

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
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**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 10
SECOND SAMUEL
CHAPTER 17**

INTRODUCTION

Wickedness abound because “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”(Jeremiah 17:9). But we thank God that He is still on the throne and restrains the extent of evil. The day will come when all evil will be vanquished forever! Matthew Henry commented (vol. 2, p.530): “God suffers wicked men to prosper a while in their wicked plots, even beyond their expectation that their disappointment may be grievous and disgraceful.”

We witness how some people, driven by ambition, fail to listen to the true and wise advice of others. We need to be discerning, to be “wise as serpents but harmless as doves”. It is common today for many to apply situational ethics to resolve their dilemmas instead of trusting in God. This “situational ethics” approach is so common that it has even affected Christians in their decision making. To use deception or discretion is to some an acceptable means of achieving their desired purpose. But God’s Word is clear on this matter. This study will stimulate our minds and hearts to contemplate these issues.

This chapter focuses on Absalom’s wish to consolidate his kingdom through the capture and

destruction of his father, David. For this, Absalom sought the counsel of Ahithophel and Hushai, who gave opposing advice. The advice which Absalom chose would determine his success or failure, as seen from man’s perspective. But David is God’s anointed. In fighting the chosen king, Absalom was not fighting against David per se but against God.

COMMENTARY

**The Counsel of Hushai and
Ahithophel—17:1-14a**

Ahithophel counselled Absalom concerning the need to pursue David. He told Absalom to let him gather 12,000 men (probably from the 12 tribes of Israel) and he would set out immediately to capture David. It would take David by surprise while he was “weary and weak”. David would be afraid and his supporters would flee from him. Ahithophel continued (v.3, literally in Hebrew): “*And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be at peace.*” **The proposal pleased Absalom** and all the elders of Israel. However, there was **a flaw in his advice**. He offered to lead the soldiers himself instead of getting Absalom to do so. In those days, the paramount criterion for a king was his military ability.

For no apparent reason, **Absalom wanted a second opinion**. He summoned Hushai. Absalom related to him Ahithophel’s proposal and asked him whether they should adopt his proposal. If not, Hushai should speak up. It was an advantage for Hushai to know what Ahithophel’s proposal was. It helped him to make a quick judgment

of Ahithophel's suggestion and present a counter proposal.

Hushai directly and boldly declared that Ahithophel's proposal was ill-timed. He did not say that it was not good. He said that the timing was not right! **He cautioned** Absalom that he should know that David and his men were "mighty men" and at present they were bitter and angry like a "bear robbed of her whelps in the field". Moreover, David was an expert in war and he would be hiding somewhere without his people. If there was a battle and David was not captured, a rumour might circulate that "There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom" (17:9). That would cause even those with the heart of a lion to be discouraged because all Israel knew that David was a powerful man and his men were brave (v.10).

Hushai proposed that they should gather all Israel from Dan (in the north) even to Beersheba (the most southern part). The gathering would be a great multitude like "*the sand that is by the sea*". He called Absalom to lead this vast army himself. In this way, Absalom and his vast army would descend on David and his men who could not resist them like "*the dew falleth on the ground*". In this way, David and all his men would be utterly destroyed; not one soul would survive. And if David had withdrawn to a city, then all Israel would pull the walls down, leaving no stone standing, not even a small one (v.13). Absalom and all the elders of Israel were so impressed that they all said: "***The counsel of Hushai, the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel***" (v.14a).

Hushai perhaps knew that Ahithophel's proposal would destroy

David and his men. Hushai's proposal sought to buy time for David as he had been called to do. He used all his rhetorical skills to convince Absalom and the elders that his counter proposal was better. If there was a prime example where the life and death of a king depended on the words and persuasion of a man, this would be it.

Hushai was successful. This gave David and his men time to escape to a safer location, cross the river Jordan and reorganise. Hushai's proposition used **two essential elements** to convince his hearers. **Firstly**, he used **the element of fear** to great effect by resorting to past records—"*they be mighty men*" (v.8), "*they be chafed in their minds as a bear robbed of her whelps*"(v.8), "*there is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom*" (v.9), "*he also that is valiant whose heart is as the heart of a lion shall utterly melt*" (v.10), "*all Israel be generally gathered . . . as the sand that is by the sea for multitude*" (v.11), "*we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground*" (v.12), "*all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river*" (v.13).

Secondly, he appealed to **Absalom's desire for personal achievement and self-glory**. He described the preparation for war in glorious terms and suggested that Absalom lead this great army – "that thou go to battle in thine own person" (v.12). In other words, this would be a time of great victory and glory and Absalom should not give it to another man, namely Ahithophel. This appealed to the ego and pride of Absalom. It is no different today. Many men have fallen by the way side because their pride got the better of them.

The Unseen Hand of God —17:14b

The inspired narrator added that it was **the LORD who ordained the defeat of Ahithophel's counsel**. The purpose was to bring "evil" (distress, misery, calamity) upon Absalom (v.14b). We know that if Absalom had not called Hushai for his opinion and had instead acted on Ahithophel's proposal, David would have been destroyed. So **Absalom made a fatal flaw**. He made a **mistake** by making known Ahithophel's military strategy to Hushai. If he had just asked Hushai for his strategy point blank, his answer might have been different. Because he was informed of Ahithophel's plan, he could rebut it convincingly. An interesting point was that Ahithophel did not go back to Absalom and try to convince him that Hushai's plan would not work. If he had, Absalom might change his mind. However such speculation is futile. The bottom line was that God was with David.

The LORD would not let His anointed be touched. Fighting against David was not fighting against an individual. It was fighting against the LORD who had chosen and ordained him. God works in marvellous and mysterious ways. He sees, He knows and He acts in behalf of His faithful servants. God is still on the throne. The servant of God need not fear his enemies.

David Crosses Jordan to Safety— 17:15-21

Hushai had to get word to David to escape to safer ground. The situation was extremely urgent because Absalom might change his mind. Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, were summoned. They were informed of both Ahithophel's and Hushai's counsel to Absalom and the

elders of Israel. Hushai advised David not to camp that night but to quickly and speedily cross over Jordan, otherwise "the king" (referring to David) and all his men would be killed (v.15, 16).

Two young men, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, who were staying in En-rogel, a fountain located near the south of Jerusalem, were chosen to bring the news to David. The news was passed to these two men by a "wench" (a servant girl) (v.17) but they were spotted by a lad who reported to Absalom. The two men, upon receiving the news, immediately left En-rogel and arrived at a man's house in Bahurim. In the courtyard of his house, there was a well. The young men, pursued by Absalom's men, hid themselves in the well. His wife covered the mouth of the well and spread corn thereon, so that no one would suspect anything. Absalom's men came and were told by the woman that the two young men had gone off. Absalom's men could not find them so they returned to Jerusalem.

The success of David's intelligence system in this particular case depended on the servant girl and the farmer's wife. When the coast was clear, the two men came out of the well and continued on their journey. David took their advice without question and straightaway ordered all the people who were with him to leave and cross over Jordan. They travelled through the night and by morning had gone over Jordan and reached Mahanaim (meaning "two hosts"). It was in Mahanaim that Jacob met the "angels of God" and where he divided his entourage into two groups on his return from Padan-aram (Genesis 32:2). It was a city of the Levites (Joshua 21:38) and where Ishbosheth, Saul's son,

reigned while David reigned in Hebron (2 Samuel 2:8, 12).

The Supporters of David and Absalom—17:22-29

Ahithophel, who had defected to Absalom's side, committed suicide. The rejection of his military plan meant his eventual death. His plan was foolproof and effective and Absalom would have defeated his father, David, had he followed this plan. Ahithophel could see the writing on the wall. David would defeat his son and return to Jerusalem. Ahithophel would certainly be executed by the king for conspiracy and treason. When Absalom chose Hushai's plan, Ahithophel did not even attempt to dissuade Absalom from accepting Hushai's plan and persuade him to follow his plan, which would ensure his success. Instead, he speedily returned to his hometown Giloh. He put his household matters in order, and then hanged himself. He was buried in his father's sepulchre. **"Absalom lost one of the best and brilliant men in the country."** "Do you agree with this evaluation?"

Why did Ahithophel, who had served David so well, turn traitor? One reason perhaps was that he could not forgive David for the adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, his grand-daughter (cf. 2 Samuel 11:3 with 23:34), and the murder of her husband, Uriah. So he served David hoping for the opportunity to take vengeance. Absalom's rebellion gave him that opportunity. Another reason could be that he aspired to be the power behind the throne. His proposal to put himself as the man to lead the army of 12,000 against David gave him away. God is in control and the wickedness of men will be restrained as He wills.

The tide was turning against Absalom slowly but surely. Joab, the experienced and skilful military commander of Israel's army remained loyal to David. Absalom had to be satisfied with Amasa, Joab's less experienced cousin, whom he appointed as his commander-in-chief.

David and his men finally settled in Mahanaim on the eastern side of Jordan near the river Jabbok. Three loyal and wealthy subjects came to Mahanaim to support David and his men. They were unknown thus far, with the exception of Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, who took care of Mephibosheth before David found him and invited him to Jerusalem. The other two were Shobi, an Ammonite, and Barzillai, the Gileadite of Rogelim. They brought a great amount of beddings, utensils, cereals, vegetables, dairy produce, and sheep for milk and meat for David and his men (v.28, 29). They were considerate, concerned and caring. They knew that David and his people were hungry, weary and thirsty in the wilderness. Christians should show similar sensitivity to the adverse circumstances and needs of their fellow brethren in the Lord.

Meanwhile, Absalom gathered his army and led them over Jordan to meet David for war.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The comforting lesson is that God is able to deliver his faithful servant in dire circumstances. David was once again a fugitive on the run, but this time from his rebellious son who was intent on killing him. David had many faithful and caring supporters who encouraged and

helped him—Ittai with 600 of his men, Hushai in Absalom's court, Zadok and Abiathar the priests, Joab his commander in chief, Shobi, Machir, Barzillai, the covetous Ziba, the servant girl and the farmer's wife who protected Jonathan and Ahimaaz. They were God's human agents sent to help David, His chosen servant.

Initially Absalom appeared to have the upper hand. He had Ahithophel, the brilliant and skilful counsellor, and the popular support of the people. Absalom's failure was due to his pride and egotism for if he had followed Ahithophel's plan, things might have turned out differently. His pride and desire for self-exaltation blinded him. He lost his most brilliant and capable advisor. David wrote in one of his psalms (37:11): *But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ echoed the same in His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:5). A person who abides on Mount Everest enjoys nothing but severe cold and wind, barrenness and emptiness, whereas a person who remains in the valley enjoys everything even the rivers and the lakes, flowers and the fruits, and the fishes and the birds. *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time* (1 Peter 5:6).

Women play a very important role and function. We are all familiar with the Genesis account that God made Eve to be Adam's help-mate not door-mat. The two women mentioned in the passage played significant roles in saving David and his men. If not for the servant-girl and the farmer's wife, David would not

have received Hushai's counsel to him and news of what had transpired in Jerusalem. Similarly, women can be an agent for evil too. It does not take many, but just one or two, a little spark and the whole forest will be on fire. Women have a special place in the affairs of man, for good and for bad.

AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 2 Samuel 17:1-14; Psalm 34:1-22.

Tuesday: 2 Samuel 17:15-22; Proverbs 27:12; Matthew 10:16.

Wednesday: 2 Samuel 17:23-29; Psalm 55:22-23.

Thursday: 2 Samuel 17:1-29.

Friday: 2 Samuel 17:1-29

Analysis:

Text	Practical Value
2 Samuel 17:1-14	
2 Samuel 17:15-22	
2 Samuel 17:23-29	

2. Absalom accepted Ahithophel's advice and then quickly rejected it in favour of Hushai's – is this fickleness common today?

3. Analyse Hushai's advice from man's perspective and from God's perspective – was it a correct advice?

4. To whom does the writer ascribe the fact that Ahithophel's counsel did not prevail? Is this true of every decision in the believer's life?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think situational ethics has a legitimate place in the believer's decision making?

5. When Hushai saw that his counsel was accepted by Absalom, what action did he take and why? What principle in Christian living can we draw from this?

6. Who did Absalom choose to be the commander of his army? Was his decision wise or unwise?

7. How did the events in chapters 16 & 17 show the truth of Psalm 34:15-16?
