

2 Samuel 2
August 6, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Most of us when we think of 1 Samuel, we mostly remember the tragic transition of kingship from Saul to David. You will recall that Saul rejected the word of the Lord, and the consequence was the loss of kingship to David. The rest of 1 Sam is filled with multiple storylines of Saul's jealousy toward David and his attempts to kill David! And of course, the Lord protected David in all attempts at his life. Moreover, David RESPECTED that Saul was the Lord's anointed king while he was alive, and he chose not to kill Saul even when he had opportunity to do so.

Transition: We left off having covered 2 Samuel, chapter 1, in which we learn that Saul has died. David has mourned the death of both Saul and Jonathan, and now David becomes the monarch first over Judah where he reigns in Hebron as his capital for the next 7.5 years. Eventually, we will see his rule over all of Israel where he makes Jerusalem his capital and reigns for 33 years. The first five (5) chapters will be about David's *political triumphs*.

We begin today in Chapter 2 where we see David's first victory over Ishbosheth, and we'll watch how that plays out in chapters 3-4 over the next couple of weeks. Let's begin with the reading of Chapter 2 to get it in our mind's eye. Would someone volunteer to read it?

BOOK:

David Anointed King Over Judah

2 In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD. "Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?" he asked.

The LORD said, "Go up."

David asked, "Where shall I go?"

"To Hebron," the LORD answered.

² So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³ David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. ⁴ Then the men of Judah came to Hebron and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When David was told that it was the men of Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul, ⁵ he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead to say to them, "The LORD bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master by burying him. ⁶ May the LORD now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favor because you have done this. ⁷ Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

War Between the Houses of David and Saul

⁸ Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. ⁹ He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri (or Asher) and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel.

¹⁰ Ish-Bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. ¹¹ The length of time David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

¹² Abner son of Ner, together with the men of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. ¹³ Joab son of Zeruiah and David's men went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. One group sat down on one side of the pool and one group on the other side.

¹⁴ Then Abner said to Joab, "Let's have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand in front of us."

"All right, let them do it," Joab said.

¹⁵ So they stood up and were counted off—twelve men for Benjamin and Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve for David. ¹⁶ Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent's side, and they fell down together. So that place in Gibeon was called Helkath Hazzurim. (Field of Daggers or Hostilities)

¹⁷ The battle that day was very fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's men.

¹⁸ The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. ¹⁹ He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him. ²⁰ Abner looked behind him and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?"

"It is," he answered.

²¹ Then Abner said to him, "Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the young men and strip him of his weapons." But Asahel would not stop chasing him.

²² Again Abner warned Asahel, "Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?"

²³ But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit; so Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot. And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died.

²⁴ But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner, and as the sun was setting, they came to the hill of Ammah, near Giah on the way to the wasteland of Gibeon. ²⁵ Then the men of Benjamin rallied behind Abner. They formed themselves into a group and took their stand on top of a hill.

²⁶ Abner called out to Joab, "Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?"

²⁷ Joab answered, "As surely as God lives, if you had not spoken, the men would have continued the pursuit of their brothers until morning."

²⁸ So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men came to a halt; they no longer pursued Israel, nor did they fight anymore.

²⁹ All that night Abner and his men marched through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, continued through the whole Bithron (ravine) and came to Mahanaim.

³⁰ Then Joab returned from pursuing Abner and assembled all his men. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's men were found missing. ³¹ But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty Benjamites who were with Abner. ³² They took Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and arrived at Hebron by daybreak.

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:

How may a person know the will of God for his life? David inquired of the Lord. God told him what to do and where to begin. There must first be a willingness to do God's will. God does not reveal his purpose for our lives simply to satisfy our curiosity. He does so in order that we may be obedient.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

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

II. David Struggles against Saul's Family (2-4)

We now begin those "political intrigues" that plagued David throughout all his life. Even though David sought the mind of God, he could not escape the plots and plans of others; and because he was indebted to these men, it was difficult for him to oppose them. David's march to the throne was a difficult one.

A. The murder of Asahel (chap. 2).

Joab, Abishai, and Asahel were all sons of David's half-sister Zeruiah (1 Chron. 2:16 and 2 Sam. 17:25). Thus, they were David's nephews as well as valued men in his army. David first reigned over Judah, his own tribe, with his headquarters at Hebron. However, Abner, the commander of

Saul's army, had made Saul's son Ishbosheth the king over the other tribes. He relocated the capital over the Jordan River in Mahanaim to protect himself and the new king from David's men. Of course, Abner had personal interest in the household of Saul since he was Saul's cousin (1 Sam. 14:50). It was to his advantage to see Ishbosheth reign, but he was deliberately rebelling against God's Word when he crowned him. God had made it very clear that David alone was to rule Israel. Perhaps Christians today are like the Jews of that day: we permit our King to reign over only a part of our lives, and the result is conflict and sorrow. Abner's murder of Asahel was the prelude to the "long war" between the two kings (3:1). As we shall see, the two remaining brothers avenged this death, much to David's grief.

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, pp. 432-434) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

B. Battle between David and Abner (chap. 2)

2:1–4a. **David** had looked back and lamented the past, but with the death of Saul came the future to which he had looked since the day of his anointing by Samuel more than 15 years before (1 Sam. 16:13). There was a power vacuum, particularly in **Judah**, now that Saul and three of his sons by his wife Ahinoam were gone. (Saul had two other sons by his concubine Rizpah, 2 Sam. 21:8, 11.) **David**, therefore, sought the mind of God and was told to go to **Hebron** where, at last, he was formally installed by oil-anointing as **king over ... Judah**. (Later he was anointed a third time, as king of the entire nation, [5:3].) This was a decisive and important move for it immediately alienated him from the Philistines with whom he had taken refuge and made an alliance; it signified the quasi-independence of Judah from Israel, an attitude which would find complete expression at the division of the kingdom after Solomon's death (1 Kings 12:16); and it asserted David's reign as being in rivalry with that of Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, who succeeded his father in the North.

2:4b–11. **David** at once began to demonstrate his diplomatic skills. He first gained the friendship of the people of **Jabesh Gilead** by commending them for their treatment of Saul's remains (cf. 1 Sam. 31:11–13). David reminded them that now that **Saul** was **dead** he was their sovereign.

Next David began to deal with the problem of succession to **Saul**. **Abner ... commander of Israel's army** now became the effective power behind the throne. **He** placed **Ish-Bosheth** (known otherwise and certainly originally as Esh-Baal; 1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39), apparently Saul's youngest and least effective **son**, in authority. The name Esh-Baal means "fire of Baal," so to avoid the pagan overtones the name was changed to Ish-Bosheth ("man of shame"). His age of **40 years** (2 Sam. 2:10) when his father died is an important chronological fact. Since he is not listed as one of the sons of **Saul** at the beginning of Saul's reign (1 Sam. 14:49) but is included in the total list of sons (1 Chron. 8:33), he must have been born after Saul became king, thus indicating at least a 40-year reign for Saul (see Acts 13:21; also see comments on 1 Sam. 13:1.)

Reigning from **Mahanaim**, in the east-central part of the Transjordan, **Ish-Bosheth** had a brief tenure of only **two years**. The fact that **David** reigned for **seven** and one-half **years** at **Hebron** before he made Jerusalem his capital (2 Sam. 5:5) need not imply that Ish-Bosheth also reigned for seven and one-half years at Mahanaim. This would contradict 2:10. There may well

have been an interregnum of some length between Saul and Ish-Bosheth, and clearly **David** reigned for some time over **Judah** from **Hebron** after Ish-Bosheth's death.

2:12–32. From the beginning of **David's** reign his real rival in the North was not **Ish-Bosheth** but **Abner**. As though to clear the air and settle the question of royal succession, **Abner** and David's military leader **Joab** appointed elite troops, **12 men** on a side, to engage in **hand-to-hand** combat at **Gibeon**. The winners would decide the issue. The nature of the contest is unclear. Perhaps it took the form of a wrestling match which ended up in swordplay. The irregular use of daggers is suggested by naming the **place** of the contest **Helkath Hazzurim** ("field of daggers").

The result was a victory for **David's men**, but they were not satisfied to end the contest there. Instead they made hot pursuit of **Abner** and his friends, a chase that resulted in the seasoned warrior **Abner** taking the life of **Asahel**, younger brother of David's leader **Joab** (v. 23). **Joab** and a surviving brother **Abishai** vowed to take revenge (v. 24) but when faced by immensely unfavorable odds gave up the chase (vv. 25–28). **Abner** then made his way home to **Mahanaim** (by way of **the Arabah**, i.e., the Jordan Valley, and **the whole Bithron**, a deep ravine leading to Mahanaim, v. 29), while **Joab returned by night** to **Hebron** (v. 32). David lost 20 soldiers, but **Abner** lost **360** (vv. 30–31). The battle was over but not the war.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 122). Broadman & Holman Publishers.*

David Anointed at Hebron (2:1–32). David showed his dependence on the Lord by inquiring what he should do about Saul's kingdom. The Lord instructed David to go to Hebron. There the elders of Judah anointed him king. His first act as king was the gracious commendation of the men of Jabesh Gilead who had bravely rescued the body of Saul (see 1 Sam. 31:8–13).

David was appointed by God. In contrast, Abner installed the surviving son of Saul, Ish-Bosheth, as David's rival. Ish-Bosheth, meaning *man of shame*, was changed from the original Esh-Baal (*man of Baal*; see 1 Chr. 8:33; 9:39). Ish-Bosheth reigned from Mahanaim in Transjordan during David's rule in Hebron.

With the outbreak of war, Abner confronted Joab, David's general, in battle at Gibeon. Abner was pursued by Joab's brother, Asahel. Abner warned him to stop, but he continued; and Abner was forced to kill him.

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

David Begins His Reign (2 Sam. 2:1–32)

The passage—David had been anointed king of Israel much earlier by Samuel. He won the hearts of the people after his victory over Goliath and the Philistines. His popularity vexed the jealousy of Saul, and David became a fugitive. Saul sought to kill him. David had opportunities to kill Saul, but always spared him.

David sought for God's leadership. He asked if he should establish his throne. He inquired about the most appropriate place to begin. God led him to Hebron. He and his men with their families went where God had directed. They were accepted by the men of Judah, and David was anointed as king over them.

His right to be king did not go unchallenged. Abner, a cousin of Saul, and a commander of his army, made Ishbosheth king over Gilead. This set the stage for a civil war. The house of Saul and the house of David struggled for power.

Neither of the opponents seemed anxious for war. Abner suggested a “game of war” in an attempt at some kind of compromise settlement. The “game” turned into a bloody battle and the war was on. Asahel, David’s nephew, and younger brother of Joab, chased after Abner. When he could not get him to turn away, Abner killed him.

Truth for today—How may a person know the will of God for his life? David inquired of the Lord. God told him what to do and where to begin. There must first be a willingness to do God’s will. God does not reveal his purpose for our lives simply to satisfy our curiosity. He does so in order that we may be obedient. Jesus said, “If any man’s will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17, RSV).

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

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