

Who was Amasa in the Bible?

Amasa was a nephew of King David who was involved in the coup attempt against David. Appointed by Absalom, David's son whose ambitions included his father's crown, Amasa led the rebel army that sought to overthrow King David. Amasa's mother was Abigail, one of David's sisters, and he was a cousin of Joab, whose mother was also a sister of David (2 Samuel 17:25; 1 Chronicles 2:16-17). Joab served as one of King David's military commanders, and it was he who eventually killed Amasa—not in battle, but by an act of treachery (2 Samuel 20:8-10).

Amasa's story is intricately intertwined with that of Absalom. Absalom was the third son of King David; in many ways, Absalom was much like his father—hot-blooded, impetuous, and popular among his countrymen. David was a man after God's own heart, but, as a parent, David had failings. His household could only be described as dysfunctional. One of David's sons, Amnon, raped his half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-19). Despite the outrage of this incestuous crime, David did nothing. Perhaps David's refusal to discipline Amnon fueled the pent-up anger inside Absalom. For two years, Absalom patiently bided his time as if all was well with Amnon, but then, in a carefully planned scheme, Absalom had Amnon murdered (2 Samuel 13:23-29). No doubt, Absalom felt justified in killing his half-brother, as his father had done nothing to avenge Tamar. From that time forward, David's relationship with Absalom was strained.

Over time, Absalom grew restless with ambition. He began plotting his father's overthrow. When Absalom's plan to take the throne was in place, he appointed Amasa captain over his rebel army (2 Samuel 17:25). For a while, it appeared as though Absalom's scheme would succeed, but, in the end, Amasa's forces were defeated. Absalom was killed by Joab, much to the distress of King David, who had wanted to spare

Absalom's life. David returned to Jerusalem, and his rule over Israel was solidified.

Displeased with Joab for slaying his son Absalom, King David planned to remove him from leadership and replace him with Amasa, whom he was willing to forgive. David sent the message to Amasa: "Are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you are not the commander of my army for life in place of Joab" (2 Samuel 19:13). During a subsequent military campaign, however, Joab murdered Amasa in cold blood:

While [Joab and his men] were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath.

Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died (2 Samuel 20:8-10a).

Amasa must have been a man of capabilities, for he garnered the attention of both David and his favored son, Absalom. Unfortunately, Amasa may have lacked a measure of discernment. He foolishly joined the rebellion against his uncle. And he fatally trusted Joab as a comrade, although Joab was a man with a reputation for bloody revenge. An extra dose of discernment might have prevented Amasa from falling prey to his adversary.