



Please turn to 2 Samuel 17 (page 250, pew Bible). We now have the opportunity to apply what we have just sung to the Lord: “I will wait for you, I will wait for you. On your word I will rely. I will wait for you, surely wait for you till my soul is satisfied.” Outside the window of our home is a robin’s nest. Ruthie and I noticed that there were not one but two robins constantly feeding the babies. Both the father and the mother are involved in this work. Furthermore, we found out that they make anywhere from 100-150 trips back and forth to the nest per day to feed their young. What a lesson to learn from nature! Only as we constantly feed on God’s word can we grow spiritually and our souls be satisfied.

Quite often when our circumstances become unsettled, so do our souls. Anxiety, fear, and a sense of dread can undermine our confidence in God. Disturbing questions begin to haunt us – questions like “Is God really in control? Is he still looking after me and my loved ones? Is he as good as he says he is? Does he know what he’s doing?”¹ But as we turn to the word of God and wait on him, he restores our souls.

Second Samuel 17 is a help in this regard. In this narrative we see the Lord at work, overriding what would have otherwise been the natural course of events. In the previous chapter, when David’s son Absalom arrives in Jerusalem having conspired against his father to usurp the throne, Absalom asks Ahithophel his counselor, “What shall we do?” (2 Sam. 16:20). God never asks any man that question! Isaiah wrote, “Who is able to advise the Spirit of the LORD? Who knows enough to give him advice or teach him? Has the LORD ever needed anyone’s advice?” (Isa. 40:13-14a NLT). *No!* The Lord God has infinite knowledge, wisdom, and power. Isaiah goes on to say that “the nations of the world are but a drop in the bucket [to God]. They are nothing more than dust on the scales. He picks up the whole earth as though it were a grain of sand” (Isa. 40:15 NLT).

By the time we get to 2 Samuel 17, Absalom has stolen the hearts of the men of Israel, duping them by his political ploys. He has declared himself king and has advanced on the capital city of Jerusalem while his father, David, the rightful king, is on the run. From the looks of things, David’s days are numbered. He’s about to lose his kingdom and his life.

But behind these dreadful circumstances is the sovereign hand of God. He’s calling the shots, not Absalom, not Ahithophel or anyone else. Today in 2 Samuel 17 we’ll see that *no human wisdom, insight, or plan can succeed against the Lord.*

***No human wisdom, insight, or plan
can succeed against the Lord.***

Watch how this principle plays out as we walk through the narrative of 2 Samuel 17.

¹ David Murray, “The Comfort of God’s Sovereignty,” Ligonier, 22 December 2021 [online]. Retrieved on 05 July 2023 from <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/comfort-gods-sovereignty>.

Ahithophel's Counsel (vv. 1-4)

¹ Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. ² I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged and throw him into a panic, and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down only the king, ³ and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace." ⁴ And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

- 2 Samuel 17:1-4

And for good reason. Ahithophel had sized up David's predicament perfectly and drew up a plan accordingly. It was a five-point plan that made perfect sense:²

1. Ahithophel would lead this military expedition, as indicated by all the "I will's." Maybe Ahithophel doubted Absalom's ability as a military commander, or perhaps he simply wanted to keep Absalom safe. Whatever the case, Ahithophel clearly had confidence in his own ability to lead this military campaign.
2. Ahithophel would select a contingent of soldiers that would represent all of Israel. Twelve thousand men for twelve tribes – perhaps a thousand men from each tribe. "This would symbolically involve the whole nation for the overthrow of David" and set the stage "for reuniting the nation after the event."³
3. Ahithophel and his men would go after David right away – "tonight." This was the night of the same day that David found out about Absalom's rebellion. As soon as David got word about the conspiracy, he fled Jerusalem. So far, he's traveled twenty miles to the Jordan where he and those with him have been resting, weary from their journey (16:14). David had sent Hushai back to Jerusalem just before Absalom arrived in the city. That same afternoon, Absalom pitches a tent on the roof of the palace and has sex with King David's concubines in broad daylight. Ahithophel's plan is to attack David that very night, which will throw everyone with him into a panic. The people will run away, leaving David exposed.
4. David would be the only target. By striking down only the king, collateral damage would be kept to a minimum.
5. Once David was dead, his supporters would be brought back to Absalom "as a bride comes home to her husband" (17:3). The nation would once again be at peace, reunited under the reign of Absalom, David's son and heir.

Ahithophel's plan was "careful, calculated, and concise."⁴ "And the advice seemed right in the eyes of Absalom and all the elders of Israel" (17:4).

² The following points are adapted from John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, Preaching the Word, series editor R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 421-423.

³ Ibid., 421.

⁴ Ibid.

“All right. That’s it then. Let’s get moving!” That should have been the end of the matter as far as the “discuss and decide” phase goes, because “in those days the counsel that Ahithophel gave was as if one consulted the word of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel’s advice” (16:23 ESV, NIV). So, now all they needed to do was to execute the plan – and quickly, since time was of the essence.

But, shockingly, at this point Absalom pauses to seek a second opinion.

Hushai’s Counterplan (vv. 5-13)

⁵ Then Absalom said, “Call Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear what he has to say.” ⁶ And when Hushai came to Absalom, Absalom said to him, “Thus has Ahithophel spoken; shall we do as he says? If not, you speak.” ⁷ Then Hushai said to Absalom, “This time the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good.” ⁸ Hushai said, “You know that your father and his men are mighty men, and that they are enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert in war; he will not spend the night with the people. ⁹ Behold, even now he has hidden himself in one of the pits or in some other place. And as soon as some of the people fall at the first attack, whoever hears it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the people who follow Absalom.’ ¹⁰ Then even the valiant man, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and that those who are with him are valiant men. ¹¹ But my counsel is that all Israel be gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, as the sand by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. ¹² So we shall come upon him in some place where he is to be found, and we shall light upon him as the dew falls on the ground, and of him and all the men with him not one will be left. ¹³ If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we shall drag it into the valley, until not even a pebble is to be found there.”

- 2 Samuel 17:5-13

Now, remember, Hushai is David’s friend. Hushai had gone out to meet David in the wilderness, but David had sent Hushai back to Jerusalem “to defeat ... the counsel of Ahithophel” (15:34). That’s because David saw Hushai as God’s answer to the prayer David had just prayed before Hushai’s arrival. David had prayed, “O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness” (15:31), and then he took proactive steps to accomplish the very thing he had asked the Lord to do. Now, Hushai is doing his part.

And he does so brilliantly. First, he undermines Ahithophel’s counsel without overstating his point. Hushai doesn’t say, “That’s stupid. Ahithophel’s an idiot.” Nobody would think that. Ahithophel was too highly esteemed. So, Hushai *disagrees* with Ahithophel without *disrespecting* him. Hushai says, “*This time* the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good,” the implication being that Ahithophel is right most of the time, just not “this time.”

Then Hushai appeals to Absalom’s pride, saying, “You know that your father and his men are mighty men...” (v. 8). The “you” is emphatic. In this instance, Absalom knows better than Ahithophel – or at least Hushai wants to give Absalom that impression.

Hushai paints a picture of David that Absalom knows well – that of a mighty warrior. “David was a formidable opponent. He and his men had defeated every adversary who had ever been foolish enough to take them on. Ever since Goliath crashed to the ground, no one had outwitted or overpowered David and his men.”⁵ So, after initially appealing to Absalom’s pride, Hushai preys upon his fears.

But then Hushai goes right back to Absalom’s pride, knowing that is Absalom’s greatest weakness and therefore Hushai’s greatest weapon. Absalom isn’t even mentioned in Ahithophel’s plan, except at the very end, when Ahithophel brings David’s supporters to Absalom. Until that point, Ahithophel is the one leading the charge, Ahithophel is the one in the limelight. Maybe that didn’t appeal to Absalom, which is why he sought a second opinion from Hushai. Whatever the case, Hushai keeps feeding Absalom’s ego. According to Hushai’s plan, Absalom will personally lead the charge – not with 12,000 men but the entire army of Israel, “an army as numerous as the sand on the seashore.” “We’ll smoke David out wherever he is. We’ll fall on him and his men like dew falls on the ground. There won’t be a single survivor. If they hide out in a city, we’ll tear down its walls until there isn’t a single pebble left. Then everyone will know how mighty we are!”

As Hushai described this magnificent scene of unstoppable military might and overwhelming victory, Absalom’s pulse quickened, his eyes widened, his face flushed with excitement. “And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, ‘The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring harm upon Absalom” (v. 14). This is where we see *the Lord’s control*.

The Lord’s Control (vv. 14-23)

We have to remember that getting counsel from Ahithophel was like consulting the word of God. That’s how highly it was esteemed. But it was the Lord’s purpose that prevailed. David’s son Solomon, who succeeded him on the throne as God said he would, wrote a slew of proverbs, including this one:

**There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the LORD.
- Proverbs 21:30 NIV**

That Scripture is where we get our Transformative Truth for today – a truth powerfully illustrated in this passage. Absalom and all the men of Israel who had initially agreed with Ahithophel’s advice completely changed their opinion after listening to Hushai. This isn’t because Hushai’s counsel was better than Ahithophel’s, but because God had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel...” (v. 14a). The Hebrew word for “ordained” means “to issue a command or order.” God is the one calling the shots. The Lord is in control. It’s his purpose that prevails. His plan is the one that really matters.

We see God’s providence at work following this revelation of God’s purpose in verse 14. Things are set in motion that eventually lead to David’s deliverance and Absalom’s downfall.

⁵ Ibid., 425.

¹⁵ Then Hushai said to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, “Thus and so did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and so have I counseled.”¹⁶ Now therefore send quickly and tell David, ‘Do not stay tonight at the fords of the wilderness, but by all means pass over, lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up.’”¹⁷ Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at En-rogel. A female servant was to go and tell them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they were not to be seen entering the city.¹⁸ But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So both of them went away quickly and came to the house of a man at Bahurim, who had a well in his courtyard. And they went down into it.¹⁹ And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth and scattered grain on it, and nothing was known of it.²⁰ When Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, “Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?” And the woman said to them, “They have gone over the brook of water.” And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.

²¹ After they had gone, the men came up out of the well, and went and told King David. They said to David, “Arise, and go quickly over the water, for thus and so has Ahithophel counseled against you.”²² Then David arose, and all the people who were with him, and they crossed the Jordan. By daybreak not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

²³ When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went off home to his own city. He set his house in order and hanged himself, and he died and was buried in the tomb of his father.

- 2 Samuel 17:15-23

In these verses, David's undercover network goes to work, and because of the Lord's providence, it succeeds. The messengers are protected, their pursuers are unsuccessful, David and those with him cross the Jordan under the cover of darkness, and Ahithophel kills himself. My guess is that he did so because he saw the writing on the wall. He knew that his counsel was good and that by not following it, Absalom was doomed. “Given time to recoup, David's crack troops would decimate Absalom's forces, after which Ahithophel would be executed for the traitor that he was.”⁶ Like a vicious horse that strikes its master, Ahithophel had lifted his heel against God's king, just like Judas Iscariot would later do in his betrayal of the ultimate King, the Lord Jesus Christ. The tragic ends of Ahithophel and Judas are “a sign of what will happen to all the enemies of that King and kingdom. You cannot attack the kingdom of God without – sooner or later – being crushed by the power of God.”⁷ That's why Jesus began his public ministry by proclaiming, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Believe the good news that God sent his Son into this world to save sinners like you and me by living a life of perfect obedience on our behalf, by dying on the cross in our place for our sins, and by being raised on the third day so that by trusting him to save us, we might be forgiven of our sin, reconciled to God, and granted the free gift of eternal life.

⁶ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, reprinted 2018), 219.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

A Story About Another Son Who Revolted

I could end today's sermon on that note, and that would be a good thing. But I also want to encourage those of you who have loved ones outside of Christ whose hearts are so hard, so resistant to the gospel, that it seems they'll never get saved. Perhaps you have a son or daughter who, like Absalom, has revolted against the rightful King.

The point of today's text is not that God has determined to bring harm upon your child as he did Absalom. That's not the point at all. The point is that . . .

***No human wisdom, insight, or plan
can succeed against the Lord.***

God fulfilled his purpose in conjunction with David's prayer, even when all seemed lost. I want to encourage you in this regard, even as I have been encouraged this past week. In the providence of God, I had begun reading what is probably my favorite missionary biography. The book is by Courtney Anderson and is titled, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson*. He was the first foreign missionary from America. Adoniram was born in 1788 in Malden, Massachusetts. His mother was Abigail and his father was Adoniram Judson, Sr., a Congregational minister. When Adoniram was thirteen, his family moved to Plymouth, MA, where his father pastored the Third Church in Plymouth.

From his earliest years, Adoniram was "unusually high-spirited, enthusiastic in anything he did, active and energetic. He had complete self-confidence. Yet, on the whole, he preferred books to play."⁸ He was a brilliant student and at age 16 enrolled at Rhode Island College at Providence – a school founded and governed by Baptist leaders. Shortly after Adoniram began his studies there, the college changed its name to Brown University – in honor of Nicholas Brown, a wealthy businessman who was an alumnus of the school and one of its greatest benefactors.

At the time the College had only 150 students, and Adoniram became close friends with one named Jacob Eames, who was "amiable, talented, witty, extremely agreeable in person and manners, but a confirmed Deist. . . . The Deist rejected . . . the Bible, New Testament and Old.... All the Deist admitted was the existence of . . . God." Adoniram's parents had no idea that their son was abandoning the Christian faith. As he and his close friend Jacob Eames talked about their dreams, ambitions and goals in life, "the whole structure of the belief so indoctrinated in Adoniram by his father collapsed like a house of cards. Or," the biographer writes, "was belief, sown and nurtured in infancy, more like a plant with deep roots penetrating far into the very foundations of personality, involving forces never to appear to memory or awareness?"⁹

This brings us to the chapter titled "Revolt." After college, Adoniram returns to Plymouth, begins teaching and publishes two textbooks by the time he turns twenty.

Nevertheless, he was dissatisfied. His work seemed nothing but a way to

⁸ Courtney Anderson, *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* (Judson Press, 1987), 18. The book was first published in 1956 by Little, Brown and Company, and represents the language of that time.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

occupy the time.

Worse, he was living a lie. Every day he dutifully took part in family worship. Sundays he faithfully attended church. No one, least of all his father and mother, suspected his real beliefs. But his private creed did not deny ethics and morality, nor condone dishonesty. Living as he did, he could not help feeling a hypocrite every time he knelt at family prayers.

Every week he grew more restless. ...

Unhappily he remembered the ambitions he had shared with Jacob Eames only a few years ago. What had happened to them? Were they nothing but dreams? That summer ... he finally came to a decision. He would leave home. He would go to New York. He would become acquainted with the people of the theater. He would learn to write for the stage. ...

... [C]autious kept him from telling [his parents] exactly what he had in mind. ... [O]n August 9 – his twentieth birthday – he merely said he planned to travel for a while and see something of the world. He thought he would visit his Uncle Ephraim, pastor of the church at Sheffield, some one hundred and fifty miles westward. Since he would be so far west, he might go on and see Albany. The newly invented steamboat, *Clermont*, had been in service for a year. Perhaps he might take that to New York, just to see what it was like, and broaden himself by looking at some of the sights of the city.

His parents reacted precisely as if he had casually announced his decision to take a little trip to the moon.

At first, they were incredulous. Then, when they realized that Adoniram was determined, they displayed a sort of horrified amazement. What was wrong, his mother asked, with the pleasant family circle in Plymouth? Why, demanded his father, had he suddenly decided to interrupt a promising career? Adoniram had no answer. They could not realize he had come to the point where he must throw off their rule, no matter how benevolent, and think and act for himself. He could not explain it. And why should he have to? As he restlessly listened to their remonstrances [protests], unreasoning anger began to rise in him. ...

... All at once Adoniram's resentment boiled over. Furiously, he flung out the truth. His father and mother froze with horror as Adoniram's words struck their startled ears.

The God of the Third Church of Plymouth was not his God, Adoniram told them. He could not believe that the Bible was anything but the work of men.... Even Jesus . . . He was certainly the son of man, but almost as certainly not the son of God except in the sense that all men are.

Mr. Judson was outraged. What had got into the boy? He had felt sure that at Brown, of all places, no harm would be done to his son's soul. ...

Swallowing his anger, Mr. Judson set himself to reason with Adoniram. Very shortly he realized with dismay that every argument he advanced was being met by two better ones. No for nothing had Adoniram been valedictorian of his class. Exposing the fallacies in his father's syllogisms was child's play. Point by point, with crushing finality, he demolished every thesis his father set out to prove. By nightfall, Adoniram was completely master of the field. So far as logic and evidence went, Mr. Judson was beaten. He still knew he was right, but he could not prove it. He lapsed into grim, impotent silence.

Adoniram might have gone to bed flushed with triumph had his mother not

possessed other, more deadly weapons: tears, prayers, and expostulations. Weeping, she pursued him from room to room. ... How could she enjoy heaven knowing her son was in hell? She used no logic. She simply assumed that, through some perverseness of his own, Adoniram chose the devil against God, hell against heaven, and wounding her feelings against making her happy. When, finally, she saw that Adoniram withstood her, she turned to prayers. Wherever she turned, he saw her bowed in prayer and heard her lifting her voice brokenly, sobbing, pleading with God to change the heart of her wayward son and save him from damnation.

For Adoniram, it was a little hell. He endured it for six days until, on the fifteenth of August, mounted on a horse his father gave him as part of his inheritance, he rode westward down the steep grade of Pleasant Street, crossed Town Brook, and slowly jogged on toward Boston, Worcester, and Sheffield.

He had won his freedom, but he was not entirely happy with it. ... As he thought of the new life ahead, his spirits began to soar ... yet he could not quite throw off a certain uneasiness.¹⁰

Eventually, Adoniram makes it to Albany and boards the steamboat *Clermont* for New York. Upon his arrival, he was disappointed.

The prospects were poor for a young stranger. But Adoniram persisted, and in a few days he succeeded in attaching himself to a shabby little band.... For a few weeks he roamed with them, living, as he said later, “a reckless, vagabond life, finding lodgings where we could, and bilking the landlord where we found opportunity – in other words running up a score [tally], and then decamping [departing] without paying the reckoning [bill].”

For some, the life might have been fascinating. For Adoniram it was the opposite of his anticipations. ...

Disgusted, heartsick, he left without notice one night, and, nursing his disappointment, made his way back to his uncle’s home in Sheffield.

The experience in New York had left Adoniram without a plan. Unless he wanted to go home, he could think of nothing better than procuring his horse from his uncle and continuing to wander.

But he was uneasy. What should he strive for now? He felt aimless. He had expected to find a more honest, freer world, swelling with fresh brilliant thought and companionship. But the world he *did* find was [cheap, vulgar, pompous and pretentious]. By contrast, his father’s character, with all its obstinate wrongheadedness, stood out in simple grandeur. His father could be mistaken – was mistaken, in fact – but he was honest granite clear through.

In this bewildered move Adoniram returned to Ephraim Judson’s parsonage. His uncle was a way and a young minister ... was taking his place. But it was too late in the day to ride on, so Adoniram decided to spend the night at the parsonage.

The two young men – close enough to the same age to talk as equals – spent several hours in conversation. ... [T]here was a warmth, “a solemn but gentle

¹⁰ Ibid., 36-39.

earnestness,” in his speech which kindled and answering warmth in the heart. ... Adoniram rode away in the morning deeply impressed. Perhaps the young minister would never find the fame Adoniram was looking for, but neither would he experience the pain of Adoniram’s conflict. He was at peace with himself. These were Adoniram’s thoughts as he rode on, still trending away from Plymouth. ...

At night drew on he found himself passing through a small village. Finding the local inn, he stabled his horse and asked the inn-keeper for a room. The house was nearly full, said the landlord apologetically. But he had one next to a young man who was critically ill, perhaps dying. He might be disturbed, but...? No, said Adoniram, still wrapped in his own thoughts, he would not let a few noises next door deny him a night’s rest. After giving him something to eat, the landlord [showed] Adoniram to [his] room and left him. Without further ado, Adoniram got into bed, and waited for sleep to come.

But though the night was still, he could not sleep. In the next room beyond the partition he could hear sounds, not very loud; footsteps coming and going; a board creaking; low voices; a groan or gasp. These did not disturb him unduly – not even the realization that a man might be dying. Death was commonplace in Adoniram’s New England. It might come to anyone, at any age.

What disturbed him was the thought that the man in the next room might not be prepared for death. Was he, himself? A confusing coil of speculation unwound itself as he lay half dreaming, half waking, while the autumn chill stole down from the mountains and crept through every crack and cranny of the house. He wondered how he himself would face death. His father would welcome it as a door opening to immortal glory. So much his creed had done for him. But to Adoniram the son, the freethinker, the Deist, the infidel, lying huddled under the covers, death was an exit, not an entrance. It was a door to an empty pit, to darkness darker than night, at best to extinction, at worst to – what? On this matter his philosophy was silent. It had no answer but “Who knows?”

He had always been neat and well-groomed. His mother had taught him to be fastidious. He cared for his own person. But he must die, and the grave was a cold, dark place. His flesh crawled. Was the wet, earthy mold and the motionless body, the slow dissolution of muscle and tendon, the slower crumbling of bone, the immense weight of soil – was this all, through the endless centuries? What of that part of Adoniram Judson he thought of as “I”? Did it go out like the flame of a candle? Or did it, too, stay in the ground with the flesh?

There was terror in these fantastically unwinding ideas. But as they presented themselves, another part of him jeered. *Midnight fancies!* that part said scornfully. What a skin-deep thing this freethinking philosophy of Adoniram Judson, valedictorian, scholar, teacher, ambitious man, must be! What would the classmates at Brown say to these terrors of the night, who thought of him as bold in thought? Above all, what would Eames say – Eames the clearheaded, skeptical, witty, talented? He imagined Eames’s laughter, and felt shame.

When Adoniram woke the sun was streaming in the window. His apprehensions had vanished with the darkness. He could hardly believe he had given in to such weakness. He dressed quickly and ran downstairs, looking for the innkeeper. It was past time to have breakfast, pay his [bill], saddle his horse, and be on his way.

He found his host, asked for the bill, and – perhaps noticing the man somber-faced – asked casually whether the young man in the next room was better.

“He is dead,” was the answer.

“Dead?” Adoniram was taken aback. There was a heavy finality to the word.

For an instant, some of his fear of the night made itself felt once more.

Adoniram stammered out the few conventional phrases common to humanity when death takes someone nearby, and asked the inevitable question: “Do you know he was?”

“Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence. Name was Eames, Jacob Eames.”

How he got through the next few hours Adoniram was never able to remember. All he recalled afterwards was that he did not try to leave the inn until some hours had passed. ...

Later, however, he found himself on the road, continuing his journey, without being sure how he came to be there. He was aware that one word was tolling in his mind like a bell: the word “Lost!”

Lost. In death, Jacob Eames was lost – utterly, irrevocably lost. Lost to his friends, to the world, to the future. Lost as a puff of smoke is lost in the infinity of air. If Eames’s own views were true, neither his life nor his death had any meaning. The coincidence of his dying on the other side of a partition from Adoniram, in a remote country inn, was simply a meaningless incident in a plan too huge and impersonal to take account of individuals.

But supposed Eames had been mistaken? Suppose the Scriptures were literally true and a personal God real? Then Jacob Eames was already lost in a most desperate sense. For already, this moment, Eames knew his error – too late for repentance. Knowing his mistake, regretting it with a bitterness which no living human could ever possibly imagine, he was experiencing already the unimaginable torments of the flames of hell – any chance of remedy, of going back, or correcting, lost, eternally lost.

Thus the pattern in Adoniram’s shocked mind. It was the night-thoughts back again, but in a more dreadful form. ...

For that hell [to] open in that country inn and snatch Jacob Eames, his dearest friend and guide, from the next bed – this could not, simply could not, be pure coincidence.

Adoniram knew his father’s God very well. He was omniscient. He knew everything. He was omnipotent. He had all power. He could foresee where Adoniram would be that night, could foresee his leaving New York when and why he did. He could foresee that Jacob Eames would be where he was, fall sick, die, be damned.

More: being All-Powerful, this He must have done with a purpose, for He could have arranged matters otherwise.

This God of the Bible, Adoniram had been taught, was an angry God, a vindictive God. But He was a just God. He could be a loving God. And He gave ample warning. If This was the real God, it was no mere coincidence that Adoniram had fallen in among rogues and left, disgusted. It was no coincidence that the pious young man had been at his uncle Ephraim’s house to converse with him. It was no coincidence that Adoniram had spent this particular night at

this particular inn, thinking those particular thoughts. He had been warned, amply warned.

Was This the real God? If so, He had a purpose for Adoniram, which Adoniram must learn to read. In his very bones, all at once, logic or no logic, Adoniram was imbued with the feeling that the God of the Bible was the real God. And Adoniram was filled with despair and dread. For Deist logic and evidence said “No.” Suddenly he reined in his horse. Without realizing it, he had been continuing the [course] he had planned originally. He straightened in the saddle for a moment of decision. Yes, he must find out about this, once and for all. He turned the horse in the road, spurred it to a faster pace, and headed back in the direction from which he had come – homeward. Toward Plymouth.¹¹

Adoniram arrived home in September, “in mortal fear for his own soul. On his return his parents at last became fully aware of the gravity of their son’s inner crisis” and continued to weep and pray for him.¹²

He entered Andover Theological Seminary on the twelfth of October. He made no profession of religious belief, and was enrolled as a special student – not as a candidate for the ministry. ...

So far as Adoniram was concerned, ... the two-man faculty served as well as a score. Languages had always interested him. Besides Greek and Latin he already knew some Hebrews. Now, under Dr. Pearson, he began to read sacred literature in the original. At the same time he began to thrash out his theological doubts with Professor Woods, who turned out to be fully his match as a dialectician [person skilled in logic]. ...

November came. ... The ground was wet with fall rain, the weather raw; only a few lonely leaves lingered on the bare boughs. But with the trees bare, he could see farther. And as he walked thoughtfully through the grove, he found that he could see farther into his problems, too. He began to suspect he had not seen the forest for the trees, nor the trees for the leaves. That month his doubts began to leave, little by little. He underwent no sudden conversion, felt no blinding flash of insight. But he was able to note that he “began to entertain a hope of having received the regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit.”

On the second day of December – a day he never forgot – he “made a solemn dedication of himself to God.”

With the issue settled and himself at peace, he devoted himself with a single mind to his studies. The next summer he joined the church at Plymouth, to the unrelieved joy of his father, mother, and [sister] Abby. From this time on he was literally a new man.¹³

No human wisdom, insight, or plan can succeed against the Lord. God is sovereign,

¹¹ Ibid., 41-45.

¹² Ibid., 46. “His father had already shot his bolt. Since he could not even imagine how anyone could question the underlying premises of Christianity, he knew he was not equipped to deal with Adoniram’s dilemma. Adoniram’s mother and sister had the same weapons of tears and prayers they had used before – but using them only intensified Adoniram’s agony. For Adoniram, faith must depend on more.”

¹³ Ibid., 48-50.

and your prayers matter. God answered David's prayer by defeating the counsel of Ahithophel. God saw the tears and heard the prayers of Adoniram's mother and answered them by orchestrating circumstances that defied the power of logic and created saving faith in Adoniram's heart. That same God still hears and answers the prayers of his people. So, keep on praying and don't lose heart. And if anyone here is lost, far from Christ, come home. Repent of your sins, believe the gospel, and you too will become a new person.