

Anyone who has read this chapter will remember the grotesque image of Absalom caught by his head in a tree, suspended between heaven and earth. In some translations the tree is an oak, in others a terebinth. Both are prized in the Middle East for their shade. Abraham sits by the oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18 and Joshua places a copy of his statutes under a terebinth. The great trees speak of authority and judgment.

And Absalom is indeed judged. “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” says Galatians 3:13, citing Deuteronomy 21:23. It is as if nature itself is outraged by Absalom’s rebellion against the Lord’s anointed and has reached out to snare him in the course of his crime.

The verse in Galatians, of course, does not refer to Absalom but to the Lord Jesus. He also was hanged on a tree under a curse, the curse of our sin. But He willingly took the curse on Himself to remove it from us and in time from all of creation. And He too was lifted up between heaven and earth but as a citizen of both, God and man at the same time, not a rebellious son but a perfectly obedient Son to his Heavenly Father.

Notes

18:6 The forests of Ephraim may be the thickets along the river Jordan, which were densely grown and inhabited by wild animals in ancient times.

18:24 David is sitting between the gates of Manahaim, the Gileadite city east of the Jordan.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. What led to David having time to gather an army? How was God’s hand in it?
2. Joab and Abishai are David’s nephews. How does Ittai earn a place among David’s generals? Is there a lesson for us?
3. David tells his commanders to deal gently with Absalom. How is this a picture of Christ?

4. How is Joab's character displayed in this chapter? Is it possible to act on God's behalf without doing God's will?
5. What is ironic about verses 17 and 18? Who else in scripture is thrown into a great pit?
6. Why does Joab discourage Ahimaaz from carrying the news to David?
7. David has been a refugee in his own land, fleeing from his son who he believes may take his life. Why does he weep for Absalom?
8. What can a broken heart accomplish for God?