

Who was Ahithophel in the Bible?

Ahithophel was originally the counselor of King David, but he later betrayed David, aiding Absalom in his rebellion to overthrow David's kingship. Ahithophel was well-known for his advice, so much so that "Absalom followed Ahithophel's advice, just as David had done. For every word Ahithophel spoke seemed as wise as though it had come directly from the mouth of God" (2 Samuel 16:23, NLT). Ahithophel had the gift of wisdom.

After Absalom captured Jerusalem, Ahithophel's first piece of advice to him was that he sleep with all his father's concubines—in a public manner—so as to become a "stench in your father's nostrils," and to strengthen his following (2 Samuel 16:21-22). In those days, taking possession of a king's concubines was a declaration of one's right to the throne. This fulfilled God's word to David after his adultery with Bathsheba: "This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel'" (2 Samuel 12:11-12). Absalom followed the advice of Ahithophel and performed this wicked act on the top of the palace roof for all Israel to see (2 Samuel 16:22).

When Absalom began his rebellion, King David knew that Ahithophel's advice would be dangerous in the hands of his son. During his escape up the Mount of Olives, David prayed to the Lord that Ahithophel's counsel would be turned into foolishness (2 Samuel 15:31). In answer to David's prayer, when David reached the summit of the Mount of Olives, he met Hushai the Arkite. David sent Hushai back to Absalom in Jerusalem as a secret agent to frustrate the advice of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:32-37). In Jerusalem Hushai pledged his loyalty to Absalom but began to give advice to work to David's

benefit (2 Samuel 17:14).

Absalom asked his counsellors what next step he should take. Ahithophel said to pursue David immediately with an army of twelve thousand men and “attack him while he is weary and weak” (2 Samuel 17:1). Hushai, however, counselled Absalom to delay the attack, form a larger force, and totally annihilate David and his men (verses 7-13). Absalom chose to follow the advice of Hushai and reject Ahithophel’s counsel. This was of God, since “the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom” (verse 14).

When Absalom rejected his advice, Ahithophel’s pride was injured, and “he put his house in order and then hanged himself” (2 Samuel 17:23). In following Hushai’s advice, Absalom was defeated and received the punishment due his rebellion (2 Samuel 18:6-15).

Because of Ahithophel’s betrayal of David, many scholars see him as a type of Judas Iscariot. Just as David’s counselor betrayed him, so also did Jesus’ disciple Judas betray Him. Similarities between Ahithophel and Judas include the following:

- they both were trusted friends who betrayed their friend (2 Samuel 15:31; Matthew 26:14-16).
- they both sided with the enemy to plot their king’s death (2 Samuel 17:1-4; Luke 22:2-6).
- they both hanged themselves once the betrayal was complete (2 Samuel 17:23; Matthew 27:5).

In Psalm 41:9 David laments, “Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my

bread, has turned against me." This is, most immediately, a reference to the treachery of Ahithophel. But it is also a prophetic reference to Judas, as Jesus points out in John 13:18, where He quotes Psalm 41:9. Like Judas, Ahithophel will forever be remembered as a traitor.