

2nd Samuel 20:1-26

Two Trumpets, Two Deaths, and a Wise Woman's Wisdom

If you follow the outline in the KJ Study Bible then you'll see that this 20th chapter in 2nd Samuel concludes the longest section of the book under the heading: "The Crimes and Troubles of David and His Household." This section began all the way back in chp. 11 which gave us the account of David's sin with Bathsheba.

There's a sense, I suppose, in which you might say that David's entire life was a life of trouble. I'm reminded of Jacob, in the book of Genesis, when his son, Joseph, introduced him to Pharaoh and Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was: *The days of the years of my pilgrimage Jacob says are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.*

I'm pretty sure that David is not 130 years old in this chapter in 2nd Samuel but I'm also fairly certain that he would say the same thing Jacob said about the character of the days he lived *few and evil have the days of the years of my life been*. From the time he had been anointed as a very young man by Samuel to be the next ruler in Israel his life had been one of strife and flight with some impressive victories as well as some unimpressive defeats to sin.

Now once again we have another uprising against his kingdom led by a Benjamite by the name of Sheba. You remember in our last study I focused on the theme of never-ending strife and pointed out that the last 3 verses in chp. 19 form a transition that leads us into chp. 20. The men of Israel, you will recall, were put out because their advice wasn't sought out and followed in the matter of bringing David back to Jerusalem following his victory over Absalom. It seems that they weren't even represented on the parade committee, so to speak.

And like so many matters of strife, something that is relatively insignificant gets blown all out of proportion and becomes a big deal – so big that Sheba, the son of Bichri would blow a trumpet and announce *We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel*. Just because your advice wasn't sought out and followed for how the parade should be conducted? We may read the verses and sigh and confess that some things never change. The same kind of things have happened right up to this present hour.

And then we're given the account of Joab's murder of Amasa which is almost an exact rerun of his earlier murder of Abner back in chp. 3. I tell you what – if I was any kind of a military man back in those days and the suggestion was put to me that I take Joab's place as the commander of the army my response would have been the same as Obadiah's to Elijah when Elijah sent to Ahab to tell him he had found Elijah. You remember Obadiah's response: *What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me?* (1Kings 18:9). Maybe that should have been Amasa's word to David when

David appointed him to take Joab's place. At any rate – soon Joab is at the head of the army again along with his brother, Abishai, pursuing after Sheba before the rebellion grows and gets out of hand and in the end the man who blows the trumpet in the beginning of the chapter to lead the rebellion against David in the last scene of the chapter has his head thrown over the wall from the city of Abel in Beth-maachah.

As I read and re-read this chapter a number of times I was searching for something that could tie the chapter together under a unifying theme. The events of the chapter seem so distinct from each other that it makes that kind of analysis somewhat challenging. In the end though my analysis consists of a few things.

There's the sounding of a trumpet in v. 1 *And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet...* There's also the blowing of a trumpet at the end of the chapter in v. 22 *Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city...*

Along with these trumpet blasts there are also two significant deaths in the chapter. Amasa, the appointed leader of the army of David was slain by Joab in v. 10. And, of course, from the verse I just cited, v. 22 Sheba, the leader of the revolt, was executed by the people in the city of Abel and his head was thrown over the wall. Add to the two trumpet blasts, and the two significant deaths the role of the woman from the city of Abel who by her own testimony was among those that were peaceable and faithful as well as a mother in Israel who was able to persuade the people of the city to execute Sheba and there you pretty well have a nearly complete synopsis of the chapter.

What I would like to do this morning is to look at these headings I just described that we may draw from them the lessons that God would have us learn from them. And we'll discover in this study that there are practical lessons and gospel lessons that emerge from these events.

Two Trumpets, Two Deaths, and the Wisdom of a Mother in Israel

That's my theme – the lessons learned from two trumpets, two deaths, and the wisdom of a mother in Israel.

I. Two Trumpets

I noted a moment ago how the chapter begins and ends with two very different trumpet blasts. Look at the reference again to the first sounding of a trumpet – v. 1 *And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name [was] Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel.*

The use of trumpets in the Bible is a study of its own. As far as back as the book of Numbers during the wilderness years of the Israelites they were commanded by the Lord

through Moses to make two trumpets of silver. These trumpets were then to be used for various things. Depending on the number of trumpets used as well as the number of times the trumpets sounded you would find the trumpets used for such things as calling the assembly together at the door of the tabernacle or for calling just the princes together (Numbers 10). They were also used for sounding an alarm and sending a signal for various parts of the camp of Israelites to advance.

They were also used to summon the soldiers together for war. When Absalom led his rebellion back in chp. 15 it was the sound of a trumpet that signaled the beginning of that rebellion. So we read in 2Sa 15:10 *But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.*

Even in the New Testament we find Paul making reference to the use of the trumpet in 1Co 14:8 *For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?* The resurrection at the end of the age when Christ returns is mentioned in connection with the sound of a trumpet. 1Co 15:52 *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

And in the book of Revelation we find in chp. 8:6 seven angels which have seven trumpets which they then sound each one being a signal for God's judgment and the advancement of His kingdom. But back in our text in 2Sam. 20:1 the sounding of the trumpet by Sheba, the son of Bichri represents the same thing that it did when Absalom began his revolt with the sound of a trumpet back in chp. 15.

You could say that this trumpet sound is the sound of rebellion. It's the signal to lead the people away from God's anointed king. Spiritually speaking you could say that this trumpet has been sounding throughout the history of civilization and just like in the case of Sheba there are those that respond to the sound of leaving the inhabitants of the world away from that greater David.

You might argue, I suppose, that everything in our culture contributes toward the blowing of such a trumpet. The popular music that dominates our culture is a trumpet call away from God and into sin. Our art, our entertainment, our movies, our television programs, our education system in both its higher and lower levels, our humanistic moral code all contribute to the volume and longevity of this trumpet sound.

And just like mice in a maze that are classically conditioned to respond to certain stimuli so sinners respond to nearly everything that sends the right signal to their fleshly lusts. For many the end of work is a trumpet call to head to the tavern; For others the weekend, including Sunday, is the trumpet call to recreation and entertainment and promiscuity. Just as Sheba's trumpet blast was a call to independence from God's anointed king so the cultural trumpet blast of our day is a call to independence from God and from Christ. It's a call to live for sin and for self.

It certainly is a popular call and a call that the flesh readily responds to. So that's Sheba's trumpet call – a call of independent rebellion. But this isn't the only trumpet sound in the chapter. If you look again at v. 22 we see another blowing of a trumpet. *Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.*

Do you see the contrast between this trumpet call and Sheba's trumpet call? Sheba's call was a call of rebellion leading the people away from God's anointed king. Joab's trumpet blast was the very opposite. This was a call to rest, following the subduing of rebellion and it too called people every man to his tent but every man to his tent under the realm of David. Notice what it says about Joab at the end of v. 22 *And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.*

So one call of the trumpet leads away from the king, the other call of the trumpet led people back to the king. One call was based on rebellion and a spirit of independence from the king, the other call was based on the victory of the king over that rebellion. One was a call to war against the king, the other was a call to peace with the king. This is the lesson, then, of two trumpets and the thing to ponder is simply this: Which trumpet call are you responding to today?

It's interesting to note from Leviticus 25 that on the day of atonement in the year of jubilee there was to be a trumpet sounded. So we read in Le 25:9 *Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth [day] of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.* The occasion was one of liberty and of every man regaining his possessions. And this was done on the day of atonement, that day that commemorated the taking away of sin through the burnt offering on the altar and the scapegoat being released into the wilderness.

The gospel analogies, of course, are easy to discern. The gospel is that trumpet sound that announces a finished atonement in Christ and calls us to liberty in Him. Is this the trumpet sound you're able to hear and respond to? Or do you prefer the trumpet call to rebellion and independence from God and from Christ? A far worse fate than what Sheba faced awaits those who follow such a call. The resurrection trumpet will call independent rebels from the grave also but to the fate of everlasting damnation.

So there is the lesson of two trumpets. Let's move on to consider:

II. The Lesson of Two Deaths

One of the things that makes this chapter in 2Samuel challenging is the difficulty of interpreting the motives behind the actions of some of the characters. For example when we read in v. 4 how Amasa, the new leader of David's army was to assemble the men of Judah within 3 days in order to go after Sheba but then v. 5 tells us that he *tarry'd longer than the set time that was appointed him* it raises the question in our minds – why did he tarry longer than the set time appointed him?

Did he find it difficult to assemble the men because of a reluctance on the part of those men to follow him? Or was he just the kind of man that was characteristically a procrastinator? Or was he in his heart still a traitor against David who harbored a grudge against David in the matter of Absalom's rebellion and he would, therefore, deliberately give Sheba more time to strengthen himself in this new revolt against David? Remember that Amasa had been the leader of Absalom's army.

And what about Joab? Did Joab murder Amasa because he took him to be a traitor? Or did he murder him because he would murder anyone who presumed to take his place as the leader of David's army? These are questions that arise but are left open to speculation because the narrative doesn't give us specific answers to these questions.

There are, however, some factual matters that can be set forth from which we can draw certain gospel analogies. We know beyond all doubt that Amasa was the appointed captain of David's host. We read back in 19:13 *Say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab.*

In an earlier study I cited the view of some preachers and commentators that appointment of Amasa was a diplomatic move on David's part through which he demonstrated his willingness to forgive his brethren in the tribe of Judah for their rebellion against him. Here was Joab's counterpart from Absalom's host being appointed to be the ruler now over David's host.

I think, given that fact, we could conclude that Joab murdered the man that had been appointed to be the captain of David's host and that this murder was tragic and unjust and bloody. David certainly viewed it that way and Solomon, the man who would succeed David in the throne would see it that way also so that if you look ahead to 1Kings 2 where you find Solomon executing the instructions that had been given him by David you find him saying with regard to Joab in v. 32 *And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah.*

So in Amasa's death you find, as I say, the execution of an appointed leader through a bloody death. We can say something else about Amasa's death also. Note the words of v. 12 *And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still.*

This was a death that stopped people in their tracks. They were stunned by it to the point that it stopped them right where they were. This was tragic, this was unjust. Why did this man have to die? – they might have asked. And it precisely in this same vein that we can draw a gospel analogy that pertains to the appointment of God's leader in the person of His Son. We're told by Paul in Col. 1:15 that Christ is the firstborn of every creature. And that term *firstborn* is a term that applies to His rank and preeminence. He was God's appointed

leader. And yet He was taken and with wicked hands was crucified and slain (Acts 2:23). And didn't His death stop you and me in our tracks? Doesn't it and shouldn't it stop us in our tracks continually as we ponder – why has this man died? His death was tragic and in one sense unjust in that He didn't deserve death and His death was a bloody death. We know, of course, that His death served the purpose of advancing His cause and bringing about salvation to those that would put their trust in Christ.

Now whether or not Amasa would have been a competent leader of David's host we'll never know but this much we can say – that following his death, David's kingdom did go forward on the path of subduing the rebellion of Sheba. And it should follow for you and me that following the tragic death of God's appointed leader, a death that stopped us in our tracks, you and I should go forward in the fight against our own sin and rebellion: *Casting down imaginations*, Paul writes in 2Cor.10:5 *and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

So that's one of the two deaths in 2Samuel 20. The other death stands in marked contrast to Amasa's tragic death and that's the death of Sheba himself. Here was a man, you could say, that got what was coming to him. He sinned against God's anointed king and was a rebel against that king and his rebellion would have brought destruction not only on himself but on the entire city of Abel of Beth-maachah were it not for the negotiating prowess of a wise mother in Israel.

And even in Sheba's death the gospel analogy becomes apparent – by this one man's death the city was saved. There is, of course, a notable contrast between Sheba's death with Christ's death. In the case of Sheba a guilty man died and the innocent inhabitants of the city were spared. In the case of Christ it's the very opposite. As Peter writes in 1Pe 3:18 *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.*

So looking at these two deaths together and noting the gospel analogies that arise from them we say regarding Christ – His death was tragic; His death was bloody; His death was unjust with regard to what He personally deserved; His death led to the advancement of His kingdom; and His death was a saving death. You and I are spared on account of His death. And it's here in the Lord's house on the Lord's Day with the Lord's people that we stop in our tracks, as it were, in order to contemplate His death with wonder and awe and equip ourselves to go forward for the extension of His kingdom and the subduing of our own rebellion and sin. I trust you're beholding Him today in the wonder of His glory in His atoning death.

It remains for us to consider:

III. The Wisdom of a Mother in Israel

And in the wisdom of this mother we can come away with some very practical lessons that pertain to our Christian lives. The negotiation of this woman with Joab begins in v. 16

where she summons Joab: Then cried a wise woman out of the city, *Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.*

Listen to the words of Matthew Henry on this wise mother of Israel. You ladies are going to love this: *It seems, none of all the men of Abel, none of the elders or magistrates, offered to treat with Joab, no, not when they were reduced to the last extremity. They were stupid and unconcerned for the public safety, or they stood in awe of Sheba, or they despaired of gaining any good terms with Joab, or they had not sense enough to manage the treaty. But this one woman and her wisdom saved the city. Souls know no difference of sexes. Though the man be the head, it does not therefore follow that he has the monopoly of the brains.*

Matthew Henry is so good on this point that I feel compelled to quote him further. I couldn't give you a better explanation and application than he does. He goes on to write:

*Joab and Abel's advocate soon agree that Sheba's head shall be the ransom of the city. Joab, though in a personal quarrel he had lately swallowed up and destroyed Amasa, yet, when he acts as a general, will by no means bear the imputation of delighting in bloodshed: "Far be it from me that I should delight to swallow up or destroy, or design it but when it is necessary for the public safety. The matter is not so. Our quarrel is not with your city; we would hazard our lives for its protection. Our quarrel is only with the traitor that is harboured among you; deliver him up, and we have done." A great deal of mischief would be prevented if contending parties would but understand one another. The city obstinately holds out, believing Joab aims at its ruin. Joab furiously attacks it, believing the citizens all confederates with Sheba. Whereas both were mistaken; let both sides be undeceived, and the matter is soon accommodated. The single condition of peace is the surrender of the traitor. Now listen to this application or this lesson that Matthew Henry draws from this negotiating process: *It is so in God's dealing with the soul, when it is besieged by conviction and distress: sin is the traitor; the beloved lust is the rebel; part with that, cast away the transgression, and all shall be well. No peace on any other terms. Our wise woman immediately agrees to the proposal: Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee presently.**

Here is the lesson, then, that we may take from this wise mother in Israel. Sin is not to be negotiated with. This wise mother reasoned with Joab but you'll note there was no reasoning with Sheba. There was no going back and forth between Joab and Sheba to see who could offer the best deal. There was only a negotiating with Joab on the condition that Sheba be turned over.

So our dealing with sin allows us but one thing – for sin to be put to death. Col 3:5 *Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.* Or as Paul writes in Ro 8:13 *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

This wise mother in Israel shows us, doesn't she, that if sin be allowed a place then destruction comes to the city but if sin be mortified then the city can be at peace. Our mortification of sin, of course, is based on a death that has already happened. *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. 10 For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. 11 Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Rom. 6:9-11).

These are some of the lessons, then, that arise from two trumpets, two deaths, and a wise mother in Israel. If this chapter in 2Samuel be read only historically it might seem crude. It's simply the account of a murder of an appointed leader and the decapitating of a rebel. If we view the chapter, though, through the lens of the gospel recognizing as we do that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished for all good works – then we should come away from the chapter being greatly profited.

May the Lord stamp His truth on each and every heart and may His Spirit make the application to every heart need.