

# War and Civil War

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] all right thanks so much for allowing me to be here I'm happy to preach and excited so let me open in prayer as well Father we thank you for the unique gift of your word which is an incredible blessing to us today as we hear your voice open our ears by your Holy Spirit and transform us into the image of your son we pray amen a kingdom is a complex thing those of us who have spent the last several months studying the book of Samuel have no illusions about that if there is one thing we cannot deny about the book of Samuel it's that it doesn't shy away from the messiness of life I can't tell you how many times as we've been going through a passage

I've sat back and thought what is going on why is this here what is Saul doing what is David doing what is God doing there are no easy answers and if there are the narrator doesn't seem to want to share them this should actually be a comfort to us if my own life is so confusing I'm glad to know that the story of an entire kingdom doesn't come without its share of bumps in the road ambiguous characters and mixed motives in chapter 20 alone we have tribalism a betrayal an underhanded assassination and a war won by a woman throwing a head over a wall can we make any sense of this well I have some good news this is the heritage of the Lord this is good news that most of the characters in the story seem to have forgotten but the wise woman reminds us who really reigns in this kingdom in verse 19 she asks Joab why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord why she asks why would you destroy this thing that is the Lord's this word heritage or inheritance reminds us that all of Israel is the Lord's this is God's land these are God's people this is

God's kingdom amidst all the complexity ambiguous motives and misplaced loyalties God is at work to bring about his purposes and to protect his kingdom though we may not always be loyal to God God will remain loyal to himself and to his people because this is his heritage and God is loyal to his heritage first however we have to dig through the complexity because these people are just like us our lives may not be filled with such violence and political intrigue but we understand jealousy we understand the desire for power the desire to be loved we understand doing good things for the wrong reasons and doing the wrong things for reasons we thought were right we have mixed motives multiple loyalties and we do things for a million different reasons you know

I don't think Israel ever forgot that they were Yahweh's chosen kingdom people are far too arrogant for that and it's pretty cool to be chosen by God however they had no idea what it meant to be God's kingdom to be God's heritage saying it is a lot easier than living out the implications of being a holy nation set apart and loyal to one Lord that is hard but hopefully we can learn a little bit from their mistakes now we're going to be focusing on three characters Sheba David and Joab and exploring where their loyalties lie but first I want to give a broad outline of this story because we won't be able to dig into all of it we want to get a little bit of the framework though so what is going on here so the beginning and the end at the beginning a guy named

Sheba who's from the same tribe as Saul rebels against David then at the end that same guy Sheba's head is thrown over a wall no more Sheba no more rebellion so Sheba's rebellion is the catalyst for the story everything that happens results from trying to put down this rebellion but the main story is about King David and two generals Amasa and Joab so Amasa is David's current general but the interesting thing is that he used to be Absalom's general he played for the other team so his loyalties are in question and Joab is David's old general but David has demoted him and replaced him with Amasa so as you can see there's a bit of tension there so scene one David sends

[ 6 : 11 ] Amasa out to gather the troops he gives him three days but Amasa doesn't come back on time so David freaks out and sends his mighty men out to chase after Sheba scene two who do the mighty men happen to meet on the road Amasa the wayward general and guess who shows up Joab demoted by David he still manages to play his part pretending to kiss Amasa he stabs him in the stomach instead and Amasa dies immediately so while Amasa is lying there dead on the ground Joab commandeers the army look at verse 11 and one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said whoever favors Joab whoever is for David let him follow Joab Joab this demoted general identifies loyalty to himself with loyalty to David now scene three

Joab has chased Sheba all the way to the city of Abel which is way up in the north tip of Israel and Joab attacks the city of Abel hoping to capture Sheba who's hidden beneath the walls but while he's battering these walls a wise woman shows up with a better idea instead of destroying the town which is part of Israel part of God's heritage why don't they just execute Sheba instead after all he's the rebel so they do they throw his head over the wall and that's the end of Sheba's rebellion well I'm glad we got all of that straightened out you see this is messy stuff but despite all of that this is God's heritage so let's dig a little bit deeper and explore some of the motivations and loyalties behind the scenes because again these guys are just like us their lives are complex their world is confusing and they do a lot of different things for a lot of different reasons let's start with

Sheba chapter 20 verse 1 now there happened to be there a worthless man well we know what the narrator thinks of this guy another worthless man like the wicked sons of Eli but in order to be fair to Sheba we have to put him in context because David in chapter 19 has just committed a major faux pas after the war with Absalom he allows his tribe of Judah to escort him back into the land but he doesn't wait for the rest of the tribes of Israel it's a grave dishonor and it feeds into suspicions that the northern tribes of Israel have had all along that David prefers the southern tribes it's hard for us to understand this deep seated tribal identity we just don't think like this anymore but it's sort of like if a man had a big 80th birthday party and then he only invited two of his 12 sons the other ten might be a little bit miffed you see

David is playing favorites it seems like the king of Judah is just that the king of Judah when he was supposed to be concerned about the whole kingdom so Sheba's rallying cry straight straight to their hearts we have no portion in David he says and we have no inheritance of the son of Jesse every man to his tents O Israel but the problem is that Sheba is trying to separate the gifts from the giver by setting himself up against David Sheba sets himself up against God because David despite his mistakes is still God's anointed Sheba is rightfully concerned for the future of his people his tribe and his land but by separating himself from God's chosen king he is choosing a future without

God there are no gifts without the giver everything Sheba has his inheritance his portion is a gift from the Lord so Sheba's loyalty is to the gifts when his first loyalty should be to the gift giver however Sheba still wins a lot of people over it says that all the men of Israel follow him apparently they're more concerned about their stuff than their God now we shouldn't be too harsh on Sheba because it isn't exactly as if David is inspiring confidence at this time though David is still God's anointed one he seems to have forgotten all of the responsibilities of this privilege he's pursuing a plan of political maneuvering to save face his own face not God's now

[ 11 : 51 ] I skipped verse three in my overview of the chapter because this is a little story of David and his concubines which seems out of place until we realize that the narrator has interrupted the story to remind us once again of the consequences of David's sin. David doesn't feature too much in this narrative but his failure to be the king that the people need underlies everything that happens. We are here in this mess because of David. David's sin has been exposed and it has shattered the kingdom and it has shattered individual lives like the lives of these concubines. This is injustice; these women have to live the rest of their lives under house arrest, cut off from the outside world through no fault of their own, simply because of the sinful choices of sinful men like

David. And yes, David takes care of them but he doesn't really do right by them and even now we can see that his loyalty is more to maintaining appearances than fulfilling his God-ordained role. Because what is David supposed to be doing as the anointed one? He is supposed to be maintaining justice, he is supposed to be protecting God's kingdom and God's people. Instead, he locks up his concubines to avoid public shame and his approach towards Sheba shows where his true concerns lie. Verse six and David said to Abishai, now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Is this the same man who once looked Goliath in the eye and said, who are you to defy the armies of the living?

God, it sure doesn't seem like it because Sheba has defied God and split the kingdom by rejecting David, God's anointed. But unfortunately, David doesn't seem to remember his role. He's afraid; his loyalty is now more about protecting himself than fulfilling God's plan as his anointed one. So enter into the story Joab. Joab, Joab, the ultimate pragmatist. The funny thing about Joab is that he shouldn't even be here and he ends up being the main catalyst of the story again. In the last chapter, David replaced Joab as general with Absalom's old general Amasa, but Joab is a survivor and he gets things done. Joab is deceitful, he's brutal, he's manipulative, but he gets things done. Now we'd be wrong to question

Joab's loyalty. Everything he does is for king and country, but Joab is one of those dangerous men who thinks that his way is the best way. So when Amasa fails to complete David's mission, Joab kills Amasa and takes control of the army for himself. He tenderly grabs the hold of Amasa's beard to give him a kiss of greeting, only to disembowel him with the sword in his left hand, an underhanded assassination. But who cares? Joab knows he'll do a better job as general anyway. It's practical. Now we need to be careful with people like Joab. We need to be careful if we're people like Joab because Joab is wildly successful. He inspires a lot of confidence but he leaves bodies in his wake.

Joab takes things into his own hands but the body of Amasa wallowing in his own blood reminds us of the cost of success without justice and loyalty without obedience. It's no wonder that Jesus warns us about people like Joab in Matthew 7, saying not everyone who says Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of the father who is in heaven. True loyalty means obedience, not setting our own agenda and claiming it as God's, even if that agenda is a successful one because ultimately Joab's campaign is successful. But if he had it his way, many more people may have died. Fortunately, a wise woman intervenes to stop the bloodshed to protect her kingdom from

[ 17:14 ] Joab's warring ways so only Sheba the rebellious Benjamite has to die his head tossed over a wall now should we see in this moment a divine intervention it seems that to do so would be taking this story a little bit further than it allows but the wise woman and the narrator does remind us what is at stake this this this is the heritage of the lord this messed up kingdom these twelve rebellious tribes god cares about all of it this is his heritage and he is loyal to his inheritance but frustrating as it may be god takes the long view his plan doesn't unfold overnight because sheba is not the last citizen of god's kingdom who will choose the comforts of life over the god who provides them david is not the last who will renege on his duties for the sake of saving his own skin and joab is not the last who will abuse his power in the name of the lord as i reflect on this passage i can't help but see myself in each of these men my loyalties are mixed look at sheba the kingdom wasn't shaping out the way he wanted it to he wasn't seeing the benefits he expected so he jumped ship why bother with this god why bother with this king if i'm not really getting anything out of it good question sometimes all we have is the faith that god is with us if all the gifts are taken away will we remain loyal to the gift giver what about david david who has received everything from god including a lot of responsibility living our lives according to the vision god has set before us that is hard maintaining justice loving others suffering for his sake that is hard because the world doesn't get it how often have

I reneged on the duties I know god has set before me in order to maintain this facade to save my own skin will we remain loyal to god's vision for our life and joab joab joab joab congratulations my friend you've conquered the world you've saved the kingdom but you did it all behind god's back god has given each and every one of us skills and abilities all he asks is that we obey 2000 years after the resurrection of christ it seems like god is taking a long time to bring about his kingdom couldn't we do it much better on our own but success is not the measure of loyalty to god faithfulness is will we remain loyal to doing things god's way my loyalties are mixed but thank god he is patient with us he knows our lives are complex and in fact i think he's the only one who can make any sense of any of it because though our loyalties are mixed his are not we are his heritage and he is always loyal to himself his kingdom and his people he was willing to get pretty messy to bring us back to himself philippians christ jesus who though he was in the form of god did not count equality with god a thing to be grasped but made himself nothing taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross god became man he lived in the same messy complex world that we do yet he remained loyal to his god his kingdom and his people so as we struggle mightily with our loyalties let's look to our savior jesus christ the true anointed one a kingdom is a complex thing but it is his kingdom and we are his heritage thank god that the kingdom depends on his loyalty and not our own amen we can have the earth one everywhere have one this one and salvation oh and the