

# 2 Samuel 20 - Sheba Conspires Against David; David's Re-Establishment of Authority; Joab Murders Amasa

III. David's foes (13:1—20:26)

(2) Turmoil surrounding David's return to power (19:1—20:26)

(I) Israel follows Sheba (20:1-2)

(J) David reclaims kingship in Judah and orders Amasa to put down the rebellion (20:3-6)

(K) Joab kills Amasa (20:7-10a)

(L) Joab pursues the fleeing Israelites (20:10b-14)

(M) Joab agrees to relent in exchange for Sheba's head (20:15-22)

(N) David rules with his mighty men (20:23-26)

## 2 Samuel 20

(I) Israel follows Sheba (20:1-2)

**1** Now a worthless man happened to be there whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite; and he blew the trumpet and said, "We have no share in David, Nor do we have an inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, Israel!"

**1** Now a worthless fellow happened to be there whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite; and he blew the trumpet and said, "We have no portion in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!"

**1** Right about then, Bichri's son Sheba, an ungodly man from the tribe of Benjamin, sounded a battle trumpet and announced: We've never been a part of David! We'll never gain anything from Jesse's son! It's every man to his tent, Israel!

**1** And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel.

- He blew a trumpet: Sheba, a worthless son of the family of Becher, the second son of Benjamin, blew the trumpet to call Israel to revolt from the house of David

— This rebellion was perhaps engendered by the traditional hostility between the house of Saul and the house of David, the Benjamites and the Judahites

— His rebellion was also built on inter-tribal resentment (Cf. 19:41-43)

— Sheba was interested in wresting the power from Judah and regaining it for Benjamin

2 So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David *and* followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained loyal to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem.

2 So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David *and* followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem.

2 So all of the other Israeli soldiers abandoned David to follow Bichri's son Sheba, while the army of Judah remained with the king all the way from the Jordan River to Jerusalem.

2 So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem.

- The contention between the Israelite and Judean delegations at Gilgal (19:40-43) became so heated that a Benjamite by the name of Sheba announced a revolutionary movement against David and led the Israelites to desert the king

(J) David reclaims kingship in Judah and orders Amasa to put down the rebellion (20:3-6)

**3** Then David came to his house in Jerusalem, and the king took the ten women, the concubines whom he had left behind to take care of the house, and put them in custody and provided them with food, but did not have relations with them. So they were locked up until the day of their death, living as widows.

**3** Then David came to his house at Jerusalem, and the king took the ten women, the concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and placed them under guard and provided them with sustenance, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as widows.

**3** When David arrived at his palace in Jerusalem, the king took the ten mistresses whom he had left behind to keep the palace in order and placed them in a separate house, providing for them under the care of a protective guard. He never visited them again, so they were under care until they died, living as if their husbands had died.

**3** And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.

- Despite the urgent need to stop Sheba, David first guaranteed the safety of the concubines who had remained behind in Jerusalem (15:16)

— He provided for them, but the laws of incest prevented David from restoring them to their place in his household, so he provided for their care

— David's actions are in harmony with the spirit of the Mosaic Law. The Law prohibited a woman who had relations with two consecutive husbands from going back to her first husband (Deut 24:1-4). The Law did not address David's case specifically, but Deut 24 is what seems to have guided his decision.

— David's actions may also indicate that his temporary exile drove him back to the Lord, and increased his desire to please Him

4 Now the king said to Amasa, "Summon the men of Judah for me *within* three days, and be present here yourself."

4 Then the king said to Amasa, "Call out the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself."

4 Meanwhile, David ordered Amasa, "Muster the army of Judah here within three days, and be here yourself!"

4 Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present.

- The first matter of state was urgent: it was clear to David that he must overcome the movement that had been initiated by Sheba at Gilgal

— He gave Amasa, his new commander (19:13), an almost impossible task: call Judah's battle-weary men together for yet another campaign

5 So Amasa went to summon *the men of* Judah, but he was delayed longer than the set time which he had designated for him.

5 So Amasa went to call out *the men of* Judah, but he delayed longer than the set time which he had appointed him.

5 But when Amasa went out to muster the army of Judah, he delayed to act within the time allotted to him.

5 So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him.

- Unsurprisingly, the men of Judah, so recently reunited with their wives and children, failed to meet the 72-hour time limit

— It is probable that some men questioned the strength of David's return to power, while others resented the change of generals, preferring Joab to Amasa

— David had already promised Amasa the position of Joab (19:13-14). Perhaps Amasa's delay was the result of military and political hindrances set up by those who questioned the wisdom of David's rash promises.

6 And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, so that he does not find for himself

fortified cities and escape from our sight."

6 And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, so that he does not find for himself fortified cities and escape from our sight."

6 So David told Abishai, "Now Bichri's son Sheba is about to do more damage than did Absalom. So take my personal guards and go after them. Otherwise, he'll run to one of the fortified cities and escape from us."

6 And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us.

- When Amasa was unable to muster the troops in the allotted time, Abishai, at David's command, took his own personal elite troops (Cf. 18:2) and set out for the North (20:7)

— David superseded Joab by giving the orders to Joab's brother. However, once the campaign was under way, Joab, with Abishai's consent, resumed his place as commander-in-chief.

(K) Joab kills Amasa (20:7-10a)

7 So **Joab's men** went out after him, along with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the warriors; and they left Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

7 So Joab's men went out after him, along with the Cherethites and the Pelethites and all the mighty men; and they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

7 So Joab's men, the special forces and mercenaries, and all of David's elite forces left Jerusalem in pursuit of Bichri's son Sheba.

7 And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

- "...Joab's men" - referred to in this way because they were formerly under Joab's command

8 When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was dressed in his military attire, and over it *he had* a belt with a sword in its sheath strapped on at his waist; and as he went forward, it fell out.

8 When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was dressed in his military attire, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened at his waist; and as he went forward, it fell out.

8 When they arrived at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came out to meet them. Joab was dressed in a soldier's uniform, over which was a belt that fastened a sword sheath to his thigh. As he walked forward, the sword was exposed.

8 When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them. And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out.

- On the way, they met Amasa at Gibeon, about five miles north of Jerusalem. Joab, though having been demoted and replaced by Amasa, was present.

9 And Joab said to Amasa, "Is it going well for you, my brother?" And Joab took hold of Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.

9 Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.

9 Joab asked Amasa, "Is everything going well with you, my brother?" As Joab took Amasa by his beard to greet him,

9 And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him.

(L) Joab pursues the fleeing Israelites (20:10b-14)

10 But Amasa was not on guard against the sword which was in Joab's hand, so he struck him in the belly with it and spilled out his intestines on the ground, and did not *strike* him again, and he died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba the son of Bichri.

10 But Amasa was not on guard against the sword which was in Joab's hand so he struck him in the belly with it and poured out his inward parts on the ground, and did not *strike* him again, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri.

10 Amasa did not notice the sword that Joab was holding in his hand. Joab stabbed him in the abdomen, spilling his intestines to the ground in a single stroke and killing him. After this, Joab and his brother pursued Bichri's son Sheba.

10 But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.

- Pretending to greet Amasa warmly, Joab killed him with his dagger

— This part of the text is quite difficult to translate accurately, and hence the nature of Joab's treachery is difficult to ascertain

— Joab, it seems, had a second weapon concealed under his military cloak, while he openly wore another sword in its sheath. Presumably he deliberately let fall the sword he wore openly to banish any doubt or suspicion from the mind of Abishai. Thus Joab gained revenge for his loss of rank.

— What is particularly heinous is that Joab and Amasa were cousins, sons of two of David's half sisters (1 Chr 2:16-17)

— Earlier, Joab coldly murdered Saul's former commander Abner (3:26-27,38-39). Both Abner and Amasa share the misfortune of having David appoint them to replace Joab as commander of the army.

— Joab, seemingly so loyal to David, never permitted the king's will to define his ambitions

— Another event from the prophecy of Nathan came to pass: "The sword will never depart from your house" (12:10)

- Solomon avenged Joab's murder of Amasa when he came to power (1 Kings 2:32-34)

11 Now one of Joab's young men stood by him and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, follow Joab!"

11 Now there stood by him one of Joab's young men, and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, *let him* follow Joab."

11 One of Joab's soldiers stood by Amasa while he lay dying and announced, "Whoever is in favor of Joab and David, let him follow Joab."

11 And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He that favoureth Joab, and he that is for David, let him go after Joab.

- Joab at once took command as though nothing had happened

12 But Amasa was wallowing in *his own* blood in the middle of the road. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa from the road to the field and threw a garment over him when he saw that everyone who came by him stood still.

12 But Amasa lay wallowing in *his* blood in the middle of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa from the highway into the field and threw a garment over him when he saw that everyone who came by him stood still.

12 While Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the highway, everybody who passed by was stopping to stare at him, so when the soldier saw that all of the army was stopping, he carried Amasa off the highway into a nearby field and covered him with a garment.

12 And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still.

13 As soon as he was removed from the road, all the men went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

13 As soon as he was removed from the highway, all the men passed on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

13 After Amasa had been removed from the highway, the rest of the army followed Joab in pursuit of Bichri's son Sheba.

13 When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

- The troops were stopping in the road to look at Amasa's corpse, so heartless Joab dragged Amasa's body to a field and threw a garment over him, without bothering to bury him

**14** Now he went on through all the tribes of Israel to **Abel, that is, Beth-maacah**, and all the Berites; and they assembled and went after him as well.

**14** Now he went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel, even Beth-maacah, and all the Berites; and they were gathered together and also went after him.

**14** Meanwhile, Sheba traveled throughout the tribes of Israel in the direction of Abel and Beth-maacah, and all of the descendants of Beri gathered together and followed him inside.

**14** And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Bethmaachah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went also after him.

- "...Abel, that is, Beth-maacah" - as is seen in v15,18, this should be read "Abel of Beth-maacah"

— This town fell to the forces of Ben-hadad of Syria (1 Kings 15:20) and afterward to the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser

(M) Joab agrees to relent in exchange for Sheba's head (20:15-22)

15 And they came and besieged him in Abel Beth-maacah, and they built up an assault ramp against the city, and it stood against the outer rampart; and all the people who were with Joab were wreaking destruction in order to topple the wall.

15 They came and besieged him in Abel Beth-maacah, and they cast up a siege ramp against the city, and it stood by the rampart; and all the people who were with Joab were wreaking destruction in order to topple the wall.

15 All of the men who had accompanied Joab arrived and besieged Sheba in Abel of Beth-maacah. They threw up a siege ramp against the city rampart and began to batter the wall to demolish it.

15 And they came and besieged him in Abel of Bethmaachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down.

- Summoning reinforcements, Joab marched as far north as Abel Beth Maacah where he found Sheba safely ensconced behind the city wall, apparently prepared to face a long siege

— The purpose of this mound was to enable them to reach the highest point of the wall in order to break down the wall and force an entrance

16 Then a wise woman called out from the city, "Listen, listen! Please tell Joab, 'Come here that I may speak with you.'"

16 Then a wise woman called from the city, "Hear, hear! Please tell Joab, 'Come here that I may speak with you.'"

16 Just then a wise woman called out from the city. "Attention!" she said, "Go tell Joab 'Come here! I want to talk to you!'"

**16** Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.

17 So he approached her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" And he answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your slave." And he said, "I am listening."

17 So he approached her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" And he answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening."

17 Joab came over and the woman asked him, "Are you Joab?" "I am," he answered. So she told him, "Listen to what your servant has to say!" "I'm listening," he replied.

17 And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear.

18 Then she spoke, saying, "In the past they used to say, 'They will undoubtedly ask *advice* at Abel,' and that is how they ended a *dispute*."

18 Then she spoke, saying, "Formerly they used to say, 'They will surely ask *advice* at Abel,' and thus they ended *the dispute*."

18 So she said, "In days past, people used to settle a dispute by saying 'Let's ask for advice at Abel!'"

**18** Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter.

- Evidently, people regarded the residents of Abel as wise

19 I *am one* of those who are ready for peace *and* faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city, even a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"

19 I am of those who are peaceable *and* faithful in Israel. You are seeking to destroy a city, even a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"

19 I'm one of the peaceful and faithful citizens of Israel. You're trying to destroy a city that's a mother in Israel. Why are you devouring the heritage of the LORD?"

19 I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?

- While attempting to batter down the walls, Joab was contacted by a wise woman from the city who yelled over the wall that she wanted to talk with him

— She told Joab of her own fame as a purveyor of wisdom (v18), and then asked why he was destroying her city which had always been loyal to Israel. The city, as a mother in Israel, was a prominent one.

The woman went on to suggest to Joab that before he began the siege and possible destruction of the town, he should ask the inhabitants of Abel whether or not they intended to fight for Sheba and his cohorts. This was to be done, according to the legislation of Deut 20:10ff. Her second implication was that Joab ought to have taken into consideration the peaceableness and fidelity of the citizens of Abel and not to destroy peace-loving citizens and members of the nation of God.

Earlier, another wise woman had cooperated with Joab and had undertaken the delicate task of bringing the king to a new viewpoint (14:1-20). Compare also Abigail's wise counsel to David (1 Sam 25). Solomon said that wisdom is better than strength, and perhaps used this incident for his reference in Eccl 9:13-16.

*Wise words override ruthless policy. Talk can many times solve a problem that war only complicates.*

20 Joab replied, "Far be it, far be it from me that I would consume or destroy!

20 Joab replied, "Far be it, far be it from me that I should swallow up or destroy!

20 But Joab replied, "No way! No way! I'm not here to devour or destroy!

**20** And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy.

21 Such is not the case. But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against King David. Only turn him over, and I will depart from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head will be thrown to you over the wall."

21 Such is not the case. But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has lifted up his hand against King David. Only hand him over, and I will depart from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head will be thrown to you over the wall."

21 That's a lie! But there is a man from the Ephraim hill country—he's known as Bichri's son Sheba—who has rebelled against King David. Turn him over and I'll withdraw from the city!" So the woman replied, "Watch this! His head will be thrown to you over the city wall."

21 The matter is not so: but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall.

- Joab replied that he was not attacking the city itself, but only wanted Sheba, the rebel who had presumed to lead Israel away from its king. If she would assist in delivering Sheba over to him, he would end his siege.

22 Then the woman wisely came to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they were dispersed from the city, each to his tent. Joab also returned to the king at Jerusalem.

22 Then the woman wisely came to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they were dispersed from the city, each to his tent. Joab also returned to the king at Jerusalem.

22 Then the woman wisely went back to her people. They cut off the head of Bichri's son Sheba and threw it out to Joab, so Joab sounded his battle trumpet and they withdrew from the city. Everybody went back home and Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.

22 Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.

- Successful in his mission, Joab stopped the siege and returned to Jerusalem

(N) David rules with his mighty men (20:23-26)

**23** Now Joab was *in command* of the entire army of Israel, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites;

**23** Now Joab was over the whole army of Israel, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites;

**23** Joab commanded the entire army of Israel, Jehoiada's son Benaiah commanded the special forces and mercenaries,

**23** Now Joab was over all the host of Israel: and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and over the Pelethites:

- Apparently David tolerated Joab's assassination of Amasa, for Joab appears in this list of David's royal administrators

— Joab was over Israel's entire army

- Benaiah son of Jehoiada was leader of David's special troops, the Kerethites and Pelethites (see comments on 8:15-18)

- Benaiah eventually replaced Joab at the beginning of Solomon's reign (1 Kings 2:35; 4:4)

24 and Adoram was over the **forced labor**, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the secretary;

24 and Adoram was over the forced labor, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder;

24 Adoram supervised conscripted labor, Ahilud's son Jehoshaphat was the recorder,

24 And Adoram was over the tribute: and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder:

- Adoniram (Heb. "Adoram") was in charge of conscripted labor gangs, a position he retained until the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kings 4:6; 12:18)

— He later became a prominent figure in the apostasy of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:18-19)

- "...forced labor" - this was an old institution (Cf. Deut 20:10-11; 2 Sam 8:2,6,14) that consisted of prisoners of war who worked on public construction projects such as highways, temples and palaces

25 and Sheva was scribe, and Zadok and Abiathar were priests;

25 and Sheva was scribe, and Zadok and Abiathar were priests;

25 Sheva was secretary, Zadok and Abiathar were priests,

25 And Sheva was scribe: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests:

- Jehoshaphat was the recorder (or Chronicler). Sheva was official scribe, evidently having succeeded Seraiah (2 Sam 8:17)

- Zadok and Abiathar remained as chief priests

26 Ira the Jairite also was a priest to David.

26 and Ira the Jairite was also a priest to David.

26 and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

26 And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David.

- Ira the Jairite was David's special minister, having succeeded the king's own sons in that capacity (8:15-18)