

The Life of David

David and the Rebellion of Sheba

2 Samuel 20:1-26

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November 22, 2020

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Scripture

David and his army soundly defeated Absalom and his army. Sadly for David, his son Absalom was killed in the battle, along with twenty thousand of Absalom's soldiers. As he returned to Jerusalem to reestablish himself as king over all Israel, David extended grace to everyone along the way. But, even before he arrived in Jerusalem, another rebellion arose against David, which David considered even more dangerous than Absalom's rebellion.

Let's read about David and the rebellion of Sheba in 2 Samuel 20:1-26:

¹Now 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!”**

²So 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.

³And 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.

⁴Then the king said to Amasa, “Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself.” ⁵So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him. ⁶And 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. (2 Samuel 20:1-26)

Introduction

God called David as a teenager to become king of his people, Israel. Moreover, God promised David to establish his eternal kingdom through one of his offspring (*cf.* 2 Samuel 7:12-16). It was many years before David was finally crowned as king over all Israel. In the beginning, there was great hope as David’s kingdom provided a glimpse of God’s eternal kingdom.

But David, like all of us, fell into sin. David’s failure showed that his kingdom was not the promised, eternal kingdom of God. God told David that the sword would never depart from his house (*cf.* 2 Samuel 12:10-12). Over the course of time, at least three of David’s children died, his concubines were molested by his son, Absalom, and David was driven from his kingdom. However, he was able to defeat his rebellious son, Absalom, in battle, although Absalom died in that battle.

In our study of the life of David, we have examined the rise,

fall, and restoration of David. Second Samuel 20 brings to a conclusion the restoration of David. But, as we shall see, David encountered numerous problems as he restored his kingdom.

Lesson

Second Samuel 20:1-26 shows us the problems encountered in restoring the promised kingdom.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Rebellion (20:1-2)
2. Sadness (20:3)
3. Instability (20:4-13)
4. Deliverance (20:14-22)
5. Administration (20:23-26)

I. Rebellion (20:1-2)

The first problem encountered in restoring the promised kingdom is rebellion.

We read in verse 1, **“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!’ ”** This verse continues the dispute that began in 2 Samuel 19:41-43. The men of Israel, which consisted of the ten northern tribes, began a dispute with the men of Judah. They were offended that the men of Judah had taken the initiative to bring David back to Jerusalem as king. This was not the case and there was a lot of misunderstanding about what actually took place. The men of Judah noted that “the king is our close relative” (19:42) and that was enough for **Sheba** to declare in rebellion, **“We have no portion in David.”** Thus, we read in verse 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.”

David returned to Jerusalem with just a very small part of his kingdom still intact. The initial problem encountered in restoring his kingdom was rebellion.

Periodically, I meet with people who tell me that they want to get back to New Testament Christianity. They usually mean that they want a church where Christians are devoted “to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” and where Christians are “praising God and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:42–47). Though this describes believers in the early days of the first-century church, they forget other descriptions of believers in the New Testament. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church and said that “each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ’ ” (1 Corinthians 1:12).

Sadly, this attitude is common among Christians in churches today. Believers get their pride hurt and then they take sides in opposition to others and the leadership of the church. This is the spirit of rebellion and it continues to destroy churches even today.

II. Sadness (20:3)

The second problem encountered in restoring the promised kingdom is sadness.

David arrived in Jerusalem with a small, shaky group of loyal followers. No doubt he was very concerned about the rebellion that was fomenting with Sheba. Then we read in verse 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.”**

I am not going to address the issue of David having concubines other than to say that since he had them, he was responsible to take care of them. We remember that these concubines were violated by his son Absalom in such a way that everyone knew about it. When David **“put them in a house under guard,”** his goal was to protect and care for them rather than imprison them. David no longer had intimate relations with these women.

The saddest part for these women is stated in the last sentence of verse 3, **“So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.”** They were never able to enjoy marital relationships. They never knew the blessing of children. They grew old and no family member took care of them. And then they died. These precious women suffered because of David’s sin. David’s sinful behavior had consequences in the lives of these women even as he tried to undo and correct their misery. Sin has far-reaching consequences. David never expected that his sin with Bathsheba, which brought him momentary pleasure, would bring a lifetime of sadness to these ten women.

Friends, sin’s payoff is immediate gratification but it will bring you, or others, long-term sadness. Beware of your sin!

III. Instability (20:4-13)

The third problem encountered in restoring the promised kingdom is instability.

Having arrived in Jerusalem, David needed to do something now to crush the rebellion of Sheba. In verse 4, we read that David said to his newly-appointed chief of the army, **Amasa, “Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself.”** For some unspecified reason, Amasa was not able to muster Judah within three days. So David ordered another general, Abishai, to pursue Sheba. Presumably, there were enough soldiers in Jerusalem for David to send Abishai after Sheba.

Then we read an unexpected statement in verse 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.”** Where did Joab come from? You remember that David had demoted Joab as chief of the army because he had disobeyed David’s order not to harm Absalom. Joab was extremely strong-willed and also extremely loyal to David, even though he at times disobeyed David.

In any event, Joab was back among the troops. Abishai and Joab arrived at Gibeon, which was about five miles northwest of Jerusalem. Amasa came to meet them there. The author of Second Samuel describes in some detail how Joab came up to meet Amasa. A sword fell out of Joab’s sheath. Joab bent down to pick it up in his left hand. Then, with his right hand he took hold of Amasa’s beard to greet him. Amasa was unsuspecting because the sword was in Joab’s non-fighting hand and, besides, Joab greeted him warmly by saying, **“Is it well with you, my brother?”** (20:9). That is when **“Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died”** (20:10b). Amasa was now dead. One of Joab’s young men took his body and put him into a field so that **“all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri”** (20:13).

Joab was intensely loyal to David, but always on his terms. He disposed of anyone whom he thought opposed David. Abner, Absalom, and Amasa were killed by Joab because they opposed David, even though David did not approve of any of Joab’s actions. Joab was an extremely talented military general but he was a thorn in David’s side. At the end of the day, Joab’s actions brought greater instability rather than stability to the kingdom.

Joab is like an extremely talented Christian who has wonderfully effective gifts for ministry. This Christian is committed to advancing God’s kingdom. However, this Christian does not submit to authority and does whatever he thinks best in advancing the

kingdom of God, regardless of who may be run over in the process. But, instead of advancing the kingdom of God, it produces instability.

IV. Deliverance (20:14-22)

The fourth problem encountered in restoring the promised kingdom is deliverance.

In verse 2, Sheba was able to get all the men of Israel to withdraw from David and follow him. Then we read in verse 14, **“And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in.”** Sheba was not able to get all the men of Israel to follow him. **Abel of Beth-maacah** was in the far north of Israel and by the time he arrived there only his clan of **Bichrites** were with him.

Verse 15 says, **“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.”** At that point, a **“wise woman”** started negotiating with Joab. She did not want her city destroyed. Joab let her know that if she gave up Sheba, he would not destroy the city, as he said in verse 21, **“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.”** The woman told the people what needed to be done to deliver the city from destruction. So, **“they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it out to Joab”** (20:22). Having accomplished what he set out to do, namely, to kill Sheba, Joab returned to Jerusalem and to David.

Sometimes there are Shebas in the church. They oppose what is being done to advance kingdom of God, and they may even try to rally others to their side. The church needs to be delivered from these professing Christians. This is done through the process of

church discipline. Our denomination's *Book of Church Order* states, "The exercise of discipline is highly important and necessary. In its proper usage discipline maintains: a. the glory of God, b. the purity of His Church, c. the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners" (*BCO* 27-3).

Discipline is a problem that must be done in the establishment of the kingdom.

V. Administration (20:23-26)

And the fifth problem encountered in restoring the promised kingdom is administration.

Good administration is vital to the proper functioning of any organization. Chapter 20 closes with a description of the administration in David's kingdom. We are immediately struck by the first words in verse 23, **"Now Joab was in command of all the army of Israel."** Commentator Richard Phillips writes, "It might as well have said, 'Now David had capitulated to the cruel power of his crafty nephew.'"¹ Joab simply would not take a back seat. Once again, he found himself in leadership in David's kingdom. Phillips continues, "Contrast this summary with its parallel from years earlier, which began, 'So David reigned over all Israel' (8:15). David might still be seated on Israel's throne, but now it was ruthless expedience and worldly passion that reigned over the nation where David had once 'administered justice and equity to all his people' (v. 15)."²

Leadership is essential in the kingdom of God. However, the kind of leadership that is essential is humble and servant-hearted, not proud and ambitious. A Christian leader must have certain spiritual gifts in order to lead effectively. But, far more important

¹ Richard D. Phillips, *2 Samuel*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 357.

² Richard D. Phillips, *2 Samuel*, 357.

and far more necessary are the character qualities that are listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Let us pray that God will raise up such leaders for his church.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed David and the rebellion of Sheba in 2 Samuel 20:1-26, let us realize that our hope must only be in the king of God's eternal kingdom.

David was called by God to become king over his kingdom on earth. God promised that one of David's offspring would rule eternally as king. David knew that he was called by God. He knew that God's kingdom was the hope of the world. But David also come to know that he was deeply flawed and that he was not the eternal king.

David's Greater Son, Jesus, is the king of God's promised, eternal kingdom. Unlike David, Jesus is not flawed. He is sinless. His kingdom continues to grow. He calls sinners to enter into his kingdom through faith and repentance.

If you have never done so, submit to Jesus as Savior, Lord, and King. Repent of all your sin. And trust in him alone for your eternal destiny. Jesus is our only hope for eternal life. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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