

2Samuel 18:1 ¶ And David numbered the people that *were* with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.

As he made preparations to engage the forces of Israel led by Absalom, David numbered and organized the men that had remained loyal to him. It wasn't a small number. He was able to appoint captains over thousands and captains over hundreds.

2Samuel 18:2 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 Zeruiah, 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.

2Samuel 18:3 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 succour us out of the city.

2Samuel 18:4 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.

David put a third of his troops under the command of Joab, a third under the command of Abishai and a third under the command of Ittai the Gittite.

Reminder: Both Joab and Abishai were brothers, sons of David's sister Zeruiah.

The king declared that he would be going to fight with his men, but they urged him not to do so. They reasoned that it would be better for him to stay out of the fight because he was the only target the enemy cared about killing. They wouldn't care if the rest of David's men ran away, but they would not stop until they eliminated David. They convinced him that it would be better for him to stay in the city and send them help if needed.

King David stood at the gate of the city while his troops passed by him as they went forth to battle.

2Samuel 18:5 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.

2Samuel 18:6 So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim;

2Samuel 18:7 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*.

2Samuel 18:8 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.

In the hearing of all his troops, the king commanded his generals—Joab, Abishai and Ittai—to deal gently with Absalom. In other words, he wanted him to be taken prisoner and not mistreated.

David's troops headed out to battle in the woods of Ephraim. His men slaughtered 20,000 of the men under Absalom's command. The battle encompassed the countryside, and the forest was responsible for the deaths of more men than were killed in the actual fighting.

The IVP Commentary offers this explanation: "When the Old Testament speaks of land devouring people (as the forest does here), it is indicating a hostile, inhospitable environment that threatens survival. Since this was a battlefield chosen by David and not Absalom, it may be expected that the king's forces utilized the rough terrain and forested areas to their advantage. Ambushes, feints drawing troops into ravines or wadis, and other guerilla tactics may have been employed. Divisions can get disoriented, lost or isolated and become easy targets."

2Samuel 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.

2Samuel 18:10 And a certain man saw *it*, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak.

2Samuel 18:11 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.

2Samuel 18:12 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.

2Samuel 18:13 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*.

At some point, Absalom encountered David's men. He was riding on a mule; and when the mule went under a big oak tree, his hair (I assume) got caught in its branches. His mule left him dangling by his hair, and some of Joab's men told him what had happened. Joab asked the man why he had not killed Absalom. He declared that he would have rewarded the man with ten shekels of silver and a girdle. JFB notes that such a reward represented being raised from the general rank of soldier to that of a commissioned officer. The IVP Commentary notes that the ten shekels of silver represented a bonus of one year's pay.

The man told Joab that even if he had offered him 1,000 shekels of silver, he would not harm the king's son. He reminded Joab that he had heard David give the command not to harm Absalom. To harm Absalom was to incur the king's wrath and endanger his life; he was sure to find out. He declared that he knew that Joab himself would have turned on him at the king's command.

2Samuel 18:14 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.

2Samuel 18:15 And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.

2Samuel 18:16 And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people.

Joab basically said that he didn't have time to argue with him. He took three weapons (some type of fighting stick) and thrust them through Absalom's heart as he hung from the tree. Ten of the young men that were Joab's armor bearers surrounded Absalom and struck him as well to ensure his death.

The Hebrew for the word "heart" can reference the center of the body. If Joab had struck him in the heart, he would have died immediately. It is clear that such did not occur.

Joab then blew the trumpet signaling that his troops should stop fighting and return to camp. The threat to the throne had been eliminated.

David Guzik made a good comment regarding Joab's actions: "We might say that Joab was *correct* but not *right*. He was *correct* in understanding that it was better for David and for Israel that Absalom was dead. He was *not right* in disobeying King David, the God-appointed authority over him. By David's dealings with King Saul, we see that God can deal with those in authority, and we don't need to disobey them unless commanded to by Scripture or a clear conscience."

The NIV Commentary notes: "Absalom's death brings to three the number of sons that David has lost as a result of his sins against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah."

2Samuel 18:17 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.

2Samuel 18:18 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.

Joab's men (I assume) took Absalom's body down and put him in a great pit in the woods and covered the pit with a large heap of stones

The men of Israel all ran away to their own homes. Before his coup attempt, Absalom had erected a pillar to himself in the king's dale because he had no son to carry on his name. He named the pillar after himself, and it was still recognized in the day that these events were written down for posterity.

JFB offers this historical note: "In the valley of Jehoshaphat, on the east of Jerusalem, is a tomb or cenotaph, said to be this "pillar" or monument: it is twenty-four feet square, dome-topped, and reaches forty feet in height. This may occupy the spot, but cannot itself be the work of Absalom, as it evidently bears

the style of a later architecture.”

Guzik adds this note: “Absalom did have three sons (2 Samuel 14:27). From this statement we surmise that they died before their father did.”

2Samuel 18:19 ¶ 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. 2Samuel 18:20 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.

Ahimaaz the son of Zadok wanted to be the one to take the king the news of their victory and how the LORD had avenged him of his enemies. Joab refused to let him go because Absalom was dead. Some commentaries posit that Joab did not want to risk Ahimaaz’s life as the messenger bringing to David the news of the death of his son.

2Samuel 18:21 Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. 2Samuel 18:22 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? 2Samuel 18:23 But howsoever, *said he*, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cush.

Confusing in light of his refusal to let Ahimaaz go, Joab sent Cush to tell the king what he had seen. Cush acknowledged the command and ran off. Ahimaaz pleaded once again to be allowed to follow Cush. Joab asked him why he wanted to go since there was no other news to deliver. Ahimaaz continued to plead to be allowed to go, and Joab finally relented. Ahimaaz took off by way of the plain and overran Cush.

2Samuel 18:24 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. 2Samuel 18:25 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. 2Samuel 18:26 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.

David was sitting at the gates of the city apparently awaiting news from the battlefield. The watchman climbed up to the roof over the gates and spotted a man running towards them. When he told the king, David reasoned that if he were alone, he had news; and he got up to wait for the news. Suddenly the watchman saw another man headed their way and informed the keeper of the gate who apparently informed the king. Again David reasoned that it must be another messenger carrying more news.

2Samuel 18:27 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.

2Samuel 18:28 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.

2Samuel 18:29 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*.

2Samuel 18:30 And the king said *unto him*, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.

The watchman told David that the first man ran like Ahimaaz, son of Zadok, who must have been well known for his speed and form as a runner. David reasoned that he was a good man and must be bringing good news. As Ahimaaz approached the king, he yelled out that all was well. He fell on his face before the king and reported the victory of David's troops over the enemy. The king immediately questioned him concerning Absalom's safety. Ahimaaz reported that he saw a commotion around him, but he did not know what had happened. David then ordered Ahimaaz to stand aside as he waited for the next messenger.

2Samuel 18:31 And, behold, Cushie came; and Cushie said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.

2Samuel 18:32 And the king said unto Cushie, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushie answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do *thee* hurt, be as *that* young man *is*.

2Samuel 18:33 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!

When Cushie arrived, he too announced that David's troops had gained the victory and the LORD had avenged him of all those that had turned against him. David's first question again regarded Absalom's safety. Cushie's answer made it clear that Absalom was dead. He basically said that he hoped all the enemies of King David were "as that young man is."

David was overcome with grief over his son's death and went up to his chamber over the gate and wept. As he went, he expressed his heart that he would have died in his stead.

Spurgeon made an insightful comment: "Our children may plunge into the worst of sins, but they are our children still. They may scoff at our God; they may tear our heart to pieces with their wickedness; we cannot take complacency in them, but at the same time we cannot unchild them, nor erase their image from our hearts."

Another insightful comment from Guzik: "David mourned so much for Absalom because he really was *his son*. David saw his sins, his weaknesses, his rebellion exaggerated in Absalom."