

CHAPTER 16

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left David flying from Jerusalem, and Absalom entering into it; in this chapter,

I. We are to follow David in his melancholy flight; and there we find him,

1. Cheated by Ziba (v. 1-4).
2. Cursed by Shimei, which he bears with wonderful patience (v. 5-14).

II. We are to meet Absalom in his triumphant entry; and there we find him,

1. Cheated by Hushai (v. 15-19).
2. Counsell'd by Ahithophel to go in unto his father's concubines (v. 20-23).

~~<0001>~~ 2 SAMUEL 16:1-4

ZIBA'S CALUMNY

We read before how kind David was to Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, how he prudently entrusted his servant Ziba with the management of his estate, while he generously entertained him at his own table, ~~<0090>~~ 2 Samuel 9:10. This matter was well settled; but, it seems, Ziba is not content to be manager, he longs to be master, of Mephibosheth's estate. Now, he thinks, is his time to make himself so; if he can procure a grant of it from the crown, whether David or Absalom get the better it is all one to him, he hopes he shall secure his prey, which he promises himself by fishing in troubled waters. In order hereunto,

1. He made David a handsome present of provisions, which was the more welcome because it came seasonably (v. 1), and with this he designed to incline him to himself; for *a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men*, ~~<0086>~~ Proverbs 18:16. Nay, *Whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth*, ~~<0078>~~ Proverbs 17:8. David inferred from this that Ziba was a very discreet and generous man, and well affected to him, when, in all, he designed nothing but to make his own market and to get Mephibosheth's

estate settled upon himself. Shall the prospect of advantage in this world make men generous to the rich? and shall not the belief of an abundant recompence in the resurrection of the just make us charitable to the poor? ^{<2144>}Luke 14:14. Ziba was very considerate in the present he brought to David; it was what would do him some good in his present distress, v. 2. Observe, The wine was intended for those that were faint, not for the king's own drinking, or the courtiers; it seems, they did not commonly use it, but it was for cordials for those *that were ready to perish*, ^{<2106>}Proverbs 31:6. Blessed art thou, O land! when thy princes use wine for strength, as David did, and not for drunkenness, as Absalom did, ^{<1038>}2 Samuel 13:28. See ^{<2107>}Ecclesiastes 10:17. Whatever Ziba intended in this present, God's providence sent it to David for his support very graciously. God makes use of bad men for good purposes to his people, and sends them meat by ravens. Having by his present insinuated himself into David's affection, and gained credit with him, the next thing he has to do for the compassing of his end is to incense him against Mephibosheth, which he does by a false accusation, representing him as ungratefully designing to raise himself by the present broils, and to recover the crown to his own head, now that David and his son were contending for it. David enquires for him as one of his family, which gives Ziba occasion to tell this false story of him, v. 3. What immense damages do masters often sustain by the lying tongues of their servants! David knew Mephibosheth not to be an ambitious man, but easy in his place, and well-affected to him and his government; nor could he be so weak as to expect with his lame legs to climb the ladder of preferment; yet David gives credit to the calumny, and, without further enquiry or consideration, convicts Mephibosheth of treason, seizes his lands as forfeited, and grants them to Ziba: *Behold, thine are all that pertained to Mephibosheth* (v. 4), a rash judgment, and which afterwards he was ashamed of, when the truth came to light, ^{<1029>}2 Samuel 19:29. Princes cannot help it, but they will be sometimes (as our law speaks) deceived in their grants; but they ought to use all means possible to discover the truth and to guard against malicious designing men, who would impose upon them, as Ziba did upon David. Having by his wiles gained his point, Ziba secretly laughed at the king's credulity, congratulated himself on his success, and departed, with a great compliment upon the king, that he valued his favour more than Mephibosheth's estate: "Let me *find grace in thy sight, O king!* and I have enough." Great men ought always to be jealous of flatterers, and remember that nature has given them two ears, that they may hear both sides.

<0065> 2 SAMUEL 16:5-14

DAVID CURSED BY SHIMEI

We here find how David bore Shimei's curses much better than he had borne Ziba's flatteries. By the latter he was brought to pass a wrong judgment on another, by the former to pass a right judgment on himself. The world's smiles are more dangerous than its frowns. Observe here,

I. How insolent and furious Shimei was, and how his malice took occasion from David's present distress to be so much the more outrageous. David, in his flight, had come to Bahurim, a city of Benjamin in or near which this Shimei lived, who, being of the house of Saul (with the fall of which all his hopes of preferment fell), had an implacable enmity to David, unjustly looking upon him as the ruin of Saul and his family only because, by the divine appointment, he succeeded Saul. While David was in prosperity and power, Shimei hated him as much as he did now, but he durst not then say anything against him. God knows what is in the hearts of those that are disaffected to him and his government, but earthly princes do not. Now he came forth, and cursed David with all the bad words and wishes he could invent, v. 5. Observe,

1. Why he took this opportunity to give vent to his malice.

(1.) Because now he thought he might do it safely; yet, if David had thought proper to resent the provocation, it would have cost Shimei his life.

(2.) Because now it would be most grievous to David, would add affliction to his grief, and pour vinegar into his wounds. He complains of those as most barbarous who *talk to the grief of those whom God has wounded*, <0085> Psalm 69:26. So Shimei did, loading him with curses whom no generous eye could look upon without compassion.

(3.) Because now he thought that Providence justified his reproaches, and that David's present afflictions proved him to be as bad a man as he was willing to represent him. Job's friends condemned him upon this false principle. Those that are under the rebukes of a gracious God must not think it strange if these bring upon them the reproaches of evil men. If once it be said, *God hath forsaken him*, presently it follows, *Persecute and take*

him, ^{<5711>}Psalms 71:11. But it is the character of a base spirit thus to trample upon those that are down, and insult over them.

2. How his malice was expressed. See,

(1.) What this wretched man did: *He cast stones at David* (v. 6), as if his king had been a dog, or the worst of criminals, whom all Israel must stone with stones till he die. Perhaps he kept at such a distance that the stones he threw could not reach David, nor any of his attendants, yet he showed what he would have done if it had been in his power. *He cast dust* (v. 13), which, probably, would blow into his own eyes, like the curses he threw, which, being causeless, would return upon his own head. Thus, while his malice made him odious, the impotency of it made him ridiculous and contemptible. Those that fight against God cannot hurt him, though they hate him. *If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him?* ^{<8316>}Job 35:6. It was an aggravation of his wickedness that David was attended with his mighty men on his right hand and on his left, so that he was not in so forlorn a condition as he thought (*persecuted but not forsaken*), and that he continued to do it, and did it the more passionately, for David's bearing it patiently.

(2.) What he said. With the stones he shot his arrows, even bitter words (v. 7, 8), in contempt of that law, *Thou shalt not curse the gods*, ^{<10228>}Exodus 22:28. David was a man of honour and conscience, and in great reputation for every thing that was just and good; what could this foul mouth say against him? Why, truly, what was done long since to the house of Saul was the only thing which he could recollect, and with this he upbraided David because it was the thing that he himself was a loser by. See how apt we are to judge of men and their character by what they are to us, and to conclude that those are certainly evil men that have ever so justly been, or that we ever so unjustly think have been, instruments of evil to us. So partial are we to ourselves that no rule can be more fallacious than this. No man could be more innocent of the blood of the house of Saul than David was. Once and again he spared Saul's life, while Saul sought his. When Saul and his sons were slain by the Philistines, David and his men were many miles off; and, when they heard it, they lamented it. From the murder of Abner and Ish-bosheth he had sufficiently cleared himself; and yet all *the blood of the house of Saul* must be laid at his door. Innocency is no fence against malice and falsehood; nor are we to think it strange if we be charged with that from which we have been most careful to keep ourselves.

It is well for us that men are not to be our judges, but he whose judgment is according to truth. The blood of the house of Saul is here most unjustly charged upon David,

[1.] As that which gave him his character, and denominated him a bloody man and a man of Belial, v. 7. And, if a man of blood, no doubt a man of Belial, that is, a child of the devil, who is called *Belial* (~~4065~~ 2 Corinthians 6:15), and who was a murderer from the beginning. Bloody men are the worst of men.

[2.] As that which brought the present trouble upon him: “Now that thou art dethroned, and driven out to the wilderness, *the Lord has returned upon thee the blood of the house of Saul.*” See how forward malicious men are to press God's judgments into the service of their own passion and revenge. If any who have, as they think, wronged them, should come into trouble, the injury done to them must be made the cause of the trouble. But we must take heed lest we wrong God by making his providence thus to patronise our foolish and unjust resentments. As the *wrath of man works not the righteousness of God*, so the righteousness of God serves not the wrath of man.

[3.] As that which would now be his utter ruin; for he endeavours to make him despair of ever recovering his throne again. Now they said, *There is no help for him in God* (~~4070~~ Psalm 3:2), *the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom* (not Mephibosheth — the house of Saul never dreamed of making *him* king, as Ziba suggested), *and thou art taken in thy mischief*, that is, “the mischief that will be thy destruction, and all because thou art a bloody man.” Thus Shimei cursed.

II. See how patient and submissive David was under this abuse. The sons of Zeruah, Abishai particularly, were forward to maintain David's honour with their swords; they resented the affront keenly, as well they might: *Why should this dead dog be suffered to curse the king?* v. 9. If David will but give them leave, they will put these lying cursing lips to silence, and take off his head; for his throwing stones at the king was an overt act, which abundantly proved that he compassed and imagined his death. But the king would by no means suffer it: *What have I to do with you? So let him curse.* Thus Christ rebuked the disciples, who, in zeal for his honour, would have commanded fire from heaven on the town that affronted him, (~~4075~~ Luke 9:55. Let us see with what considerations David quieted himself.

1. The chief thing that silenced him was that he had deserved this affliction. This is not mentioned indeed; for a man may truly repent, and yet needs not, upon all occasions, proclaim his penitent reflections. Shimei unjustly upbraided him with the blood of Saul: from *that* his conscience acquitted him, but, at the same time, it charged him with the blood of Uriah. “The reproach is too true” (thinks David), “though false as he means it.” Note, A humble tender spirit will turn reproaches into reproofs, and so get good by them, instead of being provoked by them.

2. He observes the hand of God in it: *The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David* (v. 10), and again, *So let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him*, v. 11. As it was Shimei's sin, it was not from God, but from the devil and his own wicked heart, nor did God's hand in it excuse or extenuate it, much less justify it, any more than it did the sin of those who put Christ to death, ~~Acts~~ Acts 2:23, 4:28. But, as it was David's affliction, it was from the Lord, one of the evils which he raised up against him. David looked above the instrument of his trouble to the supreme director, as Job, when the plunderers had stripped him, acknowledged, *The Lord hath taken away*. Nothing more proper to quiet a gracious soul under affliction than an eye to the hand of God in it. *I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it*. The scourge of the tongue is God's rod.

3. He quiets himself under the less affliction with the consideration of the greater (v. 11): *My son seeks my life, much more may this Benjamite*. Note, Tribulation works patience in those that are sanctified. The more we bear the better able we should be to bear still more; what tries our patience should improve it. The more we are inured to trouble the less we should be surprised at it, and not think it strange. Marvel not that enemies are injurious, when even friends are unkind; nor that friends are unkind, when even children are undutiful.

4. He comforts himself with hopes that God would, in some way or other, bring good to him out of his affliction, would balance the trouble itself, and recompense his patience under it: “*The Lord will requite me good for his cursing*. If God bid Shimei grieve me, it is that he himself may the more sensibly comfort me; surely he has mercy in store for me, which he is preparing me for by this trial.” We may depend upon God as our paymaster, not only for our services, but for our sufferings. *Let them curse, but bless thou*. David, at length, is housed at Bahurim (v. 14), where he meets with refreshment, and is hidden from this strife of tongues.

HUSHAI DECEIVES ABSALOM

Absalom had notice sent him speedily by some of his friends at Jerusalem that David had withdrawn, and with what a small retinue he had gone; so that the coasts were clear, Absalom might take possession of Jerusalem when he pleased. The gates were open, and there was none to oppose him. Accordingly he came without delay (v. 15), extremely elevated, no doubt, with this success at first, and that that in which, when he formed his design, he probably apprehended the greatest difficulty, was so easily and effectually done. Now that he is master of Jerusalem he concludes all his own, the country will follow of course. God suffers wicked men to prosper awhile in their wicked plots, even beyond their expectation, that their disappointment may be the more grievous and disgraceful. The most celebrated politicians of that age were Ahithophel and Hushai. The former Absalom brings with him to Jerusalem (v. 15), the other meets him there (v. 16), so that he cannot but think himself sure of success, when he has both these to be his counsellors; on them he relies, and consults not the ark, though he has that with him. But miserable counsellors were they both; for,

I. Hushai would never counsel him to do wisely. He was really his enemy, and designed to betray him, while he pretended to be in his interest; so that Absalom could not have a more dangerous man about him.

1. Hushai complimented him upon his accession to the throne, as if he had been abundantly satisfied in this title, and well pleased that he had come to the possession, v. 16. What arts of dissimulation are those tempted to use who govern themselves by fleshly wisdom! and how happy are those who have not known these depths of Satan, but have their conversation in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity!

2. Absalom was surprised to find *him* for him who was known to be David's intimate friend and confidant. He asks him, *Is this thy kindness to thy friend?* (v. 17), pleasing himself with this thought, that all would be his, since Hushai was. He doubts not of his sincerity, but easily believes what he wishes to be true, that David's best friends are so in love with himself as

to take the first opportunity to declare for him, *though the pride of his heart deceived him*, Obad.

3. Hushai confirmed him in the belief that he was hearty for him. For, though David is his friend, yet he is for the king in *possession*, v. 18. Whom the people choose, and Providence smiles upon, he will be faithful to; and he is for the king in *succession* (v. 19), the rising sun. It was true, he loved his father; but he had had his day, and it was over; and why should he not love his successor as well? Thus he pretended to give reasons for a resolution he abhorred the thought of.

II. Ahithophel counselled him to do wickedly, and so did as effectually betray him as he did who was designedly false to him; for those that advise men to sin certainly advise them to their hurt; and that government which is founded in sin is founded in the sand.

1. It seems, Ahithophel was noted as a deep politician; his counsel was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God, v. 23. Such reputation was he in for subtlety and sagacity in public affairs, such reaches had he beyond other privy-counselors, such reasons would he give for his advice, and such success generally his projects had, that all people, good and bad, both David and Absalom, had a profound regard for his sentiments, too much by far, when they regarded him *as an oracle of God*; shall the prudence of any mortal compare with him who only is wise? Let us observe from this account of Ahithophel's fame for policy,

(1.) That many excel in worldly wisdom who are utterly destitute of heavenly grace, because those who set up for oracles themselves are apt to despise the oracles of God. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world*; and the greatest statesmen are seldom the greatest saints.

(2.) That frequently the greatest politicians act most foolishly for themselves. Ahithophel was cried up for an oracle, and yet very unwisely took part with Absalom, who was not only a usurper, but a rash youth, never likely to come to good, whose fall, and the fall of all that adhered to him, any one, with the tenth part of the policy that Ahithophel pretended to, might foresee. Well, after all, honesty is the best policy, and will be found so in the long run. But,

2. His policy in this case defeated its own aim. Observe,

(1.) The wicked counsel Ahithophel gave to Absalom. Finding that David had left his concubines to keep the house, he advised him to *lie with them* (v. 21), a very wicked thing. The divine law had made it a capital crime, ^{<4311>}Leviticus 20:11. The apostle speaks of it as a piece of villany *not so much as named among the Gentiles*, ^{<4310>}1 Corinthians 5:1. Reuben lost his birthright for it. But Ahithophel advised Absalom to it as a public thing, because it would give assurance to all Israel,

[1.] That he was in good earnest in his pretensions. No doubt he resolved to make himself master of all that belonged to his predecessor when he began with his concubines.

[2.] That he was resolved never to make peace with his father upon any terms; for by this he would render himself so odious to his father that he would never be reconciled to him, which perhaps the people were jealous of and that they must be sacrificed to the reconciliation. Having drawn the sword, he did, by this provocation, throw away the scabbard, which would strengthen the hands of his party and keep them firmly to him. This was Ahithophel's cursed policy, which bespoke him rather *an oracle of devil than of God*.

(2.) Absalom's compliance with this counsel. It entirely suited his lewd and wicked mind, and he delayed not to put it in execution, v. 22. When an unnatural rebellion was the opera, what fitter prologue could there be to it than such unnatural lust? Thus was his wickedness all of a piece, and such as a conscience not quite seared could not entertain the thoughts of without the utmost horror. Nay, the client outdoes what his counsel advises. Ahithophel advised him to do it, that all Israel shall *see* it. A tent is accordingly spread on the top of the house for the purpose; so impudently does he declare his sin as Sodom. Yet, in this, the word of God was fulfilled in the letter of it: God had threatened, by Nathan, that, for defiling Bath-sheba, David should have his own wives publicly debauched (^{<4021>}2 Samuel 12:11, 12), and some think that Ahithophel, in advising it, designed to be revenged on David for the injury done to Bath-sheba, who was his grand-daughter: for she was the daughter of Eliam (^{<4018>}2 Samuel 11:3), who was the son of Ahithophel, ^{<4023>}2 Samuel 23:34. Job speaks of this as the just punishment of adultery (*Let my wife grind to another*, ^{<4310>}Job 31:9, 10), and the prophet, ^{<3013>}Hosea 4:13, 14. What to think of these concubines, who submitted to this wickedness, I know not; but how

unrighteous soever Absalom and they were, we must say, *The Lord is righteous*: nor shall any word of his fall to the ground.