SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 20

*Sheba Rebels Against David*

**Now a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bicri, a Benjamite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and shouted, “We have no share in David, no part in Jesse’s son! Every man to his tent, O Israel!” 2 So all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bicri. But the men of Judah stayed by their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem. 3 When David returned to his palace 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 did not lie with them. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows. 4 Then the king said to Amasa, “Summon the men of Judah to come to me within three days, and be here yourself.” 5 But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him. 6 David said to Abishai, “Now Sheba son of Bicri will do us more harm than Absalom did. Take your master’s men and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities and escape from us.” 7 So Joab’s men and the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bicri. 8 While they were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath. 9 Joab said to Amasa, “How are you, my brother?” Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. 10 Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab’s hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bicri. 11 One of Joab’s men stood beside Amasa and said, “Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!” 12 Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the road, and the man saw that all the troops came to a halt there. When he realized that everyone who came up to Amasa stopped, he dragged him from the road into a field and threw a garment over him. 13 After Amasa had been removed from the road, all the men went on with Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bicri. 14 Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maacah and through the entire region of the Berites, who gathered together and followed him. 15 All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maacah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. While they were battering the wall to bring it down, 16 a wise woman called from the city, “Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him.” 17 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. 18 She continued, “Long ago they used to say, ‘Get your answer at Abel,’ and that settled it. 19 We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up the Lord’s inheritance?” 20 “Far be it from me!” Joab replied, “Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy! 21 That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bicri, 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 woman said to Joab, “His head will be thrown to you from the wall.” 22 Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bicri and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem. 23 Joab was over Israel’s entire army; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; 24 Adoniram was in charge of forced labor; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; 25 Sheva was secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; 26 and Ira the Jairite was David’s priest.**

**20:1** *troublemaker.* See note on Dt 13:13. (CSB)

 *Bicri.* Benjamin’s second son (Beker, Ge 46:21; 1Ch 7:6–9). (CSB)

 *Benjamite.* Tribal jealousy still simmered over the transfer of the royal house from Benjamin (Saul’s tribe) to Judah. (CSB)

Tribe from which King Saul had come (1Sm 9:1). When the kingdom was later divided under David’s grandson Rehoboam, the house of Benjamin was the only other tribe left with Judah under the house of David (2Ch 11:1–12). (TLSB)

 *there.* In Gilgal (19:40–43). (CSB)

 *We have no share in David.* Sheba appeals to the Israelite suspicion that David favored his own tribe Judah over the other tribes (see 1Ki 12:16). (CSB)

Contradiction of what was said in 19:43.(TLSB)

*every man to his tents*. Sheba called Israel to desert the king on his way to Jerusalem. (TLSB)

**20:2** *all the men of Israel.* Those referred to in 19:41–43. (CSB)

**20:3** *ten concubines.* See notes on 15:16; 16:22. (CSB)

 *as if in widowhood*. They had been taken by his son, so David would not lie with them (cf Lv 18:15). (TLSB)

**20:4** *Amasa.* See notes on 17:25; 19:13. David bypasses Joab. (CSB)

 *within three days*. David wanted no delay in pursuing Sheba. (TLSB)

**20:6** *Abishai.* David bypasses Joab a second time (see v. 7). (CSB)

Joab’s brother, a military commander. (TLSB)

 *your master’s men.* “Joab’s men” (v. 7). (CSB)

General reference to David’s troops. (TLSB)

**20:7** *Joab’s men.* See 18:2. It becomes clear that Joab also accompanied the soldiers and, though not in command (by the king’s order), he was obviously the leader recognized by the soldiers (see vv. 7, 11, 15). (CSB)

Presumably the third of the army that he commanded in the battle with Absalom (18:2). Though no longer the commander, Joab quickly moved to resume his previous position. (TLSB)

 *Kerethites and Pelethites.* See note on 8:18. (CSB)

 *mighty warriors.* See 23:8–39. Once more in a time of crisis David depended mainly on the small force of professionals (many of them non-Israelite) who made up his private army. (CSB)

David’s elite soldiers. Cf 23:8–39; 1Ch 11:10–47. (TLSB)

**20:8** *the great stone*. Perhaps the “great stone” that Saul had the people bring to Gibeon for their treachery (1Sm 14:32–35). Perhaps it was also the “great high place” at Gibeon (1Ki 3:4). (TLSB)

*Gibeon.* See note on 2:12. (CSB)

 *Amasa came.* Apparently with some troops (see v. 11 and note). (CSB)

*soldier’s garment*. His tunic was girded for ready movement, for the march to battle, with his sword belt fastened over his clothing in the usual fashion. (TLSB)

*it fell out*. Joab’s sword, perhaps more of a long dagger, slid out of its sheath into the folds of his tunic. (TLSB)

**20:9** *by the beard with his right hand to kiss him*. Customary gesture of affection. By using his right hand, the fighting hand, Joab put Amasa off guard against any attack. (TLSB)

**20:10** *into his belly.* See 2:23; 3:27. For the second time Joab commits murder to secure his position as commander of David’s army (see 1Ki 2:5–6). (CSB)

Cf Jgs 3:15–23; 2Sm 3:27. Under Solomon, Joab was later put to death for his crimes (1Ki 2:28–34). (TLSB)

 *Joab and his brother Abishai.* In defiance of David’s order, Joab reassumes command on his own initiative (see v. 23). (CSB)

**20:11** *Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David.* To dispel any idea that Joab was aligned with Sheba’s conspiracy, an appeal is made to Amasa’s troops to support Joab if they are truly loyal to David. (CSB)

The propaganda was that Joab had not turned against the king by killing Amasa, but had taken charge of the army on David’s behalf. (TLSB)

**20:13** *all the people went on after Joab*. With Amasa out of the way, Joab was once more commander in chief. (TLSB)

**20:14** *Abel Beth Maacah.* See NIV text note; located to the north of Dan (see 1Ki 15:20; 2Ch 16:4). Sheba’s strategy was to gather as many volunteers for his revolt as possible, but he was obviously afraid to assemble his ragtag army anywhere within close reach of David’s men. (CSB)

Lit, “house of Maacah,” echoing name of Absalom’s mother (3:3). Absalom fled to his mother’s “house” (the kingdom of his maternal grandfather) after killing Amnon (13:37); now Sheba was following in his steps. (TLSB)

 *Berites.* Otherwise unknown. (CSB)

Sheba was “the son of Bichri” (v 1), so these would be the members of his own clan, apparently the only followers he had left; or, “Berites” may be from a wordplay on “Beersheba.” If so, the narrator is suggesting that the rebel Sheba ran from Beersheba in the south to the territory of Dan in the north and withdrew into a city. (TLSB)

**20:15** Classic siege techniques. (TLSB)

**20:18** *Get your answer at Abel.* The city was famous for the wisdom of its inhabitants. (CSB)

City had a reputation for good judgment and wise counsel, as the woman exemplified in her negotiation with Joab. (TLSB)

**20:19** *a mother in Israel.* A town that produced faithful Israelites—cities were commonly personified as women (see Jer 50:12; Gal 4:26). (CSB)

Feminine qualities she described and represented are a striking contrast to masculine bravado of both Sheba, the “worthless” would-be rebel (v 1), and ruthless Joab. (TLSB

 *the Lord’s inheritance.* See note on 1Sa 10:1. (CSB)

Joab would not want to be seen as an enemy of the Lord’s land and people. (TLSB)

**20:21** *hill country of Ephraim.* Either Sheba, a Benjamite (see v. 1), lived in the tribal territory of Ephraim or this was the designation of a geographical, rather than a strictly tribal, region. (CSB)

 *him alone*. Cf 17:2–3; 18:3, 15–16. (TLSB)

**20:22** *Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.* See notes on vv. 7, 10. (CSB)

**20:23–26** These royal officials apparently served David during most of his reign (see 8:15–18). (CSB)

**20:23** *Joab was over Israel’s entire army.* Though in some disfavor, he held this position until he participated in Adonijah’s conspiracy (1Ki 1:7; 2:28–35). (CSB)

For now, his murderous crimes were left unpunished. Cf 1Ki 2:28–35. (TLSB)

 *Kerethites and Pelethites.* See note on 8:18. (CSB)

Would later replace Joab as head of the army under Solomon (1Ki 2:35). (TLSB)

**20:24** *Adoniram was in charge of forced labor.* A position not established in the early years of David’s reign (see 8:15–16). Adoniram must have been a late appointee of David since he continued to serve under Solomon (1Ki 4:6; 5:14) and was eventually killed in the early days of the reign of Rehoboam (1Ki 12:18; 2Ch 10:18). (CSB)

 *forced labor.* Labor performed for the most part by prisoners of war from defeated nations (see 12:31; Jos 9:21; 1Ki 9:15, 20–21). (CSB)

The service taken from foreigners, which had been utilized since the conquest (Jgs 1:28–35). At first, the people of Israel were not enslaved (1Ki 9:20–22), but by 1Ki 12:1–18 their yoke of hard service was heavy. (TLSB)

 *recorder.* See note on 8:16. (CSB)

**20:25** *Sheva.* See note on 8:17 (“Seraiah”). (CSB)

 *secretary.* See note on 8:17. (CSB)

 *Zadok and Abiathar.* See note on 8:17. (CSB)

Abiathar was probably the high priest in the reign of David. Cf 1Ki 1:5–7; 2:35; 4:4. (TLSB)

**20:26** *Jairite.* A reference either to Jair of the tribe of Manasseh (Nu 32:41) or to a judge from Gilead (Jdg 10:3, 5). (CSB)

Jairites were descendants of Manasseh who were given the territory of Gilead (Nu 32:40–41; 1Ch 2:21–22). Perhaps Ira was associated with Barzillai the Gileadite (17:27–29; 19:31–39). “The sons of Barzillai” were among “the sons of the priests” (Ezr 2:61). (TLSB)

 *priest.* See note on 8:18. (CSB)

**Ch 20** For David to return to his throne in Jerusalem, a rebellion among the northern tribes of Israel must be stopped. Though David has been humbled and brought to repentance for his sins, the shadow of rebellion and violence continues to haunt his reign. Nevertheless, by restoring David to the throne of Israel, the Lord shows His promise to raise up a Son of David, whose throne and kingdom shall be eternal. That promise is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whose incarnation, death, and resurrection win every spiritual victory. • “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David” (Lk 1:68–69). Amen. (TLSB)