

AHITHOPHEL the man who could not forgive
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(2 SAMUEL 17 :23)

The cause of God is always greater than the man who represents it, and no one can ever be justified in leaving his place of service because he has discovered sin in high places of responsibility. Ahithophel was one of the greatest men of his time, but he allowed memories of injustice to colour his entire horizon.

Ahithophel's Greatness

This eminent man occupied one of the stately homes of Israel, for he was not only a great man in his own right, he was the bosom friend and honoured counsellor of the king. When he gave counsel "he spake as the oracle of God," and on innumerable occasions the king had cause to thank God for the presence of his old and trusted friend. Now, Ahithophel had a son whose name was Eliam (2 Sam. 23 : 34), a distinguished captain in David's army. He was very proud of his boy, and perhaps even more proud of his beautiful grandchild Bath-sheba (2 Sam. 11: 3). He watched her and wistfully thought of the future, and when Uriah the Hittite, another valiant captain, fell in love with this charming girl, both her father and grandfather joyously consented to their marriage. And then came tragedy!

Aithophel's Grief

"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. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath-sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers and took her . . ." (11:2-4). Poor Bath-sheba, she was just a helpless woman in an eastern land - and could hardly be expected to resist the attentions of an irresponsible passionate monarch. The weeks and the months which followed were dark with apprehension and dread. Fearful suspense tortured her mind, and even David regretted the madness of former days. Constantly the threat of discovery hung over his head, and as a last resort he ordered the execution of the faithful young husband. Bath-sheba bowed in sorrow and mourned for her lover, but old grandfather Ahithophel knew no such restraint. This act of David was despicable to the extreme -it was murder! Incensed, the great counsellor saddled his ass and went home to Giloh. Uriah was in the grave; his lovely Bath-sheba had been seduced. The old man was furious.

Ahithophel's Guilt

The subsequent story of David's bitter repentance only hardened Ahithophel's heart. Could tears bring back the dead Uriah? Could tears remove the stain from the soul of a seduced girl? Bah! When Absalom's treachery threatened the safety of King David, Ahithophel heard the news and smiled. Had not David forfeited his right to reign? "And Absalom sent for Ahithophel . . . and the conspiracy was strong. Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's

AHITHOPHEL the man who could not forgive concubines . . . and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong . . . And the counsel of Ahithophel which he counselled in those days was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God" (2 Sam. 15:12; 16:20-23). Poor man, bitterness had blinded his eyes to the fact that the cause of God is always greater than the man who represents it.

Ahithophel's Grave

The dramatic story of Hushai's opposition to the counsel of Ahithophel, makes good reading. Driven by increasing animosity, David's former friend would have pursued the weary king to slay him. Yet doubt was implanted in Absalom's mind, and ultimately Ahithophel was rejected. "And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father" (2 Sam. 17 :23). Did David ever visit the grave of his old friend? Did he weep as he read the epitaph, "Here lies Anithophel-the man who could not forgive"?

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