

2 Samuel 2:1-32

David anointed in Judah, but Ishbosheth rules in Israel

After the death of Saul and the Philistine victory, Israel was vulnerable and knocked back on its heels. The Philistines had overrun most of Israel's territory. People abandoned the cities and fled east of the Jordan River.

Abner, Saul's general and also his cousin, tried to consolidate authority under one of Saul's sons who had not been killed - Ishbosheth. He was possibly an illegitimate son of a child of a concubine, but he was the last of the bloodline in a position to take over the monarchy after Saul.

1 Chronicles 9:39 shows that his real name was Esh-baal. Ishbosheth means "The man of shame"; Esh-baal means "The man of Baal." An earlier example is Gideon, whose original name was Jerubbaal, which was later changed to Jerubosheth. "Bosheth" (shame) replaced the name of the false god Baal. The rabbis wondered why Saul would have named his son after a false idol.

But by seeing Ishbosheth as a type of the flesh, in opposition to David as a type of Messiah, it fits perfectly.

Abner follows Saul's descent from good qualities of loyalty and bravery to opposing God's anointed in David. He knew David was prophesied to be king, but loyalty to Saul's house as well as his own pride and ambition pushed him to resist.

The battles and skirmishes described in this chapter can be seen as a type of our desperate attempts to maintain control when confronted by the gospel.

Here's how this is described by 20th century evangelical scholar Alan Redpath:

- When we try to make peace between King Jesus and King Self within us, the result is a long, bitter war. It is so much better to simply surrender and submit to the reign of Jesus.
- "In the lives of many Christian people today there is raging, literally, a civil war. The flesh - the kingdom of Saul, struggles with the spirit - the kingdom of David, and the conflict is bitter. We do everything we possibly can to hold up the tottering kingdom of self, so that it might exist just a bit longer. If only we could preserve some rights; if only we could have at least part of our own way; if only we could keep this or that at any cost! We feel we must bolster up this kingdom of self, that we cannot let ourselves be crucified with Christ."

See https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_2Sa/2Sa_2.cfm

As Paul says

- **Galatians 5:17** - "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

The unrest and personal vendettas that broke out show how important it is to have King David in control of the entire realm of a unified Israel.

Several things become clear:

- David consults and inquires of the Lord before acting, basically saying like Jesus, "Not my will, but thine."

- David patiently waits for two years before any confrontation with Ishbosheth. God told Moses, "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." God also always provides time for repentance. During this time, Abner - who had retreated across the Jordan to Mahanaim - is able to begin to slowly take back the land occupied by the Philistines, and convince the other tribes to submit to Ishbosheth.

- Judah's tribal leaders approach David to anoint him as king, David does not seize the throne by force. In contrast to David's waiting for an invitation to be anointed king over Judah, it says Abner "made" Ishbosheth king of Israel.

- In a last gesture of honoring Saul, David thanks the men of Jabesh Gilead for retrieving the bodies of Saul and Jonathan.

One reason David restrained himself from attacking Ishbosheth was because he had given his word not to cut off Saul's descendants:

- **1 Samuel 24:21** - "So now, swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's house." So David gave his oath to Saul."

The Internal Struggle, a Spiritual Civil War

The "in-house" conflicts in this period before David is anointed king over both Judah and Israel illustrates Jesus' warning about the violence and divisions caused by the coming of Christ and His kingdom:

- **Matthew 10:34-36** - "Do not assume that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword (Luke has "division"). For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'"

Jesus is quoting from **Micah 7:6**, which the rabbis understood to describe the times of Messiah.

A similar idea, but this time of internal divisions and struggle within our own hearts, is expressed in Hebrews:

- **Hebrews 4:12** - "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The mere presence of Jesus sets off these divisions:

- **John 15:22** - "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin."

When it becomes apparent that our mind will never agree to the reign of Christ in our lives, that our obstinance is incurable - then Christ shows why he is the anointed one of the Lord.

The next chapters show how this all ends. Our inner voices begin to contradict each other, there is infighting and division, there is bloody conflict, and we finally surrender. Then Christ displays His victory over self and the flesh, just as David takes his place as king over all Israel.

Ultimately:

- **Revelation 11:15** - "The Kingdom of this world has become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

...which is quoting Moses:

- **Exodus 15:17-18** - "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established. The LORD shall reign for ever and ever."

2 Samuel 2:1-2 - "And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron. So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite."

Hebron is an ancient city, the place where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, were buried in the Cave of Machpalah. The Zohar says David had to first unite himself spiritually with the Patriarchs in Hebron before he could be anointed king.

Although David was king only over Judah at this point, many from other tribes had also

gathered themselves to his cause.

The Battle at the Pool of Gibeon

2 Samuel 2:12-13 - "And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool."

Joab, David's general, was David's cousin, like Abner was a cousin of Saul.

Abner and Joab seem to be identical types - hard military men, loyal to their leaders, and ruthless in carrying out a mission.

2 Samuel 2:14-15 - "And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise. Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which pertained to Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David."

Joab's orders were to only respond defensively. But the bravado of the generals and their men escalate this "play" contest into a deadly battle.

2 Samuel 2:16-17 - "And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called Helkathhazzurim, which is in Gibeon. And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David."

The Targum interprets the place Helkathhazzurim as "the inheritance of the slain."

The Pursuit of Abner

2 Samuel 2:18 - "And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe."

Abishai was the one who went into Saul's host at night, and took away his spear and cruse of water at his head (**1 Samuel 26:6**). But the story here is about Asahel the other brother of Joab.

2 Samuel 2:19-21 - "And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him, and said, Art thou Asahel? And he answered, I am. And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armor. But Asahel would not turn aside from following of him."

Asahel wanted the glory of capturing or killing Abner, even though the battle had been won.

2 Samuel 2:22-23 - "And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother? Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still."

The butt of his spear apparently also had a blade. When Asahel approached close, Abner merely slowed and jabbed his spear backwards without turning around.

A fatal wound is often described as being under the "fifth rib" (**2 Samuel 2:23; 3:27; 4:6; 20:10**). The word *chomesh* can mean "fifth," but also simply means the spear went into his body.

But it's interesting that these several mentions of wounds in the fifth rib or in the side, point to Jesus' being wounded in the side by the spear.

- **John 19:34** - "...one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water flowed out."

The violence of this period as David consolidates his reign is reflected in the violence suffered by Jesus as his kingdom begins.

A Temporary Peace

2 Samuel 2:24-27 - " Joab also and Abishai pursued after Abner: and the sun went down when they were come to the hill of Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of an hill. Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren? And Joab said, As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother."

Abner had lost the battle, but now he had the high ground and was reinforced by Benjamites (Saul's tribe) who had heard of the battle. He proposes an end to the fighting. Joab reminds him that he was the one who suggested the "play match" or duel that led to the battle in the first place.

2 Samuel 2:28-29 - "So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more. And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain, and passed over Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and they came to Mahanaim."

Rabbinical commentary says this victory of Joab and his men is not credited to David because the whole encounter was senseless.

2 Samuel 2:30-31 - "And Joab returned from following Abner: and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel. But the servants of David had smitten of Benjamin, and of Abner's men, so that three hundred and threescore men died.

The battle was a lopsided victory for the supporters of David.

As it says in the next chapter, this was a continuing trend:

- **2 Samuel 3:1** - "...David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker."

The Takeaway -

Ephesians 6:10-18

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of [b]the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

14 "Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints"

"Be strong in the Lord" was the admonition of Moses and Joshua to Israel as they approached the Promised Land. Now God is speaking to us about securing the Promised Land within.

We must recognize the deceptions, the "giants" that threaten us. Satan speaks lies to us through our inner voices. We are tempted to fear, to be resentful, to hate, or conversely to give up - whatever it takes to get us to fail to occupy the land God has given us.

Prayer activates the armor of God. By turning it over to Him - laying the burdens at His feet, and returning to the cross, the mercy seat, where forgiveness and peace reside, we can see the battle is already won.

"It is finished" is our cry of victory. "He is Lord" is proclaiming His reign over us is secure.