

Averted
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2 Samuel 20

Opening: **What do you remember about where we left off?**

The big idea: God chooses whom He uses to carry out His purposes, and sometimes it is not whom we expect. Sometimes it might be you or me!

- When we last left King David, the attempted coup by his son Absalom had been put down and the king was headed back to Jerusalem.
- All was not well though. The northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah were still divided, and yet another rebellion was brewing.
- The first two verses of 2 Samuel 20 set the stage:

2 Samuel 20:1–2 (NLT)

There happened to be a troublemaker there named Sheba son of Bicri, a man from the tribe of Benjamin. Sheba blew a ram's horn and began to chant: "Down with the dynasty of David! We have no interest in the son of Jesse. Come on, you men of Israel, back to your homes!"² So all the men of Israel deserted David and followed Sheba son of Bicri. But the men of Judah stayed with their king and escorted him from the Jordan River to Jerusalem.

- We know little about Sheba, but clearly he had influence to raise a rebellion that David said could "do more harm than Absalom" had (v.6.)
- David had replaced his general Joab with another relative, Amasa. This was probably both revenge (Joab killed Absalom against David's wishes) and politics (Amasa was Absalom's general in the revolt.)
- David gave Amasa three days to assemble forces to go after Sheba.
- For whatever reason Amasa couldn't get the job done so David made another personnel change naming Abishai (another relative) commander.
- Abishai was Joab's brother so basically Joab was back in command.
- Joab was a very complicated man. On the one hand, he was a skilled warrior and at times actually protected David from himself (i.e. - Absalom.)
- On the other hand, Joab was cold-blooded, ruthless, and seemed to have no conscience when it came to killing anyone he perceived as his enemy.
- Joab again assassinated a rival – Amasa. The way he did it was especially cold and calculated (see 20:8-10.)
- Some leaders though effective (doing the dirty work) have a dark side.
- Despite watching Joab commit murder, the soldiers step over Amasa's corpse in the road and pledge their loyalty to follow Joab pursuing Sheba.

2 Samuel 20:14–21 (NLT)

¹⁴ Meanwhile, Sheba traveled through all the tribes of Israel and eventually came to the town of Abel-beth-maacah. All the members of his own clan, the Bicrites, assembled for battle and followed him into the town. ¹⁵ When Joab's forces arrived, they attacked Abel-beth-maacah. They built a siege ramp against the town's fortifications and began battering down the wall.

- Picture the scene – a traitor is hiding within the walls of your city and David's army is pounding against the wall to invade.
- It appeared that Joab was willing to reduce Abel to rubble to get Sheba.

¹⁶ But a wise woman in the town called out to Joab, "Listen to me, Joab. Come over here so I can talk to you." ¹⁷ As he approached, the woman asked, "Are you Joab?" "I am," he replied. So she said, "Listen carefully to your servant." "I'm listening," he said.

¹⁸ Then she continued, "There used to be a saying, 'If you want to settle an argument, ask advice at the town of Abel.'" ¹⁹ I am one who is peace loving and faithful in Israel. But you are destroying an important town in Israel. Why do you want to devour what belongs to the Lord?"

²⁰ And Joab replied, "Believe me, I don't want to devour or destroy your town!

²¹ That's not my purpose. All I want is a man named Sheba son of Bicri from the hill country of Ephraim, who has revolted against King David. If you hand over this one man to me, I will leave the town in peace." [*Here it gets disturbing!*] "All right," the woman replied, "we will throw his head over the wall to you."

- What? Throw his head over the wall? This is no dainty little debutante!
- When we think about the position of women in ancient culture we often automatically assume they were always forced to the background. However, we probably don't totally understand the nuances of that culture.
- Several times in scripture we read about courageous women God used in unusual roles. (Deborah the judge and military "leader" and Jael – remember the tent peg through Sisera's head - in Judges 4)
- This is another example that God chooses whom He uses to carry out His purposes, and sometimes it is not whom we expect.
- Scripture says this woman was "wise." **What other words would describe her based on these verses? How influential was she?**
- It's possible this wise woman was a judge in Able.
- It's also possible she knew her Old Testament better than Joab. She reminded him that Deut. 20:10 (NLT) commanded ¹⁰ "As you approach a town to attack it, you must first offer its people terms for peace."
- These verses beg the question: Where were the men of Able?
- So, what happened? She solves the problem promptly! Verse 22 tells us:
- ²² Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off Sheba's head and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the ram's horn and called his troops back from the attack. They all returned to their homes, and Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem. - 2 Sam. 20:22 (NLT)

- The ESV Study Bible: [Joab would] *“be content if Sheba is handed over to him. The woman goes one better, persuading the townspeople to cut off the head of Sheba to end the siege decisively.”*ⁱ
- **Was the wise woman morally right or wrong in her solution? Why/why not? Should we feel any sympathy for Sheba? Why/why not? What lesson does her solution teach us about leadership? What does this story teach us about taking a stand for the right cause?**

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Several scholars and commentators point out lessons from the “wise” woman:
 - *“Though women in that society were usually quiet in public, this woman spoke out. She stopped Joab’s attack, not with weapons, but with wise words and a plan of action. Often the courage to speak a few sensible words can prevent great disaster.”*ⁱⁱ
 - Here’s a great quote about this “wise” woman: *“By her stern action this unknown heroine delivered up one guilty life and saved, thereby, thousands of innocent lives, and also secured peace in the kingdom of David. History, sacred and secular, is replete with records of women who, by their wit and courage in a time of crisis, brought deliverance and hope to their nation.”*ⁱⁱⁱ
 - Wayne Stiles writes: *“DEAL WITH THE ONE FOR THE SAKE OF THE MANY. I’ve seen many leaders who seem willing to make the whole congregation, company, or family suffer when the problem is really one person. I’m not suggesting we cut off their heads. But you get the idea. Deal with that one person, and many, many others lives are made easier.”*^{iv}
 - Another Lesson: *“Situations in life may arise where there are no good choices; in such cases one must always choose the least evil alternative.”*^v
- The final lesson goes back to our first “big idea” statement, God chooses whom He uses to carry out His purposes, and sometimes it is not whom we expect. In fact, sometimes it might be YOU or me! Are we ready?
- Am I staying in God’s word so I will know when a situation is violating His commands? Am I trusting in Him so completely that I’ll have the courage to stand up and speak out? Am I (or is my group) tiptoeing around sinful situations rather than meeting them head-on?

ⁱ Crossway Bibles. ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 44455-44456). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 140995-140998). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lockyer, Herbert. *All the Women of the Bible: the Life and Times of All the Women of the Bible*. Zondervan Pub. House, 1995.

^{iv} <https://waynestiles.com/abel-beth-maacah-how-to-deal-with-a-problem-person/>

^v Andrews, Stephen J.. *Holman Old Testament Commentary - 1, 2 Samuel* (p. 337). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.