

## SECOND SAMUEL

### A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 18

- Vv. 1- 8 *David's battle plan.* David divided his army into three parts, putting one under the leadership of Joab, one under Abishai, and one under Ittai. He strictly warned his commanders against harming his son, Absalom.
- Vv. 9-18 *The death of Absalom.* The terrain where the battle was fought was very rough. The difficulties faced by soldiers caused more deaths than the actual fighting. One casualty of the terrain was Absalom himself. His head was caught in the branches of a tree, and his mule rode out from under him. While he was hanging suspended in this way, Joab drove three darts through his heart.
- Vv. 19-33 *David's lament for Absalom.* David's lamentation over his son is a classical expression of a father's grief over the death of his son. It is hard to imagine any more expressive wording for a man's grief than those recorded in the last verse of the chapter.

### LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *It is folly to make a name for one's self.* Absalom had reared a pillar in his own honor. This is about the only remembrance he had in Israel. His action is reminiscent of the wicked men of Babel (Genesis 11:1 ff). These men sought to rear a tower to heaven in order that they might make a name for themselves. A man is much wiser to let others rear a memorial in his honor.
2. *Many run without tidings* (v. 22). Ahimaaz wanted to run to tell David the news of the battle. Cushie had already been sent with the news. It was useless for Ahimaaz to run since he had no more news to carry.

## STUDIES IN SAMUEL

Many preachers and churches have continued to make a lot of noise, but they have forgotten to tell the good news. They run without tidings.

3. *God mourns for His children.* God's children have gone astray and are dying in sin. God did not only say, "I would die for you," but He has said, "I have died for you."

### *David's Battle Plan. 18:1-8*

And David numbered the people that *were* with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.

2 And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also.

3 But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now *thou art* worth ten thousand of us: therefore now *it is* better that thou succor us out of the city.

4 And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.

5 And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, *Deal* gently for my sake with the young man, *even* with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom.

6 So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim;

7 Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand *men*.

8 For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

*1. Where did David get his men? 18:1*

The army had increased from 600 to great numbers. These were numerous enough to demand the appointment of captains of thousands and captains of hundreds. Most of the men were from different parts of the country. Some were from Judah; some, from the other tribes. Because of Hushai's counsel, David had time to collect a large army; and the pendulum of affairs was swinging favor towards David and not towards Absalom. Hushai had counseled Absalom to take time to collect a large force, but the time also allowed David to collect an army. David seemed to have the better advantage.

*2. How did David divide his army? 18:2*

David appointed Joab captain over a third of his army. Another third was under the direction of Abishai, Joab's brother, and the third was led by Ittai, the Gittite. The fact that there were three captains in this campaign, whereas only two had led in the war against the Syrio-Ammonite coalition, would point to the fact that David had a larger army in the field against Absalom. The exact number was not stated, but if he had one-half the total of all men available to him, he must have had at his disposal some 600,000 men.

*3. Why did David want to go into the battle? 18:3*

David wanted to go out to the battle with the troops, for he was still a soldier. He may have been prompted to go out in order that he might guard against harm coming to Absalom, but the people would not allow him to lead the army in person. They had great respect for him, and they valued him highly. They felt that the battlefield was too dangerous a spot for their leader. The enemy would naturally be looking for David, since a part of

Ahithophel's original counsel was designed to drive off David's men and attack David personally (II Samuel 17:2). David could direct the battle from a safe distance and send up reinforcements when and if they were needed.

4. *What instructions did David give concerning Absalom?*

18:5

David's command with regard to Absalom shows his deep affection for his son. At the same time, it reflects his parental indulgence. The fact that all people heard and that David gave the instructions carefully and explicitly to Joab, Abashai, and Ittai, revealed how deeply he was concerned over his safety. David did not want to spare Absalom's life so that he could punish him, but he wanted to make sure that nothing happened to the young man. As Absalom had stolen the hearts of many of the people of Israel, he had also reserved for himself a very warm spot in David's own heart. David's deep grief over his death arose out of this fondness he had for Absalom (verse 33).

5. *Where was the forest of Ephraim?* 18:6

The exact location of the forest is unknown. We cannot tell certainly where it was or what prompted the giving of its name. From the narrative we can determine that it was rough country. The men very evidently fell into pits, over cliffs, and into patches of entangling underbrush. The battle was fought east of the Jordan river, so the forest must have been there. The fact that it is called the forest of Ephraim would incline us to believe that it was parallel with the territory of Ephraim which lay west of the Jordan. Such a location would fit the description since Mahanaim was just north of the Jabbok river, and the men who helped David lived in this territory. The rugged land which lay east of the Jordan and half-way between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, must have been the scene of the battle.

*The Death of Absalom.* 18:9-18

9 And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that *was* under him went away.

10 And a certain man saw *it*, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak.

11 And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest *him*, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten *shekels* of silver, and a girdle.

12 And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand *shekels* of silver in mine hand, *yet* would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none *touch* the young man Absalom.

13 Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against *me*.

14 Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he *was* yet alive in the midst of the oak.

15 And ten young men that bare Joab's armor compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.

16 And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people.

17 And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent.

18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which *is* in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.

*6. How was Absalom's head caught? 18:9*

Absalom was following a trail through the forest that led through dense underbrush. He caught his hair in the branches of a tree. His mule went out from under him, and he was left suspended. When the enemy found him, they slew him and covered his body with a heap of stones. This was a Jewish way of showing contempt.

The mention of the pillar in verse 18 seemed to be over against the heap of stones in verse 17. Absalom had raised a pillar in the valley of Jehoshaphat to perpetuate his name. The sons of Absalom that had been mentioned all died young, and there was no one to bear his name. A daughter would not perpetuate his name. For all these reasons, the pillar was erected. The men of David heaped stones over his body to show their contempt for Absalom and his pillar in the king's dale.

*7. Why had the young man failed to kill Absalom? 18:10*

One of the young soldiers in Israel had seen Absalom hanging by his head from the oak tree, but he did not kill Absalom; rather he ran and told Joab, his captain. Joab rebuked the young man for sparing Absalom's life and told him that he would have given him ten shekels of silver and a military man's girdle if he had killed him. The young man replied that if he had received a thousand shekels of silver, he would not have put forth his hand against Absalom, since David had charged his captains not to harm him. He said that he would have endangered his own life if he had smitten Absalom. He could have expected no better treatment than David gave the Amalekite (II Samuel 1:15) and the assassins of Ish-bosheth (II Samuel 4:12).

*8. What action did Joab take? 18:14*

Joab turned impatiently away from the soldier who had discovered Absalom hanging from a tree. He took three darts in his hand and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was hanging yet alive from the branches

of the oak tree. Ten of Joab's armour bearers ringed the tree around and smote Absalom. This sadistic treatment of the king's son was completely unnecessary, and the action revealed the spirit of Joab and his men.

9. *Where was Absalom buried?* 18:17

Absalom's body was cast into a huge pit in the forest of Ephraim. The men of Israel cast a very large heap of stones on him to show their contempt and then withdrew from the battlefield. Joab blew the trumpet and called the people from their pursuit of Absalom's men and the text states that "Joab held back the people." They were enraged by Absalom's rebellion, and fought valiantly to restore David to his former position.

10. *Where was the king's dale?* 18:18

Absalom's body was covered by a heap of stones as a mark of the contempt of his enemies, but he had reared for himself a pillar of honor in the king's dale. Absalom had three sons, according to the record in II Samuel 14:27, but they must have died untimely deaths; for when he reared the pillar, he said that he had no son to perpetuate his name in Israel. Although Absalom was beaten in his campaign to overthrow his father's throne, the pillar was left standing; and it was still there when the book was written at the end of David's reign. The location of the king's dale is unknown, but Josephus located it one mile and a half from Jerusalem (*Antiquities* VIII; x; 3).

*David's Lament for Absalom.* 18:19-33

19 Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the Lord hath avenged him of his enemies.

20 And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead.

21 Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran.

## STUDIES IN SAMUEL

22 Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?

23 But howsoever, *said he*, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and over-ran Cush.

24 And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone.

25 And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he *be* alone, *there is* tidings in his mouth. And he came apace and drew near.

26 And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold *another* man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings.

27 And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He *is* a good man, and cometh with good tidings.

28 And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed *be* the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.

29 And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and *me* thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what *it was*.

30 And the king said *unto him*, Turn aside, *and* stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.

31 And, behold, Cush came; and Cush said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.



32 And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushi answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do *thee* hurt, be as *that* young man *is*.

33 And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

11. *Why did Joab choose to send the news by the Cushite?* 18:19

Ahimaaz wished to soften the news of the death of Absalom in the presence of the king. The Cushite was a Negro—a foreign-born member of Joab's army and was considered not a very honorable messenger. The poor messenger carried the bad news. The good messenger carried the good news. Joab may have been afraid that David would kill the men who brought him the bad news since he had killed the Amalekite, who brought him news of Saul's death (II Samuel 1:15).

12. *How did Ahimaaz outrun the Cushite?* 18:23

The battle was fought to the South of Mahanaim. The Cushite probably went over the hills, while Ahimaaz went by the way of the plain of the Jordan River. Since he had the easier course, he made better progress and reached David first with the news. The watchman recognized Ahimaaz's stride; and since he was a good man, he expected him to bring good news.

13. *Where was David when he heard the news?* 18:24

David was sitting on the roof of the gate. This refers to the tower over the gates of the city. More than likely, David was sitting in a room in the top of the tower. David knew that the man running alone bore tidings. Had their eyes beheld a number of men they would have surmised that the army had been defeated and routed. This one man running alone would bear tidings of the battle.

Ahimaaz was recognizable because of his peculiar stride. He did not tell the whole truth because he had not been commissioned to tell the whole story. He also wished to avoid the odium that would fall upon the bearer of the bad news.

*14. Why did the Cushite veil his message? 18:31, 32*

When the Cushite arrived in David's presence, he announced that he had news for him, but he couched his news in words that would soften the blow. He did not abruptly and brusquely say that Absalom was dead. He told David that the Lord had avenged him of all those who had risen up against him. David would perceive by this statement that the battle was going well and perhaps had been finalized in his favor. David's first question was with regard to the safety of Absalom. Once again, the Cushite did not curtly reply that Absalom was dead. He expressed a wish that all David's enemies might be in the same condition as that of Absalom. David knew by this statement that Absalom had been killed.

*15. Did David have reasons for such distress? 18:33*

Time and time again David had demonstrated his love for Absalom. David must have felt responsible for Absalom's bad career. In the first place, David himself had not been able to punish Amnon for his sin because he had himself committed such a sin. In the second place, he would not punish Absalom for avenging his sister's honor. In the third place, David's sending Hushai to Absalom had defeated Ahithophel's counsel and brought ultimate defeat to Absalom. David must have felt that he had failed miserably as a father.

*16. What had caused Absalom's bad career?*

David had set a bad example for his son by his sin against Uriah with Bathsheba. Such a great crime could hardly be kept from members of the family, and this may have led to a lack of respect for David on the part of all his children. Absalom particularly had been blessed with a

## SECOND SAMUEL

good physique which led to vanity. He had selfishly misused the popularity he won by his position and appearance. David had been lenient with him when he had killed Amnon by failing to take the vengeance which the law demanded—that of the death of a murderer. Wicked counselors had aided Absalom in his rebellion, and he finally met his death in the rugged forest of Ephraim.

### CHAPTER 18 IN REVIEW

1. Under what three men did David place his soldiers? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Did David go into the battle himself? \_\_\_\_\_
3. In what forest was the battle fought? \_\_\_\_\_
4. In what kind of tree was Absalom's head caught? \_\_\_\_\_
5. With what weapon did Joab kill Absalom? \_\_\_\_\_
6. With what did the men cover Absalom's body? \_\_\_\_\_
7. With whom did Joab send the news to David? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Who else wanted to carry the news? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Where was David when he received the news? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Quote David's lamentation of Absalom. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_