



Finer Grounds Bible Study

2 Samuel

Lesson 11: 2 Samuel 16-20

Have you ever lived as a rebel? The answer is yes. We all have lived in rebellion against God when we sin. How does God's king righteously respond to rebellion? In this lesson, we will learn the outcome of two rebellions against David and consider how David's actions compare to the only righteous king, Jesus.

Read 2 Samuel 16:13-23

How did Absalom's actions, at the advice of Ahitophel, fulfill Nathan's prophecy in 2 Samuel 12:11-12?

The fulfillment of God's decree comes to pass as Absalom rapes the wives that David left behind. Notice the parallels in this passage between the language in 12:12 and 16:21. All Israel heard of what Absalom had done to David's wives. In ancient times, usurpers would often sleep with the wives of deposed kings to signify that they were now entitled to all the rights of the king's office (Tsumura 248). For sure, this action would forever embitter David towards his son. This brash, conspicuous, "odious" action also served to rally the rebellious Israelites to Absalom's side.

Think about it: What does it say about the people who support a cause when violence incites loyalty and unity?

Read 2 Samuel 17:1-14

Compare Hushai's and Ahitophel's advice concerning the size of the forces, when the action should take place, and who should lead the military forces. Whose advice was better?

Why was Hushai's advice followed?

If you think about it, Ahitophel's advice was wise and measured militarily. It used a small force, with quick action, to achieve the specific mission of killing David, and no other if possible. It would have quickly left Absalom as the de facto ruler after his father's death and would have limited the killing of David's supporters, therefore lessening the likelihood that they would rebel against Absalom later.

However, God intervenes just as David had requested in 2 Samuel 15:31. Hushai suggested using the entire force of Absalom's



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loyal followers to kill the king and his supporters. This was bold and decisive action that matched Absalom's proclivities. In the end, Absalom chose Hushai's advice because the Lord inclined the hearts of him and his advisors to ignore Ahithophel, even though Ahithophel's council was like "that of one who inquires of God."

Read 2 Samuel 17:15-23

Describe how the supporters David met as he left Jerusalem work together to help him prepare for the battle with Absalom.

All David's supporters, including Hushai, the priests, and the priests' sons, worked together to relay a message to David. He could now prepare for Absalom and choose a superior battle position to ensure victor over the larger, yet unexperienced forces of Absalom. We also find that Ahithophel was at least wise enough to know disaster was imminent for the rebellious Absalom. He set his house in order and committed suicide to avoid prosecution when David inevitably retook the throne.

In this moment, we see how God's authority cannot be challenged. God had decided that Absalom's actions were deserving of disastrous consequences, and no one, not even the man with wisest council could stop God's ordained plan. While Absalom would meet the punishment for his rebellion in battle, Ahithophel decided to inflict the punishment for his own rebellion upon himself.

Read 2 Samuel 17:24-29

Absalom's forces and David's forces took their places for battle by establishing camps, leaders, and strategies. This section of the text is heavy with places and names, and it is easy to overlook the commentary it brings to the events in this chapter. We learn that David fortified in the city of Mahanaim. You may remember that Mahanaim was the town from which Ish-Bosheth ruled Israel for his short reign. While most of Israel seems to be against David, the city that once was the seat of an opposing king now offers safety and supplies. Yet, while enemies turn to friends, David's own family turns against him. Amasa, David's nephew, was appointed as leader of Absalom's forces.

Even the names of Barzillai, Shobi, and Makir provide some interesting details too. While Barzillai is a new character in the story, Makir was the man who sheltered Mephibosheth after the death of Saul and Jonathan. The man who once sheltered a boy from David's possible wrath now offered him much needed supplies for the battle. Shobi was the king of Ammon, the country that was at war with Israel during the incident with Bathsheba. The leader of a nation that was once at war with David willingly came to his aid rather than rebelling by joining the opposition.



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Think about it: What does the loyalty exhibited by these people tell you about how David reigned as king? As followers of Jesus, how do we live a life devoted to our king?

Read 2 Samuel 18:1-5.

Why did David stay behind for the battle?

What specific order did David give concerning Absalom?

David, a well-seasoned military tactician, created a three-pronged fighting force to attack Absalom's forces led by his best and most loyal followers. However, the decision was made for David to stay behind. This was not a cowardly move. Everyone knew that the goal of this battle was to kill David. With such a small focus, the larger forces of Absalom would easily overcome the smaller numbers of David's forces in attempt to capture and kill David alone. With David fortified in the city, the fighting would be more spread out. David humbly takes the advice of his trusted generals but asked them to spare "the young man" Absalom's life.

Read 2 Samuel 18:6-18.

What is so ironic about the cause of Absalom's capture and death (consider 2 Samuel 14:25-26)?

Why are Joab's actions unsurprising considering his history? Compare his attitude toward David's command to the man who saw Absalom hanging in the tree.

While the lead-up to this battle covers several chapters, the battle itself is described in one short verse (18:7). David wins outright, with the forest, David's battleground of choice, causing more casualties than David's men. It is uncertain how the forest "swallowed" the men. This could be an instance of personification where the Absalom's men did not know how to fight in forest terrain.

Absalom fled from David's men and rode his mule, the animal typically ridden by Israelite royalty, through the forest. However, his signature long, heavy hair that he took the time to proudly weigh, ensnared him in the trees. He was stuck, dangling from a tree, while the mule that represented his royal position continued without him.

Joab took the opportunity to stop Absalom and his rebellion once and for all. Ignoring the command of David, Joab joined with his bodyguards and killed Absalom, likely so that no individual could be blamed for the man's



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death. Once Absalom was dead, Joab stopped the battle. Without a head, the Israelite army had no unifying figure. There was no need to continue killing more countryman than necessary. Absalom was buried on the sight of his death. There was no attempt to return the body to David or to provide any time of mourning. The end of Absalom and his rebellion was complete as we discover in 18:18 that Absalom had no living sons to carry on his name, or to seek vengeance for his death.

Read 2 Samuel 18:19-33.

How does David respond to the news about Absalom's death?

This passage slows down the action as we the reader wonders how David will take the news. The answer is "not well." While his loyal subjects rejoiced that the rebellious son was dead and that they had won the battle, the king throws himself into mourning, lamenting that the outcome had not been reversed. We will see that this reaction had a sobering effect on David's loyal army.

Read 2 Samuel 19:1-8.

Considering the events that led to Absalom's rebellion, why would David had wished to die in the place of Absalom?

Describe Joab's words. Did his words have merit?

In the end, it is Joab of all people who finally talked some sense into David. I don't doubt that David understood the connection that his sins had to the sins of his son. Was not the death of four of his sons the punishment that David had unknowingly prescribed for his sin against Uriah? At this point, his infant son had died, Amnon was dead because of his actions, and Absalom had died from his rebellion.

However, it was not as if David's sin with Bathsheba directly led to the deaths of his older sons. It was a combination of their own rebellion and sin, combined with David's inability to address their actions in accordance with God's law, that eventually led to civil war. David's unwillingness to discipline his own sons now sees its most public and debilitating consequence as David's weeping and wailing caused the hearts of his people to fail as they returned home from what should have been a great victory.

Joab, just as he pled with David to return to his post as leader of the army after the pain of losing his child in 2 Samuel 12, now pleads with David to return to his position as king and to preside at the city gate where the leader of the people stood. Seeing the wisdom in Joab's words, David listened and returned to his position.



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Read 2 Samuel 19:9-40.

Describe the reconciliations mentioned. How did David choose to handle the rebellion, or perceived rebellion, of these people?

- **David and the men of Judah**

- **David and Amasa**

- **David and Shimei**

- **David and Mephibosheth**

This passage answers the dissenters that David met as he fled Jerusalem. Before his reentry to Jerusalem, David reached out to the members of his tribe, the Judahites, and asked them to restore his place as king. The Judahites were also Absalom's tribesmen, and they seem to have supported him in his rebellion as he was made king in Hebron, a major city in Judah. The tribe welcomes David back and so, David returned to Jerusalem.

On his way, he met some familiar faces. Shimei, who cursed David when he fled

Jerusalem, returned to seek the king's forgiveness. Excusing Shimei would build some bridges to eventually reconcile David with the rest of the tribes, including Shimei's tribe, the Benjamites. Mephibosheth also came, looking as if he was in mourning since David had left the city. When questioned, Mephibosheth claimed that he did not desert David, but was tricked by Ziba. Perhaps unable to discern who was telling the truth, David decided to split the possessions of Saul between Ziba and Mephibosheth. David attempted to award Barzillai, the man who provided food for David and his forces in Mahanaim. However, Barzillai was unwilling to come to the court of the king due to his age. Instead, he sent a son, or grandson perhaps, to take the honor instead.

While David could return to his rightful place in Jerusalem, the divide that incited the civil war still existed and he would have to work diligently to reunite the tribes under his rule.

Read 2 Samuel 19:41-20:2.

Why did Sheba rebel against David?

Here, the men of Judah, David's tribe, and the men of Israel, the other 10 tribes, get into a disagreement concerning how David returned to Jerusalem. The 10 tribes were concerned that Judah was receiving special treatment when David allowed them to escort him back. While their claims were baseless, the passage reveals that there was a growing resentment between Judah, the largest tribe, and the 10



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other remaining tribes. When Israel was not given the honor of escorting the king, some of the men of Israel, instigated by a Benjamite named Sheba, deserted the king while the men of Judah stayed loyal to David. Sheba claimed that David, being of Judah, had no right to rule the 10 tribes of Israel. He also spoke with disdain concerning David's heritage as the son of Jesse. No doubt Sheba, who was himself from the tribe of Saul, did not think highly of this man who took the throne in place of a king from his own tribe. Sheba easily united the men of Israel behind the idea that David was "not their king."

Read 2 Samuel 20:3.

This interjection reveals what happened to David's ten wives that Absalom defiled on the rooftop for all to see. After what Absalom had done to them publicly, David no longer could keep them as his wives, yet he had no reason to divorce them as they had not done anything wrong. David keeps them as his wives in name only, providing for their comfort but without maintaining an intimate relationship. This was not an ideal solution. These women lived the rest of their lives as victims of Absalom's, and ultimately David's sins.

Think about it: How does the fate of these women compare to the fate of Tamar? Considering that Absalom killed Amnon for similar actions, what does this tell you about Absalom's character?

Read 2 Samuel 20:4-13.

Why would David appoint Amasa as the leader of the army? What political and/or personal reasons could he have had for this decision?

How do the events in this passage parallel the events in 2 Samuel 3:22-30?

Joab quite literally strikes again in this passage. Amasa, who led Absalom's army, was named commander of David's forces, a decision that could have resulted from David's need to unite his divided nation, or from being angry at Joab for killing Absalom. Whatever the reason, Amasa proved to be ineffective as he was unable, or maybe even unwilling, to assemble an army to fight the threat posed by Sheba. Whether because of jealousy or distrust, Joab decided to murder his replacement, who also happened to be his first cousin. In a similar pattern to his murder of Abner, Joab lured Amasa close with a familial greeting and then quickly stabbed him in the gut. Joab's solution to problems tends to involve bloodshed.

Think about it: Compare how Joab dealt with Absalom and Amasa with how David dealt with Shimei.



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Read 2 Samuel 20:14-22

How was disaster thwarted by a wise woman in Abel?

Compare this passage to another time a woman stepped in to stop unnecessary bloodshed in 1 Samuel 25:23-31.

The rebellion of Sheba was short-lived as he was quickly betrayed by the people of Abel to save their own lives. While people willingly followed Sheba in rebellion, when their loyalty was challenged, it proved weak and self-seeking. The woman in Abel, seeing her city besieged, realized that the cause of Sheba was not worth dying for. For his part, Joab proved to be practical and relented from further bloodshed once the leader of the weak insurrection was handed over to him.

We live in an age where outrage is expected. People quickly cling to new causes that feed their anger and frustration. One only needs to look at a social media feed to see how quickly people can become hateful or even violent to someone who presents or represents a threat to their thinking, feelings, or physical desires. We have seen how selfish attitudes have led to violence, anger, and division within our own nation.

Compare and contrast Sheba and Absalom's rebellion. How did both men convince people to follow them?

What movements or people use similar strategies to gain followers?

As we close the section on rebellion in David's kingdom, we must consider what this history tells us about our own relationship with God. While we may want to identify with David as the righteous man who is surrounded by evil, we are more like the willingly rebellious Israelites. We live in a state of rebellion against God as we refuse to be let him rule our hearts and minds. It is only when we believe, repent, and are baptized for the forgiveness of our sins that we can begin to walk in obedience to the rightful king of creation.

Read Psalm 107. How does God react to the rebellions described in this passage?

How do David's reactions to his rebellious people compare to God's treatment of His rebellious people?



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Read Ephesians 5:1-20 (or the whole chapter if you have time!) What does a life in submission to God look like?

What are some ways that you still think or act in rebellious (i.e. sinful) ways? Create a plan to break the patterns that lead to sin.
