (READ 16:15-19)

1. Robert Bergen in his commentary on 2 Samuel, describes this section as, **"...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."**
 - a. Double entendre refers to using a word or phrase that is open to two different interpretations, and Hushai appears to do that here like a pro
 - b. Notice that when he first appears before Absalom he greets him with, **"Long live the king! Long live the king!"** a phrase that Absalom certainly would assume referred to him, but could have certainly referred to David
 - c. When Absalom is suspicious and questions Hushai's loyalty to David, Hushai responds with another phrase that Absalom would assume applies to him, but could also apply to David: **"for whom the LORD, this people, and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain."** (18)—the Lord had chosen David, as did all the people of Israel at one point

- d. Even his last statement could be taken in more than one way: **“Should I not serve in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father’s presence, so I will be in your presence.”**
 - 1) Absalom would likely interpret these words as Hushai’s commitment to serve him as loyally as he did David
 - 2) However, Hushai’s words here could also be understood differently—“as I have served in your father’s house” is certainly a reference to how faithfully he served David; however, when he said **“so I will be in your presence”** he could have been secretly insinuating that he would continue to serve David faithfully, but now in Absalom’s presence (as a double agent)
2. The fact that Absalom welcomes Hushai into his service and asks for and accepts his counsel later indicates he bought David’s and Hushai’s plot hook-line-and-sinker
3. A word about deception in the Bible:
 - a. The Bible clearly condemns lying and deception for personal benefit
 - b. However, we have exceptions in the Bible where deception is permitted, and even rewarded:
 - 1) It is a normal part of war/battles
 - 2) God **“dealt well with the midwives”** and gave them families when they refused to kill the Hebrew infants and deceived Pharaoh about it (Exodus 1:17-21)
 - 3) James wrote that Rahab was **“justified”** even though she lied to protect the spies (James 2:25)
 - 4) When David pretended to be a crazed lunatic in front of Achish so they wouldn’t kill him (1 Samuel 21:12-15)
 - 5) Later in our passage today we see a woman mislead some of Absalom’s men when she hides the sons of the priest Zadok in a well (17:18-20)
 - 6) Paul’s disciples hid him and then snuck him down the wall and out of the city to save his life (were they not being deceitful?)

B. Ahithophel gives Absalom foolish advice (16:20-23)
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1. Soon after arriving in Jerusalem, Absalom asks Ahithophel for advice on how to proceed in securing the throne from David
2. Ahithophel’s advice comes in two parts and the first part is found in verses 20-23 (READ)
3. This is where we see God answer David’s first request, to **“make the counsel of Ahithophel foolishness”** (from 15:31):
 - a. When we think of foolishness, we generally think of stupidity or having a lack of sense and these are true
 - b. In the OT, however, foolishness has an additional dimension and that is the lack of moral character and thinking or acting in opposition to the LORD and His ways:
 - 1) Listen to what Samuel said to King Saul (1 Samuel 13:13): **“Samuel said to Saul, “You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you,”**
 - 2) And what the LORD said about Israel through Jeremiah (4:22): **“For My people are foolish, They know Me not; They are stupid children And have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, But to do good they do not know.”**

- c. This is exactly what we see here—Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom involves a wicked and immoral act, that of committing sexual immorality, and doing so in public. Why would he suggest this?
 - 1) In the ancient near east, taking over another king’s wives and concubines was evidence that one had taken over the throne, and so Ahithophel’s advice and Absalom’s actions were certainly intended to communicate this
 - 2) What would make Ahithophel, a man who was regarded as being so wise that his words were heeded like that of prophets (“**as if one has inquired of the LORD**”; 23) give such wicked advice?
 - a) He had defected from David and was now serving Absalom, which made David his enemy
 - b) He was Bathsheba’s grandfather, and David had committed adultery with her
 - c) Perhaps, as a means of payback and public shaming of David, Ahithophel had Absalom commit a repugnant and vile act against David by sleeping with his concubines in front of all Israel
 - 3) We see here that God had indeed turned Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness just as David prayed:

C. Hushai thwarts Ahithophel’s advice (17:1-23)

** This is the answer to David’s second request

- 1. Ahithophel proposes a plan to kill David (READ 17:1-4):
 - a. To use a 12,000 man strike force to attack David’s significantly smaller army (600 mighty men and at most a few thousand according to 18:1)
 - b. Attack at night:
 - 1) Battles were normally fought during daylight
 - 2) He wanted to attack David when he was “weary and exhausted” and “terrify him” so that David’s men would abandon him
 - c. He would then kill David himself and bring all of David’s men back to Absalom
 - d. The plan seemed like a good one to Absalom and the elders of Israel
- 2. Hushai counters Ahithophel’s counsel with his own (5-14):
 - a. Absalom asks Hushai for a second opinion
 - b. Hushai begins by claiming that Ahithophel’s advice is “**not good**” (READ 5-10):
 - 1) He reminds Absalom that David and his men are “**fierce**” (lit. bitter in their soul) like a bear that was robbed of her cubs (e.g. David had been robbed of his throne and would be motivated to fight to reclaim it)
 - 2) He also reminds Absalom that David is an expert soldier and will not stay out in the open field with his army, but will hide in the caves or area around his army so he’ll be prepared to respond to any attack
 - 3) He warns Absalom that if he follows Ahithophel’s advice, David and his men will prevail over Absalom’s army and even his most valiant men will lose heart
 - 4) In other words, even though David’s army is significantly smaller than the 12,000 man force Ahithophel suggests using, David’s skill and drive will be no match for them

- c. Hushai then provides Absalom with a different plan (READ 11-14):
 - 1) His counsel includes Absalom gathering all of Israel's army to go after David
 - 2) He also counsels Absalom to lead the army himself instead of Ahithophel (perhaps playing on Absalom's arrogance and vanity)
 - d. Miraculously, and in answer to David's prayer, the LORD moves not only Absalom but the entire army to accept Hushai's plan over Ahithophel's (RE-READ 14):
 - 1) It is all-God: He "**ordained**" it
 - 2) The LORD intended to "**bring calamity on Absalom**"
3. Hushai's sends a warning to David (READ 15-23)

Conclusion

1. According to 11:10-11, the events we see in this passage are a direct result of the sins David committed with Bathsheba and Uriah—these events are the consequences of that sin:
 - a. The LORD told David that He would "raise up evil against" him from his own family and the sword would not depart from his house
 - b. The LORD also told David that He would give David's wives (concubines) to his companion and he would lie with them in broad daylight
 - c. Both of these came to pass just as the LORD stated

2. I struggled quite a bit with what kind of practical application this has for us until something came to mind and it moved me to write a note of encouragement to a friend who is going through a hard time right now as he faces the consequences of some past sins. Here's what I wrote:

As I struggled to figure out what kind of practical application this has for our lives, I was reminded that the events that take place in this passage were first and foremost consequences of David's own sin. Even though David had repented of his sin, and been forgiven by the LORD, the LORD told him that there would be consequences for his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, He would raise up evil against David from within his own house and would give his wives to his companion who would lie with them in front of all Israel. Basically, in this passage we see David facing those consequences (literally). What's remarkable, however, is that even at such a time the Lord did not abandon or forget about David. He wasn't ignorant of David's pain and suffering or oblivious to it. And, he didn't tune David out. Rather, he heard David's prayer, acted on his behalf, and ultimately thwarted the wickedness plotted against him.

What struck me further, is that this is a pattern in the Bible. The book of Judges catalogs Israel's constant cycle of rebellion, facing the consequences of that rebellion, repentance, and then God's deliverance. He never forgot about them, even when they were facing the consequences of their sin. He never shut them out or became deaf to their cries. The same is true of their captivity in Babylon. Even in their captivity, facing the consequences of their sin, He never forgot about them and ultimately delivered them back to their land. Even today, God's people Israel are facing the consequences of rejecting their Lord and Savior, yet Paul states clearly in Romans 9-11 that God has not forgotten them and will still fulfill His promise and save them too.

All of this reminded me that even though we all face the consequences of sin—be that the general effects of sin in a cursed world or the consequences of our own past sins—God has not and will not abandon us. He is not deaf to our pleas or unmoved by our pain or suffering. As David wrote in Psalm 55 (likely written during the events mentioned above), **“As for me, I shall call upon God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur and He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me, for they are many who strive with me. God will hear and answer them—even the one who sits enthroned from of old.”** (55:16-19).

We see this displayed in the final verses: 17:24-29 where God provides for all of David’s needs.