

The Death of Absalom – 1st Samuel 18:1-18

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Names or Relationships

When Hebrew readers read these texts, they read the meaning of the name or place. I thought it would be interesting for you to have some of this experience reading our text.

Absalom – “My father is peace” – son of David

David – “Beloved”

Joab – “Yahweh is father” – son of David’s sister Zeruah.

Abishai – “my father is a gift” or “father of gifts” - son of David’s sister Zeruah

Ittai – “the Lord is with me” - part of the group of soldiers who served with David and who were probably from Gath of Philistine descent. [I find it interesting to note that where line of descent is vital...this is how he is mentioned.](#)

Zeruah – “pain or tribulation of the Lord” “wounded” or “flowing” or “running”

Literary Devices –

Irony is a regularly used technique in Hebrew literature. Somehow it struck me that reading these names connected to the action in which these people were involved seems ironic.

Also, I think it’s heartrendingly ironic that David asks Joab to be gentle with Absalom who is a traitor while he had used Joab to collaborate with him in the murder of Uriah – one of the stellar Biblical examples of loyalty.

Parallelism – This is the second time that David not leading his troops into action

leads to a disaster for him personally, and for his family.

Use of Story

In the culture of the Israelites, stories were designed to be repeated as a way to hear their history and as teaching tales. I think it would be interesting if you try reading this short bit two or three times and see what you notice differently in each reading.

Notes on Military Organization

Note: While the name 'squad' is relatively recent, both the Romans and Catherine's favorite world conqueror divided their troops also into groups of ten.

Questions

1. What's it like for you to read this story using the meaning of the names of the people involved?
2. In the time of King David archeologists estimate that larger towns covered 15 acres and their population was 300 to 400 people. What do you make of the writer of Samuel saying David "appointed leaders of thousands and of hundreds".
3. What do you think it meant that David would replace a deceased family member with a Gittite?
4. Do you think there were other motives the soldiers may have had in telling David not to lead them.
5. Knowing what happened in the past, what is your reaction when David stayed behind at the city gate?
6. What do you think is the significance that he was "at the city gate"
7. Why do you think the writer notes that the entire army was listening when David gave the order to be gentle Absalom?
8. Why do you think David was trying to protect Absalom?

9. Are there any lessons for you in David's desire to protect Absalom.
10. What do you think would be the impact on Israel to have 20,000 soldiers killed?
11. Why do you think the soldier who discovered Absalom did not cut him down?
12. Why do you think he went and told Joab instead?
13. What do you think were Joab's motives in killing Absalom?
14. Why throw him into a pit?...this is not the norm in that family or culture.
15. There are several things that might be said about Absalom setting up a memorial monument. What do you think this says about him?
16. How do you think this murder of Joab's will affect his relationship with David?
17. What are lessons you take in your own life from this reading?

Even though this story is a difficult one for me, I look forward to talking it over with you.

I wish for you gentle blessings.

Catherine