

CHAPTER 20

INTRODUCTION TO SECOND SAMUEL 20

This chapter gives an account of a new rebellion raised by Sheba, ([2 Samuel 20:1,2](#)); of David's shutting up his concubines unto the day of their death, whom Absalom had lain with, ([2 Samuel 20:3](#)); of Amasa being ordered to assemble the men of Judah to crush the rebellion, but being dilatory, Abishai is sent out with David's servants, and was followed by Joab with the men under him, ([2 Samuel 20:4-7](#)); and of the murder of Amasa by Joab, ([2 Samuel 20:8-13](#)); and of Sheba being shut up in the city Abel, ([2 Samuel 20:14,15](#)); whose head, by the means of a wise woman, was delivered to Joab, and so an end was put to the rebellion, ([2 Samuel 20:16-22](#)); and, lastly, of the chief officers in David's camp and court, ([2 Samuel 20:23-26](#)).

Ver. 1. *And there happened to be a man of Belial*, etc.] A wicked man, as the Targum, a lawless, yokeless man, that had cast off the yoke of the law, and was without it, as Belial is by some interpreted; or one unprofitable and useless, yea, noxious and pernicious: this man, though, with respect to second causes, may be said to be there by chance, yet it was so ordered by the providence of God that he should be present at this time for the further fulfilment of the threatening to David, that the sword should not depart from his house:

whose name [was] Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite; one perhaps that had been in the rebellion of Absalom, and had a grudge against David for the removal of the kingdom out of that tribe:

and he blew a trumpet; which was done to draw off the Israelites from David, and gather a party to himself:

and said, we have no part in David; so he interpreted what the men of Judah said, because they claimed kindred to David, the rest of the Israelites had no interest in him; thus they, who just before said they had ten parts in him, now had none at all:

neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse; so he calls David by way of contempt, as if he was no king, but a private person, and a descendant from a mean family:

every man to his tent, O Israel; there to consider what to do, and whom to choose to be their king, and let Judah take David for their king, and enjoy him alone, since they had so slighted, and dealt so injuriously and roughly with the rest of the tribes.

Ver. 2. *So every man of Israel went up from after David*, etc.] Those that met him on the road departed from him, and went no further with him:

[and] followed Sheba the son of Bichri; and made him their captain, who was the author of their mutiny and sedition:

but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan to Jerusalem: never left him, after they had conducted him over Jordan, until they had brought him safely to Jerusalem.

Ver. 3. *And David came to his house at Jerusalem*, etc.] His palace there, which was in that part of the city called the fort of Zion, and city of David:

and the king took the ten women [his] concubines, whom he had left to keep the house; when he fled from Jerusalem because of Absalom, (³⁰¹⁶2 Samuel 15:16);

and put them in ward; partly as a punishment for easily yielding to the lust of Absalom, and partly that they might not be seen, which would bring to remembrance his sin:

and fed them; he did not put them to death, nor put them away, but kept them thus confined, and made a proper provision for them, not suffering them to marry any other, and be maintained by them:

but went not in unto them: into their apartments to lie with them, having been defiled by his son, (³⁰¹⁶2 Samuel 16:22);

so they were shut up unto the day of their death; kept in the ward till they died:

living in widowhood; neither used by the king as his concubines, as they had been before, nor suffered to marry any other; or “in the widowhood of life”^{f333}, which is so expressed, to distinguish it from widowhood made by

death; this was such sort of widowhood as obtained while their husband was living; so the Targum,

“widows of their husband alive,”

or remaining.

Ver. 4. *Then said the king to Amasa*, etc.] Whom he had promised to make general of his army, (³⁰⁹¹³2 Samuel 19:13); and by the following order declared him such:

assemble me the men of Judah within three days; which was done by the sound of the trumpet, or by the proclamation of a herald; it seems that the men of Judah, who attended David to Jerusalem, were gone to their respective cities and places of abode, or there would have been no occasion for such a summons; though it is strange they should, when the men of Israel appeared so inclinable to a new rebellion:

and be thou here present; to take the command of them.

Ver. 5. *So Amasa went to assemble [the men of] Judah*, etc.] To gather, them together out of their several tribes, and bring them to Jerusalem:

but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him: than the three days; whether this was owing to the remissness of Amasa, or the unwillingness of the people to serve under him, who had been Absalom's general in the late rebellion, or not having time sufficient allowed him, is not certain.

Ver. 6. *And David said to Abishai*, etc.] For it seems he would have nothing to say to Joab, being displeased with him for slaying Absalom, and having removed him from his posts; and therefore speaks to the next officer in his army, Abishai; though Josephus ^{f334} says, he addressed himself to Joab, contrary to the express words of the text:

now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than [did] Absalom; gain a greater party, and give more trouble to subdue him, unless suppressed in time:

take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him; without waiting for Amasa, and the troops he was assembling; delays in such a case as an insurrection being dangerous, which ought to be nipped in the bud, and

crushed as soon as possible; in order to which, he bids him take his servants that were about him, his bodyguards, and pursue Sheba:

lest he get him fenced cities; where he may secure himself, and hold out a siege a long time, and give a great deal of trouble:

and escape us; for the present; or “escape our eyes”, as the “Keri”, or marginal reading is; we shall lose sight of him, and not know which way he is gone, if he is not pursued quickly.

Ver. 7. *And there went out after him Joab’s men*, etc.] Who though he was removed from his post as general, yet might still have the command of a regiment:

and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites; over whom Benaiah was, (~~2~~ Samuel 20:23); these attended David in his flight, and had now returned with him, (~~2~~ Samuel 15:18);

and all the mighty men; the military men that were at Jerusalem as many as could be spared:

and they went out of Jerusalem to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri; with Abishai at the head of them; Josephus^{f335} says there were six hundred, besides the soldiers at Jerusalem that went on this pursuit.

Ver. 8. *When they [were] at the great stone which [is] in Gibeon*, etc.] Which, according to Josephus^{f336}, was forty furlongs, or five miles from Jerusalem: what this great stone was, whether an obelisk, or what, is not certain; one of the greatest stones we read of was that which Semiramis cut out of the mountains of Armenia, which was an hundred thirty feet long, and twenty five broad and thick^{f337}. This place was appointed for the rendezvous of David’s forces, and hither Amasa came with what he had assembled together, and joined them, and took the command of them: for it follows,

Amasa went before them; as the general of them:

and Joab’s garment that he had put on was girded unto him; who went along with his brother Abishai at the head of his own men, to which he was obliged by virtue of his commission; or went of himself to serve the common cause, and perhaps chiefly with a design to murder Amasa, whom he envied, because he was put into his post as general, and therefore accounted himself for it; he put on, not a coat of mail, but a common

garment which he girt about him, that it might be no incumbrance to him or hinderance of him, in doing what he intended, but that he might more expeditiously execute it:

and upon it a girdle [with] a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; the sword in the belt was not on his thigh, but on his loins, on the outside of his clothes, and was put into a sheath too large, and placed in such a position, that with the least motion, when he pleased, it would easily drop out of it, without drawing it, and so give no suspicion of his design:

and as he went forth; to meet Amasa, just as he came to him:

it fell out; the sword fell out of the sheath to the ground.

Ver. 9. *And Joab said to Amasa*, etc.] In a friendly manner, with all the air of pleasantry and good humour:

[art] thou in health, my brother? this looked like a friendly salutation to ask of his health, and wish him it, and a loving appellation to call him brother; though they were near of kin, sisters' children, and so own cousins; thus he addressed him, to cover his design:

and Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him: as was usual for the eastern people to do when they addressed and saluted one another in an affectionate way, and as the Turks and Arabs do to this day, as travellers relate. Barthius^{f338} has collected passages from the Greek poets, which show it to be a custom, that when a man asked a favour of another, he caught hold of his beard with the right hand, and of his knee with the left; and in such a posture Joab might easily do what follows.

Ver. 10. *But Amasa took no heed to the sword that [was] in Joab's hand*, etc.] In his left hand, for with his right hand he took him by the beard; he might see the sword drop out of the scabbard, and Joab take it up, which he supposed he did in order to put it into its sheath again, having no suspicion of his wicked design, and therefore not at all upon his guard to prevent it:

so he smote him therewith in the fifth [rib]; in the same place where Abner smote Asahel, and Joab Abner; (see Gill on "⁴⁰²³2 Samuel 2:23") and (see Gill on "⁴⁰²⁷2 Samuel 3:27"): he must strike him, as some observe, on the left side, because he was embracing him; and the stroke must be deadly, because he struck him in the pericardium, which surrounds the heart round

with water, to refrigerate it; for the lower part of the heart reaches to the fifth rib; (see ~~4398~~ John 19:34) ^{f339}:

and shed out his bowels to the ground; which fell out through the incision made by the sword:

and struck him not again: he gave him such a home thrust, there was no need to repeat it, he dispatched him at once:

and he died; and thus, though he was pardoned by David, and promoted to honour by him, yet the providence of God would not suffer him to go unpunished for joining with Absalom in an unnatural rebellion against his uncle:

so Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri: for Amasa being slain, Joab without any ceremony reassumed his post as general, and, with his brother Abishai under him, made all the haste they could in pursuit of the rebel.

Ver. 11. *And one of Joab's men stood by him*, etc.] By the body of Amasa; no doubt by the order of Joab, to satisfy the people as they came up, and reconcile them to this fact, and to exhort them not to stop, but to follow after Joab; for though Amasa their general was dead, Joab had taken the command of the army, and the pursuit was carried on with as much rigour as ever:

and said, he that favoureth Joab, and he that [is] for David, [let him go] after Joab: he that likes Joab should be general, and is in the interest of David, let him make no stay here, but follow after Joab; Joab and David are put together, as if their interests were the same; though there seems to be an indecency in placing Joab first.

Ver. 12. *And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway*, etc.] By which it seems, that though the wound was mortal, and of which he died, that as yet there was life in him, and through the pain he was in, and the pangs of death on him, he rolled himself about in his own blood in the high road, where the fact was committed:

and when the man saw that all the people stood still; gazing at the shocking sight, and could not be prevailed upon to go on:

he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field; which was adjoining to it:

and cast a cloth upon him; that the body might not be seen:

when he saw that everyone that came by him stood still; and so retarded the people in their march, to prevent which he took the above method, and it was a very prudent one.

Ver. 13. *When he was removed out of the highway*, etc.] Into the field, and covered over with a cloth, that he could not be seen:

all the people went on after Joab; made no stop at all, knowing nothing of the matter, or what had happened:

to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri; these were the troops that Amasa had been assembling, which followed one another after him; for Joab and Abishai, with their men, were at Gibeon first.

Ver. 14. *And he went through all the tribes of Israel*, etc.] That is, Sheba the son of Bichri, last mentioned, (^{<1013>}2 Samuel 20:13), who passed through all the tribes of Israel to get as many to be of his party as he could, and to be proclaimed their king; or finding himself pursued, he passed on as fast as he could from place to place, through all the tribes, until at length he fixed for safety in a place later named; though Josephus^{f340} understands this of Joab pursuing Sheba through all the tribes of Israel with the forces under him; and to this sense the Syriac and Arabic versions, and so R. Isaiah interprets it; but the first sense is more generally received, that Sheba is meant, who passing through various tribes, came

unto Abel, and unto Bethmaachah; which were two places very near one another, if not one and the same place; since Abel is in (^{<1015>}2 Samuel 20:15) called Abel of Bethmaachah, to distinguish it from any other place: it was a city that lay to the north of Israel near Syria; and from (^{<1259>}2 Kings 15:29), it appears to be in the tribe of Naphtali. There was one city of this name of Abel, six miles from Philadelphia, another twelve miles from Gadara, and a third between Paneas and Damascus, which, of the three, Reland thinks^{f341}, is most eligible to be the place here meant; though he rather chooses to look for it in Galilee, to the west or south of Paneas, than to the east or north in the way to Damascus; and so Adrichomius^{f342} calls it a city of upper Galilee, sixty furlongs or seven and an half miles from Jordan; and though he also places it in the tribe of Naphtali, in the plain of the country of Berim (from whence perhaps were the Berites next mentioned), not far from Caesarea Philippi; (see ^{<1153>}1 Kings 15:20);

and all the Berites; the inhabitants of Beeroth, in the tribe of Benjamin, of which tribe Sheba was, they followed him hither, as in the next clause:

and they were gathered together, and went also after him; unto Abel; of these, (see ^{f6825}Joshua 18:25 ^{f1012}2 Samuel 4:2,3); though perhaps these Berim or Berites were nearer to Abel; or rather that was in their country, as has been observed by Adrichomius.

Ver. 15. *And they came and besieged him in Abel of Bethmaachah*, etc.] That is, Joab and Abishai, with the forces under them, who pursued him hither:

and they cast up a bank against the city; which some understand of a warlike machine or engine, with which stones were cast; but it rather seems to be a bank of earth thrown up, for the better working of such engines to more advantage against the city, by throwing from thence darts into the city, or stones against the walls of it, to batter it down; such banks were used in sieges, as that Caesar's soldiers raised in twenty five days, which was three hundred thirty feet broad, and eighty feet high ^{f343}; Kimchi interprets this of filling up the ditches round about the city with dust and earth, and so making it level, whereby they could come the more easily to the walls and batter them, or scale them, and take the city by storm:

and it stood in the trench; the army under Joab stood where the trench round the city had been, now filled up:

and all the people that [were] with Joab battered the wall to throw it down; with their engines, or whatever battering instruments they had; so, often, as Hesiod ^{f344} says, a whole city suffers for one bad man.

Ver. 16. *Then cried a wise woman out of the city*, etc.] And such an one as the woman of Tekoah, supposed by some to be the governess of the city; but whoever she was, she well deserved the character of a wise woman; her conduct in this affair shows it: she cried with a loud voice, upon the wall of the city, to Joab's men, who were underneath battering it,

hear, hear; which she repeated to make them hear:

say, I pray you, unto Joab, come near hither, that I may speak with thee; tell your general I desire to speak with him; which was wisely done, to have nothing to say but to the general himself.

Ver. 17. *And when he was come near unto her*, etc.] As he did, upon the information of his men, that a woman on the wall had something to say to him:

the woman said, [art] thou Joab? she was willing to be satisfied that he was really the general, before she would impart her mind to him:

and he answered, I [am he]; the very person you ask after:

and she said unto him, hear the words of thine handmaid; though a woman, vouchsafe to hear what I have to say:

and he answered, I do hear: am ready to hear, and shall patiently and attentively hear whatever may be spoken; which was giving her leave and encouragement to proceed.

Ver. 18. *Then she spake, saying, they were wont to speak in old time*, etc.] It was a common saying, a proverbial expression among the ancient sages:

saying, they shall surely ask [counsel] at Abel, and so they ended [the matter]. Abel, it seems, had been a city so famous for wise and prudent men, that it was common for the inhabitants of other cities, in the several parts of the kingdom, when any controversy arose among them, to say to one another, since we cannot agree this matter among ourselves, let us go to Abel, and take advice there, and leave it to their arbitration; and so they did, and things were presently brought to an issue, and happily concluded; nay, when the king had a mind to make a decree or law, as R. Isaiah observes, he used to send to Abel to know whether they would submit to it; and if they agreed to it, then he proceeded in it; for other cities followed their example, so famous was this city, and of so great account: now the woman argues from hence, that surely such a renowned city should not hastily be destroyed; but the Targum directs to another sense, and which perhaps is best, and is followed by Jarchi, Kimchi, and others, paraphrasing the words thus,

“she spake, saying, I remember now what is written in the book of the law, to ask a city first, saying, (will ye make peace?) so shouldst thou have asked of Abel, will ye make peace, or receive terms of peace?”

referring to the law in (~~15200~~) Deuteronomy 20:10-15); signifying, if that had been attended to as it ought (for if such methods were to be taken with

Heathen cities, much more with a city of Israel, as Abel was), things would soon have been agreed and issued; had Joab upon approaching the city proposed his terms of peace, they would have immediately yielded to them, and so the matter would have ended at once; for they were a peaceable people, as it follows: though Dr. Lightfoot^{f345} gives another sense of these words, that Sheba and his party when they came to the city,

“they at first certainly said thus, that they would ask Abel of its peace (or on whose side it was), and so they made the matter entire, or made a show of their own integrity:”

by which this woman assured Joab, that the men of Abel had not invited, nor willingly received Sheba and his rebels into the city, but they had deceived them by fawning and false words, pretending only to inquire about the peace and welfare of their city.

Ver. 19. *I [am one of them that are] peaceable [and] faithful in Israel,* etc.] Her meaning is, that she was of a city which consisted of peaceable and faithful men, that were peaceable among themselves, and faithful to their king, who never were concerned in any insurrection or rebellion, not in the late one under Absalom:

thou seekest to destroy a city, and a mother in Israel; a metropolitan city, which had several towns and villages under its jurisdiction, which were as daughters to it. Some think she means herself, because very old, supposed^{f346} to be Serah, the daughter of Asher, a son of Jacob, which is improbable:

wilt why thou swallow up the inheritance of the Lord? a city which is a part of the land, that is the Lord's inheritance.

Ver. 20. *And Joab answered and said, far be it from me, far be it from me,* etc.] He repeats these words, to show how detestable it was to him to do what she suggested:

that I should swallow up or destroy; any in a violent and unrighteous manner, and especially a city of which she had given such a character for its greatness and worth, and for the peaceableness and fidelity of its inhabitants.

Ver. 21. *The matter [is] not so,* etc.] I am not come with the army against this city with any ill will to it, and with an intention to destroy it: the case is this,

but a man of Mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name; for though he was by birth a Benjaminite, his dwelling was in Mount Ephraim in that tribe; unless there was a place of this name in the tribe of Benjamin, so called from any memorable event there, as the wood of Ephraim, (~~1086~~ 2 Samuel 18:6). This same man, says Joab,

hath lifted up his hand against the king, [even] against David; is in rebellion against the king, even so great and good a king as David; he has lifted up his hand, and blown a trumpet to draw off men from David, and after himself; he has committed acts of hostility and treason; he has drawn his sword, and raised an insurrection and rebellion in the nation:

deliver him only, and I will depart from the city: he did not desire any of his followers to be delivered up, only himself, knowing the rebellion would cease upon the delivery of him; and being unwilling that the blood of any Israelite should be shed, whom he had unawares drawn into this rebellion, and who he knew would return to their own cities upon this:

and the woman said unto Joab, behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall; she knew the fright the inhabitants of the city were in, and how disposed they were to do anything to save their city; she knew what influence she had among them, and how weak Sheba's party was, and therefore could assure Joab that this should be done.

Ver. 22. *Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom,* etc.] Went from the wall of the city into it, and convened the principal inhabitants together, and made so wise a speech to them, and represented things in such a light, and so prudently conducted, that they unanimously agreed to her motion:

and they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast [it] out to Joab; whose face Joab knew full well, and was satisfied it was his head that was thrown over:

and he blew a trumpet; as a sign of retreat:

and they retired from the city, every man to his tent; the army under Joab broke up the siege, and departed, every man to his own city, as the Targum:

and Joab returned unto Jerusalem unto the king; to give him an account of his success, and how the rebellion was crushed; and this gave him courage and boldness to appear before the king, which one would wonder else he should have, when he had killed his general in cold blood, the king had sent out, and without his leave had reassumed his post as general of the army; but he was a bold daring man, a man of blood, and hardened in sin, and had power in the army, and over David himself, that he could not do what he would with him, but was obliged to be silent, and overlook things, and even to reestablish him in his office, as appears by what follows.

Ver. 23. *Now Joab [was] over all the host of Israel*, etc.] Established in the post in which he formerly was; either having been never displaced, which though David thought to do, he was not able to effect it, because of his power and influence with the people; or if he had displaced him, which by some things in this chapter seemed to be the case, yet Amasa being dead, and the rebellion crushed by Joab, which still made him more haughty, and increased his popularity, David saw it most advisable to replace him; and because mention is made of him, as established in his office as general over the whole army, an account is given of the rest of David's officers; and the rather, as it was a sort of beginning his reign anew, after quelling the above rebellions:

and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada [was] over the Cherethites, and over the Pelethites; was continued in his post, (see ^{<4088>}2 Samuel 8:18).

Ver. 24. *And Adoram [was] over the tribute*, etc.] Or over those that collected and brought it, as the Targum; this was a new office, and which respected both the revenue he received from his own people, and the tribute brought him from the nations conquered by him:

and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud [was] recorder; who was in this office before, and now continued and established in it, (^{<4086>}2 Samuel 8:16).

Ver. 25. *And Sheva [was] scribe*, etc.] Either the same with Benaiah, or he was dead or removed, and Sheva was put in his place, (see ^{<4087>}2 Samuel 8:17);

and Zadok and Abiathar [were] the priests; as before; (see Gill on “<1087>2 Samuel 8:17”).

Ver. 26. *And Ira also the Jairite*, etc.] Which some take to be the same with Ira the Ithrite, (<1038>2 Samuel 23:38); a son of Jether or Ithra the Israelite, (<1072>2 Samuel 17:25); though others suppose he was Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite, (<1035>2 Samuel 23:26); and so the Targum here calls him Ira the Jairite, which was of Tekoah; and Tekoah being the chief place in Israel for oil olive ^{f347}, with which the lamps were lighted, Jarchi thinks he had the name of Jairite from Jair, which signifies to enlighten; but rather he was a descendant from Jair the Gileadite, and perhaps was a great friend to David when in Gilead, and from whence he brought him and promoted him: for he

was a chief ruler about David; a prime minister, an intimate friend, the chief of his privy council; perhaps he succeeded Ahithophel; it is much we hear nothing of Hushai.