

# 2 Samuel 20 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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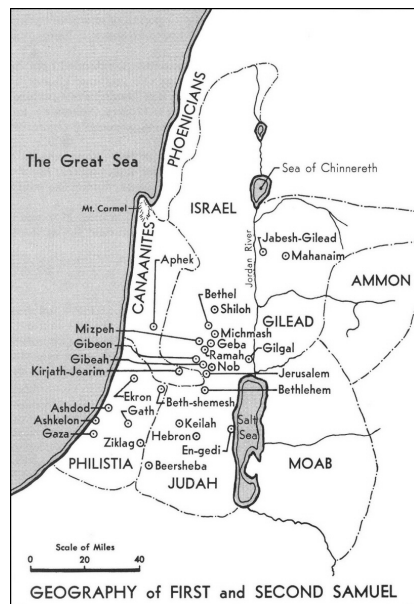
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Chart from recommended resource [Jensen's Survey of the OT](#) - used by permission  
[2 Samuel Chart](#) from Charles Swindoll

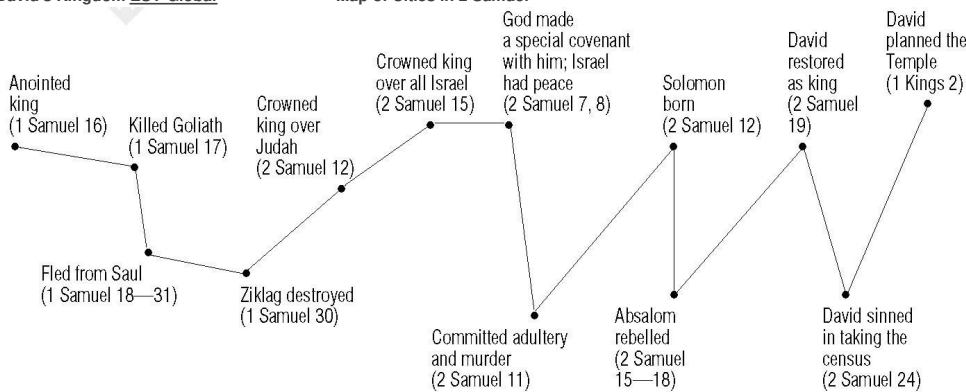
TIMELINE OF THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL, KINGS & CHRONICLES									
1107	1011				971	931	853	722	586
1 Samuel	2 Samuel				1 Kings	1 Kings	2 Kings		
31	1-4	5-10	11-20	21-24	1-11	12-22	1-17	18-25	
1Chr 10		1 Chr 11-19		1 Chr 20-29	2 Chronicles 1-9	2 Chronicles 10-20	2 Chronicles 21-36		

**Legend:** B.C. dates at top of timeline are approximate. Note that 931 BC marks the division of the Kingdom into Southern Tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and Ten Northern Tribes. To avoid confusion be aware that **after the division** of the Kingdom in 931 BC, the Southern Kingdom is most often designated in Scripture as "**Judah**" and the Northern Kingdom as "**Israel**." Finally, note that 1 Chronicles 1-9 is not identified on the timeline because these chapters are records of genealogy.



Map of David's Kingdom-ESV Global

Map of Cities in 2 Samuel



HIGHS AND LOWS OF DAVID'S LIFE  
Source: [Life Application Study Bible \(borrow\)](#)

**2 Samuel 20:1** Now a worthless fellow happened to be there whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite; and he blew the trumpet and said, "We have no portion in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!"

- **And there:** 2Sa 19:41-43 Ps 34:19
- **a man:** 2Sa 23:6 De 13:13 Jdg 19:22 1Sa 2:12 30:22 Ps 17:13 Pr 26:21 Hab 1:12,13
- **he blew:** 2Sa 15:10 Jdg 3:27 Pr 24:21,22 25:8
- **We have:** 2Sa 19:43 1Ki 12:16 2Ch 10:6 Lu 19:14,27
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Related Passages:**

2 Samuel 19:41-43+ And behold, all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, "Why had our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away, and brought the king and his household and all David's men with him over the Jordan?" 42 Then all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king is a close relative to us. Why then are you angry about this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king's expense, or has anything been taken for us?" 43 But the men of Israel answered the men of Judah and said, "We have ten parts in the king, therefore we also have more claim on David than you. Why then did you treat us with contempt? Was it not our advice first to bring back our king?" Yet the words of the men of Judah were harsher than the words of the men of Israel.



## SHEBA'S REBELLION FOMENTS AND SPILLS OVER

Remember the axiom that context is king in interpretation. Once again the chapter break could mislead the reader by obscuring the previous events. The context (ignoring chapter break) shows that this "Sheba's rebellion" had seeds of dissension sown in the quarrel between the men of Israel and the men of Judah in 2 Samuel 19:41-43+. And this evil opportunist takes advantage of the national turmoil.

**Paul Apple** introduces this chapter - A foolish man (as portrayed in the Book of Proverbs) is one who has lost his head. When confronted with life choices, the fool rejects the counsel of wisdom and the path of righteousness to strike out on his own course of self will and rebellion. His path and experiences may be varied, but his destiny is determined. Here we see one such fool Sheba who rejects the inheritance of the Lord and the rule of God's anointed to try to establish his own dominion. In the end he loses his head. No surprise – but this sad scenario is played out time and again in the lives of so many.

**Now a worthless fellow** ([beliyyaal](#) - Lit - Heb "man of worthlessness") **happened to be there whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite** - Note **Sheba** is of the tribe of Saul and this in part undoubtedly motivated him to rebel against the leadership of David who had replaced Saul. He saw the fact that David's own son had rebelled forcing David to kill him, as his opportunity to seize power.

**Sheba** may have had a root of bitterness from David replacing Saul and that is dangerous for Hebrews 12:15+ says "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled." Sheba's revolt reminds us also of a NT "revolt" in Galatians 2:11-13+

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. 13 The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

**And he blew the trumpet** ([shophar/shopar/sopar](#)) - The shofar is capable of a variety of tones but cannot play a tune, so it is used primarily for signals either in worship or in warfare. The ram's horn was softened in hot water, bent and flattened to produce its distinctive shape. Shofars were used for various calls to a large group and in this case sounded a call to rebel against King David.

**And said, "We have no portion in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!"** - Notice they had just stated the north had 10 parts, but Sheba inverts this, announcing "We have no share in David! We have no part in the son of Jesse! People of Israel, let's go to our own homes!" This is an idiom (anachronism) from the exodus and wandering period. It means "to your homes." In effect he is calling not just to go home, but to go to war, to rebel against the authority of David and thus he is **throwing down the gauntlet** (so to speak) which would be to his great regret! He is out of his mind and soon would be minus his head! Basically what Sheba is claiming is that David's heart was solely with Judah.

**Warren Wiersbe** sums up Sheba's rebellion noting that "All it takes to light the fires of conflict is a speech from a would-be leader, and Sheba was that leader. Being a Benjamite, he favored the house of Saul, and he was probably an officer in the northern army. If the ten tribes seceded from the kingdom, perhaps he could become commander of their army. **Sheba didn't declare war; all he did was dismiss the army and the citizens who came from the northern tribes and tell them not to follow David any longer. But in essence it was a declaration of war, for Sheba marched through the northern tribes trying to gather a following** (2Sa 20:14). It appears that not many people responded, and Sheba and his followers ended up in the walled city of Abel (2Sa 20:14,15). ([Bible Exposition Commentary - Old Testament](#))

**John MacArthur** notes that "Sheba's declaration (**ED: BUT SEE WIERSBE'S COMMENT ABOVE**) that the northern tribes had no part in David's realm was similar to words later used in 1Ki 12:16 when Israel seceded from the united kingdom under [Jeroboam](#).

(Borrow [The MacArthur Study Bible](#))

**Don Anderson** - Here the king was coming back, and everything should have been going well. But jealousy throws a monkey wrench into the whole works. That is what happens in our own churches. People get so caught up in their own petty jealousies and arguments they don't see what damage they do to the church as a whole. Christ gets pushed into the background and people just square off for rebellion and battle. And believe me, there is always a Sheba around to start the ball rolling. When tempers run high, people act without thinking. Sheba, a Benjamite, evidently nursed the tribal grudge against David....Remember God's judgment on David: "The sword will not depart from the house of David," But we never hear any complaint from David....(Sheba a Benjamite) makes you wonder how Shimei and the 1,000 Benjamites who came down to meet the king and Shimei especially having experienced this gracious forgiveness, handled this present uprising."

**Life application study Bible (borrow)** - Although Israel was a united kingdom, it was still made up of 12 separate tribes. These tribes often had difficulty agreeing on the goals of the nation as a whole. Tribal jealousies had originally kept Israel from completely conquering the Promised Land (read the book of Joshua), and now tribal jealousies were threatening the stability of David's reign by giving Sheba an opportunity to rebel (2Sa 20:1ff).

**Walton on Sheba's declaration.** The troops of all the tribes but Israel, feeling like outcasts in the re-installation process, do not initiate military action against Judah or David but simply abandon David under the leadership of Sheba (he sends them "to their tents" rather than mustering them for battle). Sheba's declaration effectively announces withdrawal of support of David's kingship, but it does not indicate support for another king. Since Sheba is a Benjamite, it is possible that there is still some linkage to the house of Saul and that a Saulide would be sought, but the text does not reveal that element. (See page 349 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

**The Complete Biblical Library – Samuel.** - Much flammable material being thus provided, a casual spark speedily set it on fire. Sheba, an artful Benjamite, raised the standard of revolt against David, and the excited ten tribes, smarting with the fierce words of the men of Judah, flocked to his standard. It was a most miserable proceeding! The quarrel had begun about a mere point of etiquette, and now they cast off God's anointed king, and that, too, after the most signal token of God's anger had fallen on Absalom and his rebellious crew. There are many wretched enough slaveries in this world, but the slavery of pride is perhaps the most mischievous and humiliating of all.

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**Worthless** (wicked, Belial)([01100](#)) [beliyyaal](#) from **beli** + **ya'al**: "not, without" and "to be of use, worth, or profit.") A worthless person, good for nothing to himself or others, and capable of nothing but mischief. Some feel that the word **Belial** can be traced to the false god Baal, and is also a term for yoke (they cast off the yoke of decency), and a term for entangling or injuring. The LXX renders it according to the context by the terms paranomos, anomia, and apherōn, i.e. "lawless, lawlessness, witless." By the NT time, Belial had become synonymous with Satan (cf. 2 Cor. 6:15<sup>±</sup>). There is one use we would all do well to ponder and in the power of the Spirit affirm or declare (or pray) to be true in our life from time to time...

I will set no **worthless** ([beliyyaal](#)) thing before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not fasten ([dabaq](#)) its grip on me. (Psalm 101:3<sup>±</sup>) (MARK IT DOWN - WORTHLESS IMAGES CAN BE VERY "STICKY" IN YOUR MIND'S EYE! I AM SPEAKING ESPECIALLY TO YOU MEN AS YOU KNOW TO WHAT I AM REFERRING!)

**Beliyyaal** - 26v - **base(1), destruction(1), rascally(1), scoundrels\*(1), ungodliness(1), wicked(3), worthless(18), worthless one(1)**. Deut. 13:13; Deut. 15:9; Jdg. 19:22; Jdg. 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 1 Sam. 2:12; 1 Sam. 10:27; 1 Sam. 25:17; 1 Sam. 25:25; 1 Sam. 30:22; 2 Sam. 16:7; 2 Sam. 20:1; 2 Sam. 22:5; 2 Sam. 23:6; 1 Ki. 21:10; 1 Ki. 21:13; 2 Chr. 13:7; Job 34:18; Ps. 18:4; Ps. 41:8; Ps. 101:3; Prov. 6:12; Prov. 16:27; Prov. 19:28; Nah. 1:11; Nah. 1:15

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**ISBE - Sheba** - Heb. id. A "son of Bichri," of the family of Becher, the son of Benjamin, and thus of the stem from which Saul was descended (2 Sam. 20:1-22). When David was returning to Jerusalem after the defeat of Absalom, a strife arose between the ten tribes and the tribe of Judah, because the latter took the lead in bringing back the king. Sheba took advantage of this state of things, and raised the standard of revolt, proclaiming, "We have no part in David." With his followers he proceeded northward. David seeing it necessary to check this revolt, ordered Abishai to take the [gibborim](#), "mighty men," and the body-guard and such troops as he could gather, and pursue Sheba. Joab joined the expedition, and having treacherously put Amasa to death, assumed the command of the army. Sheba took refuge in Abel-Bethmaachah, a fortified town some miles north of [Lake Merom](#). While Joab was engaged in laying siege to this city, Sheba's head was, at the instigation of a "wise woman" who had held a parley with him from the city walls, thrown over the wall to the besiegers, and thus the revolt came to an end.

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[Josephus Antiquities 7 \(chapter 11.6\)](#) - While these rulers were thus disputing one with another, a certain wicked man, who took a pleasure in seditious practices, his name was *Sheba*, the son of Bichri, of the tribe of Benjamin, stood up in the midst of the multitude; and cried aloud, and spake thus to them: "We have no parts in David; nor inheritance in the son of Jesse." And when he had used those words, he blew with a trumpet, and declared war against the King. And they all left David, and followed him: the tribe of Judah alone staid with him, and settled him in his royal palace at Jerusalem. But as for his concubines, with whom Absalom his son had accompanied, truly he removed them to another house; and ordered those that had the care of them to make a plentiful provision for them: but he came not near them any more. He also appointed Amasa for the captain of his forces: and gave him the same high office which Joab before had: and commanded him to gather together, out of the tribe of Judah, as great an army as he could; and come to him within three days: that he might deliver to him his entire army; and might send him to fight against [Sheba] the son of Bichri. Now while Amasa was gone out, and made some delay in gathering the army together, and so was not yet returned, on the third day the King said to Joab,<sup>24</sup> "It is not fit we should make any delay in this affair of Sheba; lest he get a numerous army about him, and be the occasion of greater mischief, and hurt our affairs more than did Absalom himself. Do not thou therefore wait any longer, but take such forces as thou hast at hand, and that [old] body of six hundred men,<sup>25</sup> and thy brother Abishai with thee; and pursue after our enemy, and endeavour to fight him wheresoever thou canst overtake him. Make haste to prevent him; lest he seize upon some fenced cities, and cause us great labour and pains before we take him." (NOTE: JOSEPHUS SEES DAVID AS GIVING THE COMMAND BACK TO JOAB, BUT THE TEXT INDICATES HE GAVE IT TO ABISHAI JOAB'S BROTHER).

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**G Campbell Morgan** (borrow [Life applications from every chapter of the Bible](#)) -We have no portion in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel.-2 Sam. 20.1.

This was the cry raised by an evil man who sought to divide the kingdom and to create a position for himself. It was extremely clever, in that it was of the nature of a protest against a certainly unjustifiable action on the part of the men of Judah. The roots of the trouble are found in the preceding chapter. The tribes of Israel had been the first to propose the restoration of the king after the defeat of Absalom (19.D, io). The men of Judah had not invited them to take part in the great gathering at Gilgal. This had raised their anger. Occasion invariably finds a man for evil, as well as for good. This chapter opens with the words: "And there happened to be there a base fellow." He it was who sought personal aggrandisement, and made this hour of tension his occasion. The movement was quickly defeated, as Joab, with relentless anger, quelled the insurrection. The story should teach us that popular and plausible catchwords ought to be received and acted upon with great caution. There may often be an element of truth in complaints which are made; but when they are made, careful attention should be paid to the character of the men who voice them. Too often evil men are thus allowed to make a just cause the occasion of seeking, not its rectification, but the bringing about of some evil design subversive of all that is highest in the interests of the people who complain. That Judah blunders, is no reason why the kingdom should be disrupted. Injustice is never corrected by a yet deeper wrong.

**2 Samuel 20:2 So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem.**

- **All the men of Israel:** 2Sa 19:41 Ps 62:9 118:8-10 Pr 17:14
- **the men of Judah:** Joh 6:66-68 Ac 11:23
- **from the Jordan even to Jerusalem:** 2Sa 19:15,40,41 2Ch 10:17
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

2 Samuel 19:41 And behold, all the men of Israel came to the king and said to the king, "Why had our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away, and brought the king and his household and all David's men with him over the Jordan?"

Samuel 19:15 The king then returned and came as far as the Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal in order to go to meet the king, to bring the king across the Jordan.

### **MEN OF ISRAEL REBEL AND FOLLOW SHEBA**

**So** - For this reason. What reason?

**All the men of Israel withdrew from following David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri - All of Israel** (primarily the northern tribes) would indicate that men from other tribes threw in their lot with Sheba the Benjaminite.

**but** - Marks an important contrast.

**The men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem**- The tribe of Judah remained loyal to King David. The verb steadfast is [dabaq](#) (Lxx = [kollao](#)) which pictures these men as "sticking like glue" (cf Ge 2:24+) to King David! In short, it was only the troops from Judah who would be left to escort David back to Jerusalem.

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**Steadfast** (1692) [dabaq](#) means to stick to, adhere to, cling to, join with, stay with, stay in close proximity to and which yields the noun form for "**glue**". Dabaq describes something that sticks or clings to something else (Ezek 29:4 and Ezekiel's tongue to roof of his mouth Ezek. 3:26). **Dabaq** often refers to physical things sticking to each other, especially parts of the body as described vividly by Job who said "My bone **clings** to my skin and my flesh, and I have escaped only by the skin of my teeth" (Job 19:20, cf one's tongue "**stuck** to their palate" Job 29:10). **Dabaq** also conveys the ideas of **loyalty** and **devotion** as in the first use of **dabaq** where "a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Ge 2:24+) which also emphasizes the basic meaning of being intimately joined to another and of being identified with one another, even as Ruth was now committing to be "identified" no longer with the Moabites but primarily with Naomi, her people and her God.

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**F B Meyer - Our Daily Homily** - 2 Samuel 20:2 The men of Judah cleave unto their King.

We are reminded of the exhortation of the good Barnabas, that with purpose of heart the converts of Antioch should cleave unto the Lord. This is the test of a true faith. We often come to the dividing of the paths. We stand on the watershed of the hills: that way leads back to Moab with its fascinations; this on to Canaan with its spiritual attractions. Orpah and Ruth must choose. Each is equally profuse in speeches and tears; but the ultimate test of love is whether they will stay or go. Which will cleave to the widowed Naomi? She is the truest lover; her fidelity will attest the fervor and strength of her affection. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, and returned to her people and her gods, while Ruth "clave unto her."

We must cleave to Jesus, in spite of the derision of the multitude. We must be prepared to stand with Him when He stands alone, or goes forth alone to die. We must be willing to stem the mighty tide of the world which has left Him and pours past us. Though all forsake Him, yet we must cleave.

We must cleave to Jesus, in spite of the rebellion of the flesh. Our whole nature may sometimes rise in insurrection, demanding some forbidden fruit. It is no child's play then for the lonely will to stand by itself in unshaken fidelity and loyalty; but it must.

We must cleave to Jesus when He seems to rebuff us. Only those who can stand so sharp an ordeal, are exposed to it. But sometimes we are called to pass through it as job, that angels may learn how Christ's lovers cling to Him, not for His gifts, but for Himself.

**2 Samuel 20:3 Then David came to his house at Jerusalem, and the king took the ten women, the concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and placed them under guard and provided them with sustenance, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as widows.**

- **ten women**: 2Sa 15:16 16:21,22
- ward: Heb. an house of ward, Ge 40:3
- shut: Heb. bound
- living in widowhood: Heb. in widowhood of life
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **COLLATERAL DAMAGES OF DAVID'S SIN PUNISHMENT OF TEN CONCUBINES**

**Then** - This marks an important progression in the narrative, after the defeat of Absalom and those who followed him. David seems to have given this item high priority when he returned to his palace.

**David came to his house at Jerusalem, and the king took the ten women, the concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and placed them under guard and provided them with sustenance, but did not go in to them** - David seems to respond a bit in the flesh in this passage (in my opinion) especially since the act committed against these women was the



consequence of David's sin! Oh, the ever widening circle of our secret sins! Beware! After all who had left the concubines in Jerusalem? David had. And who had heard and should have pondered the prophecy by Nathan about his wives (2Sa 12:11-12+). David had heard this prophecy, and theoretically should have taken the concubines (who were considered lesser wives) out of harm's way. Of course it was a prophecy from God and every prophecy is fulfilled perfectly. So one must propose that David had to leave them to fulfill the prophecy. I don't think he knowingly did that, but somehow was caused to forget Nathan's prophecy. In either event, David seems to react strongly against the 10 women who would have had no choice but to surrender to Absalom raping them! They are collateral damage of David's sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah!!!

Our sins like David's can affect so many others in so many different ways!

**So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as widows** - David's punishment is firm and left no room for pardon or forgiveness. Would God have forgiven these 10 women? That's a rhetorical question for you to ponder. Not every decision David made in his life was in the good and acceptable and perfect will of the LORD. And yet in the final analysis David was still called by God a man after God's own heart. God's mercy, grace and forgiveness are indeed greater than our sins beloved and for that we give Him thanks and praise!

As an aside in China, when an emperor dies, all his women are removed to an edifice called the palace of chastity, situated within the palace, in which they are shut up for the remainder of their lives. This is a secular solution!

**Dale Ralph Davis** - And one might be tempted to think this information about the **concubines** is merely that, simply filler to provide us with the whole story. That would be a mistake, for this is the **very first item the writer reports to us about David's activities upon his re-entry of Jerusalem**. The prominence the writer gives this matter implies that he sees a definite importance about it. Had he only wanted to provide data he could easily have inserted the contents of 2Sa 20:3 after 2Sa 20:22 with the lead-in, 'Now when David had returned to Jerusalem, he.....' Instead, he places it front and center where we run smack into it. Understandably so. We cannot read this little note without 2Sa 12:11-12, 15:16; 16:20-22 coming to mind. The same must have been true for David. He was informed of Absalom's afternoon with these concubines (2Sa 16:20-22). And as he began to make arrangements for them, the unceasing echo of Yahweh's threat must have reverberated through his head: **'I shall take your wives before your eyes and I shall give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives'** (2Sa 12:11). The misery of these women was occasioned by David's sin in the Bathsheba-Uriah affair. No, they were not homeless; David situated them in secluded quarters. Nor were they starving or destitute, for David provided for them. But he would have nothing more to do with them. They were confined, isolated, and alone. They passed the days of their bland existence as de facto widows....**There is simply something intensely, irretrievably sad about 2Sa 20:3**. Yet this is no surprise. We have seen it before - in the tragedy of Tamar (2Sa 13). Amnon had craved her (2Sa 13:1-11) and violated her (2Sa 13:14), then despised her (2Sa 13:15) and threw her out like human refuse (2Sa 13:17-19). He had 'laid her' (2Sa 13:14) and she was 'laid waste' (2Sa 13:20), **desolate the rest of her days**. Amnon sinned and Tamar suffered. His glands ensured her gloom. **We continue to meet this radical sadness in the kingdom of God. Scores of Christ's people know what it is to have their lives turned to gray because of the sins of others. And when all is said and done, there is no help for it, except in the One sent to 'bind up the broken-hearted'** (Isa. 61:1) and in the hand that promises to wipe away the tears from all faces (Isa. 25:8). ([2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity](#))

**Winter** raises the question, "Why did David isolate the concubines? David had left them behind to pursue their normal activities of keeping the house. He felt that they had been shamed, and it would not be proper for him to reinstate them to their former positions. He did not turn them out to fend for themselves but put them in separate quarters and ordained that they should be provided for but left to live as widows."

**Utley** - The Aramaic Targums translates this as "widows of a living man." It is tragic to me how women are treated in Patriarchal cultures, ancient and modern. I so long for the mutuality of Genesis 1. It has come in Christ (cf. Gal. 3:26-29)! Borrow [Discovering biblical equality : complementarity without hierarchy](#)

**Walton on treatment of the ten concubines**. Because Absalom had taken sexual possession of these women, they could no longer serve as sexual partners of the king. If they had been in the harem to represent political allies who had supported Absalom, their status as persona non grata would be doubly justified. David maintained his obligation to them, but they would never have children by him. Hammurabi's code requires that widows receive "food, oil and clothing" as their due, and Exodus 21:10 addresses similar rights of concubines. (See page 349 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

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**Walter Kaiser - 20:3 Was David Right to Take Concubines?** (See page 196 - [Hard Sayings of the Bible](#))

The institution of concubinage seems to many of us as wrong and as evil as the institution of slavery. And so it was from an Old Testament point of view as well.

Genesis 2:21-24 presents us with God's normative instructions for marriage: one man was to be joined to one woman so as to

become one flesh.

Polygamy appears for the first time in Genesis 4:19, when Lamech became the first bigamist, marrying two wives, Adah and Zillah. No other recorded instances of polygamy exist from Shem to Terah, the father of Abraham (except for the episode in Gen 6:1–7).

Was polygamy (with its correlative concubinage) ever a lawful practice in the Old Testament? No permission can be recited from the text for any such institution or practice. To support it, one could appeal only to illustrations in the lives of a rather select number of persons. None of these examples has the force of normative theology. The Bible merely describes what some did; it never condones their polygamy, nor does it make their practices normative for that time or later times.

From the beginning of time up to 931 B.C., when the kingdom was divided after Solomon's day, there are only fifteen examples of polygamy in the Old Testament: Lamech, the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1–7, Abraham's brother Nahor, Abraham, Esau, Jacob, Gideon, Jair, Ibzan, Abdon, Samson, Elkanah, Saul, David and Solomon. In the divided monarchy, Rehoboam, Abijah, Ahab and Jehoram all were bigamists, and possibly Joash (depending on how we interpret "for him" or "for himself" in 2 Chron 24:2–3). This gives us a total of nineteen instances, and among them thirteen were persons of absolute power whom no one could call into judgment except God.

The despotic way in which the rulers of Genesis 6:1–7 took as many wives as they pleased is censured by Scripture, as are those who indulged in adulterous and polygamous behavior prior to the flood. The law of Moses also censures those who violate God's prescription of monogamous marriage. Scripture does not, however, always pause to state the obvious or to moralize on the events that it records.

Those who say the Old Testament gave direct or implied permission for polygamy usually point to four passages: Exodus 21:7–11, Leviticus 18:18, Deuteronomy 21:15–17 and 2 Samuel 12:7–8. Each of these texts has had a history of incorrect interpretation. (Borrow Walter Kaiser's [Toward Old Testament ethics](#) - page 184-190)

There is no suggestion of a second marriage with "marital rights" in Exodus 21:10, for the word translated "marital rights" should be rendered "oil" or "ointments." The text says that a man who has purchased a female servant (perhaps to fulfill a debt) must continue to provide for her if he proposes marriage and then decides not to consummate it. Leviticus 18:18 does not imply that a man may marry a second wife so long as she is not a sister to the one he already has. Instead, it prohibits his marrying his wife's sister during the lifetime of his wife, since having her sister as a rival would vex her. Likewise, Deuteronomy 21:15–17 legislates the rights of the firstborn, regardless of whether that child is the son of the preferred wife or of the wife who is not loved. To contend, as some do, that legislation on rights within polygamy tacitly condones polygamy makes about as much sense as saying that Deuteronomy 23:18 approves of harlotry since it prohibits bringing the wages earned by harlotry into the house of the Lord for any vow!

Finally, 2 Samuel 12:7–8 supplies no encouragement to polygamy when it says that all that Saul had, including his wives, were to be David's possessions. Nowhere in all the lists of David's wives are Saul's two wives listed; hence the expression must be a stereotypic formula signifying that everything in principle was turned over for David's disposition.

Malachi 2:14 says that God is a witness to all weddings and contends for the "wife of [our] youth," who is all too frequently left at the altar in tears because of the violence caused by divorce (or any of marriage's other perversions). Jeremiah had to rebuke the men of his own generation who were "neighing for another man's wife" (Jer 5:8). Had polygamy been customarily or even tacitly approved, this text of Jeremiah would have had to record "another man's wives." Furthermore, these men's sin would have had a ready solution: they should look around and acquire several new wives on their own, instead of seeking those who were already taken! No, polygamy never was God's order for marriage in the Old Testament. David sinned, therefore, in having a plurality of wives. But what of his putting the ten concubines under guard after his son Absalom had violated them in a palace coup?

The answer this time is one of political expediency of that day. If David had had relations with any one of them and she conceived, it would be difficult to know whether the son was his or Absalom's. And he dare not turn these women out in the streets, for that would have violated the rules of compassion and could have produced another contender to the throne, since all who had any contact with the king, even as a concubine, could lay some claim to the throne in the future.

Thus, David took the only course he could under such circumstances. There is no doubt about it: he had sown to the wind and now he must reap the whirlwind. God had never changed his mind about the appropriateness of one wife for one husband to become one flesh.

See also comment on GENESIS 6:1–4 ([page 76](#)); PROVERBS 5:15–21 Drink Water from Your Own Cistern?. ([page 256](#))

**2 Samuel 20:4 Then the king said to Amasa, 'Call out the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself.'**



- **Amasa:** 2Sa 17:25, 19:13 1Ch 2:17
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passages:

2 Samuel 17:25+ Absalom set **Amasa** over the army in place of Joab. Now Amasa was the son of a man whose name was Ithra the Israelite, who went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother.

2 Samuel 19:13+ (**DAVID APPOINTS AMASA OVER HIS ARMY**) "Say to **Amasa**, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? May God do so to me, and more also, if you will not be commander of the army before me continually in place of Joab.'"

## DAVID'S CHARGE TO AMASA

**Then** - Marks further progress in David's return to reign as he prepares to put down Sheba's revolt.

**The king said to Amasa, "Call out the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself."** - **Amasa** had been appointed commander over David's army in 2Sa 19:13+. David is just replacing one nephew with another. David "demotes" Joab, most likely because he was upset with Joab for slaying his son Absalom. So he replaced Joab with Amasa, whom he was willing to forgive for leading the Absalom's forces against him (cf 2Sa 17:25+)! **Three days**, was a short time to assemble the army. But who Amasa would be assembling? He would be assembling some the very troops that he had just been fighting against! Might it be logical that some of them might not trust him. Perhaps there was some hesitancy in following Amasa's leadership for this reason. And put yourself in the position of the Judahite troops who had just been led to victory by Joab, so that their loyalties may still have been with Joab (cf 2Sa 20:11).

**Walton** on 2Sa 20:4-5 **mustering the army**. The short period of time allotted for Amasa to assemble an army from the clans of Judah may be a test of his and their loyalty. Amasa had served Absalom, and the elders of Judah had only recently renewed their oath of loyalty to David. Runners may have been used to gather the troops (see the seven-day mustering of 1Sa11:3-5), but the Mari texts indicate the use of inscribed lists that were to be taken to villages and encampments to enlist soldiers. This procedure would have required much more than three days to gather a large force. (See page 349 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

### QUESTION - [Who was Amasa in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - **Amasa** was a nephew of King David who was involved in the coup attempt against David. Appointed by Absalom, David's son whose ambitions included his father's crown, Amasa led the rebel army that sought to overthrow King David. Amasa's mother was **Abigail**, one of David's sisters, and he was a cousin of [Joab](#), whose mother ([Zeruiah](#)) was also a sister of David (2 Samuel 17:25; 1 Chronicles 2:16–17). Joab served as one of King David's military commanders, and it was he who eventually killed Amasa—not in battle, but by an act of treachery (2 Samuel 20:8–10).

Amasa's story is intricately intertwined with that of Absalom. Absalom was the third son of King David; in many ways, Absalom was much like his father—hot-blooded, impetuous, and popular among his countrymen. David was a man after God's own heart, but, as a parent, David had failings. His household could only be described as dysfunctional. One of David's sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1–19). Despite the outrage of this incestuous crime, David did nothing. Perhaps David's refusal to discipline Amnon fueled the pent-up anger inside Absalom. For two years, Absalom patiently bided his time as if all was well with Amnon, but then, in a carefully planned scheme, Absalom had Amnon murdered (2 Samuel 13:23–29). No doubt, Absalom felt justified in killing his half-brother, as his father had done nothing to avenge Tamar. From that time forward, David's relationship with Absalom was strained.

Over time, Absalom grew restless with ambition. He began plotting his father's overthrow. When Absalom's plan to take the throne was in place, he appointed Amasa captain over his rebel army (2 Samuel 17:25). For a while, it appeared as though Absalom's scheme would succeed, but, in the end, Amasa's forces were defeated. Absalom was killed by Joab, much to the distress of King David, who had wanted to spare Absalom's life. David returned to Jerusalem, and his rule over Israel was solidified.

**Displeased with Joab for slaying his son Absalom, King David planned to remove him from leadership and replace him with Amasa, whom he was willing to forgive.** David sent the message to Amasa: "Are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you are not the commander of my army for life in place of Joab" (2 Samuel 19:13). During a subsequent military campaign, however, Joab murdered Amasa in cold blood:

While [Joab and his men] were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath.

Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died (2 Samuel 20:8–10a).

Amasa must have been a man of capabilities, for he garnered the attention of both David and his favored son, Absalom. Unfortunately, Amasa may have lacked a measure of [discernment](#). He foolishly joined the rebellion against his uncle. And he fatally trusted Joab as a comrade, although Joab was a man with a reputation for bloody revenge. An extra dose of discernment might have prevented Amasa from falling prey to his adversary. [GotQuestions.org](#)

**2 Samuel 20:5 So Amasa went to call out the men of Judah, but he delayed longer than the set time which he had appointed him.**

NET 2 Samuel 20:5 So Amasa went out to call Judah together. But in doing so he took longer than the time that the king had allotted him.

CSB 2 Samuel 20:5 Amasa went to summon Judah, but he took longer than the time allotted him.

ESV 2 Samuel 20:5 So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him.

NIV 2 Samuel 20:5 But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him.

NLT 2 Samuel 20:5 So Amasa went out to notify Judah, but it took him longer than the time he had been given.

NRS 2 Samuel 20:5 So Amasa went to summon Judah; but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him.

NJB 2 Samuel 20:5 Amasa went off to summon Judah, but he took longer than the time fixed by David.

NAB 2 Samuel 20:5 Accordingly Amasa set out to summon Judah, but delayed beyond the time set for him by David.

- **So Amasa:** 2Sa 19:13
- **he delayed longer:** 1Sa 13:8
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **THE MESSAGE IS DON'T DELAY WHEN KING ORDERS**

**So Amasa went to call out the men of Judah, but he delayed longer than the set time which he had appointed him-** For reasons not stated (but alluded to in my comments above), Amasa's obedience was delayed and as we always say delayed obedience is disobedience! And disobedience always has consequences of some magnitude, and in this case would cost Amasa his life!

**2 Samuel 20:6 And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom; take your lord's servants and pursue him, so that he does not find for himself fortified cities and escape from our sight."**

- Abishai: 2Sa 2:18 3:30,39 10:9,10,14 18:2,12 21:17 23:18 1Sa 26:6 1Ch 11:20 18:12
- do us: 2Sa 19:7
- thy lord's: 2Sa 11:11 1Ki 1:33
- escape us: Heb. deliver himself from our eyes
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DAVID NOW COMMANDS ABISHAI, JOAB'S BROTHER

**And David said to Abishai** - Recall that Abishai is the brother of the defrocked general Joab. Apparently because Amasa delayed, David sought out Abishai to lead the charge against the rebellious forces.

**Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom** - For some reason David feels the threat of Sheba's rebellion was even greater than that of his son Absalom.

**take your lord's servants and pursue him, so that he does not find for himself fortified cities and escape from our sight** - David realized the real danger of another rebellion involving Saul's tribe uniting with all Israel. The tension between Judah and the other tribes was intensifying! David's point was that Abishai should not delay (like Amasa did) but move out and overtake Sheba's rebel band before they could escape to a fortified city which and make Sheba more difficult to defeat.

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**ABISHAI** - ab'-i-shi, a-bi'-shi ('abhishai, in Ch 'abhshai; meaning is doubtful, probably "my father is Jesse," BDB): Son of Zeruiah, David's sister, and one of the three famous brothers, of whom Joab and Asahel were the other two (2 Sam 2:18). He was chief of the second group of three among David's "mighty men" (2 Sam 23:18). He first appears with David, who was in the Wilderness of Ziph, to escape Saul. When David called for a volunteer to go down into Saul's camp by night, Abishai responded, and counseled the killing of Saul when they came upon the sleeping king (1 Sam 26:6-9). In the skirmish between the men of Ishbosheth and the men of David at Gibeon, in which Asahel was killed by Abner, Abishai was present (2 Sam 2:18,24). He was with and aided Joab in the cruel and indefensible murder of Abner, in revenge for their brother Asahel (2 Sam 3:30). In David's campaign against the allied Ammonites and Syrians, Abishai led the attack upon the Ammonites, while Joab met the Syrians; the battle was a great victory for Israel (2 Sam 10:10-14). He was always faithful to David, and remained with him, as he fled from Absalom. When Shimei, of the house of Saul, cursed the fleeing king, Abishai characteristically wished to kill him at once (2 Sam 16:8,9); and when the king returned victorious Abishai advised the rejection of Shimei's penitence, and his immediate execution (2 Sam 19:21). In the battle with Absalom's army at Mahanaim Abishai led one division of David's army, Joab and Ittai commanding the other two (2 Sam 18:2). With Joab he put down the revolt against David of Sheba, a man of Benjamin (2 Sam 20:6,10), at which Joab treacherously slew Amasa his cousin and rival, as he had likewise murdered Abner, Abishai no doubt being party to the crime. In a battle with the Philistines late in his life, David was faint, being now an old man, and was in danger of death at the hands of the Philistine giant Ishbi-benob when Abishai came to his rescue and killed the giant (2 Sam 21:17). In the list of David's heroes (2 Sam 23) Abishai's right to leadership of the "second three" is based upon his overthrowing three hundred men with his spear (2 Sam 23:18). He does not appear in the struggle of Adonijah against Solomon, in which Joab was the leader, and therefore is supposed to have died before that time.

He was an impetuous, courageous man, but less cunning than his more famous brother Joab, although just as cruel and relentless toward rival or foe. David understood and feared their hardness and cruelty. Abishai's best trait was his unswerving loyalty to his kinsman, David.

**2 Samuel 20:7 So Joab's men went out after him, along with the Cherethites and the Pelethites and all the mighty men; and they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.**

- 2Sa 20:23 8:16,18 15:18 23:22,23 1Ki 1:38,44
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JOAB PURSUES SHEBA'S REBEL BAND

**So Joab's men went out after him** - Note that the writer calls these **Joab's men**, not Abishai's men (cf 2Sa 20:6) implying that Joab had usurped control of David's forces from Amasa.

**Along with the Cherethites (see note below) and the Pelethites (see note below) and all the mighty (gibbor; Lxx - dunatos - powerful) men; and they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri** - Three groups (Joab's men, bodyguards and mighty men) are in hot pursuit of Sheba's band.

**2 Samuel 20:8 When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was dressed in**

**his military attire, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened at his waist; and as he went forward, it fell out.**

- Gibeon: 2Sa 2:13 3:30
- Amasa: 2Sa 20:4,5
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **AMASA MISTAKE: MEETING JOAB**

**When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them-** It seems Amasa realized his delay had cost him the leadership of David's forces, so he catches up with the forces at **Gibeon**. Did he intend to try and assume command at this time? The text does not say, but that would be a reasonable assumption.

**Now Joab was dressed in his military attire, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened at his waist; and as he went forward, it fell out** - Note that clearly Joab is back in the saddle (so to speak) as he is dressed for battle. And he is also preparing for treachery by letting his sword fall out. Swords don't just fall out of their sheath. There is more to this than meets the eye, so we must read on.

**Walton** on Joab's gear. It is difficult to reconstruct Joab's ruse. He is wearing his soldier's tunic with the normal warriors' belt and sheath for his sword. The most common understanding is that Joab contrived somehow to tip his sword out of its sheath in a way that appeared accidental. He retrieved it with his left hand and was holding it non-threateningly when he came up to Amasa (See page 350 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

**2 Samuel 20:9 Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.**

- Art thou: Ps 55:21 Pr 26:24-26 Mic 7:2
- to kiss him: Mt 26:48,49 Lu 22:47,48
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **JOAB'S SLIGHT OF HAND TREACHERY**

**Joab said to Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him-** If we did this today, we would probably get a punch in our "kisser" as the response. But in ancient near east, this was a not uncommon way of greeting another person. So Amasa would not be at all suspicious of Joab's deceitful action.

**TSK** on taking Amasa by the beard - Thevenot says, that among the Turks it is a great affront to take one by the beard, unless it be to kiss him, in which case they often do it. D'Arvieux, describing an assembly of Arab emirs at an entertainment, says, "After the usual civilities, caresses, kissings of the beard, and of the hand, which every one gave and received according to his rank and dignity, they sat down upon mats." The doing this by the Arab emirs corresponds with the conduct of Joab, and illustrates this horrid assassination.

**Pink:** We have also seen how that, at length, David made a determined effort to strip Joab of his power, by removing him from the head of the army. Accordingly Amasa was selected as the one to replace him. But the king's design was thwarted, frustrated by one of the vilest deeds chronicled in the Scriptures. Under pretense of paying obeisance to the new general, Joab thrust him through with the sword. Such an atrocity staggers the thoughtful, making them to wonder why God suffers such outrages to be perpetrated. This is indeed one of the dark mysteries of divine providence—why the Lord permits such monsters of wickedness to walk the earth. Faith is assured that He must have some sufficient reason. Though often God giveth "no account of His matters" (Job 33:13), yet His Word does indicate, more or less clearly, the general principles which regulate His governmental dealings.

**Walton** taking by the beard. Greeting a nonrelative with a kiss is not often attested except in situations of obeisance (i.e., kissing the feet; found in many ancient texts, including the Epic of Gilgamesh). There are instances in which the kiss is a form of reconciliation (see Joseph and his brothers in Gen 45:15), and this may be the case with Joab and Amasa. It also could be an expression of concern or commiseration with a common problem, as in 2 Samuel 15:5. When men kissed, it would not have been unusual for one to grasp his fellow's beard. This act makes each man vulnerable and is more often associated with aggressive action in battle. Here it is a sign of trust to allow the kiss. In this case, Amasa's trust was misplaced, and Joab used the opportunity

to eliminate his rival. (See page 350 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

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**Josephus Antiquities 7 (chapter 11.7)** - So Joab resolved to make no delay; but taking with him his brother, and those six hundred men, and giving orders that the rest of the army which was at Jerusalem should follow him, he marched with great speed against Sheba. And when he was come to Gibeon; which is a village forty furlongs distant from Jerusalem; Amasa brought a great army with him, and met Joab. Now Joab was girded with a sword, and his breast-plate on: and when Amasa came near him to salute him, he took particular care that his sword should fall out, as it were of its own accord. So he took it up from the ground: and while he approached Amasa, who was then near him, as though he would kiss him, he took hold of Amasa's beard with his other hand, and he smote him in his belly when he did not foresee it, and slew him. This impious and altogether profane action Joab did to a good young man, and his kinsman, and one that had done him no injury; and this out of jealousy that he would obtain the chief command of the army, and be in equal dignity with himself about the King. And for the same cause it was that he killed Abner. But as to that former wicked action; the death of his brother Asahel, which he seemed to revenge, afforded him a decent pretence, and made that crime a pardonable one: **but in this murder of Amasa there was no such covering for it.** Now when Joab had killed this General, he pursued after Sheba: having left a man with the dead body: who was ordered to proclaim aloud to the army, that Amasa was justly slain, and deservedly punished. But, said he, if you be for the King, follow Joab, his General; and Abishai Joab's brother. But because the body lay in the road, and all the multitude came running to it; and, as is usual with the multitude, stood wondering a great while at it; he that guarded it removed it thence, and carried it to a certain place that was very remote from the road, and there laid it, and covered it with his garment. When this was done all the people followed Joab. Now as he pursued Sheba through all the country of Israel, one told him, that **he was in a strong city called Abel-beth-maachah.** Hereupon Joab went thither, and sat about it with his army, and cast up a bank round it, and ordered his soldiers to undermine the walls, and to overthrow them. And since the people in the city did not admit him, he was greatly displeased at them.

**2 Samuel 20:10** But Amasa was not on guard against the sword which was in Joab's hand so he struck him in the belly with it and poured out his inward parts on the ground, and did not strike him again, and he died. Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri.

- Joab's: 2Sa 20:9 Jdg 3:21 1Ch 12:2
- he smote: 2Sa 2:23 3:27 Ge 4:8 1Ki 2:5,6,31-34
- and shed: Ac 1:18,19
- struck him not again: Heb. doubled not his stroke, 1Sa 26:8
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### AMASA'S NAIVETE COST HIM DEARLY

**But Amasa was not on guard against the sword which was in Joab's hand so he struck him in the belly with it and poured out his inward parts on the ground, and did not strike him again, and he died** - Joab is able to easily retrieve the sword which just happened to have fallen to the ground. It is hard to imagine that Amasa did not see this blade gleaming in the sun. But his naivete would cost him his life, for Joab strikes him with this sword while holding him close by his beard!

**Gulston** points out, "Joab's murders have horrible similarity about them. Abner was lured to his death by believing Joab wished to speak with him quietly. Amasa was struck down in the middle of what he thought was a friendly embrace. Both were unaware. Absalom had been an even more helpless victim. There was a total ruthlessness about Joab that was to bring its own retribution, but for a while longer he went unchallenged." (Borrow [David - Shepherd and King](#))

**Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri** - Note the order of the names - Joab before Abishai. David had given the orders to pursue to Abishai, but clearly Joab now assumes his former job as commanding general. Powerful men will do almost anything to keep from losing their power!

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**QUESTION - [Who was Joab in the Bible?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Joab was a son of Zeruah, King David's sister (1 Chronicles 2:13-17) and was therefore one of David's nephews. Joab's brothers were two of David's brave warriors, Abishai and Asahel. Joab was positioned as commander of David's armies because of his victory over the Jebusites, resulting in the possession of the city of Jerusalem. It was through this victory that Jerusalem became "the city of David" (1 Chronicles 11:4-9).

Joab fought and won many battles for the king, but his personal lack of self-control was problematic. In a war against the forces of Ish-Bosheth, Joab's brother Asahel was killed by [Abner](#), the commander of Ish-Bosheth's armies. Joab was furious and pursued Abner to kill him, but Abner escaped (2 Samuel 2:12–32). Later, after Abner swore allegiance to David, Joab's fuse blew, and his desire to avenge his brother's blood drove him to deceive and murder Abner (verses 26–27). This action deeply grieved David, but the king felt unable to bring justice against the mighty Joab (verse 39). Instead, David pronounced a curse over Joab and his future descendants: "May his blood fall on the head of Joab and on his whole family! May Joab's family never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food" (verse 29).

As the commander of David's armies, Joab was provided many victories by God, but Joab caused much grief to the king and to Israel. His anger and perhaps the power of his position drove him to poor decisions at times. In addition to his murder of Abner, Joab killed his own cousin, [Amasa](#)—and his betrayal was Judas-style, accompanied by a kiss: "Joab said to Amasa, 'How are you, my brother?' Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died" (2 Samuel 20:9–10). Joab disobeyed King David's command to spare [Absalom's life](#), himself striking Absalom with three javelins (2 Samuel 18). David mourned the death of his son Absalom, a response that was sternly reprimanded by Joab (2 Samuel 19:1–8). It was also Joab who, in accordance with David's command, placed Uriah the Hittite at the front of the battle to be killed, so that David could feel justified in marrying [Uriah's widow](#) (2 Samuel 11).

Joab, for all his faults, was obviously a capable man of war and valiant on the battlefield. And he ought to be given credit for his loyalty to David for almost four decades. Joab also counseled David when David sinfully desired to take a census; if David had heeded Joab's advice, he could have spared his nation the plague that befell Israel (2 Samuel 24).

When David was on his death bed, Joab conspired with [Adonijah](#) to install Adonijah as the next king, instead of Solomon (1 Kings 1). This action, plus Joab's other rash decisions, vengeful murders, and inability to take certain important orders, finally drove David over the edge. David commanded Solomon to ensure Joab's execution, an act that was carried out by Benaniah as Joab was clinging to the [horns of the altar](#) in hopes of finding clemency (1 Kings 2:5–6, 28–34).[GotQuestions.org](#)

**2 Samuel 20:11 Now there stood by him one of Joab's young men, and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab."**

- He that: 2Sa 20:6,7,13,21
- for David: 2Sa 20:4 2Ki 9:32
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### JOAB'S MAN CALLS FOR MEN TO FOLLOW JOAB

**Now there stood by him one of Joab's young men, and said, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab."** - In other, this astute aide of Joab, called out that those who were for Joab and on David's side should now follow Joab. Clearly Joab is now viewed by the men as their commanding officer and this would be solidified in 2Sa 20:23.

**2 Samuel 20:12 But Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa from the highway into the field and threw a garment over him when he saw that everyone who came by him stood still.**

- 2Sa 17:25 Ps 9:16 55:23 Pr 24:21,22
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### JOAB'S AIDE REMOVES DEAD DETERRENT

**But Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa from the highway into the field and threw a garment over him when he saw that everyone who came by him stood still** - Amasa's bloody corpse was distracting the soldiers from heeding his charge to follow Joab. At the very least, the troops slowing to view the corpse, increased the chances that Sheba might get away and/or make it to a fortified city.



[Anderson](#) - Whenever you have a fatal car accident, you will always find spectators and the gawkers and the lookers that want to witness the tragedy. The man appointed by Joab to stand there at that location realized he needed to do something so he dragged the corpse from the road into a field and threw a garment over it.

**2 Samuel 20:13 As soon as he was removed from the highway, all the men passed on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.**

- **the highway:** 2Sa 20:12,13 Nu 20:19 Jdg 21:19 1Sa 6:12 2Ki 18:17 Pr 16:17 Isa 7:3 Isa 36:2 62:10 Jer 31:21 Mk 10:46
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **CLEARING CORPSE CLEARS THE WAY TO MOVE ON**

**As soon as he was removed from the highway, all the men passed on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri-** Corpse impediment clears the way for pursuit of Sheba.

**Blaikie:** There is nothing to indicate that the kingdom was weakened in its external relations by the two insurrections that had taken place against David. It is to be observed that both of them were of very short duration. Between Absalom's proclamation of himself at Hebron and his death in the wood of Ephraim there must have been a very short interval, not more than a fortnight. The insurrection of Sheba was probably all over in a week. Foreign powers could scarcely have heard of the beginning of the revolts before they heard of the close of them. There would be nothing therefore to give them any encouragement to rebel against David, and they do not appear to have made any such attempt. But in another and higher sense these revolts left painful consequences behind them. The chastening to which David was exposed in connection with them was very humbling. His glory as king was seriously impaired. It was humiliating that he should have had to fly from before his own son. It was hardly less humiliating that he was seen to lie so much at the mercy of Joab. He is unable to depose Joab, and when he tried to do so, Joab not only kills his successor, but takes possession by his own authority of the vacant place. And David can say nothing. In this relation of David to Joab we have a sample of the trials of kings. Nominally supreme, they are often the servants of their ministers and officers. Certainly David was not always his own master. Joab was really above him; frustrated, doubtless, some excellent plans; did great service by his rough patriotism and ready valour, but injured the good name of David and the reputation of his government by his daring crimes. The retrospect of this period of his reign could have given little satisfaction to the king, since he had to trace it, with all its calamities and sorrow, to his own evil conduct.

#### **Related Resource:**

- [A Narrative Reading of Solomon's Execution of Joab in 1 Kings 1–2: Letting Story Interpret Story](#) JOEL EDMUND ANDERSON

**2 Samuel 20:14 Now he went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel, even Beth-maacah, and all the Berites; and they were gathered together and also went after him.**

- **Abel:** 1Ki 15:20 2Ki 15:29 2Ch 16:4
- **Berites:** Jos 18:25, Beeroth
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Now he went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel even Beth-maacah**(cf. 1Ki 15:20; 2Ki 15:29) - In other words Sheba had traveled north across Israel, presumably picking up rebel recruits. **Abel** is about 110 miles north of Jerusalem (see map above) and about 5 miles to the west of the northern city of Dan.

**And all the Berites; and they were gathered together and also went after him** The Berites were Sheba's own clan of Bieri who joined up with him to hold up in the city of Abel Beth-maacah. which was a strategic northern city (see map above and [Wikipedia note](#) on why it was so strategic).

**Josephus** says it was a fortified city, and a metropolis of the Israelites; and also that it belonged to the ten tribes, having been taken

from the king of Damascus.

**Abel-beth-maacah** (meadow of the house of Maachah) was a city in the north of Palestine, in the neighbourhood of Dan and Ijon, in the tribe of Naphtali. It was a place of considerable strength and importance. It is called a "mother in Israel", i.e., a metropolis (2Sa 20:19). It was besieged by Joab (2Sa 20:14), by Benhadad (1Ki 15:20), and by Tiglath-pileser (2Ki 15:29) about B.C. 734. It is elsewhere called Abel-maim, meadow of the waters, (2Ch 16:4). Its site is occupied by the modern Abil or Abil-el-kamh, on a rising ground to the east of the brook Derdarah, which flows through the plain of Huleh into the Jordan, about 6 miles to the west-north-west of Dan.

[Wikipedia](#) adds that "**Tel Abel Beth Maacah** ([Hebrew](#): תֵּל אֶבְל בֵּית מַעֲכָה; [Arabic](#): تل آبل الغامع, [romanized](#): *Tell Abil el-Qameh*) is a large [archaeological tell](#) with a small upper northern section and a large lower southern one, connected by a saddle. It is located on the northern border of present-day [Israel](#), about 2 km south of the town of [Metula](#) and about 6.5 km west of [Tel Dan](#).<sup>[1][2]</sup>...The site was fortified by walls and a rampart in the Middle Bronze Age II. These fortifications were reused in the Late Bronze Age in the south of the mound, but went out of commission in the Iron Age I....The site is approximately 100 dunams (10 hectares) in size and sits astride the narrow defile of [Nahal Ayun](#), one of the four headwaters of the [Jordan River](#). The Tanur Waterfall, fed by the Iyyon, is located just north of the site. **From its strategic vantage point overlooking the narrow northern end of the fertile Hula Valley, the site commands roads leading north to the Lebanese Beqaa Valley, northeast to inland Syria (Damascus) and Mesopotamia, and west to the Lebanese/Phoenician coast.** The [tell](#) is identified with Abel Beth-Maacah mentioned in the [Hebrew Bible](#) and consists of an upper mound in the north and a larger lower mound in the south, with a moderately high saddle between them.

The location of the town in such a strategic spot points to it having played a major role in the interaction between the various national groups and political powers in the [Bronze Age](#) ([Canaanites](#), [Hurrians/Mitannians](#), [Egyptians](#), and [Hittites](#)) and the [Iron Age](#) ([Israelites](#), [Arameans](#) and [Phoenicians](#)). Abel Beth Maacah was a border town, and as such, was exposed to these influences at the same time that it fulfilled the role of buffering, or bearing the brunt of, foreign invasions. Its proximity to numerous water sources and a rich agricultural hinterland was yet another factor in making Abel Beth Maacah a large and prominent site in antiquity.

**Walton** Abel Beth Maacah. Typically identified with [Tell Abel el-Qamh](#), three miles northwest of Dan in the northernmost part of Israel, Abel Beth Maacah also appears in the list of Thutmose III's conquests. Its strategic importance is attested to by the recording of its capture by Tiglath-Pileser III in 1 Kings 15:29 and the Assyrian annals. (See page 350 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

**2 Samuel 20:15 They came and besieged him in Abel Beth-maacah, and they cast up a siege ramp against the city, and it stood by the rampart; and all the people who were with Joab were wreaking destruction in order to topple the wall.**

- **cast up**: 2Ki 19:32 Jer 32:24 33:4 Lu 19:43
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JOAB LAYS SIEGE TO ABEL

**They came and besieged him in Abel Beth-maacah, and they cast up a siege ramp against the city, and it stood by the rampart; and all the people who were with Joab were wreaking destruction ([shachath](#)) in order to topple the wall - Siege ramps** were mounds or ramps built out of dirt, rubble, and timbers designed in such a way that soldiers could batter down a city's walls and fortifications. The Assyrians were the first to use wheeled towers with these mounds so that they were protected inside the tower as it was moved up the ramp to the wall. The objective was for the soldiers to exit the tower and invade the city. There is still a siege mound can at Masada - [see this picture](#) and imagine you are high up in the citadel of Masada looking down as this mound of dirt the Romans had built up in order to facilitate entry into Masada on the top.

**Walton on siege ramp.** One of the common methods in siege warfare was the construction of a ramp that could be used as an assault platform for siege towers as well as a means of gaining approach for battering rams (2 Kings 19:32; Jer 6:6; Ezek 4:1-8). The ramps were made necessary because of the common construction of a sloping glacis and high walls that made it difficult to attempt a frontal assault. Archaeological investigations have found evidence of the construction of these ramps (such as at Masada), and depictions of the use of the siege ramp are found in Assyrian bas-reliefs and are described in the annals of

Sennacherib and other Assyrian kings. The earliest archaeological remains of a siege ramp were found in connection with the Assyrian siege of Lachish in 701. Though evidence of ramps has not been found for this period, the battering ram had already been in use for nearly a thousand years, so ramps must also have been in use. (See page 350 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

**2 Samuel 20:16 Then a wise woman called from the city, "Hear, hear! Please tell Joab, 'Come here that I may speak with you.'"**

- 2Sa 14:2 1Sa 25:3,32,33 Ec 9:14-18
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **A WISE WOMAN WILL OFFER A CITY SAVING PLAN**

**Then a wise woman called from the city, "Hear, hear! Please tell Joab, 'Come here that I may speak with you.'"**- It is notable that this is the fourth time a woman has played a significant role in David's story changing the course of events! First was Abigail (1Sa 25:14-32+), then the wise woman of Tekoa (2Sa 14:2-20+), third the maidservant relaying the message to the couriers who would take the warning message to David (2Sa 17:17+) and here the fourth averting destruction of a major northern city in David's kingdom!

**Walton wise woman.** - The context of the story and of the political situation requires a person skilled in speaking (see also the wise woman 2 Sam 14:2+). However, for a woman to have an authoritative voice, as each of these women do, a special status is also required. Educated women as well as women in positions of authority (priest, scribe and prophet) occasionally occur in the ancient Near Eastern material, but the category of "wise woman" has not yet been isolated. (See page 350 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

**2 Samuel 20:17 So he approached her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" And he answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening."**

- Hear the words: 2Sa 14:12 1Sa 25:24
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **GENERAL JOAB ACCEPTS WOMAN'S INVITATION TO TALK**

**So he approached her, and the woman said, "Are you Joab?" And he answered, "I am."**- She is indeed wise. She is not seen Joab so does not recognize his face and needs to make sure she is giving her argument to the man in charge.

**Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening-** This is an interesting dialogue and says something about the wisdom of Joab, even though he is often seemingly impetuous and treacherous (having killed Abner, Absalom and Amasa!) He as the general is willing to listen to a woman, keeping in mind women were not highly respected in ancient Israel.

This wise woman may have based her appeal on Deuteronomy 20:10-12 which instructed Israel that "When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace." 11 "If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. 12 "However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it."

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**[Josephus Antiquities 7 \(chapter 11.8\)](#)** - Now there was a woman of small account, and yet both wise and intelligent, who seeing her native city lying at the last extremity, ascended upon the wall; and, by means of the armed men, called for Joab: and when he came to her, she began to say, that "God ordained Kings and Generals of armies that they might cut off the enemies of the Hebrews, and introduce an universal peace among them. But thou art endeavouring to overthrow and depopulate a metropolis of the Israelites; which hath been guilty of no offence." But he replied, "God continue to be merciful unto me: I am disposed to avoid killing any one of the people: much less would I destroy such a city as this: and if they will deliver me up Sheba, the son of Bichri, who hath rebelled against the King, I will leave off the siege, and withdraw the army from the place." Now as soon as the woman heard what Joab said, she desired him to intermit the siege for a little while: for that he should have the head of his enemy thrown out to him

presently. So she went down to the citizens, and said to them, "Will you be so wicked as to perish miserably, with your children and wives, for the sake of a vile fellow; and one whom no body knows who he is? And will you have him for your King instead of David, who hath been so great a benefactor to you; and oppose your city alone to such a mighty and strong army?" So she prevailed with them, and they cut off the head of Sheba, and threw it into Joab's army. When this was done the King's General sounded a retreat, and raised the siege. And when he was come to Jerusalem he was again appointed to be General of all the people. The King also constituted Benaiah Captain of the guards,<sup>26</sup> and of the six hundred men. He also set Adoram over the tribute, and Sabathes<sup>27</sup> and Achilau over the records. He made Sheva the Scribe: and appointed Zadok and Abiathar to be the High Priests.

**2 Samuel 20:18 Then she spoke, saying, "Formerly they used to say, 'They will surely ask advice at Abel,' and thus they ended the dispute.**

- **Formerly they used to say**, They plainly spake in the beginning, saying, Surely they will ask of Abel, and so make an end. De 20:10,11
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Then she spoke, saying, "Formerly they used to say, 'They will surely ask advice at Abel,' and thus they ended the dispute-** GWT paraphrases it ""There's an old saying: 'Be sure to ask at Abel <before doing anything>. That's the way they settle matters.' Her opening salvo to Joab was that the inhabitants of Abel were known for their wisdom. The NLT paraphrases it this way "saying, 'If you want to settle an argument, ask advice at the city of Abel.'" **Abel** is short for **Abel Beth-maacah**, her hometown.

**2 Samuel 20:19 "I am of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You are seeking to destroy a city, even a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"**

- **peaceable**: Ge 18:23 Ro 13:3,4 1Ti 2:2
- **a mother**: Jdg 5:7 Eze 16:45-49
- **swallow**: 2Sa 17:16 Nu 16:32 26:10 Ps 124:3 Jer 51:34,44 La 2:2,5,16 1Co 15:54 2Co 5:4
- **the inheritance**: 2Sa 21:3 Ex 19:5,6 De 32:9 1Sa 26:19
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**I am of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel**- She proceeds in essence to declare her loyalty to the king with no desire was war with him.

**You are seeking to destroy a city, even a mother in Israel**- Abel was a mother in Israel, a "mother city" or capital and had strategic prominence as one of the northern fortresses of Israel (See [Wiki note above](#)).

**Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?**- **Swallow up** is an idiom for destruction. She is saying in essence why would Joab be willing to destroy a royal city, one that ultimately belongs to Yahweh? That might give Joab something to cause him to pause destroying the city. **The inheritance of the LORD** refers to the land of Israel (see 1Sa 10:1b+).

**Utley** - **the inheritance of the Lord** was a way of referring to YHWH's covenant people and covenant promise of a land (cf. Dt. 32:9; 1Sa 26:19; 2Sa 14:16; 21:3).

**Walton 20:19. city that is a mother in Israel** Phoenician, Ugaritic and Old Babylonian word parallels to 'em, "mother," are kin terms related to clan groups. It is therefore likely that the wise woman's argument is related to the extermination of one of Israel's clans, not a "founding city." This is coupled with a long tradition of common sense by the inhabitants of Abel. Joab is therefore encouraged to be "wise" like them and spare his fellow covenantal partners. (See page 350 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

**2 Samuel 20:20 Joab replied, "Far be it, far be it from me that I should swallow up or destroy!**

- **Far be it**: 2Sa 23:17 Job 21:16 22:18
- **that I should**: 2Sa 20:10 Pr 28:13 Jer 17:9 Lu 10:29
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## JOAB'S RELUCTANCE TO DESTROY ABEL

Joab replied, "Far be it, far be it from me (NET = "Get serious"; CSB = "Joab protested "Never!"; GWT = "that's unthinkable!") that I should swallow up or destroy! - NJB = 'The last thing I want to do', said Joab, 'is either to devour or to destroy.'" Clearly the wise woman's logic has struck a cord with Joab, who would like to avoid destroying this prominent city in Israel.

2 Samuel 20:21 "Such is not the case. But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has lifted up his hand against King David. Only hand him over, and I will depart from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Behold, his head will be thrown to you over the wall."

- **a man:** 2Sa 20:1 Jdg 2:9 7:24 2Ki 5:22 Jer 4:15 50:19
- **lifted:** 2Sa 23:18 1Sa 24:6 26:9
- **his head:** 2Sa 17:2,3 2Ki 10:7 Jdg 18:4-8
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SOLUTION - FOR THE CITY TO GET A HEAD!

**Such is not the case** - NET = "That's not the way things are." CSB = "That's not my intention."

**But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has lifted up his hand**(rebelled) **against King David. Only hand him over, and I will depart from the city."** And the woman said to Joab, "**Behold, his head will be thrown to you over the wall** - Joab continues the dialogue with the wise woman and finally the negotiation comes to a head (so to speak)! The wise woman will head to the people to get a head. The text does not say what happened to the supporters of Sheba in v. 14.

- [SPECIAL TOPIC: HAND](#)

2 Samuel 20:22 Then the woman wisely came to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they were dispersed from the city, each to his tent. Joab also returned to the king at Jerusalem.

- **the woman wisely:** Ec 7:19 9:14-18
- **he blew:** 2Sa 20:1 2:28 18:16
- **And Joab:** 2Sa 3:28-39 11:6-21 Ec 8:11
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries



## ONE WAY TO HEAD OFF TROUBLE IN ABEL

Then the woman wisely came to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it to Joab. So he blew the trumpet ([shophar/shophar/sopar](#)), and they were dispersed from the city, each to his tent. Joab also returned to the king at Jerusalem - Sheba's rebellion began (2Sa 20:1) and ended with a shofar sounding! **They were dispersed from the city, each to his tent** refers to the men of Israel who had followed Sheba and who now peacefully went back to their homes.

## 2 Samuel 20:23 Now Joab was over the whole army of Israel, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites;

- **Now Joab:** 2Sa 8:16-18 1Ch 18:15-17
- **Benaiah:** 2Sa 20:7
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passages:

2 Samuel 8:18+ **Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites;** and David's sons were chief ministers.

1 Chronicles 27:5 The third commander of the army for the third month was **Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada the priest,** as chief; and in his division were 24,000.

## JOAB RISES TO THE TOP AGAIN

**Mittelstaedt** makes an excellent point regarding the significance of this list. It is notable that "this list (2Sa 20:23-26) is practically identical to the listing of officials given in 2Sa 8:15-18. The implication here is that order had once again been restored and the kingdom returned to the stability it once had enjoyed. There are a few additions to the earlier list. Adoniram was now minister of labor and public work projects, and Ira the Jairite was David's personal priest."

There is an interesting phrase that is missing from this passage that is included in 2 Samuel 8:18 "**And David's sons were chief ministers**" You see no indication at this point that any of David's immediate family are involved in the administration.

**Now Joab was over the whole army of Israel** - Joab had proved himself a wise, worthy commander at Abel, avoiding significant bloodshed and destructive. And so clearly David reversed his order, so that once again Joab was the commander in chief.

**And Benaiah** ("Yahweh builds up") **the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites** - **Benaiah** was one of David's mighty warriors, son of **Jehoiada** the chief priest, a Levite (1Ch 27:5), set by David over his bodyguards (2Sa 8:18+; 1Ki 1:32; 1Ch 18:17), later having remained faithful to Solomon during Adonijah's attempt on the crown, was raised into the place of Joab as commander-in-chief of the army. His exploits are enumerated in 2Sa 23:20-22+; 1Ch 11:22. **The Cherethites and the Pelethites** functioned as David's bodyguards.

**Walton administrative offices.** This list of officials within David's inner circle is an indication of the growing complexity of David's growing bureaucracy (compare Solomon's administrative lists in 1 Kings 4:1-19). It and the list in 2 Samuel 8:15-18 are typical of similar rosters found in Neo-Babylonian administrative documents. While these offices are unrelated to the story of Sheba's revolt, it would be appropriate for the editor to insert the list here as an indication of the restoration of political order. The inclusion of a new office, that of chief of forced labor, also suggests new policy objectives to strengthen fortresses and improve communication and travel within the kingdom (See page 350 [IVP Bible Background Commentary](#))

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**CHERETHITES** - ker'-e-thits (kerethim, ha-kerethi; Chelethi "executioners," "life-guardsmen"): The CHERETHITES are responsible for capital punishment and to carry out the executions. A people in South Palestine whose territory bordered upon that of Judah (1Sa30:14). In 1 Sam 30:16 this land is apparently identical with that of the Philistines. In Ezek 25:16 the Philistines and the Cherethites are threatened together; while in Zeph 2:5 the Cherethites are evidently the dwellers in "the land of the Philistines," "the inhabitants of the seacoast." Septuagint in both Ezekiel and Zephaniah renders the name "Cretans." The translators may have been "guided only by the sound." But Zeus Cretagenes in Gaza suggests a connection with the island of Crete. See, however, [CAPHTOR](#). It may be taken as certain that the Cherethites were a Philistine clan. In conjunction with the Pelethites they are frequently named as forming the guard of David (2 Sam 8:18, etc.). It was the custom of many ancient monarchs to have a guard of foreign mercenaries.

**PELETHITES** - 7 verses - 2Sa 8:18; 2Sa 15:18; 2Sa 20:7; 2Sa 20:23; 1Ki 1:38; 1Ki. 1:44; 1Chr. 18:17 - They are always mentioned along with the **Cherethites**, and only in the time of David. The word probably means "runners" or "couriers," and may denote that while forming part of David's bodyguard, they were also sometimes employed as couriers (2Sa 8:18; 20:7, 23; 1Ki 1:38, 44; 1Ch 18:17). Some, however, think that these are the names simply of two Philistine tribes from which David selected his body-guard. They are mentioned along with the Gittites (2Sa 15:18), another body of foreign troops whom David gathered round him.

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[Josephus Antiquities 7 \(chapter 11.8\)](#) - So she prevailed with them, and they cut off the head of Sheba, and threw it into Joab's



army. When this was done the King's General sounded a retreat, and raised the siege. And when he was come to Jerusalem he was again appointed to be General of all the people. The King also constituted Benaiah Captain of the guards,<sup>26</sup> and of the six hundred men. He also set Adoram over the tribute, and Sabathes<sup>27</sup> and Achilau over the records. He made Sheva the Scribe: and appointed Zadok and Abiathar to be the High Priests.

## 2 Samuel 20:24 and Adoram was over the forced labor, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder;

- **Adoram:** 1Ki 4:6 12:18
- **recorder:**, remembrancer, 1Ki 4:3
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passage:

2 Samuel 8:16+ Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder.

## DAVID'S ADMINISTRATION CONTINUED

**and Adoram** (aka Adoniram) **was over the forced labor** ([mas](#)) - Adoram's role would have been somewhat akin to our modern "Secretary of Labor." He is also known as Adoniram in 1Ki 4:6 (see [summary below](#)). He is a new addition to the list of administration in 2Sa 8:15-18. Because of David's great military success, many of the people who were subservient now because of the conquest have been put in a position of being used in forced labor. David now has placed Adoniram over this particular department.

**and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder** - He continued in the same role David had assigned him before Absalom's revolt (2Sa 8:16+). **Jehoshaphat** (not the same as the later king of Judah of same name) was a **recorder** or annalist/royal historian under David and Solomon (1Ki 4:3), a state officer of high rank, chancellor or vizier of the kingdom.

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**Forced labor** ([04522](#))([mas](#)) denotes a government-enforced taxation, filled by labor or material goods. The latter usage is only attested in Est. 10:1, which records King Ahasuerus' empire-wide tax. The noun is used seven times to refer to the reduction of the former inhabitants of the Promised Land to forced laborers by the invading Israelites (Josh. 16:10; 17:13; Judg. 1:30, 33, 35; 1 Kings 9:21; 2 Chr. 8:8). There was the equivalent of a cabinet post for the person in charge of forced labor. The same name appears under the reigns of David, Solomon, Rehoboam and Adoram (2 Sam. 20:24; 1 Ki. 4:6; 12:18; 2 Chr. 10:18). It is logically possible that the same individual filled this post for Solomon's reign and an overlapping portion of the others. There were lower officials involved with the implementation of the taskmasters (Exo. 1:11). All citizens were subject to the levy for forced labor for public works (1 Kings 9:15) as well as the Canaanite classes who were consigned to this status in perpetuity. The permanent status of **mas** was a risk of war. In the instructions for how to pursue holy war, Yahweh instructs the population that they must offer peace and the status of **mas** to the inhabitants of certain besieged cities before destroying the city and killing the inhabitants (Deut. 20:11). The eventual fall of Assyria, the rod of Yahweh's vengeance against Israel, is assured by the promise that they will "fall with the sword, not of a mighty man... and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited" (Isa. 31:8). The Book of Lamentations begins with the imagery of Jerusalem, a former princess, now reduced to an antithetical status of forced labor, imagery of defeat in war (1:1). **Forced labor** could also have been the result of laziness, of unwillingness to work extra hours to produce a surplus. In the Blessing of Jacob, Issachar is accused of having strength but lacking interest in working hard for himself, preferring the lack of anxiety about his labors at the end of the day, willingly becoming a laborer (Gen. 49:15). Likewise, an aphorism in Prov. 12:24 declares, "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, while the slothful will be put under tribute." ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Mas** - 22v forced(2), forced labor(13), forced laborer(1), forced laborers(5), laborers\*(2), men subject to forced labor(1), taskmasters\*(1), tribute(1). Gen. 49:15; Exod. 1:11; Deut. 20:11; Jos. 16:10; Jos. 17:13; Jdg. 1:28; Jdg. 1:30; Jdg. 1:33; Jdg. 1:35; 2 Sam. 20:24; 1 Ki. 4:6; 1 Ki. 5:13; 1 Ki. 5:14; 1 Ki. 9:15; 1 Ki. 9:21; 1 Ki. 12:18; 2 Chr. 8:8; 2 Chr. 10:18; Est. 10:1; Prov. 12:24; Isa. 31:8; Lam. 1:1

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**ISBE - ADONIRAM** - ad-o-ni'-ram ('adoniram, "my lord is exalted"): An official of Solomon (1Ki 4:6; 5:14). Near the close of the reign of David, and at the opening of the reign of Rehoboam, the same office was held by Adoram (2Sa20:24; 1Ki 12:18). **The name Adoram seems to be a contraction of Adoniram, and doubtless the same person held the office in all the three reigns.** The name also appears as Hadoram (2Ch 10:18). In the King James Version and the Revised Version (British and American) the office is variably described as "**over the tribute**," which is misleading, and "over the levy," which is correct, though obscure. In the American

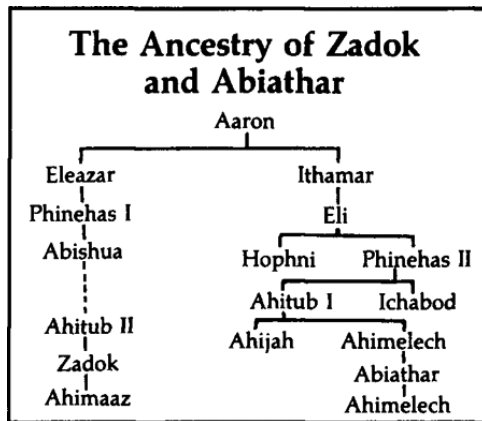
Standard Revised Version it is uniformly "over the men subject to taskwork." **Adoniram was at the head of the department of forced labor for the government.** The record is to the effect that peoples conquered by Israel, except the Canaanites, were to be spared, subject to the obligation to forced labor on the public works (Dt 20:11); that this law was actually extended to the Canaanites (Josh 16:10; 17:13; Jdg 1:28 ff); that David, in his preparations for the temple, organized and handed over to Solomon a service of forced labor (1Ch 22:2,15, etc.); that under Solomon this service was elaborately maintained (1Ki 5:13ff; 9:15 ff; 2Ch 8:7ff). It was not for the temple only, but for all Solomon's numerous building enterprises. In theory men of Israelite blood were free from this burden, but practically they found it a burden and a grievance. At the accession of Rehoboam they protested against it (1Ki 12:1-33; 2Ch 10:1-19). Nothing in the account is more indicative of Rehoboam's utter lack of good judgment than his sending his veteran superintendent of the forced labor department to confer with the people. The murder of Adoniram, and the ignominious flight of Rehoboam, were natural consequences.

**2 Samuel 20:25 and Sheva was scribe, and Zadok and Abiathar were priests;**

- **Sheva:** 2Sa 8:17 1Ki 4:4 1Ch 18:16
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Related Passages:**

2 Samuel 8:17+ Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were priests, and Seraiah was secretary.



From Eugene Merrill - BKC

**DAVID'S ADMINISTRATION  
CONTINUED**

**And Sheva** ("Jehovah contends") **was scribe** ([sopher](#); Lxx - [grammateus](#)) - **Sheva** is the same as "Shavsha was secretary" (1Ch 18:16) and [Seraiah](#) (2Sa 8:17+), although some think this was a different person (the name changes/variations in the OT can be very confusing!) A scribe was a member of a learned class in ancient Israel through New Testament times who studied the Hebrew scriptures and served as a copyist, editor, teacher.

**And Zadok and Abiathar were priests** - **Zadok and Abiathar** had been the priests during David's reign in Jerusalem and were instrumental (along with their sons) in warning David of Absalom's plans to attack, thus giving him time to escape across the Jordan and to the city of Mahanaim.

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**Scribe** ([05613](#))([sopher](#)) enumerator, secretary - derived from the same root as sāphar "to count," "to relate," refers to a "scribe" (2 Chr. 26:11; Neh. 13:13; Ps. 45:1; Jer. 52:25). ([See also lengthy dictionary description](#)) Sōpher also denotes a state scribe or secretary to the king (2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Ki. 4:3; 1 Chr. 27:32; Isa. 37:2; Jer. 36:12, 20f). In ancient times, the role of a scribe was an honored position because the one chosen for the role was educated in all aspects of the formal learning of literate culture. Sometimes scribes served as royal messengers (Est. 3:12; 8:9). Shebna, Hezekiah's "scribe," acted as an emissary to the invading Assyrian commander (Isa. 36:3). A secretary of David named Shavsha was probably a foreigner, since his father's name is omitted in the very exacting list of David's officers (1 Chr. 18:16). Furthermore, his name sounds foreign. Perhaps he was chosen because his duties involved handling correspondence with other countries. One of the royal scribes was a Levite (1 Chr. 24:6), and Ezra the priest acted as a secretary for Jewish matters during the exile (Neh. 8:1, 4, 9; 12:26, 36). The scribal art first became associated with the priesthood through Ezra's ministry, although priests surely performed such activities before his time. Ezra is also the first

person given the title of scribe in the Bible (Ezra 7:6, 11). Sōphfir speaks of a secretary or scribe skilled in the law of Moses (Judg. 5:14; Ezra 7:6, 11). A class of specialists developed among the priests who were the custodians, teachers and interpreters of the Law. As documented in the intertestamental literature and the NT, they became a powerful religious and political force. In fact, there were whole families of scribes (1 Chr. 2:55). ([Complete Biblical Library](#))

**Sopher - 52v - learned(1), office(1), scribe(39), scribe's(2), scribes(5), secretaries(1), secretary(2), writer(1), writing(2).** Jdg. 5:14; 2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Sam. 20:25; 1 Ki. 4:3; 2 Ki. 12:10; 2 Ki. 18:18; 2 Ki. 18:37; 2 Ki. 19:2; 2 Ki. 22:3; 2 Ki. 22:8; 2 Ki. 22:9; 2 Ki. 22:10; 2 Ki. 22:12; 2 Ki. 25:19; 1 Chr. 2:55; 1 Chr. 18:16; 1 Chr. 24:6; 1 Chr. 27:32; 2 Chr. 24:11; 2 Chr. 26:11; 2 Chr. 34:13; 2 Chr. 34:15; 2 Chr. 34:18; 2 Chr. 34:20; Ezr. 7:6; Ezr. 7:11; Neh. 8:1; Neh. 8:4; Neh. 8:9; Neh. 8:13; Neh. 12:26; Neh. 12:36; Neh. 13:13; Est. 3:12; Est. 8:9; Ps. 45:1; Isa. 36:3; Isa. 36:22; Isa. 37:2; Jer. 8:8; Jer. 36:10; Jer. 36:12; Jer. 36:20; Jer. 36:21; Jer. 36:23; Jer. 36:26; Jer. 36:32; Jer. 37:15; Jer. 37:20; Jer. 52:25; Ezek. 9:2; Ezek. 9:3

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#### QUESTION - [Who was Zadok in the Bible?](#)

**ANSWER** - Zadok son of Ahitub was a Levite priest during the time of [King David](#). For a long time, he was co-high priest with [Abiathar](#). Zadok was a descendant of Aaron and a leader over his family of Levites (1 Chronicles 27:17).

When Absalom conspired against his father, David, David was forced to flee from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 15:13–14). Zadok and his son Ahimaaz, and his co-priest Abiathar and his son Jonathan accompanied David, with Zadok leading a procession of Levites who carried the ark of the covenant. As the people exited the city, Zadok's Levites set down the ark, and Abiathar offered sacrifices (verse 24). Once the people had vacated Jerusalem, David ordered Zadok and Abiathar, along with their sons, to return with the ark to Jerusalem (verse 25). Zadok was to send word to David with any news of what was happening in the kingdom under Absalom.

David had also sent his friend Hushai back to Jerusalem to listen in on Absalom's plans, and it was through him that Zadok and Abiathar heard that Absalom planned to seek out David and destroy him and the people who were with him. Hushai, Zadok, and Abiathar sent Ahimaaz and Jonathan to find David. After hiding in a well from Absalom's men, Ahimaaz and Jonathan were able to escape the city and bring the message to David: "Do not spend the night at the fords in the wilderness; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up" (2 Samuel 17:16). David escaped, and it wasn't much longer before David's commander, Joab, killed Absalom (2 Samuel 18:1–15). Heartbroken at the death of his son, David returned to Jerusalem.

Years later, when King David was very old, his son Adonijah set himself up as king, even though David's other son [Solomon](#) was to take the throne at David's death (1 Kings 1:5). Adonijah had some supporters, including Abiathar the priest, but Zadok, Nathan the prophet, and several other important men supported David's choice and opposed Adonijah (verse 8). Nathan told David's wife Bathsheba what Adonijah was planning and advised her to apprise King David of the situation. She did so, and David ordered that Zadok and Nathan immediately take Solomon to Gihon and anoint him as king (verses 32–34).

**When Zadok the priest anointed Solomon's head with oil at Gihon, a trumpet was sounded, and all the people assembled began to shout and rejoice** (1 Kings 1:39–40). The noise was so great that Adonijah, who was feasting nearby, heard it and wondered what was happening. At that moment, Abiathar's son Jonathan arrived and told Adonijah that Solomon had been anointed king (verses 41–45). Adonijah fled to the temple and grabbed the horns of the altar, begging Solomon to spare his life (verses 50–51). Solomon did so, but Adonijah later renewed his designs on the throne, forcing Solomon to execute him (1 Kings 2:13–25).

**Even though Abiathar had spurned King David's wishes and supported Adonijah, Zadok stayed true to David and supported Solomon. Abiathar lost his priesthood as a result, but Zadok was rewarded with a position as one of Solomon's chief officials (1 Kings 4:4) as well as being recognized as the sole high priest.**

There are several other men named Zadok in the Bible, but they are only mentioned in one or two verses apiece. They can be found in 1 Chronicles 6:12 (Zadok the descendant of Zadok the priest), 1 Chronicles 9:11 and Nehemiah 11:11 (Zadok the Levite), 2 Kings 15:33 and 2 Chronicles 27:1 (Zadok the father of Jerusha), Nehemiah 3:4 (Zadok the son of Baana), Nehemiah 3:29 (Zadok the son of Immer), Nehemiah 10:21 (Zadok the Israelite leader), Nehemiah 13:13 (Zadok the scribe), and Matthew 1:14 (Zadok, an ancestor of Jesus Christ). [GotQuestions.org](#) (Bolding added)

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**Zadok** ("righteous") was high priest (2Sa 20:25) under David, and was son of Ahitub of the house of Phinehas, in turn of Eleazar (1Ch 24:3) the son of Aaron, and 11th in descent from Aaron (1Ch 6:4-8). David had two priests, so that **Zadok** and Abiathar acted as high priests. "Then David called for **Zadok** and **Abiathar** the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab, and said to them, "You are the heads of the fathers' households of the Levites; consecrate yourselves both you and your relatives, **that you may bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel** to the place that I have prepared for it.(1Ch 15:11-12; cf 2Sa 15:24-29, 35-36). As David was dying **Adonijah** sought to secure his throne and Abiathar sided with him, and therefore

"Solomon dismissed Abiathar from being priest to the LORD, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD, which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh." (1Ki 2:27) [Zadok](#), who had remained faithful to David (1Ki 1:8, 26), became sole high priest, for Solomon "appointed Zadok the priest in the place of Abiathar." (1Ki 2:35; cf 1Ch 29:22). As the only High-Priest in Solomon's reign, **Zadok** fulfilled God's promise to Phinehas ("a covenant of a perpetual priesthood" = Nu 25:10–13+). This "perpetual priesthood" will in fact be continued in the Millennial Reign of the Son of David, Ezekiel recording "the Levitical priests, **the sons of Zadok**, who kept charge of My sanctuary when the sons of Israel went astray from Me, shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer Me the fat and the blood," declares the Lord GOD." (Eze 44:15)

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#### **QUESTION - [Who was Abiathar in the Bible?](#)**

**ANSWER** - Along with [Zadok](#), Abiathar served as one of the chief priests during David's reign as king. Abiathar's name means "father of excellence" or "father of abundance" in Hebrew.

Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech, who served as a priest at Nob (1 Samuel 21:1; Mark 2:26) until he and the other priests were murdered by King Saul (1 Samuel 21:1–19). Being the only son of Ahimelech to escape the massacre at Nob, Abiathar fled to David and was promised protection by the future king (1 Samuel 21:20–23).

Because Abiathar served David and acted as priest for all of David's men in hiding, he was made high priest along with Zadok once David began his reign as king (1 Chronicles 15:11). This was a natural role for him to take on, as he had kept the ephod and administered the [Urim and Thummin](#) when David sought direction from the Lord (1 Samuel 23:6; 30:7).

When Absalom rebelled against his father and attempted to usurp the throne, Abiathar remained loyal to David. Abiathar was among those who fled the capital city with David (2 Samuel 15:24). Zadok and the Levites carried the ark of the covenant, "and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city" (2 Samuel 15:24). Although David admired the loyalty and faithfulness of the priests, he ordered them to return to the city with the ark. This proved helpful because they were then able to send word to David about Absalom's plans (2 Samuel 15:27–29; 17:15–16). David was restored to his throne and Abiathar to his priestly office.

Things changed as David's son [Solomon](#) took the throne. Abiathar was not loyal to the new king. [Adonijah](#), another one of David's sons, put himself forward as king with the help of [Joab](#) (one of David's nephews) and Abiathar (1 Kings 1:5, 7). Once the threat from Adonijah was neutralized, King Solomon dealt with the conspirators. One of Solomon's actions was to remove Abiathar from the priestly office. This fulfilled the Lord's word of judgment over Eli and his descendants, which impacted Abiathar since he was related to Eli (1 Samuel 3:12–14; 1 Kings 2:27). It was only because of the priest's loyal service to David that Solomon did not kill him. Solomon told Abiathar, "Go back to your fields in Anathoth. You deserve to die, but I will not put you to death now, because you carried the ark of the Sovereign LORD before my father David and shared all my father's hardships" (1 Kings 2:26). Zadok replaced Abiathar as priest under Solomon (1 Kings 2:35).

**Abiathar lived most of his life in faithful service to the Lord, but he did not finish well.** Instead of siding with the rightful king of Israel (2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Kings 1:17), Abiathar assisted one of David's rebellious sons who desired to rule. He allowed earthly matters to become his focus, which cost him the priestly office. Like Abiathar, we can easily get caught up in worldly schemes and lose sight of God's plan. Rather than seeking our own way or chasing what seems politically expedient, we should seek to faithfully follow God. Then, when our time on earth is done, we can state with the apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful" (2 Timothy 4:7NLT). [GotQuestions.org](#)

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**NAVE's summary of [Abiathar](#)** - He was high priest under David and was called by two other names -- Ahimelech (2Sa 8:17), and Abimelech (1Chr. 18:16). Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech (1Sa. 22:20), and was the priest who escaped with the ephod when Saul killed the priests in Nob (1Sa 22:20-23, 6-19). Abiathar on three occasions consulted the ephod for David (1Sa 22:10; 23:9; 30:7). Here in 2Sa 8:17 Abiathar is named associate high priest with Zadok (cf 2Sa 15:35; 20:25; 1Ki 4:4; 1Ch 15:11). Abiathar remained loyal to David when Absalom rebelled, leaving Jerusalem with the Ark of the covenant, but later directed by David to return with the Ark (2Sa 15:24-29). Abiathar aided David by sending his son from Jerusalem to David with secret information concerning the counsel of [Ahithophel](#) (2Sa 15:35, 36; 17:15-22; 1Ki 2:26). Unfortunately he made a mistake in supporting David's son Adonijah when he attempted to take David's throne (1Ki 1:7) and because of this he was dismissed from office by Solomon (1Ki 2:26, 27) in fulfillment of the prophecy to Eli that "there will not be an old man in your house" (1Sa 2:21). The prophet had predicted to Eli the destruction of his priestly family which was partially fulfilled in the massacre of the priests of Nob (1Sa 22:11-19) and then fulfilled in the dismissal of Abiathar by King Solomon who transferred the priesthood solely to the family of Zadok (1Ki 2:26-27, 35).

## 2 Samuel 20:26 and Ira the Jairite was also a priest to David.

BGT 2 Samuel 20:26 κα γε Ιρας Ιαριν υ ερε ς το Δαυιδ

LXE 2 Samuel 20:26 Moreover Iras the son of Iarin was priest to David.

NET 2 Samuel 20:26 Ira the Jairite was David's personal priest.

CSB 2 Samuel 20:26 and in addition, Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

ESV 2 Samuel 20:26 and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest.

NIV 2 Samuel 20:26 and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

NLT 2 Samuel 20:26 And Ira, a descendant of Jair, was David's personal priest.

NRS 2 Samuel 20:26 and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest.

NJB 2 Samuel 20:26 also: Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

NAB 2 Samuel 20:26 Ira the Jairite was also David's priest.

YLT 2 Samuel 20:26 and also, Ira the Jairite hath been minister to David.

- **Ira:** 2Sa 23:38 1Ch 11:40, Ithrite
- **Jairite:** Jdg 10:4,5
- **priest** 2Sa 8:18 Ge 41:43,45 Ex 2:14,16 2Sa 24:11 2Ch 35:15
- [2 Samuel 20 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### DAVID'S PERSONAL PRIEST

**And Ira the Jairite** - In 1Ch 11:40 he is called "Ira the [Ithrite](#)." Some think he was a royal adviser to David and others that he was actually David's personal priest.

**Was also a priest to David** - KJV says Ira "was a chief ruler about David," where the Hebrew is "kohen ledawid" and the Septuagint has hierous which is literally one who officiates at or performs sacred rites. TSK note suggests "probably he was a kind of domestic chaplain or seer to the king." Thus the NLT refers to him as a "personal priest."