

# The Lord Accomplishes His Purposes

## Text: 2 Samuel 17

**Introduction:** When major military operations are planned, they are often coordinated in what is called a war room. Maps are reviewed. Intelligence reports are analyzed. Military leaders debate strategy. And every decision matters because lives and entire nations can hang in the balance.

As you think about a war room, perhaps images from recent American history come to your mind.

But in 2 Samuel 17, we are essentially brought into the war room in Jerusalem of King David's son, Absalom.

Absalom's most trusted advisor, Ahithophel, lays out a brilliant military strategy: strike David immediately while he is weak, scattered, and exhausted. It is decisive. It is efficient. Humanly speaking, it would likely succeed.

But on the other side of the table is another counselor named Hushai. And Hushai offers different advice. Delay the attack. Gather a massive army. And wait until all Israel is assembled.

To everyone listening, Ahithophel's proposal initially seemed like the better plan. But Absalom and all the men of Israel ultimately determined to follow Hushai's counsel instead.

Why?

We're told in 2 Samuel 17:14: "For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring harm upon Absalom."

In other words, what looked like a political decision was actually the hand of God. Behind the political maneuvering. Behind the military planning. Behind the secret messages and narrow escapes. God was accomplishing His purposes.

That's what we're going to see in 2 Samuel 17. Go ahead and turn there in your Bible. 2 Samuel 17. It begins on page 250 in the black pew Bible in front of you. If you don't own a Bible, we invite you to take the pew Bible with you when you leave.

(Read 2 Samuel 17...Pray)

The events of 2 Samuel 17 show us that **the Lord accomplishes His purposes through believing prayer, human action, and divine providence.**

Let's first see that...

### I. The Lord accomplishes His purposes through believing prayer.

#### A. You remember that King David's son Absalom has rebelled against his father and is seeking to overthrow his kingdom.

##### 1. We were first introduced to this reality in chapter 15.

a. Absalom "got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him" (15:1). The point was to make himself look impressive to all the people. Look at me. I am Absalom. Don't I look like a king?

b. Then we saw that Absalom stood by the gate questioning his father's commitment to judging the people's disputes and suggesting to them that he would do a much better job.

c. And ultimately, the text says that "Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (15:6).

d. And from there, Absalom was off to the races. He went out from Jerusalem so that he could assemble his forces and prepare to take the kingdom by force.

##### 2. When David heard all that was happening, he knew he and his loyal followers had to get out of Jerusalem. Otherwise, Absalom and his men would overtake them and bring down ruin on them.

3. **And last week we saw at the end of chapter 16 that Absalom and all his people entered into Jerusalem where they intended to assert themselves and establish Absalom as king.**
    - a. **In fact, we saw where Ahithophel, Absalom’s counselor, instructed Absalom to lay claim to the kingdom by going into his father’s concubines.**
    - b. **And that’s exactly what Absalom did. In the sight of all Israel.**
  4. **But as chapter 17 begins, there’s still one big problem if Absalom is going to become king. Israel already has a king. David is Israel’s king. And he is very much still alive. Of course, there’s only one way to fix that. Which is what Absalom intends to do.**
- B. But before we get too far into the narrative of chapter 17, I want to direct your attention back to something that happened near the end of chapter 15.**
1. **Look at 2 Samuel 15:31, “And it was told David, ‘Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom’” (15:31a).**
    - a. **Now, Ahithophel had been David’s counselor. But now, Ahithophel has turned his back on David (much like Judas did with Jesus) and is providing counsel to Absalom.**
    - b. **You can imagine the sense of betrayal that David must have felt.**
    - c. **David could have responded in anger. He could have responded with despair. He could have responded in any number of ways. But what did David do?**
  2. **The text records, “And David said, ‘O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.’” (15:31b).**
    - a. **What did David do? He prayed. He turned to the Lord.**
    - b. **Now, I haven’t shied away from being critical of David ever since his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah in chapter 11.**
    - c. **But let’s give credit where credit is due. David is right to turn to the Lord here. David is right to pray.**
  3. **In fact, we know from the Psalms that despite his many flaws at this point in his life, David’s trust in the Lord and reliance on the Lord through prayer remained strong.**
    - a. **We’ve said that Psalm 41:9 is about Ahithophel’s betrayal of David: “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.” In the very next verse, “David prays, ‘But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up’” (Ps. 41:10).**
    - b. **Similarly, in Psalm 3, David writes, “O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. BUT you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill” (Ps. 3:1-3). He continues, “Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God!” (Ps. 3:7a).**
  4. **And without getting too far ahead of ourselves, we can say here that the Lord heard David’s prayers and answered them according to His good purposes.**
  5. **There is no doubt here in 2 Samuel 17 that the Lord accomplishes His purposes through believing prayer.**
- C. In fact, that is exactly what the whole Bible teaches about prayer. The Lord accomplishes His purposes through believing prayer.**

1. I think of James 5 where James writes, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit” (James 5:16-18).
2. In His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). And we know that His kingdom shall come. His will shall be done. On earth as it is in heaven. Jesus will bring about His kingdom through the prayers of His people.
3. And that’s exactly what we see throughout the book of Acts. Jesus accomplishing His purpose to bring about His kingdom through the prayers of His people.

**D. So, knowing that the Lord accomplishes His purposes through the prayers of His people, what should we do? Pray!**

1. God will accomplish His purposes. We can be certain of that.
2. But we also know that God accomplishes His purposes through believing prayer. So, we must pray!
3. Just as David did. Depend upon the Lord. Express our reliance upon the Lord through prayer. And trust that the Lord will accomplish His purposes.

The Lord accomplishes His purposes through believing prayer. Number 2...

**II. The Lord accomplishes His purposes through human action.**

**A. David doesn’t just pray. David takes action.**

1. At the end of chapter 15, David prayed that the Lord would turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.

2. But that’s not all David did. He sent Hushai the Archite to Absalom with the intention of defeating the counsel of Ahithophel (15:34).
3. Not only that, Hushai was supposed to report to Zadok and Abiathar anything that he heard from the king’s house (15:35).
4. Then Zadok and Abiathar would send their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan to report to David everything that Hushai learned from the king’s house (15:36).
5. See, David had a plan. He prayed. He trusted the Lord. But he also took action.

**B. And as chapter 17 begins, David’s plan begins to unfold.**

1. We learn of Ahithophel’s plan in the first three verses of the chapter. (Read vs. 1-3)
  - a. One commentator says Ahithophel’s plan was “bold, simple, and likely to succeed.” The plan incorporated three hallmarks of classic military strategy: use of overwhelming force, the element of surprise, and a narrowly focused object (Bergen, 411).
  - b. Concerning overwhelming force, the plan was for Absalom to assemble an army of “twelve thousand men” (vs. 1). David’s army at this point was likely not more than two thousand men. This would have given Ahithophel a 6-1 advantage over David. That’s overwhelming force.
  - c. Concerning the element of surprise, Ahithophel says, “I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged and throw him into a panic” (vs. 2a). Combining his numerical advantage with a surprise attack would virtually guarantee Ahithophel’s success.
  - d. And finally, concerning a narrowly focused object, that was David’s death. Ahithophel would know if he had been successful if at the end of his mission David was dead. He said, “I will strike down the king” (vs. 2b). Everyone else would be brought back under the rule and reign of Absalom.

2. Now look at verse 4. (Read vs. 4)
  3. This could be a problem. What's going on here? Ahithophel's plan sounds like a good one. It doesn't sound like the Lord has turned Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness like David prayed.
  4. But then in verse 5, Absalom says, "Call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say."
  5. We're not told why Absalom called for Hushai to give his opinion. If Ahithophel's plan was good, why not just go with it? The answer seems to be that God is answering David's prayer to "turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." For we know from Proverbs 21:1 that "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."
  6. So, Absalom called for Hushai, Hushai came, Absalom told him Ahithophel's plan, and then Absalom asked Hushai his opinion.
  7. And Hushai's response begins in verse 7.(Read vs. 7-11)
  8. Robert Bergen writes, "The speech is masterful in its construction and powerful in its effect: it simultaneously discredits Ahithophel, undermines Absalom's confidence, magnifies the king's worst fears, and buys David precious time to escape and regroup" (Bergen, 412).
    - a. First, Hushai argues that Absalom should not think his father could be overthrown in battle as easily as Ahithophel had suggested. Remember, we're talking about David. This is the same person who as a young man had slain a Philistine giant with just a sling and a stone. This was the same man of whom it was said, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." David had fought valiantly against Israel's enemies many times and came out victorious. He had evaded the attempts of King Saul to kill him. He had gone from shepherd boy in Bethlehem to King of Israel. The point is that David was no slouch. If Absalom wanted to overthrow him, he better take him seriously.
      - b. Next, Hushai undermines Absalom's confidence by highlighting all that could go wrong with Ahithophel's plan.
      - c. And then Hushai appeals to Absalom's pride by putting Absalom at the head of the victorious army. Remember, Ahithophel's plan? Ahithophel would be the one to kill David. But in Hushai's plan, Absalom would establish dominance himself by leading an even greater army into battle against David.
  9. Hushai presented his plan as unstoppable. He said, "Of [David] and all the men with him not one will be left" (vs. 12). He said, "If [David] 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" (vs. 13).
  10. And look at Absalom's response to Hushai's plan in verse 14. (Read vs. 14a)
  11. The Lord turned the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. And to do it, He used the counsel of Hushai who was sent by David. See, the Lord accomplishes His purposes through human actions.
  12. We're going to come back to the second half of verse 14 because I think it is the key to understanding 2 Samuel 17.
- C. But first, let's see in the rest of the chapter how the Lord uses human action.
1. We see in verse 15 that Hushai immediately reported to Zadok and Abiathar what he heard from Absalom and Ahithophel.
  2. And Hushai sent Zadok and Abiathar to report to David just as David had instructed Hushai to do (vs. 16).
  3. Zadok and Abiathar then sent a female servant to pass the message along to their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan who were to report to David (vs. 17).

4. The problem was that one of Absalom's young men saw Ahimaaz and Jonathan and reported to Absalom (vs. 18).
5. So, Ahimaaz and Jonathan went to Bahurim and hid in the well of a wealthy man there. The man's wife concealed the well, and when Absalom's servants asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" she deceived them and told them that Ahimaaz and Jonathan had already left. We're reminded here of Rahab and the two spies in Joshua 2. The Lord used this woman's efforts to protect Ahimaaz and Jonathan so they could report to David what was happening and preserve the king's life. The Lord accomplishes His purposes through human action.
6. Then we read in verse 21. (Read vs. 21-22)
7. In verse 23, we're given a note about Ahithophel that again reminds us of Judas. (Read vs. 23) You remember that after betraying Jesus and feeling the guilt of his sin, Judas hung himself. But why did Ahithophel take his own life? Was it because his feelings were hurt when Absalom rejected his counsel? No, it was because he knew that Hushai's counsel would bring about Absalom's defeat, and Ahithophel was serving the wrong king. As a traitor against King David, Ahithophel feared he would either be slain or banished from the kingdom forever (Wiersbe, 136).
8. The stage is set in the verses that follow for a confrontation between David and Absalom. David is at Mahanaim (vs. 24). Absalom and his men are encamped in the land of Gilead (vs. 25-26). It's the proverbial calm before the storm.
9. The text presents David and Absalom and their men as making real choices about what to do next. But undergirding it all is the reality that the Lord is accomplishing His purposes. He's doing so through human action. Because that's what He does. The Lord accomplishes His purposes through human action.

10. In verse 27 through the end of the chapter, we see the Lord's care for David through the provisions given to him and his men by Shobi and Machir and Barzillai. We don't know much about these men. We only know that here they showed themselves loyal to David, presumably because David had been kind to them at some point in the past. The Lord used them to accomplish His purposes. To care for David. To prepare him and his men for battle. The Lord accomplishes His purposes through human action.

Finally...

### III. The Lord accomplishes His purposes through divine providence.

- A. I told you that we would come back to the second half of verse 14. Let's do that now.
  1. Look at verse 14. The text says, "For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring harm upon Absalom."
  2. The purpose of God to bring harm upon Absalom and preserve the throne of David undergirds this chapter and really this entire section of 2 Samuel where Absalom is trying to overthrow his father's kingdom. See, it's not just that Absalom is opposing David. Absalom is opposing God.
  3. God is the one who first set David aside to be Israel's king. All the way back in 1 Samuel 16, the LORD said to Samuel concerning David, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he" (1 Sam. 16:12). Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed David. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward (1 Sam. 16:13). David's path to the throne from that day forward was a long and winding road. But God kept His promise. God did exactly what He said He was going to do. He established David as Israel's king.

4. **The entire story of 1 and 2 Samuel is a story of divine providence. God accomplishing His purposes. Even when things seem bleak. Even when there doesn't appear to be any conceivable way that something can happen, God does what He intends to do by His divine power.**
  5. **That's really the story of the whole Bible. Do you realize that our God always does exactly what He intends to do? Have you ever had a situation where your intentions were frustrated? You wanted to do something, but you couldn't? You wanted to accomplish something, but you couldn't? You wanted to make something happen, but you couldn't? Do you know that God has never had that experience? He always does exactly what He intends to do, There's nothing outside of His sovereign control. He always accomplishes His purposes.**
  6. **So, when Absalom set out to overthrow David's kingdom, he was in trouble. Because God had no intention of Absalom overthrowing David's kingdom. Instead, "the LORD ordained to...bring harm upon Absalom."**
  7. **See, God had ordained that David's son would become king. We learned that in 2 Samuel 7 where God said, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom" (7:12). David's offspring would become Israel's king. But it would not be Absalom.**
- B. The fact that the Lord accomplishes His purposes through divine providence has massive implications for our lives, doesn't it?**
1. **Because God is no less in control today than He was in David's day. He always accomplishes His purposes. He always does exactly what He intends to do.**
  2. **And as His children, we can trust Him. As a father, I love to make things happen for my kids. But my ability to do that is limited by so many things. Money. Time. Knowledge. Strength. The list goes on.**

3. **Goshen, God is our Father. And His ability is not limited in any way. He is all-powerful. And He is a good Father who always does what is good and right.**
4. **He takes what others intend for evil and uses it for good. He brings all things together for His glory and our good. Even when we can't see it. Even when we don't understand. We can trust Him.**

**Conclusion:** We've said that the Lord accomplishes His purposes through believing prayer, human action, and divine providence. We've seen that in the story of David, and we've talked about how it's true in our lives as well.

But before we finish this morning, I think it's important for us to see believing prayer, human action, and divine providence in the story of Jesus as well.

I mentioned earlier that Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). But we also know that Jesus put that into practice in the Garden of Gethsemane just prior to His arrest when He prayed, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus expressed His complete trust in God the Father. He trusted the Father to accomplish His good purposes in and through Him even if those purposes included His suffering to the point of death on a cross.

But the story of Jesus' death on the cross is also one of human action. It was God's purpose for Jesus to die on the cross to pay for our sin. And He accomplished that purpose through human action. There were the Jewish religious leaders who arrested Jesus and put Him on trial. There was the crowd that chanted "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" There was Pilate who sentenced Jesus to death. And there were the Roman soldiers who carried out the execution. It was God's purpose for Jesus to die. And God accomplished that purpose through the free choices of human beings.

But let's be clear this morning that it was also through divine providence that Jesus was crucified to pay for our sin. Peter makes this abundantly clear in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts. Hear his words:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up **according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:22-24).

My point this morning is that the Lord accomplishes His purposes. He did so in Creation. He did so in the Exodus. He did so in the life of David. He did so at the cross. He has been doing so for 2,000 years in and through His church. And we can be sure that for all of eternity, the Lord WILL accomplish His purposes.

No promise of God will fail. Everything He has promised to us in Christ will be ours. And most importantly, we will be with Him. We will be His people. And He will be our God. The Lord accomplishes His purposes.