

The Kingdom-Destroying Influence of a Bitter Heart

We must first see the vital importance of the two invisible kingdoms: the Kingdom of light (God) and the kingdom of darkness (Satan). Our rational minds sometimes overlook the fact that the story of the Bible is about an unseen God we accept by faith, angels and demons that are not visible to the naked eye, and the forces of two kingdoms that influence the visible world in which we live.

The unseen realm of the spirit, though we cannot see it, not only is real and active but has the ability to influence our motives and behaviors. Much of what happens on Earth is affected by it, though most people, including some Christians, give little credence to it.

We know that physical forces can be seen or unseen. If someone pushes you into the mud, for example, it is easy for a spectator to understand what just happened. But if your foot catches on a small crack in the sidewalk and gravity takes over, observers may think you fell over for no apparent reason. Just as the laws of physics govern the physical world, the laws of influence govern the spiritual world of human events. You see, sometimes unseen forces push our decisions and actions over the edge. Such was the case with Ahithophel.

Though Ahithophel is not a hero in this story, God used his role to help me understand the importance of maintaining a pure heart so that the right influence operates through us. What do I mean? Though it is not explicitly stated, a bitter heart might be the reason Ahithophel betrayed King David. Their friendship and political relationship could have been strained because of David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba. As the familiar story goes, not only does David get Bathsheba pregnant, but to cover it up, he arranges for her

husband's death in battle and then marries her. (What a mess!)

As you probably recall, this is later exposed by the prophet Nathan, with the result that David repents and is forgiven by God (see 2 Sam. 12:1–14). By the time Absalom plans his coup attempt, many years have passed. But sometimes you never know who gets touched by the ripple effects of your sin. Why do I say this? Well, it turns out that Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather (see 2 Sam. 11:3; 23:34). What a drama. Who needs TV when you have the Bible?

Now that we know more about Ahithophel's background, let's observe a vital part of this crafty plan carried out by Absalom and his followers. Watch as a simple celebration is manipulated into a euphoric victory parade.

Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'" Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing.

—2 Sam. 15:10–12 (emphasis added)

How clever! This most ingenious plan created the perception of a rising public demand for Absalom to take the throne. The 200 people were important for Absalom's image. What if they were some of the most well-respected people in Israel? Imagine sly Absalom walking with your:

- most respected politician
- adored actor
- beloved teacher
- favorite coach or athlete
- godly mentor, father or pastor

If the people you most respect are walking innocently with Absalom, in the midst of this adulation with blowing trumpets, you could be swept in also. These A-list guests, unknowingly, are lending their credibility to the scheme. This key strategy is important. Listen, Ahithophel and Absalom know that the sight of these esteemed men walking with them will influence David's supporters and power base to follow Absalom instead. Combined with Absalom's clandestine supporters, they are able to generate enough momentum to sweep up the "regular folks" who have no idea what is going on. Using the laws of influence, this strategy gives just the right thrust. It pushes the idea of Absalom's rule over the edge onto David's throne. As if a poll has been taken, it is reported to David that "the hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom" (2 Sam. 15:13).

As Malcolm Gladwell, author of the best-seller *The Tipping Point*, might say, Absalom reaches the "tipping point" of epidemic popularity. Though the chants are about Hebron, everyone knows it is a mere pit stop on his way to take his father's palace. The plan works, and the collective mind of Israel is poisoned concerning King David's ability to reign. Mind you, we are talking about David, one of the greatest leaders in Israel's history. Entangled in a mess, his credibility shot, David has to flee Israel to save his life (see 2 Sam. 15:14). To say that David's approval ratings are at an all-time low is an understatement.

What an incredibly diabolical scheme! Absalom knows Ahithophel is one of the most important people to make this plan work. Though his motives for betrayal are not clearly revealed in Scripture, Ahithophel's advice definitely conveys the influence of dark forces.

Ahithophel's advice was once considered "like that of one who inquires of God" (2 Sam. 16:23), but now his counsel reflects the kingdom of darkness. This is revealed in his sinful and utterly depraved advice, as he persuades Absalom to have sex

with his father's concubines, supposedly to strengthen his coalition (see 2 Sam. 16:21–22). How sick! He then devises a clever plan to assassinate David in a manner that would actually increase Absalom's following (see 2 Sam. 17:1–4). At this point, if a movie were made of Ahithophel's life, the title would be not *The Oracle of God* but rather *The Devil's Advocate*. The demonic grip of unseen hands definitely pushes him over the edge.

I thought I understood influence, until God prompted me to dig more after reading this story.

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