

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

**John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A.**

Thirty-Ninth Week - Tuesday

### TWO HANGINGS

*"Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, 'Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king.' . . . And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom spoke to him saying, 'Ahithophel has spoken in this manner. Shall we do as he says? If not, speak up.' So Hushai said to Absalom: 'The advice that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time.' . . . So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel.' . . . (2 Samuel 17:1-7, 14).*

*"Absalom rode on a mule. The mule went under the thick boughs of a great terebinth tree, and his head caught in the terebinth; so he was left hanging between heaven and earth. And the mule which was under him went on. . . . And he [Joab] took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom's heart, while he was still alive in the midst of the terebinth tree" (2 Samuel 18:9, 14).*

Soon after David's departure, Absalom marched into Jerusalem and took possession of the palace and the treasures of the crown. He had a firm resolve to reign, yet he feared lest unforeseen circumstances should bring about a reconciliation between him and his father. If such should happen, his supporters would likely be afraid to commit themselves wholly to his cause. Absalom was therefore ready to adopt any means, however atrocious, that might convince those inclined to support him that any compromise between him and his father was impossible.

The first "wisdom" of Ahithophel was most effectual--but most atrocious. It was that Absalom should take public possession of the concubines whom David had left behind in charge of the palace. This counsel was followed, and the people were satisfied that all chances of a reconciliation between Absalom and David was rendered impossible.

Absalom's next step was to make plans for his father's destruction, for he was convinced that his throne would never be secure so long as David lived. A council was held on this question. The insightful Ahithophel advised immediate action in pursuing David before he could collect his forces. Absalom then suggested that Hushai be called in for his thoughts. Now Hushai was

not a member of this council but was in fact a spy for the king; but he had been well received by Absalom after having given every appearance of being a traitor to David. Being informed, then, of the course Ahithophel had advised, Hushai saw at once the danger it threatened to David. Therefore he advanced various reasons against it--all tending to delay the astute advice of Ahithophel. The council with one voice declared Hushai's advice to be better than that of Ahithophel.

Ahithophel was deeply offended at this disrespect of his sound judgment, which all Israel admired. Convinced of what surely would come to pass--that the cause of Absalom would be lost by the delay Hushai recommended--he saddled his ass and rode to his home in Gilon. After having deliberately set his affairs in proper order, he hung himself.

Hushai seems not to have been too sure that his counsel would be followed, for he sent trusty messengers to apprise David of what had passed and advised him immediately to cross the river. This the king did and went to reside at Mahanaim, where Ishbosheth had formerly reigned. Here he received abundant supplies for himself and his followers: "beds and basins, earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds, sheep and cheese of the herd." Here in this pastoral region, where there was little commerce, the wealth of the people consisted chiefly in flocks and herds and the prime articles of food; thus there is no mention of wine, oil, raisins, figs, dates, or any of the commodities supplied in the countries west of the Jordan.

David soon found himself at the head of a considerable army. Their services were speedily required, for Absalom soon crossed the Jordan with his army under the command of his cousin Amasa (a son of David's sister Abigail), who probably was discontent at having been kept in the shadows by the sons of Zeruah. He hoped to exercise under Absalom the same authority that Joab wielded under, or rather over, David.

A bloody and decisive battle was now inevitable. Finding that his soldiers would not allow him to risk his own life in the engagement, David divided his force into three brigades, severally under the command of Joab, Abishai, and Ittai (the commander of the foreign guards). The general command was under Joab. The battle was fought in the Forest of Ephraim, and as it was not the Lord's purpose that *this* chastening should proceed any further, the cause of David triumphed. Absalom himself fled for his life upon his mule, but as he rode in unguarded haste through the woods, his long hair, in which he so much gloried, got caught in the low branches of an oak, and the escape of his mule from under him left him dangling in the air.

When Joab got news of this, he hurried to the spot and settled all further questions by sending three darts through the body of the guilty prince. This was contrary to the orders of David, who that morning had strictly instructed the soldiers to respect the life of Absalom for his sake. But in this act of Joab, there was probably a true regard for the king and kingdom. He knew that Absalom could not with safety be allowed to live, and that it would be difficult to rid the state of so foul a member at any other time than now, when a just right to slay him had been earned

in open battle. This can by no means be classed with Joab's assassinations. It had nothing in common with them. Nothing can be alleged against him in this matter but his disobedience to the king. In his position he felt he must disobey David for his own good, and Joab was quite prepared to vindicate and maintain his action.

And he did so. When the king, in the bitterness of his grief on receiving the tidings that his son was dead, bewailed him, "O my son Absalom--my son, my son Absalom--if only I had died in your place, O Absalom my son, my son," Joab went in to him and reprimanded him in strong language for thus discouraging the men who had risked their lives in his cause by making them feel as if they had committed a crime in delivering him from his enemies. David felt the force of this and therefore presented himself to the people with a cheerful countenance. But it is evident that for this act he abhorred Joab in his heart, even to his own deathbed.