

Who was Hushai in the Bible?

Hushai first appears in the Bible in 2 Samuel 15:32 as part of the story of Absalom's coup and David's departure from Jerusalem. Absalom, David's son, had started a rebellion against his father and "stole the hearts of the people of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:6). David and his officials in Jerusalem fled the city for fear of their lives (2 Samuel 15:14). They climbed the Mount of Olives, "weeping as they went" (verse 30). Then, "when David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head" (verse 32).

The tearing of one's robe was an ancient way of showing mourning, grief, and loss. The dust on Hushai's head added to the expression of grief. It was a day of tragedy, and Hushai mourned on behalf of his king and his nation. Hushai is described as "the king's friend" in 1 Chronicles 27:33 (ESV).

When Hushai met David on Mt. Olivet, the king had an idea. David told Hushai to return to Jerusalem and to work against Absalom on David's behalf. David gave Hushai the words to say to Absalom: "Your Majesty, I will be your servant; I was your father's servant in the past, but now I will be your servant" (2 Samuel 15:34). If Hushai could ingratiate himself, then he could sabotage Absalom's plans.

The ploy to use Hushai as a secret agent was necessary because Ahithophel, one of David's respected counselors, had defected and joined forces with Absalom (2 Samuel 15:31). Ahithophel had double-crossed his king and was giving David's son advice on how to defeat David. When David heard this news, he prayed that God would "turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness" (verse 31). Hushai was the instrument of God through which that prayer would be answered.

Hushai obeyed David's order and returned to Jerusalem, arriving there just as Absalom was entering the city (2 Samuel 15:37). Unbeknownst to Absalom, other men loyal to David were also in the city: the priests Zadok and Abiathar were there to act as spies, and the priests' sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, would relay the intel the priests gathered to David (2 Samuel 15:35-36).

When Hushai met Absalom in the capital city, Hushai greeted him with "Long live the king! Long live the king!" (2 Samuel 16:16). Absalom was suspicious at first: "This is the love you show your friend [David]? If he's your friend, why didn't you go with him?" he asked (verse 17). Hushai responded by pouring on the praise, calling Absalom "the one chosen by the Lord, by these people, and by all the men of Israel" (verse 18). Then he told Absalom what David had instructed him to say: "Just as I served your father, so I will serve you" (verse 19). Absalom was satisfied that Hushai meant what he said.

Later, as Absalom was considering the best strategy to defeat his father, he asked the advice of both Ahithophel and Hushai. Ahithophel said, "Choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. I would attack him while he is weary and weak. I would strike him with terror, and then all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only the king and bring all the people back to you" (2 Samuel 17:1-3). This was actually a sound strategy, but then Hushai was given a chance to thwart the plan.

Hushai presented a different strategy meant to frustrate the wisdom of Ahithophel (see 2 Samuel 15:34). Hushai said that Absalom needed a bigger force to deal with David and his desperate men. Also, Absalom should not focus on killing David but on wiping out David's entire army: "Let all Israel . . . be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them

into battle. Then we will attack him wherever he may be found. . . . Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive" (2 Samuel 17:11-12).

Hushai also reminded Absalom that David was well acquainted with the lay of the land and that he was an expert in avoiding capture. If Absalom were to come at him, per Ahithophel's counsel, David would escape. That would place David in a position to strike first, causing Absalom's men to lose heart (2 Samuel 17:7-10).

After hearing both plans, Absalom and his advisors believed that Hushai's counsel was better than Ahithophel's (2 Samuel 17:14). Hushai's advice certainly was better—better for David! Hushai's advice was meant to cause Absalom to delay deploying his army. That delay would provide David the opportunity to strategize and prepare. God was in all of this. Absalom chose the advice of Hushai because "the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom" (verse 14).

Ahithophel did not take rejection well. "When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself" (2 Samuel 17:23). Meanwhile, Hushai sent word of the battle plan to David through the priestly spies. Hushai's advice to David was, "Do not spend the night at the fords in the wilderness; cross over without fail" (2 Samuel 17:16).

The battle between the forces of David and Absalom took place "in the forest of Ephraim" (2 Samuel 18:6). The forces of Absalom were routed, and the battle "spread out over the whole countryside" (verse 8). Absalom himself was killed by Joab, one of David's commanders (2 Samuel 18:14). The coup was ended.

Through Hushai, God answered David's prayer and preserved David's throne. Absalom made his choices, but God was sovereign all the while. "We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps" (Proverbs 16:9, NLT).