

Exegetical Notes – 2 Samuel 17:24-18:20

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2 Samuel 17:24-18:20

(For more information about Absalom, David's son and Israel's Crown Prince after Amnon's murder and his rebellion against King David, read 2 Samuel 13:1-17:23 and the exegetical notes prepared for those passages.)

Verses 17:24-26

^{17:24} *David went to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel.* ²⁵ *Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of Jether, an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah the mother of Joab.* ²⁶ *The Israelites and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.*

- The lines were drawn for battle between David and Absalom. David and his forces were camped at Mahanaim. Absalom and his army were camped in Gilead.
- Amasa was the commander of Absalom's army. Joab, the commander of David's army, was Amasa's cousin.

Verses 27-29

²⁷ *When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim* ²⁸ *brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils,* ²⁹ *honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, "The people have become exhausted and hungry and thirsty in the wilderness."*

- Absalom's failure to attack David immediately after entering Jerusalem gave David's men time to rest before the fight began.

Verses 18:1-4

^{18:1} *David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds.² David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out with you."*

³ *But the men said, "You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city."*

⁴ *The king answered, "I will do whatever seems best to you."*

So the king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands.

- David organized the army for battle. He put 1/3 of the army under Joab, 1/3 under Abishai, Joab's brother, and 1/3 under Ittai. Verse 1 implies that David's army was huge.
- David resolved to march with the army into battle. Remember that not being where he was supposed to be as Israel's king had been the first step that led to David's sin with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 11:1). But his leaders insisted that this was a bad idea as the king was the one Absalom most wanted to kill. They urged David to remain behind as they led the fight. David agreed. He stood beside the gate as his troops marched out to fight for him.

Verse 5

⁵ *The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.*

- David asked his generals to "be gentle with Absalom." All the men heard this request from David.

Verses 6-8

⁶ *David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim.⁷ There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men.⁸ The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.*

- David's army defeated Absalom's forces. 20,000 men died in the battle.
- The battle moved from the field into the forest. Many men from Absalom's army deserted.

Verses 9-15

⁹ *Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.*

¹⁰ *When one of the men saw what had happened, he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree."*

¹¹ *Joab said to the man who had told him this, "What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt."*

¹² *But the man replied, "Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake,' ¹³ And if I had put my life in jeopardy—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me."*

¹⁴ *Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this for you." So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. ¹⁵ And ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.*

- As Absalom was retreating, his hair (see 2 Samuel 14:25-26) got hung up in the branches of a tree. His horse raced out from under him leaving him hanging helplessly in the tree.
- One of David's soldiers saw Absalom hanging in the tree and reported what he saw to Joab, David's general. Joab chided the soldier for not killing Absalom on the spot. But the soldier had heard David's command to treat Absalom kindly. He said that he knew if he had killed Absalom against David's command, the generals would have let David punish him for Absalom's death.
- In disgust with the soldier, Joab went to the tree and threw three spears into Absalom. Then Joab's assistants finished Absalom off. This way, it could not be determined exactly who was responsible for Absalom's death.

Verses 16-17

¹⁶ Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. ¹⁷ They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.

- Joab sounded the trumpet to end the battle when Absalom was dead.
- They buried Absalom in a pit.
- Absalom's army went home.

Verse 18

¹⁸ During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King's Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, "I have no son to carry on the memory of my name." He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day.

- (See 2 Samuel 14:27.) Apparently, Absalom's sons predeceased him.
- There is still a monument to Absalom in the King's valley. But it is not this monument although it may be on the same spot.

Verses 19-20

¹⁹ Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "Let me run and take the news to the king that the LORD has vindicated him by delivering him from the hand of his enemies."

²⁰ "You are not the one to take the news today," Joab told him. "You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king's son is dead."

- David needed to be informed of Absalom's death. However, Absalom's death had been forbidden by the king (see verse 5). They were unsure how David would behave.
- Ahimaaz, the son of the high priest, wanted to take the news to David. He assumed that David would see God's hand of deliverance in news. But Joab would not allow him to take the news to David for fear that David might harm Ahimaaz.

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