

SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 18

Absalom Killed

Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. 2 And David sent out the army, one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the men, "I myself will also go out with you." 3 But the men said, "You shall not go out. For if we flee, they will not care about us. If half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore it is better that you send us help from the city." 4 The king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do." So the king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. 5 And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom. 6 So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. 7 And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. 8 The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword. 9 And Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. 10 And a certain man saw it and told Joab, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." 11 Joab said to the man who told him, "What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt." 12 But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king's son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake protect the young man Absalom.' 13 On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." 14 Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak. 15 And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him. 16 Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained them. 17 And they took Absalom and threw him into a great pit in the forest and raised over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled every one to his own home. 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance." He called the pillar after his own name, 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)

18:3 *You shall not go out.* In addition to the reason given, David was growing old and was no longer the warrior he had been. 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 over.* 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.* Used esp by the king and his family (13:29) Symbolizes Absalom's claim to be king. (TLSB)

head caught fast 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 glad 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. (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 *great heap of stones.* 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)

18:18 *set up for himself the pillar.* 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.* (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 Hears of Absalom's Death

19 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Let me run and carry news to the king that the LORD has delivered him from the hand of his enemies." **20** And Joab said to him, "You are not to carry news today. You may carry news another day, but today you shall carry no news, because the king's son is dead." **21** Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab, and ran. **22** Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for the news?" **23** "Come what may," he said, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and outran the Cushite. **24** Now David was sitting between the two gates, and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and when he lifted up his eyes and looked, he saw a man running alone. **25** The watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." And he drew nearer and nearer. **26** The watchman saw another man running. And the watchman called to the gate and said, "See, another man running alone!" The king said, "He also brings news." **27** The watchman said, "I think the running of the first is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "He is a good man and comes with good news." **28** Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." And he bowed before the king with his face to the earth and said, "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king." **29** And the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I do not know what it was." **30** And the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still.

18:20 *shall carry no news.* The choice of a messenger depended on the content of the message. (CSB)

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

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 *comes with good news.* David presumed that Joab would not have sent someone like Ahimaaz to carry bad news. (CSB)

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

18:29 *I saw great commotion.* 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)

David’s Grief

31 And behold, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, “Good news for my lord the king! For the LORD has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you.” 32 The king said to the Cushite, “Is it well with the young man Absalom?” And the Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man.” 33 And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

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)