

The Rebellion of Sheba

2 Samuel 20

2 Samuel 20 - *"And there happened to be there a rebel, whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said: "We have no share in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, O Israel!"* ² *So every man of Israel deserted David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, remained loyal to their king.*

³ *Now 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 seclusion and supported them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their death, living in widowhood.*

⁴ *And the king said to Amasa, "Assemble the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself."* ⁵ *So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah. But he delayed longer than the set time which David had appointed him.* 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, lest he find for himself fortified cities, and escape us."* ⁷ *So Joab's men, with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the mighty men, went out after him. And they went out of Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.* ⁸ *When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came before them. Now Joab was dressed in battle armor; on it was a belt with a sword fastened in its sheath at his hips; and as he was going forward, it fell out.* ⁹ *Then Joab said to Amasa, "Are you in health, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.* ¹⁰ *But Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab's hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not strike him again. Thus he died.*

Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. ¹¹ *Meanwhile one of Joab's men stood near Amasa, and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David—follow Joab!"* ¹² *But Amasa wallowed in his blood in the middle of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he moved Amasa from the highway to the field and threw a garment over him, when he saw that everyone who came upon him halted.* ¹³ *When he was removed from the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.*

¹⁴ *And he went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel and Beth Maachah and all the Berites. So they were gathered together and also went after Sheba.* ¹⁵ *Then they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth Maachah; and they cast up a siege mound against the city, and it stood by the rampart. And all the people who were with Joab battered the wall to throw it down.*

¹⁶ *Then a wise woman cried out from the city, "Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, 'Come nearby, that I may speak with you.'"*

¹⁷ *When he had come near to her, the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Hear the*

words of your maidservant.” And he answered, “I am listening.” ¹⁸ So she spoke, saying, “They used to talk in former times, saying, ‘They shall surely seek guidance at Abel,’ and so they would end disputes. ¹⁹ I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?”

²⁰ And Joab answered and said, “Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! ²¹ That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.” So the woman said to Joab, “Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall.” ²² Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.

²³ And Joab was over all the army of Israel; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; ²⁴ Adoram was in charge of revenue; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; ²⁵ Sheva was scribe; Zadok and Abiathar were the priests; ²⁶ and Ira the Jairite was a chief minister under David.”

Background Notes

This is one of those Bible stories you probably didn't learn when you were a child, right? And there are no pictures of this event in Sunday school lessons or in Bible story books. We've seen pictures of David slinging a stone at Goliath in children's Bible story books, but we have yet to see a picture of Amasa lying in the middle of the road after his cruel murder at the hands of Joab.

Well, there's no need to play up the gory and gruesome murders in the Bible, but it is important to note that this was Joab's third murder – first Abner, then Absalom, and now Amasa. And Amasa was Joab's cousin – they were both nephews of David. So while Joab supported David, and was a capable and valiant military man, he was certainly not “Mr. Nice Guy.” He sought his own political ambition and success more than his loyalty to David. In fact, in this chapter, Joab went directly against David's military orders by killing Amasa, David's new general, and then taking over the army from his brother Abishai.

It appears that Joab systematically planned Amasa's murder at Gibeon. He probably deliberately wore his sword in such a way that it would fall out of its sheath and onto the ground as he moved forward to greet Amasa. Thus Amasa was not on guard when Joab picked up his sword and struck Amasa in the stomach, killing him. We'll see at the end of the chapter that Joab was able to maintain his position as general of David's army because he was successful in quelling the rebellion of Sheba - a rebellion that could have resulted in further civil war.

Doctrinal Points

1. One foolish man can divide a fellowship.

Sheba, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, started a rebellion. He took advantage of the falling out between the tribe of Judah in the south, and the ten tribes in the north (see 2 Samuel 19:41-43). Rather than trying to bring peace to the situation, Sheba blew a trumpet and got a number of northern tribe Israelites to follow him by saying, *“We have no share in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse. Every man to his tents, O Israel!”*

As a result, the united effort to bring David back as king was fractured by one man. Verse 1 calls Sheba a rebel, or troublemaker, or worthless fellow. The Hebrew here is, literally, *“son of Belial.”* This rebellion was certainly a further satanic attempt to bring the dynasty of David to an end, because Satan knew that the Messiah was to come through the line of David. The fact that Sheba was from Saul’s tribe of Benjamin (and may even have been in the house of Saul) gave him some clout and thus he was able to mount the rebellion.

At this juncture, the right man could have brought healing and peace to the nation instead of further division. Wise peacemakers are blessed, but they’re much more rare than the foolish friction- and faction-makers. This is not only true in the affairs of a nation and government, but in the church as well. One troublemaker can divide a fellowship. How often this has happened in the history of the church! One foolish man can divide a fellowship in the area of false doctrine, or personality clashes, or prideful jealousy. James 3:5 *“Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”*

In 3 John we read about Diotrephes who “loved to be first” in the fellowship, and would not be subject to apostolic authority. As it was in David’s day and in the days of the early church, so it is today. One foolish and rebellious man can divide a fellowship. That’s why the Lord commends the peacemakers so highly in Matthew 5:9 - *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* One foolish man can divide a fellowship.

2. One wise woman can save the day.

Sheba made his way north, recruiting rebels as he went. He finally took refuge in the walled city of Abel Beth Maachah, in the far north of Israel. When Joab and David’s army arrived at Abel Beth Maachah, they built a siege mound. They were prepared to break down the wall and slaughter the whole city if that’s what was necessary to capture Sheba and end the rebellion.

It was at this point that a wise woman of the city called out to Joab, and talked to him using reason and logic: “Joab, are you going to destroy a whole city for one man? This city has been an important city in Israel for years. You don’t have to tear down the wall - we’ll give you the head of the man that you’re seeking! Why be a butcher when you can do a better job as a surgeon?” So, Joab listened to reason and agreed with her logic. When the wise woman communicated this to

the people of the city, they executed the rebel Sheba, threw his head over the wall, and the city was saved. Again, I haven't seen this biblical event in Veggie Tales yet, but the lesson is certainly here. One wise woman saved the day.

God uses wise women today to deal with problems and save the day – in homes, in churches, and in nations. When the brand new state of Israel was threatened with extinction by the armies of surrounding hostile nations, God used the wisdom of Golda Meir to save the day in political discussions and raising support, money and munitions. Be open to the counsel of a wise woman. She may be your mother or your wife. One wise woman can save the day!

Practical Application

Would we be as loyal as Adoram?

Verses 23-26: *“And Joab was over all the army of Israel; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; ²⁴ Adoram was in charge of revenue; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; ²⁵ Sheva was scribe; Zadok and Abiathar were the priests; ²⁶ and Ira the Jairite was a chief minister under David.”*

In these verses we have a list of David's officials, his cabinet members and chiefs of state. Adoram was over the collecting tribute and forced labor - that is, the POWs who were captured and put to work on public works projects. Deuteronomy 20:10-11 says, *“When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you.”*

Adoram was not only a loyal servant of King David, but we find in 1 Kings 4 and 5 that he went on to be a loyal servant to David's son King Solomon as well. And then we read in 1 Kings 12 that Adoram continued to loyally serve the kingdom of Judah under David's grandson, King Rehoboam, in Jerusalem. Even though Rehoboam made some bad decisions, Adoram was loyal to the point of death. As an elder statesman, Adoram was sent on a dangerous mission to the northern kingdom of Israel, which was in the process of being established under King Jeroboam the 1st. As a result, all Israel stoned Adoram to death (1 Kings 12:18).

Adoram's loyalty to his king cost him his life. Adoram was loyal to the point of death. What about our loyalty to our King, the Lord Himself? Would we be as loyal as Adoram? Will we obey our King to the point of death?