

2 Samuel 17

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[0 : 00] That is page 268, if you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, 2 Samuel 17. I wonder whether you've ever felt like you are in the wilderness, hungry, thirsty, weary, maybe physically, emotionally, relationally, or spiritually.

That's a situation David and his followers are in during this chapter. In fact, that's how they're described in the last verse. And this evening, we're in a section of 2 Samuel where basically David's life, his kingdom, his family has been falling apart, largely due to David's own moral failure. David was in a very vulnerable place for a whole bunch of reasons. But what we see in this chapter is that even when we failed, and even when our life is falling apart, God doesn't abandon us to our enemies, but rather he mercifully provides for us.

Now, maybe you've been coming here and through this whole long series in 1 and 2 Samuel, but maybe you haven't. So let me just bring us all up to speed on the story of David as it's written in the book of Samuel.

So the book of 1 Samuel, we see David's suffering. We see David is anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the future king of Israel.

[1 : 27] But then for the rest of the book, for like 16 chapters, King Saul is pursuing him, persecuting him. He has to flee into the wilderness. He's running for his life.

And King Saul's trying to kill him. He's suffering. The first 10 chapters of 2 Samuel, after King Saul is killed in battle, we see David's rise to power.

And David is raised up to reign over the United Kingdom of Israel. The people come together under him. He defeats their enemies. He brings peace. And God promises that his kingdom will be established forever.

And everything seems great. And then we see David's fall, starting in chapter 11, when he commits adultery with Bathsheba, and when he arranges for her husband to be killed in battle.

And after that, David's family begins to fall apart, and David's kingdom begins to fall apart. And that's what we've seen over the last few chapters. Chapter 16, David is tricked, and then cursed, and then betrayed.

[2 : 34] And so he's not only reaping the consequences of his own failure, he's also being unjustly treated and attacked. And even in this situation, David doesn't give up.

He entrusts himself to the Lord. And here we are in this chapter. What's happened in this chapter is that David's son, Absalom, has organized a conspiracy and has rode into Jerusalem, the capital city, and declared himself king.

And David has had to flee. And so David's gone, and his son, Absalom, has seized the throne, completely against David's wishes.

And that's sort of what's going on. And David is in the wilderness again. It seems like he's right back where he was in 1 Samuel when Saul was pursuing him, and when he was persecuted again in the wilderness.

Seems like he's risen and fallen, and he's right back there. So here's where we are tonight. So I want to walk us through the passage and show us three main things.

[3 : 44] Now, the first thing is God doesn't abandon us when we've been betrayed. We see this in verse 1 through 14. Now, before I read these verses, verse 1, we see Ahithophel.

Sorry, Ahithophel. Let me just explain so the story will make sense when I read it. Ahithophel was David's counselor. That means his trusted friend and his political advisor.

Ahithophel was widely respected. If you look at the last verse of chapter 16, it says people took his words like they were the word of God. It literally says that, right?

He was widely respected, and his words were weighty. So he had been David's counselor, David's friend, but then he defected.

He betrayed David. He joined Absalom's conspiracy. When Absalom tried to seize the throne from his father. And when David heard about that, he was devastated. And he prayed.

[4 : 50] He said, Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. He realized that unless God intervened, things weren't looking good. Because Ahithophel was a wise and strategic counselor.

And now he had deserted David. All right, so here we are, chapter 17. Ahithophel is in Jerusalem with Absalom, David's son. So moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, let me choose 12,000 men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight.

I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged and throw him into a panic, and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down only the king, and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband.

You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace. And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel. Then Absalom said, call Hushai the archite also, and let us hear what he has to say.

Now Hushai is David's friend, and he's hanging with Absalom, but he's actually like a spy. And so he's trying to give Absalom bad advice to trick him, because he's actually on David's side.

[6 : 01] So let me briefly run through Ahithophel's plan. So Ahithophel, if you look at what his plan is, he's basically like, let me take care of this.

Okay? I'll choose 12,000 men. That means 12 military units. Sometimes 1,000 was a word referring to a military unit, even if it didn't have, even it didn't always have 1,000 people in it.

But he says, let me take 12 military units, sort of representing all the 12 tribes of Israel. We're going to go target David, finish him off tonight, and the kingdom's yours.

Clean. I'll take care of it. I'll take the risk. I'll take responsibility. I'll make sure it happens. I'll do it. His plan is careful, calculated, and concise.

He knows that David is in a vulnerable position, and he is saying, I'll finish him off. Okay, second plan, Hushai the Archite. Verse 6.

[7 : 01] When Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, thus has Ahithophel spoken, shall we do as he says? If not, you speak. Then Hushai said to Absalom, this time the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good.

Hushai said, you know that your father and his men are mighty men, and that they are enraged like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert in war.

He will not spend the night with the people. Behold, even now he has hidden himself in one of the pits or in some other place. And as soon as some of the people fall at the first attack, whoever hears it will say, there has been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.

Then even the valiant man whose heart is like the heart of a lion will utterly melt with fear. For all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and those who are with him are valiant men.

But my counsel is that all Israel be gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, as the sand by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person.

[8 : 00] So we shall come upon him in some place where he is to be found, and we shall light upon him as the dew falls on the ground, and of him and all the men with him, not one will be left.

If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we shall drag it into the valley until not even a pebble is to be found there. Now, if you compare these two speeches of advice, they're almost completely opposite.

And his fellow's like, I'll do it. I'll do it now. I'll take care of it. He's crisp. He's clean. He's a military guy, and he knows what he's doing. Hushai the Archite, his speech is three times as long.

Absalom, it's full of flowery metaphors and grandiose ambitions. And he doesn't say, I'll take care of it. He says, Absalom, you, you know best.

You know your father. You should lead the people into battle. You should gather all Israel to you from the far north to the far south. And you lead them majestically.

[9 : 11] And don't just kill David. Wipe out everyone who's on his side. If they're in a city, you put ropes around that city and drag it to the ground until it doesn't exist anymore.

Well, verse 14. Absalom and all the men of Israel said, the council of Hushai the Archite is better than the council of Ahithophel.

Hushai successfully appealed to Absalom's pride, his vanity, his desire to be at the center of everything, even though Ahithophel's advice was actually militarily the more prudent advice. The advice that would have worked if he took it. But then we have the end of verse 14, which says, for the Lord had ordained to defeat the good council of Ahithophel so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom.

Now, if you read the book of Samuel, if you read most biblical narratives, there aren't many statements like this one. That explicitly reveal God's sovereign purposes.

[10:32] And so when you see one, you should stop and notice it. It's sort of like if you're hiking. If you're hiking on a trail in the woods, most of the time, you got to look for those little dots, right?

On the rocks or on the trees in front of you. And if it snowed, then you got to look even more carefully or follow the footprints, right? And you're sort of looking one at a time.

But then every once in a while, you might come to a clearing or a trail junction or a major landmark. And there's this like big wooden sign, right?

That says summit 1.4 miles. Waterfall 3.6 miles. This trail, you know, West Trail, North Trail, whatever.

Right? And so when you get to one of those markers, you're not just sort of going step by step, but you can sort of see the big picture. And you get an idea, that's where I want to go.

[11:32] That's where this trail is leading me. And that's like what this, this statement is one of those big signs that says, here's what God is doing in the midst of all this, you know, human acting and reacting.

You know, because if you just read these stories, you know, it can sometimes be confusing. Who's on whose side? And who's right? And who's wrong? And should we, you know, is Ahithophel right? Is Hushai right? And what about David? I mean, David's the anointed king, but then he does this terrible thing with Bathsheba. And I mean, is he good? Is he bad? Like, it's a little murky.

All right, but what does this statement say? So first of all, it says Ahithophel's counsel was good. Now that doesn't mean it's morally good, but it means it was strategically effective. Or functionally effective.

It would have worked if Absalom had followed it, but the Lord had arranged to frustrate it. You see, God had chosen David to be king and not Absalom.

[12:45] And the main point of Samuel, if you want to summarize the book of Samuel in one sentence, it's God brings down the proud and he raises up the humble. And Absalom is one of the proud who exalts himself and lifts himself up.

And so God says, I'm going to bring him down. And I'm going to, even though David has failed, he had repented. And God says, I'm not done with David yet.

I'm not going to bring David down forever. I'm not done with him. I'm going to uphold him because he trusts in me. So we see God didn't abandon David.

Even when David was betrayed by one of his closest advisors, by one of his, when he had lost one of his best resources, God didn't abandon him. So that's the first point.

Second point, what we see in this passage is God judges those who remain unfaithful to his kingdom. If you look down at verse 23, we see Ahithophel's reaction to his advice not being followed.

[14:03] Verse 23, when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order and hanged himself.

And he died and was buried in the tomb of his father. So Ahithophel saw that Absalom didn't follow his advice. I think he realized Absalom didn't follow my advice.

Things aren't, and so Absalom's not going to succeed. And if David comes back on the throne, I've just betrayed the king and committed treason against the king.

So I'm going to deserve the death penalty. There's no future for me in David's kingdom. So I'm going to end it myself. So Ahithophel, I want to spend a little time thinking about Ahithophel.

Because his life ended tragically. He was David's counselor. High official in David's kingdom. Powerful, close to David. Trusted confidant.

[15:08] David relied on him. And his life ends in a tragic way. When he saw no hope for his future. So let me ask this question.

Why would Ahithophel join Absalom instead of remaining loyal to David? Why did he betray David? You have to think about this. You might think, well, maybe Ahithophel gave David some advice that

David didn't listen to.

And so Ahithophel was like, I don't want to advise you anymore if you're not going to listen to me. Well, that's probably actually not right. Because chapter 16, verse 23 says, both Absalom and David highly esteemed Ahithophel's advice.

So it's probably not because David didn't listen to him. You might think, well, maybe Ahithophel was being pragmatic. Maybe he was like, David's getting older. He seems indecisive.

If Absalom's young and handsome, charismatic leader, I'm going to side with the winner. Possibly. But at the same time, Absalom was a risky bet.

[16:14] And he didn't end up listening to Ahithophel's advice. And he didn't end up succeeding. There's one very likely factor that motivated Ahithophel. And we can't be 100% sure, but I think this is the most likely reason that would have motivated him to do what he did.

If you look in 2 Samuel 23, 34, it's an obscure verse. It says, Ahithophel had a son named Eliam. Now, there's only one other place where a man named Eliam appears in the Bible.

And that's 2 Samuel 11, verse 3. Right? These are two verses you'd sort of never notice unless you do a Bible gateway word search. Right? And you realize these are the only two.

And you've got to have somebody who tells you to do that word search too because you wouldn't guess it on your own. Right? I didn't guess this on my own. Right? Eliam was the father of Bathsheba.

Now, if this is the same Eliam, which it probably is, Ahithophel is Bathsheba's grandfather. Now, imagine if you're Ahithophel and you're David's counselor and Bathsheba is your granddaughter.

[17:37] And then you see what David does. That he steals her from her husband and violates her and then gets her husband killed.

And then you think, am I going to stick with this guy or not? Maybe we can understand why Ahithophel defected.

He was furious with David. And in one sense, he was right because God was furious with David too. And that's why God sent the prophet Nathan to rebuke him after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

But when Nathan confronted him, what was David's response? David said, I've sinned against the Lord. And he wept.

And he wrote what we have now as Psalm 51 where he said, Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love. I'm full of sin and iniquity and I need your mercy.

[18:45] And I rely only on your mercy. And the prophet Nathan said to him, The Lord has put away your sin.

You shall not die. In other words, God's not finished with you yet. God saw that David's repentance was sincere. It wasn't just a show, but it was sincere and enduring.

And God said to David, I'm not going to totally remove you from my kingdom. And I think that's what Ahithophel couldn't accept.

Ahithophel couldn't accept that God would forgive and even restore David after such a serious moral failure involving his granddaughter, of all people.

But here's the irony. In Ahithophel's animosity toward David, Ahithophel ends up advising Absalom to be even worse than David was.

[19:59] David had violated Bathsheba. But the first thing Ahithophel advises Absalom to do is sleep with all of David's concubines in a tent on the roof of the palace.

The end of chapter 16. David had violated one woman and Ahithophel counsels Absalom to violate a whole bunch of them. to establish his kingdom, supposedly.

David had intentionally arranged for Uriah to be killed in battle and targeted. That's exactly what Ahithophel says to do to David. He says, come upon him when he's weary and discouraged and in a panic and kill him.

And then at the end, Ahithophel couldn't fathom the possibility that God could forgive and restore David after he had sinned so grievously.

And so when Ahithophel saw that he had failed grievously and his advice wasn't listened to, Ahithophel couldn't imagine any possibility that David would ever forgive and restore him and include him in his kingdom again.

[21:20] Now here's another irony. In chapter 19, when David returns to Jerusalem, he forgives all his enemies.

He forgives the guy who tricked him in chapter 16. He forgives the guy who cursed him in chapter 16. And most likely, he would have forgiven Ahithophel if Ahithophel was still there.

You see, Ahithophel's unwillingness to forgive David poisoned his career, poisoned his judgment, and poisoned his life and his end.

So I think there's a warning here. If there's someone that you're unwilling to forgive, if there's someone that you're holding a grudge against, if there's someone that you don't want to be reconciled with even if they repent, beware.

Hebrews says, don't see to it that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble and by it many become defiled. That's why Jesus taught us to pray, forgive us our sins even as we forgive those who sin against us.

[22 : 53] Because, you see, when we're unwilling to forgive others, we can become as bad or worse than the people we refuse to forgive. And that's the warning that we see from Ahithophel.

Perhaps a warning we wouldn't have expected. But there's also an invitation to come to the king and be forgiven.

To receive forgiveness from Jesus Christ and by his spirit living in us to have the power to extend his forgiveness to others and to be reconciled to someone when they also express repentance.

There's only one other character in the Bible who's like Ahithophel. Maybe you can see the parallels.

A trusted friend who ended up betraying the Lord's anointed king whose counsel was turned to foolishness and who ended his life in despair.

[24 : 04] Judas. Of course unlike David Judas had no Jesus had committed no sin that Judas had to forgive or overlook.

But it's certainly possible that one of the things Judas resented about Jesus was his teaching about forgiveness. It's possible that Judas was one of the zealots that may be what his last name means Iscariot and the zealots were people who wanted to kill the Romans and overthrow them and Judas may have been disappointed that that wasn't Jesus' agenda and that Jesus even talked about forgiveness for enemies.

That may have been part of why Judas decided I'm not going to follow this king anymore. And just like David and Ahithophel well well Jesus offered Judas his friendship to the very end.

He gave him the piece of bread at the last supper reaching out to him offering him his friendship his loyalty and yet Judas rejected it. Anyway God provides God doesn't abandon us when we're betrayed God judges those who remain unfaithful to his kingdom and third God provides for us through faithful friends.

So we've seen God's purpose to bring down Absalom and to rescue David but we also see in this chapter some of how God accomplished that plan. If you read verse 15 let's look at verse 15 then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests thus and so did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and all the elders of Israel and thus and so have I counsel.

[26 : 02] Now therefore send quickly and tell David don't stay tonight at the fords of the wilderness by all means pass over lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up. It seems like Hushai doesn't know what Absalom's going to do.

He doesn't know if Absalom's going to listen to Ahithophel and start pursuing David immediately or if he's going to listen to Hushai who's basically getting him to delay. And so Hushai sends a warning message to David through some people that he had previously arranged.

And so in this chapter we see how that happened. There are at least five different people involved. Zadok and Abiathar the priests.

They tell their sons Jonathan and Ahamaz in verse 17 and there's a female servant involved as well who's passing the message to them. They almost get found out.

Verse 18 a young man saw them and told Absalom so both of them went away quickly and came to the house of a man at Behurim who had a well in his courtyard. They went down into it and the woman the man's wife took and spread a covering over the well's mouth and scattered grain on it and nothing was known of it.

[27 : 11] When Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house they said where Ahamahaz and Jonathan and the woman said to them they have gone over the brook of water and when they had sought and could not find him they returned to Jerusalem.

After they had gone the men came up out of the well and went and told King David and David flees. So you might ask well okay so what's the point of that whole paragraph I just read?

Why doesn't the author simply say Absalom didn't follow Ahithophel's counsel he followed Hushai's counsel and so David was safe.

Why does he tell this whole story about two guys and being seen and being hidden in a well and the woman saying no they're not here they're over the water. here's what I think the point of this paragraph is.

Not only that it would make a good action movie scene right? Narrow escape they barely make it but we see in this chapter we see God's sovereign purpose verse 14 and we also see the people whom God uses who take risks to be loyal to David whom God uses to accomplish his purpose.

[28 : 24] So we see that God has sovereign purposes and that we're also responsible to play our part in them. And God uses people who step up and do their little parts even if it's passing on a message to somebody else or hiding two guys under a well.

Sort of like Rahab did when the spies came into Jericho back in the book of Joshua. So we see both these things in the midst of a hostile world God has a sovereign plan to preserve his kingdom and we see that God uses us when we take risks and step out in ways that are loyal to him.

Verse 24 David arrives at Mahanaim that's about 30 miles north of where he'd crossed the Jordan and we come to the end of the chapter verse 27 when David came to Mahanaim Shobbi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites and Mekur the son of Amiel from Lodabar and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogalim brought beds, basins, and earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, parched grain, beans, and lentils, honey, and curds, and sheep, and cheese from the herd for David and the people with him to eat for they said the people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness. So we see God provides for David when one of his closest advisors has betrayed him. God provides several faithful friends.

All these people who pass along the message so that David can be warned and flee to safety and preserve his own life and the life of the men with him. And we see these three men in verse 27 to 28 who come to provide a place for them to rest and some food and drink to refresh them in the wilderness.

[30 : 26] And so we see God provides for David through faithful friends. Now these three guys at the end, let me just introduce you to them briefly because they're an interesting bunch. Shobbi, son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites.

Now he's interesting because he is from a pagan background, an Ammonite, right? The Ammonites were another group of people who were not part of the people of Israel.

And Shobbi's brother appears in chapter 10. Basically David had a sort of some kind of a treaty or David was loyal to Nahash, the father of Shobbi and his brother.

And Nahash had been loyal to David. And so when Nahash died, David sent a delegation to express condolences to the family concerning the death of their father who had been the king. And Shobbi's brother rejected this kindness. And he was like, yeah, right. David's, this is fishy business.

[31 : 37] And so he shames David's men and he sends them back home and treats them very badly and rejects them. But Shobbi here must have seen David's kindness and loyalty.

And we see that Shobbi responded positively. Right? So Shobbi's brother was like, yeah, right. Don't deal with this guy. You know, he's tricking you. And Shobbi's like, actually, no, he's not. He's the real stuff. He's good to his word. And his, he was won over by David's kindness and loyalty, even though he was from a non-Israelite background.

So that's the first guy. Second guy, Machir, son of Amiel from Lodabar. The only other thing we know about him is that the beginning of David's kingdom, he was taking care of Mephibosheth, who was one of Saul's surviving relatives.

So most likely, he was also not on David's side from the beginning. He was on Saul. He was probably loyal to Saul. That's probably why he was taking care of Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth.

[32 : 43] And yet, what did David do to Mephibosheth? He extended kindness and loyalty to him and brought Mephibosheth into his court and was faithful to his covenant with Jonathan, Mephibosheth's father.

So most likely, this guy Machir became loyal to David because he saw David's kindness again. Kindness to an outsider.

And the third guy, Barsili, the Gileadite, in the next chapter we learn he's a wealthy, retired, 80-year-old man. This is the first time he appears in the story, but later on, David is also kind and loyal to him as well.

And so these three guys, from all different backgrounds, have been won over by David's kindness. They've become part of his kingdom.

They're his loyal followers because of David's kindness and David's loyalty, his steadfast love. And, you know, isn't that, in one sense, isn't that a picture of who we are as a church?

[33 : 54] Right? We're all different kinds of people from all different kinds of backgrounds, and some of us, you know, would never have grown up seeing ourselves in a church. Some of us might have grown up in another kind of church and never saw ourselves in a Baptist church or whatever, and some of us don't really care that it's a Baptist church, and that's fine.

Right? But we're coming from all different backgrounds, but we've been won over by the kindness and loyalty of our King, Jesus. And so we come to follow him, we come to give our treasures to him because he has shown us his kindness, and he has shown us his faithfulness.

So in conclusion, three things. God doesn't abandon us when we've been betrayed. God judges those who remain unfaithful to his kingdom. God provides for us through faithful friends. We see how this is true for David. Now you might, your last, one last question, you might say, well, how do we know it's true for us?

Okay, it's true for David. Nice story back then. How in the world, why in the world should I assume that it will be true for me? Just because it happened to David doesn't mean it's going to happen to me the same way.

And here's your answer. It's not just because it was true for David, it's true for us. It's that because, it's that David, it was true for David, and it was also true for Jesus.

[35 : 21] When Jesus was betrayed, God did not abandon him. God did not abandon him to Judas's, Judas's, or the Jewish leaders, or the Roman authorities' purposes.

But even through their betrayal, God accomplished his purpose for Jesus, and to bring us salvation. God didn't abandon Jesus when he was betrayed.

God brought judgment on Judas the betrayer. God provided for Jesus. Even through faithful friends. Interestingly, most of his followers abandoned him, but there were a couple who remained with him to the end, and who were there with him even at the cross. And you know, it's because these things are true of Jesus, and because Jesus promises, I will be with you, even to the end of the world.

That's the reason why you can be confident these things are true of us, is if you trust in Jesus as your king, if you have put your trust in him, even if, even if like David, you have failed in the past, even if your life feels like it's falling apart, even if you're hungry, thirsty, weary in the wilderness, if you say, yes, King Jesus, you are my king, God won't abandon you, even if you're betrayed.

[36 : 51] God will bring judgment on those who remain outside his kingdom, and God will provide for you through faithful friends. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for these stories in the Old Testament that are so realistic, Lord, that don't shy away from showing the messiness of life, the failures that we often get ourselves into, and the troubles that we face as human beings, but we thank you that we see in them your faithful and steadfast love.

We thank you for your son, Jesus Christ, and that he is our merciful and faithful high priest who has drawn near to us and who has experienced these trials with us and who's died on behalf of our sins so that we can know your promises, so that we can know that you won't abandon us, that you are our friend who sticks closer than a brother, and you are the one who provides for us through faithful friends.

Lord, we pray that we would experience your provision, that we would trust in your provision through Jesus Christ, and that we would be the means of your provision and your grace for others as your spirit dwells in us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.