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2SAMUEL 18: 1 David numbered the people who were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.

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

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2SAMUEL 18: 2 David sent the people out, a third part under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. The king said to the people, "I will also surely go out with you myself."

2SAMUEL 18: 3 But the people said, "You shall not go out; for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us. But you are worth ten thousand of us. Therefore now it is better that you are ready to help us out of the city."

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#### Verse 3

But now thou art worth ten thousand of us - The particle *אתה* *attah*, now, is doubtless a mistake for the pronoun *אתה* *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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 4 The king said to them, "I will do what seems best to you." The king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands.

2SAMUEL 18: 5 The king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." All the people heard when the king commanded all the captains concerning Absalom.

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#### 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?

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2SAMUEL 18: 6 So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the forest of Ephraim.

2SAMUEL 18: 7 The people of Israel were struck there before the servants of David, and there was a great slaughter there that day of twenty thousand men.

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 8 For the battle was there spread over the surface of all the country; and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 9 Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the sky and earth; and the mule that was under him went on.

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#### 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, 2Sam 18:14, he was yet alive, an expression which intimates he was nearly dead.

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2SAMUEL 18: 10 A certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak."

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 11 Joab said to the man who told him, "Behold, you saw it, and why didn't you strike him there to the ground? I would have given you ten pieces of silver, and a sash."

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#### 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, 1Sam 18:4. And Ajax gave his to Hector, as a token of the highest respect. - Hom. Il. vii., ver. 305.

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2SAMUEL 18: 12 The man said to Joab, "Though I should receive a thousand pieces of silver in my hand, I still wouldn't stretch out my hand against the king's son; for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Beware that no one touch the young man Absalom.'

2SAMUEL 18: 13 Otherwise if I had dealt falsely against his life (and there is no matter hidden from the king), then you yourself would have set yourself against me."

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 14 Then Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this with you." He took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak.

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#### 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, Deu 21:18, Deu 21:21.
4. In having lain with his father's concubines, Lev 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 15 Ten young men who bore Joab's armour surrounded and struck Absalom, and killed him.

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 16 Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel; for Joab held back the people.

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 17 They took Absalom, and cast him into the great pit in the forest, and raised over him a very great heap of stones. Then all Israel fled everyone to his tent.

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself the pillar, which is in the king's dale; for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in memory." He called the pillar after his own name; and it is called Absalom's monument, to this day.

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## 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 1Sam 15:12.

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2SAMUEL 18: 19 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Let me now run, and bear the king news, how that the LORD has avenged him of his enemies."

2SAMUEL 18: 20 Joab said to him, "You shall not be the bearer of news this day, but you shall bear news another day. But today you shall bear no news, because the king's son is dead."

2SAMUEL 18: 21 Then Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen!" The Cushite bowed himself to Joab, and ran.

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## 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, 2Sam 18:22 : "Thou hast no tidings ready."

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2SAMUEL 18: 22 Then Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said yet again to Joab, "But come what may, please let me also run after the Cushite." Joab said, "Why do you want to run, my son, since that you will have no reward for the news?"

2SAMUEL 18: 23 "But come what may," he said, "I will run." He said to him, "Run!" Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the Plain, and outran the Cushite.

2SAMUEL 18: 24 Now David was sitting between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate to the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, a man running alone.

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## 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 25 The watchman cried, and told the king. The king said, "If he is alone, there is news in his mouth." He came closer and closer.

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## 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 26 The watchman saw another man running; and the watchman called to the porter, and said, "Behold, a man running alone!" The king said, "He also brings news."

2SAMUEL 18: 27 The watchman said, "I think the running of the first one is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." The king said, "He is a good man, and comes with good news."

2SAMUEL 18: 28 Ahimaaz called, and said to the king, "All is well." He bowed himself before the king with his face to the earth, and said, "Blessed is the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who lifted up their hand against my lord the king!"

2SAMUEL 18: 29 The king said, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent the king's servant, even me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I don't know what it was."

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#### 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.

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2SAMUEL 18: 30 The king said, "Turn aside, and stand here." He turned aside, and stood still.

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#### Verse 30

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

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2SAMUEL 18: 31 Behold, the Cushite came. The Cushite said, "News for my lord the king; for the LORD has avenged you this day of all those who rose up against you."

2SAMUEL 18: 32 The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you to do you harm, be as that young man is."

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#### 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, 2Sam 19:5.

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2SAMUEL 18: 33 The king was much moved, and went up to the room over the gate, and wept. As he went, he said, "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! I wish I had died for you, Absalom, my son, my son!"

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#### 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: - בני אבשלום בני Beni Abshalom, beni! My son Absalom! O my son! בני אבשלום Beni Abshalom! O my son Absalom! מי יתן מותי אני תחתך Mi yitten muthi ani thachteicha. O that I had died in thy stead! אבשלום בני בני 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?