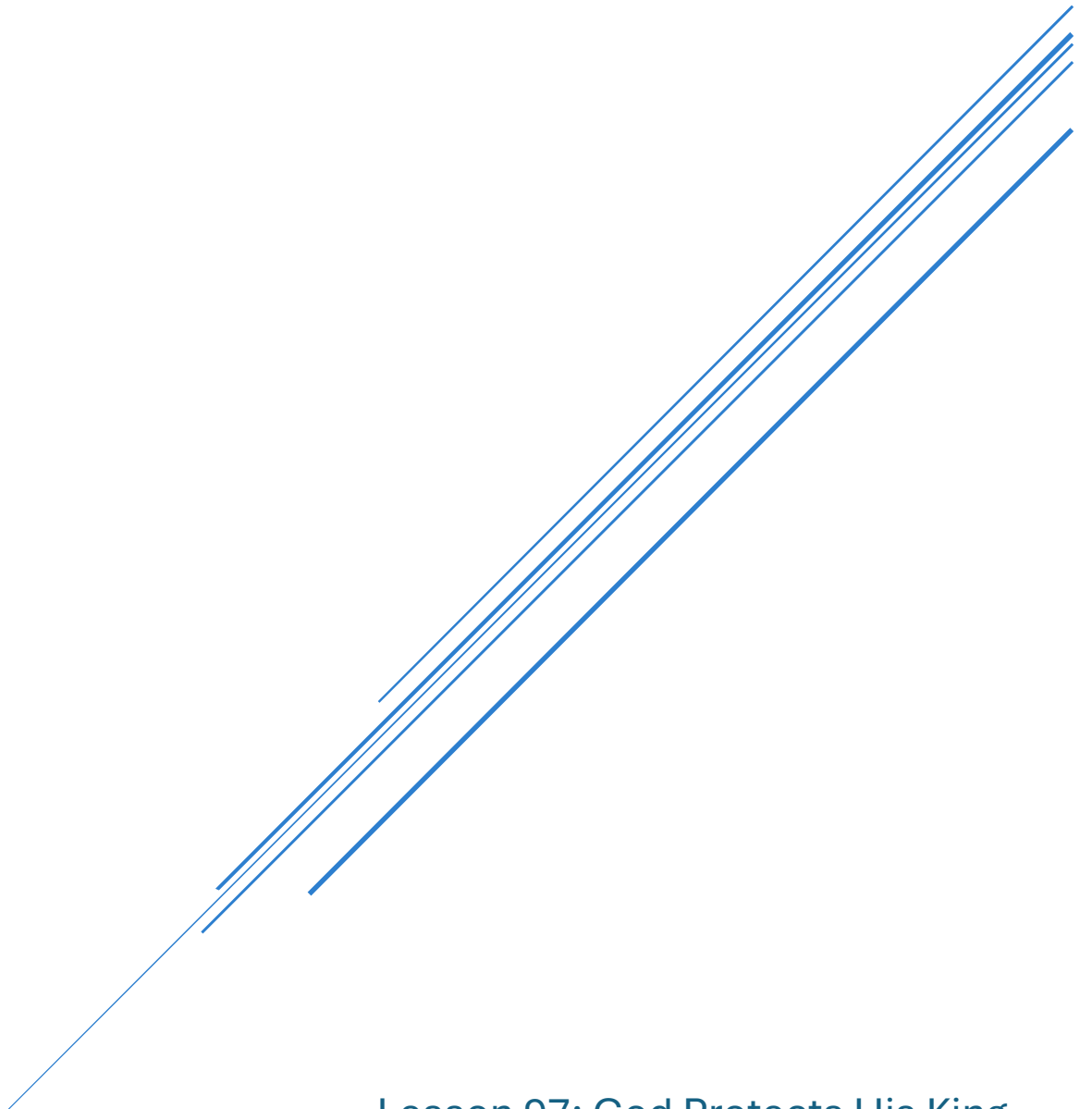


THE KINGDOM, THE BIBLE, & US

Understanding the Bible's story, Jesus' importance, & our place in God's kingdom plan



Lesson 97: God Protects His King
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Absalom Secures Jerusalem

2 Samuel 16:15-23

Absalom and his group made it into Jerusalem and secured the palace. Thus, this was Absalom's way of setting himself up as the new king over Judah. Hushai (David's spy) was able to convince Absalom that he had abandoned David and wanted to serve the new king of Israel.

Ahithophel's Wicked Advice

2 Samuel 16:20-23

Absalom asked the former top advisor to David what should be done next. Ahithophel counseled Absalom to sleep with David's concubines he left behind to tend the palace. He says if this is done, then the people will know for certain that Absalom has overthrown his father's rule and his own men would rally to his cause even more.

This event sounds bizarre to us, but back in that era, this unfortunately would not have been uncommon. If one king invaded another king's territory, they may also take over the subjected king's harem of women. This was an added sign that the invading king had so subjected the opposed king that he had even his concubines.

Ahithophel's counsel comes from a place of wickedness. He wants Absalom to engage in a depraved action that shows David is totally degraded in Israel. Ahithophel calls for a tent to be set up on the roof of the palace for Absalom to carry out this wicked act. This takes us back to God's judgment on David after he sinned with Bathsheba and attempted to keep in secret.

God said in 2 Samuel 12:11-12 says, "This is what the Lord says: 'Behold, I am going to raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed, you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and in open daylight.' "

The actions of Absalom must have been a fulfillment of that divine judgment. The author also gives us a footnote in 2 Samuel 16:23 that Ahithophel's counsel was considered as coming straight from God, even David thought so. We will see later though, how God uses this to work against Absalom.

David's Spy

2 Samuel 17:1-14

Hushai's Deceptive Advice

Ahithophel counsels Absalom that he should take immediate military action against David's forces. His advice is that a unit of 12,000 soldiers would be sufficient because David and his warriors must surely be exhausted from running away. They could overtake them and because of David's forces' fatigue, Absalom would win. Ahithophel says that if the forces can find David and kill him, then Absalom will immediately win because even the rest of David's forces will surrender if David falls. Ahithophel was essentially arguing for the idea "cut off the head of the snake and the body dies." Find David, kill David, then David's forces would return and follow Absalom.

Absalom doesn't want to hear only one side, he calls for Hushai to give his advice. Hushai says Ahithophel is wrong this time, his advice would end in ruin for Absalom. His argument is that David and his warriors are the best warriors Israel has. David would not even be found by Absalom's 12,000 if he sent them because David is a cunning warrior who would not sleep with the people.

Hushai advises that Absalom rally all the forces he can muster, a massive army like the sands of the shore. They must overwhelm David's forces with more numbers and more force. Furthermore, Absalom must personally go into battle to ensure he solidifies his leadership through this victory (vs. 11).

Absalom agreed with Hushai's advice, and we learn in verse 14 that this was part of God's providence at work to bring about destruction on Absalom. The New American Standard translates this as, "For the LORD had ordained to foil the good advice of Ahithophel, in order for the LORD to bring disaster on Absalom." The word "ordained" is a Hebrew word for giving a command, an order. In this context it seems the author of 2 Samuel points out for us that God was working behind the scenes through His divine power of providence to bring about judgment on Absalom. The manner that He did this was that He so ordained (structured it so), that Ahithophel's advice be overturned.

The verse says that Ahithophel's advice was actually "good." We can infer that technically Ahithophel's advice was the better plan Absalom should have followed, and it might have worked. However, God was working things out according to His plans and set Hushai up in such a manner that He knew Hushai's counsel would override Ahithophel's leaving Absalom convinced by Hushai's advice.

No matter how we theologically interpret the process of God "ordaining" matters to foil Ahithophel's advice, one thing we can be certain of is that the author wants us readers to understand that everything that happens to Absalom was part of God's plan of judgment.

Why do you think God determined to set Himself against Absalom?

Hushai's Warning to David

2 Samuel 17:15-28

Hushai's advice was accepted by Absalom and the plan set in motion to take over David's forces. Now it was up to Hushai to alert David to the plan he convinced Absalom of, so David could set up a counter-move.

Hushai sent a message through the priest Zadok, who sent a messenger to David's spy network to alert him of the plan. Hushai got word to David's forces that they must quickly keep traveling well past the Jordan river because Absalom was coming by nightfall. David heeded the warning and they all left the area.

In a curious turn of events, we are told in verse 23 that once Ahithophel learned his counsel was not followed by Absalom, he returned to his own home, set his affairs in order, and hanged himself.

Why do you think Ahithophel killed himself over this?

Absalom's Fate

2 Samuel 18:1-17

David set up his troops, which by this time had amassed to thousands. He divided them into thirds with Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite as the three commanders. David even intended to join the battle. However, his people told him that he must not go out to battle but stay back in case they lose. David consented to their advice. David's only direct order to his commanders was, "Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake" (vs.5).

David's forces waged battle with Absalom's and David's forces were winning and they killed 20,000 soldiers of Absalom. An interesting note we are told in verse 8 is that when Absalom's forces retreated into the forests, it says the forest killed more people than David's soldiers.

At a point in the battle, Absalom was riding his mule and attempting to flee some of David's soldiers. Along the way the mule went under low branches of a large oak and his head got lodged in the branches so firmly that his donkey traveled on while he was stuck hanging by his head from the tree (v.9).

A messenger informed Joab that he saw Absalom trapped hanging from a tree. Joab berated the man and asked how come he didn't strike him dead and get a reward? The man told Joab that he knew David's orders about Absalom and that no reward money would be worth killing the king's son (vv.12-13). Joab went to Absalom and threw 3 spears into his chest. Then, Joab's 10 armor carriers struck Absalom until he died (vv. 14-15). Joab blew the trumpets signaling David's forces needed to stop fighting. Absalom's body was thrown into a deep pit in the woods and built a large stone pile over him. The rest of Absalom's forces retreated to their homes.

Why do you think Joab ignored David's orders to keep Absalom safe?

David's Grief

2 Samuel 18:19-33

David receives word through messengers that they won the battle. As he kept asking them what happened with Absalom, a second messenger confirmed that Absalom had suffered the fate that all of David's enemies deserve. "Then the king trembled and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And this is what he said as he walked: "My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son! (vs.33).

Do you sympathize with David's grief or think he should have been more grateful God protected David?

Joab's Intervention

2 Samuel 19:1-7

Joab heard that David was mourning Absalom's death, rather than celebrating his army's victory. Furthermore, verses 2-4 say that David's mourning over Absalom's

death was so severe it caused his own forces to become grieved. When they entered Jerusalem again, they entered the city with the attitude of soldiers who had ran away from losing a battle rather than those who won.

Joab's intervention is worth quoting in full:

Then Joab came into the house to the king and said, "Today you have shamed all your servants, who have saved your life today and the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines, by loving those who hate you, and by hating those who love you. For you have revealed today that commanders and servants are nothing to you; for I know today that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then it would be right as far as you are concerned. Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, no man will stay the night with you, and this will be worse for you than all the misfortune that has happened to you from your youth until now!" (2 Samuel 19:5-7).

Joab boldly charged David with doing wrong to his entire military and their families. He accused David of 'loving those who hate you and hating those who love you.' David's immense grief over Absalom was sending a terrible message to David's own people. Those who had risked their lives to save David and his kingdom would feel like they had done some great evil rather than accomplished a great victory. Joab candidly says that he is convinced if Absalom had prevailed and killed them all, then David would have been more pleased. If David does not go out and congratulate his forces on their valiant victory, then David's people would abandon him that night.

Do you think Joab was right to intervene in this way?

Conclusion

The battle was over, David's son Absalom was dead, but David had won. God intended to judge Absalom and protect David, which is what happened. However, David's grief shows that he personally suffered through this process. David lost a son, even though his son sought his life, he was David's son nonetheless. David's grief became so severe, Joab had to step in and get David to think rationally once again.

As sad as this situation is, it is also God's fulfillment of the disciplinary judgment he warned David about after his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah. We will see in our next lesson that David gets restored to his throne, but his kingdom does not have peace for the rest of his days.

