11-17 August 2024

2 Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33

**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.

**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.

**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…

. **15**And ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him…

**31**Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The Lord has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.”

**32**The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.”

**33**The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”[[f](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Samuel+18%3A+5-33&version=NIV#fen-NIV-8512f)]

**Bible notes**Rape, arson, open-air philandering, treason, and a coup d’état have all taken place in David’s family when we pick up the story again in 2 Samuel 18. Nathan’s pronouncements come sooner than anticipated (2 Samuel 12:11-13). In summary, David was reaping the whirlwind. Amnon, David’s eldest son, duped him and raped his half-sister, Tamar, without punishment or redress (2 Samuel 13:1-21). Two years later, an enraged Absalom, Tamar’s brother, sought justice by killing Amnon and was exiled to Geshur, his mother’s homeland, ruled by his maternal grandfather, for three years (2 Samuel 13:23-39). On his return, Absalom is still in a form of exile as he does not see his father for two years. However, his desire for justice and to overthrow his father is not diminished (2 Samuel 15).

David would have to fight Absalom and his followers to regain his kingdom. David’s unconditional love for Absalom demands preserving his life, despite the humiliation, treason and dishonour (v.5). The ensuing bloody battles spread nationwide, with thousands of lives lost (vv.6-8).

The text is bookended by David’s strict instructions not to harm Absalom and his lament when the news of Absalom’s death reached him (vv.5, 33). Absalom’s choice of a mule (v.9) is rather strange. Unlike horses, mules are not known for their intelligence, speed or stamina but are symbols of peace. Absalom’s hair, which brought great admiration and national fame and symbolised his strength (2 Samuel 14:25-6), contributed to his downfall. He was unprepared for battle.

‘And all the troops heard the king…’ is an undisputable order (v.5). David’s trusted nephew, Joab, bore a grudge against Absalom and tried and failed to bribe and persuade others to murder him (vv.11-13). Verse 15 implies that Joab’s armour bearers killed Absalom. However, Joab first thrust three javelins into Absalom’s heart (v.14). Joab disobeys the king’s instructions out of his own self-interest.

### ****Reflection****

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

Chickens come home to roost. David’s grief over Absalom’s death is heart-wrenching but there is a sense of cause and effect that has led us to this point. David has not only set up rival claimants to his throne with his sons by different wives (including Solomon by Bathsheba) but has set an example to them that a king can do what he likes. Absalom has followed the path his father set in later life as opposed to the humble servant David was in the beginning. David is now powerless to affect the outcome – he orders his generals to be merciful to Absalom and they all hear David’s words. However, Joab’s armour bearers don’t agree with David’s approach and strike Absalom down dead, leaving David again mourning a son. Often, we are angry when circumstances don’t turn out the way we would like but there is often a need for us to pause and reflect to what extent we have caused the consequences we are facing.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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| A hand holding a chess piece  Description automatically generated |   |

**Questions**

* What decisions taken by others influence your life today, positively or negatively?
* Where are the deep-seated conflicts in your community or the wider world? Can you pray for healing for these situations this week?
* Do you or someone you know have a big decision to make in the coming weeks?

## Prayer

*Adapt to your local context.*

Father, we thank you for all the loving relationships in our lives,
even though they may be complicated or challenging.
We praise you for this many-faceted thing called love,
that can survive the darkest days of despair,
and lives on in our hearts even when loved ones are gone.
Thank you for your love, which neither death
nor despair can break.
**Amen.**

**A prayer to end the Bible study**

Almighty God, we thank you for the freedom you give us.
Guide us in the week to come.
Through our actions, may we share your love and kindness
and draw people closer to you.
When we make mistakes, help us to make amends quickly
so your grace is still seen.
We give this week to you and ask that your will would be done.
**Amen.**