

2 Samuel 18 Introduction – The Death of Absalom and the Defeat of His Army.

18:1-5, David's Battle Plan. Because of Hushai's counsel in chapter 17, Absalom delayed his pursuit of David. This allowed David precious time to prepare a counter-attack. When chapter 17 concludes, Absalom and "*all the men of Israel*" (17:24) cross over the Jordan to find and destroy David. The military force accompanying king Absalom was massive (likely, 25,000 to 30,000 men, far more than Ahithophel's recommended force of 12,000; see 17:1 and 18:7). The new king had every reason to be confident of a crushing victory over his father David and over those who were with him. However, Absalom's plan failed to take into account one critical factor: the presence and blessing of God Most High! God was not with Absalom; to the contrary, God was against him (17:14). For nearly every action that Absalom took, it was in direct rebellion against God!

David divided his forces into three groups: one third under the command of Joab; one third under Abishai, Joab's brother; and one third under Ittai the Gittite. As the army marched out of Mahanaim, David stood at the gate with instruction for each commander in the presence of all the men, saying, "*Deal gently with ... Absalom*" (v.5), that is, 'take Absalom alive'. "*And all the people heard when the king gave orders ... about Absalom*" (v.5).

18:6-8, Absalom's Forces Severely Defeated.

Strategically planned by David, the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim (a large forested area about 30 miles N. of Mahanaim, on the eastside of the Jordan). It was a densely wooded forest that could "*devour*" people (Absalom was even caught in the boughs of a tree in this forest). It was likely an area well-known to David because of earlier warfare in the region. "*The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David,*" and the loss of life in the army of king Absalom was great: 20,000 men! (7). "*And the forest devoured more people that day than the sword*" (8).

18:9-16, Absalom's Death.

The first word in verse 9 is "*happened.*" From man's perspective events may appear to just "happen;" but, in God's world they are divine appointments. Absalom's appointed day of divine judgment had come. The emphatic placement of the word "*happen*" in verse 9 is effectively placed to arouse the interest of the reader to "behold" the providential hand of God in this encounter between Absalom and the servants of David. In Absalom's haste to escape, the LORD used the thick forest as His servant of judgment. One Bible commentator pictured the event well, writing, "The mule was a royal mount; in losing his mule Absalom has lost his kingdom" (EBC, p. 1019). Absalom was caught in a mesh of tangled branches, but his mule moved on without him. So too, Absalom judgment from God had come, and the kingdom he sought at any price had come and it had now gone.

A servant of David spotted Absalom in his helpless condition and reported it to Joab, the commanding officer. Joab, in clear disregard for king David's instruction, "*took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom*" (v.14). He then "*blew the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel*" (v.16). To his credit, if Joab had not stopped the rout, many more who were in the army of Israel would have died.

18:17-33, Absalom's Death Reported to David. At Mahanaim, David awaited word concerning the battle's progress. Eventually, one messenger then another messenger was spotted bringing news to the king. The first messenger, Ahimaaz, cried out, "*All is well!*" But the concern that weighed heaviest on David's heart was: "*Is it well with the young man Absalom?*" (v.29). For that news David had to wait for the next messenger's report. The next messenger, a Cushite, also came with good news for the king, saying, "*Good news for my lord the king!*" (31). However, again David inquired concerning Absalom. But the news was *not* good concerning his son. When David learned of Absalom's death, he lifted his voice and wept, saying, "*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!*" (v.33). Oh, the bitter consequences of David's sins; like towering sea billows they continue to pummel the king.