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Israel and Judah:

11. David's Restoration as King

by David Sielaff, July 2015

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Israel and Judah: 11

David's
Restoration
as King

THE SITUATION: We do not know if David knew about all the events of 2 Samuel 18:1–18. David probably knew his army was victorious over the army of Israel led by Absalom. He knew this because none of his soldiers fled from the enemy. But David did not know his beloved son had died. What would be David's reaction to Absalom's death? Giving David such bad news in the past had been dangerous. David's next problem was to reconcile the leaders and people of Israel to David's kingship and reward those who were loyal. Then, of course, another rebellion occurred.

The narrative opens with David not knowing about the great victory his army under Joab had against the army of Israel under Absalom. The triumph was complete and total. Nor does David know that Absalom is dead. He is waiting at the city of Mahanaim (2 Samuel 17:27) for news of the battle. King David needs to be told about both the victory and Absalom ... but how should he be told?

We know from past instances that David does not act well when informed that people he loves and admires were killed or murdered. Joab himself killed Absalom, so David's top military commander has great interest in David being "handled" properly when he is told how Absalom died. Ahimaaz, son of Zadok the high priest, greatly desires to present this news to David. He wants to be the bearer of good news. Consider again God's prophecy to David (given through the prophet Nathan):

"Therefore the sword shall not withdraw from your house for the eon, inasmuch as you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to become your wife. Thus said Yahweh: Behold, I am raising up over you evil from your own house; ..."

• 2 Samuel 12:10–11

These verses were fulfilled in part by Absalom's rebellion and by his death. David's kingdom and life were threatened. Yet, a major concern of David's was that Absalom would be harmed. He wanted Absalom to be safe, but none of David's actions were successful. "God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven," paraphrasing Matthew 6:10. Absalom was doomed, just as David and Bathsheba's first son was doomed.

TEXT: David Receives the News of Absalom's Death

2 Samuel 18:19–33

¹⁹ Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, “**Now let me run and bear the tidings to the king that Yahweh has vindicated him against the hand of his enemies.**” ²⁰ But Joab said to him, “**You are not a man of tidings this day. You will bear the tidings on another day; but this day you shall not bear the tidings.**” — This was because the king's son was dead. ²¹ Then Joab said to a Cushite, “**Go tell the king what you have seen.**” The Cushite bowed down to Joab and ran off.

²² Yet Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, “**Let come what may, let me run now, me too, after the Cushite.**” Joab asked, “**Why then have you to run, my son, when there are no tidings of benefit for you to be found?**” ²³ But Ahimaaz said, “**Let come what may, let me run.**” So Joab replied to him, “**Run! Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the basin, and he passed by the Cushite.**”

²⁴ David was sitting between the two gates when the watchman went up to the roof-level of the gateway by the wall; as he lifted up his eyes, he saw there was a man running alone by himself.

²⁵ The watchman called down and told the king; and the king replied, “**If he is alone, there are tidings in his mouth.**” While the man was running and came near, ²⁶ the watchman saw another man running. Then the watchman on the gate called down, saying, “**There is another man running alone by himself.**” And the king replied, “**That one, too, is a bearer of tidings.**”

²⁷ The watchman continued, “**I can see that the running-style of the first one is like the running of Ahimaaz son of Zadok.**” The king replied, “**This one is a good man; he comes with good tidings.**”

²⁸ Ahimaaz drew near and said to the king, “**Peace!**” He bowed down to the king with his nostrils to the earth and said, “**Blessed be Yahweh your Elohim, Who made those men surrender who lifted their hand against my lord the king.**”

²⁹ Then the king asked, “**Was it peaceable for the lad, for Absalom?**” And Ahimaaz answered, “**I saw a great throng when Joab was sending off the king's servant and me, your servant. Yet I do not know what it was about.**”

³⁰ The king said, “**Go around and stand by here.**” So he went around and stayed.

³¹ Just then the Cushite was coming up; and the Cushite said, “**Let my lord the king receive the tidings that Yahweh has vindicated you today against the hand of all those who rose up against you!**”

³² The king asked the Cushite, “**Was it peaceable for the lad, for Absalom?**” And the Cushite replied, “**May the enemies of my lord the king and all those who rise up against you for evil become like that lad!**”

³³ Then the king was disturbed. He went up to the upper chamber of the gateway and wept. Thus he lamented as he went, “**O my son Absalom! my son! my son Absalom! O that I had died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son!**”

[end text]

Verse 19–22. Ahimaaz must have felt, because he brought news that would help David, that David would not harm him. In fact, perhaps he expected favor from his king. He was mistaken.

Verse 21. Two motives for Joab sending a Cushite are possible, (1) a non-Israelite is expendable if David has him killed through anger, or (2) this particular Cushite (unnamed) was well known and liked, so he could give David bad news without harm coming to him.

Verse 22. Ahimaaz was the son of Zadok. When Joab calls him “my son,” it was a term of affection. He did not want Ahimaaz to be hurt by an enraged David.

Verse 28. Ahimaaz tells David about the surrender of his enemies. He says nothing about Absalom.

Verse 29. David asks specifically about Absalom. Ahimaaz does not directly answer David, nor does he hint that he knows anything about Absalom's situation. The word translated “throng” is different in several translations, variously rendered “commotion,” “tumult,” “multitude,” or “crowd.” Take your pick. The Cushite is identified here as “the king's servant.” Some commentators speculate this may mean he was a personal servant of David's.

Verse 30. David tells Ahimaaz to stand aside. Ahimaaz did what he was told. No further mention is made of Ahimaaz in Scripture. Although Ahimaaz's father Zadok was high priest, but there is no biblical statement of Ahimaaz rising to Zadok's position in either David's court or in Solomon's court. He was literally set aside, not mentioned in Scripture again.^a

Verse 31. The Cushite arrives and proclaims victory for David, not knowing that Ahimaaz already gave that news of victory to the king.

Verses 32–33. David then uses the same words to ask the same question he asked Ahimaaz in verse 29: **"Was it peaceable for the lad, for Absalom?"** The Cushite euphemistically phrases his answer that Absalom is dead. David breaks down. There is no mention of evil coming to the the Cushite from David.

"He lamented as he went," up the stairs. David's expressions of grief and lament are repeated again and again. Like Job, David laments over a situation that cannot be changed. Nothing can assuage his grief.

TEXT: Joab Takes Action; David Responds

2 Samuel 19:1–14

¹ Then Joab was told that the king was weeping and mourning over Absalom. ² And the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the soldiers, for that day the soldiers heard it said, **"The king is grieved over his son."** ³ The soldiers stole away that day to enter the city just as soldiers would steal away who are put to shame when they have fled in battle. ⁴ As for the king, he wrapped up his face. And the king cried out in a loud voice, **"O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"**

⁵ Then Joab came into the house to the king and said,

"Today you have put to shame the faces of all your servants, who provided an escape for your soul this day and the souls of your sons and your daughters, and the souls of your wives and the souls of your concubines, ⁶ by loving those who hate you and hating those who love you. For you have professed today that chief officers and conscript servants are nothing to you. Now I know today even if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then that would be upright in your eyes.

⁷ **Now arise! Go forth and speak to the heart of your servants! For I swear by Yahweh, if you are not going forth, assuredly no man shall lodge with you tonight; and this will be worse for you than any evil plight that has come over you from your youth until now."**

⁸ So the king arose and sat down in the gateway; and when all the soldiers were told, saying, **"Behold, the king is sitting in the gateway,"** all the soldiers came before the king.

Israel had fled, each man to his tent. ⁹ All the people came to be speculating among all the tribes of Israel, saying,

"It was the king who rescued us from the palm [hand] of all our enemies, and he provided our escape from the palm [hand] of the Philistines. Yet now he ran away from the land, from control over his kingdom and from Absalom. ¹⁰ But Absalom, whom we had anointed over us, has died in battle; why then do you keep silent about bringing back the king?"

And the word of all Israel came to the king. ¹¹ So king David himself sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying,

"Speak to the elders of Judah, saying, 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since the word of all Israel has come to the king at his house? ¹² You are my kinsmen, you are my bone and my flesh. Why should you be the last to bring the king back?'

¹³ **And to Amasa you shall say, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? Thus may Elohim do to**

^a Josephus says differently, **"The first high priest then at the temple which Solomon built was Zadok; after him his son Ahimaaz received that dignity; after Ahimaaz was Azariah"** (*Antiquities of the Jews* 10:152).

me, and thus may He add, if you do not become chief of the military host before me all your days instead of Joab.”

¹⁴ And Amasa won over the heart of all the men of Judah as one man; and they sent word to the king, saying, **“Return, you and all your servants!”** [end text]

Verse 1. It can be presumed, although it is not mentioned, that David’s soldiers return to Mahanaim. David weeps and mourns for Absalom, again seeming to care more for his enemies while ignoring his supporters.

Verses 2–4. The soldiers are dejected, which is not what soldiers want to feel after risking their lives for their king and winning a decisive victory. After close hand-to-hand combat there is a period of exhaustion and recovery from the high emotions of the combat, the chase, the killing, and the knowledge that you are still alive. The effect of the hormone adrenaline gradually wears off. David adds a new burden on them, making them feel guilty, or that they displeased their king, for whom they risked much and served loyally.

Verse 5–7. Joab would not have it. He acted immediately. In my opinion, this is Joab’s finest hour of service, both to his king and to the kingdom. Joab speaks truth to power as few ever do. He is not threatening David, although it seems he is doing so. In reality Joab declares facts to David. Those facts are real and they threaten everything that was recently won and recovered. David acts as if he cares nothing about those who had done so much for him. Joab boldly tells David how he was wrong in his actions, and how those actions will affect the entire kingdom unless he recovers his senses and perspective. Although Joab is a vicious killer, he is not a coward. He admonishes David to, **“arise! Go ... and speak ...”**

Verse 8. David hears and acts. When a king sits in the gateway of a city, he can be approached by anyone; “no appointment necessary.” The soldiers are David’s professional military men who gave him the victory over his enemies. There is no mention here of soldiers from Judah supporting David being present at the gateway. Apparently all the soldiers came to give their condolences and to receive praise from their king.

Verses 9–10. Notice how easily and quickly the people of Israel turn their affections. Word of David’s victory over Absalom reaches all parts of Israel (probably from the defeated soldiers of Israel who returned home). There is quick discussion and a response from tribal leaders, clan leaders, town and city leaders, and military leaders from around Israel, all seeming to pledge renewed allegiance to David’s kingship. They are at David’s mercy and need to act quickly. Not to do so at that moment would be an unspoken statement of sustained opposition to David as king or even continued rebellion. At this moment they respond positively and the result was, **“the word of all Israel came to the king,”** meaning David. As a result, Israel will gain David’s help against their enemies, particularly the Philistines.

Verse 11. On his part, David spoke through his representatives, Zadok the high priest and Abiathar (the son of the former high priest Ahimelech who was murdered by King Saul). Abiathar was also a high priest. Abiathar was faithful to David from his time before he was made king, after he was crowned King of Judah, after he was crowned King of all Israel, and he brought the ark to Jerusalem. He continued to support David during Absalom’s rebellion. David sends two messages.

Verse 12. David sends the first message to **“the elders of Judah,”** reminding them that he has a blood relationship with them. Few from Judah support David, nor did many travel with him or give him and his army material support. In fact, people of Judah either supported Absalom or were silent, not giving support to either David or the usurper Absalom. David’s message to those elders is, “choose now,” or soon it may be too late. Do you want to **“be the last”**? The last what? The last of the tribes of Israel to support David.

Verse 13–14. The second message is surprising. It was to one man, Amasa, a relative of **“my bone and my flesh.”** He was David’s nephew. Amasa was the leader of the enemy army, just defeated (2 Samuel 17:25). David solemnly promised to make Amasa leader of his army, **“instead of Joab,”** as if Joab did not exist or was dead. He does so because everyone seemingly loves Amasa. However, being the leader of an army should not be based on a popularity contest. Nevertheless, David’s action was well received (verse

14). **“They sent word”** means Abiathar and Zadok sent word to David that it is safe for him to return to Judah and Jerusalem.

Why did David cast aside Joab and embrace the general of the former enemy army? The equivalent of this would have been for President Lincoln, after the surrender of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox, suddenly dismissing General Grant and placing General Robert E. Lee in charge of the Union Army. David did this for several reasons, here are some likely ones:

1. Joab has insulted David several times, offending his dignity as king.
2. Joab murdered Abner, Ishbosheth’s general of Israel’s army, and potential rival to Joab when he attempted to make peace.
3. Joab helped reconcile Absalom to David, which resulted in rebellion.
4. Joab murdered Absalom, David’s beloved son rather than taking him prisoner, contrary to David’s explicit order.
5. Joab’s harsh words to David in verses 5–7 above, although true and necessary, must have been resented. People, and especially kings, do not like to be told they are wrong.

These reasons and more must have led to David’s decision to put Joab in his place.

TEXT: Requiring Friends and Enemies for Past Actions

2 Samuel 19:15–43

¹⁵ So the king returned and came as far as the Jordan; and the men of Judah had come to Gilgal on their way to meet the king, to bring the king across the Jordan.

¹⁶ Shimei son of Gera the Benjamite from Bahurim made haste and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David, ¹⁷ and with him were a thousand men from Benjamin. Also Ziba, the young attendant of Saul’s estate, his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him, they prospered in arriving at the Jordan before the king; ¹⁸ and they crossed the ford to bring across the king’s household, and to do whatever was good in his eyes. As for Shimei son of Gera, when he had crossed the Jordan, he fell down before the king; ¹⁹ and he said to the king,

“Let not my lord account depravity to me, and do not remember what depravity your servant did on the day when my lord the king went forth from Jerusalem, so that the king should take-it to heart. ²⁰ For your servant knows that I, yea I have sinned. So here I have come today, the first of all the house of Joseph, to go down and meet my lord the king.”

²¹ Then Abishai son of Zeruiah responded, saying, **“Should Shimei not be put to death for this because he has maledicted [cursed] Yahweh’s anointed?”** ²² Yet David replied,

“What is it to me and to you, sons of Zeruiah, that today you have become my adversary? Should anyone in Israel be put to death on this day? For do you not know that today I am again king over Israel?”

²³ Then the king said to Shimei, **“You shall not die.”** And the king swore an oath to him.

²⁴ Also Mephibosheth, grandson of Saul, came down to meet the king. He had neither cared for his feet, nor had he cared for his upper lip, nor had he laundered his clothes from the day the king departed until the day he came back in peace. ²⁵ So it was when he came from Jerusalem to meet the king that the king said to him, **“Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?”** ²⁶ He replied,

“My lord the king, it was my own servant who deceived me. For your servant had said to him, Saddle the donkey for me that I may ride on it and go with the king. For your servant is lame.

²⁷ **Ziba has vilified your servant before my lord the king. But my lord the king is like a messen-**

ger [angel] **of the One, Elohim; so do what is good in your eyes.** ²⁸ **For all of the household of my grandfather were nothing now but men doomed to death before my lord the king. Yet you set your servant among those who ate at your table. So what righteous claim have I then to cry out any more to the king?"**

²⁹ The king replied to him, **"Why should you speak any longer of your affairs? I decree that you and Ziba apportion the field."** ³⁰ But Mephibosheth said to the king, **"Just let him take the whole, inasmuch as my lord the king has come to his home in peace."**

³¹ Also Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim and had passed on with the king to the Jordan to see him off at the Jordan. ³² Barzillai was very old, eighty years of age. He had provided the king with food during his stay at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. ³³ So the king said to Barzillai, **"You, cross over with me, and I will provide for your old age with me in Jerusalem."** ³⁴ Yet Barzillai replied to the king,

"How many days of the years of my life are left that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?"

³⁵ **I am eighty years of age today. Would I know the difference between good and bad? Or can your servant taste what I eat and what I drink? Or can I still make out the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant become a further load to my lord the king?** ³⁶ **Your servant could barely cross the Jordan with the king! Why should the king requite me with this requital?**

³⁷ **I pray, let your servant return that I may die in my own city near the tomb of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham, my son; let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what is good in your eyes."**

³⁸ The king said, **"Chimham shall cross over with me, and I myself will do for him whatever is good in my eyes. And anything else you choose to ask of me, I will do that for you too."**

³⁹ Then all the soldiers crossed over the Jordan. When the king was ready to cross, the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him; and Barzillai returned to his own place.

⁴⁰ Then the king crossed over to Gilgal, and Chimham crossed with him, and all the soldiers of Judah; they brought the king across, together with half the force of Israel.

⁴¹ Now all the men of Israel kept coming to the king and said to the king, **"For what reason have our kinsmen, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king and his household across »the Jordan, and all of David's men with him?"**

⁴² Then all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, **"Because the king is a near relative to us! Why does this make you angry about this matter? Have we eaten, yea eaten from the king's food? Or did he carry a load for us?"**

⁴³ The men of Israel answered the men of Judah, saying, **"We have ten shares in the king; moreover we are the firstborn, rather than you. For what reason do you slight us? Was not our proposal first, to bring our king back to us?"** Yet the words of the men of Judah were more obstinate than the words of the men of Israel.

[\[end text\]](#)

Verse 15. David begins the procession with his troops from the town or small city of Mahanaim to Jerusalem. They come to the Jordan River. **"Men of Judah"** traveled to Gilgal (about 4 miles west of the Jordan River, the exact location is unknown) to greet David on the way.

Verse 16–17. We meet Shimei again. A Benjaminite, Shimei was the foul-mouthed hater of King David from 2 Samuel 16:5–14, when Shimei cursed David as a murderer and threw rocks and dirt on him and those with him. Now he comes to meet David with the people of Judah and with his 15 sons, 20 servants, and **"a thousand men from Benjamin."** Surely, Shimei and the men of Benjamin were searched for weapons.

Although Ziba is an old man with many children, he is identified by the Hebrew word *"nor"* which means "young" so the Concordant Version identifies him as **"the young attendant of Saul's estate."** Perhaps

he was very young when he became Saul's servant, **"young"** being a nickname. Also note that Shimei and Ziba (both loyal to the deceased King Saul), seem to be cooperating with each other.

Verse 18. They assist David's household (family, servants and guards) with their baggage at a ford in the River Jordan, apparently helping in any way to assist the victorious king. Shimei puts on a display of obeisance before David.

Verse 19–20. Shimei begs David to forgive and forget his prior behavior — all to Shimei's advantage, of course. It is unclear what is meant by **"the house of Joseph"** in verse 20.^b

Verse 21. Again, Abishai, son of Zeruah and brother of Joab, accompanying David, again wants to kill Shimei for opposing and cursing his rightful king.

Verse 22. David tells Abishai (who later^c saves David's life in a battle with the Philistines) that this is not the time to kill any Israelites, not even the foolish Shimei. This must have offended Abishai. David states boldly that Abishai has become his adversary, while the people of Israel have again become his proper subjects, or so they say publicly. David exercises his kingly prerogative and declares that now is not the time to kill anyone, but a time for him to be king over his subjects.

Verse 23. After all this go-round, David publicly pardons Shimei.

Verse 24. Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, was heir to King Saul's throne after Ishbosheth was murdered (2 Samuel 4:7–8). King David kept this potential enemy close, although because he was lame, he was not a realistic candidate to be king.

Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of King Saul, should have been the rightful heir, or so it seems when considering all the texts. The kingship usually goes through the eldest surviving son. For some unknown reason a lame man was apparently not eligible to be king.^d After Saul and Jonathan's death (along with his next two oldest sons, Abinadab [also called Ishvi, 1 Samuel 14:49] and Malchishua), Ishbosheth (Saul's youngest son) was raised to the throne by Abner, general of Israel's army. Ishbosheth ruled for two years (2 Samuel 2:10). Joab killed Abner; assassins murdered Ishbosheth, but Mephibosheth survived, grew up, and benefitted from David's oath to Mephibosheth's father Jonathan.

Earlier, Ziba, the servant who maintained Saul's properties, told King David that Mephibosheth hoped to be made king by the people of Israel:

"Then the king asked, 'And where is the son of your lord?' Ziba replied to the king, 'Oh, he is staying in Jerusalem, for he thinks, Today the house of Israel shall restore to me the kingship of my grandfather.'"

• 2 Samuel 16:3

Ziba probably lied as we read in 2 Samuel 19:24–29 above. Mephibosheth says he wanted to meet and help David, but Ziba would not help him do so. Who should David believe?

Verse 25. David asks Mephibosheth in effect, why were you disloyal?

Verse 27. Mephibosheth claims that Ziba slandered him to David. He also says David is "as" an angel of God. (1 Samuel 29:9 and 2 Samuel 14:17, 20 compliment David in that way. See also Zechariah 12:8).

Verse 28. This passage presages more than Mephibosheth imagined. King Saul's descendants have been greatly reduced. What comes in the future will decrease the number of family members even more.

Verse 29. David makes a decision that cuts a middle course between deciding in favor of either Ziba or Mephibosheth. He decides for both, and neither. He apportions Saul's property between Ziba and Mephi-

^b One idea is that **"house of Joseph"** is a reference for all the northern tribes, as is done in Ezekiel 37:16 and Psalm 78:67, where the name 'Joseph' is similarly used. See Roger L. Omanson and John Ellington, *A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001), p. 1043.

^c We cannot know for sure if this incident occurred before or after the incident with Shimei in verse 16–23. Whenever it happened, Abishai saved David from an onslaught by a trained military "giant" who sought to kill Abishai's king.

^d Perhaps physical vitality was linked to virility and military prowess. A king was supposed to lead his troops, at least when he is young. If Mephibosheth had not been lame, perhaps he would have been the rightful heir to sit on Saul's throne.

bosheth. This effectively separated the two antagonists. David was rid of them both, although Mephibosheth is mentioned later regarding another matter.^e

Verse 30. After David makes his decision, Mephibosheth is unable to keep quiet (a theme that seems to recur throughout the narrative of David's reign), continuing to pour out spiteful words, saying in effect, "Well, let Ziba take everything." We are not told if David took Mephibosheth's suggestion, or went with his first decision to divide Saul's property between them.

Verses 31–38. Finally David encounters a true friend, someone who helped when David and his people needed that help. David offers to help Barzillai in return, but this true friend of David refused anything for himself. Barzillai did ask for his son Chimham to be favored by David. Nothing else is said in Scripture about either Barzillai or Chimham, except that an inn near Bethlehem was named for Chimham (Jeremiah 41:17).

Verses 39–40. All the soldiers crossed the Jordan and went to Gilgal, 4 miles west of the Jordan River.

Verses 41–43. Tensions are building. One can presume David's guards carefully watched the soldiers of Israel and Judah, especially when they started arguing which had the greater claim on David as their sovereign. This and other issues soon got out of hand.

A New Rebellion Arises

Another rebellion soon breaks out. An ancient reader, say in New Testament times, must have wondered as I do, what was wrong with David's kingdom that there were two insurrections in such a short time? Surely, important issues and grievances of the people of Israel were not properly dealt with by David and his government. There were signs that Israel was never comfortable being ruled by David and Judah.

1. Problems between the people of Israel in the north and Judah in the south were demonstrated by the separate kingdom of Israel under Ishbosheth, heir of King Saul (2 Samuel 2:4–9). Only after Ishbosheth died did Israel give allegiance to David as their king.^f This was likely done because allegiance to David's rule protected them from the Philistines, Syrians, Moabites, and Edomites, which David successfully accomplished, as Israel acknowledged in 2 Samuel 19:9.
2. During Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel chapters 15–18) Israel supported Absalom, even though he was from Judah (and Judah was itself divided in its support of David). But note, Israel did not declare Absalom to be THEIR king. David's military support came mostly from his professional army fighting the levy armies of Israel and some from Judah.
3. After Absalom's rebellion ended, the people of Israel claimed David as their king, as much their king as he was Judah's king. They were accusing Judah of claiming David was their king first, and secondarily Israel's king. This was not an issue of priority of bragging rights. This was an issue of power sharing.
4. Now, with this new rebellion by a man named Sheba, the issue of distinctions between the north and south realms arise again.

^e This incident may have been an example to Solomon in his judgment as to which prostitute should receive the newborn son (1 Kings 3:16–28). He ordered the child cut in half, but the real mother intervened, saving the child, saying, give it to the other woman. Solomon rewarded the real mother with the child. David was able to split the land between Mephibosheth and Ziba.

^f Such broken allegiances are the ultimate cause of civil wars. Grievances cause one party to attempt to dissolve their union with a larger political entity. Rarely are such separations peaceful, but they do occur, as when Canada separated itself as a sovereign nation from Britain's rule in 1867.

TEXT: Sheba's Rebellion

2 Samuel 20:1–23

¹ A worthless man happened to be there; his name was Sheba son of Bichri, a man of Jemini. He blew the trumpet and declared, **“There is no portion for us in David and no allotment for us in the son of Jesse! Each man to his tents, O Israel!”** ² So every man of Israel moved away from following David to go after Sheba son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, they clung to their king from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem.

³ When David came to his palace in Jerusalem, the king took the ten women, his concubines, whom he had left to be in charge of the palace, and he put them in a house under guard. He provided for them, but he did not go in to them; they remained constricted until the day of their death, in living widowhood.

⁴ The king said to Amasa, **“Call a convocation for me with the men of Judah within three days, and stand ready here yourself.”** ⁵ So Amasa went to call a convocation with Judah; but he delayed longer than the appointed time that the king had set for him.

⁶ And David said to Abishai,

“Now Sheba son of Bichri shall cause us more evil than Absalom. And now, take with you your lord’s servants and pursue after him, lest he find for himself fortified cities and rescue himself, away from our eyes.”

⁷ So Joab’s men marched forth after him with the Kerethite, the Pelethite and all the masters of war. They marched forth from Jerusalem to pursue after Sheba son of Bichri. ⁸ When they were at the large stone that is in Gibeon, then Amasa himself came up before them. Now Joab was girded with his coat over his clothing; and on it a girdle with the sword in its scabbard strapped to his waist. Now the sword came forth, and it fell down.

⁹ Joab said to Amasa, **“Is all well with you, my brother?”** And Joab’s right hand took hold of Amasa’s beard as if to kiss him. ¹⁰ So Amasa was not on guard against the sword that was in Joab’s left hand who smote him with it on the fifth rib, and his bowels were poured out to the earth. He did not have to repeat it to him, for he was dying.

While Joab and his brother Abishai pursued after Sheba son of Bichri, ¹¹ a man of Joab’s lads stood over him and said, **“Anyone who delights in Joab and anyone who is for David, let him follow after Joab.”**

¹² Amasa was rolling himself in his blood in the middle of the highway. When the man saw that all the soldiers stood still, he brought Amasa around, off the highway into the field; and he flung a cloak over him as he realized that anyone coming up onto him would stand still.

¹³ As soon as he was removed away from the highway, all the men marched by, following Joab to pursue after Sheba son of Bichri, ¹⁴ who was passing through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah; and all the Bichrites assembled and came also after him.

¹⁵ Joab’s men came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maacah. They poured out earthwork against the city, and it stood against the rampart. All the soldiers with Joab were wrecking the wall so as to cast it down,

¹⁶ when a wise woman called out from the wall, **“Hear! Hear! Please tell Joab, ‘Come near over here, and let me speak to you.’”** ¹⁷ So he went near to her, and the woman asked, **“Are you Joab?”** He replied, **“I am.”** She said to him, **“Hear the words of your maidservant.”** He answered, **“I am hearing.”**

¹⁸ Then she continued, saying,

“They spoke, yea spoke in former times, saying, ‘Let them ask, yea ask at Abel and at Dan whether that which the faithful of Israel had established ever came to end.’ Let them ask, yea ask at Abel, and thus they will come to end.

¹⁹ **I represent the peaceable and faithful of Israel. But you are seeking to bring death to a city that is a mother in Israel. Why should you swallow up the allotment of Yahweh?”**

²⁰ Joab answered, saying,

“Far be it, far be it from me that I should swallow up or bring down to ruin. ²¹ The matter is not quite so because a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba son of Bichri is his name, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Give him up, him alone, and I shall withdraw from the city.”

The woman replied to Joab, **“Behold, his head shall be flung to you over the wall.”**

²² Then the woman went to all her people and spoke to all the city in her wisdom. So they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bichri and flung it down to Joab. He then blew the trumpet, and they scattered from the city, each man to his tents.

As for Joab, he returned to Jerusalem, to the king. ²³ Joab was over Israel’s entire military host; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethite and over the Pelethite. ²⁴ Adoniram was over the tributary service; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the recorder. ²⁵ Sheva was scribe; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests. ²⁶ Ira the Jairite also served David as priest. [end text]

Verse 1. No ruler is without opposition or without those willing to foment violent opposition. The name Sheba may mean “oath,” but it also is the ordinal number “seven” in Hebrew. He was a Benjaminite as the name of his hometown indicates. Sheba blew a trumpet, which was a ram’s horn.

Sheba declared publicly that there was no connection between David and the tribes of Israel, **“There is no portion for us in David and no allotment for us in the son of Jesse!** Sheba is saying that no good can come from being associated with David. Israel will benefit little or not at all. David is not related to the people, clans, or tribes of Israel, nor does Israel have an **“allotment”** or an inheritance due to them from David or his descendants. This means all monies go to Judah and King David, very little comes back to Israel.

Again, there are likely other grievances that we are not told about, for example, perhaps Israel did not gain much from the benefit or booty from David’s foreign wars, even though Israelites fought alongside David’s professional military and the troops of Judah. Sheba declared the northern tribes of Israel to be independent from David’s rule.

Verse 2. People begin to take sides. Every military man of Israel began to mobilize. Judah stayed loyal to David and their soldiers protected David from the Jordan River to Jerusalem. David now acts quickly.

Verse 3. This verse is a parenthetical interruption in the story flow about Sheba, perhaps placed here to show other events were going on while the new rebellion formed. David does not go into his concubines (who were sexually violated by Absalom, 2 Samuel 16:20–22). He puts them in a house in a similar way he put away his first wife Mical who publicly insulted him (2 Samuel 6:20–23).

Verse 4. David gives a command to Amasa to gather the army of Judah. He failed to do so and the text says **“he delayed.”** We don’t know if he delayed on purpose, or because of insurmountable circumstances. The bottom line is Amasa failed.

Verses 6–7. David expresses his level of concern about Sheba’s insurrection when he describes the situation as more dangerous than Absalom’s rebellion. David tells Abishai (not Amasa or Joab) to take **“Joab’s men”** and march against Sheba. The professional component of David’s army begins to move.

Verse 8. Joab is mentioned for the first time since 2 Samuel 19:7.

Verses 9–11. Joab again murders a rival, just as he murdered Abner (2 Samuel 3:22–30).

Verses 12–13. Amasa’s body (not yet dead) was covered so it would not disturb other soldiers. After all their new general had been killed by their old general (now their general again). The men follow Joab. Bichrites, from the same city as Sheba of Bichri, have joined forces with Sheba.

Verse 14. The soldiers travel north through Israel without resistance from Israelite soldiers, who probably do not want to fight these professional soldiers. Sheba and his allies take shelter in a city, Abel of Beth-maacah in northern Palestine.

Verse 15. Abel of Beth-maacah is besieged by Joab’s forces. The army begins to tear down the walls with metal hooks attached to ropes or poles. The walls of the small city were probably only 10 to 12 feet tall.

Verses 16–17. “**A wise woman**” from the city wants to speak to Joab directly.

Verses 18–19. She quotes a proverb from “**former times.**” The proverb says in effect, ask of this city and you can receive what you want. She asks Joab what he wants; why are his men attacking their city, a city that is “**a mother in Israel**”? No one knows that that means, but it meant something to Joab.

Verses 20–21. He tells her what he wants ... the head of the rebel Sheba.

Verse 22. She tells her people. They seize Sheba, cut off his head, and throw it down to Joab. He blows the rams horn (as in verse 1) to recall his troops. The city is saved. Joab and the troops return to Jerusalem.

Verse 23. David makes Joab chief of the host of Israel again. Benaiah was head of the “special services branch” of the military. This comprised David’s bodyguard and professional military units.

Verse 24. The King James Version has Adoniram’s name as Adoram. The Concordant Version chose to use the name from the Greek Old Testament. Adoniram’s name means “Our Lord is exalted.” His position as being “**over the tributary service**” may indicate he kept accounts that all subordinate peoples, kingdoms, and lands sent their proper amount of periodic tribute to King David’s treasury. If they did not pay the amount of tribute arranged by treaty, there were various actions he could take in consultation with King David. The ultimate response would be various military actions to punish the defaulter. Such was the business of kings and empires. Most modern translations state that Adoniram supervised “forced labor.”

Remember also that David’s kingdom had two recent rebellions that disrupted his kingdom. Commerce within and through the trade routes of Israel and Judah, alliances with neighbors, protection of vassals from their enemies, all such matters of governance were disrupted by these rebellions. They were addressed after David’s sovereignty and control were reestablished throughout the land of Israel. Many vassals would justifiably withhold payments until they were certain who should properly receive their taxes/tribute. After all, if they gave the tribute to the wrong side, the winning side would not be forgiving.

What comes next is a horrible episode. Did God truly require the death of Saul’s relatives?

TEXT: Gibeonites Require Retribution

2 Samuel 21:1–14

¹ There was a famine in the days of David year after year for three years. So David sought the face of Yahweh, and Yahweh replied, “**On Saul and on his house is bloodguilt because he put the Gibeonites to death.**”

² The king called the Gibeonites together and spoke to them. As for the Gibeonites, they were not of the sons of Israel, but rather of the rest of the Amorite, and the sons of Israel had sworn an oath to them; but Saul had sought to smite them in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah.

³ David asked the Gibeonites, “**What shall I do for you? In what way shall I make expiation that would lead you to bless the allotment of Yahweh?**” ⁴ The Gibeonites answered him, “**For us there is no claim of silver and gold against Saul or his estate; and it is not up to us to put a man in Israel to death.**”

And David responded, “**Whatever you say, I shall do for you.**” ⁵ They replied to the king,

“The man who destroyed us, who betrayed us that we should be prohibited from standing by in all the territory of Israel — ⁶ let seven men of his sons be handed over to us, and we will gibbet [hang] them before Yahweh at Gibeon [or Gibeon of Saul] on the mountain of Yahweh.”

And the king said, “**I shall hand them over.**”

⁷ Yet the king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul because of the oath of Yahweh that was between them, between David and Jonathan son of Saul. ⁸ So the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah’s daughter Rizpah whom she had borne for Saul, together with the five sons of Saul’s daughter Merab whom she had borne for Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite; ⁹ and he gave them into the hand of the Gibeonites. They gibbeted them on the mountain before Yahweh. The seven of them fell altogether; they were put to death in the first days of the harvest, at the start of the barley harvest.

¹⁰ Aiah’s daughter Rizpah took sackcloth and stretched it out for herself on the rock from the start of the

harvest until water poured forth on them from the heavens. She did not allow the flyers of the heavens to rest on them by day, nor the animals of the field by night. ¹¹ Now David was told what Saul's concubine Rizpah daughter of Aiah had done.

¹² So David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from the commanders of Jabesh-gilead who had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them on the day the Philistines smote Saul on Mount Gilboa. ¹³ He brought up the bones of Saul and the bones of his son Jonathan from there; and they gathered the bones of those who had been gibbeted.

¹⁴ They entombed the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan and of those gibbeted in the land of Benjamin, at Zela, in the tomb of his father Kish. Thus they did all that the king had enjoined on them. Afterward Elohim granted the entreaty for the land. [end text]

Verse 1. This incident occurs at an unspecified time, **"in the days of David."** We cannot be sure if the famine occurs before or after Sheba's rebellion. It may have happened before Absalom's rebellion, which would explain Mephibosheth's morose and morbid statements every time he meets with David, implying that all of Saul's extended family were dead except Mephibosheth. The Gibeonites lived in the city of Gibeon, within Benjaminites territory about five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Verse 2. These people were Amorites, not Israelites,

"... in the person of Joshua, the people of Israel had made an agreement with the Amorites to allow them to live (see Josh 9:3–27). Saul's violation of this peace treaty was considered to be murder that defiled the land (see Num 35:33–34)."

• ***Omanson and Ellington, A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel, p. 1089***

Verse 6. Sons means male descendants. The Concordant Version has **"at Gibeon on the mountain of Yahweh,"** but this differs significantly from the Hebrew text and even the Greek LXX. Most translations have **"in Gibeon of Saul, the chosen of Yahweh"** (Rotherham translation), meaning the hometown of Saul, the chosen man of YHWH.

To "gibbet" someone meant to hang them from a pole until death. It may or may not involve a rope around the neck. Usually the bodies were left to hang for a period of time as a witness to people passing by. Crucifixion is a later form of gibbeting.

Verse 7. David spares Mephibosheth son of Jonathan from being one of Saul's descendants killed by the Gibeonites. David's oath to Jonathan supersedes the Gibeonites' desire.

Verses 8. Saul had a son and a grandson, both named Mephibosheth. The individual in this verse is not Saul's grandson, the son of Jonathan, but Mephibosheth the son of Saul through his concubine Rizpah (2 Samuel 3:7). Her two sons were not mentioned in Scripture until this verse.[§]

Verse 9. David gave Mephibosheth over to the Gibeonites along with six others. Mention of the barley harvest may have reference to the Gibeonites timing their act to some kind of spring ritual of the Amorites.

Verses 10–11. Poor Rizpah! She watches over the bodies to ensure they are not desecrated by birds and animals.

Verses 12–13. David ended Rizpah's vigil by re-burying the bones of King Saul and Jonathan along with the bodies of those killed by the Gibeonites. David had them all buried properly in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. The famine ended.

God's Operations with Man

Remember, God can do with His creatures as He wishes. If He wishes to diminish the family line of Saul, He is justified to do so (Romans 9:21; 2 Timothy 2:20). Why? One reason is because He can and will

[§] Note that the individual named Barzillai mentioned in verse 8 is not the old man from 2 Samuel 17:27 and 19:31–39.

make them live again. In the future God will “kill” most all of mankind (as He did in the flood), and most of those will be in human terms “innocent” people. In the future God will send a strong delusion so that people will “**believe a lie**” (2 Thessalonians 2:11). In terms of God’s righteousness, no one is ever innocent, except those who are “**in Christ.**” We do not have to like such operations of God, we just have to accept them.

Lastly, we have a set of narratives that have no chronological linkage, so it is unclear when these events occurred during David’s reign. They are narratives of four heroic combats by David’s champions. In general, these combats likely took place when David was at Hebron and the Philistines felt strong enough to challenge Judah militarily. However, it is useful to remember that outbreaks of violence, confrontations, battles, and skirmishes occur continually in history, even in the most peaceful kingdoms in ancient times, even as they occur today.

TEXT: *Battle with the Philistine Giants*

2 Samuel 21:15–22

¹⁵ There was again a battle between the Philistines and Israel, and David and his servants with him went down and fought the Philistines; yet David grew faint.

¹⁶ Ishbi-benob who was among the **votaries** of the Rapha (the weight of his lancehead was three hundred bronze shekels, and he was **girded** with a new mace), he intended to smite David. ¹⁷ But Abishai son of Zeruah came to his help; he smote the Philistine and put him to death. Then David’s men swore an oath to him, saying, “**You shall not march forth with us into battle any more that you may not quench the lamp of Israel.**”

¹⁸ It occurred afterward that there was again fighting with the Philistines, at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite smote Saph who was among the votaries of the Rapha.

¹⁹ When there was again fighting with the Philistines, at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair the Bethlehemite smote Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear had a shaft like the heddle-rod of weavers.

²⁰ There was again fighting at Gath. A gigantic man came with six fingers on his hands and six toes on his feet, twenty-four in number; he too was a votary of the Rapha. ²¹ When he challenged Israel, Jonathan, son of David’s brother Shimeah, smote him.

²² Those four were votaries of the Rapha in Gath; they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

1 Chronicles 20:4–8

⁴ It occurred afterward that there was again a battle with the Philistines, at Gezer. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite smote Sippai who was among those born of the Rephaim; and they were made submissive.

⁵ When there was again a battle with the Philistines, Elhanan son of Jair smote Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, whose spear had a shaft like the heddle-rod of a weaver.

⁶ There was again a battle at Gath. A giant came, with his six fingers and six toes, twenty-four in number; he too was born to the Rapha. ⁷ When he challenged Israel, Jonathan, son of David’s brother Shimea, smote him.

⁸ Those were born to the Rapha in Gath; they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants. **[end text]**

There are four separate combats, beginning with verse 15, then verses 18/4, 19/5, and 20/6. These combats read very similarly to those described in Homer's *Iliad*. The Greek heroes in that book were also described in some instances as being giants.

Verse 15. “**Went down**” means down to the coast from the highlands of Judea.

The Jewish historian Josephus adds detail to this event, although I do not know where he obtained his extra-biblical information. It does, however, fit hand-to-hand combat situations. He says that David and his men defeated the Philistines (again) and were in pursuit of the routed enemy. David grew tired and became separated from his scattered soldiers and the enemy. David was isolated when Ishbi-benob noticed David and turned back to attack him. David fought but was tired. “**Abishai, Joab's brother, appeared suddenly, and protected the king with his shield, as he lay down, and slew the enemy**” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 7:299).

As I have written before, Joab and his brother Abishai were very dangerous men, but it was good to have them fight alongside you.

Verse 16. In English, a “votary” is a worshipper or adherent to a set of beliefs. In this case, it may refer to the beliefs of the Rapha. Most translations just render it as “descendants.” It may have involved the giant men who supposedly followed these pagan military heroes who were seen to have some religious aura about them. Three hundred shekels is about 7½ pounds, easily enough to penetrate any body armor or shield when thrust with force. (Goliath's spearhead was twice that weight, 1 Samuel 17:7.) “Lancehead” and “mace” are Greek Old Testament translations.

Verse 17. This repeats the desire of David's troops to preserve their king in 2 Samuel 18:3 before the battle with Absalom.

Verses 20/6. The medical condition of having more than five fingers or toes is called “polydactyly.” Its occurrence is unrelated to gigantism, but is mentioned in this verse alone. It occurs in animals as well. Sometimes the extra digits may be useful but most of the time they are not. David's nephew killed this powerful fighter.

Jonathan was the son of David's brother Shimeah (or Shimea), the third-born son of Jesse, David's father.

Verse 21/7. The word translated “challenged” can also mean “defied” or “taunted.” The object of his challenge or derision was the army of Israel.

Verse 22. The four fighters can be listed:

1. Ishbi-benob (verse 16), killed by Abishai, brother of Joab, cousin of David
2. Saph or Sippai (verses 18/4), killed by Sibbecai the Hushathite
3. Lahmi (verses 19/5), killed by Elhanan
4. 6-fingered/toed giant (verses 20/6), killed by Jonathan, David's nephew

These Philistine fighters that David's men killed were great heroes themselves. They were not just oversized brutish men. They were trained in and proficient in hand-to-hand combat and likely killed many men during their lives. Their size likely gave them extra striking power with hand weapons, but with a sacrifice of speed.