**David faces another rebellion** 30/7/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 20, Matthew 26:47-56

Text: 2Samuel 20

Psalms: 100old, 85, 132:10-18, 133

Following his sins of adultery and murder, David faced troubles within his own house. The Lord forgave his sin but because of ongoing guilt and shame, and/or a failure to exercise discipline and justice within his family, a discontented son, a son guilty of murder, conspired against David. Up to this point in his reign David had been as strong and wise king, defeating enemies all around. The nation was united behind him even though the first king was from Benjamin and David was from the tribe of Judah. There was a brief attempt to maintain the royal line of Saul but David was the Lord’s anointed. In a brief summary of his administration before he sinned, it is written that David ‘administered judgment and justice to all his people’ (8:15). These words are not found in the description of his administration found at the end of chapter 20.

When David fled Jerusalem rather than stand up to the rebellion led by his son, he left ten concubines behind to keep the palace. It was prophesied that his wives or concubines would be violated ‘in the sight of the sun’, and this is what happened when Absalom marched into Jerusalem and took over the palace; he lay with these ten concubines on the roof of the palace (12:11, 16:22). This violation of the king’s concubines marked the overthrow of the king. Such brutality towards women is still a tragic mark of most wars.

When David returned to Jerusalem he put these women into seclusion, treating them as widows (20:3). This seems to be a harsh response on the part of David when the women were victims of violence in war. But remembering that his son’s violation of these women was a mark his seizing the throne, David could hardly take them back as his concubines. His treatment of them as widows was probably a kindness in those days. Even today, widows in India are often despised and locked away in widow’s homes. David fled Jerusalem to avoid confronting his son but he failed to consider the plight of these women. In the end his son was killed anyway, and there was a great slaughter of men (18:7, 15).

In fleeing Jerusalem, David also left the people wondering if he was still fit to be their king. The men of the northern tribes called for David’s return, and the men of Judah, many of whom had joined Absalom’s conspiracy, eventually called for his return also. But when he returned the men of his own tribe of Judah and the men of the other ten tribes started bickering, and David did nothing to settle this disputation (19:40-43). So it was that before very long a troublemaker and rebel rose up to exploit this tribal division, and David was faced with another rebellion. Our subheadings are: 'Sheba calls ten tribes to rebel’, ‘Struggles over leadership in David’s army’, ‘Speech and action of a wise woman’, and, ‘Senior servants in David’s administration’.

**1. Sheba calls ten tribes to rebel**

A man called Sheba from the tribe of Benjamin decided to blow a trumpet and call the people of Israel to separate from King David and the people of Judah. He is called a worthless person, a troublemaker, a rebel, or literally, ‘a son of Belial’ (20:1). Yet with this ram’s horn and a catchy political phrase, he incited the people of Israel to return to their tents because they had no share in David. That such a person could gain a following shows just how tense the political situation was. It also shows the failure of David and his administration to include people from all the tribes; these people felt excluded from their inheritance in the nation.

It is interesting that when Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, spoke harshly to the people and threatened them, that they took up the same cry as Sheba and the kingdom was divided (1Kings 12:16). This separation led to ongoing civil war, which weakened both the northern and southern kingdoms, and led to them being overrun by enemies. But the initial rebellion led by Sheba was short-lived because the men of Judah remained loyal to David and went to catch and destroy Sheba (20:2).

**2. Struggles over leadership in David’s army**

While the men of Judah were loyal to David, he was having troubles with leadership in his army. David replaced Joab with Amasa when he returned to Jerusalem, a largely political move because Amasa had joined Absalom’s rebellion. Political appointees are seldom the best people for the job, and this was the case with Amasa. When Sheba blew the trumpet by way of rebellion against David, David knew he had to act quickly to put down this rebellion; we note a very different response to the way he responded to Absalom’s rebellion.

David called on his newly appointed general, Amasa, to assemble the men of Judah into an army within three days (20:4). He knew he had to act before Sheba gathered followers and got to a fortified city (20:6). But Amasa failed to get back to David within the three days so David turned to Abishai, Joab’s older brother, to lead the army in search of Sheba (20:5, 6). Just why Amasa failed we are not told but we can imagine men doubting his loyalty to David, and/or Joab undermining his authority. It is not long before Joab’s name appears in this account, with the army led by Abishai labelled ‘Joab’s men’ (20:7). ‘Joab’s men’ were regular army, and this was joined by a sizable mercenary force of Cherethites and Pelethites led by Benaiah- although he is not mentioned here (cf. 20:23).

Abishai led ‘Joab’s men’ out of Jerusalem in pursuit of Sheba. When they came to a large rock at Gibeon just a few kilometres northwest of Jerusalem, Amasa suddenly appeared, apparently with some men he and gathered after three days. So here was Amasa, who David first asked to assemble his forces, with Abishai, who David later put in charge, and Joab, who had been demoted by David. Joab did not accept this demotion. Amasa had been handed a poisoned chalice; Joab had previously murdered a rival named Abner (3:27) and had also killed Absalom in cold blood. Clearly, Joab was a man Amasa need to watch carefully.

Joab approached Amasa with smooth words to give the usual greeting kiss. But as he did so his sword or dagger ‘accidently’ fell out of its sheath; he was dressed in full battle armour (29:8,9). Joab’s ‘clumsiness’ was deliberate. He bent over to pick up his dagger so had it in his hand as he took Amasa by the beard to kiss him- a ‘Judas kisses long before Judas! Joab stabbed Amasa in the stomach, killing him on the spot (20:10). Leaving Amasa in the middle of the road wallowing in his own blood, Abishai and Joab left in pursuit of Sheba. Joab had regained his command of the army through treachery and murder.

All the soldiers, but particularly those gathered by Amasa, were obviously shaken by Joab’s treachery. One of Joab’s men stood near Amasa’s bloodied corpse urging them to follow Joab- and no one argued! But they did stop beside Amasa’s corpse as they went by, until Joab’s man dragged the dead body to the side and covered it with a coat (20:11,12).

**3. Speech and action of a wise woman**

Recall if you will the brief but brutal rule of ISIS in the Middle East a few years ago. The Kurds fought bravely against these militant Muslims. One strategy of the Kurds was to enlist women in their army. The Muslim fighters dreaded the idea of being killed by a woman. The military leader and treacherous murderer called Joab was confronted by a woman, a wise woman, when he reached the city to which Sheba had escaped. Joab humbly listened to this woman and agreed with her wisdom.

Sheba, the rebel from Benjamin, went all the way north to a place near Dan, gathering supporters as he went; all the Berites anyway (20:14). He took refuge from Joab and his men in a fortified town called Abel of Beth Maachah (20:15). David was afraid this would happen, but Joab was not deterred. He had his men build a siege ramp against the all of the city so they could climb up and demolish the wall.

But a woman, a wise woman, from the city called out, asking for Joab, and Joab came forward to listen to her. The woman asked why Joab and his men were disturbing the peace of this city that was renowned as a city of peace, and indeed wisdom. ‘You seek to destroy a city and mother in Israel. Why?’ she asked (20:19). Joab answered her peaceably, explaining that a man from the mountains of Ephraim called Sheba has raised his hand against the king and fled to this city. So this wise woman went to her people, who decapitated Sheba and threw his head over the wall to Joab. Joab was satisfied so blew the trumpet and led his men back to Jerusalem to tell David that the rebellion had been crushed.

It is interesting that this wise woman came forward to stop her city being destroyed; interesting that she is labelled ‘wise’, and interesting that she stepped forward as she did. One man’s head was all it took to save her city. She stands in contrast to David in terms of decisive action that saved the lives of a lot of people. God in his wisdom and love- God is wisdom and love- acted decisively in the cross his Son, Jesus Christ, delivering the world, or all the elect, from sin and death (John 1:29, 1John 2:1).

**4. Senior servants in David’s administration**

The closing verses of this chapter are a record of the names of the people in King David’s administration. We have a similar list at the end of chapter 8 when David returned home victorious over all his enemies because, ‘The Lord preserved David wherever he went’ (8:6,14). Despite the sins of David shortly after that time, and the subsequent rebellion of his son, and now Sheba, his administration remained by and large intact. But there is no reference to David exercising ‘judgment and justice to all his people’ (8:15).

General Joab remains at the top of the list despite David’s effort to replace him. Benaiah, the son of Jehoida, moves up the list but remains as leader of David’s mercenary force or body guard. Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud, continues as recorder; kings liked to keep a detailed diary of their exploits.

A new position within David’s administration, and a seemingly important one, was a man in charge of revenue, or, in other translations, forced labour. A man called Adoram or Adoniram took this position. Foreigners taken as prisoner made up the bulk of this labour force, although by Solomon’s time men were conscripted from all Israel (1Kings 5:13).

Sheva or Seraiah continued as scribe, and Zadok and Abiathar continued as priests (20:25). The last man on the list is again a newcomer. Ira the Jairite replaced David’s sons as royal advisor or priests for obvious reasons- his sons were dead! The Lord preserved his kingdom and preserved David as his king, despite David’s sins and subsequent failure to rule wisely and justly. The Lord’s purposes were bigger than any one man, even David. It will be generations before the greater Son of David comes to rule with heavenly wisdom and justice in the heavenly kingdom to which all God’s people belong.