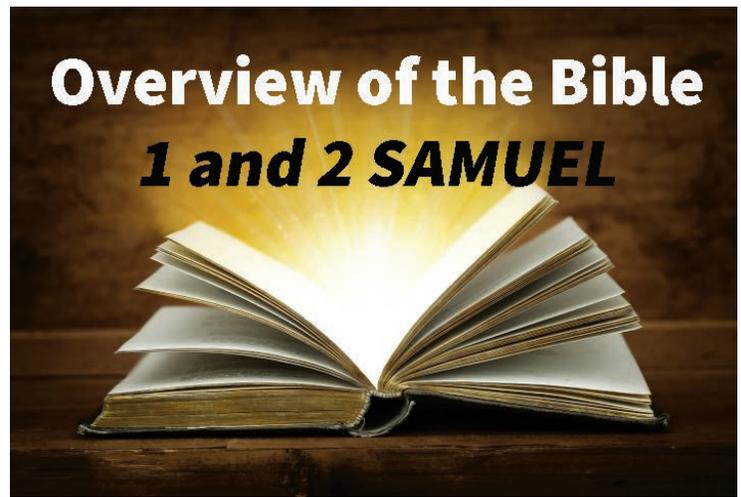


# THE RETURN OF THE KING BRINGS TURMOIL IN THE KINGDOM

2 Samuel 19:9–20:26

Lesson 86

Wednesday, May 18, 2022



**Big Idea:** *The consequences of sin can be persistent, even when the Lord's repentant servants do their best to promote unity and the Lord's faithful covenantal promise is fulfilled.*

## The Text in Context

The previous episode ended with David's mourning the death of Absalom as if he were not grateful for what his men had accomplished on his behalf. Joab warned him that he was jeopardizing the loyalty of the troops, who had risked their lives for him. David presented himself to his loyal followers, and they came before him in a show of support. However, the Israelite tribes, who had supported Absalom, have fled to their homes. So as the story continues, two important questions surface: How will David respond to those who have opposed him? Will Israel renew its allegiance to David so that national unity can be restored? This next episode answers these questions: in an effort to solidify his rule and restore national unity, David extends favor to all, including enemies as well as friends. While Judah welcomes David back, the Israelite tribes vacillate. They argue among themselves (19:9–10) and then with Judah (19:41–43). Sheba the Benjamite even organizes a rebellion against David that foreshadows the eventual secession of the Israelite tribes (20:2; cf. 1 Kings 12:16). The saga continues in 1 Kings. (Thus 2 Samuel 21–24 does not continue the story; these chapters are an epilogue to the book and summarize David's reign.)

## Interpretive Insights

**19:9** *The king delivered us.* Though the Israelite tribes acknowledge that they threw their support to Absalom and "anointed" him, they refer to David, not his dead son, as "the king" and contemplate restoring his rule (v. 10).

**19:23** *You shall not die.* Later, on his deathbed, David is not so merciful. He advises Solomon to make sure Shimei dies violently (1 Kings 2:8–9). This makes one wonder about David's motives in sparing Shimei now. He may be afraid of the Benjamites, who have turned out in large numbers. However, it is more likely that this pardon is designed to communicate to Benjamin and the northern tribes his willingness to let bygones be bygones. If David can pardon Shimei, then certainly he will welcome them back as his supporters.

**19:43** *the men of Judah pressed their claims even more forcefully than the men of Israel.* The tribal unity sought by David is in serious jeopardy, despite his efforts to promote reconciliation.

**20:1** *a troublemaker named Sheba.* The narrator leaves no room for a sympathetic view of the Benjamite rebel Sheba. He labels him a "troublemaker" (*'ish beliya'al*). Abigail used this same expression to describe her husband, Nabal (1 Sam. 25:25), and Shimei falsely accused David of being such a person (2 Sam. 16:7). Similar phrases are used of Eli's sons (1 Sam. 2:12), Saul's critics (10:27), and Nabal (25:17).

**20:2** *all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba.* Sheba, a Benjamite, exploits the hostility between Israel and Judah (cf. 19:41–43). This incident foreshadows the eventual division of the kingdom after Solomon's death. In fact, Sheba's words are repeated by the Israelites on that later occasion when they declare their independence from the Davidic dynasty (see 1 Kings 12:16).

## Key Themes of 2 Samuel 19:9–20:26

- In contrast to the Israelite tribes, Judah welcomes David back.
- Despite David's attempts to promote reconciliation and peace, tribal jealousy and opposition to David persist.
- In fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy, violence continues to taint the royal court.
- In fulfillment of the Lord's covenantal promise, he preserves David's throne.

**20:3** *They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows.* By including this detail, the narrator reminds us of Absalom's crime against his father (16:21–22), foretold by Nathan. In God's providence this is a fitting punishment for David's adultery (2 Sam. 12:11–12), the consequences of which continue to haunt him.

**20:10** *Amasa died.* Nathan prophesied that the sword would never depart from David's house (12:10). In fulfillment of that prophecy, David's son Absalom murdered his brother Amnon, and later Joab, David's nephew, murdered Absalom. The narrator now records another bloody incident that stains David's house. We are not told of Joab's motives, but we can certainly make an educated guess. He is undoubtedly jealous of Amasa, his replacement as David's general (20:4–5). He probably also distrusts Amasa, who has served as Absalom's general (17:25), and regards him as a threat to both the king's and his own well-being.

## David's Sisters and Their Children

According to 17:25, Amasa is the son of Abigail (not David's wife), who is Zeruiah's sister. Zeruiah is the sister of David and the mother of Joab. With help from 1 Chronicles 2:16–17, we can reconstruct the family tree as follows: Joab and Amasa are cousins; both are David's nephews. According to 2 Samuel 17:25, Abigail's father is Nahash, not Jesse. This suggests that Abigail is the half-sister of David and Zeruiah. Apparently Nahash was married to David's mother before or after her marriage to Jesse.

**20:16** *a wise woman called from the city.* The reference to a wise woman invites comparison to an earlier incident involving a wise woman (14:1–22). During Absalom's exile, Joab hired a wise woman to persuade David to grant Absalom amnesty. The wise woman, encouraged by Joab, argued that David should give priority to the well-being of a guilty individual rather than implement justice. David's decision to do so led to disaster when Absalom rebelled against his father. On this later occasion a wise woman and her fellow citizens refuse to give priority to a dangerous individual (see 20:22). This wise woman is a literary foil for Joab and David, who could have avoided a great deal of turmoil if they had not indulged Absalom following the murder of Amnon.

**20:23** *Joab was over Israel's entire army.* The episode concludes with a list of David's cabinet members within the royal court. This is the second such insert in the narrative (see 8:16–18). There are two striking features of this second list when compared to the first: (1) Despite Joab's bloody deeds and temporary demotion, when all is said and done, he remains in charge of David's army, a testimony to the king's failure to implement justice, especially when close family members are involved. (2) By the end of his reign David has a supervisor of forced labor (20:24), an office that is not mentioned in the earlier list. Just as the list of David's wives foreshadowed trouble (3:2–5; 5:13–16), so this addition to the cabinet is ominous. David's polygamy, while perhaps not technically violating the law (cf. Deut. 17:17), sets a bad precedent for his son Solomon, who blatantly breaks God's command (1 Kings 11:1–8). Although the organization of forced labor may not be oppressive in David's time, it sets a dangerous precedent for Solomon and Rehoboam, who eventually expand this workforce in an oppressive manner (see 1 Kings 4:6; 5:13–14; 12:1–18), violating the principle that the king must not elevate himself above his countrymen (see Deut. 17:20). The oppressive policies of Solomon and Rehoboam lead to the division of the kingdom. In fact, Adoram (also called Adoniram), David's supervisor, continues in this position under Solomon (1 Kings 4:6; 5:14) and Rehoboam. When Rehoboam sends him out to retrieve the rebellious northern workforce, the Israelites stone him to death (1 Kings 12:18).

## Theological Insights

The primary theological theme of this episode is the reliability of the Lord's word. On the one hand, the Lord preserves David's throne, in fulfillment of the covenantal promise he made through Nathan (2 Sam. 7:16). On the other hand, the persistent consequences of David's crimes continue to play themselves out. The civil unrest caused by Absalom's coup continues to threaten the nation's unity, and Nathan's prophecy that the sword will not depart from David's royal court (2 Sam. 12:10) continues to ring true. For the exiles the sustaining of the Davidic throne generates hope as they read the account, but the reality of God's discipline in David's experience also resonates with them: they know all too well from their own experience how persistent the consequences of sin can be.

## David's Return to the City

Why does the narrator inform us of the three encounters as David returns to the city? At least two reasons come to mind: (1) We are reminded of David's vulnerability. David has loyal friends like Barzillai (and apparently Mephibosheth), but he also has people (like Ziba) within his sphere of influence whose main concern is to promote their own interests. He also has outright enemies (like Shimei) who curse him one minute and then the next minute act as if they are loyal subjects. David can never be completely sure who is truly loyal. (2) David's response to all three of these individuals demonstrates his beneficence and his desire to unify God's people. He pardons an outright enemy, restores to favor one whose loyalty is not entirely certain (at least from his perspective), and offers a tried-and-true loyal subject a home in his royal palace. One would think that Israel will embrace such a beneficent king, but the northern tribes are restless and prone to go their separate way (see 2 Sam. 19:40–20:22).

## Teaching the Text

1. *The consequences of sin can be persistent.* As in the preceding episode, we see again that the disciplinary consequences of sin can linger. The prophet Nathan announced David's punishment: the sword will not depart from David's house (2 Sam. 12:10). David has already lost two sons by the sword; in this episode he loses a nephew at the hands of another nephew. As in the case of Absalom (18:14–15), the vivid, detailed account of Joab's violent assault on Amasa draws attention to this reality (20:10, 12). It is as if the narrator, speaking for the divine Author of the story, wants us to see, smell, and feel sin's consequences as we see Amasa's intestines spill out on the ground and watch him wallowing in his own blood in the middle of the road, before finally being dragged aside and covered.

### **Ehud and Joab: Similarities and Differences**

There are parallels between Joab's assassinations of Abner and Amasa and Ehud's assassination of the Moabite king Eglon, recorded in Judges 3:12–30. Both Ehud and Joab employ deceit to kill their victims. Joab asks to speak with Abner in private and then kills his unsuspecting victim (2 Sam. 3:27; cf. Judg. 3:19). Later he kills Amasa with a left-handed sword thrust as he grabs Amasa's beard with his right hand as if to kiss him (2 Sam. 20:9–10). The description of how Joab has strapped his sword to his side (2 Sam. 20:8) is very similar to the description of Ehud given in Judges 3:16. The significance of the link between Ehud and Joab is not so much in the similarity of the actions themselves (the description of which merely establishes a parallel), but rather in the contrast between the objects of those actions. Ehud killed a foreign oppressor and delivered Israel; Joab of Judah struck down a Benjamite (Abner), escalating the conflict between Judah and Benjamin, and now he kills one of his own relatives (his cousin Amasa). Ehud killed to liberate a nation; Joab's killing is strictly to promote his own interests.

2. *Even as the Lord's discipline persists, the Lord's faithful promise to his chosen servant remains reliable.* Even as more blood is poured out within David's royal court and his nation is in danger of being torn apart around him, the Lord preserves his throne. Shimei begs for mercy, addressing David as "my lord the king" (19:20). Mephibosheth, whose loyalty has been in question since Ziba's report (16:1–4), and faithful Barzillai address him in this same way (19:26, 35 [27, 36 MT]). The rebel Sheba challenges David's authority but ends up dead and headless, as Joab returns to "the king" in Jerusalem (20:22). David himself expresses his awareness that his royal position has been restored (19:22), and the episode concludes with a list of the members of his royal court (20:23–26), as if we have returned to a more successful time in David's career (cf. 8:15–18). When the Lord delivered his covenant promise to David, he emphasized that David's throne, in contrast to Saul's, would endure (7:15–16), and this promise proves to be reliable.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 278–282.