

# Sheba Rebels Against David

Notes for 22 Mar

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Read: [2 Samuel 20](#)

Chapter 20 tells us that all is not entirely well. The natives are revolting...

The sad case of Absalom has only just been resolved (whatever that means!) and here we go again. David may have been promised the throne by Yahweh but it is a fragile crown.

Our narrator, ever loyal to David, refers to Sheba, the leader of the insurrection, as a *troublemaker*. Sheba is a Benjaminite (with that tribe's allegiance to Saul and to its older Mosaic tradition) and declares that David does *not* represent him or his people.

Sheba wants to split the barely united kingdom in two and appears to have some support. Verse 2 tells us that the 'men of Israel deserted David and followed Sheba'.

## Concubines...

Verse 3 seems to be a bit out of place - why are we inserting a paragraph about the poor concubines, who have suffered much already in this sorry saga?

Brueggemann's commentary on v3 gives some hints as to why, and suggests that this insurrection may be about more than simply power.

*It must have been galling to the traditional North that the king in Jerusalem has concubines. The presence of concubines suggests how much the monarchy has embraced the royal ideology of the Near East, which is inimical to the old covenant tradition. David takes the drastic step of confining the concubines and presumably having no more to do with them. His action is most likely a concession and a conciliatory gesture to the North. By this act David moves visibly away from the royal ideology in the direction of the old requirements of covenant. In making this move, David not only distances himself from his own former practices but also offers a contrast to the conduct of Absalom (16:21-22).*

*Brueggemann, p330*

I find this analysis interesting. Let me skip ahead to the end of Chapter 21, to verse 24, which contains the rather chilling statement that "Adoniram was in charge of *forced labour*". This is a new phrase - the first mention of this abusive practice, later to become so important to the reign of Solomon ([1 Kings 5:13](#), [9:15-22](#)).

Recall our study on 2 Samuel 8, where David "made the people lie down on the ground in a row, and he measured them off in groups with a length of rope. He measured off two groups to be executed for every one group to be spared".

What has happened to David?

- Do you think David has lost his 'moral compass'?
- Did he ever have one? Or am I guilty (as has been frequently charged!) of hoping that some of the decency of Christ could be found in a man supposedly 'after God's own heart'?

- Think back to the last few studies, where David has been very unclear as to his place in the kingdom, even wondering at one point whether Absalom was Yahweh's chosen replacement (2 Sam 16:11). And it's my impression that the writer is using much less of the 'and the Lord said to David' style in his narrative.
  - Does David still deserve the 'chosen one' appellation?
  - Is God still talking to him, in the same way as he did earlier in the story?

## Amasa and Joab

Amasa is sent out to round up the army. He's given 3 days and apparently doesn't do the task in time. Verse 6 and onwards tell us that Abishai and Joab were sent off with the best of the troops, the king's bodyguard, to chase Sheba before he could hole up in a fortified town.



It's unclear to me what the justification is for the killing of Amasa in vv8-10.

- Do you understand why Amasa is so badly treated?

His body is left lying in the road and is causing such a distraction that one of Joab's men has to drag the bloodied body off the road into a field and hide it with a cloak.

- Is Joab out of control?
- Remember the killing of Absalom - Joab seems to be doing whatever he likes. And he likes killing David's enemies. Do you think David might want it this way? Might David want (need?) an ultra-loyal killing machine?

## The non-battle

Read vv14-22.

- What exactly is going on in this story?!
- Does Sheba have the support of the people of Abel-beth-maacah?
- The 'wise woman' declares herself to be "one who is peace loving and faithful in Israel" (v19) but a few moments later she is throwing the head of Sheba over the city wall (v21-22).
  - [Realpolitik?](#)
  - ['Situational ethics'?](#)
  - [WWJD!](#)

Discuss!

## Royal bureaucracy

Breuggemann considers vv23-26 to indicate that the long narrative from Chapter 9 to Chapter 20 is over. The king is safe and well-established, and the text discusses the bureaucracy. Look back at [chapter 8:15-18](#) and you'll see a similar listing.