

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 11A
SECOND SAMUEL
CHAPTER 18**

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 18 presents a sad picture of a broken-hearted father. Absalom was killed in a battle to dethrone his father. It is indeed torturous for any parent to experience ungratefulness from the very children whom they have nurtured and brought up. It is also heartbreakingly painful to see them die prematurely, before their three score years and ten.

Chapter 18 records the showdown between David and his son Absalom. Absalom's death in battle was described in some detail. The chapter ends with David being informed of his son's death and his mourning for him.

COMMENTARY

**Instruction from David before
Battle—18:1-8**

Absalom led his large army of less experienced generals and mostly militia-men of Judah to battle against his father. David had recovered from his initial flight from Jerusalem to Mahanaim. He organized his men to meet the enemies.

Joab, in the past, had been the head of his army. This time, David divided the army into three parts and Joab had to share the command with

two others namely, Abishai, his brother, and Ittai the Gittite, a Philistine mercenary soldier. Perhaps the mention of these facts was to point us to the possibility that sharing the command with Abishai was probably acceptable to Joab but sharing with Ittai was probably not.

David desired to personally lead the army but his people would not allow him to do so. Their love for the king was seen by their reply. They reasoned that David would be better off remaining in Mahanaim. If they should lose the battle, the enemy would not be interested in anyone of them but they would pursue after David at all costs. They told David that "thou art worth ten thousand of us" (v.3). David submitted to their request—"what seemeth you best I will do".

As they marched off before him, David specially commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai to be gentle with Absalom for his sake. David's charge to his three generals was loud and clear for all the men heard the instruction. David was probably very confident that he would win the battle.

The battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. This was no accident. The location of the battle was surely ordered by the Lord. Perhaps if they had fought in open country, Absalom's larger army might have prevailed. The forest was dense and more soldiers died in the forest than by the sword. The battleground was more suited to experienced and courageous soldiers rather than the sheer number of inexperienced men that Absalom commanded. David's men prevailed and Absalom's army suffered great losses – 20,000 men were killed (v.7).

Absalom was Killed in Battle —18:9-18

When Absalom was confronted by David's men, he tried to escape on his mule. In the course of his flight amidst the low-lying branches of the forest, his head was caught in one of the oak branches. His mule went off from under him and he was left hanging from his head. His hair was his pride and joy but it had now become his hindrance and downfall. He, who wanted to be head of Israel, was left hanging by his head! Could this be an example of biblical humour?

One of the men told Joab: "Behold I saw Absalom hanged in an oak". Joab immediately asked the man why he did not kill Absalom for he, Joab, would handsomely reward him with "ten shekels of silver and a girdle" (v.10). But the man displayed courage and loyalty to his king. He answered Joab that even if he were rewarded a hundredfold yet he would not kill the king's son. He reminded Joab that they had all heard clearly David's directive not to kill Absalom. He further reasoned that if he had done so, he would be putting his own life in danger because nothing could be hidden from the king. Could this be a reference to what David did to the men who killed king Saul? This soldier might be thinking that if David sought to avenge his son's death, and commanded Joab to kill the one who disobeyed his order, Joab would probably see to it personally that he be killed. History is full of stories of those who betrayed the people who carried out their commands. The loyalty of this soldier to his king was admirable.

Joab had no time to argue or reason with him. He took "three darts" (arrows or light spears), found Absalom and thrust them through his

heart while the latter was hanging from the tree. Then 10 of Joab's armour bearers took turns to impale Absalom. Absalom was probably dead already as three darts pierced his heart. These 10 men went through the motion even as they thrust their spears into Absalom's body.

Now that Absalom was killed, Joab sounded the trumpet to end the war so as to prevent further bloodshed and killing. The killing of Absalom was a very good tactical move to bring the rebellion and "civil" war to a swift conclusion. The rebellion was quenched immediately upon the death of the chief rebel, Absalom! Joab and his men took the body of Absalom and threw it into a large pit in the forest and "laid a very great heap of stones upon him" (v.17). In contrast when he was alive, Absalom had built a memorial monument for himself in "the king's dale" which was known as "Absalom's place" in the Kidron valley near Jerusalem.

The Tactical Telling of Absalom's Demise—18:19-33

Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok the priest, volunteered to break the news of their victory to David. Joab told him not to do so. He could bring news on other days but not this day because "the king's son is dead". Joab was actually acting in the interest of Ahimaaz. He knew that David might burst into a terrible rage and kill the bearer of bad news – the news that his beloved son, Absalom, was dead. In the past, David had been known to kill messengers who brought bad news to him. Joab sent Cush, (from Cush, south of Egypt) an African slave. It seemed that, to Joab, Cush was expendable. Cush obeyed Joab and ran off. However, Ahimaaz was determined to bring the

news to David. He asked Joab again who reluctantly agreed. Ahimaaz reached David first because he took the way of the plain instead of the undulating terrain.

Now David was anxiously waiting between the gates of Mahanaim. Ahimaaz came to David and said: "All is well"; and falling down to his face on the ground, he said: "Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king" (v.28). David showed no interest in the outcome of the war. He was more interested in Absalom: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz feigned ignorance of what had happened to Absalom. He realized the wisdom of Joab in not allowing him to be the news bearer. Joab had known that David would ask about Absalom above everyone and everything else. Ahimaaz was asked to stand aside while the king was told that a second messenger was coming. Cushie came and told the king: "Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee." Once again, David showed his interest in his son, asking the same question, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Cushie answered, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is" (v.32). We observe that Cushie did not directly mention the name of Absalom. He said in a roundabout way that Absalom had been killed by saying that all who rebelled against David, had been killed by the LORD, including Absalom.

Notice that David asked him the same question he posed to Ahimaaz. Cushie spoke the truth whereas Ahimaaz lied. An insignificant and a lower status man, often despised by

others, spoke the truth whereas a notable Aaronic priest lied.

David was "much moved". As he went up to the room above the gate, he wept. He repeated "my son" five times in one verse (v.33). It was not just the grieving of a father for the death of a son whom he loved. David said, "Would God I had died for thee." David implied that if it were possible, he would have taken Absalom's place. In other words, David implied that he was the guilty man. He sinned against God with Bathsheba! He was the one who had allowed evil to perpetuate in his own home instead of putting a stop to it. He had the power but he did nothing.

PRACTICAL VALUE

First, what strikes us is David's desire to win back his kingdom but not at the expense of Absalom's death. He made that very clear to his entire army. He put on two hats, the hat of a father who loved his son and the hat of a king who needed to punish a rebel. Such dilemmas are often experienced both inside the local churches as well as in the affairs of the world. In cases like these, it is very difficult to make a right decision.

Second, Joab's unilateral decision to kill Absalom against his king's clear and public command would put David in a spot. If David did nothing and let the matter rest, then Joab would be seen as more right than David. If he killed Joab for disobeying his command, then he might have a new civil law in his hands since Joab was very well connected to the entire army.

Third, David deeply grieved for Absalom. There is nothing wrong in grieving for someone whom we

dearly loved. Was David's grieving mixed with guilt? Did he blame himself for Absalom's death?

AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 2 Samuel 18:1-18; Psalm 3:1-8; Judges 16:15-21.

Tuesday: 2 Samuel 18:19-33; Romans 5:7-10.

Wednesday: 2 Samuel 18:1-33.

Thursday: 2 Samuel 18:1-33.

Friday: 2 Samuel 18:1-33.

Analysis:

Text	Practical Value
2 Samuel 18:1-5	
2 Samuel 18:6-18	
2 Samuel 18:19-33	

Discussion Questions

1. Is it true that David was really worth 10,000 of his own men including the generals? Can we apply this in our church or in our lives? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Was it right for David to ask that Absalom’s life be spared since he had definitely “touched” the LORD’s anointed? Remember how David dealt with those who “touched” the Lord’s anointed in the past.

5. How did David take the news of the death of his son, Absalom, who had tried to kill him – did he wear the hat of a king or a father?

3. Why did Joab assign Cushie, a non-Israelite, to break the news of Absalom’s defeat and death? Why not assign Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok the priest? Do you agree with the observations made in the notes?

4. Do you agree with the lie of Ahimaaz? What would you have done in his place?
