**Absalom enters Jerusalem** 9/7/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 16:15-17:14, 2Samuel 17:15-29

Text: 2Samuel 16:15-17:29

Psalms:146, 41:4-13, 55:1-3&9-14, 134

The reading in our family prayer the other night was about Solomon becoming king. When Solomon became king he did not ask for riches or honour but for wisdom, heavenly wisdom. A king needs wisdom even more than he needs an army, as shown by the story we have just read. Absalom, David’s son, conspired against him and marched on the capital. When David was informed, he fled the palace and the city. We have watched him cross the Kidron Valley and go over the Mount of Olives as he fled towards the wilderness. He and those with him, including women and children, were weary as night fell, so they camped by the Jordan.

Absalom and his men reached Jerusalem shortly after David left, so there was no bloodshed. Hushai the Archite, David’s friend, arrived back in Jerusalem just before Absalom arrived. David had left ten concubines behind to keep the palace (15:16). With Absalom was ‘Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counsellor’ (15:12). He was no longer David’s counsellor because he had joined Absalom’s rebellion. His defection may be related to his being the grandfather of Bathsheba.

The focus of today’s narrative returns to Jerusalem, to Absalom and the two advisors he has acquired. Our subheadings are: ‘Advice of Ahithophel’, ‘Advice of Hushai’, and, ‘David escapes across the Jordan’.

**1. Advice of Ahithophel**

Absalom entered an almost empty city. David had fled, leaving behind ten women in the palace. David had sent the two priests, Zadok and Abiathar back to the city with the Ark of the Covenant, along with Hushai the Archite. He told Hushai to serve Absalom, or at least pretend to do so. He wanted Hushai to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel (15:34). David had prayed, asking the Lord to do the same thing, defeat the advice of Ahithophel; which is what this passage is all about.

We see Absalom getting advice from two skilled advisors, Ahithophel and Hushai, but in the end we are told it was the Lord who determined the outcome, ‘that he might bring disaster on Absalom’ (17:14). We are reminded of Pilate desperately seeking advice concerning a prisoner called Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. In the end he made a foolish decision, just like Absalom, because the Lord was overruling in the affairs of men to bring about his own ‘determined purpose’ (Acts 2:23).

Absalom was surprised when Hushai came up to him saying, ‘Long live the king!’ (16:16). He knew Hushai was David’s friend, so why was he being disloyal. As David’s son, Absalom knew all about disloyalty! But hearing the words, ‘Long live the king!’ Absalom was flattered; we know him to be a proud and arrogant man. Hushai did not say, ‘Long live King Absalom’ but this is how Absalom understood his words. Hushai let Absalom believe this as he pledged loyalty to the king ‘whom the Lord and the people choose’ (16:18); David of course, was the anointed of the Lord!

David had told Hushai to pledge loyalty to his son, which is what Hushai does in verse 19; but again Hushai is referring to the legitimate passing of the crown from father to son, not to a son staging a coup. His words in the Hebrew can mean that he will continue serving the father while in the presence of the son! Blinded by pride and ego, Absalom thinks Hushai has defected to him, but Hushai’s words were far from clear, and deliberately so. Pride and inflated ego has led many a leader to misunderstand his status in society and the church, and ultimately to his fall.

Absalom, with his band of rebels, had captured Jerusalem ‘without firing a shot’ as we say. What would be his next move? David was still alive, and Absalom may have had intelligence as to his whereabouts. As the legitimate king, David would pose a threat as long as he was alive. Absalom turned to Ahithophel for advice concerning his next move.

Ahithophel first advised Absalom to go and lie with his father’s concubines. This would humiliate David, not to mention the women, and make Absalom a stench in the nostrils of his father. You will recall the offence felt by Ishbosheth when he thought Abner had slept with Saul’s concubine (3:7). Taking a king’s harem was the ultimate mark of defeat and shame in those days. So a tent was set up on the roof of the palace and Absalom sexually assaulted each of the ten concubines left by David ‘in the sight of all Israel’ (16:22). This was the advice of Ahithophel who had completely thrown his lot in with Absalom. We are told that Ahithophel’s advice was like an oracle of God in those days (16:23) - but not for much longer! We know that this was God in his sovereignty working out his own words and purposes. It was the fulfilment of the words of the prophet Nathan when he spoke to David after his adultery with Bathsheba (12:11).

Ahithophel gave further advice to Absalom. He told Absalom to let him choose twelve thousand men and chase after David that very night. He reckoned that David would be exhausted and afraid, and so easily overcome. The coup was successful so far, but many were still with David. Ahithophel reckoned he could take David out and have the people come over to Absalom. The possibly of avoiding a deadly civil war was attractive to Absalom and the elders of Israel (17:1-4), but he wanted a second opinion. Why Ahithophel wanted to lead this attack on David himself is not clear. As the new king, Absalom needed to prove himself on the battlefield as well as in the bedroom. Maybe Ahithophel thought Absalom was not up to killing his own father, or maybe he was intent on his own vengeful killing David. Despite Ahithophel’s reputation for sound advice, Absalom decided to ask Hushai for advice now that he had become his servant.

**2. Advice of Hushai**

When Absalom called Hushai, he relayed the advice just given by Ahithophel and asked for his opinion (17:5, 6). Hushai again showed wisdom and a deft use of words in answering Absalom. He told him that Ahithophel’s advice was ‘not good at this time’ (17:7); his advice was usually good but not this time. A master of metaphor and simile, Hushai goes on to give his own advice, advice contrary to that of Ahithophel. Everyone knows the danger posed by a bear robbed of her cubs, which is just what David would be like having been robbed of his throne (17:8). David was a warrior and would not be so foolish as to camp with the people, as suggested by Ahithophel. Hushai pictured David hiding in a pit. If Ahithophel’s men attacked there would be a battle, and men, including Absalom’s men, would get killed, the very thing Ahithophel said he would avoid (17:9). Hushai goes on to compare David to a lion, a warrior who strikes fear into the heart of any who dare come against him.

Having undermined the advice given by Ahithophel, the very task David sent him to do, Hushai goes on to give his own advice by way of again flattering Absalom; proud hearts are vulnerable to flattery. Hushai continues with further figures of speech, including hyperbole, suggesting Absalom’s army could put a rope around the city where David was hiding and drag it into the river (17:13). Hushai advised Absalom to gather a huge army from all over Israel before attacking David, and army ‘like the sand of the sea’ that Absalom himself would lead (17:11). This might take time but now not even David would be able stand against such force. No matter where he fled, David and those with him would be defeated, with no one left alive (17:12).

After a brief consultation, Absalom and the elders chose to follow the advice of Hushai rather than Ahithophel. Ahithophel’s advice was best, but in ‘working all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose’ (Rom 8:28), the Lord purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel. He did so that he might destroy Absalom for his rebellion against the Lord’s anointed king (17:14).

Ahithophel was distressed that his advice was rejected. In ordaining this rejection, the Lord may have been ordaining Ahithophel’s condemnation for joining Absalom’s rebellion. Ahithophel knew that when David returned he would be condemned as a traitor. So he saddled his donkey and went home. He put his house in order and hanged himself (17:23). Ahithophel joined King Saul, and later Judas Iscariot, as one of few suicides in the Bible. Suicide is never heroic. All these men were guilty of rebellion against the Lord’s anointed, a sin for which there is no forgiveness.

**3. David escapes across the Jordan**

Hushai moved quickly to get a message to David along the line of communication set up by David. If he had heard about Ahithophel’s advice being rejected he was not sure that this would remain the case. David must be warned to flee across the Jordan that very night. Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, who told their sons to take this message to David at once. Another intermediary was needed to get the message out of the city and to the boys. The city gate was closely guarded so these boys stayed just outside the wall at En Rogel, a spring in the Kidron Valley (17:17). Even then the two boys were spotted by another boy, who went and told Absalom.

A couple in the town of Bahurim gave shelter to these two boys (17:18). The stone-throwing Shimei was from Bahurim, but thankfully not all the inhabitants were like him. This couple must have supported David because they took the risk of hiding these two boy spies. They put them in a dry well and the woman covered the well with a cloth. She spread grain on this cloth as if to dry it (17:19). In India villagers spread grain on sealed roads to dry. I was reluctant to drive over it but cars and trucks just drove over the grain. The scene at Bahurim is reminiscent of Rahab hiding Joshua’s spies. When Absalom’s servant came looking for the boys the woman told them that they had ‘gone over the water brook’, so they gave up their search and returned to Absalom (17:20).

When ‘the coast was clear’ as we say, the boys climbed out of the well and ran off to find David. When David got Hushai’s message he and all those with him got up from their rest and made their way across the Jordan River. By morning no one was left on the western side of the Jordan. They had crossed over into Gilead, still Israelite territory but near to where the Ammonites lived. David moved into the city of Mahanaim, known to us as the city from which Ishbosheth briefly ruled Israel.

David was helped by Shobi from the Ammonite city of Rabbah; he was probably their king but did not think to rebel against David. Machir, who took the crippled son of Jonathan into his house, also came to David’s aid (17:27). Finally, Barzillai the Gileadite came to help David. He must have been a rich man because he brought bedding and utensils, as well as a great variety of food for David and his followers. David greatly appreciated this help after their long and tiring journey.

It was not long before Absalom and his army had crossed the Jordan and came to Mahanaim. Absalom had made Amasa captain of his army. Amasa was a nephew of David’s, and cousin to Absalom and Joab; Joab was till with David.

The advice of Hushai was instrumental in allowing David to escape the clutches of his rebellious son, but in all the affairs of men it is the Lord who overrules for his purposes and for his glory. I trust you are able to see the Lord’s overruling in all the decisions you make- decisions made with prayer I hope, but not necessarily! I trust you can see the Lord’s overruling in affairs that are out of your hands, affairs in your own life, in the life of your family, your church, and all the nations.