SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 18

*Absalom’s Death*

**David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. 2 David sent the troops out—a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab’s brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, “I myself will surely march out with you.” 3 But the men said, “You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won’t care about us. Even if half of us die, they won’t care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city.” 4 The king answered, “I will do whatever seems best to you.” So the king stood beside the gate while all the men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands. 5 The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders. 6 The army marched into the field to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. 7 There the army of Israel was defeated by David’s men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. 8 The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword. 9 Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s head got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going. 10 When one of the men saw this, he told Joab, “I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree.” 11 Joab said to the man who had told him this, “What! You saw him? Why didn’t you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior’s belt.” 12 But the man replied, “Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lift my hand against the king’s son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.’ 13 And if I had put my life in jeopardy—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me.” 14 Joab said, “I’m not going to wait like this for you.” So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. 15 And ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him. 16 Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. 17 They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes. 18 During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, “I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.” He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.**

**18:1** *mustered*. Organized for war. (TLSB)

*commanders of thousands* … *hundreds*. Technical terms for military officers. Number of men in each unit varied. (TLSB)

**18:2** *Joab* … *Abishai*. Cf 2:18–32; 3:26–39; 1Sm 26:6; 1Ch 11:6–8. (TLSB)

*Ittai the Gittite.* See 15:18–22. (CSB)

**18:3** *You must not go out.* In addition to the reason given, David was growing old and was no longer the warrior he had been (see note on 15:7). This is essentially the same idea that Ahithophel had expressed to Absalom (see 17:2). (CSB)

*worth ten thousand of us*. If David fell, the war would be over and Absalom would have won. Cf 17:2–3. (TLSB)

*the city*. Mahanaim. Cf 17:24. (TLSB)

**18:4** *hundreds* … *thousands*. Divisions of the army (cf v 1). (TLSB)

**18:5** *Be gentle with … Absalom for my sake.* David’s love for his (now) oldest son was undying—and almost his undoing (see 19:5–7). (CSB)

David knew that much of the current situation was the result of his sin, yet the Lord forgave him and spared his life. David wanted to do the same for Absalom. Cf Mt 5:44–45; Lk 23:34; Ac 13:22–23. (TLSB)

**18:6** *Israel.* Absalom’s army (see 15:13; 16:15; 17:4, 11, 24–26). (CSB)

*forest of Ephraim.* The battle was apparently fought in Gilead, east of the Jordan (see 17:24, 26). Why this area is termed the “forest of Ephraim” is not clear (perhaps it comes from an Ephraimite claim on the area; see Jdg 12:1–4). (CSB)

Likely a heavily wooded area with rocky, uneven terrain, probably east of the Jordan. (TLSB)

**18:8** *The battle spread out.* The armies apparently became dispersed, and many of the men got lost in the forest. (CSB)

Rough terrain disrupted tactics and worked against Absalom’s troops. (TLSB)

**18:9** *his mule.* See note on 13:29. (CSB)

Used esp by the king and his family (13:29) Symbolizes Absalom’s claim to be king. (TLSB)

*Absalom’s head got caught in the tree.* Whether by the entanglement of his abundant hair (14:26) or by some other means is not stated, but his handsome head (see 14:25) was in the end—ironically—his undoing. (CSB)

As the mule continues on its way without Absalom, God unseats the usurper from his father’s throne. (TLSB)

**18:10** *hanging in an oak*. Thus, he was shown to be cursed. Cf Dt 21:22–23; Gal 3:13. (TLSB)

**18:11** *I would have had to give you.* Joab must be referring to an announced intent on his part to reward anyone killing Absalom. His actions and interests did not always coincide with David’s wishes (see note on 2:13). (CSB)

**18:15** *killed him.* The easiest and most certain way of ending the rebellion—but the brutal overkill is indicative of the deep animosity felt by David’s men against Absalom. (CSB)

Joab had his servants finish off Absalom. Nevertheless, Joab was responsible for his death. (TLSB)

**18:16** Cf 17:2–3; 18:3. The one contending for the throne was killed; there was no need to fight. (TLSB)

**18:17** *large heap of rocks.* A mound of rocks that mocked the monument Absalom himself had erected (v. 18). (CSB)

Absalom was “stoned” after death. Cf Dt 21:18–21. (TLSB)

*all the Israelites.* See note on v. 6. (CSB)

**18:18** *erected it … as a monument to himself.* As Saul had done (1Sa 15:12). (CSB)

*King’s Valley.* Thought to be located near Jerusalem (see Ge 14:17; (CSB)

Josephus, *Antiquities,* 7.10.3). *I have no son.* See 14:27 and note. (CSB)

*Absalom’s Monument.* Not to be confused with the much later monument of the same name that is still visible today in the valley east of Jerusalem. (CSB)

**18:1–18** Absalom, a son of David, is defeated by the Lord and hung on a tree. Joab has Absalom killed and brings the war to an end so the rest of Israel is spared. Pride comes before a fall. Our lives are held and weighed in God’s hands. In contrast to Absalom, Jesus, the sinless Son of David, was reckoned a rebellious sinner (2Co 5:21) and died on a tree to bear God’s curse against the world’s sins (Gal 3:13). • “Fulfilled is all that David told In sure prophetic song of old, That God the nations’ king should be And reign in triumph from the tree.” Amen. (*LSB* 455:3) (TLSB)

*David Mourns*

**19 Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, “Let me run and take the news to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the hand of his enemies.” 20 “You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him. “You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king’s son is dead.” 21 Then Joab said to a Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off. 22 Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, “Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite.” But Joab replied, “My son, why do you want to go? You don’t have any news that will bring you a reward.” 23 He said, “Come what may, I want to run.” So Joab said, “Run!” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite. 24 While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. 25 The watchman called out to the king and reported it. The king said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.” And the man came closer and closer. 26 Then the watchman saw another man running, and he called down to the gatekeeper, “Look, another man running alone!” The king said, “He must be bringing good news, too.” 27 The watchman said, “It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok.” “He’s a good man,” the king said. “He comes with good news.” 28 Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, “All is well!” He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, “Praise be to the Lord your God! He has delivered up the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king.” 29 The king asked, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” Ahimaaz answered, “I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king’s servant and me, your servant, but I don’t know what it was.” 30 The king said, “Stand aside and wait here.” So he stepped aside and stood there. 31 Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The Lord has delivered you today from all who rose up against you.” 32 The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.” 33 The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”**

**18:19** *Ahimaaz son of Zadok.* See 15:27; 17:17–21. (CSB)

**18:20** *not the one to take the news.* The choice of a messenger depended on the content of the message (see v. 27 and note). (CSB)

To protect Ahimaaz in case David became angry at news of Absalom’s death (cf 1:13–16; 4:7–12). (TLSB)

**18:21** *Cushite.* An alien (see notes on Ge 10:6–8; Am 9:7). (CSB)

**18:23** *the way of the plain*. Presumably, the Cushite ran directly from the battle to Mahanaim, a demanding route over steep and rugged terrain. Ahimaaz took the longer, but easier, route through the Jordan Valley. (TLSB)

**18:24** *between the two gates*. City had both an inner and outer gate. David positioned himself in the courtyard between the two. (TLSB)

**18:25** *there is news in his mouth*. He has a message to tell. A lone runner would be a messenger, while a group could have been retreating troops. (TLSB)

**18:27** *He comes with good news.* David presumed that Joab would not have sent someone like Ahimaaz to carry bad news (see v. 20 and note). (CSB)

**18:28** *All is well*. Hbr *shalom*, “peace,” root word of Absalom’s name. (TLSB)

**18:29** *I saw great confusion.* Ahimaaz avoids a direct answer to David’s question, though he knew Absalom was dead. (CSB)

*I do not know*. He knew, but lost his nerve at the crucial moment. (TLSB)

**18:19–30** Ahimaaz is anxious to bring news of the victory to David, but he fails to tell about Absalom’s death. Expecting an angry reaction from the king, Joab sends a Cushite to bear the message. Official messengers must be faithful in delivering the news given them to tell, even if their message is not welcome. This holds true especially for ministers of the Gospel. How blessed are the feet of those who proclaim the Gospel, who tell us that our King Jesus reigns with mercy! • Heavenly Father, give us courage to speak Your Word according to our vocation as Christians. Amen. (TLSB)

**18:33** *chamber*. Guardroom in the watchtower. Towers usually flanked the city gate. (TLSB)

*O my son Absalom!* One of the most moving expressions in all literature of a father’s love for a son—in spite of all that Absalom had done. (CSB)

Repetition expresses pity. (TLSB)

*I had died instead of you*. See similar expressions from Moses and Paul in Ex 32:30–34; Rm 9:1–3. (TLSB)

**18:31–33** The Cushite tactfully reveals what has happened, pointing out that Absalom was the king’s enemy and had risen up against the king for evil. Nevertheless, David is overcome with grief at the report of his son’s death. Not only does our sin bring death upon us, but it also brings death and destruction into our relationships with others and much grief to everyone around us. For all of his faults, David is described as a man after God’s own heart, never more so than when his heart went out to the son who betrayed him and sinned against him. Likewise, our Father in heaven has opened His merciful heart to us in the outstretched arms of Jesus, the Son of David. • Lord, grant us grace to rejoice in Your salvation, and to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, that we may be merciful, even as You are merciful. Amen. (TLSB)