

## 2 Samuel 4:1-12

### Ishbosheth is Murdered

David had promised Saul not to cut off his offspring. David honored his promise, and still revered Saul in his office as God's anointed king, regardless of how much Saul's deranged mind and "evil spirit" had cause him to pursue him.

This story is a warning against our tendency to misunderstand Jesus according to our own agendas by "leaning on our own arm of understanding."

- **Proverbs 3:5-6** - "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

This is the second time people miscalculated David's intentions or desires, using the measurements of the world.

David reminds us that God doesn't need our help. God alone has "redeemed my soul out of all adversity (4:9)."

**2 Samuel 4:1** - "And when Saul's son (Ishbosheth) heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled."

Ishbosheth was not only mentally dismayed by this news, but was politically weakened. His ability to act was now even less than before.

**2 Samuel 4:4** - "And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."

Again, "bosheth" means "shame" and his original name was Merib-baal "one who contends with Baal" or the opposite "Baal's fighter" (1 Chronicles 8:34).

Not only was Ishbosheth weakened, but even Jonathan's son - the only other living descendant of Saul - had become lame in an accident while fleeing the Philistines when he was five years old. His lameness left him unfit to rule, just as a lame man could not be a priest and approach the altar (**Leviticus 21:18**). This story is mentioned here to emphasize the weak situation of the House of Saul, and how the murder of Ishbosheth ended it.

### Ishbosheth's Murder

"All the Israelites were troubled (or confounded, shocked)." The rabbis wonder if David, by not punishing Joab, could have been seen as beginning a campaign to eliminate all of Ishbosheth's allies - despite his public mourning for Abner.

Whatever their motives, two leaders of Ishbosheth's guard decided on a plan to betray and murder their king, thinking by this to earn David's favor.

**2 Samuel 4:5-7** - "And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, who lay on a bed at noon. And they came thither into the midst of the house, as though they would have fetched wheat; and they smote him under the fifth rib: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night."

Nothing wrong with a siesta on a hot afternoon, but Ishbosheth sleeping at noon reflects and emphasizes his sloth and lack of focus. This was no time to slumber. "Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty" (Proverbs 20:13). The killers probably knew he would be alone at that time.

Perhaps they entered with wheat merchants as a pretext for approaching Ishbosheth. Or to procure wheat for their men from the king's granary. It's unclear. But their actions indeed cut him down like the last sheaf of wheat harvested of the House of Saul.

The LXX has a different explanation: "And, behold, the portress of the house had been winnowing wheat, and she slumbered and slept, and the brothers slipt through." See **John 18:16** - "her that kept the door." The passage is confusing and obscure.

This was another savage killing "under the fifth rib" in this in-between time where there was no sure king yet established in all Israel, and "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (**Judges 17:6**).

**2 Samuel 4:8** - "And they brought the head of Ishbosheth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ishbosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and the LORD hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed."

They either had convinced themselves that they were acting under orders from God, or were hoping to convince David that they were, at least.

This is a moment of prideful miscalculation that rivals the earlier incident when the Amalekite brings Saul's crown to David. And it's right up there with the words of Agag: "Surely the bitterness of death is past," or Haman's thought that, "To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?"

These all seemed plausible, but each were completely wrong.

How do we get from "every man did what was right in his own eyes" to "Not my will but thine"?

First we have to see the error of our own way.

**2 Samuel 4:9** - "And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As the LORD liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings: How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?"

"How much more" - At last the Amalekite had been asked by Saul, and Joab was avenging his brother.

"take you away from the earth" - The guilt of murder defiled the land, until expiated by the execution of the murderer (**Numbers 35:33**).

The murderers' names are recorded for posterity, so that we can ponder their actions and consider what it means to second-guess God. He has a plan, and doesn't need our advice on how to carry it out.

**2 Samuel 4:12** - "And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ishbosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron."

David wants it known that assassination will be quickly punished.

Normally, mutilation of a dead body is against Torah law (**Deuteronomy 21:23**). But the rabbis said that David acted by royal decree to punish them "in kind." They had cut off Ishosheth's head. Now David cut off the hands that murdered and the feet that hurried to carry out the crime.

This might somehow be related to Jesus' saying:

- **Matthew 5:29** - "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

Ishbosheth's head was buried with Abner to show the close connection they had despite their animosity, and possibly to rebuke Joab that here were two who were both killed treacherously.

The interesting thing in this is how David honors his enemies, but punishes the slippery weasels who try to do the "right thing" out of pride - like the Pharisees. Their piety and loyalty was false.

(In fact, Jesus never turns the other cheek to Pharisees - He kicks over the money changers' tables in His Father's house and pronounces "Woes" upon them)

The bottom line is that God can't be manipulated. He doesn't need our offerings: "Look what I did for you today, Lord!" And evil can't be justified for some "good" we imagine will result.

- **Matthew 7:22-23** - "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Instead God requires faith and obedience, which is only available through Christ Himself.

The fate of these murderers points to Jesus who was lanced in his side (under the fifth rib) and whose hands and feet were pierced on the cross to absolve us of sin.