

# David's Defeat of Absalom

2 Samuel 18

## Lesson Outline

### I. Absalom Routed: 2 Samuel 18:1-18

- A. Absalom's Debacle: 2 Samuel 18:1-8
- B. Absalom's Demise: 2 Samuel 18:9-18

### II. David's Report: 2 Samuel 18:19-33

- A. Messenger Dispatched: 2 Samuel 18:19-23
- B. Message Delivered: 2 Samuel 18:24-33

## Absalom Routed

2 Samuel 18:1-18

### Absalom's Debacle: 2 Samuel 18:1-8

#### David's Men Organized

David's men were numbered. We are not told their names or where they were from, but it's likely many aligned with David after hearing about Absalom's deception. According to Jewish historian Josephus, they numbered about 4000.<sup>1</sup> The men were divided into three companies led by three experienced soldiers.

1. *Joab* – David's nephew and captain of the host. He was ruthless but effective on the battlefield (2 Samuel 8:16, 12:26).
2. *Abishai* – David's nephew and a valiant man in battle (1 Samuel 26:6; 1 Chronicles 11:20).
3. *Ittai* – David's dedicated friend who led a group of mighty men (2 Samuel 15:19-22).

It must be noticed that David's strong faith did not lead to neglect of personal responsibilities. Believing God would bless he prepared his men for battle (James 2:18). David wisely used his resources. He neither complained about what he lacked nor coveted what Absalom possessed but carefully planned based upon his situation. It is important to be faithful with what the LORD has given. Too many times we gripe about what could have been instead of using what we have blessed with.

As David prepared to lead the men into battle, his people encouraged him to remain at the city. They were prepared to die if necessary but wanted no harm to come to their anointed king. Since it was

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<sup>1</sup> Flavius Josephus, "The Works of Flavius Josephus: Volume 2," (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1995) p. 453

civil war, there would be much bitterness involved and their enemies clearly wanted to destroy David (2 Samuel 17:2).

Before the men departed, David provided explicit direction concerning Absalom. Because he was young and foolish they were to treat him gently. The men were to fight to win but if Absalom fell into their hands, David requested they spare his life. This was for David's sake, not Absalom's. David knew his son was a wicked vile man that deserved death but being a merciful father he hoped to spare him. The two extremes found in this passage are interesting because they exemplify the relationship between God and sinners.

1. *Intense Hatred of Absalom* – though blessed he opposed his father seeking to slay him. Sinners display no desire for God or His ways and often fight against Him (Romans 3:10-12).
2. *Incredible Love of David* – though despised he loved Absalom hoping to spare him. God loves sinners and is willing to forgive those that come to Him through His Son Jesus Christ (John 3:16, 14:6).

In this case, David allowed sentiment to dictate his decisions making it awkward for his leaders. Any other individual would not have been treated in this manner.

### David's Men Outstanding

The two forces met in the Ephraim woods where the battle went in David's favor. Absalom quickly found he was no match for his father, as a leader and strategist. It also became evident there was nobody equal to David's captains – Abishai, Joab, and Ittai. Though they had more numbers, Absalom and Amasa were soundly defeated. Their army was unable to overcome David's seasoned veterans.

The fierce fighting led to the loss of 20,000 Israelites. These discontent men suffered for their treasonous actions (Galatians 6:7-8). Instead of remaining loyal to their anointed king, they followed a fool and were slain (Proverbs 17:19; Luke 6:39). What good were Absalom's words? What advantage did he provide them? They discovered the results of rejecting God's ways in order to follow an ungodly charmer. Though the rebellion was stopped David was not entirely victorious. In the process of winning, the nation was weakened. Inner strife produces nothing but trouble, whether it involves a family, church, or nation (Proverbs 17:14). It's best to live in peace whenever possible (Romans 12:18).

### **Absalom's Demise: 2 Samuel 18:9-18**

#### Absalom Stuck

When the battle turned against him, Absalom hastily retreated upon his mule. Apparently he rode near David's men who may have allowed him to continue because of the king's direction. Incredibly, his head became stuck in a tree. Perhaps his head, along with his hair, were tangled in the thick branches or his head lodged in a fork of a tree branch. Either way, his mule continued leaving Absalom hanging in the air unable to break free. The vain man became a spectacle (Psalm 2:1-6).

Unable to escape or defend himself, Absalom hung helplessly in the air. It appears enough time elapsed for him to be helped down but nobody assisted him.

Absalom's odd predicament was reported to Joab. He immediately asked why the man did not slay the rebellious traitor. Had he slain Absalom, Joab would have greatly rewarded him, or so he claimed, with ten shekels of silver and a new girdle. This was a promotion equivalent to a captain's position.<sup>2</sup> The man's response displayed a correct attitude.

1. *He was obedient* – he reminded Joab of David's message.
2. *He was dedicated* – he would not rebel against the king's orders, not even for reward. Some would do anything for power or possessions, not this man.
3. *He was knowledgeable* – he knew such an act was worthy of death.
4. *He was wise* – he knew Joab's character and understood the captain would have sided against him before the king. Joab's men knew he was a selfish schemer.

Joab did not reply to the man's comments, perhaps knowing he was correct. The ruthless leader wasted no more time with the man and went off in search of Absalom.

### **Absalom Slain**

Joab took three darts and thrust them through Absalom, and then his armor bearers slew him. The darts were like small spears, similar to arrows.<sup>3</sup> Though it may have been the accepted way to treat a vile traitor, it was a direct violation of David's order. Joab was a valiant leader that often sought his own desires, like bitterly avenging personal matters (2 Samuel 3:27).

After Absalom's death, the trumpet was blown signifying the end of the battle. With the danger over, David's men halted their pursuit of the Israelites. Absalom was given a crude burial. In his short time on the throne he erected a pillar in the king's dale, which was also known as the Kidron Valley near Jerusalem (Genesis 14:17). It was named after him and may have been where he planned to be buried. The monument of pride remained empty while his body was placed in a pit of shame. He is remembered as a vain man, traitor to his nation, and a rebellious son (Proverbs 20:20, 30:17). His life reminds us of the danger of pride (Proverbs 16:18).

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Henry, "Matthew Henry's Commentary, Volume 2," (United States: Hendrickson, 1996) p. 421

<sup>3</sup> John Butler, "David: The King of Israel," (Iowa: LBC Publications, 1998) p. 901

## David's Report 2 Samuel 18:19-33

### **Messenger Dispatched:** 2 Samuel 18:19-23

#### **Cushi Commissioned**

With the battle over and Absalom dead, Joab had the task of informing David. Ahimaaz, the priest, stepped forward requesting permission to relay the outcome to the king but was denied. Instead Joab sent Cushi with a message for David. He was told to tell David what he had seen, so apparently he was present when Absalom died, perhaps he was one of Joab's armor bearers. Unlike Ahimaaz, he waited to be called and sent. He may not have been as fast as Ahimaaz but he proved to be faithful.

Evidently Ahimaaz was prohibited because of Absalom's death. Maybe it was not proper for a priest to deliver such a message or Joab wanted to protect Ahimaaz from David's anger, though it is unlikely David would have slain a faithful priest like he did the deceitful Ethiopian (2 Samuel 1:14-16). Whatever the case, Ahimaaz should have been content with Joab's decision.

#### **Ahimaaz Continued**

Ahimaaz desperately sought permission to take a report to the king. He may have had David in mind and wanted to make certain good news was given before the bad (Proverbs 25:25). He was reminded he had nothing to deliver, whereas Cushi carried the official message from Joab to David. It appears Ahimaaz knew of the victory but was ignorant concerning the details surrounding Absalom's death. Eventually Joab consented and sent Ahimaaz to David.

In his zeal, Ahimaaz failed to submit to Joab's authority. He didn't like the answer, so he argued. He didn't agree with the decision, so he persisted. Apparently he was a faithful man with good intentions but here he was discontent. Though it may be difficult at times, it is important to be content with what the LORD allows (Philippians 4:11).

### **Message Delivered:** 2 Samuel 18:24-33

#### **Information Concerning the Action**

As David eagerly waited, the watchman spotted a lone man running towards the city. Since he was by himself, David concluded the news was good. If the battle continued he would not have been sent and if they were losing many would have been retreating. After a few moments, another man was seen approaching the city, which may have caused some confusion. Soon they were able to identify the first runner as Ahimaaz. He had taken a different route and was able to overcome Cushi. Upon seeing Ahimaaz it appears David had his hopes up. He knew him to be a good man, and believed Joab would not have sent him with bad tidings (Proverbs 25:13).

Ahimaaz hurried towards the city with his message for David. His direction and speed allowed him to arrive first with a report.

1. *It was positive* – as he approached the city he cried out that all was well. This was a joyful announcement that implied David's men were victorious.
2. *It was praise* – he gave the LORD glory, remembering Him and recognizing His blessing (Psalm 92:1). He understood the work of the LORD in the affairs of men.
3. *It was partial* – when asked, he was unable to provide a direct answer concerning Absalom.

Ahimaaz got his way and outran Cushai but his message was incomplete. His speed was impressive but his report was inadequate. He failed because like Joab stated he had no message to deliver. Instead of being content, through persistence he discovered his inability to deliver a full report. He was not reprimanded but directed to stand aside.

### Information Concerning Absalom

Cushai arrived with the official report from Joab. He may have been beaten to the city but delivered a complete message. He was quick to inform the king of the victory. Because of Ahimaaz, David knew this so instead of seeking further information he asked about Absalom. It is clear what was on David's mind. Cushai responded appropriately.

1. *Cushai answered respectfully* – he said nothing negative of Absalom.
2. *Cushai answered discreetly* – he did not provide the details of Absalom's death or burial.
3. *Cushai answered wisely* – he stated Absalom died with the other traitors who looked to hurt David.

Though Cushai's answer was true, the message was difficult for David to receive. Overcome by his emotions, David went to a private chamber above the gate where he wept for Absalom. Here we find the grieving father of a rebellious son (Proverbs 17:21, 25). Alone with his thoughts, perhaps believing he was partly to blame and wondering if he could have done something different, David grieved greatly. It was a bittersweet day for David. His men defeated the threat but his son entered into eternity.