

Exegetical Notes – 2 Samuel 16:15-17:14

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(For more information about Absalom, David's son and Israel's Crown Prince after Amnon's murder and his rebellion against King David, read 2 Samuel 13:1 – 16:1-14 and the exegetical notes prepared for those passages.)

Verses 16:15-19

¹⁵ *Meanwhile, Absalom and all the men of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him.* ¹⁶ *Then Hushai the Arkite, David's confidant, went to Absalom and said to him, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"*

¹⁷ *Absalom said to Hushai, "So this is the love you show your friend? If he's your friend, why didn't you go with him?"*

¹⁸ *Hushai said to Absalom, "No, the one chosen by the LORD, by these people, and by all the men of Israel—his I will be, and I will remain with him.* ¹⁹ *Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you."*

- “Meanwhile” (see 2 Samuel 15:1-16:14). Absalom, Israel’s crown prince, has rebelled against his father, King David. David has fled Jerusalem. It appears that Absalom has successfully taken the kingdom. He and his men have entered Jerusalem. David and his “people” are camped on the Mount of Olives.
- Ahithophel, Bathsheba’s grandfather, is advising Absalom. But, according to David’s instructions, Hushai, David’s trusted friend, went to Absalom and declared that he, too, was with Absalom (see 2 Samuel 15:32-37).
- At first, Absalom was distrustful of Hushai’s declaration of allegiance. However, in quick order, Hushai convinced Absalom to trust him.

Verses 20-23

²⁰ *Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give us your advice. What should we do?"*

²¹ *Ahithophel answered, "Sleep with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself*

obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute.”²² So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he slept with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.

²³ Now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel’s advice.

- Absalom asked Ahithophel what he should do to secure his victory over David. Ahithophel told him that he should sleep with the ten concubines that David had left in Jerusalem to care for the palace (see 2 Samuel 15:16). In so doing, Absalom would claim his father’s harem. In those days, taking the harem was an indication that one controlled the kingdom. Taking the harem would show everyone that Absalom was king. This would also be an insult to his father and show his contempt for David. Interesting, that David’s decline had included sexual sin with Ahithophel’s granddaughter and that this advice to Absalom came from him.
- So, Absalom had sex with the ten concubines on the roof of the palace, the place where David had first lusted for Bathsheba. Absalom did this publicly to declare that he was now Israel’s king (See 2 Samuel 12:8. When David’s sin with Bathsheba was first disclosed by the prophet Nathan, Nathan had predicted that this would happen.)
- Ahithophel was the man of the moment. His advice to Absalom was like the voice of God. He was the one on whom both David and now Absalom leaned. They did not consult God, they asked Ahithophel.

Verses 17:1-4

^{17:1} Ahithophel said to Absalom, “I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. ² I would attack him while he is weary and weak. I would strike him with terror, and then all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only the king ³ and bring all the people back to you. The death of the man you seek will mean the return of all; all the people will be unharmed.”⁴ This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

- Ahithophel recommended that Absalom set out with a small force of men to overcome David before David had time to prepare to defend himself. This plan made sense. Ahithophel argued that if Absalom quickly capture, or even better, killed David, the whole kingdom would be his.
- At first, Absalom agreed with Ahithophel.

Verses 5-13

⁵ *But Absalom said, “Summon also Hushai the Arkite, so we can hear what he has to say as well.”* ⁶ *When Hushai came to him, Absalom said, “Ahithophel has given this advice. Should we do what he says? If not, give us your opinion.”* ⁷ *Hushai replied to Absalom, “The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time.* ⁸ *You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops.* ⁹ *Even now, he is hidden in a cave or some other place. If he should attack your troops first, whoever hears about it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.’* ¹⁰ *Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave.*

“So I advise you: Let all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba—as numerous as the sand on the seashore—be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle. ¹² *Then we will attack him wherever he may be found, and we will fall on him as dew settles on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive.* ¹³ *If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley until not so much as a pebble is left.”*

- But, Absalom wanted Hushai's advice, too. Hushai gave an entirely different plan to Absalom. He disagreed with Ahithophel in every detail.
- Hushai's advice to Absalom was to launch an all-out attack on David. His argument was a resounding defeat of David was all that would turn Israel to Absalom. He argued that Absalom should destroy David and David's army in one big move.

¹⁴ *Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel.” For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.*

- While the text clearly implies that Ahithophel's plan was best, Absalom listened to Hushai and followed Hushai's plan of attack.
- This was because God was with David. THE BATTLE BELONGS TO THE LORD! Notice that Absalom put his trust in men, not in the Lord!

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