

LESSON 20

A Kingdom on the Brink Again

2 Samuel 20

"We have no portion in David, no inheritance in Jesse's son! Each man to his tent, Israel!"

2 Samuel 20:1

Class Overview: Second Samuel 20 shows how quickly division can return after a crisis. Just as David is being restored to the throne, a new rebellion begins. A man named **Sheba** rises up and calls the tribes of Israel to break away from David. The unity that seemed to be forming at the end of chapter 19 quickly falls apart.

David responds by organizing a pursuit, but internal problems continue to surface. Amasa, newly appointed as commander, delays in gathering the troops. Joab takes matters into his own hands and kills Amasa, reclaiming control of the الجيش. The rebellion is eventually contained when Sheba is cornered in a fortified city, and a wise woman negotiates an end to the conflict.

The chapter closes with the kingdom preserved, but not without more bloodshed and instability. Second Samuel 20 reminds us that unresolved tensions and weak leadership transitions can quickly lead to renewed conflict.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain how Sheba's rebellion began and spread.
 2. Understand the leadership challenges David faced in responding quickly.
 3. Recognize Joab's actions and their impact on the kingdom.
 4. Describe how the rebellion ended in Abel Beth Maacah.
 5. Apply lessons about unity, leadership, and resolving conflict before it grows.
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Introduction:

Second Samuel 20 begins with a warning. The kingdom has just come through a major rebellion, yet the unity is still fragile. It does not take long for another leader to stir division. Sheba steps forward and appeals to the frustrations already present among the tribes. His message is simple: reject David and return home. The response is immediate. Many in Israel abandon David once again.

Here we see how quickly people can be influenced when tensions are unresolved. The disagreement between Judah and the other tribes at the end of chapter 19 creates the opening for Sheba's rebellion.

David must respond quickly, but the situation is complicated. Leadership transitions are unsettled. Loyalties are divided. Even within David's own ranks, conflict and violence emerge. Second Samuel 20

reminds us that unity must be guarded carefully. When division is left unaddressed, it does not fade away — it grows.

Sheba's Rebellion Ignites Division (20:1-2)

The chapter opens with a new threat rising almost immediately after the previous conflict. A man named **Sheba**, described as a “worthless man,” seizes the moment. He blows the trumpet and calls out:

“We have no portion in David, no inheritance in Jesse’s son! Each man to his tent, Israel!”

His words tap into the tension that was already building between the tribes. The disagreement at the end of chapter 19 had not been resolved. It was just waiting for someone to stir it up. Sheba gives the people a simple message: walk away from David. And many do. The text says the men of Israel desert David and follow Sheba. Only the tribe of Judah remains loyal and stays with the king.

This shows how fragile unity really was. One voice, at the right moment, was enough to divide the nation again. The issue was not just Sheba. The problem was already there beneath the surface. This moment also reminds us how quickly people can be influenced when emotions are high. Sheba did not present a long argument. He gave a short, sharp call to division, and it spread.

David is once again facing rebellion. The kingdom that had just been restored is now threatened again. The work of rebuilding unity has barely begun, and already it is being tested.

David's Response and Amasa's Delay (20:3-5)

As David returns to Jerusalem, the first thing he does is deal with unfinished business from Absalom’s rebellion. The ten concubines who had been violated are placed in seclusion. David provides for them but no longer lives with them. It is a quiet reminder that even though the rebellion has ended, its consequences remain.

Then David turns his attention to the new threat. He appoints **Amasa** to gather the men of Judah within three days so they can pursue Sheba. This is significant. Amasa had been Absalom’s commander, and David had promised to put him in charge as part of restoring unity. The decision shows David’s desire to reconcile and bring former enemies back into the kingdom.

But Amasa does not act quickly. He delays beyond the time David had set. We are not told exactly why, but the result is clear. The delay creates a serious problem. Sheba now has more time to move through the tribes and strengthen the rebellion. This moment highlights a leadership challenge. David is trying to unify the kingdom by placing Amasa in command, but the choice comes with risk. Amasa does not respond with urgency, and the situation begins to slip.

David recognizes the danger. He tells **Abishai** that Sheba will cause more harm than Absalom if they do not act quickly. The window to stop the rebellion is closing. Notice how delays in leadership can make a bad situation worse. Timing matters. When action is needed, hesitation can allow problems to grow.

Joab Kills Amasa and Takes Command (20:6-13)

With time running out, David sends **Abishai** to pursue Sheba, along with Joab's men and the king's elite warriors. As they move out, they come across **Amasa**, who is finally arriving with the troops.

What happens next is sudden and brutal.

Joab approaches Amasa as if to greet him. He speaks kindly and reaches out, taking him by the beard as though to kiss him. It looks like a gesture of friendship and respect. But Joab is not there to welcome him. Without warning, Joab strikes Amasa with a sword, killing him on the spot. Amasa falls to the ground, and Joab leaves him there in the road.

The act is calculated. Joab removes a rival and takes back control of the army. From this point forward, Joab resumes leadership of the pursuit. The scene is disturbing. Amasa's body lies in the road, and the soldiers hesitate when they see it. One of Joab's men eventually drags the body aside and covers it so the army can continue moving forward. Only then does the pursuit regain momentum.

Here we see the kind of man Joab is. He is effective, decisive, and committed to protecting the kingdom. But he is also ruthless. He takes matters into his own hands and eliminates anyone who stands in his way. Joab's actions solve the immediate problem of leadership, but they create deeper issues. He has once again acted without restraint or accountability. David's authority is quietly undermined, even while the kingdom is being preserved.

Can you feel the tension between results and righteousness? Joab gets things done, but not in a way that honors justice or submission to the king.

Sheba's Flight and the Siege of Abel (20:14-22)

Sheba continues moving through the tribes of Israel, gathering support as he goes. Eventually, he retreats to the fortified city of **Abel Beth Maacah** in the far north. The rebellion is now concentrated in one place. Joab and the army arrive and lay siege to the city. They begin building a ramp against the wall and prepare to break it down. The situation is serious. If the city falls, many innocent people will suffer along with the rebel they are harboring.

At this point, an unexpected voice steps forward. A **wise woman** from the city calls out to Joab and asks to speak with him. She challenges what is happening. Abel has a reputation as a place of wisdom and peace, yet now it is about to be destroyed.

She asks a simple question: why should an entire city be ruined over one man?

Joab responds that he has no desire to destroy the city. He is only after Sheba, the one who has led the rebellion. If the city will hand him over, the army will withdraw. The woman returns to the people, and they act quickly. Sheba is killed, and his head is thrown over the wall to Joab. With that, the siege ends. Joab sounds the trumpet, and the army withdraws.

Note the power of wisdom in resolving conflict. What could have become a destructive battle is settled through clear thinking and decisive action. The woman recognizes the real issue and acts to protect her city. The rebellion ends not with a massive battle, but with a wise decision that prevents further loss of life.

The Kingdom Stabilized (20:23-26)

The chapter closes with a brief summary of David's leadership structure. It lists the key officials in his administration: **Joab** over the army, **Benaiah** over the royal guard, **Adoniram** over forced labor, and others serving as priests, recorders, and advisors. On the surface, this looks like stability. The rebellion has been stopped. The kingdom is still intact. Leadership roles are filled, and order has been restored.

But there is tension beneath the surface.

Joab is still in command of the army, even after killing Amasa. David had attempted to replace him, but Joab has forced his way back into power. This shows that while the kingdom is functioning, not everything is as it should be. Authority has been preserved, but not fully aligned.

Outward stability does not always mean inward health. The rebellion is over, but unresolved issues remain within the leadership itself. The kingdom stands, but it carries the weight of everything that has just happened — division, betrayal, and violence. The structure is in place, but the deeper work of healing and true unity is still ongoing.

Practical Application

Division rarely begins in a moment. It builds over time. The disagreement at the end of chapter 19 created an opening, and Sheba stepped in to take advantage of it. That reminds us how important it is to deal with tension early. When issues are ignored, they do not disappear. They grow until someone uses them to divide people further.

This chapter also shows how quickly people can be influenced by the wrong voice. Sheba did not present a careful argument. He made a bold, emotional appeal, and many followed him. We have to be careful about what voices we listen to, especially when emotions are already stirred. Not every loud or confident voice is a wise one.

We also see the danger of acting outside proper authority. Joab solved the leadership problem by killing Amasa, but he did it through deception and violence. The outcome may have helped stop the rebellion, but the method was wrong. This reminds us that how something is done matters, not just the result.

At the same time, the wise woman at Abel shows a better path. She recognized the real issue and acted quickly to resolve it without unnecessary destruction. Her wisdom saved the city. This shows that calm thinking and courage can stop conflict before it spreads further.

Finally, the chapter reminds us that outward stability does not always mean everything is right beneath the surface. The kingdom was preserved, but there were still unresolved problems. It is possible for things to look settled while deeper issues remain. True peace requires more than stopping conflict. It requires addressing the causes behind it.

Conclusion


Second Samuel 20 shows how fragile unity can be. The kingdom had just come through one rebellion, and yet another rises almost immediately. That alone is a warning. Problems that are not fully resolved do not stay quiet for long.


Sheba's rebellion is stopped, but the chapter leaves us with a mixed picture. The kingdom is still standing. The threat has been removed. Order has been restored. But the path to that outcome was marked by tension, violence, and hard decisions. What stands out is how quickly things can unravel and how difficult it is to hold a people together once division takes root. Even strong leadership is tested when loyalties are divided and trust is strained.


Questions still linger. The crisis has passed, yet the deeper issues are not fully settled. It is a reminder that preserving unity requires constant attention. It cannot be assumed. It must be guarded and strengthened over time.


For Discussion

1. What conditions allowed Sheba's rebellion to gain traction so quickly after Absalom's defeat?


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2. What does Amasa's delay teach us about the importance of timely leadership in moments of crisis?

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3. How should we evaluate Joab's actions in killing Amasa? What does this reveal about the tension between results and righteousness?


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4. What can we learn from the wise woman of Abel about resolving conflict before it causes greater damage?


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5. Why is it dangerous to assume that everything is settled just because a conflict has ended?

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