

Sheba Rebels Against David

Second Samuel 20: 1-22

DIG: In what ways do events in the previous chapter (especially 19:41-43) fuel Sheba's revolt? What did Sheba say that lit the fires of conflict? To squash Sheba's revolt, why did David bypass Joab twice, first favoring Amasa and then Abishai? What particularly galls Joab about Amasa's appointment? Is Sheba's revolt a popular uprising? Popular with whom? Betrayed by whom? Beheaded by whom? Why did Joab kill Amasa? How did the woman of Abel act wisely to save the city?

REFLECT: Joab was extremely loyal to David but essentially unsubmitive to him. Could this be true of your relation to Christ? When have you been really tempted to desert your King? For what reason? What kept you from going AWOL? When someone diminishes your status or authority, how does that make you feel? When resentment builds up, how do you keep that in check? Where might resentment be getting the better of you now? How can your faith make a difference during such trying times?

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Instead of basking in the glow of his newly won victory with a united nation, David continued to face a series of problems. He went from the pan to the fire. I am sure the words of Nathan continued to echo in David's head: **Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own (Second Samuel 12:10).** That bloody sword would claim two more victims here.

The Revolt of Sheba: The contention between the Israelite and Judean delegation at Gilgal (see Ed - **David Returns to Yerushalayim: Epilogue - Y'hudah or Yisra'el**) became so heated that a Benjamite by the name of Sheba announced a revolutionary, separatist movement against David and led the Israelites to desert the king. When the king crossed over the Jordan River to Gilgal, an ungodly man named Sheba son of Bikri, a Benjamite, was there. The feelings became so heated that one person could spark a whole revolt. He sounded the shofar and shouted, "We have no share in David, no part in Jesse's son! Every man to his tent, Isra'el!" So all the men of Isra'el deserted David to follow Sheba. But the men of Judah stayed by their king all the way from the Jordan River to Jerusalem (Second Samuel 20:1-2).

As Dale Ralph Davis points out in his commentary on **Second Samuel**, when **Sheba** rebelled against **the covenant king**, he also rebelled against **YHVH**. Which is somewhat tiring to the reader of **Second Samuel**. We've already been through this with **Absalom** in **Chapters 15-18**. But we must remember that the same ungodly principle goes on in the universal Church. People "say" that the Bible is inerrant, and claim they follow the Word of **God**. Yet they are only "Talking the Walk". Talk is not truly follow and yielding one's life to **God**. When a married woman finds another man she prefers to her husband, or a husband who has gotten close to another woman at work and wants to get rid of his older wife for a younger and prettier woman, somehow that authority of the Bible doesn't matter very much to him anymore. Or when someone has been wronged by another, they think: it was too much, the wound too deep, the offense too vicious to be reconciled and seek forgiveness. No, that thought is not from **God** and **God** calls us to take every thought captive (**First Corinthians 10:5**). Instead they should point out to the offended that **Yeshua** gives no option but to reconcile: **If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, "I repent," you must forgive them (Luke 17:3-4)**. They forget that they are recipients of **Jesus's** love and forgiveness. The offended cannot control their pride. We must always remember that there are "Sheba's" in the Church. They rebel against rightful authority to call their own shots; they lift up their hand against **the King**.⁴⁶¹

When **David** returned to his place in **Jerusalem**, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them but had no sexual relations with them because **Absalom** defiled them (**Second Samuel 16:21-22**). And because they had been the king's concubines, they could not be married to any other man. Therefore, they were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living, for all intents and purposes, as widows (**2 Samuel 20:3**). **Absalom's** first act was to claim **David's harem** as a public act of taking the royal throne; **David's** first act was to reclaim his authority over **the royal harem** as a means of regaining the royal throne.

There is something intensely sad about this scene. We have seen it all before in the tragedy of **Tamar** (see **Dh - Amnon and Tamar**). **Amnon** raped her and threw her out like human garbage. She remained alone and childless the rest of her days. **Amnon** sinned and she suffered the consequences.

We continue to meet this radical sadness in the Kingdom of **God**. You do and I do. Multitudes of **Messiah's** children know what it is to have their lives turned upside down because of the sins of others. And when all is said and done, there is no remedy. There is help . . . in the **One sent to bind up the broken hearted** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Jz - The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is On Me**), and in the hand of **Him** who promises to wipe every tear from their eyes (see the commentary on **Revelation Fr - Then I Saw a New Heaven and a New Earth**).

The Murder of Amasa: The overriding issue for David, however, was not the removal of his concubines, but an effective response to the challenge of the ten northern tribes. He would not allow Sheba's rebellion to grow. Then the king said to Amasa, the new general of David's army: **Summon the army, the men of Judah, to come to me within three days, be ready to march and be here yourself. But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him (Second Samuel 20:4-5). Amasa failed his first assignment. You never have a second chance to make a first impression. He either had the slows or simply couldn't accomplish the call-up in the allotted time.**

Therefore, David turned to Abishai, Joab's younger brother, to be the general of his army. The king said to Abishai, "Now Sheba will do us more harm than Absalom did. Take your standing army and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities and escape from us." So Joab's own military staff, the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors (see Ej - [David's Mighty Warriors](#)) went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba (2 Samuel 20:6-7). David continued to pass over Joab as his general, but significantly, the troops are still called Joab's men.

Imagine their surprise when they met Amasa at the great rock of Gibeon about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. He had adjusted it so as he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath. To Amasa it would appear that Joab's dagger fell out accidentally. So when Joab picked up the dagger, Amasa wouldn't be focusing his attention on it. Joab had planned to kill Amasa at his first opportunity. It was all over but the stabbing. Then Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But the kiss of Joab turned out to be the kiss of a Judas (Luke 22:47-48). Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's left hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. It was merely a clinical matter for Joab. An obstacle to be removed so he could proceed to the next item on his agenda. Then Joab (now mentioned first) and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba. But by the force of his personality and actions, Joab became the real leader of the expedition despite David's expressed wishes and effort (Second Samuel 20:8-10).⁴⁶²

Now Joab stationed one of his soldiers beside the body of Amasa and he called out as the soldiers marched by: **Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!** He made sure everyone got the message: Joab was in control of the king's army, although unbeknownst to the king! The pursuing army was aghast at the gruesome sight of Amasa's body Amasa laying there in the middle of the road wallowing in his blood. And one of the soldiers saw that all the troops came to a halt there. Soldiers loyal to Amasa didn't want to leave the body of their commander in that pitiful state in the middle

of the road. So they didn't move. When the soldier stationed there by Joab realized that everyone who came up to Amasa stopped, he dragged him from the road into a field and threw a garment over him. After Amasa had been removed from the road, everyone went on with Joab to pursue Sheba (Second Samuel 20:11-13). Abishai then disappeared from the record, unable to hold his own once Joab showed up on the scene.

The Death of Sheba: Things were beginning to look bleak for Sheba. He had passed through all the tribes of Isra'el looking for support: To Abel Beth Maakah (the extreme north of Yisra'el) and through the entire region of the Bikrites (members of his own tribe), who gathered together, but very few actually ended up following him. All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maakah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. In the middle of the attack, while they were battering the wall to bring it down a female voice pierced the air. A wise woman called out from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him" (2 Samuel 20:14-16). Others already recognized Joab as the real general. She was sharp, clever, insightful, and for the third time in the life of David, a woman changed the course of events. Abigail was the first (see Bn - [Abigail Acted Quickly](#)), the wise woman of Tekoa was the second (see DI - [The Wise Woman of Tekoa](#)), and this wise woman of Abel Beth Maakah was the third. Her quick thinking saved the day.

He went toward her, and she asked, "Are you Joab?" "I am," he answered. She said: Listen to what your servant has to say. "I'm listening," he said (Deuteronomy 20:10-11). She continued: Long ago they used to say, "Get your answer from Abel," and that settled it. The point was that Joab would do well to seek her counsel. We are peaceful and faithful in Isra'el. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother of Isra'el, a place where people have looked for guidance, well-being and life. Why do you want to swallow up ADONAI's inheritance (Second Samuel 20:17-19)?

"Far be it from me!" Joab replied, "Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy! That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bikri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I'll withdraw from the city." The deal was cut. It wasn't long before Sheba lost his head over the matter. The woman said to Joab, "His head will be thrown to you from the wall." Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba and threw it to Joab. The traitor was dead. The rebellion had ended. So Joab sounded the shofar, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. He had done what was necessary to save David's throne.

And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem, after a successful mission, once again the general of the king's army (Second Samuel 20:20-22). We are not surprised. Joab had butchered Abner (Second Samuel 3:27) and Absalom (Second Samuel 18:14-15). Now Amasa. He specialized in treachery and bloodshed. At this point, the reactions of David are omitted, but on his deathbed they were made clear to Solomon, who was warned: Don't let his gray head go down to the grave in peace (First Kings 2:6 CJB). But for the moment, Joab gambled and won. David could hardly have welcomed him with open arms. Nevertheless, he had saved the Kingdom. Joab was both intensely loyal and completely uncontrollable. He didn't revolt against David like Sheba, nor did he seek the throne like Absalom. He was faithful. He didn't try to become the king . . . but he acted like the king. On the one hand he was loyal to David, but on the other hand he really didn't submit to David. In a way, it was like there was a double rebellion going on: by Sheba who wanted to leave the kingdom and by Joab who would not be controlled within the kingdom, but was continually slicing and dicing to keep his own position unopposed. We can see a spiritual principle there.⁴⁶³

Spiritual deception is not only about false outward appearances, but also has much to do with false words. Anyone can say, "Lord, Lord" with their mouth. Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of My Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21). Notice that it is not the one who says he knows Jesus or who believes certain facts about Him; rather, it is the one who does the Father's will that is saved. The issue is obedience to the Word of God. Yeshua said: If you hold to My teaching you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31). You cannot separate salvation and obedience from the will of ADONAI, as the writer to the Hebrews makes clear: He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). There is such a thing as acknowledging God's sovereignty and disagreeing with His will. In the end, such people will have no place in the Kingdom. There are scores of "Joabs" in the congregations of God.