

Exegetical Notes – 2 Samuel 17:15-23

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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 – 17:14 and the exegetical notes prepared for those passages.)

Verses 15-16

¹⁵ Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, "Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the elders of Israel to do such and such, but I have advised them to do so and so. ¹⁶ Now send a message at once and tell David, 'Do not spend the night at the fords in the wilderness; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up.'"

- As David fled from Jerusalem, he had set up a system of loyal spies to stay behind in Jerusalem to keep him informed about what Absalom was up to (see 2 Samuel 15:25-27). Hushai was sent back to Jerusalem as part of this group of spies. His specific job was to win Absalom's trust so that he could counter the advice of Ahithophel, Absalom's chief counselor (see 2 Samuel 17:1-14). His second objective was to inform David through the spy network of what Absalom was going to do. So, he sent word to David through Zadok and Abiathar about Absalom's plans (see 2 Samuel 17:11-14).

Verses 17-20

¹⁷ Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel. A female servant was to go and inform them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they could not risk being seen entering the city. ¹⁸ But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So the two of them left at once and went to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. ¹⁹ His wife took a covering and spread it out over the opening of the well and scattered grain over it. No one knew anything about it.

²⁰ When Absalom's men came to the woman at the house, they asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"

The woman answered them, "They crossed over the brook." The men searched but found no one, so they returned to Jerusalem.

- Jonathan and Ahimaaz were the sons of Zadok and Abiathar. They were to be the runners who took messages to David. They were not in Jerusalem but were staying nearby in the town of En Rogel. A woman servant was sent to them there with a message to deliver to David. Apparently, the priests were being watched by Absalom. A woman servant was less likely to be noticed.
- However, Absalom was watching the sons of the priests, too. A young man saw them at En Rogel and reported the news of their whereabouts to Absalom. So they were forced to leave En Rogel. They went to a man in Bahurim who they knew to be loyal. They must have suspected that they were being followed for they hid in the well in the courtyard of this man's house. His wife covered the top of the well to make it look as though it was being used to dry grain. No one knew that the sons of priests were hiding there.
- When Absalom's men arrived at the house, the woman told them that the sons of the priests had gone by and crossed over the brook. Absalom's men could not find the sons of the priests so they gave up the search and returned to Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 17:14. God is moving to protect David).

Verses 21-22

²¹ After they had gone, the two climbed out of the well and went to inform King David. They said to him, "Set out and cross the river at once; Ahithophel has advised such and such against you." ²² So David and all the people with him set out and crossed the Jordan. By daybreak, no one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

- After Absalom's men had gone, the sons of the priests delivered the message to David. David followed the advice of Hushai.

Verse 23

²³ When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

- Ahithophel, Absalom's chief advisor, realized that he had been replaced by Hushai. He realized that Absalom's cause was lost and that having backed Absalom against David, he had backed the wrong side. Thinking that all was lost, he went home and hanged himself.

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