

# SECOND SAMUEL

## Chapter 20

### *The Rebellion of Sheba*

Now there happened to be there a worthless man, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, "We have no portion in David, and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!" 2 So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem. 3 And David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood. 4 Then the king said to Amasa, "Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself." 5 So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been 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 get himself to fortified cities and escape from us." 7 And there went out after him Joab's men and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men. They went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. 8 When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a soldier's garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened on his thigh, and as he went forward it fell out. 9 And 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. 10 But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. 11 And one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab." 12 And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway. And anyone who came by, seeing him, stopped. And when the man saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field and threw a garment over him. 13 When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. 14 And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in. 15 And all the men who were with Joab came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maacah. They cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart, and they were battering the wall to throw it down. 16 Then a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'" 17 And he came near her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your servant." And he answered, "I am listening." 18 Then she said, "They used to say in former times, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel,' and so they settled a matter. 19 I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the heritage of the LORD?" 20 Joab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! 21 That is not true. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David. Give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall." 22 Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king. 23 Now Joab was in command of all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was in command of the Cherethites and the Pelethites; 24 and Adoram was in charge of the forced labor; and Jehoshaphat

**the son of Ahilud was the recorder; 25 and Sheva was secretary; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests; 26 and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest.**

**20:1** *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** *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*. 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 lord's servants*. "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)

*mighty men*. 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)

*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** *in the stomach.* 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.* 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** *ask counsel 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)

*heritage of the LORD’s.* 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)

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

**20:23** *Joab command of all the army of Israel.* 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.* 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)

**20:25** *Zadok and Abiathar.* 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)

**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)