

# Lies, Curses and Counsel

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thanks, Christy. Yeah, that was a tough read. Well done. Well done there. Let's pray.

Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name, amen. So the passage we're looking at this evening unfolds in seven scenes.

Seven scenes, seven little vignettes. And within these seven scenes, there are character lessons and encouragements. But the big lesson is about God's sovereignty. And we know that the big point is God's sovereignty because there's only one point over those two chapters where the narrator, the storyteller, breaks from just telling the story to actually interpreting what's going on.

And that's in verse 14 of chapter 17. For the Lord has ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ohithophel. So the narrator wants us to be in no doubt that God is in complete control.

Even though, as you read the passage, you didn't hear a lot about him. God is in complete control bringing about his plan. And I think that whole idea of God being in control is something that we probably need to hear quite often, I think.

[ 1 : 17 ] Okay, team. Let's get into it. Seven little stories. Okay, I'll be following the text pretty closely, so grab your Bibles. Page 267, I think. Okay, chapter 16, verses 1 to 4.

What's going on here? This guy called Ziba brings food for David's troops. David is on the run, you remember. Just a reminder, David's at the wrong end of a military coup and instigated by his son, Absalom.

So it's pretty ugly. So this guy Ziba brings provisions for David, and it's very unexpected. And Ziba is the head servant of Mephi, who's the grandson of Saul, the son of Jonathan, right?

That David helped a few chapters ago. So Ziba brings David some food, which is very nice. And then David says, so how's Mephi going along? Like, what's he up to? Where's he at?

What's happening there? And you can imagine, you know, this was the question that Ziba was hoping for. This was what he was banking on. And you can imagine the scene. Ziba leans forward and he goes, listen, King David, you didn't hear this from me.

[ 2 : 20 ] But while I overheard Mephi saying that, you know, well, he's really talking it up. He said he's going to get his kingdom back, the one that you stole from Saul.

So, you know, not my words, his words. I'm just letting you know what he said. That's all I'm saying.

So David makes the snap decision and says, right, all of Mephi's stuff is now yours.

And Ziba is obviously delighted. All right. What's going on here? Well, David is most likely swindled. He's being swindled.

I say that because we know that Mephi's so Beth wasn't going to get the kingdom, right? This is Absalom's coup, not Mephi's coup. Mephi would be lucky to get out alive, to be honest, out of this, I think.

So Ziba was an opportunist. He was greedy. He was taking advantage of the fact that David couldn't check up on his facts. He used this situation. He feigns loyalty to get money.

[ 3 : 24 ] Obviously, you're a pretty, you know, pretty put-it-on-the-line kind of guy. Pretty savvy, relationally kind of guy. Pretty good strategist, obviously. Folks, what's the lesson here for us in this?

Well, it's this. If you are relationally savvy, I said this a few weeks ago. If you're relationally savvy, if you can read situations quite well, those things are gifts, all right?

But would you pray that God would give you integrity with those other gifts? All right. That's the moral challenge of the sermon. Let's keep going because we've got quite a bit to get through here.

All right, scene 2, chapter 16, verses 5 to 14. After David has swindled, he walks a bit further and runs into this guy called Shimei, who, again, has really got some guts here, you know?

He starts laying into David, cursing him, throwing rocks at him. You're a terrible man. Nobody likes you. You've got no, you know, like, you're terrible. He says, he calls him a man of blood.

[ 4 : 23 ] Shimei is a descendant of Saul, and likely he thinks that Saul, that David had something to do with the death of Saul's kids, Abner, who was actually killed by one of his own generals. So he thinks he kind of stole the kingdom from Saul, right?

And Shimei's insults to David are not just personal. They're also theological, which in the world of insults, it's a fairly niche market, you know? He says in verse 8, this is God's judgment on you, David.

This is God's judgment. And he's actually right. David's current situation is God's judgment on him. He gets the reasoning wrong, but he's kind of half right here.

Then one of David's guys says, listen, this is getting really boring. Let me cut the guy's head off. And David's response is this really huge challenge to us, I think. Okay, let me read it to you, verse 11 to 12.

David says this, It's ambiguous.

[ 5 : 27 ] This kind of like, the Lord will look on the wrong done to me. It could mean wrong done to me. It could be the wrong that I've done. All right, so David's relief, I'll come back to that.

David's relief from these insults is not to silence the guy, to kill the guy off. His relief is a belief in God's incredible grace.

I love David's faith in this situation. He believes in a God who replaces curses with blessing. Let me read it to you again. It may be that the Lord will look upon the wrong done to me, wrong in me, and that the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing today.

This is a great comfort, team. It's a great comfort for us who think that we have made a complete mess of our lives, that we're kind of stuffed, that we've dug this huge hole, that we've made our bed and now we've got to lie in it, that we've kind of ruined everything, you know.

I want you, if you think that, to get a glimpse of David's God here, the God who can look at your mess, who can look at your guilt, who can look at my mess, who look at my guilt, and return good.

[ 6 : 35 ] And that's the gospel, isn't it? That's the gospel team, right? We are sinners, and yet we receive mercy and goodness. We receive God's presence and not his rejection.

Not only that, the curse is directed at us. Jesus takes upon himself, and Galatians talks about this. Galatians 3.13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

All right. Scene 3, chapter 16, verses 15 to 23. We didn't read these ones out, but let me summarize pretty quickly. Verses 15 to 19 tell us about Hushai, who is actually faithful to David, but he manages to get into Absalom's inner circle.

Dan talked about that last week. But the real action is verses 20 to 23. Let me read this to you. So there's this guy called Ahithophel. He's a counselor. He's kind of like the right-hand man of Absalom, who's leading the coup here.

Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, give me your counsel. What shall we do? Ahithophel said to Absalom, go into your father's concubines, whom he left to keep the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened.

[ 7 : 54 ] So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom went into his father's concubines in the sight of Israel. So how's that, eh? Let me talk about Ahithophel first.

Ahithophel is the Judas Iscariot of the Old Testament. He is the great traitor of the Old Testament. He was on David's team, and then he just switched.

Now, of course, David is not one of a variety of employees that you can choose from. David is God's chosen one. So Ahithophel, in working with Absalom, he's opposing God.

Anyway, so as his counselor, Ahithophel says to Absalom, listen, just go and sleep with all of David's concubines, and make it really obvious, you know, tent on the roof, you know, everyone will see the concubines going under the tent, everyone will see you wandering in and out of the tent, you know.

Why would he advise this? Well, it makes him look pretty virile compared to David, who's on the run. But the big one is, as mentioned in the text, it's a relational, you know, bridge-burning exercise, right?

[ 9 : 07 ] It says, you know, Absalom is like, man, he means business. There's no turning back. There is no reconciliation. He is out to get the kingdom. And the idea being that this would sort of galvanize his troops.

Absalom seems pretty keen on the idea. Now, is there anything in this that reminds you of anything? In the last few weeks, does this ring any bells?

It should. Let me read chapter 12 to you. Remember when David killed Uriah and got with Bathsheba? Remember that sort of scenario, right?

And God said to David, well, here's what's going to happen as a result of that. Let me read this. Chapter 12, verses 10 to 12. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. Absalom. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this son.

[ 10 : 19 ] For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the son. Okay, that's a pretty distasteful kind of situation here.

What can we learn from this? Anything? Well, yes, this is profound, the theological lesson for us here. Let me explain that to you.

The advice given, right, by Ahithophel is treachery. And yet, this treacherous act actually executes God's plan.

So Ahithophel, his plan is to remove God's king, David. In doing so, he actually fulfills God's plan of judgment. And this is one of these really encouraging mysteries in the Bible, how all of this kind of stuff all kind of works together, right?

But the most vivid example, another example why he's like Judas, is the betrayal of Christ. When you read the story, it just says, you know, Judas betrayed Christ, right?

[ 11 : 20 ] It just tells the story. When you read the New Testament interpretations of that, what does it say? Romans 8. God did not hold back his very son, but handed him over for all of us.

In betraying Christ, in Ahithophel betraying David, they were carrying out God's design. And one commentator described this as the ultimate humiliation for all of those who oppose God.

Now, I don't want you to use this, you know, this little point here as a reason to sift through your life and try and work out every time something bad happened, what kind of, you know, God was up to. Because you can't, you can't sort of fit all the pieces together sometimes, right?

This is about finding solace when you find yourself in the presence of life's enemies, I guess. Okay, team, scene four, chapter 17, verses 1 to 14.

Ahithophel goes on and says to Absalom, he says, listen, let me, Ahithophel, gather a small army together and go and kill David while he's tired and disorganized. It's a really good idea. Everybody agrees.

[ 12 : 33 ] Hushai, David's double agent, says in these passages, he says, I don't know. He gives some reasons why he doesn't think it's a good idea. And then he says, I've got another idea. How about this?

How about we gather an enormous army? Let's get the conscription back in place. Let's gather this huge army. And you, Absalom, will lead that army.

You'll be out in front. You'll have your war lions. I don't know. Your gold thing and your stuff. And it'll be awesome, right? You lead this ginormous army.

You hunt down David. Instead of just killing David, we'll wipe everybody out. We'll kill them all. And then if he's in this town or whatever, we'll put ropes around the town. We'll drag that town into the sea.

It's going to be huge. And you'll be out front. It's a terrible idea. It is a terrible idea. And yet Hushai goes for it because, I'm sorry, Absalom goes for it because Hushai strokes his ego.

[ 13 : 34 ] Let me remind you, verse 14 says, this all happens because God ordained it. God was in control.

But here's the kicker, though. Just not obviously in control. And I think that's one of the primary characteristics of this text, right? It's that God's sovereignty, his in-chargeness was often mostly hidden.

And that is really hard for us. It's really hard for us when we think about our own lives, when we try and make sense of it. Because we want an obvious God, right? And yet, I think this story helps us

to see that God's workings are often hidden.

But we want a God without mystery. We want a God of no loose ends. But that's not what we have. Like this, we have a story, the story of our lives. We have this journey, this process, and sometimes it's a messy one.

And we don't have God sort of yelling in our ear every five minutes going, you know, marry them. There's a car park for you. Get that job.

[ 14 : 45 ] Do this. You know, we don't often have that. And that is frustrating. But this passage helps us to realize that God is not absent.

Even though it seems like it's going sideways, God is not absent. He's just not always obvious. Now, I know this issue of sovereignty raises a lot of philosophical questions, right?

About God's sovereignty, his in-charge-ness, our free will, etc. But the principal purpose here is not to get you philosophically excited. It's to comfort you. It's to know the comfort of, it comes with the knowledge of knowing that God is at work, just not really obviously sometimes.

Okay, verses 15 forwards. Okay, scene 5, verses 15 to 20. It's the story of Hushai. He's getting word out to David about what's happening. And so he's got these spies to sneak out of the city. They get spotted. This woman hides them in a well and, you know, puts a thing over the well and spreads some grain on the well. And it's quite a miraculous kind of story of them escaping and getting word to David.

[ 15 : 56 ] And it's a story of provision. And provision in this context, provision is a glimpse of God's sovereignty. It's a small sign that God is in control.

And whilst his workings are often hidden from us, these kingdom moments in our life are like little sparks. They go, yep. Yeah, God's here. God is doing something. Let me tell you a story about how I paid for Regent College.

It is a story I don't tell many people, so don't tell anyone. Because it's a ridiculous story. All right. So I come from New Zealand. New Zealand and the New Zealand peso isn't worth a lot of money, right?

And so the thought of coming to Regent College and trying to work out how to pay for that is just overwhelming if you're a Kiwi. And because I can't... The big deal is I can't get a student loan because I'm an international student.

So you've got to turn up and pay up, right? And so I saved up a little bit of money. And probably enough for like a year maybe. But I was enrolled in a three-year degree.

[ 16 : 59 ] So this is a story in two parts of Miraculous Provision. The first one is this. I'm not very good at sports, but I didn't mind being in front of people.

So I started being in bands. I started playing with my friends. I had lots of musician friends. We started playing in bands and it was fun. It was like what I did on the weekends, you know, like pubs or proms, balls, whatever you call them over here.

You know, we'd do stuff like that. And anyway, so I wrote this little song years ago, right? And had no rock and roll dreams. This was all just a hobby. And anyway, I had these two mates, these two friends who were quite keen on...

Who actually had rock and roll dreams. And they were, unlike me, they were actually quite talented. And so they said, listen, we really like the song. It's got a nice melody. Can we record it?

I said, yeah, great, record it. You know, we'll split the royalties if anything happens with it. So anyway, so they recorded the song and they released the album. They released my song as a single and it did actually pretty good.

[ 17 : 59 ] And so you get a bit of money out of that. And then got some radio play and stuff. And then, but the album went number one in New Zealand. And so, you know, sort of did okay to that. And then, but the big, the amazing, the miraculous thing was this.

Is that my agent gave me a call one day and, you know, never talks to me because I'm nobody, right? And said, listen, KFC, Kentucky Fried Chicken, want to use your song...

I'm not joking. I swear to you, this happened. KFC wants to use your song as their jingle for like a year. Because they have this kind of thing of being, they're trying to make KFC kind of like New Zealand.

So they go, we'll use this kind of popular New Zealand song as our jingle. There is a lot of money in jingles. And I'm sort of going, oh, that's nice. Like, I'm on the phone going, oh, that's really nice.

I think, this is great. I'll get like 500 bucks or something for this, right? Anyway, and she could tell I didn't know what was going on. And she goes, it's quite a lot of money. I went, oh, okay, great.  
[ 19 : 03 ] So anyway, it paid for my, basically paid for a whole year at Regent College. Okay, so that's, so that's, I will not tell you the name of the song. So you can't find it on YouTube.

All right, because they changed it and there's bikinis in the video. I don't know what happened. It's an absolute shocker. So anyway, so I actually wrote the song about heaven and they made it about like hanging out at swimming pools.

Anyway, so third year, I'm at third year Regent. I've got through two years, third year of Regent College. I'm married at this point. Money's really, really tight. Beginning of the year, I get a call from this guy.

I think his name was like, it was like Eddie Lee or something like that, Chinese guy. He said, can you come and preach at my church? I go to a Chinese church. We have an English speaking congregation.

Can you, we need somebody to preach on Sunday. I said, great. I go, I preach. It's good. It's nice. It's they, when you, when you do pulpit supply in Vancouver, you sort of get paid \$100, \$150, right?  
[ 20 : 03 ] To preach a sermon. That's, it's nice, right? When you're earning 10 bucks an hour cleaning bathrooms. I was, I had three parts arm drives, right? \$150 is great. So I do that. It's good. Next week, I get a call.

Hey, this is, you know, like, you know, Charlie Wong. I'm a mate of Edie's. Can you like, can you come and preach at our church? Different church. I preached like every probably second week, some random Chinese church in Vancouver.

And I was preaching camps. I started doing their camps as well. At the end of, it was 10 days before I graduated. I didn't have enough money to graduate because I owed Regent College money. I didn't pay up front. I couldn't, you know. And I owed X amount of dollars. I did this, I did this camp 10 days before I graduated. I was supposed to graduate. And they paid me almost of a dollar exactly what I owed.

Handed that check in. Graduated. No student loan. I never got another phone call from a Chinese church after I graduated. Like, absolutely miraculous kind of, absolutely miraculous, right?

[ 21 : 04 ] Okay, here's the point. The point is not this. The point is not if you just have enough faith, freaky stuff will happen, right? That is not the point. The point is this. God gets the job done.

God will get the job done. And sometimes he'll use a wild card to do that. And it is this glimpse into the sovereignty of God that, yes, he is in control of your life. It would be a mistake on my part to presume on God's provision.

To say that, well, God, you know, you did this for me in the past. So every time I need some money, I'm just going to roll up to a Chinese church or a fast food chain and, you know, demand tens of thousands of dollars, right? No.

God gave me what was good in his mind at that time. He gets the job done. Verse 23, the saddest passage in the whole thing.

Hithophel, the counselor, goes home, puts his house in order and hangs himself. If you need another illusion that this is the Old Testament Judas, well, there it is, team. Why did he do it?

[ 22 : 06 ] Because he knew Hushai's advice was terrible, that David, given a couple of minutes to get his army together, would decimate Absalom's army. And he would be executed as a traitor. I mean, it's a very sad story.

But it's meant to be read in the context of scene seven, which is the last few verses with the difficult names, where you have all these random people coming up to David and giving him a whole lot of stuff. What's happening there, it's sort of like a pivot point in the story where Absalom is losing friends.

David is gaining them. Okay, time to wrap up. There are a lot of lessons for us in this passage. One, if you are smart, if you are savvy, would you pray that God would give you integrity to go along with those gifts?

Otherwise, you can become an opportunist. Two, a reminder that God is someone who can look at our mess and return goodness. And if there's any doubt in your mind, remember the cross.

Three, that God's hiddenness peeks through in miraculous provision. And look for those kingdom moments in your life. And that's all good stuff, right? That's a good point. But I think the really big one, the main point of this passage is this.

[ 23 : 19 ] No one can overthrow the kingdom of God. No one can overthrow the kingdom of God. And that is good news. In a world where there are lots of Absaloms trying to muscle in with their own kingdoms, it's good to know that God gets the job done.

That no one can oppose him long term. The other reason it's good is because, just speaking frankly, the world like Absalom can appear very well resourced and charming and enticing and powerful, right?

And as Christians, we can feel rather small and a bit underpowered sometimes. But nothing can stop the kingdom of God coming. The kingdom has come.

The kingdom is coming. God's going to get it done. Now can I get an amen? Amen. 25 minutes.