

22. Nothing can succeed against the Lord

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now. I'll leave you to read the rest of these notices. Please do do that. We're going to read twice this morning. It's a long reading, and Bob is going to be preaching to us from 2 Samuel 16 and 17.

You'll find that if you have one of our visitor's Bibles on page 267, but otherwise it's in the early part of the Old Testament.

And we pick up our stories here with the conspiracy and the rebellion of David's son Absalom. So let's read chapter 16 beginning at verse 1 into the first part of chapter 17. Then we'll sing and then read again the rest of chapter 17. First one of chapter 16 of 2 Samuel then.

And when David had passed a little beyond the summit, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, met him with a couple of donkeys saddled, bearing 200 loaves of bread, 100 bunches of raisins, 100 of summer fruits, and a skin of wine.

[1 : 08] 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 the summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for those who are 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 has said, Today the house of Israel will give me back the kingdom of my father. And the king said to Ziba, Behold, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours. And Ziba said, I pay homage, that may 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 Gerah. And as he came, he cursed continually.

And he threw stones at David, and 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.

[2 : 11] The Lord has avenged on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you've reigned. And the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, your evil is upon you, for you're a man of blood.

Then Abishai, the son of Zeruah, 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 Zeruah? 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 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. 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.

[3 : 18] And the king and all the people who were with him arrived weary at the Jordan. And there he refreshed himself. Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem and Ahithophel with him.

And when Hushai, the archite, David's friend, came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, Long live the king, long live the king. And 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, for whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be. And with him I will remain.

And again, whom should I serve? Should it not be his son? As I have served your father, so I will serve you. And Absalom said to Ahithophel, Give your counsel.

What shall we do? Ahithophel said to Absalom, Go into your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house. And all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father. [4 : 22] And the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened. So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof. And Absalom went into his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

Now in those days, the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God. So was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed, both by David and by Absalom. 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. So they've taken the advice of Ahithophel, the counsel, whose word was as good as the word of God in their eyes. [5 : 35] Then Absalom said, Call Hushai the archite also. And let's hear what he has to say. 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 of 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'll not spend the night with the people. Behold, even now he's 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 of it will say, There's been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.

Then even the valiant men, 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. And 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 into battle in person.

[6 : 46] 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 of 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. And Absalom and all of the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.

For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom. Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiath of the priests, Thus and so did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and so have I counseled.

Now therefore send quickly and tell David, Do not stay tonight at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means pass over, lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up.

Now Jonathan and Ahimaz were waiting at En-Rogel. A female servant was to go and tell them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they were not to be seen entering the city.

[7 : 59] But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So both of them went away quickly and came to the house of a man at Bahurim who had a well in his courtyard, and they went down into it.

And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth and scattered grain on it, and nothing was known of it. When Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, Where are Ahimaz and Jonathan?

And the woman said to them, They've gone over the brook of water. When they'd sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem. After they'd gone, the men came up out of the well and went and told King David.

They said to David, Arise and go quickly over the water, for thus and so has Ahithophel counseled against you. Then David arose, and all the people who were with him, and they crossed the Jordan. By daybreak, no one was left who had not crossed the Jordan. When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city.

[9 : 04] He set his house in order and hanged himself, and he died and was buried on the tomb of his father. Then David came to Machinaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel.

Now Absalom had set Amasa over the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Isra the Ishmaelite, who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruah, Joab's mother.

And Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead. When David came to Machinaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabah of the Ammonites, and Machia the son of Amiel from Lodabar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogalim, they brought beds and basins and earthen vessels and wheat and barley and flour, parched grain, bean and lentils, and honey and curds, and sheep and cheese from the herd.

He brought them for David and for the people with him to eat. For they said, the people are hungry and weary and thirsty. In the wilderness. Amen.

May God bless to us this exciting and involved reading of his word. And may he help us to understand it for our blessing.

[10:24] Father, as we turn from the praising of your name to the preaching of your word, we pray that that word will come to us with clarity, unmistakably speaking to our hearts, and with all its life-changing power.

And we pray that as we draw near to you, you will most graciously draw near to us, that you will open your word to our hearts and minds, that you will open our hearts and minds to your word. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the living word. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. There are a few more frustrating experiences in life than discovering you're back at the same old problem, the same old place you had thought you had left behind even many years before.

Anyone who's lived any length of time will know that experience. Sometimes it can be a fairly trivial thing. Sometimes you try out some scheme or project that you haven't properly thought out and it doesn't succeed.

[11:38] Other times it can be very trivial. Indeed, like the time many years ago, I very proudly set up a gate-leg table and discovered I got it wrong. The first step was wrong.

So let's go right back to the very beginning and start all over again. Other times it can be far, far more serious. It perhaps can be the recurrence of an illness you thought you had got rid of.

Perhaps it can be an experience which had haunted you all your life. You suddenly find yourself back there again. And that is where David is as our story opens.

Many years before David had been hunted through the Judean countryside, persecuted and in exile by King Saul, now he's back there again, this time with the added twist and the added nastiness that this time he's pursued by his own son, Absalom.

He's in rejection. He's in exile. Left the city of Jerusalem, as I suggested the last time, in order to save the people from Absalom's depredations and to save the city itself from being destroyed.

[12:49] There's one thing I want you to notice throughout the story. Indeed, it's run throughout the last few chapters. Notice the references to the king and King David over and over and over again.

Now that's not vain repetition, nor is it accidental. David isn't just anybody. David is the Lord's anointed king. And this is fundamentally the story about God rather than the story about David. It is how God will set his king, who will reign on the holy hill of Zion. This is God's story, God's story about his king. And of course, it's part of a much bigger story.

As I said often, we must read this story through the lens of Genesis 3.15, where the Lord God said that he, that there would be enmity between the promised seed and the seed of the serpent.

That's what's happening here. This is the big story where God and his enemies are battling it out. Now, David had sinned badly, and David's sins have consequences.

[13:56] Yet God is overruling the actions of foolish and malevolent and evil men to ring about his greater purposes. That's the first thing. It's God's story. I have set my king on my holy hill of Zion, as Psalm 2 says.

There's also a story of human scheming. There are fascinating little character studies here. That's not the main point of the story, but it is a point of the story.

These characters who appear, now they're not puppets. Simply because God's providence is at work, it doesn't mean that they have no choice over what they do and no responsibility to declare their allegiance.

You can see that as you read the whole story. They are responsible. Nevertheless, God is overruling even that. Look at Proverbs 21, verse 30, says this, No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, that's C-O-U-N-S-E-L, but I suppose also applies to C-O-U-N-C-I-L, no counsel can succeed against the Lord.

And that's where we get our title, Nothing Can Succeed Against the Lord. This is what this story is about. The providence of God. God's king will reign, where he is the sun.

[15:18] David will reign in Zion. Nevertheless, it's a perplexing and confusing world. The story really develops, I think, in three acts.

First of all, we have unhelpful echoes from the past. Chapter 16, verses 1 to 14, blasts from the past, which are distinctly unwelcome and positively unhelpful.

See, one of the most distressing parts of this story is the re-emergence of Saul's family. The re-emergence of an attempt by the discredited and deposed regime to put someone from Saul's family on the throne again.

And always when opposition emerges, it tends to emerge in two ways. First of all, we have the manipulator, Ziba, the manipulator, the servant of Mephibosheth.

Mephibosheth was the grandson of Saul and the son of David's great friend, Jonathan. And back in chapter 9 of this book, you can read how David took Mephibosheth into his home, treated him as one of his own sons, brought him up as part of his family, and Mephibosheth ate at the king's table day after day.

[16:36] Now here comes Ziba, the manipulator, saying that Mephibosheth has been disloyal to you, David, and he's really let you down.

Now, Ziba is perfectly safe. There is no possible way David can check that story. And there is no possible way that even if afterwards Ziba proves to be a liar, he's going to get into any great trouble because he does come with help, doesn't he?

Verse 2, the donkey, verse 1 rather, 200 loaves of bread, 100 bunches of raisins, 100 summer fruits, and the skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, why have you brought these?

And Ziba's answer is crashingly obvious, which ought to make you suspicious to begin with. The donkeys are for the king's household to ride the bread, and the summer foot to eat, and the wine to drink. You don't have to be Sherlock Holmes to know that donkeys are for riding on, or that bread is for eating, and wine is for drinking.

It's obvious Ziba is a manipulator. He's a chancer, Mr. Smoothie. He's out to impress. He's out to make a profit.

[17:51] And also out to make a show. Ziba's the kind of person, there's a Ziba in each one of us. Let's not distance ourselves from these people who is always very willing to help, but make sure that everyone knows about it.

He's not the kind of person who is going to help by stealth. He's not the kind of person who is going to slip you an envelope when you're low down on cash.

He's the kind of person who is going to give and make sure that everyone knows he's given. This is Ziba in each one of us. Manipulative, out for ourselves.

That's the first way in which the opposition comes. Now the second type of opposition is more blatant and virulent. Verse 5, When King David came to Behurim, 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. At least you know Shimei is not on your side. In some ways it's better to deal with Shimei than with Ziba. Ziba who sidles up to you, pretends he's your friend in order to stab you in the back.

[19:00] Shimei, at least you know he's not on your side. Hurling stones, hurling threats. And like all of Saul's family, he cannot accept God's king.

He's not prepared to accept what God has done. And like so many of the people in this story, he uses the language of piety. Verse 8, The Lord has avenged on you all the blood 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. He claims to be God's spokesman, but the violence of his actions and the violence of his words make him an extremely discredited spokesman.

Now this is a very vivid account, almost certainly an eyewitness account. There's probably a gorge, a deep valley between David and his people, and Shimei, as Shimei throws stones and curses.

across the valley. Always at times of crisis, you get Ziba and Shimei emerging. And they have one thing in common.

[20 : 09] They're very different. One, the smooth manipulator. The other, the cursing, violent aggressor. They have one thing in common. They want to turn the clock back to suit themselves.

Let's go back to the status quo. But this story is doing more than that. It's showing something else. Look at verse 9.

Then Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, said to the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? The Bible doesn't like dogs very much. And you just have to accept that, those of you who are fond of your canine friends, the dogs in the Bible tend to be those mongrels that sniff around the rubbish sheeps in ancient cities.

Anyway, this dead dog has to do, has to do with 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?

Abishai is the brother of Joab, that dark and sinister man. The sons of Zeruiah are themselves men of violence. David is not going to meet violence with violence.

[21 : 21] Look what he says. David said to Abishai, verse 11, and to all his servants, Behold, my own son seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to.

David knows very well that he's under God's judgment. David knows very well the Lord is punishing him for his sin.

But it's the next bit that's so important, verse 12, It may be that the Lord will look on the wrong done to me, and the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing today.

Now notice, David does not presume. David says it may be. Perhaps the Lord will. Not that David doubts the Lord's grace. It's that David doesn't presume on the Lord.

David has great flaws. But here we see another glimpse of the genuine man. The man who is anointed to be king. The man who, as we'll see later on in 2 Samuel 23, the man whose reign was like the morning dew or the sun shining after the rain.

[22 : 30] This is God's king. And think about this. What would happen if Ziba and Shammai had won? What would happen if Absalom came to the throne?

Now we need to make these decisions all the time. David is God's king. And we continually need to make these decisions. Whose side are we on?

Well he was pointing that out last Sunday in the story of Jacob. And this is a story that runs all through scripture. It's not that God's servants are perfect. They are flawed.

It's not that God's servants get everything right. It's that God has appointed his servants. God has appointed his leaders. And we need to declare allegiance to them.

If Ziba and Shammai had won, disaster would have followed. And the whole story would have crumbled about people's ears. So we have these unhelpful, unwelcome echoes from the past.

[23 : 32] Bring back Saul. Restore the status quo. Let it all be like what it was before. And you know what that means. The time we rejected God.

The time the king led us astray. The time the king refused to lead us in godly ways. And that's the first element. Now the second act, really, 16:15 to the first part of 17, 17 verse 4, we have unscrupulous plotting in the present.

Verse 15, Now Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. And what's wrong with that, you see?

Surely Ahithophel can change his loyalty if he wants. Surely if Ahithophel, the shrewdest man in Israel, judging by what's said about him in verse 23, he can decide this new leader is better than David.

But the trouble is, as I've said, it's not simply choosing the most attractive employer. It's showing loyalty to God's king. That's what the point of and Ahithophel with him.

[24 : 49] These little details you get in biblical narrative. Now he's mentioned here to show his significance in the story. And then, the little section in verses 16 to 19 are significant.

We're going to come to Hushai in a moment or two. But Hushai's words here are deeply, deeply ironical. And Hushai says, Long live the king.

Long live the king. Absalom in his conceit, of course, imagines that Hushai is talking about himself, Absalom. That's what he thinks it means. And notice as well, verse 18.

Hushai says to Absalom, No, for whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, I will be, his I will be, and with him I will remain.

Once again, Absalom does not take these words in the meaning that Hushai clearly takes them.

The Lord has chosen. Well, the Lord has chosen David back in 1 Samuel 16.

[25 : 53] The people of Israel had chosen David back in 2 Samuel 5. So you see, Hushai's words are giving us a little trailer of what's to come. It seems to be almost slipped in as a kind of irrelevance.

It's not. Absalom is riding high. Ahithophel is supporting him. And yet here, little seeds of doubt are being sown.

Who is the king? Who has chosen him? And what am I going to do? And now Ahithophel shows his true colors. Ahithophel doesn't want David out of the way.

Simply, he does. He wants to destroy him in every sense of that word. And first of all, as Ahithophel suggests, public humiliation in verses 20 to 22.

He says to Absalom, take your father's concubines. Go into your father's concubines. Verse 21.

Whom he has left to keep house, and all Israel will hear you.

[26 : 57] May a stench to your father the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened. And then again in verse 22, Absalom went into his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

Mr. Virility up there on the roof saying, my dad's a sad old man. He's long past it. I'm going to show who's in charge now. Now, of course, even here, Absalom doesn't know it.

He's carrying out the decrees of providence. Back in chapter 12, verse 11 and 12, Nathan had said to David, what you have done in secret, your family will do in public.

And that's being fulfilled here. So mysteriously, even God's enemies carry out his purposes, even although God's people are protected.

David is being judged, but David is being protected. And Absalom, as I say, I mean, Absalom is, Absalom is a man of boundless vanity. Absalom is a man without any kind of inhibitions at all.

[28 : 01] A man who thinks that every compliment ought to come to him and cannot imagine for a moment why anyone would follow his father. Why follow that sad old man when you've got new Mr. Virility to lead you?

That's the first thing, public humiliation. And this is followed by penetrating advice, which is verses 1 to 4 of chapter 17.

But look at verse 23, the last verse of chapter 16. Now in those days, the counsel of Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God.

So was all the counsel of Ahithophel esteemed both by David and by Absalom. Is Ahithophel going to manage to carry this off?

He is the man whom everyone looks to. And the implication of both by David and by Absalom is both David's supporters and Absalom's supporters are likely to listen to this man.

[29 : 03] This man is, I mean, this man is riding high. What does Ahithophel say about it? That's the question that would always be asked in court, whether David or Absalom. We need Ahithophel's advice.

Whereas listening to him is like listening to the Lord himself. And notice what he says. He suggests a plan that will not involve Absalom in any personal risk.

Let me choose 12,000 men. I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will strike down only the king and all the people will be at peace. He'll kill David and the people automatically transfer their loyalty to Absalom.

But you see, even here there are clues to what's really happening behind the scenes. I will strike down only David. That's not what he says. I will strike down only the king.

Now who is the king? The Lord's anointed. Some are saying, I will strike down the Lord's anointed. No, he won't because the Lord has his anointed in his hand and he is going to set him on the holy hill of Zion.

[30 : 12] And then, as a bride comes home to her husband, the language of covenant, only he's going to bring the bride to the wrong bridegroom. That is the point.

So even Absalom's words, sorry, Ahithophel's words, shrewd, sensible, good advice as they are, are actually carrying out the Lord's purpose.

Ahithophel seems unassailable and David seems doomed. So we have the unwelcome echoes of the past, the blasts from the past which chill David and his supporters.

We have the unscrupulous plotting in the present. And finally, we have in verses 5 to 29 of chapter 17, the unerring providence of God, which of course encapsulates past, present, and future. Now, there is no reason given to begin with why Absalom said, verse 5, call Hushai the archite, let us hear what he has to say.

[31 : 19] That is until verse 14. And verse 14 really is the key to what's happening here. And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, the council of Hushai the archite is better than the council of Ahithophel.

Why? For the Lord had ordained to defeat the good council of Ahithophel so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom. God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

And here he is using this man, Hushai, who has been infiltrated into Absalom's court. Why does Ahithophel fail when his plan is so good and his advice is so sensible?

It's because God frustrated it. Nothing can succeed against the Lord. That's what providence means. Providence isn't just some kind of abstract word.

Providence means that the creator God is carrying out his purpose day by day, year by year, in the lives of nations, of communities, and in the lives of individuals.

[32 : 24] As we saw last week again, in the story of Jacob, God uses means. Providence does not mean we sit back and do nothing. Providence means we trust in God and keep our powder dry.

And the powder is kept dry in all kinds of ways here. First of all, by Hushai's wisdom, verses 7 to 14. A very carefully crafted speech here.

Then Hushai, verse 7, said to Absalom, This time, the council Ahithophel has given is not good. Hushai is a shrewd customer. He doesn't say Ahithophel is talking rubbish.

He says, This time, implying he usually gives good advice, but this time, it's not good. And you'll notice how Hushai uses facts.

Verse 8, You know that your father and his men are mighty men. No one could deny that. No one could, no one who knows the story up to this point could possibly deny that.

[33 : 24] He's reminding Absalom what people had forgotten. David's prowess as a warrior. And he also has cunning veterans with him. That's the point. You're not, you're not pursuing some, some discredited, sad old man.

You see, this is the point. You may think, Absalom, you may think that because you, you're fooling around your father's concubine has defeated him. Forget it. Your father and his men are mighty men and they are enraged like a bear robbed of her cubs.

Besides, your father is expert in war. He will not spend the night with the people. So first of all, he takes these facts. He takes the facts of David's wisdom, David's strategy, David's known military prowess.

Then he flatters Absalom's vanity in verse 11. My counsel is that all Israel be gathered to you from Dan to Beersheba. Don't let Ahithophel go. He'll get the credit.

You go in person and all Israel will follow you. That's the point. You see, Hushai is a very discreet, very wise man.

[34 : 35] And the kind of language he uses here is like the language of the wisdom books later on in the Old Testament. But the real point is not Hushai's wisdom but God's providence.

The Lord had ordained it. That's one of the first things then. The second thing that providence uses in this exciting little story in 15 to 22.

I remember many, many years ago in secondary school my English teacher reading this story to us and being absolutely excited. And he said to the class, this is a great story, isn't it?

Oh yes. He says, where do you think it came from? Because all sorts of gestures this comes from the Bible. This is an exciting story. It comes straight from the Bible.

So he uses the effective spy work, spy network that David has set up. Hushai's wisdom, David's effective spy network. Zadok and Abiath are the priests who have often supported him.

[35 : 35] And then these two, and then this woman, the female servant first of all, and the woman who hid, who hid, who hid the spies. You know, some commentators are awfully, awfully prissy and moralizing.

This woman ought not to have told lies, they say. What should she have done? Should you feel the men are here? Come on, I'll lead you to them. Rather like those who criticize the midwives in Exodus who saved the children, including Moses, from the, from the genocide of Pharaoh.

Rather like Rahab, hiding the spies. These unknown women are caught up in God's purposes and they become part of God's saving of his anointed king.

And isn't that the story of the gospel? All throughout, unknown people, insignificant people become part of the story by which the king comes to his throne.

And then grimly in verse 23, there is the death of Ahithophel. There, when Ahithophel saw his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey, went home, set his house in order, and hanged himself.

[36 : 49] We can't read that story without thinking of another betrayer, can we? Judas Iscariot who betrayed David's greater son. It's a sad, a tragic end, but he had taken the wrong side.

That meant there could only be one end. Unless God's foes submit to him, they will be removed. This is what will happen to the enemies of the kingdom.

So the unerring providence of God uses means Hushai's wisdom, the effective spy network, and the death of Ahithophel. And finally, in verses 24 to 29, God's providence provides the most generous provision.

Unwelcome echoes of the past at the beginning of the story are now extremely welcome echoes from the past at the end. Three men whom David had helped in earlier years now establish a food supply for him.

These men, remember, were taking a risk. Absalom might still win. They didn't know how the story was going to turn out. And yet, in their gracious provision, comes to David.

[38 : 05] The other thing to notice is all three are not Israelite. David's son, David's people had rebelled against him. And here come foreigners who are going to be loyal to him.

I cannot tell how he will win the nation, says the hymn, how he will claim his earthly heritage. That's the gospel, isn't it? How the nations will come to worship before him.

And all the time, God's king is being protected. So we, as we end the story then, we see how all these elements are under God's control.

They blast from the past, the plotting in the present, and the provision in the present as well. God's king will reign. And he will reign from the river to the ends of the earth and over the whole universe. And we have the choice. We can behave like Ziba and Shimei and Ahithophel. Or we can be like those three good men at the end of the story who are loyal to him in his rejection.

[39 : 17] And may that be true of each one of us. Loyal to the king who is coming but now rejected. Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, as we read these ancient words, we realize they are not ancient words, they are the living word.

The living word of the living God whose anointed king will one day reign. A word challenging us to take sides. A word challenging us to declare loyalty.

A word challenging us to show our colors in the time of rejection. So we pray, Lord, we indeed be faithful to the king who is to come.

We ask this in his name. Amen.