

Ahithophel

'And the counsel of Ahithophel in those days, was as if a man had consulted the Word of God' (2 Samuel 16:23).

One of the saddest and most tragic stories in the Bible concerns the revolt of King David's third son, Absalom. His mother was Maacah, the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur (2 Samuel 3:3). He was tall, handsome and had a head of 'big' hair (2 Samuel 14:25 & 26). The scriptures record how Absalom stirred up rebellion against his father King David, by promising to do justice for everyone who came to him, effectively 'stealing' the hearts of the men of Israel (2 Samuel 15:1 to 6). Absalom sent for Ahithophel, David's counsellor from his city. The conspiracy was strong, for the people increased their support continually with Absalom (2 Samuel 15:12). Then Ahithophel became one of the people who conspired against David (2 Samuel 15:31). Ahithophel had been King David's faithful counsellor for many decades, giving David the benefit of his great wisdom which was so brilliant, it was as if a man had inquired the Word of God (2 Samuel 16:23). When David learned his trusted friend had betrayed him, he was so afraid, he prayed, "O Lord I pray You, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness" (2 Samuel 15:31).

There was a terrible battle in the Ephraim Forest between the rebellious people of Israel led by Absalom, and the House of Judah led by David, where 20,000 men died, but what was strange, was more people died from being in the forest than died in the actual battle (2 Samuel 18:6 to 8). Absalom died a very painful and terrifying death. 'Absalom accidentally met the servants of David. Absalom rode on a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak and Absalom's head caught in a fork of the oak, and the mule under him ran away, leaving him hanging by his head. A certain man saw it and told Joab, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." Joab said to the man, "You saw him! Why did you not strike him down to the ground? I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a girdle." The man told Joab, "Though I should receive 1,000 pieces of silver, yet I would not put forth my hand against the king's son. For in our hearing the king charged you, Abishai and Ittai, 'Have a care, whoever you be, for the young man Absalom.' Otherwise, if I had dealt falsely against his life, for nothing is hidden from the king, you yourself would have taken sides against me." Joab said, "I will not tarry thus with you." Joab took three darts in his hand and thrust them into Absalom's heart while he was yet alive caught in the oak. Ten young men, Joab's armour-bearers, surrounded and struck Absalom and killed him' (2 Samuel 18:9 to 15). When David heard of his loyal army's victory over the rebels, he asked Ahimaaz and later a Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" (2 Samuel 18:29 & 32). After finding out his rebellious son Absalom was dead, King David risked turning the people against himself by mourning for Absalom. David sobbed, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would to God I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son" (2 Samuel 18:33). "O my son, Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2 Samuel 19:4).

'The victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. The people slipped into the city stealthily that day as humiliated people' (2 Samuel 19:2 & 3). David was rebuked by his nephew Joab. "You have today covered the faces of all your servants with shame, who this day have saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. For you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have declared today that princes and servants are nothing to you; for now I see that if Absalom had lived and all the rest of us had died, you would be well pleased. So now arise and go out and speak kindly and encouragingly to your servants; for I swear by the Lord if you do not go, not a man will remain with you this night" (2 Samuel 19:5 to 7).

Why did Ahithophel, one of King David's most trusted advisors, betray him after so many years faithful service, and why would he ask Absalom to allow him to personally lead the army of rebels to attack and kill King David before the king could escape? (2 Samuel 17:1 & 2). Finally, why would Ahithophel advise Absalom to have sexual relations with his father's concubines on the roof of the palace, for all to see? 'Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give your counsel. What shall we do?" Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go into your father's concubines whom he has left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father, then the hands of all who are with you will be made strong." So they spread for Absalom a tent on the top of the king's house, and Absalom went in to his father's harem in the sight of all Israel' (2 Samuel 16:20 to 22).

The Bible does not openly record the motivation for this incredible betrayal of King David, as if the reason were so obvious to people living in that day, there was no need to comment on it. The answer to this great mystery is found in several scriptures scattered through the Bible, that often cause readers to skip forward because the list of names seems to have little relevance. However, the solution to this puzzle about Ahithophel's motive is written in the Bible. To learn the solution to the mystery of the betrayal during Absalom's rebellion, we need to turn back to David's adultery with Bathsheba. Most people would think the adultery was a moment of weakness when David happened to observe Bathsheba bathing. The whole story was somewhat different. David was supposed to be at war but he stayed in Jerusalem instead (2 Samuel 11:1). David's first mistake was, he was not where God had called him to be; at war leading his nation against their enemies as their king. Only some time later, we read where David was told not to go out to battle again (2 Samuel 21:17).

We can see evidence that Bathsheba was no stranger to the king. Bathsheba's father Eliam (2 Samuel 11:3), was the son of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 23:34); therefore Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather. We can begin to

understand what was occurring behind the scenes. Bathsheba's husband Uriah and her father Eliam were part of an elite force of 37 men (2 Samuel 23:13, 34 & 39) that fought for the king and so they would not have been strangers to David. The scriptures tell us Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah, and she was very lovely to behold (2 Samuel 11:2 & 3). We can also see that Bathsheba knew she could fall pregnant during that exact time when she bathed naked in front of the king, because it is written in verse 4; 'for she was purified from her uncleanness'. That meant she had just finished a menstrual period, and women even in those ancient of days, knew they could fall pregnant soon after the period ended. Another point to think about, was according to Jewish law, she could not even have sex with her own husband for another week (Leviticus 15:28) yet she was willing to go to the king, thus ensuring the child would certainly be the king's son. King David fell for Bathsheba's deliberate seduction. Did she warn him she could fall pregnant at that time of the month? Did she protest and say she was married; therefore could not lie (have sexual relations) with the king? If she could not refuse the king, did she tell her husband Uriah, that the king had insisted she sleep with him? It seems not. If Bathsheba was innocent, then she would have protested and told her husband. Bathing naked in public wasn't acceptable behaviour either, and she was seen by other people – not just David. They were as guilty as each other in this time of adultery.

If we read the whole story from the beginning (2 Samuel 11:1 to 17), we can see that David was desperately trying to cover up for his sin with Bathsheba by encouraging Uriah to go to his wife, but Uriah publicly refused. If Uriah had gone into Bathsheba, the child could have been accepted as his, but Uriah said, "As you live and as my soul lives, I will not do this thing." Uriah would not touch his wife to cover for the king. David even tried to make Uriah drunk so he would comply. King David betrayed one of his loyal friends then had him murdered. They were friends who had fought back to back against their enemies and would have sat around campfires at night during military campaigns. The reason Uriah had a house close to the king's palace, was because he was a faithful bodyguard. Bathsheba's father Eliam was also a loyal bodyguard. They could have attended royal banquets. When one looks at the whole picture and sees these scriptural facts, it takes on a different complexion. When David took Bathsheba, he took the wife of Uriah, the daughter of Eliam and granddaughter of Ahithophel, all loyal servants. Then when Bathsheba became pregnant David tried to get Uriah to visit his wife to cover his sin. When Uriah refused to visit his wife, David conspired to have him murdered. Another shocking thing about this story, is the very faithful and loyal Uriah took a letter from David to Joab and in that letter was Uriah's own death sentence (2 Samuel 11:14 & 15). Uriah could have opened the letter and peeked in to see what was written, but being so faithful he delivered the letter – unopened – to Joab who then had him murdered by order of the king.

David's sin upon sin caused 'the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme' thus causing God's wrath (2 Samuel 12:14). The people in the palace would have known that Bathsheba's child was David's because he married her, and prayed and fasted for the gravely ill infant (2 Samuel 12:16). Eliam and Ahithophel would have seen the defilement, the public humiliation and the sorrow of bereavement of their daughter and granddaughter Bathsheba, all caused by King David. Ahithophel and Eliam must have burned with rage but there was nothing they could do about it. If they had risen up in anger, David would have had them killed too, so they waited secretly until an opportunity arose for revenge and to destroy David. Decades later, perhaps as long as forty years later, Absalom rebelled against his father and Ahithophel saw his chance and advised Absalom to have sex with all of David's concubines in sight of all Israel, just as David had done with Bathsheba. The Lord said to David, 'Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun"' (2 Sam 12:11 & 12). That was fulfilled when Absalom went in to his father's harem in the sight of all Israel (2 Samuel 16:20 to 22). The sin of David and Bathsheba caused David's wives and concubines to have to endure public rape and humiliation.

These scriptures help us to solve the mystery of Ahithophel's betrayal of David. The scriptures do not tell us what became of Eliam. Sadly it didn't end well for Ahithophel. He must have given up in despair at trying to avenge Bathsheba. He 'saddled his donkey, went home to his city, put his household in order, then hanged himself and he died' (2 Samuel 17:23). How awfully sad.

Amen and God bless you.

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