

Explore the Bible: Averted

July 18, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for August 5 focuses on 2 Samuel 20:1-2, 14-21.*

We would hope that after the previous saga of battle and personal pain, David might be able to gain a sense of normalcy. With punishment and consequences, we easily come to the point where “enough is enough.” However, we are not the deciders of what “enough” is.

In the latter half of 2 Samuel 19, we see a heartwarming story between David and Barzillai that results in the latter receiving a well-earned blessing. Yet the simple act of crossing the Jordan River triggered division between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes of Israel. The quarrel was due to jealousy over who was “closer” to the king.

How have we seen divisions and quarrels rise up over simple circumstances? Division always is looking for an opportunity, and here it finds Israel and Judah splitting, a precursor to what would happen not much after David’s reign. In the “harsh” words of chapter 19, the opportunity would be taken advantage of, launching us into witnessing another struggle.

Division (2 Samuel 20:1-2)

Sheba (whose name could mean “seven” or “oath”) is a “troublemaker.” As Robert Chisholm points out, this unsympathetic label is the same expression Abigail (David’s wife) used to describe her first husband Nabal (1 Samuel 25:25); David was also accused as such by Shimei in 2 Samuel 16:7 (Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, 279).

Sheba was also a Benjamite (the same tribe as Saul), and so the rivalry continues to tear at David's kingship. While we should pay attention to what Sheba will do as an opportunistic divider, we should not consider him as much more than a necessary evil to this story. He will only be known as a "troublemaker" who sparked further trouble.

Ask your group: *What influence can a troublemaker have?* Here, Sheba made a statement many Israelites were sure to be thinking, and so they followed his lead. Trouble follows troublemakers. *How should we respond to those whose only role is to bring trouble?*

Civil War (2 Samuel 20:14-16)

David's statement in verse 6 is true: "Now Sheba son of Bicri will do us more harm than Absalom did." With this in mind, the king sent his warriors to battle to conquer this troublemaker and did so with ruthless intent. They completely surrounded Sheba and his growing group of followers.

This was a true civil war of greater proportions than the battle that Absalom led. Chaos was ensuing, and much carnage was inevitable as Joab was ready to annihilate the uprising. One might recall the visual of the gathering of armies in "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies" and how astounding and terrifying it appeared. Perhaps this was as astounding and terrifying, though not likely on the same graphic scale.

This is when something amazing happens—the single voice of a nameless woman pressed the pause button by calling out, "Listen! Listen!" This brings to mind Solomon's words: "Out in the open wisdom calls aloud, she raises her voice in the public square; on top of the wall she cries out, at the city gate she makes her speech" (Proverbs 1:20-21).

Wisdom Conquers (2 Samuel 20:17-21)

Within what seemed to be an inevitable crisis, we now see the significance of wisdom, especially when wisdom falls on listening ears. Joab, who was certainly guilty of making some gruff decisions, showed himself to be of wise ears. *How does this conversation between the woman and Joab strike you? What is it about this woman's words that pierced through the near-battle scenario?*

The “peaceful and faithful” reputation of the city Abel Beth Maacah would have been vanquished with the defeated should the battle have taken place. Thankfully, bloodshed was minimal, and wisdom won, bringing peace in more ways than one. Truly, the reputation of peace was worth saving. This makes us ask: *Are we willing to listen so that peace can be possible?*

The situation of this potential civil war makes the late President Abraham Lincoln's words vibrate all the more from his second inaugural address: “Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away.” War should not be enjoyed by anyone, but peace is worthwhile and should be afforded to all.

Conclusion

We cannot miss the negotiating skill and tactics that were used here. The “wise woman” spoke in such a way that both sides listened, resulting in peace and the squelching of Sheba's uprising. It really is something that the troublemaker was disposed of, because we see little or no defense from those who came to the city supporting his uprising.

Ask your group: *Do we believe that trouble will eventually run its course and will not be able to go on? Again, we hope that “enough is enough” when it comes to trouble, pain and consequences. In the case of Sheba, we*

see his troublemaking come to an end. In the case of wisdom, we see its power in every book of the Bible.

Perhaps the most telling phrase of the story is that “his (Sheba’s) men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home” (2 Samuel 20:22b). All seemed to be moving towards the peace that was hoped for. *Is peace something we can hope for and believe to be possible?* From what we see here, it would seem so.

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