



Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

2 Samuel 18

“Then
David came
to
Mahanaim”

“Absalom
camped in
the land of
Gilead.”



Notice as we Read:

The author refers to David no less than five times in this section as “the king” leaving no doubt as to who was the legitimate ruler and who was really in charge.



2 Samuel 18:1-3

1 Then David numbered the people who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. **2** David sent the people out, one third under the command of Joab, one third under the command of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the command of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I myself will surely go out with you also." **3** But the people said, "You should not go out; for if we indeed flee, they will not care about us; even if half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us; therefore now it is better that you be ready to help us from the city."

David Has Been Given Time

- And in that time he has been able to exercise his administrative and military skills to respond to Absalom's challenge.
- His 1st priority: Organizing the troops.
- David understands the advantages in striking first, in his time, at a strategic location, and under ideal conditions.



David's Five-Tiered Army

- Level 1: Regular Army
- Level 2: “Commanders of Hundreds”
- Level 3: “Commanders of Thousands”
- Level 4: General Officers
 - Joab, Abishai, Ittai the Gittite
- Level 5: David, Commander-in-Chief



David Intends to Lead his Troops

- However, the soldiers thought this too risky and implore David to “help us from the city,” so if the attack falters, and David’s men are forced to flee, the cause to restore David to the throne can continue.
- While he is probably not happy about it, David recognizes the wisdom in that plan.



2 Samuel 18:4-5

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 The king charged
Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying,
“Deal gently for my sake with the
young man Absalom.” And all the
people heard when the king charged all
the commanders concerning Absalom.

David is Almost Democratic

“Whatever seems best to you I will do.”

- However, David does give one decidedly firm and public order to the army:

“Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.”

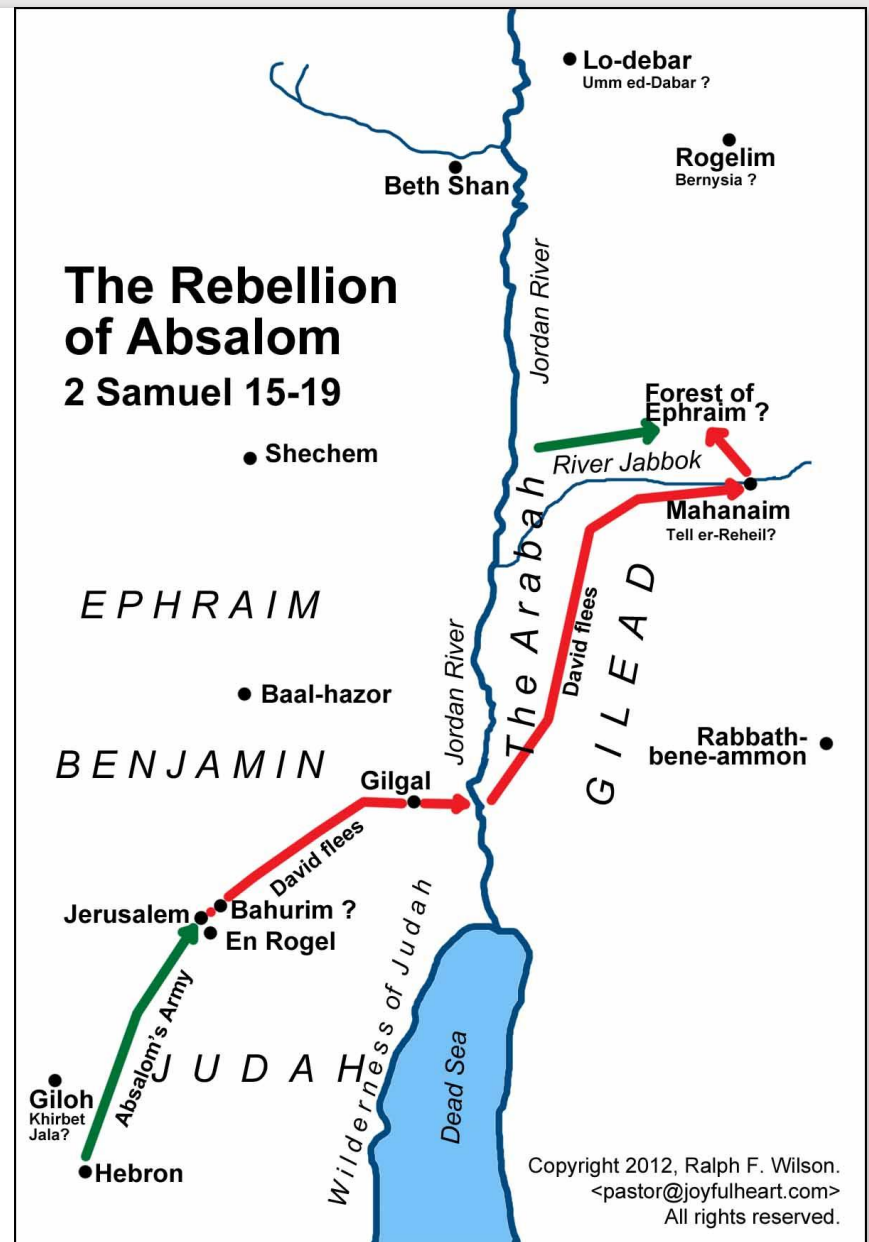


2 Samuel 18:6-8

6 Then the people went out into the field against Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. **7** The people of Israel were defeated there before the servants of David, and the slaughter there that day was great, 20,000 men. **8** For the battle there was spread over the whole countryside, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

The Forest of Ephraim

- The location of the forest of Ephraim is unknown, but it was probably in Gilead.
- As early as the Judges period, so many Ephraimites had settled in Gilead that the western Ephraimites called the Gileadites “fugitives of Ephraim” (Judges 12:4)



David Picks the Battlefield

- By fighting in a “forest,” David minimizes Absalom’s numerical advantage.
- David’s three commanding officers show their military acumen by fragmenting Absalom’s army.
- The text says “the battle there was spread over the whole countryside.”



Israel and Guerrilla Warfare

“the forest devoured
more people that day
than the sword
devoured.”





2 Samuel 18:9-10

9 Now Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. For Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. And his head caught fast in the oak, so he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him kept going. **10** When a certain man saw it, he told Joab and said, “Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak.”



Symbolism

- One Commentator said:

“The mule was a royal mount; in losing his mule Absalom has lost his kingdom.”



Absalom's Fate

“Behold, I saw Absalom *hanging* in
an oak.”

• תלה *talah*

There is theological and thematic
significance to this...



Deuteronomy 21:22-23a

22 “If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you *hang* him on a tree, **23** his corpse shall not *hang* all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is *hanged* is accursed of God)...”



Absalom Broke Divine Law

- He rebelled against his father (Exodus 20:12).
- He openly had sexual relations with his father's harem (Leviticus 20:11).

He had massive armies protecting him and a means of escape (mule) not afforded other soldiers, but he could not escape judgment...

Deuteronomy 27:16, 20

16 Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother...

20 Cursed is he who lies with his father's wife...

Absalom has done both, and the Lord will uphold His Law.



2 Samuel 18:11-13

11 Then Joab said to the man who had told him, “Now behold, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? And I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt.” **12** The man said to Joab, “Even if I should 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 charged you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, ‘Protect for me the young man Absalom!’ **13** Otherwise, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof.”

Joab Gets Angry

- Ironically, David's general is also a rebel against the king.
- Although David had clearly ordered his men to be “gentle” with Absalom, Joab had promised a reward of “ten pieces of silver and a belt” to anyone who killed Absalom.



The Soldier Refuses

“Even if I should receive a thousand pieces of silver in my hand, I would not put out my hand against the king’s son...”

- And David would find out!

“there is nothing hidden from the king”

- And he doesn’t trust Joab for a second!

“then you yourself would have stood aloof”

2 Samuel 18:14-15

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 yet 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.



When You Want a Job Done Right...

- He takes “three spears” and ten armor bearers.
- They arrive at the oak tree and find Absalom suspended, just as the soldier described.
- Without hesitation, Joab thrusts all three spears “through the heart of Absalom,” and his armorbearers do likewise.





Why Did Joab Do This?

- Perhaps Joab feared David would have pardoned Absalom's sin thus giving him another opportunity to revolt.
- This is not the first nor will it be the last time that Joab acted on his own instincts in disobedience to the king.



Joab
Murders
Abner
(2 Samuel 3)



**Joab Murders
Amasa
(2 Samuel 20)**



He will later
ally himself
with Adonijah
(1 Kings 1)



2 Samuel 18:16-17

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



Absalom (and the Coup) is Dead

- More irony: Joab followed Ahithophel's logic—that the only one who had to be destroyed was the “king.”
- In accordance with Deuteronomy 21:23, Absalom's body was removed from the tree before nightfall, thrown “into a deep pit in the forest,” and covered with a “great heap of stones.”



Why is this Significant?

- It denied Absalom the honor of being laid to rest in the family tomb.
- Technically, Absalom is buried outside of the Promised Land.
- The manner of burial identified Absalom with another rebel, Achan (Josh. 7:26).
- The death and burial also identify him with the king of Ai, an enemy of the Lord's people (Josh. 8:29).
- It also fulfilled (in a way) Deuteronomy 21:21, which demanded a rebellious son be stoned.

This is Now the 3rd Son

That David has
Lost as a Result of
his Sin with
Bathsheba.



2 Samuel 18:18

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



The Text Tells Us

- Absalom built the monument because, “I have no son to preserve my name.”
- **But back in 2 Samuel 14:27, we read:**
“To Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a woman of beautiful appearance.”

His 3 sons must have died prematurely.





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Elena Muttik

“Tomb of Absalom”

- Absalom’s shrine has traditionally been identified as the monument of Absalom, referred to in 2 Samuel 18.
- For centuries, it was the custom among passersby—Jews, Christians and Muslims—to throw stones at the monument.
- Residents of Jerusalem would bring their unruly children to the site to teach them what became of a rebellious son.



2 Samuel 18:19-23

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 carry news this day, but you shall carry news another day; however, you shall carry no news today 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** Now 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 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 up the Cushite.

Ahimaaz the Messenger

- He requests permission to carry news of the battle to King David, however, Joab refuses to grant him the honor.

Why?

- Joab may think that reporting Absalom's death would put Ahimaaz in danger (David killed the last two messengers who reported to him about the death of two kings, Saul and Ish-bosheth).



Joab Sends a Non-Israelite

- A “Cushite,” perhaps Joab’s slave, is sent instead, and he gladly accepts the responsibility.
- Ahimaaz will not take no for an answer and promises to “run after the Cushite.”
- Thinking he will arrive after the initial shock is delivered to David, Joab gives Ahimaaz leave to go.



Ahimaaz Be Like...



2 Samuel 18:24-27

24 Now David was sitting between the two gates; and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate by the wall, and raised his eyes and looked, and behold, a man running by himself. **25** The watchman called 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 running by himself." And the king said, "This one also is bringing good news." **27** The watchman said, "I think the running of the first one is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "This is a good man and comes with good news."

Meanwhile...

- David is anxiously awaiting word from the battle, and he has a watchman on the ramparts to report to him any activity.
- The watchman sees “a man running by himself,” and interprets it as good news.
- And then “another man running by himself,” which again is interpreted as good news.

2 Samuel 18:28-33

28 Ahimaaz called 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 delivered up the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king.” **29** 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 tumult, 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. **31** 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, “Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be as that young man!” **33** The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

Ahimaaz Reaches the City First

- He provides a short answer, “All is well.”

- **And then a longer one:**

“And he prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground. And he said, ‘Blessed is the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king.’”



David Only Has One Question

“Is it well with the young man
Absalom?”

- Ahimaaz takes Joab’s warnings to heart and avoids the truth:

“When Joab sent the king’s servant,
and your servant, I saw a great tumult,
but I did not know what it was.”



David Then Waits for the 2nd Man

- The Cushite confirms the good news –
“the Lord has freed you this day from the hand of all those who rose up against you.”

And when asked about Absalom, he too avoids specific details, but confirms –

“Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be as that young man!”



David is Crushed

The king was deeply moved (*lit. tremble, quake*) and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept.

“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”



Seeing David's Reaction...

Was Joab right
to do what he
did?



In Coming Weeks:

- God had promised to punish David for his disregard of the Mosaic Covenant and the Lord.
- However, God promised that He would not cut him off as He had cut off Saul (12:10-12).
- The following chapters record Yahweh's restoration of His anointed after discipline.



