

## 2nd Samuel Chapter 16-17 – John Karmelich

1. These chapters can best be described as “lessons on how to make good decisions in life”.
  - a) For Christians, we want (or should want!) our moment-by-moment decisions to be pleasing to God. We pray for “God’s will” to be done daily in our life.
  - b) We don’t have time to stop and pray to God prior for every decision in life. We don’t have to pray, “Lord, should I brush my teeth this morning?” ☺ The point is we pray regularly, study God’s word and then go about our business making the best decisions possible given the information at hand. With that said, the bible does have lessons on making good decisions. These chapters are full of examples on making those decisions.
  - c) These two chapters are full of stories with the same common theme about decisions:
    - i) The king, or the son of the king, gets information requiring a decision.
    - ii) The king, or the son, then has to make decisions based on that information.
    - iii) Sometimes the decision is right, sometimes it is wrong.
    - iv) The great lessons of these two chapters teach us about how to make good decisions and the factors that affect those decisions.
  - d) Let me summarize these two chapters and tie it to this theme:
    - i) King David is on the run, as his son has committed mutiny against him.
    - ii) Almost all of Israel has sided with David’s son Absalom.
    - iii) A few-thousand follow David out of town (Cross Reference: 2nd Sam. 18:1).
    - iv) A few people confront David with some decisions to be made on his exodus.
    - v) Meanwhile, Prince Absalom has to make decisions on how to attack David. The Absalom related text is mostly about two consultants giving him advice on how to carry out such an attack. A few verses are then given on Absalom’s decision over which advice to take.
2. Let’s stop and talk about how these chapters fit into the context of First and Second Samuel:
  - a) The main character through most of these two books is King David. The two books of Samuel primarily focus on David’s rise in power and end right before his death.
  - b) A few chapters back, the focus is on David sinning by having an adulterous affair with Bathsheba and having her husband killed to cover it up. God announces punishment on David by saying he will have trouble in his own house for the rest of his life.
  - c) Now we read of one of David’s grown sons, named Absalom, committing mutiny against his father. Absalom gets the vast majority of the Israelites to support him. Now Absalom has David on the run and Absalom is trying to kill him.
  - d) Remember God could have punished David in lots of different ways. God specifically punished David by having his son rebel against him. This way, “the punishment fit the crime”. God made David see the consequences of rebellion. David rebelled against God’s will by his sins. Now David is seeing his own family rebel against him.
  - e) It was not “God’s will” for Absalom to be the king at this time. We know this because in a few chapters, Absalom will be dead and David on the throne again. God appoints the leaders over His people and God does this on His timing!
  - f) My point is that God allowed this whole rebellion to teach us lessons of the consequences of rebelling against God. It doesn’t excuse Absalom’s actions. It puts it in perspective.
3. These chapters spend a lot of text on the strategy of Absalom attacking David and David’s strategy of defending himself. Why are all of these details here? The bible could have summed up many chapters by saying, “David’s son rebelled against him, there was a civil war, but in the end, David won”. Instead, we have many chapters giving us the details of the rebellion.
  - a) These stories are to show us how God’s will gets done through people, who may, nor may not be aware they are doing God’s will. God’s will was to get David back on the throne.

- b) One of the reasons these stories go on and on with lots of details is that's the way life works. Life's problems do not come and go in five minutes. The same applies to David. Just because David is king, "sin" does not magically go away. Life's problems do not magically go away when he became king. When we become Christians, we too have to deal with the temptation and consequences of sin. We too, still have problems despite the fact we have committed our lives to serving God.
    - i) Keep in mind that God still "allows" sin in the life of the believer, 1) to keep us close to God and dependant upon Him and 2) It shows us just how bad sin is.
  - c) These stories are to teach us how to confront specific situations that can happen to us. The first two stories teach us how to make good decisions under times of stress. Other stories in this text teach us about the results of prayer and how God works in the background for our benefit.
  - d) What I want you to keep in mind as you read these stories is, "What lessons does God want me to learn from these detailed stories about consultation and decision making? How should David's decisions affect my decision making?"
  - e) Confused? Good! ☺ Then we're ready to start the bible verses. I'll come back to these questions throughout these lessons.
4. Chapter 16, Verse 1: When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine. <sup>2</sup> The king asked Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" Ziba answered, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who become exhausted in the desert." <sup>3</sup> The king then asked, "Where is your master's grandson?" Ziba said to him, "He is staying in Jerusalem, because he thinks, 'Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.'" <sup>4</sup> Then the king said to Ziba, "All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours." "I humbly bow," Ziba said. "May I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king."
- a) We start Chapter 16 by being reintroduced to a character named "Ziba".
    - i) If you remember a few chapters back, David wanted to show kindness to any surviving family members of his late-best-friend Jonathan. David found out Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth. This boy was crippled as he was dropped as boy. This was all covered in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, Chapter 9.
    - ii) A man named Ziba, who was a servant of King Saul, is the one who dropped him.
    - iii) Ziba spend many years taking care of Mephibosheth. When David called them both in, Ziba was ordered to take care of Mephibosheth. David ordered Ziba to take Saul's "family farm" and provide food for Mephibosheth. (Again, Chapter 9).
  - b) With all of that background in mind, let's summarize these four verses:
    - i) Here is David and his supporters leaving Jerusalem. In the end of Chapter 15, we read of them climbing the Mount of Olives, which borders Jerusalem.
    - ii) Now we read of Ziba showing up with a bunch of donkeys, some fruit and wine.
    - iii) Ziba explains that these are gifts for David and his men.
    - iv) When David inquires about Mephibosheth. Verse 3 says, "Where is your master's grandson?" To paraphrase David, "Where is King Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, which I (David) put you in charge to take care of him?"
    - v) Ziba answered in effect, "He's stayed in Jerusalem because he thinks that he will be restored to power and has joined in the rebellion with Absalom."
    - vi) Verse 4 is the key. After hearing this news about Mephibosheth's rebellion, David then says, "OK, since that is true, all the land that I gave you to use to feed Mephibosheth now belongs to you. Ziba answers essentially by saying thank you.
    - vii) (With all of this in mind, it may help to reread the paragraph at this point.)

- c) Here is the problem with these verses: Ziba is lying.
    - i) We know that because coming up in Chapter 19, after David is king again, we read of Mephibosheth telling David how Ziba lied to him.
    - ii) Why did Ziba do this? To get the land. David gave the land of Saul's family to Mephibosheth. Ziba, a servant, was in charge of farming that land to provide food for Mephibosheth. Maybe Ziba was tired of taking care of Mephibosheth. For whatever reason, he wanted Mephibosheth's land for himself.
    - iii) Remember David's decision would only be good if David was in power. Ziba "bet" that David being restored to power. Ziba told David this lie with the intention of having King David giving Mephibosheth's land to him.
    - iv) The only partial credit we'll give Ziba is he "bet on the right horse".
  - d) OK, now let's get back to the opening theme of "good decision making".
    - i) Here's David on the run. He's stressed as his own son is trying to kill him and he has to run for his life. The vast majority of Israel has turned against him.
    - ii) In that moment of stress, David is asked to make this decision about Ziba versus Mephibosheth. It's hard to blame David under the circumstances.
    - iii) I'm speculating that David saw the food and other provisions, and then made the bad decision to give the land to Ziba without hearing the other side of the story.
    - iv) Here is what David should have said: "Ziba, if what you say is true, tell you what, if and when I become king again, I want to hear Mephibosheth's side of the story. After that, if I believe your side of the story, I'll give you the land. If Absalom ends up being king, then it doesn't matter what I say about this situation."
      - a) "Any story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight." (Proverbs 18:17, The Living Bible)
    - v) What is to be learned here (time to pay attention! ☺) is, whenever possible, hold off making major decisions during times of stress. This applies to decisions one does not have to make during such times. David was under no obligation to decide Ziba's case on the spot.
      - a) The point here is some people take advantage of you during such times.
      - b) What we don't read of in this paragraph is "God". There is no mention of David praying or seeking God's will in this time. David simply made a rash judgment without hearing the other side of the story. Again, I suspect David saw the food gift and it got his mind off making the right decision.
  - e) We now move on to the next story and another decision David has to make.
5. Verse 5: As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. <sup>6</sup> He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. <sup>7</sup> As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel!" <sup>8</sup> The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!"
- a) We are now introduced to another new character named Shimei (pronounced "shim-ee").
  - b) Shimei is a distant cousin of the late king Saul, as stated in Verse 5.
  - c) Let me summarize these verses:
    - i) David and his followers are walking up a hillside, leaving town.
    - ii) This guy Shimei started throwing rocks at David and his men, and cursing them.
    - iii) Shimei says in effect, "You guys got what you deserved. You killed my relative King Saul and now God has repaid you by letting your son Absalom reign".
  - d) Shimei is not a man with a lot of regard for his own life.
    - i) Imagine an army of soldiers coming past you, armed with swords.
    - ii) Cursing them and throwing rocks at them is not good for your health. ☺

- iii) My speculation is that Shimei had some sort of power and prestige back when Saul was king. He lost that when David took over. Now, he is a grumpy old man with no regard for his own life and is happy to see David lose his power.
  - e) Here's the problem with Shimei's speech. Almost none of it is true.
    - i) Shimei had bad information. David never killed Saul, nor allowed it to happen. Saul died in battle (Ref.: 1st Sam 31:6). David wasn't even on the scene. Somehow, Shimei believed that it was David's fault his relative Saul was no longer in battle.
  - f) The point of all of this is not the curse itself, but how David reacted to it. Let's read on:
- 6. Verse 9: Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head."
  - a) Now we have another old character being reintroduced: Abaishai.
    - i) Abaishai is the brother of General-Joab. He is also a general.
    - ii) Abaishai says to David in effect, "Let me kill this guy so he'll shut up."
  - b) Notice that when Abaishai wanted to kill Shimei, he didn't even regard him as human. Abaishai called him a "dead dog". When somebody wants to do violence against someone else, the first thing he or she will do is dehumanize that person.
  - c) Again, the main point of all of this is David's reaction to the cursing, which is coming up.
- 7. Verse 10: But the king said, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'" <sup>11</sup> David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. <sup>12</sup> It may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today." <sup>13</sup> So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt.
  - a) Let me paraphrase David's reaction to this guy's cursing: "Let the guy curse away, it doesn't bother me. My own son rebelled against me. That hurts! In comparison to what my son did, this is nothing. Besides, I'm still paying the price for my own mistakes with Bathsheba many years ago. Maybe God is allowing this guy to curse me for a reason. Maybe God will feel sorry for me for this cursing and lighten up my punishment."
  - b) David allowed the guy to keep on cursing him and throwing rocks. Part of it is a self pity-party because David was so distraught over his own son rebelling against him. Sometimes emotional pain is so strong, we become numb to anybody else trying to hurt us. In summary, David was depressed and it affected his decision making process.
  - c) The positive news about this (time to pay attention again! ☺) is that David put the results in God's hand. David said in affect, "Lord, I'm trusting You in this situation. Vengeance is Your problem, and not mine." (Cross reference: Deuteronomy 32:35)
  - d) Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44) and not seek revenge. Why?
    - i) In moments when we desire revenge, it often helps to see that person as needing God as opposed to your punishment. Try praying for someone when they cut you off in traffic. Born again people change their behavior. Revenge only harms them.
    - ii) The act of "praying for your enemies" helps to take away that anger. Years ago, somebody stole a lot of money from me and my family. It wasn't until I started praying for him daily that I could let go of that anger.
    - iii) If we trust in the fact that God loves us, then we have to trust in the fact that God will take care of those who want to do us harm.
    - iv) Does that mean we stand there and let other people hit us and hurt us? Of course not! There are times to defend yourself and times to run. Both are mentioned throughout the bible. This is not about self-defense. This is about the specific plotting and planning for revenge.

- v) Further, don't confuse revenge with justice. If someone hurt you, they can hurt others as well. There are times to go to the police so the same person can't hurt others the way we may have been hurt.
- vi) The bible also says, "an eye for an eye" (Exodus 21:24). That is about society taking action for punishment, as opposed to taking matters into your own hands. In other words, it's ok to call the police and have a person arrested.
- e) Let's get back to the opening theme of "decision making":
  - i) The mistake David made with "Ziba (the guy who lied to David to get some land and brought gifts to David) was that David didn't turn the situation over to God. David made a decision without hearing all the facts of the case.
  - ii) With "Shimei the rock throwing curser", David did turn the situation over to God. David's decision was to let "God deal with this guy".
  - iii) David understood that all things that happen to us are "God's will". David believed it was God's will to let this guy curse him. Again, believing it was God's will does not always mean we are to let others harm us. I'm sure David would have killed this guy Shimei if he were attacked with a sword. It does mean that we pray to God to work through us, and then make the best decision possible given regular prayer and knowing that God wants us to be obedient to His word.
  - iv) I've always been a big believer that as a Christian, we don't have to pray to God for every single decision we make. What we should do is pray regularly and often for God's will to be done, read God's word with the understanding that God wants us to be obedient to His word, confess when we mess up, and then go live our life.
  - v) That is what David did here. David didn't stop and pray whether or not to kill Shimei. David concluded that this was "God's will". As long as Shimei didn't attack David with say, a sword, David decided to let this guy curse away and let God and not David seek revenge for the situation.
- 8. Verse 14: The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.
  - a) David reached some point where he decided that he and his followers set up camp.
  - b) How David "refreshed himself" is not stated. He probably got some sleep and ate some of the food supply that Ziba gave him. David wrote many of the Psalms. I can picture David at this point stopping to write out his emotions. Venting your frustrations in a healthy way, especially if it is a God-given-gift, can refresh you.
  - c) Notice what is not said in Verse 14:
    - i) "As David reached his destination, Shimei was still throwing rocks at them!"
    - ii) My point is we don't read of Shimei any more. He gave up. Sometimes, the best way to deal with taunting is to ignore it. Miserable people want you to be miserable with them. If you refuse to succumb to them, they eventually give up.
- 9. Verse 15: Meanwhile, Absalom and all the men of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him.
  - a) It is important to understand that the rest of Chapter 16 now takes place in Jerusalem. We are now taking a break from following the story of David on the run and now we go back to the king's palace where prince Absalom is now in charge.
  - b) In the last lesson, I mentioned there was a well-regarded counselor (consultant) named Ahithophel. Remember that this guy was "a hit" in Israel as he gave wise counsel. That is why I nicknamed him "A-hit-hophel".
  - c) This guy sided with prince Absalom in the mutiny over David. Why Ahithophel sided with Absalom is unknown. The most logical speculation is that Ahithophel is the grandfather of Bathsheba (Ref.: 2nd Samuel 11:3 and 23:34). Maybe Ahithophel was angry about what David did to Bathsheba and having her ex-husband killed.

10. Verse 16: Then Hushai the Arkite, David's friend, went to Absalom and said to him, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"
  - a) We are coming up to a set of verses where two rival consultants both give advice to prince Absalom over how to attack David.
  - b) One of them is "a-hit" Ahithophel. The other one is "hush" Hushai. I call the latter one "hush" because we learned in Chapter 15 he is actually loyal to David as a spy. Hushai's job is to give counsel in a way that would eventually allow David to win.
  - c) "Step 1" for Hushai-the-spy is to get prince Absalom to trust him. Absalom knows that Hushai was a trusted counsel of David. Therefore, Verse 16 is Hushai running up to Absalom and yelling out "Long live the king!"
11. Verse 17: Absalom asked Hushai, "Is this the love you show your friend? Why didn't you go with your friend?" <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you."
  - a) Let me paraphrase the response of "hush" Hushai the spy: "Your highness, my job is to serve the king, whoever the king is. Whomever God chooses to be the king, that is whom I will serve and be a good counselor. Since you're here on the throne and David's on the run, God "must" have chosen you to be in charge, therefore, I'll serve you."
  - b) Hushai understands Absalom's weakness: A big ego.
    - i) Hushai has to flatter Absalom enough to get Absalom to trust him, but not enough to be suspicious. Absalom bought in to the idea of being "God ordained".
    - ii) There's a good little lesson here about Absalom and "God's will": Just because God allows something to happen temporarily, does not mean it is God's desire. God allowed Absalom to be a temporary-king to teach us lesson about dealing with stress, dealing with God-ordained punishment, etc. It does not mean that God wanted Absalom in charge and accept his rebellion.
12. Verse 20: Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give us your advice. What should we do?"
  - a) Now we are back to the other consultant, "A-hit" Ahithophel. What Prince Absalom is going to do is: 1) listen to Ahithophel's advice, 2) listen to Hushai's advice, and 3) make a decision over which advice to take.
  - b) The next set of verses is Ahithophel's advice to "king-wanna-be" Absalom. ☺
13. Verse 21: Ahithophel answered, "Lie with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench in your father's nostrils, and the hands of everyone with you will be strengthened." <sup>22</sup> So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.
  - a) Let me paraphrase Ahithophel: "Your father left 10 concubines here in the palace to go take care of the place. Set up a tent on the rooftop that everyone could "see" (or be aware of) what you are about to do. Go have sexual relations with them. That is a sign in Middle-East culture that this harem now belongs to you and not your father."
    - i) What Ahithophel's advice is about is not so much having sex, but about "laying down the gauntlet". This is Ahithophel saying, "Make it known all through Israel that you and your father are now in a death-match and there is no turning back!"
  - b) Absalom took the advice and had a sexual orgy up on the rooftop. (Verse 22). This may have included rape as we assume these women didn't want to cooperate with this action.
    - i) For starters, this is a fulfillment of the punishment-prophecy to David back in Chapter 12. When the prophet Nathan told of David's punishment, Nathan said in effect, "What you did secretly with Bathsheba, I'll punish you out in the open." David first sexually desired Bathsheba from his rooftop. On this same rooftop is where his son Absalom had "public sex" with the concubines.
    - ii) If (again an assumption), Ahithophel was angry with David over having sex with his granddaughter, you have to wonder if Ahithophel didn't plan this in revenge.

- c) Let me summarize Absalom's action in three words: It is sin.
  - i) Prince Absalom should have said, "The one good thing about my father is he taught me the bible and how to fear God. I can not accept your advice as it would be wrong for me to have sex with these women."
  - ii) My topic for this lesson has to do with advice and having good discernment on making decisions. A good sign that you are making a bad decision is if it violates the commands of the bible.
  - iii) Let me give an illustration: If you get a "feeling" that God wants you to steal your neighbor's television set, that "feeling" is not of God, period! You don't trust feelings if they violate any of God's commandments. The same goes for advice. If someone is advising you to say, have sex with a married man or woman, that advice is never wise nor of God, period.
  - iv) Ahithophel's advice may have been good in terms of "seizing power" but it is never right if it violates biblical commands. The fact that Ahithophel gave it and Absalom took it are both examples of sin.
- 14. Verse 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.
  - a) Here we have an editorial comment by the writer of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. The point of this verse is that Ahithophel's advice was well respected. Both David and Absalom listened carefully to what Ahithophel said. To use the nickname, the guy was "a hit" among the kings.
  - b) Notice the Verse said he was like that who inquires of God. It doesn't mean he did inquire of God or gave God the credit for his advice. Any man who gave advice to go have an orgy with David's concubines is not a man trying to please God. The point of this statement is that his advice was based on learning-experience.
  - c) God gives everyone gifts. Some people have a great gift for giving good counsel. Ahithophel had that gift. The mistake was he didn't use his gift to glorify God.
  - d) In the next set of verses, Ahithophel's advice will continue. Now Ahithophel gives his opinion on how to attack David. There is probably a time gap between the "sexual" advice and the advice of how to attack David.
- 15. Chapter 17, Verse 1: Ahithophel said to Absalom, "I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. <sup>2</sup> 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 <sup>3</sup> 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."
  - a) Here we have Ahithophel telling Absalom how to attack David.
  - b) Let me paraphrase Ahithophel: "Absalom, if you want to win, you have to strike now and you have to strike fast. David is on the run. Send your 12,000 best troops with the specific instructions of hunting down David and killing him. Right now he's weary and on the run. You must strike fast."
  - c) In terms of military strategy, Ahithophel was right. When an enemy is weak and on the run, it is best to go attack right away.
  - d) Here is something that doesn't come out very clearly in the NIV translation above:
    - i) Ahithophel wants to lead the invasion himself.
    - ii) The New King James Version says, "Now let me (Ahithophel) choose twelve thousand men, and I (Ahithophel) will arise and pursue David tonight."
    - iii) What's the point? The point is Ahithophel wants to do this himself! Why? We don't know. Maybe it is for the glory. As mentioned, maybe because he is the grandfather of Bathsheba.
- 16. Verse 4: This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.
  - a) Visualize a throne room with Absalom in the center. Here is Ahithophel laying out his plan. Now picture a bunch of elders nodding their heads up and down in agreement.

17. Verse 5: But Absalom said, "Summon also Hushai the Arkite, so we can hear what he has to say."
- The next set of verses lay out Hushai's plan. Remember that Hushai is a spy for David.
  - Hushai must give a plan that essentially can stall for time. What Hushai wants is for David to have time to get away and regroup.
  - Remember that Hushai just left David. Hushai knows the limited resources that David has and how dejected David is at this time.
  - Before we move on, let's remember a prayer-verse that David prayed right before this:
    - "So David prayed, "O LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness." (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15:31b NIV)
    - First, know what the biblical concept of "foolish" means. It refers to one who does not seek God. A foolish person is one who is "morally deficient" (NIV Study Bible notes). The opposite of wanting God's will done for your life is foolishness.
      - "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." (Psalm 14:1 NIV)
    - What all this means is that David prayed for Ahithophel to give "non-biblical" advice. When Ahithophel told Absalom to go have sex with David's concubines, that was a good example of foolishness.
  - With all of that said, notice something else:
    - When Ahithophel gave the advice to go have sex with the concubines, Prince Absalom never asked for another opinion. (Men understand this. ☺)
    - Now that Absalom needs to capture David, "all of a sudden" Absalom asks for a second opinion. The point is David's little one-line prayer was answered by giving Hushai a chance to give a "pro-David" counsel.
    - What's my point? This gets back to my opening theme of "making good decisions". Get God involved in the process! Not only can He give you good discernment for your decisions, but God can work "behind the scenes" to influence other decisions.
    - "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." (Proverbs 21:1 NIV)
  - Now let's move on to Hushai's (the spy) counsel to Prince Absalom:
18. Verse 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." Hushai replied to Absalom, "The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.'<sup>10</sup> 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.
- Let me paraphrase Hushai's response in these verses: "I (Hushai) have an idea that is much better than Ahithophel's. David is an experienced warrior. If you attack David now, you will suffer many casualty losses. CNN® News will report your war losses and it will affect your approval ratings. ☺ David is probably hiding in some hole by now. The guy is a brave fighter. Ahithophel recommended 12,000 troops. You will need more than that in order to search out every nook and cranny in the surrounding region."
  - It is important to emphasize that Hushai is lying through his teeth. Hushai knows that David is weak and depressed at this time. Hushai is describing the younger David-the-warrior that his son Absalom remembers.
  - What is interesting is to compare the dehumanizing of David by Ahithophel with the positive comments about David by Hushai.
    - When Ahithophel gave his plan, his focus was on the "I's". It was "I'll attack him and I'll get him". There is no direct reference to the strengths of David.



- ii) With Hushai's plan, the first thing he does is get the focus on David the warrior. Hushai wants to scare Absalom and the elders about David's fighting ability.
  - d) This also gets into the question: Is it ok to lie? Remember that one of the Ten Commandments is not to bear false witness (i.e., lie.) (Reference: Exodus 20:16).
    - i) Here, Hushai is clearly lying. If he wasn't lying here, he was definitely lying when he said he wanted to be loyal to Absalom and not King David.
    - ii) So the question is, "Is it ever ok to lie? This goes back to the principal of "higher law". There are situations where one can say, lie in order to protect human life. For example, in Exodus, the Pharaoh gave orders to kill all the Hebrew babies. The two midwives in charge of baby deliveries lied to the Pharaoh because they knew the order was wrong. (Ref. Exodus 1:19). My point is there can be times when lying is appropriate if and only if it violates greater commandments.
19. Verse 11: "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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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 even a piece of it can be found."
- a) Let me paraphrase Hushai's advice, "In order to get David, we need more than the 12,000 troops as proposed by Ahithophel. We need a huge army. Then, we can scour the cities, towns and countryside. We'll bring ropes into the cities and pull down the walls. That way, we can search every nook and cranny until we find David.
  - b) Notice the text says, from "Dan to Beersheba". That is like when an American says, "from Maine to Hawaii". It just means it covers the entire territory of Israel.
  - c) Notice the "we" of this plan. Hushai's plan was for Absalom to lead the attack.
    - i) In Ahithophel's plan, Ahithophel lead the attack.
    - ii) Hushai wants to tag along with this attack. That way, there is the possibility he could help David in the actual attack.
  - d) The brilliance of Hushai's speech is the appeal to Absalom's ego.
    - i) Instead of 12,000 troops, there is a "huge army".
    - ii) In Hushai's plan, Absalom himself gets to lead the army.
  - e) Remember what Hushai is trying to do: Stall.
    - i) Getting a huge army takes time. It will give David time to run and regroup.
20. Verse 14, (First sentence): Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel."
- a) Hushai won. The people in the room, and prince Absalom bought the scenario. Prince Absalom was going to follow the advice of Hushai and organize a major army.
21. Verse 14, (Second sentence): For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.
- a) This is an editorial comment by the unnamed author of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel.
  - b) The sentence is saying that God himself ("The LORD") was behind Absalom's decision.
  - c) Again, remember that David prayed that Ahithophel's advice to be turned to foolishness.
    - i) Here we read that God answered that prayer.
  - d) Let's go back to the prayer itself:
    - i) There was nothing fancy about this prayer. There was no fasting involved. David didn't spend 10 hours on his knees begging for this prayer. David just "blurted it out" and God answered the prayer.
    - ii) This leads to a quick discussion of prayer style. There are no style rules. You can pray on your knees, laying flat on the floor or standing on your head.
    - iii) God cares about the sincerity of the prayer, not the style of the prayer.

- iv) There are times when God does ask for a long term or major commitment to prayer. Jesus himself taught on persistent prayer. (Ref. Luke 11:5-13). The reason is God often wants to test our faith and our commitment.
  - v) The point here is there is no specific formula to get God to answer your prayers. Prayer style is not important. What is important is the sincerity of the heart and if it is God's will to answer that prayer on God's timing.
22. Verse 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. <sup>16</sup> Now send a message immediately and tell David, 'Do not spend the night at the fords in the desert; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up.' "
- a) Now we are back to "Hush the spy". Hushai needs to get word to David to run away.
  - b) In Chapter 15, there were 2 other spies. These were priests named Zadok and Abiathar.
  - c) In these verses, Hushai is telling Zadok and Abiathar, "get word to David to keep running. Don't spend the night in desert near Israel. Get out of the local territory."
23. Verse 17: Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel. A servant girl 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. <sup>18</sup> But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So the two of them left quickly and went to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. <sup>19</sup> 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.
- a) In 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15:27, we learned that these two priests (that were spies for David) each had a son. Those two sons are named in Verse 17. Therefore, the spy ring went from Hushai to the two priests to their two sons.
  - b) One of the two priests was the high priest and was well recognized. If he himself was seen going out of the city, word might get back to Absalom. Therefore, these two priests sent their sons to relay the message.
  - c) The next link on this spy ring was an "unnamed servant girl". The son of the high priest might also be recognized. Therefore, a servant girl was the one who would actually leave Jerusalem and try to get word to David.
  - d) The plot thickens as someone loyal to prince Absalom saw the two sons of the priests talking to the girl. In other words, the spy ring was exposed.
  - e) The next step in this little drama is the two sons-of-the priests hid in a well.
    - i) A well in those days is different from how we picture a well. There is no brick cylinder structure on top with a bucket and rope. A well was just a hole in the ground that opens wider down below. The surrounding ground was graded in a way so that this hole would collect rainwater.
    - ii) These two sons-of-the-priests hid in this well. The unnamed girl then put a flat cover over the well hole and covered the well-cover with grain (Verse 19). This way, the soldiers didn't even know there is a well in the area.
24. Verse 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. <sup>21</sup> After the men 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." <sup>22</sup> 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.
- a) Let me summarize this whole section: The plan worked. The spies were not caught when they hid in the well. The servant girl lied to the soldiers and said in effect, "They went that-a-way". The men got word to David so that he and his companions fled the scene.
  - b) This story is included as well, it's good drama. ☺ This would make a good movie as the men were hiding in the hole and the soldiers couldn't find them.

- c) The actual purpose of the story is to show how God is “working in the background” to restore David as the king. In a matter of chapters, David will be king again and Absalom will be dead. If it weren’t for this spy story, David would have been killed.
  - d) My theme for the chapter has to do with making good decisions. Here we have a bunch of spies willing to commit their lives to do the right thing, even if meant death. There is no greater purpose in life than to be used by God. Here is a wonderful story of a handful of people who would have been lost in history if not for their effort to do the right thing. Think about all the little decisions made all done under stress (e.g., “let’s go hide in the well”) so that “God’s will” accomplished of getting David back on the throne.
25. Verse 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.
- a) Here we read of Ahithophel committing suicide because his advice was not followed.
  - b) This is not a case of Ahithophel being a sore loser. ☺ Ahithophel understood that with Hushai’s plan, David would eventually win. The problem is Absalom has no experience as a general. Absalom is not an experienced warrior like David and General Joab. Ahithophel figured that “Prince Absalom will lose this battle. When David comes back in power, he’ll have me killed for being a traitor. I can’t take that embarrassment.” Given that thought, Ahithophel committed suicide.
  - c) The verse says, “Ahithophel put his house in order and then hanged himself”.
    - i) I’m not sure what “putting his house in order” meant. Maybe it was goodbye notes to his family and writing out his last will and testament.
  - d) Let’s talk a little about suicide. First, suicide is a sin. It is murder of one’s self.
    - i) Satan wants suicide because a dead person is not praying. A dead person is not being a witness to others about God. Therefore, I am positive that Satan or his legions were planting the thoughts in this guys head: “Hey, you might as well kill yourself for what you did. David will do it anyway!”
      - a) The truth is Ahithophel had no idea what David would do.
    - ii) I once heard a story of a man who went from millionaire to bankruptcy. He seriously considered suicide at that point. What kept him going was he said, “He couldn’t do it to God.” The man was a bible teacher for years. He knew that his life was a living witness to God. His “fear of God” kept him going. (The epilogue of that story is he recovered well and is now living a good life.)
    - iii) If I am a living witness for God, that means I am a living witness. God decides when it is my time and I can’t “rush it”. During such times, one has to focus upon what we are grateful for and remember that God still has plans for our future.
    - iv) I consider the most selfish thing a person can do is to commit suicide. I have personally seen loved ones suffer for a lifetime based on such an action.
  - e) This also is a good time to discuss the classical question, “Can one commit suicide and still be saved?” My answer is yes, but that doesn’t mean I endorse the idea. ☺
    - i) Jesus said the only unforgivable sin is “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”. (Reference: Matthew 12:31, Mark 3:29 and Luke 12:10.) That particular sin is a continual, lifetime-long denial of Jesus as Lord and Savior. My point here is that all other sins are forgivable.
    - ii) So, does that mean that a committed Christian who suffers from terrible depression can kill himself and still be in heaven? Apparently, the answer is yes. I’m convinced that person’s rewards in heaven are minimal, but technically, that person can still be in heaven based on Jesus’ statement.
    - iii) Understand that this is a Christian view. There are those who disagree with that view. I also know that religious Jews consider suicide to be an unforgivable sin.

26. Verse 24: David went to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel.<sup>25</sup> Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Jether, an Israelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah the mother of Joab.<sup>26</sup> The Israelites and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.
- a) Now we come to the actual war setting between Prince Absalom and King David.
  - b) The verses mentioned that Prince Absalom appointed a man named Amasa as general.
    - i) Remember that General Joab defected with David.
  - c) These verses have the family lineage of "General Amasa". What this family lineage is showing is that the new general Amasa is a cousin of the "old" general Joab. If you go back to the early chapters of Samuel, you will discover that Joab is a cousin of King David. Here we read that Amasa is a cousin of Joab.
    - i) OK John, what is your point? ☺ This is another case where I prefer the King James Version to the NIV translation:
      - a) In Verse 25, here in the NIV, it says that Jether married Abigail.
      - b) The King James Version says that Jether "went into to Abigail".
      - c) OK, what does that mean? That means, if the King James Version is right, than Amasa is an illegitimate son. OK, what does that mean?
      - d) The whole point is to show that Amasa is "illegitimate". It is designed to be a "pun" in the same way Prince Absalom is an illegitimate king of Israel! The illegitimate king appointed an illegitimate general!
    - ii) If the NIV is right, then it just means that Absalom picked a relative the same way David picked a relative to be the head general.
    - iii) Another point is to show the "family split" in loyalty between David and his son.
  - d) We'll come back to Amasa in chapter 20 when he faces Joab in battle. David will replace Joab with Amasa, as David will be angry with Joab for killing Absalom against his will.
27. Verse 27: When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim<sup>28</sup> brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils,<sup>29</sup> honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, "The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert."
- a) Here we read of three new characters, Shobi, Makir and Barzillai.
    - i) All three of these guys are non Jewish.
    - ii) All three of these guys provide food for David.
  - b) These "obscure" people will now be remembered through all of history all because they made the right decision (there's that word again! ☺) to support David in his time of need.
  - c) There is some speculation in the commentaries how these guys knew David, but it is just that. The point is they knew of David being on the run and they made the decision to help David. Don't take that lightly. With Absalom chasing after David, to help David was a death sentence.
  - d) Think about this scene from David's perspective:
    - i) David is much older at this point in his life. Some commentators speculate that David is in his 60's when this revolt took place. He can't run like he used to. He's now on the run with his family and his friends. He didn't have much supplies.
    - ii) All of a sudden "out of nowhere", comes three people from different regions with food supplies for David and his companions.
    - iii) David wrote in Psalm 37: "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." My paraphrase: "David has never seen those loved of God starve to death." David trusted in God and God provided for David when all other options ran out. That is a great lesson for us when the bottom drops out of our lives.

28. Let's wrap this up: These two chapters focus on making good decisions for God.
- a) What is to be learned is that during the tough times, people who fear God still chose to "do the right thing" despite the consequences. The eternal perspective gives one the bravery and the boldness to take a stand for what is right, even if that can cost your life.
  - b) David made decisions based on the best information available at the time. David then trusted God with the results. David wasn't perfect in his decisions (remember Ziba and his deception). The point is David is trusting God. He preserved David through this tough experience.
  - c) This whole section is God "working in the background" to 1) teach David about the consequences of his past sins and 2) God working through individuals to get God's will done, which is to eventually get David back on the throne despite the fact he is rejected by the vast majority of the Israelites. That latter point brings up a whole, separate lesson on "God's will" versus the "people's will" over who God wants to be our leaders.
  - d) It's interesting to think about David's life from a fugitive to a king to a fugitive.
    - i) God raised up David after being on the run from King Saul for many years. David knew he was to be king one day. In his early life, David was on the run from Saul due to Saul's jealousy.
    - ii) David eventually became king. He had all he could ever want. Still, David rebelled against God because our old human nature still wants "more" even when we have it all.
    - iii) David paid the price and had to be brought down to a fugitive again. David would eventually be king again, but all of this taught David the valuable lesson of the price of disobedience even when we are blessed by God.
  - e) The point? God demands obedience. When we are poor and needy, God demand obedience. When we are successful, God demands obedience. We as Christians are saved and forgiven of all our sins, past, present and future. That is not a license to sin. That forgiveness should draw us to a life of obedience by sticking close to God and living for Him. As someone who has committed his or her life to Christ, God now demands more of us as we are now a living witness for God. The decisions we make affect our future and those around us. David has to learn that the hard way. The "trick" for us is to try to learn from others success and failures so we don't repeat the same mistakes.
29. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for these lessons on making good decisions. Help us to live a life that is pleasing to You in all that we do. Help us to stick close to You so that we do make wise decisions in all that we do. Help us to have the boldness, the obedience, the love and the strength to live the life that is pleasing to you. May Your love reflect through us in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.