

## THE AHITHOPHEL STORY

There are sins that go underground and, for a while, remain unnoticed. One of the most dangerous sins that often flies under the proverbial radar is bitterness. This past week I was preaching with my old friend, Dr. Jim Schettler and he defines bitterness as “the unresolved violation of your justice system.” God used Dr. Schettler and Alexander Whyte to stir my heart to speak on this subject. Many years ago I heard this statement: “Bitterness is the only chemical that destroys the vessel that holds it.” How serious is bitterness? The Bible says, “*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice*” (Ephesians 4:31). Bitterness is the leadoff sin we are to “put away.” It appears that bitterness can lead to wrath, anger and clamour. Then the Word of God warns, “*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled*” (Hebrews 12:15). We see the root of bitterness, when not eradicated, will defile a person. We are entering into a study of bitterness that hopefully exposes this occurrence in any of us and lead us to repentance.

### 1. The Magnetism of Bitterness

Read II Samuel 15: 3-12. When Absalom was carefully laying the groundwork for the Israeli coup d'état, the Bible says, “*And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom*” (II Samuel 15:12). I submit to you that the rebel Absalom knew whom to solicit to help him.

Absalom was still very bitter over the rejection his father gave him over his plot that took the life of his half-brother Amnon because of the abuse Absalom's sister, Tamar suffered. Ahithophel, as we see later in our story, was a very bitter old man as well. Bitter people attract bitter people.

### 2. The Betrayal of Bitterness

The Bible says, “*And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the*

*counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness*" (II Samuel 15:31). The reason David mourned so deeply and immediately over Ahithophel's betrayal is because he was David's chief counsellor. No one knew David's strengths and weaknesses or the country's condition better than his confidant. Listen to the way Alexander Whyte describes Ahithophel: "David and Ahithophel had been bosom friends from their boyhood up. Ahithophel may not have been exactly a Jonathan, and yet he may have been a very dear and well-deserving friend for all that. David and Ahithophel were such close companions, indeed, that had it not been for Jonathan, the proverb might have run thus—so was the soul of David knit to the soul of Ahithophel. When David's time came to be lifted up of God into the throne of Israel, Ahithophel was proud to lay all his magnificent gifts of sound advice and incomparable counsel at David's feet. And Ahithophel continued to do that for all the best and most shining years of David's kingdom. David never made a law, nor gave a judgment, nor proclaimed a war, nor negotiated a truce, nor signed a peace, till Ahithophel had been heard, and till his advice had been taken." Listen to the Scriptures that describe the betrayal that took place later in David's life at the hands of his lifetime friend: *"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: "But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company"* (Psalm 55:12-14). *"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me"* (Psalm 41:9). The Son of David, our Lord and Savior used this very reference to the pain David experienced to what He experienced with the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, *"...but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me"* (John 13:18).

### **3. The Desecration of Bitterness**

Read II Samuel 16:20-23. We see the horrid advice Ahithophel gave to Absalom. He tells him to defile his father's household of women. He encouraged him to do this on the rooftop of David's palace! We see this is the place where David was first tempted with wrongdoing in the matter of Bathsheba, *"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"* (II Samuel 11:2). When David was rebuked for his sin with Bathsheba, Nathan said, *"Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives*

*before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun"* (II Samuel 12:11,12). We surmise David's closest counselor, Ahithophel was in the court when the prophet pronounced judgment. Ahithophel vengefully chose the rooftop to repay David for his iniquity. He was more than willing to aid the prophet's fulfillment.

As we study the Scriptures we discover vengeance belongs to God, not us. *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"* (Romans 12:19). We see some deep hurt is working in Ahithophel that would possess him to be so bent to embarrass and ruin the king, his former boyhood friend.

#### **4. The Deception of Bitterness**

The Word of God reveals, *"And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom"* (II Samuel 16:23). We know Ahithophel is not in the right, yet he is the most respected man in Israel. When he opens his mouth the people believe they have heard from God. One can speak the truth yet still have bitterness of heart.

#### **5. The Lethality of Bitterness**

As we read II Samuel 17:1-4 we see the mean spirit of bitterness can turn to the murderous spirit of hatred. *"But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes"* (I John 2:11). *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer..."* (I John 3:15).

If not dealt with, bitterness renders a blow to you that was meant for someone else. This is seen in the eventual suicide of Ahithophel recorded in II Samuel 17:23.

#### **6. The Source of Bitterness**

There is always a reason that people develop a bitter spirit. It may have been an abuse, a mistreatment or an unrequited love. There can be many reasons. We discover Ahithophel had a reason. We read in II Samuel 11:3, *"And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the*

*daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"* Knowing who Eliam is will be a key to understanding this very sad turn of events. In II Samuel 23 we see a list of David's mighty men. Observe the mighty man listed in the last part of II Samuel 23:34: *"...Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite."* Ahithophel is Bathsheba's grandfather! His family was devastated by the boyhood friend of Ahithophel, David the king.

## **7. The Solution of Bitterness**

There is a beautiful story in Exodus 15:23-25. In the first twenty-one verses of this chapter Israel is singing with Moses and his sister Miriam. Soon their song was turned to murmuring and they lost their joy. When Israel went three days without water only to find poisoned water, they became bitter. The only answer God gave for their problem was found in a tree. *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"* (Galatians 3:13). In light of the cross of Calvary, all our bitter waters can be made sweet, even in the face of betrayal, disappointments and heartbreaks.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.