

April 28, 2002
Palm Sunday

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

In calling Him "the son of David" the early Christians expressed their conviction that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything Israel had been promised in that great historical figure, who was the father of Judah's messianic line. For this reason Christians studied carefully the life and career of Israel's second king, so as to miss no aspect of the prophecies associated with him. In fact, we find this detailed preoccupation with David already obvious in the Church's first sermon (Acts 2:29-36).

Moreover, in interpreting David through the lens of Christ, those Christians were not obliged to start from scratch, because Israel's prophets had bequeathed them a great deal of material interpretive of David's life and significance. One such prophet was Zechariah.

Zechariah had based one of his messianic prophecies on the figure of David as the latter fled from the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 15-17). He remembered King David, crossing the Kidron valley eastwards and ascending the Mount of Olives, rejected by his people. The king left in disgrace, riding on a donkey, the poor animal of the humble peasant. David was the very image of meekness. As he went, he suffered further humiliation from those who took advantage of his plight, but in his heart was no bitterness; he bore all with patience, planning no revenge. Unlike the usurping Absalom who drove "a chariot and horses with fifty men to run before him" (2 Samuel 15:1), David rode on the back of a little donkey. The prophet Zechariah, seeing all of this as a narrative prophetic of the greater David yet to come, exclaimed, "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly and seated on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey'" (Zechariah 9:9= This oracle the early Christians saw strikingly fulfilled near the end of the earthly life of Jesus (Matthew 21:5).

Furthermore, amidst all King David suffered that day, there was even a foreshadowing of Judas the traitor. The man's name was Ahitophel, and he was one of David's trusted counselors. Truly, the resemblances between Judas and Ahitophel are remarkable. Ahitophel, joining the conspiracy against David (2 Samuel 15:12; 16:15,23), sought to seize him by night (17:1), just east of Jerusalem (15:23), so that all his companions

would flee (17:2). Judas, joining the plot against Jesus (Matthew 26:3f,14-16), led the conspirators to seize Him by night (26:47f), just east of Jerusalem (26:36), causing His companions to flee (26:56). Whereas Ahitophel hanged himself when his treachery failed (2 Samuel 17:23), Judas hanged himself when his treachery succeeded (Matthew 27:5). Just as Judas Iscariot, then, is the obvious traitor in the New Testament, Ahitophel is the obvious traitor in the Old. The one betrayed the "type," the other its fulfillment.

There was a good reason that Ahitophel's betrayal did not succeed like that of Judas, and the reason's name was Hushai the Archite. A sagacious man worthy of the office of "king's friend" (1 Chronicles 27:33), Hushai hoped to join the fleeing David's paltry force and partake of his flight. From this plan he was dissuaded nonetheless. Meeting the king on the Mount of Olives, near the very site where Judas would later betray Jesus (2 Samuel 15:30-32; Luke 22:39), Hushai was convinced by David to return to Jerusalem in order to serve as the king's secret agent in the capital and thereby thwart the evil counsel of Ahitophel (2 Samuel 15:34-37). Going back to the city, Hushai succeeded completely, both frustrating Ahitophel's designs (17:5-14) and then disclosing Absalom's schemes to David (17:15-22). Joab and the army would do the rest.

This union of wisdom and personal loyalty, fused in the perilous setting of Absalom's rebellious court, renders Hushai one of the truly attractive figures in Holy Scripture. He also well exemplifies the biblical principle that true wisdom is tried by fire and tested in strife. His obedience to David's counsel caused Hushai to do a dangerous thing, but he very bravely placed his wisdom at the service of his loyalty, rather than his own safety, and in doing so he became the instrument of God's intention to frustrate what even the biblical author thought the sounder counsel of David's betrayer: "For the Lord had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahitophel, to the intent that Lord might bring disaster on Absalom (17:14).

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All Saints Orthodox Church
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

4129 W. Newport Avenue / Chicago, IL 60641

Church Office: (773) 777-0749

<http://www.allsaintsorthodox.org/>

Father Patrick Henry Reardon, Pastor
phrii@touchstonemag.com

Pastor's Daily Biblical Reflections:
www.touchstonemag.com/frpat.html

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