

# 2 SAMUEL—WEEK 13

## DIVISION



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)  
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

Despite David's attempts at reconciling his people, they just can't stop contending for power. Eventually, the rebellions fizzle out and David returns to Jerusalem and sets up his administration.

Israel is starting to look like a real nation.

---

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal  
[tmmoore@ailbe.org](mailto:tmmoore@ailbe.org)

Thank you.

All the individual weekly study guides are available for download here:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/itemlist/category/91-deep-studies>

2 Samuel, Week 13 — Division  
Copyright 2023 F. Michael Slay  
The Fellowship of Ailbe  
[www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org)

*Except as indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.*

1 2 Samuel 19:31–39

*And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim and went across the Jordan with the king, to escort him across the Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, eighty years old. And he had provided the king with supplies while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very rich man. And the king said to Barzillai, “Come across with me, and I will provide for you while you are with me in Jerusalem.”*

*But Barzillai said to the king, “How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am today eighty years old. Can I discern between the good and bad? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any longer the voice of singing men and singing women? Why then should your servant be a further burden to my lord the king? Your servant will go a little way across the Jordan with the king. And why should the king repay me with such a reward? Please let your servant turn back again, that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him cross over with my lord the king, and do for him what seems good to you.”*

*And the king answered, “Chimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him what seems good to you. Now whatever you request of me, I will do for you.” Then all the people went over the Jordan. And when the king had crossed over, the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his own place.*

David’s desire to bless Barzillai is not grace; Barzillai needs no forgiveness. He’s been a faithful ally, and David wants to reward him.

But Barzillai recognizes that David is offering him first-class hospice care. That may be appealing to some folks, but Barzillai wants to spend his last days with his family.

Some things are more important than the trappings of luxury.

---

There used to be a bumper-sticker that read, “The one who dies with the most toys wins.” I never personally met anyone who put that on their bumper, so I don’t know what it meant for those who did.

But if it isn’t parody, it’s tragically false. Toys mean nothing, and counting how many you have is just an exercise in arithmetic.

We’ve all seen kids ignore a toy to play with the box it came in. What the child understands that we don’t is that life isn’t a competition, and the box can do fun things that the toy can’t.

But as the child grows, boxes lose their magic. Simple pleasures give way to chasing a goal. It might not be the goal of the bumper sticker, but it’s often no better.

And most people can’t even say what they’re chasing or why they’re chasing it.

Somehow Barzillai kept his wits as he grew up.

Oh, that we could learn to think like him.

2 2 Samuel 19:40–43

*Now the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. And all the people of Judah escorted the king, and also half the people of Israel. Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, “Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David’s men with him across the Jordan?”*

*So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, “Because the king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king’s expense? Or has he given us any gift?”*

*And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, “We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you. Why then do you despise us—were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?”*

*Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.*

This is one of the most disturbing passages in all scripture. Who cares who escorted David across the Jordan? Yeah, some folks missed being in the parade. Big deal. And do not miss that David’s escort wasn’t just the people of Judah, but “*also half the people of Israel.*”

The final sentence is especially foreboding. The Hebrew word that’s translated as *fiercer* (יִּקְשׁוּ, yi-qesh) means hard, harsh, difficult, hard-hearted, stiff-necked, or stubborn. The root word (קָשָׁה, qa-sha) is used, for example, to describe the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus.

And notice that it doesn’t explain what transpired, just the tone of the conversation.

But, if it doesn’t explain what happened, why is it even there?

Because it explains what’s about to happen.

---

Both sides are getting their noses out of joint over nothing, and, to make matters worse, each side is angry at the other’s attitude. The whole thing is pure competitiveness.

And it’s not even about anything either side got or will get; not even a meal with the king is involved. They’re just arguing over who has the greatest “share” of the king—whatever that means.

David did everything he could to treat everyone with dignity and grace. He’s not showing favoritism to anyone, but mercy to all. He’s giving them absolutely nothing to fight over.

So, they fight over who “escorted” David across the Jordan. Really. Soon this fight will escalate.

In Exodus, the LORD repeatedly uses “qa-sha” to refer to his chosen people as “stiff-necked”. Despite the spectacular miracles of their escape from Egypt, they aren’t happy.

They just can’t seem to relax and accept His blessings.

3 2 Samuel 20:1–10a

*And there happened to be there a rebel, whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said:*

*“We have no share in David,  
Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse;  
Every man to his tents, O Israel!”*

*So every man of Israel deserted David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, remained loyal to their king.*

*Now David came to his house at Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, his concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in seclusion and supported them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up to the day of their death, living in widowhood.*

*And the king said to Amasa, “Assemble the men of Judah for me within three days, and be present here yourself.” So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah. But he delayed longer than the set time which David had appointed him. 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 find for himself fortified cities, and escape us.” So Joab’s men, with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the mighty men, went out after him. And they went out of Jerusalem to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. When they were at the large stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa came before them. Now Joab was dressed in battle armor; on it was a belt with a sword fastened in its sheath at his hips; and as he was going forward, it fell out. Then Joab said to Amasa, “Are you in health, my brother?” And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword that was in Joab’s hand. And he struck him with it in the stomach, and his entrails poured out on the ground; and he did not strike him again. Thus he died.*

Notice Sheba’s complaint. *“We have no share in David.”*

This is ridiculous. Any king would have to be from one tribe. Nothing David has done favors his own tribe. He’s been careful to mend fences. David isn’t perfect, but in this phase he’s done everything right.

Nevertheless, Sheba’s complaint rings true with *every man of Israel*, and the rebellion is on. David is right when he says, *“Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom.”* Note two things.

First, David is thinking of the whole nation, not just of himself. Absalom’s rebellion was within his family. It was terrible for David, but it couldn’t fracture the nation the way Sheba’s rebellion could.

Second, David said, *“will do us more harm,”* not, *“could do us more harm.”* Yikes.

---

The tribes of Israel will find any excuse to fight with each other. Rivalry is systemic to the human condition. People hold grudges, especially ones with little foundation.

It’s why Joab killed Amasa.

4 2 Samuel 20:10b–21 (ESV)

*Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba the son of Bichri. 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." 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. When he was taken out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri.*

*And Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah, and all the Bichrites assembled and followed him in. 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.*

*Then a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'" 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." Then she said, "They used to say in former times, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel,' and so they settled a matter. 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?" Joab answered, "Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! 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."*

It's striking that Amasa's followers don't seem upset that Joab murdered their leader. And just like that, *all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri*. "Ding, dong the witch is dead."

Unfortunately for Sheba, he gets the same love. Joab is building a siege mound against Abel when a wise woman from the city calls out to negotiate terms of peace.

She does an impressive job of making her case, and Joab responds with a reasonable offer. They have no gripe with anyone other than Sheba. Give him up and we're good.

The woman replies with a shocking idea. "*Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall.*"

Only the dark comedy of some Monty Python movies can do that scene justice.

---

Notice how this passage doesn't display a battle of ideas. It's just a popularity contest between celebrities. No one is asked what they follow, only who they follow.

Israel is on the brink of being split, and over what? Who has the greatest grievance? Who has the prettiest hair?

Our culture of celebrity is nothing new.

5 2 Samuel 20:22–26

*Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent. So Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.*

*And Joab was over all the army of Israel; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; Adoram was in charge of revenue; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; Sheva was scribe; Zadok and Abiathar were the priests; and Ira the Jairite was a chief minister under David.*

They deliver Sheba's head and that's the end of it. The text doesn't say anything about how Sheba was buried. There's nothing to say. No one did anything special—like parade his head around or dump his body in a pit like they did with Absalom. He presumably got a normal burial.

The rebellion is over, and that's all there is to the story.

Then David sets up his administration, and we get a list of his cabinet officials. About half of this list is a repeat of the one in 2 Samuel 8:15–18.

But there's one new position, and it's more than a little surprising—*Adoram was in charge of revenue.*

The surprise is that the Hebrew word that's translated as "revenue" (מַמָּס, *mmas*) literally means, "body of forced laborers" (like what the Israelites were in Egypt). The ESV has this as, "*Adoram was in charge of the forced labor.*"

What does David need this guy for? Who's he going to manage?

If David had just conquered and subjugated a rival nation, this would make sense, but that is not what has been going on. The only explanation is that he's planning something—maybe not wars, but projects—and he's thinking about the laborers he'll need.

We'll see where this leads.

---

The NKJV translating *mmas* as "revenue" seems strange, but it's just a recognition of what government is. All governments use force or the threat of force to collect taxes, conscript people into military service, and otherwise regulate life.

This is essential; it makes society civilized and keeps us safe. Just look at the decay that resulted from the "defund the police" movement in the US.

In a sense, Adoram is in charge of team building. Governments form larger teams. Big teams do big things, like build the temple.

In appointing Adoram, David is starting to form a fully functioning government.

Israel won't just be an extended family, but a real nation.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What are people chasing?
2. What do Christians fight over?
3. What's the silliest church split you've heard of?
4. Why does celebrity have such power over us?
5. What should the government NOT control?

*Items for prayer:*