

the Cushite

2 Sam. 18:19-33

18:19 Then [after Absalom was killed] said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies.

18:20 And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead.

18:21 Then said Joab to **Cushi**, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And **Cushi** bowed himself unto Joab, and ran.

18:22 Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after **Cushi**. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? **18:23** But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran **Cushi**.

18:24 And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone. **18:25** And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. **18:26** And the watchman saw **another man running**: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold **another man running** alone.

And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. **18:27** And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings.

18:28 And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king. **18:29** And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. **18:30** And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.

18:31 And, behold, **Cushi** came; and **Cushi** said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. **18:32** And the king said unto **Cushi**, Is the young man Absalom safe? And **Cushi** answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. **18:33** And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

Was Cushi the runner's name?

There were a few Israelites named Cushi. (Cf. Jer. 36:14 and Zeph. 1:1.) However, many scholars believe the runner was an unnamed man from the area of Cush south of Egypt, an area which has been famous for its long-distance runners from ancient times. Joab favoring Ahimaaz (who was obviously Jewish) over Cushi may support this view as well, since prejudice against people from distant places and with darker skin has always been common. (Cf. Jer. 13:23.)

negatives

The passage does not directly say why Joab thought it was better to send the Cushite, instead of Ahimaaz, with the bad news of Absalom's death. But it is clear that he thought that way. Maybe Joab was a racist since he was also a murderer, having killed Absalom (18:11-15) and Abner (3:22-39) which was contrary to David's wishes.

That said, the watchman with David recognized the running of Ahimaaz (18:27), but to him "Cushi" was just "another man running." (18:26). This may help explain Joab's thinking.

Perhaps he thought it was better to send a less-well-known runner in this case since there was bad news as well as good news to report. So race and skin color may not have been a factor after all. At any rate, the glory-seeking Ahimaaz did not like being replaced by the Cushite as Joab's messenger to the king.

As for David calling Ahimaaz, rather than the Cushite, "a good man," this probably says more about David's desperate hope for good news than it does about the two messengers.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() The Cushite was a loser.
A-1	() He was outrun by Ahimaaz.
A-2	() The watchman did not recognize him (18:27).
A-3	() He didn't take the shortcut like Ahimaaz (18:23).
A-4	() He is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.
A-5	() His service was unappreciated (18:33).
B	() The Cushite was a lowly servant.
B-1	() He simply bowed and ran (18:21).
B-2	() He did not say a word to Joab (18:21).
B-3	() Joab did not highly esteem him (18:19-21).
B-4	() "Cushi" may or may not have been his name.
B-5	() He may have been from Cush in southern Egypt.
B-6	() He may have been a dark-skinned proselyte.
B-7	() David did not call him "a good man" (18:27).

positives

Most of the positive things that can be said about the Cushite have to do with his character. We don't know whether he could have beaten Ahimaaz in a fair foot race or not. But when it comes to character he was a far better man than his more famous competitor. (By the way, "Cushi" probably didn't even think of Ahimaaz as a rival.)

The most obvious positive point about the Cushite is his honesty, in contrast to the dishonesty of Ahimaaz (18:29). Their goals and attitudes were very different.

In addition, there are several details in the passage which point to "Cushi" being a better person. For instance, though 18:28 shows that Ahimaaz was probably a more polished speaker—raising his voice, bowing his face to the ground, and breaking up his lines for effect—it also probably shows that he was less sincere.

Both men spoke about the Lord (18:28, 31), but was the faith of both genuine? *Most of the statements below are correct or partly correct, but at least one is false.*

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() The Cushite did his job well.
C-1	() He was probably a strong runner.
C-2	() He obeyed immediately (18:21).
C-3	() He did exactly as he was told.
C-4	() He honored those over him.
C-5	() He had a servant's attitude.
D	() The Cushite was a good person.
D-1	() The Cushite did not lie; Ahimaaz did.
D-2	() He did not shout like Ahimaaz did (18:28, 31).
D-3	() The Cushite's bowing was not a show (18:21, 28).
D-4	() The Cushite did not try to impress King David (18:31).
D-5	() The Cushite immediately told David everything (18:31-32).
D-6	() He seems more like a believer than Ahimaaz (18:28, 31).
D-7	() David didn't know that the Cushite was more honest than Ahimaaz.

conclusions

worksheet answers

All of the lines on the positives worksheet on the previous page are correct or partly correct except for the one about Cushie telling David everything immediately (D-5). Like Ahimaaz, he wisely said nothing about Absalom's death in his first couple of sentences (18:31). When questioned soon after, however, the man from Cush told the truth (18:32). Unlike Ahimaaz, he planned to tell the whole story all along, though he was cautious in the way he did so.

Perhaps the most important question is whether "Cushie" was a loser or not (line A). Since he came in second in the run to the king, he could be considered a loser in that sense. However, he alone told the whole truth. So only the Cushite finished according to God's rules, and Ahimaaz was like a runner who is disqualified by the judge. Thus line A is best marked incorrect, though it could also be considered partly correct.

In human eyes, as well, Ahimaaz became a loser eventually, when his dishonesty was exposed. Though he appeared to be a winner at the time, it was the lowly Cushite who did and said what was right. He has been remembered for doing so ever since.

So what?

Why did the author of Samuel bother to report the story of Ahimaaz and Cushie in the first place? Both runners are minor characters compared to David and Absalom. One reason is that the two messengers help show us more of David's love for his lost son, Absalom. For instance, because of this passage we know that the king waited anxiously for news about his son near the city gates and took a keen interest in the two runners (18:25).

If learning more about David were all there was to it, however, the passage could have been shorter. The interaction between Joab and Ahimaaz in 18:19-20 could have been omitted for instance. Obviously, God also wants us to learn from the two runners themselves. So the story of their runs and their reporting is given in considerable detail. **We should be like the lowly Cushite rather than the overly-ambitious and dishonest Ahimaaz.**

Ahimaaz may have been the more intelligent of the two runners, as indicated by his elaborate scheming. And he may have been the faster runner. But "Cushie" or the Cushite showed more faith and was the better servant. Let us learn from him!

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.
