

**Rival Monarchies**  
**2 Samuel 2:1-32**  
**February 19,2023**

- Good morning, before we get into our text this morning, I would like to pray that the Lord would bless our time together.

Lord, we come to you recognizing our need for you. Lord we know that if your Spirit is not at work in our hearts this morning, then this message will fall on deaf ears. We ask you and pray that you would help us to heed your word carefully this morning. Father, I ask that you would speak through me and that you would use your word, that you would use this message to accomplish all that you have for us this morning. We ask this in your name, AMEN!

- If you have your Bibles, go ahead and turn with me to 2 Samuel 2, as that will be our text for this morning, **2 Samuel 2**. If you are using the pew Bible, you can find that on page
- It is a joy to be with you this morning, and I am excited to open God's word with you.
- Last week we looked at David's lament for Saul and Jonathan. If you remember, this account takes place right on the heels of the battle on Mount Gilboa where Saul, Jonathan, and the rest of Israel are defeated by the Philistine army.
- As we enter into this chapter, we see that David's long awaited moment has finally arrived.
- Though he won't become king over all of Israel until **chapter 5**, in **chapter 2** he will officially begin his reign.
- His years on the run from Saul are now behind him, and by God's grace, his integrity has remained intact.
- Though far from perfect, David has remained a man who truly fears the Lord!
- Despite the many opportunities that seemed to present themselves, David never acted out against Saul or against the people of Israel.
- He has not sought out his own advantage, but has maintained righteousness and faithfulness.
- And although he has certainly suffered for this, it was now time for God's purpose for David that has been long anticipated, even when he was a young man (cf. **1 Samuel 16**) and had been confirmed again and again through not only the Lord, but also through Jonathan, his wife Abigail, and even Saul himself. It was now time for this purpose to advance.<sup>1</sup>
  - It was now time for David to become king.
- But the question quickly becomes how will that happen? The situation was very dire at this point.
- Again, just a short three days journey to the North from Ziklag, which is where David was, the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines, meaning that these philistines now occupied many of the cities in the northern areas of the land, on both sides of the Jordan River. (cf. 1 Samuel 31:7)

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come (John Woodhouse)

- So, what role would this enemy play in the days following their victory?
  - While it is difficult to imagine that they simply withdrew from the Israelites (and later we will see that this isn't what happens) it doesn't seem like their influence is that significant because we really don't hear from them until the middle of chapter 5, after David becomes king over all of Israel.
- What is important and what the author wants us to see is not what the enemy is up to, but what David is up to and really, what God is up to!
- What he wants us to understand about David becoming king is that David's ascent was in direct obedience to the words of the Lord. Let's look at verses 1-7 now and see **David's Faithful Beginning! (READ 1-7)**

### **A Faithful Beginning (vv. 1-7)**

- So if you remember, years earlier, Samuel had told Saul that as the Lord's anointed king over Israel, there was one thing above all else that was required of him: He must "Listen to the words of the LORD." (cf. 1 Samuel 15:1)
- And what ultimately caused Saul's kingship to fail is precisely because as Samuel tells him in 1 Samuel 28, he "Did not obey the voice of the LORD."
- But David's movement to become king began in a very different way than Saul. **verse 1** sets the tone: "After this David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" And the Lord said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" And He said, "To Hebron."
  - The beginning of this verse "After this" shows that only a little bit of time has passed since Saul and Jonathan's death, Israel's defeat, and David's lament upon hearing the tragic news.
  - And the first thing David does after this, is inquire of the Lord.
- If you remember, back in 1 Samuel 27, David seems to trust his own logic and flees from Israel and lives among the Philistines for 16 months.
  - And during that time, there is hardly any mention of the Lord, or David turning to Him.
  - But here, David is not going to make the same mistake twice.
- Unlike **chapter 27**, David makes no moves before he seeks direction from the Lord.
  - This was most likely done through Abiathar the priest who has been with David.
  - Though it is unclear exactly how David sought guidance, it is perfectly clear who he sought guidance through.
  - And in David's question, we see the key word that is translated "go up" that is repeated five times in **verses 1-3**.<sup>2</sup>
    - The leading idea here is David's ascent to the throne. His ascent to kingship!
    - And the crucial point is that he "went up" in obedience to the Lord.

---

<sup>2</sup> 2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come (John Woodhouse)

- And in this, David really foreshadows the One who would, many years later, be “highly exalted” through His path of obedience, as we read about in [Philippians 2](#).<sup>3</sup>
  - God’s king (who is first David and then finally Jesus) did not grasp power out of a selfish ambition.
    - The path to their kingship was obedience to God.
- And in this obedience, we see the Lord tell David to leave Ziklag and to head to Hebron.
- As one commentator points out, “By this David burns his philistine bridges behind him.”<sup>4</sup>
- This is why the writer also mentions David’s two wives as well as all the men who were with him and their families as those who also followed David to Hebron.
  - David has completely broken things off with Philistia so to speak, and has made really a new beginning in Judah.<sup>5</sup>
- And specifically, in Hebron, which was an important city about nineteen miles south of Jerusalem.
- And it really is difficult to overstate the significance of the Lord’s direction to David to “go up” to Hebron.
- Hebron was a town that was overflowing in covenant memories!
- Hebron was where Abraham first settled and built an altar to the Lord.
- This was also where the Lord appeared to him and where he heard the good news that Sarah would have a son. (cf. [Genesis 18](#))
- And Hebron is also where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were all buried.
- Hebron was the location of the only portion of the promised land that would become the possession of Abraham (cf. [Genesis 23](#))
  - Making it the first part of the land to be given to Abraham and his descendants as promised by the Lord.
  - We might say that Hebron is where Israel’s life in the land of God’s promise began.
- And so with that in mind, David’s journey to Hebron links his story with Abraham’s.
  - It suggests that David’s rise is the continuation of the story that began there with Abraham.
  - It connects David with the promises that God had made to Abraham.
- And so this detail is a very important indication that what God will do through David is of massive significance because it is connected to God’s promise to Abraham to bring blessing to “all the families of the earth.” (cf. [Genesis 12:3](#))
- David’s going up to Hebron anticipates the fact that Jesus will be introduced in the first sentence in the New Testament as “the son of David” and “the son of Abraham.”
  - The key to understanding David is the key to understanding Jesus, and that key is God’s promises to Abraham.
- And it is here, in this very important town that the men of Judah “Anoint David King over the house of Judah.” (v. 4)

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Dale Davis Commentary on 2 Samuel, 32

<sup>5</sup> Dale Davis Commentary on 2 Samuel, 32

- As Dale Davis points out, “It is here that the kingdom of God becomes visible in the world – for those who have eyes to see.”<sup>6</sup>
- And it is here that for the first time, the Lord’s chosen king visibly rules on Earth.
- And as king, the first thing David does is send a message to the men of Jabesh-Gilead who had risked their lives to retrieve the bodies of Saul and his sons at the end of 1 Samuel 31.
- And David, not wanting to let a noble deed go unnoticed, sends these messengers to thank the men of Jabesh-Gilead for their courageous act, to bless them in the Lord, and also to appeal to them to pledge their allegiance to his kingship.
- In this message, David is mixing his gratitude for them with a campaigning message.
- And as we read this account, we may be tempted not to pay much attention to the men of Jabesh-Gilead and instead see them simply as a minor detail in the story.
- However, I’d like for us to pause here for a second and consider these men and their situation because I think there is a lot of relevance for us today.
- I would even argue that we need to see **ourselves** as citizens of Jabesh-Gilead, for I would venture to say that is where believers live.
  - Of course not physically, but spiritually.
  - Jabesh-Gilead is sandwiched between David and as we will see in just a moment, Abner.
  - So in other words, it is between the true kingdom vying for its allegiance and a fake kingdom expecting its allegiance! (vv. 8-11)
  - And to defy this kingdom takes courage, and such courage only comes from grace.
    - And I would say that Jabesh-Gilead is a perfect picture of Romans 7:21; “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.”
- Even when you look at this map here, you will see that Jabesh-Gilead is right near Mahanaim, which is where Abner makes Ish-Bosheth king. (picture) (you can see Mahanaim is just south of Jabesh-Gilead and then if you keep going south and cross the the Dead Sea, that is where Hebron is located)
  - So even from a geographical standpoint, “evil lies close at hand.”
- And I believe the lesson here is to recognize that there is an enemy that lies close at hand! As believers, we have been delivered from the enemy.
  - Colossians 1:13 says that “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and He has transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
  - However, we also read in 1 Peter 5:18 that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for who he can devour, so we must stay vigilant.
  - Though we have been transferred to the kingdom of God, we still face the constant temptation to return to the kingdom of darkness, and it is only with the help of the Spirit that we are able to resist that temptation!
  - And in this way, the men of Jabesh-Gilead I think are a great physical example of the spiritual struggle believers face.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- And as we continue here, we have talked a lot about David’s faithful beginning, but we must now turn our attention to **Abner’s Unfaithful Beginning**. Let’s look at **verses 8-11**. (READ)

### **An Unfaithful Beginning (vv. 8-11)**

- The text does not tell us how the men of Jabesh-Gilead responded, or if they even responded at all. That isn’t what is highlighted by the author.
- It instead focuses on Abner, who was related to Saul (there is a debate on whether he is Saul’s uncle or his cousin)
- He also served as the commander of Saul’s army.
- What is highlighted and what is crucial to assessing **verses 8-11** is grasping the significance of Abner’s actions in the larger context.
- C.F. Keil states this point very clearly. And I quote: “The promotion of Ish-Bosheth as king was not only a continuation of the hostility of Saul towards David, but also an open act of rebellion against Jehovah, who had rejected Saul and chosen David prince over Israel, and who had given such distinct proofs of this election in the eyes of the whole nation, that even Saul had been convinced of the appointment of David to be his successor upon the throne.”<sup>7</sup>
- Whereas David waited patiently for the Lord to appoint him king in His timing, Abner quickly tried to take things into his own hands and seize this opportunity for power.
- In other words, whereas David trusted in the Lord, Abner trusted in himself.
- And over the next few chapters, we are going to see the massive difference between David who trusts God at every turn and Abner who trusts himself at every turn, which ultimately leads to Abner’s death.
- And this theme is why for our transformative truth, I have used **Proverbs 3:5** because I believe it really captures the essence of this passage as we see the results of both sides: **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. (Transformative Truth)”**
- David trusts in the Lord, and the Lord continues to make him prosper; Abner openly defies the Lord and his result is destruction.
- And make no mistake about it: Abner’s actions are one of open defiance.
- Abner’s move to make Ish-Bosheth king is not simply the beginning of a civil conflict as two parties are both seeking power.
- And while Ish-Bosheth is the one who becomes king, it is very clear from the text that Ish-Bosheth serves as nothing more than a puppet that Abner uses to gain the power that he craves.
- There is seemingly nothing significant about Ish-Bosheth other than the fact that he is a son of Saul which gives him his path to the throne. But to be clear, Abner is running the show!
- And Abner knew that the LORD had promised the kingship to David.
  - Abner had been by Saul’s side when David killed Goliath in **1 Samuel 17**, and even brought David to Saul afterwards

---

<sup>7</sup> Church History Study Bible

- David and Abner also later shared a place at Saul's table together, and so David and Abner knew each other well,
  - And Abner knew that David had been appointed by the Lord to be the next king of Israel.
- And in opposing the Lord's chosen king, Abner was opposing the Lord Himself.
- Abner knew the will of the Lord but yet he chose to fly in the face of it.
- And it is here that Abner joins in saying with Herod and Pontius Pilate in their press release: "We do not want this man to reign over us."
- In this chapter, we see that the regime of the chosen king has been met with rebellion and with opposition, and it continues through to the end of this chapter and into the following chapters.
- And the reality is that this kingdom conflict will continue, in one form or another until Jesus returns in glory and in power (cf. [Matthew 13:40-41](#))
- And if we are the people of God, then we can not allow the defiance of the latest Abners' to deter us, and there does seem to be quite a lot of that going on these days isn't there?
  - People who want to be masters of their own body, people who want full autonomy!
    - They don't want God ruling over their lives, they want to be the sovereign ones!
    - And this defiance all stems back from the Garden! It is nothing new! Remember the Devil's lie: "You will be like God..."
    - It is the same poison packaged in a different way, but delivers the same destruction!
  - And as believers, we must recognize that lie for what it is and know that TRUE freedom is only found in Christ!
- And because of what Christ has done for His children on the cross, there is no reason for us to grow discouraged even when it seems like evil is prevailing.
- We know that those who are in Christ are victors in Christ!
- Let that bring comfort to you this morning, if you are in Christ, you are on the winning side!
- And if you are not in Christ, the good news is that you can be!
  - Christ has made a way for all to come to Him through His death on the cross and through His resurrection from the grave so that if you turn from your sins and trust in Him, you too can have life! You too can experience true and lasting freedom! It is good news indeed!
- And as we enter into our final section, we again see the different outcomes for Joab's army and Abner's army.
- I titled this section "**A Tale of Two Armies**" because these two kingdoms could not be more different! Again, follow along with me as I read starting in [verse 12](#). (READ to the end)

### **A Tale of Two Armies (vv.12-32)**

- From verse 12 all the way through to the end of chapter 4, what we really see is a story of human politics.

- A number of men attempt to have an influence on the kingship by their own efforts, and are all unsuccessful.
- None of them are good enough, wise enough, or powerful enough to accomplish their intended goal, reaffirming our **Transformative Truth: “Do not lean on your own understanding.”**
  - And as Proverbs 3 continues, it says, “**In ALL your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh, and refreshment to your bones.**” (cf. Proverbs 3:6-8)
- And unfortunately for Abner and the servants of IshBosheth, we see the exact opposite happen for them.
- Because they have sought to do things their own way, they will reap what they have sown.
- So as this section begins, we read that Abner and these men set out from Mahanaim and they head to Gibeon.
  - And what is crucial to understand, as I’m sure most of you understand at this point, is that Abner is the aggressor in this entire affair.
  - Once again, even the Geography shows this to be the case.
- They left from Mahanaim and came to Gibeon, meaning that in order to do that they had to leave where they were staying, cross the river, and then come to the outskirts of where David and his men were.
  - Abner is clearly taking the offensive.
  - And so Joab then meeting Abner at Gibeon is not an offensive approach, but rather a defensive move to prevent Abner’s troops from storming into Jerusalem.
  - What takes place then is not a civil conflict between two armies.
  - It is a deliberate attempt by Abner to impose his will on David’s kingdom.
  - As one commentator points out plainly: “**Abner is on the attack.**”<sup>8</sup>
- And I think it is important to note that neither David nor Ish-Bosheth were directly involved in what took place.
- The text says that they met at the Pool of Gibeon, with one army on one side of the pool, and the other army on the other side.
- Here is a picture of what the Pool of Gibeon looks like. (Picture)
- First off, I apologize for these random people on the steps, you can just ignore them obviously.
  - This was the best picture I could find.
  - But as you can see, it was quite a big landmark. It was about **37 feet wide and 35 feet deep.**
  - And there were these winding steps that would lead the people to a water reservoir located underneath.
  - And people would use this pool to get water during times of battle or when the town was under attack.
- And so if you can picture it, you have Joab’s men on one side of the pool, and Abner’s men on the other side.

---

<sup>8</sup> Dale Davis Commentary on 2 Samuel, 40

- And **verse 14** once again shows Abner as the instigator, with him saying to Joab, “**Let the young men arise and compete before us.**”
  - What is interesting to me is that it seems to be a game for Abner.
    - Like pure entertainment! **In the same way we gather around to watch a football game or baseball game, Abner wants to gather around and watch these men fight to the death.**
  - Joab, not wanting to seem weak, accepts the challenge, and this gladiator-like duel ensues, with the rest of the armies watching as twelve men from each side engage in this fight.
- The result seems so bizarre, as **verse 16** tells us that all twenty-four men are killed. The result is a tie!
- As Albert Mohler notes, “**The outcome is providentially ordained. The Lord is showing that nobody wins when the nation engages in civil war.**”<sup>9</sup>
- Verse 16 also tells us that the name of that place was called “Helkath-Hazzurim” which means “the field of sword edges.”
- This name seems very fitting not only for the 12 on 12 duel that just took place, but also for the all out war that breaks out right after.
- With the result being a tie, the two armies are not interested in participation trophies, they decide that there must be a winner!
  - And verse 17 tells us plainly who wins this battle: “Abner and the men of Israel we beaten before the servants of David.”
  - Like the bully who picks on the wrong kid, Abner who has been instigating since the beginning, is defeated handedly by the servants of David.
  - But that isn’t where this account ends.
- In **verses 18-19**, we see that this conflict is far from over: “**And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. And Abner pursued Asahel, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.**”
  - It says that “**Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle.**”
  - In other words, Asahel was fast! To quote a popular movie, Asahel makes fast people look not fast.
  - And Asahel pursues Abner.
  - For the first time in this chapter, Abner is actually the one on the defensive, not wanting to retaliate, warning Asahel multiple times to stop chasing him.
    - Asahel may have had the quick feet, but Abner held the spear.
- The reason Abner is reluctant is because he knows Asahel is no match for him, and he also knows that if he kills Asahel, it is going to further antagonize things with Joab.
  - However, as Asahel continues to gain on him, Abner has no choice but to take matters into his own hands and actually kills him with the blunt end of his spear.
  - The text also says that “**All who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still**” implying that the army may have still been pursuing Abner, but unable to keep up with Asahel.

---

<sup>9</sup> Grace and Truth Study Bible, 2 Samuel 2:12-17 note

- But there were two who did not stay still. **Verse 24** says “**But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner.**”
- Abner was right to anticipate that the killing of Asahel would bring him into direct conflict with Joab.
- And as this eventful day is coming to an end, we see the defeated Abner call out for a truce.
- There is some irony here: Abner is the one who has been instigating all day long.
  - He came on the offensive in verse 12
  - He instigated the twelve on twelve duel that resulted in this battle in verse 14
  - And now he is calling for a truce.
- There are varying interpretations of Joab’s response to Abner.
  - Some interpret it that if Abner hadn’t spoken in verse 26, then the battle would have continued, but his speech made everyone come to their senses.
  - However, I think a far better interpretation is that Joab is saying essentially, “**Look if you never made the challenge you did in the beginning, none of this would have happened. You brought this on yourself.**”
- Nonetheless, Joab does withdraw his troops, blowing the trumpet and putting an end to the battle.
- But before continuing, I think it is worthwhile to pause here and consider the lesson that Abner teaches us.
- We talked about in **verse 14** that Abner makes this call to have a duel as almost entertainment for himself.
- And then here in **verse 26**, he cries out for an end to the bloodshed.
- And I believe this is a **powerful picture of sin.**
- Sin seems pleasant at first. It lies to us and tells us that it will be worth it, no matter what the sin may be. Whether it is the sin of jealousy, of lust, of gluttony, or of pride, all sin promises pleasure at first!
- Abner thought this battle would be fun, but he did not realize what it was going to cost him.
  - **This decision took Abner much further than he wanted to go. It kept Abner longer than he wanted to stay. And as we continue in the narrative, it will wind up costing him more than he ever thought that he would pay.**
    - Though at the end of chapter 2, Abner is able to return home, Joab gets his revenge on Abner and kills him in chapter 3.
    - And his death is directly a result of him engaging in this battle that he had no control over.
  - And so it is with us and our battle with sin. Too often we think that we can tame our sin, that we are the ones in control.
  - But if we are not careful, our sin will devour us! It is not to be taken lightly.
  - As we saw earlier, the devil is described as a roaring lion! You don’t live in close proximity to a roaring lion. Why? Because a lion will eat you!
- That is why **Romans 8:13** talks about us needing to put our sin to death!! That is how we fight sin, by killing it!
  - John Owen has famously said, “**Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.**”

- And I would encourage you to pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you sins that you seem to be more casual about. Sins that you don't take as seriously.
- I find that often times when people talk about sin in their life, they highlight one or two major ones that seem to have a hold on them, and they neglect the smaller sins that go unnoticed, that slip under the radar.
- It is also important to note that this decision did not only effect Abner. At the end of the chapter, we read that Abner and his army killed 20 of the men of David, but that the men of David killed 360 men of Ish-Bosheth.
- We don't sin in a vacuum. Our decisions effect other people! And often times, the people it effects are those that we love most! Our family, our friends, our church family.
  - We need to recognize that our sin goes past just ourselves!
- And this picture of sin being deadly is seen so clearly in this account in 2 Samuel 2 where we end this chapter with a funeral.
- **Verse 32** says, "And they took Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father, which was at Bethlehem. And Joab and his men marched all night, and the day broke upon them at Hebron."
- And this ending represents the bitter ending of sin
- Matthew Henry comments; "This is true of every sin, oh that men would consider it in time, that it will be bitterness in the latter end!"
- This fate would soon befall Abner in just a short while, but here Asahel is the one buried.
- Asahel's funeral is mentioned here, but the rest of the men were buried in the field of battle.
- There are distinctions made here between the dust of Asahel and the dust of the others; but in the resurrection no difference will be made, except between the godly and the ungodly, and that difference will remain forever.
- The hope of the Gospel is that while those who reject Christ will be eternally separated from Him, those who have believed in Christ and have received Him by faith will be eternally united with Christ in glory forever!
- And as we read last week for our scripture reading in Revelation 21, that will be a day of unbelievable celebration for the believer where "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new!"
- Amen! What a day that will be! Let's pray!

Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the lessons that we receive from your Word. God, we know that your word is living and active and that it is sharper than a double-edged sword. We pray that you would use your word and the message that was just preached to convict us Father! Help us to recognize the areas in our lives where we fall short. Help us to also recognize that for the believer, we have an immense hope because of your great salvation! Lord, I also want to pray for anyone here that does not know you. God I pray that you would overwhelm them with the truth of your Word! Lord, make them uncomfortable and convict them of their wicked ways. Lord, as my dear brother used to always say, I ask that you would send the hound dog of heaven after their souls and that you would draw them to repentance oh God. We praise you that you are a God who delights in turning hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, and we ask that you would do this wonderful work today. We ask this in your name, AMEN!