



Please turn to 2 Samuel 20 (page 254, pew Bible). That song well expresses our prayer: “Speak, O Lord, till your church is built and the earth is filled with your glory.” This ties in beautifully with the song we sang earlier: *Cornerstone*. It is based on Ephesians 2:20: “you are ... fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone” (CSB). The cornerstone is the most crucial stone in a building because it ensures that the rest of the building is square and stable. It is the rock on which the entire structure rests. Jesus is the cornerstone of God’s temple, and every believer is a living stone in that structure.

Jesus declared, “Upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it” (Matt. 16:18 NLT). For this reason the author of Hebrews says, “Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe” (Heb. 12:28 NLT).

I love our VBS decorations. Don’t they look great? Better yet, don’t they make me look great? Look how strong I am! But the truth is, these stones are quite collapsible. These walls can easily be torn down – because they’re fake imitations of the real thing. That’s what the kingdoms of this world are like. All the political, societal, educational, economic structures built by humanity won’t last. “All of creation will be shaken and removed, so that only the unshakable things will remain” (Heb. 12:27) – the things of God’s kingdom.

David’s kingdom was a faint reflection of the ultimate kingdom to come. Overall, David was a good king, but he was not a perfect king. His kingdom was solid, but it was not unshakable. Absalom’s revolt proved that. As we come to chapter 20, David’s kingdom is still standing, but it’s unstable. As David returns to Jerusalem, he faces difficulties which show that . . .

***Human sin produces instability,
but God’s kingdom never collapses.***

Let’s see how this principle plays out in 2 Samuel 20 and how it relates to our lives today.

The Rebellion of Sheba (vv. 1-2)

¹ Now there happened to be there a worthless man, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, “We have no portion in David, and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!”

² So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

- 2 Samuel 20:1-2

Whereas Absalom and his men attacked David, Sheba and his men abandoned David. They withdrew their support of him as king. This secession stemmed from the conflict that had erupted between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes as David returned to Jerusalem. They were arguing over who would get to escort the king back to the capital city. The men of Israel said, "There are more of us, so we should escort the king." The men of Judah said, "We're related to the king – he's from our tribe – so we should be the ones escorting him." Chapter 19 ends by saying, "the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel" (v. 43). Scripture says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). That's what happened here, and things went from bad to worse.

A "worthless man" named Sheba took advantage of the conflict to gain a following for himself. With one blow of the trumpet and a ten-second speech, he roused the ire of the ten northern tribes of Israel and got them to abandon David.

Sadly, there are Shebas among God's people today – individuals who take advantage of a conflict to gain a following for themselves. Such people are of no moral worth. They bring instability instead of blessing. In Titus 3 we are told to avoid divisive people and "have nothing to do with them, because such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned" (Titus 3:10b-11).

Verse 3 introduces us to another destabilizing effect of sin:

The Ruination of Victims (v. 3)

And David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten concubines whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood.

- 2 Samuel 20:3

The account of Sheba's rebellion is interrupted with this note about David's concubines. Why now? Why here? If the narrator merely wanted to fill in the gaps regarding David's return, he could've mentioned this detail near the end of the chapter, once David arrived in Jerusalem. Instead, the narrator "places it front and center where we run smack into it."¹

Absalom's vile act of violating David's concubines on the roof of the palace fulfilled God's prophetic word to David after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. The Lord had said, "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight" (2 Sam. 12:11 NIV).

David should have never multiplied wives to himself in the first place. God's blueprint for marriage from the very beginning has been for it to be a one-man, one-woman, strong-

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999, reprinted 2018), 253.

bond, one-flesh, God-made, life-long union (see Genesis 2:24; cf. Matthew 19:1-9). The misery of these women came about by David's accumulation of wives, his adultery with Bathsheba and his son Absalom's violation of them.

These women did not wind up homeless, nor did they go hungry. David continued to provide food and housing for them. "But he would have nothing more to do with them. They were confined, isolated, and alone."² W. G. Blaikie wrote,

... All joy and brightness were thus taken out of their lives, and personal freedom was denied them. They were doomed, for no fault of theirs, to the weary lot of captives, cursing the day, probably, when their beauty had brought them to the palace, and wishing they could exchange lots with the humblest of their sisters that breathed the air of freedom.³

Dale Davis rightly adds, "There is simply something intensely, irretrievably sad about verse 3." Do you feel it? Does the brokenness caused by sin break your heart? A few days ago I went into the heart of the Beechwood district of Rochester and had a cup of coffee and two-hour conversation with Joshua Horn, the new Executive Director of 441 Ministries Beechwood. Their stated mission is "to see our neighborhood flourish spiritually, relationally, and economically as the gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed in the thoughts, words, and deeds of its residents." Just below that mission statement is this quote by Dr. John Perkins: "We live out our call most fully when we are a community of faith with arms wrapped about a community of pain."

Boy, there's a lot of pain in the world today. Some of that pain is owing to our own sin, but much brokenness is also brought about by the sins of others. An obvious example would be a newborn baby addicted to crack. That's not the baby's fault, but he or she suffers for the sins of the parent.

Some examples are less obvious but hit closer to home. How about the link between pornography and sex trafficking? Many ignore or even deny this connection as they continue to feed their addiction to porn. Globally, porn is a 97 billion dollar industry. The United States accounts for 12 billion of it. High rates of consumption mean high demand.

The 2019 Trafficking in Persons Report from The U.S. Department of State ... revealed that some traffickers ... pose as model or actor agencies. They use "fraudulent recruitment techniques to coerce ... **men, women**, and girls into signing vague contracts and then threaten[ing] them with legal action or the release of compromising photographs to force them to participate in pornographic films."

With approximately 42 billion visits annually, Pornhub profits millions each year from illegal and abusive content.⁴

² Ibid., 252.

³ W. G. Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel*, The Expositor's Bible (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, n.d.), 319. Cited by Davis, 252.

⁴ Taylor Tennis, "Porn and Human Trafficking: The Facts You Need to Know." *The Exodus Road*, 26 August 2021 [online]. Retrieved on 29 July 2023 from <https://theexodusroad.com/porn-and-human-trafficking-the-facts-you-need-to-know/>.

You want to heal broken people? “First, do no harm.” That’s what Hippocrates, the father of medicine, said. More importantly, that’s what Scripture says: “Love does no harm to a neighbor” (Rom. 13:10). So, if you want to stop sex trafficking, stop viewing pornography. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

We do that by proclaiming the gospel and by walking worthy of the gospel that we have received. This means that our words, our actions, our character, our relationships, and our lives should reflect the glory of King Jesus. In commenting on 2 Samuel 20:3, John Woodhouse writes,

These sad women represent something important about David’s kingdom.... It was a kingdom that suffered the consequences of sinful men. David himself was responsible for the sadness of these women. So was Absalom. David was not the kind of king who could wipe away their tears.⁵

But Jesus is that King! In the song “Hosanna” we sing to the Lord, “In your kingdom broken lives are made new, you make us new.” Scripture says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). “The Lord heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3). *What sin ruins, God restores.*

In Exodus 34, God introduces himself to Moses as “Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness” (v. 6). The Lord goes on to say that while he allows sin’s consequences to endure for three, perhaps four generations, he lavishes unfailing love to “a *thousand* generations” (v. 7a). Bill Arnold writes, “Because of Yahweh’s nature, sin has a limited life span, but love lasts forever.”⁶ *Human sin produces instability, but God’s kingdom never collapses!*

A third contributor to the instability of David’s kingdom was *the ruthlessness of Joab.*

The Ruthlessness of Joab (vv. 4-13)

⁴ Then the king said to Amasa, “Call the men of Judah together to me within three days, and be here yourself.” ⁵ So Amasa went to summon Judah, but he delayed beyond the set time that had been appointed him. 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, lest he get himself to fortified cities and escape from us.” ⁷ And there went out after him Joab’s men and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men. They went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. ⁸ When they were at the great stone that is in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing a

⁵ John Woodhouse, 2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 472.

⁶ Bill T. Arnold, 1 & 2 Samuel. The NIV Application Commentary, gen. ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2003), 537.

soldier's garment, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened on his thigh, and as he went forward it fell out. ⁹ And 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. ¹⁰ But Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died.

Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. ¹¹ And one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab."¹² And Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the highway. And anyone who came by, seeing him, stopped. And when the man saw that all the people stopped, he carried Amasa out of the highway into the field and threw a garment over him. ¹³ When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.

- 2 Samuel 20:4-13

My wife Ruthie said that Amasa's death occasioned the first instance of rubber-necking in Scripture. The men of Judah were distracted in their pursuit of Sheba as Amasa lay in the middle of the road wallowing in his own blood. Thankfully, a young man saw what was happening, so he carried Amasa out of the way and got traffic moving again.

But the murder of Amasa was not the first time that Joab had shown such ruthlessness. Joab had executed Abner, the commander of King Saul's army, when David wanted to make peace with him (3:26-29). He had brutally stabbed Absalom when David wanted his son to be spared (18:9-15). Then Joab had no patience with David's grief after his son's death (19:5-6). Joab was a firm believer that "might is right." He saw the sword as the solution to just about everything. Such was the case here.

We don't know why Amasa was delayed in returning to David, but he catches up with Abishai and Joab and their men at Gibeon, six miles northwest of Jerusalem. Joab goes to greet his brother with his right hand. This detail is significant, because the right hand is used in battle, but Joab's right hand is empty here, so no threat is implied. In fact, he uses his right hand to reach for Amasa's beard as part of the greeting kiss so common among family and friends.⁷ But with his left hand he thrusts the sword so viciously into Amasa's belly, that a second blow was unnecessary.

Joab and Sheba are both rebellious but in a different kind of way. Whereas Sheba walks away from David and the kingdom, Joab refuses to be controlled within the kingdom. He constantly bucks against the king's authority and takes matters into his own hands. Joab acknowledges the king's sovereignty while disregarding his will.

Likewise, there are people who call Jesus their Lord, but don't live like it. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Just this morning one of my professors from Bible college sent me this quote by J. C. Ryle, who wrote,

⁷ Edward A. Neiderhiser, "2 Samuel 20:8-10: a Note for a Commentary," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24 (1981): 210. Cited by Davis, 254.

“People will never set their faces decidedly toward heaven ... until they really feel that they are in danger of hell.... I am convinced that the first step toward attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin.”

“The amazing sinfulness of sin” was evident even in David’s kingdom – in the rebellion of Sheba, the ruination of women, the ruthlessness of Joab, and we see it fourthly in ...

The Reaction of the People (vv. 14-22)

The bulk of the Israelites were a fickle bunch. First, they rebelled against David under Absalom. Then, after Absalom was defeated, “all the men of Israel came to the king” (19:41) to escort him back to Jerusalem. Then, after getting into a tiff with the men of Judah, “all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba” (20:2). Now we will see that once Sheba loses his head, “all the army of Israel” will be one again (v. 23).

Proverbs 20:6 says, “Many claim, ‘I’m a loyal person!’ but who can find someone who truly is?” (ISV). The point is that such people are few and far between! But, praise God, there are faithful men do exist – and so do faithful women! We find such a woman right here in 2 Samuel 20, verses 14-22, a woman whose wisdom saved a city!

¹⁴ And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in. ¹⁵ And all the men who were with Joab came and besieged him in Abel of Beth-maacah. They cast up a mound against the city, and it stood against the rampart, and they were battering the wall to throw it down. ¹⁶ Then a wise woman called from the city, “Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, ‘Come here, that I may speak to you.’” ¹⁷ And he came near her, and the woman said, “Are you Joab?” He answered, “I am.” Then she said to him, “Listen to the words of your servant.” And he answered, “I am listening.” ¹⁸ Then she said, “They used to say in former times, ‘Let them but ask counsel at Abel,’ and so they settled a matter. ¹⁹ I am one of those who are peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord?” ²⁰ Joab answered, “Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! ²¹ That is not true. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David. Give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city.” And the woman said to Joab, “Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall.” ²² Then the woman went to all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet, and they dispersed from the city, every man to his home. And Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king.

- 2 Samuel 20:14-22

If find it ironic that Joab says, “Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up and destroy!” I mean, that was the pattern of his life! But Joab was still a patriot at heart, and he heeded the words of this wise woman. The citizens of the city did the same, for they killed Sheba, cut off his head, and “threw it out to Joab,” who then withdrew from the city.

The wise woman of Abel Beth-maacah understood the principle: "Throw out the trouble-makers, and things will quiet down. Fighting and quarrels will cease" (Prov. 22:10, paraphrased). Sheba was a worthless man who divided a nation and nearly destroyed a city. But one wise woman reunited a nation and saved her city. Her counsel was pure gold.

What sort of effect do your words have on others? Proverbs 29:8 says, "People with no regard for others can throw whole cities into turmoil. Those who are wise keep things calm" (GNT).

David's kingdom was unstable, but by God's grace it was still standing! This takes us to the final verses of 2 Samuel 20.

The Recovery of David's Kingdom (vv. 23-26)

²³ Now Joab was in command of all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was in command of the Cherethites and the Pelethites;²⁴ and Adoram was in charge of the forced labor; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder;²⁵ and Sheva was secretary; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests;²⁶ and Ira the Jairite was also David's priest.

- 2 Samuel 20:23-26

Dale Davis writes, "In their own way these verses quietly say that the kingdom of David is still intact. ... [I]n spite of all the corruption from within and attacks from without, the kingdom is still standing."⁸

God held the kingdom together, sometimes by a mere thread, to show (1) the depravity of man and the instability that sin brings, and (2) the dependability of God's promise and the Savior that he would bring. Drawing from multiple Scriptures, John Woodhouse writes, and I'll close with this quote:

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ announces the day when "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15). We who have come to Jesus are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28). In this kingdom, to which we belong and for which we are waiting, there is no place for underhanded ways like Joab. This kingdom cannot be built by cunning, deceit, or brute force (see 2 Corinthians 4:2). Church politicians, take note! This kingdom is a matter of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17).⁹

⁸ Ibid., 258.

⁹ Woodhouse, 480.