

A. Introduction

1. when I was young, there was an expression that was used from time to time in church bulletins or even local newspapers
 - a. usually when some lady had reached an elevated age
 - b. or, as part of an obituary notice
 - c. that Mrs So-and-so was the mother of so many children, the grandmother of so many and great-grandmother of so many; that she was, indeed, 'a mother in Israel'
 - d. which made me wonder, for as far as I could tell, the person was not Jewish and had never been to Palestine

2. well, the phrase 'a mother in Israel' is used twice in Scripture
 - a. once, by Deborah describing herself, in Judges 5:7, after the slaying of Sisera and the victory of Israel over Jabin, king of the Canaanites
 - b. and once in our Scripture reading for today, where it is used by a wise woman, either speaking of her city, or, as we will apply it today, of herself: 2 Samuel 20:13b-22a:

3. ^{13b}... all the people went on after Joab to pursue Sheba the son of Bichri. ¹⁴ And he {Sheba} went through all the tribes of Israel to Abel and Beth Maachah and all the Berites. So they were gathered together and also went after Sheba. ¹⁵ Then they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth Maachah; and they cast up a siege mound against the city, and it stood by the rampart. And all the people who were with Joab battered the wall to throw it down. ¹⁶ Then a wise woman cried out from the city, "Hear, Hear! Please say to Joab, 'Come nearby, that I may speak with you.'" ¹⁷ When he had come near to her, the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Hear the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening." ¹⁸ So she spoke, saying, "They used to talk in former times, saying, 'They shall surely seek guidance at Abel,' and so they would end disputes. ¹⁹ I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of

the Lord?" ²⁰ And Joab answered and said, "Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! ²¹ That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city." So the woman said to Joab, "Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall." ²² 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. (NKJV)

4. now, you most probably are thinking, 'what a gory story to tell on Mother's Day! ... what's Garth thinking of!'
 - a. certainly, this seems
 - (A) a bit too gruesome for a Sunday morning!
 - (B) a most unmotherly-like kind of activity!
 - (C) not the way that we should encourage mothers to behave!
 - b. yet, in this history, we find this wise woman exhibiting some important qualities which we value in a mother
 - c. so let us look at it from that point of view and see the lessons that are to be learned and to highlight them

B. Mother's Day

1. a note about the history of this day:
 - a. Anna M. Jarvis (1864-1948) first suggested the national observance of an annual day honouring all mothers because she had loved her own mother so dearly. At a memorial service for her mother on May 10, 1908, Miss Jarvis gave a carnation (her mother's favourite flower) to each person who attended.
 - b. Within the next few years, the idea of a day to honour mothers gained popularity, and Mother's Day was observed in a number of large cities in the U.S.
 - c. On May 9, 1914, by an act of Congress, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. He established the day as a time for "public expression of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country." By then it had become customary to wear white carnations to honour

departed mothers and red to honour the living, a custom that continues to this day. -{2}.

- d. so this not Mothers' (s-apostrophe) Day
 - (A) a day for honouring mothers in general
 - (B) but Mother's (apostrophe-s) Day, being primarily a time when we give honour to our own mothers, my own mother, in response to the devotion, care and labour they have gone through on our behalf

2. now, I recognize that in this world, where relationships have been made dysfunctional by sin, not everyone has the same happy, ideal relationship with his or her parents
 - a. nevertheless, it still behoves us to honour our mothers
 - b. for as Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:2-3 (I am using that in case anyone thinks the Old Testament no longer applies!) "Honour your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise) that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth" (NAS)
 - c. so, let us take this opportunity to honour our mothers

3. and, yet, a word of caution concerning this text and the expression, 'a mother in Israel'
 - a. remember those notices I told you about which appeared in the church bulletin in which for 'a mother in Israel' all her descendants were counted and listed ... implying that the more children, the more the mother?
 - b. well, although we are told that Deborah, a prophetess and a judge, was the wife of Lapidoth, we do not find in the Scriptures any such enumeration of her children
 - c. nor for this wise woman of Abel Beth-Ma'achah do we find any such enumeration and naming of her children
 - d. indeed, the emphasis for both these mothers,
 - (A) seems not so much to be with their own children,
 - (B) but with their status within the community of Israel
 - (C) as a person who cared for and nurtured her people
 - e. so we would expand the honour we give this day beyond that of its secular origin to include along with

mothers by maternity all those who have a special place in children's lives by their spiritual, mothering ministry to children

C. The Background

1. All that we know about this man Sheba, the son of Bichri, of the tribe of Benjamin is to be found in 2 Samuel 20
 - a. shortly before this time, Absalom, David's son, had won the affections of the people of Israel by his intrigue and words, supplanting his father as the King of Israel
 - b. Absalom's revolt was short-lived and when David had been restored to the throne that was rightfully his,
 - c. for which God had selected him and made him the Messiah, the anointed one of Israel,
 - d. we now find that this rebel, this Sheba, continued the revolt that Absalom had started by these words in verse 1: *'We have no portion in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!'*
 - e. what happened? ... verse 2 continues ... *So all the men of Israel withdrew from following David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the men of Judah remained steadfast to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem.*
2. so then, this man, Sheba, was a rebel and a traitor
 - a. one who had revolted against the rightful king
 - b. one who had denied the claim of God's Messiah
 - c. one whose life was forfeit, who deserved to die
3. which will explain, I think, why the Joab and his army chased him all the way to Abel Beth-Ma'achah where he holed up, seeking to escape the punishment that was due to him
 - a. and we can now note some qualities about this woman:
 - (A) she was wise
 - (B) she was peaceful (yes! she was peaceful)
 - (C) she was faithful
 - (D) she was just

D. This Mother was Wise

1. she was a wise woman, in a city renowned for its wisdom
 - a. that she was eminently wise, markedly so, is to be found in the following circumstances
 - (A) she was permitted to speak on behalf of all the city
 - (B) she was able to speak convincingly in its defence
 - (C) and she was obeyed by the people of the city
 - b. every mother is well aware of her need for wisdom
 - (A) everyone who ever seeks to instruct children knows full well the truth of the statement, 'we are only a single generation away from returning to being savages'
 - (B) and where did this wise woman find her wisdom?
 - c. well, she was 'a mother in Israel,' one who knew Israel's – and her – relationship with Yahweh God
2. the Bible tells us the source of wisdom
 - a. Proverbs 9:10, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* (NAS)
 - b. so, you mothers today, who are in need of wisdom more than ever, are able to turn to the Lord, wisdom's source
 - c. let me make a minor alteration to James 1:5, without destroying its truth, "But if any {mother} lacks wisdom, let {her} ask of God, who gives to all {} generously and without reproach, and it will be given to {her}." (NAS, altered)
 - d. that's God's promise: you can take it to the bank!

E. This Mother was Peaceful

1. do you remember the character of this city's wisdom?
 - a. people would come to Abel if they had a dispute, and at Abel they would get advice to settle it, to bring peace
 - b. it was a reconciling wisdom, a peaceful wisdom

2. in this mother you find she not only claims being peaceable
 - a. but her actions and her words are peaceable
 - b. she speaks with both force and humility to Joab
 - c. she uses reason, not guile, drawing upon one of Joab's best character traits, his patriotism, to gain her purpose

3. many is the time a mother needs all of God's grace to settle family disputes, arguments among children
 - a. a mother will be well, if she follows the instruction of Psalm 34:12-14 (again I have altered the words slightly): "Who is the {mother} who desires life, And loves length of days that {she} may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; Seek peace, and pursue it." (NAS, altered)
 - b. a mother can ask for God's wisdom which is a peaceable wisdom, James 3:17: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy." (NAS)
 - c. 'Blessed,' said Jesus, 'are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God' (Matthew 5:9)

F. This Mother was Faithful

1. she didn't take the easy road
 - a. here was Joab, King David's five-star general, with all of his troops, come against this city because the rebel Sheba had fled and was hiding there
 - b. the city was walled and protected? ... no problem! build a bank of earth! march right up onto and over the walls!
 - c. now, as a woman, she would probably have escaped the worst that would have happened to the townspeople
 - d. but she identified with this city, with its people – and it is here that the line becomes blurred as to whether the term 'a mother in Israel' refers to her or to her city – no matter
 - e. for, there she is, on the walls of the city, exposed to the battle and siege of the city, calling out to this

fierce Joab to come and let her speak to him

f. for she cares for a people who are God's inheritance

g. she was faithful because she saw her duty and did it, she did it in the face of danger, trusting in her Lord

2. a mother is faithful – she remains identified with her children

a. I suppose that many a mother has said these words, 'you may no longer be a child, but you are still my child'

b. the caring and nurturing of one's children does not cease with manhood or womanhood, does not end when they leave home ... ask any older parent!

c. she is faithful, because she is trusting in a faithful God

G. This Mother was Just

1. her actions demonstrate that she admitted, she confessed that David was God's rightful king, God's Messiah

a. when she hears of the right and wrong of the matter, of Sheba's guilt, there is no debate, no tarrying

b. she immediately sets in motion the just solution

c. where there is punishment deserved, there is punishment to be dealt and it will be done

2. now, as an illustration of discipline, this is a little extreme

a. In 1971, President KoBassa of the Central African Republic honoured the Mother's Day by rounding up all the men who were in jail for committing crimes against their mothers. Then he executed them. ^{3}.

b. nor do we advocate such extremes

3. yet a mother, much as it hurts her, disciplines her children

a. not in opposition to, but in co-operation with the father

b. we have just planted a number of new fruit trees and my job was to drive in stakes to which they could be fastened for otherwise, they would grow bent and misshapen

- c. likewise, without correction, a child can grow up bent
- d. but a mother who has confessed that Jesus is her Messiah, her Lord, Who has treated her with mercy in saving her from sin, will exercise that correcting discipline with love

H. Conclusion

1. this wise woman, a mother in Israel, shows a number of qualities which every mother should seek and for which we honour our own mothers (physical or spiritual) this day
 - a. being wise mothers
 - b. being peaceful mothers
 - c. being faithful mothers
 - d. being just mothers

2. Motherhood is a life-long commitment
 - a. this applies whether we are talking of nurturing and caring for natural children by childbirth
 - b. or that of watching over spiritual children
 - c. but the mother who first commits her life to Jesus as Lord will find Him always there to help her in all she does.

3. Children, husbands: did you notice when we read Proverbs 31 this morning that it is alright to praise your mother, your wife? Living for Jesus will help you to honour and to praise her.

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. Fredericksburg Bible Illustrator Supplements, Kerux illustrations #9327
3. From an old sermon by David Holwick, Kerux illustration #2187