

The “sons of Zeruiah”—Joab, Abishai, Asahel— David’s covert assassins in 2 Samuel?

After the death of Abner at the hand of Joab, David says:

Today I am powerless, even though anointed king; these men, **the sons of Zeruiah, are too violent for me.** YHWH pay back the one who does wickedly in accordance with his wickedness!" (3.39)

After Abishai offers to take off the head of Shimei, who has denounced David as a “Man of bloods! Man of Belial!”:

But the king said, "**What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?** If he is cursing because YHWH has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" (16.10)

And again later, after Abishai again offers to put Shimei to death:

David said, "**What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah,** that you should today become an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?" (19.22)

And on his deathbed, David tells Solomon (after Joab killed Absalom’s general, Amasa, although Amasa had brought people back to David):

"Moreover **you know also what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner son of Ner, and Amasa son of Jether, whom he murdered,** retaliating in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist, and on the sandals on his feet. Act therefore according to your wisdom, but **do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace.** (1 Kings 2.5-6; Joab dies at the hand of Benaiah, 2.34)

Only Abishai is reported to have survived David’s reign or the succession, 2 Samuel 23.18