

Bitterness Can Kill

Mike Ford (1955-2021)

Given 04-Apr-20; Sermon #1536B

I mentioned in my previous message that I would like to delve deeper into the life of Ahithophel, friend and counselor to King David. I would like to show a little bit about how bitterness consumed his life. So let us start in I Chronicles 11. I only need verse 1, maybe a little bit of verse 2, where David is crowned king over Israel.

I Chronicles 11:1-2 Then all Israel came together to David at Hebron, saying, "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. . . and the Lord your God said to you, "You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over My people Israel."

David has been ruling Judah from Hebron for seven and a half years and he is now going to be king over all Israel and he goes on to rule thirty-three more years in Jerusalem. I started here to point out that David was very familiar with the territory God had given the tribe of Judah. Hebron is in about the center of this area. It is fourteen miles south of Bethlehem, where David was born. Jerusalem is north, about 40 miles from Hebron.

David's been evading King Saul for eight years, running for his life. He has lived off the land all over this area, mostly to the east in the wild country near the Dead Sea, but he never stayed very long in any one place.

Ahithophel was from Giloh, a town between Bethlehem and Hebron. It is a little bit north of Hebron. Ahithophel is a few years older than David. We do not know anything really about his life before he comes into view as David's counselor. Now, he lives in an area that was given to Caleb. You can find that in Joshua 15:13. It is the area around Hebron so it is very possible he is from the line of Caleb. We do not need to turn there, but Joshua 15 lists some cities of Judah. In verse 51, Giloh is there. In verse 55, the towns of

Maon, Carmel, and Ziph. A little geography lesson here. Giloh is a few miles north of Hebron and then below, headed south, Ziph, Carmel, and Maon, in that order.

Let us turn to Psalm 54 as we lay some foundation here. Before actually the verse starts, you should have a heading (I do in my Bible), and a little bit of an intro into the psalm, and it says: To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Contemplation of David when the Ziphites went and said to Saul, "Is David not hiding with us?"

Psalm 54:1 Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your strength.

You see the people of Ziph were supporters of Saul and they ratted David out, not once, but twice.

Now let us go over to I Samuel 25, verses 2 and 3. I will read this from the *Good News Bible*.

I Samuel 25:2-3 (GNT) There was a man of the clan of Caleb named Nabal, who was from the town of Maon, and who owned land near the town of Carmel [these are really just villages fairly close to one another]. He was a very rich man, the owner of three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. His wife Abigail was beautiful and intelligent, but he was a mean, bad-tempered man.

Nabal was shearing his sheep in Carmel. So, think about that geography lesson. Nabal is from Maon. He is shearing sheep in Carmel. Just past Carmel is Ziph, then Hebron, then Giloh—all part of Judah and the inheritance of Caleb.

David was operating in this area for years eluding Saul. Nabal was very wealthy and as such supported the status quo, meaning Saul. Now, you all know the story here, how David's young men did not bother Nabal's shepherds in the field. They did not harass them. They did not steal any animals. So, David sent some young men to ask Nabal for a contribution. Nabal then answers them.

I Samuel 25:10-11 (CEV) This is what he said: Who does this David think he is? That son of Jesse is just one more slave on the run from his master, and there are too many of them these days. What makes you think I would take my bread, my water, and the meat that I've cooked for my own servants and give it to you? Besides, I'm not sure David sent you!

This guy is a real snot. David has about 600 men following him at this point. So, when his emissaries return with Nabal's reply, of course he gets angry and he says, "Alright, let's go fellas. Let's teach this guy a lesson." Four hundred men arm themselves and follow David over to Nabal's place. Nabal is in big trouble and he does not even know it.

Now, one of his employees tells Abigail what is going on. You remember her? She is beautiful and intelligent. She goes to work to save her husband's life.

I Samuel 15:18 (CEV) Abigail quickly got together two hundred loaves of bread, two large clay jars of wine, the meat from five sheep, a large sack of roasted grain, 100 handfuls of raisins, and 200 handfuls of dried figs, She loaded the food on donkeys . . .

While this is happening, David and his soldiers headed that way. David is walking along, verse 21, muttering to himself,

I Samuel 15:21 (CEV) "I surely wasted my time guarding Nabal's things in the desert and keeping them from being stolen! I was good to him, and now he pays me back with insults."

Abigail intercepts the army.

I Samuel 15:23-25 (CEV) Abigail quickly got off her donkey and bowed down in front of David. Then she said: Sir, please let me explain. Don't pay any attention to that good-for-nothing Nabal. His name means "fool," and it really fits him! I didn't see the men you sent.

This might seem to be a bit of a too-strong paraphrase from the CEV, but the Good News Bible says the same thing. Abigail calls Nabal good for nothing. It seems harsh. But remember she is trying to save her husband's life. And what she says here is the truth. We are all familiar with the practice of God naming people in the Bible what they are. Nabal is the only man in the Bible with that name. I am sure there has got to be a story there how his parents came to name him thus.

But I mention all this because there is a connection (it took me a while to get there) to Ahithophel. The name Ahithophel means "brother of folly." Better yet, "brother of a fool." Now I cannot say with 100% certainty that Ahithophel was Nabal's brother, but the evidence points that way. After Nabal dies and Abigail marries David, it is very possible she would introduce her brother-in-law to her new husband, if they did not already know one another. But because David had roamed this area of Judah practically from birth and Ahithophel was known as a wise man, they knew *of* one another and may well have known each other. But now they have something of a family tie. I am making the case that they were a team from early on.

One more piece of this puzzle. Just keep a finger in I Samuel and let us go back to I Chronicles 27. The book of Chronicles is just that. It is a chronicle and starting back in chapter 10, it chronicles the dynasty of David. It starts with some broad strokes: the end of Saul, the rise of David, the mighty men. They moved to Jerusalem, the Levite priests, and listing the musicians, and so on. Now, near the end of the book, we get down to the leaders of the tribes and the high state officials. In other words, we started with the lowest and we are moving up to the highest. So in I Chronicles 27, verse 25-34, we find a listing of state officials. For instance, in verse 25 is the head of the treasury, verse 26, the head of the grounds, and so on. Verse 33 is where we are headed.

I Chronicles 27:33 And Ahithophel was the king's counselor, and Hushai the Archite was the king's companion.

The way this reads, Ahithophel and Hushai were the top dogs in David's administration.

Look at verse 34.

I Chronicles 27:34 After Ahithophel was Jehoiada the son of Benaiah, then Abiathar. And the general of the king's army was Joab.

The priest and the general of the army are *after* Ahithophel, as an inferior to him, but superior to all the others. But I think Ahithophel joined with David during this time fleeing Saul or at least around the time he became king of Judah. Now, the best I can determine from my research is that Ahithophel was about 12 years older than David. So he is not so much a father figure as he is an older brother type.

Let me show you one more connection to David while we are on the subject. Back to II Samuel 23 which has a listing of David's mighty men. These are men who were with him from practically the start.

II Samuel 23:34 Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite.

Ahithophel's son Eliam was one of David's chief soldiers, one of his thirty mighty men. I am estimating his age at eight years younger than David, allowing twenty years per generation.

Notice, while we are close by, in verse 39, and we see the name, Uriah the Hittite, also part of his thirty mighty men. He was a convert. He was with David also from the time before he was king. So Ahithophel and his family are all close to David. They are *very* close. And since we have introduced Uriah into the story flow, let us go to II Samuel 11, back a few chapters, which in my Bible has the heading: David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. I know we are all familiar with the story. I am just going to touch on a few details.

II Samuel 11:1 It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

Now in those days, wars were not fought in the winter. It was too cold. And they were not fought in the summer. It was too hot. It is almost as if a king would wake up one morning in April and hear the birds singing and the trees are in flower, in bloom, and he would say, "Alright! The weather is good, let's find someone to fight." But notice this time, David remained in Jerusalem. It says the time when *kings* go forth to battle, but he remained in Jerusalem. The word remained is also translated in other versions, "tarried." The sense of it is, he did not feel like going out as had been his custom. He is around 50 at this time, not as eager to venture forth from the comforts of the palace.

II Samuel 11:2 (KJV) And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

I always thought growing up, reading the King James, David could not sleep one night, went up to the roof for some fresh air, saw the beautiful Bathsheba bathing, but it was night. How did he see her so well? It is not like he had one of those million candle watt lights that we use on the back porch to look into the woods. You can see anything. Now, the King James is a bit of a poor rendering here. Other translations do a better job. Let us look at just one in the Good News Bible.

II Samuel 11:5 (GNB) One day late in the afternoon, David got up from his nap and went to the palace roof. As he walked around up there, he saw a woman taking a bath in her house. She was very beautiful.

So after a nice afternoon nap, he leisurely arises, goes out to the flat roof of the palace, gazes out upon his kingdom. He has got life going his way, it would seem. His army is out fighting on his behalf. He is taking afternoon naps. It is good to be king. Notice it said David got up from his nap, not a nap, *his* nap, something he customarily would do. Now he should have been in the field leading his army or at least close by so that he could exhort and encourage and manage. And if he had, none of this would have happened. Most translations just say the woman was bathing. The Good News Bible says she was in her house. The Contemporary Version says she was in her

courtyard. Certainly she could only be seen from one place, the roof of the palace.

II Samuel 11:3 So David sent and inquired about this woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

"Someone" told him who this beautiful woman was, and not just her name, but her lineage. I think this someone was Ahithophel, David's close friend, confidante, and counselor. Now he could have gone one step further. He could have said, "Well, this is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah, and *my granddaughter*." Ahithophel, or whoever that someone was, is attempting to warn David. They know him. They know how he thinks. They know what he wants. They are saying, "This is the daughter of Eliam, one of your mighty men. This is the wife of Uriah, one of your mighty men." Because these were men David had been to war with. He camped in the field with, he drank and told war stories with. These were his friends, his supporters, and protectors. This person, this someone, Ahithophel, is saying, "Don't even think about it!"

II Samuel 11:4 Then David sent messengers, and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house.

Now, once upon a time, I will admit, I felt that Bathsheba shared equally in the guilt of this sin. But I have changed my mind. She was around 20 years old at this time. David is about 50. As the daughter of Eliam, granddaughter of Ahithophel, she has most likely been in and around the palace all her life growing up. David probably bounced her on his knee when she was a child. Do you not think he was also present at her wedding to Uriah? And obviously, she lived near the palace. All her life she has been in awe of this great man. She looked upon him as bigger than life. King David!

So much is said in this verse in so few words. "He sent messengers and took her." Because as king, he had that power. "She came to him," it says. Because again he was the king and he had that power. Now we see she is not

pregnant at the time. It is made clear she has just finished her monthly cycle. The child conceived is not Uriah's, but clearly David's. Your sins will find you out.

As far as we know, she has been happily married to Uriah the Hittite. He is probably a few years older than her. He is a mighty man. A Hittite by nationality. He may have been a convert, but he also may have been a second generation spiritual Israelite. His name contains the "iah" suffix for God. It means the light of God.

In II Samuel 12 where Nathan the prophet tells David a story about a rich man stealing the only lamb from a poor family, it is said David's anger was greatly aroused. Let us just look at that. We will see Uriah more clearly.

II Samuel 12:3 But the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; it was like a daughter to him.

Uriah had nothing in this world except Bathsheba. She meant everything to him. But his loyalty to God through his service to David and Joab and his fellow soldiers, shows that he placed God ahead of all else. I am not going to go much more into Uriah. You can check out Ted Bowling's sermonette out on www.cgg.org to learn more there. But let us add Uriah into the mix of what is going on with Ahithophel.

I mentioned his wisdom and renown. Let us verify that.

II Samuel 16:23 Now the advice of Ahitholphe, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God. So was all the advice of Ahithophel, both with David and with Absalom.

His words were as if straight from God. He was not a priest, he was an adviser. He gave advice. But his word was looked at as inspired. No doubt David, and later Absalom, followed his advice for the most part. So after twenty years as David's chief counselor, after his son has become one of David's mighty men, after his granddaughter grows up in the shadow of the palace and marries another mighty man, David sees Bathsheba bathing and

says, "Who is that?" Now Ahithophel does not forget his position. He respects the throne. He says very politely, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" and left unsaid, "My granddaughter." Ahithophel has to be thinking, "How do you not know who this is? She's been around you her whole life." Obviously, she grew up.

David did a lot of bad things in his life. This has to be one of the worst, if not *the* worst. Taking advantage of your position for sex, then a cover up, then a murder. As I said, he is around 50. This will be something of a peak in life. He is still physically strong. He is also powerful in position, and he is lounging around the palace. He is napping. He is a little full of himself "Oh yeah, I'm the man. Oh yeah, I'm the man." She is a beautiful, naked woman who no doubt idolizes him. Who can deny the king?

Ahithophel watches all this play out. He has got to be horrified. And then he is angry. We do not know what all he might have said to the king as a counselor. My sense of it is he gives advice when asked. But they have been together all these years—two decades! He probably feels he can go further than most, but we just do not know what all he might have said.

But the aftereffect of David's sins is death. God actually had the prophet Nathan pronounce three punishments for these sins. Number one, the sword would never depart from David's house. That is in II Samuel 12:10, three of his sons die successively in violent deaths, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. The second punishment, his wives would be humiliated in front of all Israel, which we will see a little later. And number three, the son conceived in this sin would die.

God punished David. God handled the matter. His infant son dies. A year later, his son Amnon rapes his daughter, Tamar. And what do you think prompted Amnon to think he could get away with this? Do you think our kids do not pay attention to our actions? And then Amnon is killed. David is humiliated when Absalom tries to take the throne when he lays with his concubines, and then Absalom dies, and Adonijah dies. Four sons die!

Back to Ahithophel. What is happening with him? Well, he has seen his good friend attack his family. And you know what happens yourselves. What is your immediate reaction when this happens? You circle the wagons. Their

lives and fortunes are totally tied up with David's. They supported him, they fought for him, they worked for him, they lived with him. And in a moment of weakness, it is all destroyed. Ahithophel is hurt, he is crushed. So what does he do? At first, nothing, it would seem. He continued to serve as advisor to the king. But it becomes obvious that over the next twelve years, he is a bitter man and he is plotting revenge. He just needed the right political vessel to use, and he found one in Absalom. Notice II Samuel 15, verse 12. We are going to jump into the middle of this plot here.

II Samuel 15:12 Then Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city—from Giloh—while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number.

Now, this is about twelve years out from this sin with Bathsheba. This is deep in the timing of Absalom's rebellion. And he sends for Ahithophel and Ahithophel is in Giloh, not in Jerusalem. He wanted Ahithophel with him during these sacrifices to publicly bind him to the cause. And it is evident Absalom knew Ahithophel would come because they are already in this plot together. In fact, I believe Ahithophel planted the seed in Absalom's mind and watered it, cultivated it, grew it. I think at every opportunity he would probably make little comments over the years. "You'll make a fine ruler someday, Absalom. Oh, yes sir. You're a bright and capable man, Absalom."

You see Ahithophel's words carried weight. A compliment from him would have someone walking on air. David, his "good friend," had murdered his grandson-in-law and taken his granddaughter. How could he let this stand? He had to do something, did he not? Well, actually, no, he did not. He was not happy with the punishment God decided to mete out. He obviously felt that David should no longer be king, that David should die.

Put a finger or a marker in II Samuel and turn to Deuteronomy 32, verse 35. And this verse is quoted several times in the New Testament as well. I have no doubt Ahithophel knew this verse.

Deuteronomy 32:35 [God says] "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them."

I will just read you what Paul says,

Romans 12:19 (CEV) Dear friends, don't try to get even. Let God take revenge. In the Scriptures the Lord says, "I am the one to take revenge and pay them back."

Ahithophel became increasingly more bitter, I think, feeling that David had not been punished adequately. On the afternoon that David saw Bathsheba and lusted for her, he was on top of the world. He then committed a laundry list of sins and what happened? He had his friend Uriah killed, the baby conceived died. Amnon raped Tamar. Amnon was later killed by Absalom. David is driven from the throne. He is put on the run. His concubines are humiliated in front of the nation. Absalom himself was killed, and then later Adonijah, another son, died too. Those are just the obvious punishments. I am sure there are a multitude of smaller potholes that he drove through.

This is what God decided to do. But we do not think God knows what He is doing sometimes. Why do the evil prosper? Why does God not do something? So we try to play God and it never works. As humans we just do not have the capacity, the ability, to make godly judgments. Either you believe in God, that He is omnipotent and He is in charge, or you do not. Is He capable of punishing evildoers? And how is that even our job? It is not. We have all been "done wrong" at some point or feel we have. If you dwell on it, you can become resentful and bitter, and our carnal human nature wants revenge, does it not?

These sins of David were taken as an attack on Ahithophel's family and as the years went by, he stewed on them, it became as bile in his stomach. Ahithophel was no doubt in the background, behind the scenes, nudging Absalom towards rebellion. So what did David know? And when did he know it? It is very hard to say. I think he was taken unawares.

Let us go to Psalm 55. This, in my New King James, is headed: Trust in God Concerning the Treachery of Friends. It is commonly thought that Psalm 55 is about Ahithophel. Some add Saul in there as well. But when you read David's thoughts here, I get the sense that he was totally blindsided by Ahithophel's betrayal. Now, perhaps David was naive and that he, like many

leaders, starts to believe his own press. Meaning all those that hang around the fringes of power, sucking up. "Oh, you're so mighty, you're so handsome, you're so smart." And the leader begins to believe it. You start not to question their motives.

Psalms 55:12-14 For it was not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor was it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. [In other words, he felt like he could see an enemy coming and prepare.] But it was you, a man my equal, my companion [Remember I Chronicles 27:33. Ahithophel is David's chief counselor.] and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked into the house of God in the throng.

David thought he and Ahithophel were solid. He seems to have no idea that he is plotting his overthrow. Although the fact that Ahithophel is in Giloh and not Jerusalem might mean that they have already grown apart. Ahithophel had separated himself from David. Dwight Armstrong put it this way on page 45 of the church hymnal. "Twas not a foe who did deride, for that I could endure. No hater thus, who rose in pride, else would I hide secure. But thou it was, my friend and guide, we did as equals meet. We walked to God's house side by side, and counsel blended sweet."

Ahithophel was David's counselor, his friend. It says here, his equal. But verse 21 says "in his heart was war" and he carried this bitterness inside for years and it destroyed him. When he stirred up Absalom into open revolt against the king, he thought he had finally succeeded in his quest, in his plot, in his effort for revenge.

II Samuel 15:31 (GNB) Then David was told that Ahithophel had joined Absalom's rebellion, he prayed, "Please, Lord, turn Ahithophel's advice into nonsense!"

He did not ask God for vengeance, it does not even appear that he was mad, upset. He simply said, or prayed, "Turn his advice into nonsense."

David is on the run at this point, from Absalom, running for his life, and he meets up with Hushai the Archite. You remember him. Hushai the Archite

was next to Ahithophel in the king's inner circle. Ahithophel was the king's counselor, Hushai was the king's companion. The two top dogs. David sends Hushai back into Jerusalem as a plant, a spy, if you will, into Absalom's Cabinet.

II Samuel 16:16-19 (GNT) [Hushai proceeds to blatantly lie to Absalom.] When Hushai, David's trusted friend, met Absalom, he shouted, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" [Now, you could take that two different ways, I will grant you that.] "What has happened to your loyalty to your friend David?" Absalom asked him. "Why didn't you go with him?" Hushai answered, "How could I? I am for the one chosen by the Lord, by these people, and by all the Israelites. I will stay with you. After all, whom should I serve, if not my master's son? As I served your father, so now I will serve you."

The amount of intrigue and treachery and lying going on here is incredible. But there truly is nothing new under the sun. And Absalom falls for it. That really gets me. He is so full of himself, he cannot see through this deceit, this load of stuff he has been given. And he says to Hushai, "Okay, well, cool."

II Samuel 16:20-22 (GNT) Then Absalom turns to Ahithophel and said, "Now that we are here, what do you advise us to do? [This one scene tells me who is behind all this.] Ahithophel answered, "Go and have intercourse with your father's concubines whom he [David] left behind to take care of the palace. Then everyone will know that your father regards you as his enemy, and your followers will be greatly encouraged." So they set up a tent for Absalom on the palace roof, and in the sight of everyone Absalom went in and had intercourse with his father's concubines.

This act here means there is absolutely no hope of reconciliation with his father. And it is interesting to me that it is done pretty much in the same place where David laid eyes on Bathsheba and started this whole sorry mess.

We read verse 23 earlier. Ahithophel's advice was as if one inquired at the oracle of God. Now Ahithophel next, in II Samuel 17, wants to take 12,000 men and pursue David.

II Samuel 17:2 "I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king."

This man is a bitter man and he wants revenge. He wants to do this to the man God put in that position. He wants to humiliate. He wants to kill him! But just this one person. The bitterness comes bubbling right to the surface here, does it not?

Absalom likes this idea, but he turns to Hushai and says, "What do you think?" To this point, as far as we know, Absalom has done everything Ahithophel suggested. Why seek additional advice now? Obviously God inspired this. This is an answer to David's prayer. Hushai says flat out,

II Samuel 17:7 Hushai said to Absalom: "The advice that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time."

And then he goes to the next several verses, laying out all the reasons, and there is a lot of them, why this suggestion is not good. In verse 14, Absalom and his followers say the counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. What a blow!

II Samuel 17:23 Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father's tomb.

All that plotting, all that scheming, all that maneuvering, came to nothing. His bitterness consumed him. He could not kill his former friend, so he killed himself. Because that is what bitterness does. It eats away from the inside. Oh, from time to time, others might see it, as when Ahithophel said, "I will strike only the king." Other times, it is known only to you and to God.

I want to finish this up in I Peter 3. You know, as we approach Passover, it is appropriate, I think, to end here because as we examine ourselves (as been

discussed today) and our attitudes, I think, also towards the spiritual body of Christ.

I Peter 3:8-10 (GNB) To conclude: you must all have the same attitude and the same feelings; love one another, and be kind and humble with one another. Do not pay back evil with evil or cursing with cursing; instead, pay back with a blessing [oh, that is hard], because a blessing is what God promised to give you when he called you. As the scripture says, "If you want to enjoy life and wish to see good times, you must keep from speaking evil and stop telling lies."