

2 Samuel 18

Verses 1 - 5

Then David took a count of the people who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. ² And David sent the people out, a third under the command of Joab, a third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I myself will certainly go out with you also." ³ But the people said, "You should not go out; for if in fact we flee, they will not care about us; and if half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us; so now it is better that you will be *ready* to help us from the city." ⁴ Then the king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do." So the king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and thousands. ⁵ But the king commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, "*Deal* gently with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the people heard when the king commanded all the commanders regarding Absalom.

Then David took a count of the people who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds.

The number of men following David had grown substantially from the initial departure from Jerusalem.

² And David sent the people out, a third under the command of Joab, a third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third under the command of Ittai the Gittite.

David divided the army into three divisions. The native troops were put under his nephews Joab and Abishai. David placed the foreigners under Ittai since he had brought his clan with him.

And the king said to the people, "I myself will certainly go out with you also."

David knew his men would not allow him to take part in the battle but David wanted his men to object least any of the troops were left with the impression that David was unwilling to go to war against his son Absalom.

³ But the people said, “You should not go out; for if in fact we flee, they will not care about us; and if half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us; so now it is better that you will be *ready* to help us from the city.”

David’s men persuaded him not to go into battle so He remained at Mahanaim in order to send reinforcements if they were needed.

⁵ But the king commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, “*Deal* gently with the young man Absalom for my sake.” And all the people heard when the king commanded all the commanders regarding Absalom.

This order put his military men in a difficult position. Nothing could resolve this conflict except the death of David or Absalom. An insurrectionist must be eliminated unless he has an opportunity to rise again.

The Republican party of our day has let an insurrectionist off the hook by claiming he never led an insurrection. What has happened to the party that once believed in law and order?

Verses 6 - 8

⁶ Then the people went out to the field against Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷ The people of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there that day was great, twenty thousand *men*. ⁸ For the battle there was spread over the whole countryside, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

⁶ Then the people went out to the field against Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim.

David was at Mahanaim, and Absalom in Gilead, therefore this battle took place east of the Jordan.

See 2 Samuel 17:24, 26

²⁴ Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom crossed the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. ²⁶ And Israel and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.

See map 1805



But why was this area on the east side of the Jordan named after the tribe of Ephraim which was on the west side? There may be an explanation for this in Judges 12:4

4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought Ephraim; and the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You are survivors of Ephraim, you Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and in the midst of Manasseh.”

7 The people of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the slaughter there that day was great, twenty thousand men. **8 For the battle there was spread over the whole countryside, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.**

We don't know how many soldiers Israel had mustered against David but 20,000 died in battle and another 20,000 plus were swallowed up by the forest. Those lost in the forest probably died of hunger and/or thirst before they could find a way out.

Verses 9 - 15

⁹ Now Absalom encountered the servants of David. Absalom was riding on *his* mule, and the mule went under the branches of a massive oak. Then his head caught firmly in the oak, and he was left hanging between the sky and earth, while the mule that was under him kept going. ¹⁰ When a certain man saw *him*, he informed Joab and said, “Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.” ¹¹ Then Joab said to the man who had informed him, “So behold, you saw *him*! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? And *it would have been* my duty to give you ten *pieces* of silver and a belt.” ¹² But the man said to Joab, “Even if I were to receive a thousand *pieces* of silver in my hand, I would not put out my hand against the king’s son; for in our hearing the king commanded you, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for me!’ ¹³ Otherwise, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have avoided *me*.” ¹⁴ Then Joab said, “I will not waste time here with you.” So he took three spears in his hand and thrust them through the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the midst of the oak. ¹⁵ And ten young men who carried Joab’s armor gathered around and struck Absalom and killed him.

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Josephus gave us the tradition that Absalom's hair got entangled in the tree; however, the text does not support his account of what happened. Absalom was caught by his head.

¹² But the man said to Joab, “Even if I were to receive a thousand *pieces* of silver in my hand, I would not put out my hand against the king’s son; for in our hearing the king commanded you, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, ‘Protect the young man Absalom for me!’ ¹³ Otherwise, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have avoided *me*.”

The man who reported seeing Absalom was loyal to King David but he was also aware of the unscrupulous character of Joab. The fact that he was brave enough to say this to Joab’s face is quite remarkable.

¹⁴ Then Joab said, “I will not waste time here with you.” So he took three spears in his hand and thrust them through the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the midst of the oak. ¹⁵ And ten young men who carried Joab’s armor gathered around and struck Absalom and killed him.

One would think that 3 spears in the heart would be enough to kill any man so why does it say that the 10 young men killed Absalom?

There are two issues that need to be addressed here.

1. These “spears” may have been darts.

See these same two verses in the Septuagint.

14 And Joab said, I will begin this; I will not thus remain with thee. And Joab took three darts in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Abessalom, while he was yet alive in the heart of the oak. 15 And ten young men that bore Joab’s armour compassed Abessalom, and smote him and slew him.

These darts were wooden stakes sharpened and hardened in fire. But someone would rightly argue that these 3 darts in the heart would also kill him.

2. In the heart may refer to the midst of Absalom's body.

If “in the heart of the oak” means in the “midst of the oak” then it makes sense that “in the heart of Absalom” means in the midst of Absalom's body.

The 3 darts would do much less damage than 3 spears. Also the darts in the midst of his body rather than in his heart is survivable.

Joab’s armor bears arrived shortly after Joab had pierced Absalom and they finished the job making sure Absalom could not survive.

Verses 16 - 18

¹⁶ Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained the people. ¹⁷ And they took Absalom and threw him into a deep pit in the forest, and erected over him a very large pile of stones. And all Israel fled, each to his *own* tent. ¹⁸ Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a memorial stone, which is in the King’s Valley, for he said, “I have no son to continue my name.” So he named the memorial stone after his own name, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.

¹⁶ Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained the people. ¹⁷ And they took Absalom and threw him into a deep pit in the forest, and erected over him a very large pile of stones. And all Israel fled, each to his *own* tent.

After the fighting was over the people of Israel buried Absalom in a deep pit and erected a monument of stones over him. Then the people of Israel fled to their respective homes.

¹⁸ Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a memorial stone, which is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to continue my name." So he named the memorial stone after his own name, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day.

Prior to his death Absalom had set up this monument because he had no son to keep his name in remembrance.

However, Absalom did have 3 sons and a daughter at some point in his life. The three sons must have died in their youth but the fate of his daughter is unknown other than that she was a beautiful woman.

See 2 Samuel 14:27

²⁷ And to Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a woman of beautiful appearance.

Verses 19 - 23

¹⁹ Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Please let me run and bring the king news that the Lord has freed him from the hand of his enemies!" ²⁰ But Joab said to him, "You are not the man *to bring* news this day, but you shall bring news another day; however, you shall bring no news this day, because the king's son is dead." ²¹ Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." So the Cushite bowed to Joab and ran. ²² However, Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said once more to Joab, "But whatever happens, please let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why would you run, my son, since you will have no messenger's reward for going?" ²³ "But whatever happens," *he said*, "I will run." So he said to him, "Run." Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and passed by the Cushite.

¹⁹ Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, “Please let me run and bring the king news that the Lord has freed him from the hand of his enemies!”

Joab told Ahimaaz not to run because the good news of victory would be followed by the news of Absalom’s death. In the not so distant past this had not worked out well for the ones who delivered the “good” news.

1. David executed the messenger who brought him the news of Saul's death.

2 Samuel 1:15-16

¹⁵ Then David called one of the young men and said, “Come forward, put him to death.” So he struck him and he died. ¹⁶ And David said to him, “Your blood is on your head, because your *own* mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have finished off the Lord’s anointed.’”

2. He did the same to those who brought him the news about the death of Ishbosheth.

2 Samuel 4:9 – 12

⁹ But David replied to Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said to them, “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, ¹⁰ when the one who informed me, saying, ‘Behold, Saul is dead,’ also viewed himself as the bearer of good news, I seized him and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for *his* news. ¹¹ How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his *own* house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood from your hands and eliminate you *both* from the earth?”

¹² Then David commanded the young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet, and hung them up beside the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the grave of Abner in Hebron.

In both of these cases there were good reasons for the men to be punished. While this was not the case with Ahimaaz, he should have listened to Joab and avoided bringing bad news that would surely pierce the heart of the king.

²¹ Then Joab said to the Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” So the Cushite bowed to Joab and ran.

Joab sent the Cushite because he was an Ethiopian, a black slave. To Joab the life of this man was less valuable than Ahimaaz.

²² However, Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said once more to Joab, “But whatever happens, please let me also run after the Cushite.” And Joab said, “Why would you run, my son, since you will have no messenger’s reward for going?” ²³ “But whatever happens,” *he said*, “I will run.” So he said to him, “Run.” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and passed by the Cushite.

Why would Ahimaaz want to bring the news so badly?

Verses 24 - 27

²⁴ Now David was sitting between the two gates; and the watchman went to the roof of the gate by the wall, and raised his eyes and looked; and behold, a man was running by himself. ²⁵ So the watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, “If he is by himself there is good news in his mouth.” And he came nearer and nearer. ²⁶ Then the watchman saw another man running; and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, “Behold, *another* man is running by himself.” And the king said, “This one also is bringing good news.” ²⁷ The watchman said, “I think the running form of the first one is like the running form of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.” And the king said, “This is a good man, and he is coming with good news.”

²⁴ Now David was sitting between the two gates; and the watchman went to the roof of the gate by the wall, and raised his eyes and looked; and behold, a man was running by himself.

David’s men had persuaded him not to go into battle so he was still at the city of Mahanaim. This city was surrounded by a wall with city gates that had a high column with a roof at both ends of the gate.

²⁵ So the watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, “If he is by himself there is **good news** in his mouth.” ²⁶ Then the watchman saw another man running; and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, “Behold, *another* man is running by himself.” And the king said, “This one also is bringing **good news**.” ²⁷ The watchman said, “I think the running form of the first one is like the running form of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.” And the king said, “This is a good man, and he is coming with **good news**.”

David hoped & wished for “good news” on all fronts but that was not realistic.

Verses 28 - 30

²⁸ Then Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, "All is well." And he prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground. And he said, "Blessed is the Lord your God, who has turned over the men who raised their hands against my lord the king." ²⁹ But the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, and your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I did not know what *it was*." ³⁰ Then the king said, "Turn aside and stand here." So he turned aside and stood still.

Then Ahimaaz called and said to the king, "All is well."

Ahimaaz lied about this; Joab had told him that Absalom was dead. See verse 20.

²⁹ But the king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, and your servant, I saw a great commotion, but I did not know what *it was*."

This was exactly why Joab didn't want Ahimaaz to run. As a result he ended up telling the king two lies. One lie often begets another lie.

Verses 31 - 33

³¹ Then behold, the Cushite arrived, and the Cushite said, "Let my lord the king receive good news, for the Lord has freed you this day from the hand of all those who rose up against you." ³² Then 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 Then the king trembled and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And this is what he said as he walked: "My son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!"

³² Then 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!"

The slave was more honest than Ahimaaz.

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Absalom had brought about his own death by being a rebellious son and committing an act of treason. But David, like most fathers, would rather die than lose their son.