

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

David reviews and arranges the people, and gives the command to Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, 2 Samuel 18:1, 2 Samuel 18:2. On his expressing a desire to accompany them to the battle, they will not permit him, 2 Samuel 18:3. He reviews them as they go out of the city, and gives commandment to the captains to save Absalom, 2 Samuel 18:4, 2 Samuel 18:5. They join battle with Absalom and his army, who are discomfited with the loss of twenty thousand men, 2 Samuel 18:6-8. Absalom, fleeing away, is caught by his head in an oak; Joab finds him, and transfixes him with three darts, 2 Samuel 18:9-15. The servants of David are recalled, and Absalom buried, 2 Samuel 18:16-18. Ahimaaz and Cushi bring the tidings to David, who is greatly distressed at hearing of the death of Absalom, and makes bitter lamentation for him, 2 Samuel 18:19-33.

Verse 1

And set captains of thousands - By this time David's small company was greatly recruited; but what its number was we cannot tell. Josephus says it amounted to four thousand men. Others have supposed that they amounted to ten thousand; for thus they understand a clause in 2 Samuel 18:3, which they think should be read, We are now ten thousand strong.

Verse 3

But now thou art worth ten thousand of us - The particle "attah", now, is doubtless a mistake for the pronoun "attah", thou; and so it appears to have been read by the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the Chaldee, and by two of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS.

Verse 5

Deal gently - with the young man - David was the father of this worthless young man; and is it to be wondered at that he feels as a father? Who in his circumstances, that had such feelings as every man should have, would have felt, or acted otherwise?

Verse 7

Twenty thousand men - Whether these were slain on the field of battle, or whether they were reckoned with those slain in the wood of Ephraim, we know not.

Verse 8

The wood devoured more people - It is generally supposed that, when the army was broken, they betook themselves to the wood, fell into pits, swamps, etc., and, being entangled, were hewn down by David's men; but the Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic, state that they were devoured by wild beasts in the wood.

Verse 9

And his head caught hold of the oak - It has been supposed that Absalom was caught by the hair, but no such thing is intimated in the text. Probably his neck was caught in the fork of a strong bough, and he was nearly dead when Joab found him; for it is said, 2 Samuel 18:14, he was yet alive, an expression which intimates he was nearly dead.

Verse 10

I saw Absalom hanged in an oak - He must have hung there a considerable time. this man saw him hanging; how long he had been hanging before he saw him, we cannot tell. He came and informed Joab; this must have taken up a considerable time. Joab went and pierced him through with three darts; this must have taken up still more time. It is therefore natural to conclude that his life must have been nearly gone after having been so long suspended, and probably was past recovery, even if Joab had taken him down.

Verse 11

And a girdle - The military belt was the chief ornament of a soldier, and was highly prized in all ancient nations; it was also a rich present from one chieftain to another. Jonathan gave his to David, as the highest pledge of his esteem and perpetual friendship, 1 Samuel 18:4. And Ajax gave his to Hector, as a token of the highest respect. - Hom. Il. vii., ver. 305.

Verse 13

Thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me - This is a strong appeal to Joab's loyalty, and respect for the orders of David; but he was proof against every fine feeling, and against every generous sentiment.

Verse 14

I may not tarry thus with thee - He had nothing to say in vindication of the purpose he had formed.

Thrust them through the heart of Absalom - He was determined to make sure work, and therefore he pierced his heart.

Joab should have obeyed the king's commandment: and yet the safety of the state required the sacrifice of Absalom. But independently of this, his life was quadruply forfeited to the law: -

1. In having murdered his brother Amnon.

2. In having excited an insurrection in the state.

3. In having taken up arms against his own father, Deuteronomy 21:18, Deuteronomy 21:21.

4. In having lain with his father's concubines, Leviticus 18:29.

Long ago he should have died by the hand of justice; and now all his crimes are visited on him in his last act of rebellion. Yet, in the present circumstances, Joab's act was base and disloyal, and a cowardly murder.

Verse 15

Ten young men - smote Absalom and slew him - That is, they all pierced the body; but there could be no life in it after three darts had been thrust through the heart: but they added as much as would have killed him had he been alive.

Verse 16

Joab blew the trumpet - He knew that the rebellion was now extinguished by the death of Absalom; and was not willing that any farther slaughter should be made of the deluded people.

Verse 17

And laid a very great heap of stones - This was the method of burying heroes, and even traitors, the heap of stones being designed to perpetuate the memory of the event, whether good or bad. The ancient cairns or heaps of stones, in different parts of the world, are of this kind. The various tumuli or barrows in England are the same as the cairns in different parts of Ireland and Scotland. In the former, stones were not plenty; hence they heaped up great mounds of earth.

Verse 18

Reared up for himself a pillar - There was a marble pillar in the time of Josephus called Absalom's pillar: and there is one shown to the present day under this name; but it is comparatively a modern structure.

Absalom's place - Literally Absalom's Hand. See the note on 1 Samuel 15:12.

Verse 21

Tell the king what thou hast seen - At this time the death of Absalom was not publicly known; but Joab had given Cushite private information of it. This Ahimaaz had not, for he could not tell the king whether Absalom were dead. To this Joab seems to refer, 2 Samuel 18:22: "Thou hast no tidings ready."

Verse 24

David sat between the two gates - He was probably in the seat of justice. Before the gate of the city it is supposed there was an enclosure, which had its gate also; David sat in the space between these two doors. Over the larger gate there appears to have been a turret, on which a sentinel or watchman stood continually, and gave information of what he saw in the country.

Verse 25

If he be alone, there is tidings - That is, good tidings. For if the battle had been lost men would have been running in different directions through the country.

Verse 29

I saw a great tumult - It was very probable that Ahimaaz did not know of the death of Absalom; he had seen the rout of his army, but did not know of his death. Others think he knew all, and told this untruth that he might not be the messenger of bad news to David.

Verse 30

Stand here - He intended to confront two messengers, and compare their accounts.

Verse 32

Is the young man Absalom safe? - This was the utmost of his solicitude, and it well merited the reproof which Joab gave him, 2 Samuel 19:5.

Verse 33

O my son Absalom - It is allowed by the most able critics that this lamentation is exceedingly pathetic. In what order the words were pronounced, for much depends on this, we cannot say. Perhaps it was the following: -

x'x xTM x•x'x©xœx•x• x'x xTM (Beni Abshalom), (beni)! My son Absalom! O my son!

x'x xTM x•x'x©xœx•x• (Beni Abshalom)! O my son Absalom!

xžxTM xTMx^axŸ xžx•x^axTM x•x xTM x^ax—x^axTMxš (Mi yitten muthi ani thachteicha). O that I had died in thy stead!

x•x'x©xœx•x• x'x xTM x'x xTM (Abshalom), (beni)! (beni)! O Absalom, my son, my son!

Is there no hope for the soul of this profligate young man? He died in his iniquity: but is it not possible that he implored the mercy of his Maker while he hung in the tree? And is it not possible that the mercy of God was extended to him? And was not that suspension a respite, to the end that he might have time to deprecate the wrath of Divine justice?

This is at least a charitable conjecture, and humanity will delight in such a case to lay hold even on possibilities. If there be any room for hope in such a death, who that knows the worth of an immortal soul, would not wish to indulge in it?