

2 Samuel 3:1-21
August 13, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you hear the phrase “soap opera,” what thoughts come to mind? [Let people engage]

Transition: Soap operas are typically characterized by an emphasis on family life, personal relationships, sexual dramas, emotional and moral conflicts, etc. Today’s text reads a bit like a soap opera. We’re going to see an unstable relationship between Abner and Ishbosheth, an accusation that angers Abner, Abner acting out on his anger, and then crossing over from the house of Saul to the house of David with an agenda.

We are continuing the remarkable story of how David eventually becomes the king over both Israel and Judah to become a united people. But it doesn’t just happen overnight once Saul died. We learned last week that David reigned in Hebron for 7.5 years. During this time as we’ll see in verse 1, there has been a war between the house of Saul and the house of David that has lasted a long time (cf. v. 6). As you might imagine, the supporters of Saul’s family were determined to resist David’s reign as king by limiting him to Judah only. But those of David’s dynasty were convinced that it was time for “the man after God’s own heart” to become ruler of the whole nation, i.e. both Israel AND Judah. So there is an undercurrent of tensions as we will see in our reading. Would someone read 3:1-21 aloud?

BOOK:

3 The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

² Sons were born to David in Hebron:

His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel;

³ his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel;

the third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;

⁴ the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith;

the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;

⁵ and the sixth, Ithream the son of David’s wife Eglah.

These were born to David in Hebron.

Abner Goes Over to David

⁶ During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. ⁷ Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, “Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine?”

⁸ Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said, and he answered, “Am I a dog’s head—on Judah’s side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven’t handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman! ⁹ May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for

David what the LORD promised him on oath ¹⁰ and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba." ¹¹ Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.

¹² Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, "Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you."

¹³ "Good," said David. "I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal, daughter of Saul, when you come to see me." ¹⁴ Then David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, demanding, "Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins."

¹⁵ So Ish-Bosheth gave orders and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish. ¹⁶ Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go back home!" So he went back.

¹⁷ Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, "For some time you have wanted to make David your king. ¹⁸ Now do it! For the LORD promised David, 'By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.'"

¹⁹ Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person. Then he went to Hebron to tell David everything that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin wanted to do. ²⁰ When Abner, who had twenty men with him, came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and his men. ²¹ Then Abner said to David, "Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a compact with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

We begin the chapter's opening verse with the end in mind. From there, the writer unfolds the schemes and details of kingdom intrigue for us. There are birth announcements, power moves, peace agreements made and broken, deceptions, murders, people wanting the right thing but going about it the wrong way. And in the middle of the bloodthirsty ambition surrounding him, David was becoming a leader. While he's not without shame, we get to witness David's growth as a man and king. Rather than take part in the foolish mischief of those who'd woo him toward calculated misdeeds to secure the throne, we see that David engaged in the practices of honor and justice, poetic lament, and respect. It's those things that honor his God and serve to build loyalty in his people; it's the right things, for the right reasons.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (2 Sam 3)*. Victor Books.

B. The murder of Abner (chap. 3).

David's many wives were chosen in direct violation of Deut. 17:15–17. Some students believe that this expression of David's lust eventually led to the many family problems that plagued his later days. Amnon violated his half-sister Tamar (chap. 13); Absalom rebelled against David and tried to capture the crown (chaps. 13–18); and Adonijah tried to wrest the kingdom from Solomon (1 Kings 1:5ff). Abner had problems with lust too; for he took one of Saul's concubines and incurred the displeasure of the pretended king. This led to a disruption between Abner and Ishbosheth. Abner tried to make a peaceful agreement with David, but the "sons of Zeruah" plotted against him and killed him (vv. 26–30). While Joab did the actual killing, it is likely that his brother was in on the plans. Joab's hands were stained with blood before his own death came; for he not only killed Abner, but also Absalom (2 Sam. 18:14) and Amasa (2 Sam. 20:10). David asked his son Solomon to deal with Joab, and he did (1 Kings 2:5–6, 28–34). How different history would have been had Abner lived, it is difficult to tell. Certainly, Joab held unusual power over David, particularly after he assisted the king in his murderous plot against innocent Uriah (11:14ff). Note, however, David's godly conduct in the matter of Abner's death.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). *2 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 459) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

3:1–11. The struggle was not limited to individuals but included dynasties. This is evident in verse 1: **The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time** (cf. v. 6). The supporters of Saul's family were determined to resist David's designs and to limit him to Judah. But those of David's dynasty were convinced that it was time for "the man after God's own heart" to become ruler of the whole nation. The historian described these power plays by recounting the marriages of **David** to six wives (vv. 2–5; see the chart "David's Family"), especially **Maacah, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur**, a state northeast of the Sea of Kinnereth (see 15:8). In the North, **Abner** took **Rizpah, a concubine of Saul**, as one of his own, a common practice in the ancient Near East when one wished to indicate his succession to a king. **Ish-Bosheth** understood the meaning of the act and rebuked **Abner** (3:7). In anger **Abner** responded that he would now work to deliver **the kingdom of Saul** over to **David** (vv. 9–10). Abner would help **establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba**. This ruptured the relationship between **Abner** and **Ish-Bosheth** (v. 11).

3:12–21. **Abner** then proposed to **David** that they **make an agreement** (a covenant) and that he would help David secure **Israel**. **David** demanded that Abner restore, as a sign of his good faith, his long-separated wife **Michal** to him (vv. 13–14; cf. 1 Sam. 18:20–27; 25:44). After this was accomplished (2 Sam. 3:15–16), **Abner** met with Israel's **elders**, especially those from **Benjamin**, Saul's own tribe, and persuaded them that the rule of **David** over them was in their best interest. This, of course, elevated **Abner** considerably in David's estimation, which greatly displeased David's loyal men.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 123). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God Strengthens David (3:1–39). David's house increased while Ish-Bosheth's foothold weakened. David possessed many sons, a sign in antiquity of strength and blessing.

As a result of his dispute with Ish-Bosheth, Abner defected to David's side. Abner had sexual relations with a concubine in the royal harem. Ish-Bosheth interpreted this as a threat to his throne (see 16:21–22; 1 Kgs. 2:22). Abner was so incensed at this charge that he secretly met with David in Hebron. Abner vowed to bring all Israel under David's rule. David agreed on the condition that Abner return his wife Michal, whom Saul had given to another man (1 Sam. 18:20–27). Abner left under a covenant of peace.

Tatum, S. L. (1972). *2 Samuel*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (pp. 180-181). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Abner's Revolt to David and His Murder (2 Sam. 3:1–39)

The passage—The principal character of this passage is Abner. While David was growing stronger in his claim to leadership of Israel, the house of Saul was growing weaker. It was not Ishbosheth who had the power, but rather Abner. Abner's taking one of Saul's concubines for himself was almost as if he were claiming royal rights for himself.

Abner sent messengers to David. He sought to make a covenant with him. David's condition was that Ishbosheth return Michal, Saul's daughter, who had been given to David as a wife. She seems to have hated David and was living with Paltiel. Abner arranged for the return. He came with some of his leaders to David and promised to unite Israel under his reign. David made a feast for him and sent him away in peace.

Joab, David's military leader, returning from a battle, heard about Abner's feast with David. He was very angry. He accused David of folly and Abner of deception. Joab secretly called for Abner's return and he murdered him.

Special points—Joab and Abner were strong personal enemies. It may be that David arranged for Joab to be away while he was dealing with Abner. Joab took advantage of David's dependence on him to get his revenge against Abner.

Michal's return to David was probably against her will. Her husband, Paltiel, protested, but only briefly. David did not seek her return in love, but rather as a political move. This shows the low estate of womanhood prior to the coming of Christ.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 3:1-21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.