

### The Death of Absalom' and David's Grief

#### 2 Samuel 18

2 Samuel 18 - *"And David numbered the people who were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. <sup>2</sup> Then David sent out one third of the people under the hand of Joab, one third under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I also will surely go out with you myself."<sup>3</sup> But the people answered, "You shall not go out! For if we flee away, they will not care about us; nor if half of us die, will they care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us now. For you are now more help to us in the city."<sup>4</sup> 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 by thousands. <sup>5</sup> Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom.*

*<sup>6</sup> So the people went out into the field of battle against Israel. And the battle was in the woods of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David, and a great slaughter of twenty thousand took place there that day. <sup>8</sup> For the battle there was scattered over the face of the whole countryside, and the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then Absalom met the servants of David. Absalom rode on a mule. The mule went under the thick boughs of a great terebinth tree, and his head caught in the terebinth; so he was left hanging between heaven and earth. And the mule which was under him went on. <sup>10</sup> Now a certain man saw it and told Joab, and said, "I just saw Absalom hanging in a terebinth tree!"<sup>11</sup> So Joab said to the man who told him, "You just saw him! And why did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a belt."*

*<sup>12</sup> But the man said to Joab, "Though I were to receive a thousand shekels of silver in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king's son. For in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Beware lest anyone touch the young man Absalom!' <sup>13</sup> Otherwise I would have dealt falsely against my own life. For there is nothing hidden from the king, and you yourself would have set yourself against me."<sup>14</sup> Then Joab said, "I cannot linger with you." And he took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom's heart, while he was still alive in the midst of the terebinth tree. <sup>15</sup> And ten young men who bore Joab's armor surrounded Absalom, and struck and killed him.*

*<sup>16</sup> So Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing Israel. For Joab held back the people. <sup>17</sup> And they took Absalom and cast him into a large pit in the woods, and laid a very large heap of stones over him. Then all Israel fled, everyone to his tent,<sup>18</sup> Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up a pillar for himself, which 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 to this day it is called Absalom's Monument.*

<sup>19</sup> Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, “Let me run now and take the news to the king, how the LORD has avenged him of his enemies.”<sup>20</sup> And Joab said to him, “You shall not take the news this day, for you shall take the news another day. But today you shall take no news, because the king’s son is dead.”<sup>21</sup> Then Joab said to the Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” So the Cushite bowed himself to Joab and ran.<sup>22</sup> And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said again to Joab, “But whatever happens, please let me also run after the Cushite.” So Joab said, “Why will you run, my son, since you have no news ready?”<sup>23</sup> “But whatever happens,” he said, “let me run.” So he said to him, “Run.” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain, and outran the Cushite.

<sup>24</sup> Now David was sitting between the two gates. And the watchman went up to the roof over the gate, to the wall, lifted his eyes and looked, and there was a man, running alone.<sup>25</sup> Then the watchman cried out and told the king. And the king said, “If he is alone, there is news in his mouth.” And he came rapidly and drew near.<sup>26</sup> Then the watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, “There is another man, running alone!” And the king said, “He also brings news.”

<sup>27</sup> So 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.”<sup>28</sup> So Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, “All is well!” Then he bowed down with his face to the earth before the king, and said, “Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king!”

<sup>29</sup> The king said, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” Ahimaaz answered, “When Joab sent the king’s servant and me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what it was about.”<sup>30</sup> And the king said, “Turn aside and stand here.” So he turned aside and stood still.<sup>31</sup> Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, “There is good news, my lord the king! For the LORD has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you.”

<sup>32</sup> And the king said to the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” So the Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm, be like that young man!”<sup>33</sup> Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: “O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!”

## Background Notes

Absalom didn't follow the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17). Ahithophel advised Absalom to follow David quickly before David could escape over the Jordan River and get organized. Instead, Absalom followed the counsel of Hushai, David's spy, and waited in Jerusalem until he could gather a huge army from the entire nation of Israel. This delay gave David time to get to Mahanaim, a fortified city in the land of Gilead, on the east side of the Jordan River. There David was able to plan and prepare for the coming battle. 2 Samuel 18:2 says that David sent his forces out to battle in three divisions: one under Joab, one under Abishai, and one under Ittai the loyal man from Gath. Before the troops departed from Mahanaim, David commanded his three generals to deal gently with Absalom his son.

## **Doctrinal Points**

### **1. God has ordained nature to serve His purposes.**

2 Samuel 18:6-14 – *“And the battle was in the woods of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> The people of Israel were overthrown there before the servants of David... for the battle there was scattered over the face of the whole countryside, and the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured... Absalom rode on a mule. The mule went under the thick boughs of a great terebinth tree, and his head caught in the terebinth; so he was left hanging between heaven and earth. And the mule, which was under him, went on... Then Joab...took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom’s heart, while he was still alive in the midst of the terebinth tree.*

Absalom, with his great army, was defeated by David’s outnumbered forces. Many of the men in David’s accumulated army came from this area, and they were able to use the dense forest of Ephraim to their advantage, probably hiding behind trees and picking off Absalom’s men who were not used to fighting in that kind of terrain. Verse 8 says that “the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.” This does not mean that there were man-eating trees in the forest(!) - it means that Absalom’s men got separated and lost in the thick woods, and fell into pits and over rocks. They were no longer an effective fighting unit and thus they were “devoured” by the forest.

Do you think that it was just by chance that this battle happened to be in the dense forest of Ephraim with its pits, rocks, and uneven terrain? Of course not! God Himself planned this location for the battle. God has ordained nature to serve His purposes.

Verse 9 says that Absalom was riding a mule, and when the mule went under the thick boughs of an oak tree, Absalom’s head got caught in the branches of the tree. The mule kept on running, so Absalom was left hanging “between heaven and earth.” An oak tree was the undoing of proud Absalom! Again, do you think this happened just by chance? No way! God had ordained it. God ordained every detail of this event that ended Absalom’s short-lived grab for power - including the very position of the oak branches that caught Absalom’s head.

God has ordained nature to serve His purposes. If you disagree with this point, read the biblical accounts of the Genesis Flood and the destruction of Sodom Gomorrah (just for starters). God certainly has ordained nature to serve His purposes! God can use oak trees and forests, rocks and water, wind and weather and other things of nature to accomplish His purposes today. In fact, God recently used hurricanes to cancel a couple of immoral festivals. God has ordained nature to serve His purposes.

### **2. God has ordained sorrow to serve His purposes.**

2 Samuel 18:24; 31-33 - *“ Now David was sitting between the two gates. And the watchman went up to the roof over the gate, to the wall, lifted his eyes and looked, and there was a man, running alone.... <sup>31</sup> Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, “There is good news, my lord the king! For the LORD has avenged you this day of all those who rose against*

you.”<sup>32</sup> *And the king said to the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” So the Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm, be like that young man!”*<sup>33</sup> *Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: “O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!”*

David was sitting “between the two gates” of Mahanaim, and the watchman “went up to the roof over the gate.” This means that Mahanaim was a fortified city with double-chambered gates. A double-chambered gate means the city gateway had two sets of gates for better defensive purposes, and David was sitting between the gates. The gate area of the city was like today’s City Hall or the county courthouse, and the chambers between the gates were used for official business in peacetime. The whole gate complex had a roof over it, and sometimes city gates had towers for defense and lookout on the roof of the gate.

From the roof over the gate, the watchmen reported to David that two runners were coming with news of the battle. Both Ahimaaz and the Cushite reported the good news of victory, but only the Cushite reported the news that Absalom had been killed. However, he wisely didn’t go into all the details of how Absalom had died at the hands of Joab and his ten armor bearers while dangling in a tree. David was overwhelmed with grief when he heard the sad news. He wept and cried out, “*O Absalom my son, my son!*” How sad! This was the sad consequence of David’s sins of adultery and murder, and his failure to discipline his sons for their sins. God was using the grief of Absalom’s death as judgment in David’s life.

God can use sorrow to discipline His children today - but He wouldn’t have to if we would judge ourselves when we sin! 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 says, “*For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*” Many Christians suffer needless sorrow because they don’t practice self-discipline, and they don’t judge themselves when they sin. God has ordained sorrow to serve His purpose.

## **Practical Application**

### **Watch out that your strength doesn’t become your weakness!**

We certainly see this truth illustrated in Absalom’s death, don’t we? Absalom was so proud of his good looks and his glorious head of hair. Remember that he used his looks and charm to steal away the hearts of the men of Israel? Now that once-proud head was caught in a tree, and probably (as the Jewish historian Josephus records), Absalom’s beautiful long hair was entangled in the branches. Absalom was trapped- his strength became his weakness!

Watch out! That can happen to us as well. Whatever strength that God has blessed you with - whether it be talent or beauty or some unique ability – these strengths can become your downfall if they lead to pride and self-glory. Watch out that your strength doesn’t become your weakness!