

## Sunday Night Message

July 5, 2020

### *2 Samuel 17 – The Rebellion of Absalom, Continued*

Topics – David; Absalom; rebellion

Series – *2 Samuel*

#### Introduction

We have been studying the life and reign of King David and have observed some of the problems that have taken place within his family. The trouble begins in chapter thirteen, where we discovered that Amnon, one of David's sons, raped one of David's daughters, a girl named Tamar. They were actually half-brother and sister, which does not make it any less vile. Tamar's full brother Absalom learns about how his sister was treated, and plots the murder of his older brother. After two years, Absalom finally goes through with his plan and kills Amnon for what he did to Tamar.

Absalom then fears punishment from his father David, and flees to Geshur, which is in Syria. It was also the place where his mother was from. David's wife, Absalom's mother was the King of Geshur's daughter. Absalom remains in Geshur for three years.

When we get to chapter fourteen, we learn that Joab intervenes on behalf of Absalom and secures permission from David to bring him back to Jerusalem, but David refuses to see him for another two years.

However, at the end of chapter fourteen there appeared to be a full reconciliation between them. David agrees to see his son and it seems on the surface that all was well.

However, in chapter fifteen, we learned that there was war in the heart of Absalom, and he launched a full-scale rebellion against his father, David. Absalom seduces the people of Israel, convincing them that David was not a good king and that he could do a much better job. He blows the trumpet and declares himself to be king in Hebron.

Note – the Bible says in 2 Samuel 15:7 that this rebellion took place "after forty years." This time span has been a source of much debate. Some scholars dismiss the number as being wrong altogether, and claim that it should have been four instead of forty. The King James is accurate, but does the forty years represent. We stated that it could have meant forty years from the time that David was anointed by Samuel to be king. But, it also could be that this rebellion by Absalom takes place at the very end of David's life. We know that David reigned for forty and a half years (7 ½ years in Hebron and 33 years in Israel – 2 Samuel 5:5). If this is true than it means that all of the events that take place in the remaining chapters of 2 Samuel are not in chronological order. The reason for this is that the writer to 2 Samuel placed the entire story about Absalom in one place. It is in a logical order.

David knows that Absalom will make a move on Jerusalem so he abandons the city, in order to keep the battle away from there, thereby sparing the city much damage, and the citizens much danger.

In the last part of chapter fifteen, we see the leaders of Israel and supposed friends of David all choosing sides. Most will remain faithful to David, but some would betray him. The two main characters we meet are Hushai and Ahithophel. Both were trusted counselors for David, but we find out that Ahithophel has switched sides and allied himself with Absalom. Perhaps, Ahithophel was upset with David for what he had done to his grand-daughter Bathsheba. See 2 Samuel 11:3; 23:34 - Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam, and Eliam was the son of Ahithophel.

Hushai, on the other hand, was still a trusted counselor to David, but was pretending to be a friend to Absalom.

In chapter sixteen, we met more characters and saw where their allegiances lay. Some were for David; some for Absalom; but many were just out for themselves.

At the close of chapter sixteen, Ahithophel was counseling Absalom as to what he should do about David and here in chapter seventeen, the advice continues.

### I. The Added Advice of Ahithophel (vs. 1 – 4)

This advice is continued from chapter sixteen (vs. 20 – 23). However, the context indicates that this counsel was given at a later time. His advice is sound, simple, and straightforward, and had Absalom heeded it, it probably would have brought him the victory.

### II. The Crafty Counsel of Hushai (vs. 6 – 14)

Remember, Hushai is a double agent. He is secretly working for David. His job is to find out what Absalom is doing and get word to David. Here, we see that Hushai is actually steering events by giving Absalom counsel. However, the counsel that he gives will be used to defeat Absalom.

Notice that Hushai's advice is very flowery and appeals to Absalom's ego. He uses a lot of metaphors, which paint a vibrant picture.

Warren Wiersbe's great book – *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* uses these two counselors and their advice to demonstrate the effectiveness of communication.

Read the two speeches again and notice the two different approaches. Apart from the fact that Hushai's speech is three times longer than Ahithophel's (and for a good reason), the contrast between the two approaches is obvious. In modern terms, Ahithophel used a cerebral "left brain" approach and Hushai, a visceral "right brain" approach. Absalom *heard* what Ahithophel was saying, but he *saw* and *felt* what Hushai was saying. Ahithophel's counsel was wise, but it was rejected, and this led to his humiliation and death. Hushai's counsel was weak in military strategy, but it was accepted and led to Absalom's defeat.

"If we have learned anything else," wrote Norman Cousins in his book *Human Options*, "it is that the ideas of the poets and artists penetrate where everything else has failed."<sup>1</sup> The movers and shakers in history have usually been people like Hushai who can turn

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Cousins, *Human Options* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1981), 100.

people's ears into eyes so that they see and feel the message and respond positively to it. In the United States in the '60s, the folk songs of the "flower people" probably did more to influence government policy about Vietnam and civil rights than did all the speeches given in Congress. Why? Because, like Hushai's speech, these songs painted pictures and stirred the imagination. Songs such as "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and "Blowin' in the Wind" affected more people in a deeper way than did press releases from the White House.

I realize that "right brain" and "left brain" are popular terms used to describe a phenomenon that isn't totally accepted by everybody in the scientific community. Nevertheless, using these terms is helpful in discussing recognized human approaches and behaviors. Physiologists and psychologists tell us that, generally speaking, each half of the brain performs specific functions, although these functions are not monopolized by that half of the brain. The "right brain" specializes in things creative, such as artistic patterns and shapes, the writing of poetry and the painting of pictures; while the "left brain" deals with things cognitive and logical, such as language and numbers and scientific concepts. Musicians and artists would especially use their right brain, while scientists and architects would lean heavily on the left brain.<sup>2</sup>

Read Ahithophel's speech again and notice the "left-brain" flavor. Four times he says "I would" and focuses attention on himself as an authority figure. He presents a logical plan for killing the king and capturing the people, a plan that probably would have worked. But listening to his plan is like reading the road map when you'd rather be looking at the scenery. *Like some of our preaching today, Ahithophel's speech has authority, precision, logic, and wisdom, but it doesn't have what it takes to make people see and feel the message and want to obey it.*

Now consider Hushai's speech. To begin with, the emphasis is on the listener, not the speaker. Hushai spoke to Absalom personally and wasn't afraid to say "you" or "your." At the close of his speech, he used the pronoun "we" so that Absalom got the feeling that "all Israel" was behind him. Hushai enabled Absalom to picture himself at the head of the victorious army. "Let all Israel ... be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle." What did Absalom know about leading an army? Probably very little. But Hushai convinced him he could do it and, in his imagination, Absalom had already won the victory.

Hushai used words to paint pictures. Look at the similes and metaphors he used: "as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs"; "whose heart is like the heart of a lion"; "melt with fear"; "as numerous as the sand on the seashore"; "as dew settles on the ground." These are expressions that turned Absalom's ears into eyes so that he could see what

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that there isn't logic involved in the writing of a song or imagination in the conducting of a scientific experiment. Creative activity depends on both sides of the brain, and the more we can build a bridge between the two, the more creative we can be.

Hushai was saying. I especially like the images of the sand (v. 11) and the dew (v. 12). When Absalom imagined the sand on the seashore, it gave him a false sense of security, and the image of the falling dew made the whole enterprise look easy.

Hushai's *coup de grace* was his description of Absalom supervising the destruction of David's city of refuge, dragging every stone into the valley. By the time Hushai had finished his speech, Absalom had turned his left brain off and his right brain to "high" and had already crowned himself the conquering hero.

I mentioned earlier that there was a good reason why Hushai's speech was longer than Ahithophel's. Remember Sgt. Joe Friday of the popular "Dragnet" radio and TV series? Remember his famous saying, "Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts"? Well, Ahithophel followed that line of thinking: "Here's the plan. It's logical. It will work. Now, get with it!" In police work, I suppose, Sgt. Friday's approach is the best; but it isn't the best way to prepare and deliver a sermon.

It takes time to paint pictures. It takes time for our listeners to see those pictures and in their imagination place themselves in the scene. I can't prove it from the text, but I get the impression that Hushai spoke deliberately, pausing to let each simile sink in. When he got to that last sentence, he saw Absalom smile and nod his head as the usurper visualized himself leading the army of Israel and defeating Israel's greatest soldier.<sup>1</sup>

### III. Running the Report to David (vs. 15 – 23)

Hushai gets word to David through his spy network. Zadok and Abiathar the priests contacted "a wench," or a maidservant, and she got the news to Enrogel, where Jonathan and Ahimaaz, which take the note to David. They had to hide for a little bit in Bahuram in order to avoid being detected, but are able to get the news to David.

Note – Ahithophel commits suicide after his advice was not followed. Ahithophel knew that Hushai's advice would lead to Absalom's defeat and ultimately his own (Ahithophel's) death as a traitor to David.

### IV. Preparations for the Battle (vs. 24 – 29)

Mahanaim was the capital for a short time of the ten northern tribes under Ishbosheth, immediately after Saul was slain in the battle with the Philistines.

Notice in v. 25 Not only is this going to be a battle of father against son; it is also a battle between two cousins. Amasa and Joab were cousins. Amasa was also David's nephew.

Notice also that David had a lot of help along the way (vs. 27 – 29). God will supply all of the things you need as well as all of the friends you need in order to do what he has called you to do.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 16–19.



