*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 16 - 21

David’s Flight and Absalom’s Defeat

**Monday, August 16 2 Samuel 16:1-14**

*“Encounters with Ziba and Shimei”*

Ziba was the steward of Saul’s house and the person responsible for Mephibosheth’s welfare (9:9-11). The motives for his support of David are unclear, but he may have seen Absalom’s insurrection as an opportunity to ingratiate himself to David at Mephibosheth’s expense. Mephibosheth himself will deny the charges in 19:24-28.

As the king and his retinue pass his town, Shimei takes the opportunity to pour down on them insults and stones, declaring that David deserves the current crisis. He is expressing the resentment of himself and others who felt David’s rise to power was not condoned by God. Shimei is right that David is accursed, but not in his assessment of the reason. 1 and 2 Samuel have been clear that God is behind David becoming king. When Abishai offers to bring an end to such blasphemy, David demurs. Now is not the time for further violence. Moreover, David wants to be submissive to the Lord’s will in every respect. Could it be that the curse is allowed by God as a result of David’s disobedience? Is this a part of the Lord’s discipline in David’s life?

*Living with the consequences of our sin, Lord, is hard. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 17 2 Samuel 16:15-23**

*“Ahithophel’s advice”*

The scene shifts from David’s flight from Jerusalem to events in Jerusalem. When Absalom and his supporters come to Jerusalem, he seems assured of success, not only because David is on the run but because Ahithophel is with him. Ahithophel always seems right, and his counsel was respected and valued by everyone as though he received it directly from God. His support of Absalom’s rebellion gives it respectability and strength.

His advice to Absalom is that he should publicly sleep with David’s royal harem. Royal women played a significant political role in these ancient societies. Sexual relations with a king’s wife or concubine was tantamount to a claim to that king’s throne and appears to have been common in the ancient Near East when a king was replaced with a new dynasty. Absalom follows Ahithophel’s advice, giving the message to the inhabitants of Jerusalem that the insurrection is in fact successful and Absalom is now king. It also fulfills Nathan’s prophecy that David’s secret sins will result in his public shaming.

*What is done in darkness, Lord, will be brought to light. Amen.*

**Wednesday, August 18 2 Samuel 17:1-14**

*“Conflicting advice”*

Absalom’s two primary advisors, Ahithophel and Hushai, give him conflicting advice on pursuing David. Ahithophel advocates striking while David’s position is weakened, while Hushai argues that only a carefully planned and well-staffed attack will be successful against so experienced an opponent as David. Of course, as readers we are privy to information unavailable to Absalom. David is especially vulnerable just now, and Ahithophel’s advice is right. But Absalom has no such insight, and Husain’s speech is impressive, especially the subtle reminders of David’s abilities in guerrilla warfare.

However, lest the reader place too much credit on Hushai’s rhetorical flare, the narrator intrudes with the statement: “For the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.” This pronouncement is the turning point – the moment at which the reader learns how the story will end.

*We make our plans, Lord, but you determine the outcome. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

August 16 - 21

David’s Flight and Absalom’s Defeat

**Thursday, August 19 2 Samuel 17:15-29**

*“David is informed of Absalom’s plans”*

Here we see David’s espionage ring in action. Jonathan and Ahimaaz (the sons of Zadok and Abiathar) are well positioned to take reports of Ahithophel’s and Hushai’s advice to David, who is waiting at the Jordan River. The two young priests narrowly escape capture thanks to the benevolent aid of an unnamed couple, and they successfully reach David with the vital information. David and everyone with him cross over the river and head to Mahanaim in order to prepare for the coming battle.

The brief note on Ahithophel’s ignoble death is surprising. We can only assume this seasoned politician realizes his cause is irreversibly lost once Absalom rejects his advice. The acceptance of Hushai’s advice over Ahithophel’s gives David time to prepare for battle. As a result Absalom has lost the strategic advantage, and the rebellion can only fail. Once David is restored to power, Ahithophel is sure to face a humiliating death. Rather than suffer such an indignity, he takes his own life.

*While battles will rage, Lord, you have already won the war. Amen.*

**Friday, August 20 2 Samuel 18:1-18**

*“Absalom’s defeat and death”*

The war to determine who will be king in Jerusalem takes only one battle on a single day. The text describes preparations for that battle and the quick end of hostilities. But our narrator is more interested in the personal aspects than in the military details, so the passage is dominated by the specifics of Absalom’s fate. David’s instruction to his military commanders is clear: Absalom is to be spared. But, his orders are disobeyed and Absalom is killed when his head is caught in a tree (probably by his hair) and the mule he is riding keeps going, leaving him dangling in midair.

The rebellion has a superior force, “the army of Israel,” and it appears to command an impressive advantage. But, the forest of Ephraim is difficult terrain for fighting and seems to give the advantage to David’s men. It is even possible to imagine that David and Joab intentionally draw Absalom into a trap. By choosing Mahanaim as David’s headquarters, they effectively choose a battle site amenable to David’s warriors, who specialize in guerrilla warfare.

*Those who oppose your Anointed One, Lord, will not survive. Amen.*

**Saturday, August 21 2 Samuel 18:19-33**

*“David receives news of Absalom’s death”*

The account of the two messengers running to David slowly builds suspense as we are forced to wait for David’s reaction. Ahimaaz appears to have been genuinely ignorant about the specifics of Absalom’s death. When he is forced to stand aside and wait for the Cushite (Ethiopian) to deliver the vital piece of missing information, we as readers are also left waiting for the moment when David learns of Absalom’s death. We may have anticipated at least an ambivalent response: David rejoicing because of the military victory but melancholy because of the death of his son. But there is no joy here – only grief.

David’s powerful sense of loss towers over the landscape of the narrative, turning the army’s spectacular military achievement into defeat. His anguished “my son” is repeated five times in verse 33 and reflects David’s inconsolable attempts to comprehend his loss. He seems to gather the past, with all his own sins and those of his family, into this one defining moment of sorrow. When all is said and done, David cannot begin to resolve the enormity of all his losses.

*You forgive, Lord, but we live with the consequences of our sin. Amen.*