

2 SAMUEL—WEEK 10

PRIORITIES



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

In this week's readings, we see David caring about others (people and the ark) while letting his own issues slide.

David is growing.

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Thank you.

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2 Samuel, Week 10 — Priorities
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1 2 Samuel 15:24–29

There was Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. Then the king said to Zadok, “Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place. But if He says thus: ‘I have no delight in you,’ here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him.” The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait in the plains of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.” Therefore Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem. And they remained there.

This might be David’s finest hour. Even though he’s in the pit of despair, he doesn’t want to use the ark to his own advantage. It’s God’s ark, not his, and he wants it treated properly.

David knows that if God wants to punish him, taking the ark from its proper home isn’t going to help. That seems obvious to us now, reading about it thousands of years later, but to someone who has seen the power of the ark in practice, the situation is tempting. Who wouldn’t want to have it handy, just in case?

And, on top of all that, one could be worried about how Absalom and his henchmen will treat the ark. Isn’t it safer with David?

No. The ark can take care of itself just fine. It should be treated with respect, and part of that respect is not treating it like a helpless baby.

David is showing that his faith in the reality of God’s presence with the ark is more than just words.

“Actions speak louder than words.”

We know that if someone says he believes one way, but acts as if he believes another way, the other way is what he actually believes.

But this applies reflexively. Our own actions speak to us.

You don’t choose what you believe. You can choose to study, and that can affect what you believe, but your beliefs just are.

David’s actions with Bathsheba showed his faith in God to be less sincere than he thought. He claimed faith, but he acted like an atheist. He had no sense of the presence of God. He didn’t “believe in his heart.”

But David’s actions with the ark in today’s passage display real faith. He isn’t putting any trust in anything or anyone else but God.

You don’t know what’s in your heart until you’ve analyzed your own actions.

2 2 Samuel 15:30–37

So David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up. Then someone told David, saying, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” And David said, “O LORD, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!”

Now it happened when David had come to the top of the mountain, where he worshiped God—there was Hushai the Archite coming to meet him with his robe torn and dust on his head. David said to him, “If you go on with me, then you will become a burden to me. But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, O king; as I was your father’s servant previously, so I will now also be your servant,’ then you may defeat the counsel of Ahithophel for me. And do you not have Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? Therefore it will be that whatever you hear from the king’s house, you shall tell to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Indeed they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok’s son, and Jonathan, Abiathar’s son; and by them you shall send me everything you hear.”

So Hushai, David’s friend, went into the city. And Absalom came into Jerusalem.

David doesn’t know what God is going to do next, but that doesn’t mean he shouldn’t pray about it. “*O LORD, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!*”

And the answer comes right away. Hushai shows up *with his robe torn and dust on his head* (symbolic of grief). Hushai is just as sad about the current events as David is.

David recognizes this as the LORD’s clever response to his prayer. Hushai would be the perfect mole in Absalom’s cabinet, so David sends him back with this mission. Zadok, Abiathar, and Hushai will be David’s eyes and ears in the palace. They will use Ahimaaz and Jonathan as messengers to deliver the news to David.

This may *turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness*, but even if it doesn’t, David will know what Absalom is up to.

God ordains the means as well as the ends.

The quick timing of this answer is just what the doctor ordered for David’s emotional state. He suddenly doesn’t feel alone. Yes, Nathan pronounced severe punishments from the LORD, and all that is now coming true, but there are many things he did not say. God’s promises to David were not revoked. All is not lost. Hope is returning.

Nothing in life is more encouraging than answered prayer. Even if the answer isn’t my first choice, the sense of God’s presence is worth far more than getting my way on some issue.

In fact, getting my way all the time would be kind of depressing.

God is supposed to be smarter than I am. I should expect some disagreement.

3 2 Samuel 16:1–14 (ESV)

When David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred of summer fruits, and a skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, “Why have you brought these?” Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who faint in the wilderness to drink.” And the king said, “And where is your master’s son?” Ziba said to the king, “Behold, he remains in Jerusalem, for he said, ‘Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father.’” Then the king said to Ziba, “Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.” And Ziba said, “I pay homage; let me ever find favor in your sight, my lord the king.”

When King David came to Bahurim, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, and as he came he cursed continually. And he threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David, and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And Shimei said as he cursed, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you worthless man! The LORD has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned, and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is on you, for you are a man of blood.”

Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.” But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, ‘Curse David,’ who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’” And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today.” So David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along on the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went and threw stones at him and flung dust. And the king, and all the people who were with him, arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself.

Ziba is lying, as we’ll see chapter 19, but David doesn’t know that. Ziba only seeks self-advancement. David is somewhat skeptical, and questions Ziba repeatedly, but is ultimately deceived. Then David makes a premature proclamation, decreeing that all of Mephibosheth’s possessions belong to Ziba.

Much of 2 Samuel is about David learning from his mistakes. He will ultimately learn from this one.

Next, we see how much David has already learned. Shimei comes out, cursing David. Shimei’s actions are punishable (see Exodus 22:28), and Abishai wants to deliver the punishment, but David calls him off.

David’s response to criticism, even unjust criticism, displays considerable spiritual maturity. He isn’t anxious to defend his honor. You could say that, emotionally, he “takes one for the team.”

David has taken to heart the truth of his fallen human nature.

4 2 Samuel 16:15–23

Meanwhile Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem; and Ahithophel was with him. And so it was, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, that Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

So Absalom said to Hushai, "Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?"

And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, but whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with him I will remain. Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father's presence, so will I be in your presence."

Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give advice as to what we should do."

And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

Now the advice of Ahithophel, 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.

Absalom's questioning to Hushai is caustic. He's more than just suspicious; he's accusing Hushai of being disloyal. Hushai's response cleverly diffuses the situation, but notice the hidden ambiguity.

Absalom thinks Hushai is pledging loyalty to him, but Hushai doesn't actually say that. He pledges loyalty to "*whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel choose.*" Hushai is less ambiguous in the other things he says, but there are still double meanings.

It's all deception with a pinch of sarcasm.

Then Absalom turns to Ahithophel for advice. His response is to tell Absalom, "*Go in to your father's concubines.*" This will fulfill one of Nathan's prophecies:

Thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; 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 sun. — 2 Samuel 12:11

While Ahithophel is known for wisdom, and that reputation is presumably earned, this advice borders on plagiarism. There is no evidence that Nathan's prophecy was somehow kept secret. It probably wasn't widely known, but if anyone knows about it, Ahithophel would be one of the ones who did.

Plus, in countless ways, this is terrible advice. He's recommending unethical behavior for the purpose of offending David. His prediction of how the public will react to this is quite a stretch.

There's something wrong with this guy. Later events will illuminate that.

5 2 Samuel 17:1–13 (ESV)

Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, “Let me choose twelve thousand 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.” And 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 that 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. 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.”

David’s spies inside Absalom’s court guarantee that almost any attack plan will fail. David will know all and can set up an ambush. So, if Ahithophel’s plan is doomed to fail, why try to replace it with another plan?

Ahithophel’s plan keeps Absalom out of the battle. Hushai’s plan has Absalom *go to battle in person*.

This may sound like a more effective way to win, but it endangers Absalom.

As we will see, endangering Absalom is not what David wants. He hopes to see Nathan’s prophecy (God’s punishment) play out with as little damage as possible to himself and to others. He already witnessed the death of an innocent baby, and he’d like to keep the rest of the carnage to a minimum.

Frankly, he’s mostly worried about minimizing the damage to others—to himself, not so much. This raises an interesting psychological point.

David knows that he messed up and that his sin is leading to all kinds of bad things. He doesn’t want bad things to happen to himself, but if they do, at least it’s just.

But when bad things happen to others, that’s unjust, which is worse.

That attitude is an important part of David being a man after God’s own heart.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever caught yourself not acting like you believe what you claim?
2. Have you ever felt God's presence?
3. Have you ever dealt with severe unjust criticism?
4. What is your favorite example of a double-entendre?
5. What other characteristics make David a man after God's own heart?

Items for prayer: