

1  **BAD HAIR DAY**

2 Samuel 18

2  **WARRIORS & POETS**

- A verse-by-verse, story-by-story study through the united kingdom period of Israel, specifically looking at the reign of this period's three kings: Saul, David, and Solomon.
- While examining the life of each one of these kings, we will look at not only how their decisions apply to us, but how they function as positive or negative examples of the kind of king we serve.
- We will be asking the question: How does this show that Jesus is a better king?

3  **ON THE RUN**

- After his son Absalom raised an army against him out of the 10 northern tribes, David successfully crossed the Jordan and is able to take the time to reorder his forces.
- Absalom, in the meanwhile, commits a grave sin with his father's wives as a means of establishing his authority as king. He is prevented from catching up with David and completely destroying his forces while he is fleeing by the timely intervention of Hushai.

4  **DAVID MUSTERS HIS MEN**

- *Then David mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. And David sent out the army, 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 men, "I myself will also go out with you."* (2 Samuel 18:1-2)

5  **DAVID MUSTERS HIS MEN**

- Now safely across the Jordan, David has time to rally "the men who were with him." This would include his personal bodyguard, and likely included other fighting men from Jerusalem and the Judean hillside they picked up on their way to the Jordan.
- Although this is a numerically significant force (and probably would have been enough to hold Jerusalem in the event of a siege if David had not panicked), it is important to note that it is still much smaller than Absalom's.

6  **"I WILL ALSO GO"**

- David organizes his army and divides it up under the command of Abishai and Joab (his two nephews) and Ittai the Gittite, who has recently proven his loyalty to David and whose Philistine mercenaries form an important part of David's army.
- With everything ready and a plan of attack put in place, David expresses his desire to personally oversee the battle.

7  **"...YOU ARE WORTH TEN THOUSAND OF US."**

- *But the men said, "You shall not go out. For if we flee, they will not care about us. If half of us die, they will not care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore it is better that you send us help from the city." The king said to them, "Whatever seems best to you I will do." So the king stood at the side of the gate, while all the army marched out by hundreds and by thousands.* (2 Samuel 18:3-4)

8  **"...YOU ARE WORTH TEN THOUSAND OF US."**

- David's commanders protest. As long as David is alive, their cause is alive. If David were to die in battle, then all the efforts of those who have remained loyal to him would have been for nothing.
- David has already been reprimanded previously by his men for putting himself at too great a risk in battle.
- In the end, David acquiesces to their request.

9

- *And the king ordered Joab and Abishai and Ittai, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." And all the people heard when the king gave orders to all the commanders about Absalom. (2 Samuel 18:5)*
- Before the army leaves for battle, David gives a very public command: if at all possible, Absalom is to be spared. This command effectively defines the rules of engagement for his army, and is given in the hearing of the entire army (not just his commanders).

10  **VICTORY!**

- *So the army went out into the field against Israel, and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim. And the men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men. The battle spread over the face of all the country, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword. (2 Samuel 18:6-8)*

11  **THE "FOREST OF EPHRAIM"**

- What is actually happening here is more complex than a brief glance at these two verses would suppose.
- When David's army advances against Absalom's, there would have been numerous military actions and possibly even engagements preceding this decisive battle – particularly given the battle's location.
- The battle takes place in the "forest of Ephraim" – which can mean either a forest actually in the inheritance of Ephraim (on this side of the Jordan), or an area on the other side of the Jordan near Gilead, where a large army of Ephraimites had been defeated in the time of the judges.

12  **FLIGHT THROUGH THE FOREST**

- The men of Israel are completely put to flight by the "servants of David."
- The area in which the battle takes place (a forest around the Jordan valley area) would have been full of ravines, precipices, and marshes, into which the fleeing Israelites were driven and in which they perished.
- More men are killed in the flight through the unforgiven terrain of this "forest" than died in the battle.

13  **HAIR CAUGHT**

- *And Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. 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, and he was suspended between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. And a certain man saw it and told Joab, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." Joab said to the man who told him, "What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt."*

14  **HAIR CAUGHT**

- As Absalom is riding along on his mule (the Israelites did not typically ride horses into battle, as we might imagine. They tended to fight on foot and use mules and donkeys for riding), he gets his ample hair tangled in the branches of a tree. This causes his head to get stuck between the branches of the oak.
- One of David's soldiers sees this and reports it back to Joab. Joab is outraged that the soldier didn't just kill him himself – because apparently Joab has already put out a bounty on Absalom's head, despite David's orders.

15  **HAIR CAUGHT**

- *But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not reach out my hand against the king's son, for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake protect the young man Absalom.' On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." (2 Samuel 18:9-13)*

16  **HAIR CAUGHT**

- The soldier protests that he would not have disobeyed the king's orders for even 100 times the reward that Joab was promising.
- He points out that if Joab was willing to betray the king, there is no way he would "have the soldier's back" – and his life would be worth nothing.

17  **THE MURDER OF ABSALOM**

- *Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." And he took three javelins in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom while he was still alive in the oak. And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him and killed him. Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained them. And they took Absalom and threw him into a great pit in the forest and raised over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled every one to his own home. (2 Samuel 18:14-17)*

18  **THE MURDER OF ABSALOM**

- Joab grows impatient arguing with the soldier and heads for where Absalom is hanging by his hair. Then, together with his ten armor bearers, Joab brutally murders Absalom in a way which can only be described as "overkill."
- Once again, Joab goes about demonstrating his undying loyalty to David in a completely brutal and violent fashion.

19  **ABSALOM'S PILLAR**

- *Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself the pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance." He called the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's monument to this day. (2 Samuel 18:18)*
- Absalom's life ends with an interesting postscript. In 2 Samuel 14, we are told that Absalom has three sons. We are not given their names – probably because they all died in childhood.

20  **ABSALOM'S PILLAR**

- At some point before his rebellion, Absalom erected a pillar or monument to himself as a way of leaving a memorial to himself since he has no son to carry on his name.

- If nothing else, a usurper with no heirs is very short-sighted.

21  **REBELLION**

- So far the majority of our teaching has been focused on David – his struggles, his repentance, and his personal journey back towards a decisive kingship. But it is equally useful to examine Absalom's life and decisions.
- Absalom was what we have all been: rebellious sons.

22  **REBELLION GROWS FROM A ROOT OF BITTERNESS**

- Absalom's rebellion grows out of bitterness toward his father for the latter's inaction before and after the horrible events surrounding Absalom's sister Tamar.
- Absalom feels as though David did not do his job as a father or as a king.
- Implicit in this is a thinking (later verbalized) that, "if only I were a king, I could do a better job."

23  **REBELLION GROWS FROM A ROOT OF BITTERNESS**

- *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled...* (Hebrews 12:14-15)
- Bitterness begins when we reject the grace of God in dealing with a situation – grace that is intended to use difficult situations to sanctify us and make us more like Christ.
- Bitterness can have many different causes, but it always ends in rebellion.

24  **REBELLION THRIVES IN SECRET**

- Absalom quietly nurses his plans in secret for several years before he acts upon them. When it is exposed to the light, rebellion is almost never able to grow to full strength.
- Absalom's death is reminiscent of another famous rebel who was stoned to death near here – Achan.
- Achan took of the spoils of Jericho that which had been dedicated to the Lord as the firstfruits of the promised land. He did so in secret, hiding his sin in his own tent and corrupting his family in the process.

25  **REBELLION FEEDS ON DISSATISFACTION**

- Absalom's rebellion grows because he looks for (or creates) dissatisfaction in the lives of those around him.
- It was this same dissatisfaction that drove both Achan and David to their respective sins. Remember that both Achan and David's rebellion against God begins with their "seeing" the eventual object of their sin.
- Later, it is ingratitude that Nathan first chastises David for.

26  **REBELLION LEAVES A STERILE LEGACY**

- Even though Absalom is remembered (because of his role in the Biblical narrative), he leaves no legacy. He is not part of the messianic line, nor does he even have any heirs who could possibly continue his dynasty after his death.
- Absalom's lasting legacy – like that of so many others who rebelled against God – is a tragic reminder that nothing is so finally self-destructive as to rebel against God.

27  **JESUS IS A BETTER KING**

- Even as David defeated his son in battle, he was anxious to be reconciled with him.
- Even as God is a just God who “cannot look upon evil”, so too he also desires to be reconciled with his rebellious creation.
- But Jesus is a better king than David because he made his own death the means of accomplishing this reconciliation.
- Jesus is a better king than Absalom because he obeyed his father, and because he is concerned with turning men’s hearts toward Him.