

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

# Kingdom Conflict

2 Samuel 2:1-32

*The Second Sermon on Second Samuel*

© 2014 Daniel R. Hyde

I have a confession to make: I don't like conflict. No doubt many of you feel the same way. Conflict among people is inevitable, given that we are sinners, it's necessary at times to iron things out, and it's even healthy as it enables us to grow. I like the end result, but I struggle with the actual time in conflict. I especially feel this way with people who thrive off conflict, always looking to incite, never content. Some people want power no matter who they have to run over to get it.

Our story picks up after King Saul has died. There has been national lament for him. Now the Lord's anointed, David, has a clear path to the throne and everyone will bow the knee, right? Wrong! To cite Alfred Pennyworth who said about The Joker (for you Batman fans): "Some men just want to watch the world burn."

Conflict. That's what we have before us this morning; but it's not just interpersonal conflict, it's *Kingdom Conflict*. There is God's kingdom whose leadership is now passing from Saul to David, but then there's an alternative kingdom set up in conflict to it under the figurehead of Ish-bosheth and the real power, Abner. I want you to see two things about the newness that David brought and then a third thing about the actual conflict itself.

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

1. *The New Kingdom*
2. *The New Kingdom*
3. *The Old Conflict*

May the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth of his Word today.

## **The New King**

Let's begin where our text begins, with *the new king*. **After this**, meaning, after Saul's death and David's mourning, **David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?"** (v. 1) He **inquired**—the Hebrew word is *sha'al*—which is a pun on Saul's name because he is the true Saul, the king. We should be impressed that the first thing David does after his period of mourning was is to pray. This was a wonderful beginning to this new king's kingdom! As the Scottish commentator, William Blaikie, said, "Prayer was not the last resort of one whom all other refuge had failed, but the first resort of one who regarded the Divine approval as the most essential element for determining the propriety of the undertaking."<sup>1</sup>

So David prays and the Lord answers, **"Go up"** (v. 1), which means ascend to the throne from the depths of your lamentation. David again prays, asking, **"To which shall I go up?"** and the Lord responds, **"To Hebron"** (v. 1). The new king would begin his reign from Hebron. Does that ring any bells? This was where Abram built an altar to the Lord, dedicating the Promised Land to the Lord (Gen.

---

<sup>1</sup> W.G. Blakie, *The Second Book of Samuel* (1893; repr., Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1978), 16.

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

13:8). This was where Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah, which became the burial place of his wife, Sarah (Gen. 23:17–19), himself (Gen. 25:9–10), his son Isaac and his wife Rebekah, where Jacob buried his wife Leah (Gen. 49:29–32), and where Joseph and his brothers brought Jacob’s body (Gen. 50:12–13). This was a resting-place of the twelve spies who went into the Land (Num. 13:22). This was one of the cities of refuge in the Land (Josh. 21:11–13). And this was one of the places David sent gifts after defeating the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30). So the Lord directed him to Hebron. As Blaikie again said, “It was equivalent to a new promise that the God of Abraham and of Isaac and Jacob would be the God of David.”<sup>2</sup> What a God we serve! He makes promises to us his people; he keeps his promises; and then he makes even more promises giving us the expectation that he will keep those as well in the future.

After arriving with his wives, his men, and their households in verses 2–3, we read the climactic moment: **And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah** (v. 4). All the way back in 1 Samuel 16 Samuel anointed David as the legitimate king of Israel after the Lord rejected Saul. So why another anointing? Did the first one not count? Samuel’s anointing was religious while this anointing was a public, popular, and political act of the people of Judah.<sup>3</sup> So now, for the first time, the new king David is ruling.

---

<sup>2</sup> Blaikie, *The Second Book of Samuel*, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann, 219.

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

## **The New Kingdom**

David enters the kingship with prayer, and once in office, what does he do? Notice a second point here is *the new kingdom*. Children, the next time a new President enters office, find out what the first thing he or she did. Oftentimes Presidents will say in their first one hundred days they will do certain things as symbolic of their entire Presidency. So what did David do first?

Apparently the first thing he did was to ask about those who rescued Saul's body and gave him a proper burial, because verses 45 jumps in and tells us: **When they told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul," David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead.** His first act had to do with Saul of all things! Why? This is obviously a wise political move, as he tries to consolidate power in a fractured country. You see that in verse 7 as he proclaims, **"the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."** But this is also a sign of his kingdom as he shows grace, mercy, and peace to those who should be his enemies. This is a different kind of kingdom!

And we see that in verses 5-7 as he blesses the men of Jabesh-gilead, **"May you be blessed by the LORD, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him"** (v. 5). They were "loyal" to Saul. This is that word we've seen before that communicates faithfulness to a covenant and promise (*hesed*). They had marched twenty miles to take down Saul and his sons' bodies from a Philistine wall and to properly bury them (1 Sam. 31:11-13). Why? Because Saul's first battle was to defeat the Amalekites and save Jabesh-gilead back in 1

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

Samuel 11. Now David prays they who were faithful to Saul would know the **steadfast love and faithfulness** of the Lord. These two phrases combine that same word for covenant faithfulness with the Hebrew word for truth as a way of strengthening the idea. And then David says, “**And I will do good to you because you have done this thing.**” The word translated **do good** is equivalent to another ancient word used for making treaties.<sup>4</sup>

So what you need to see here in terms of this new kingdom of David, is that although he began his rule from the small town of Hebron with only one tribe at his back, he was ruling from a town with ancient significance and he was doing so in a way to show that his kingdom was one of peace. Like the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ to which we belong, although it looks small and unimpressive like one mustard seed, nonetheless it is powerful.

## **The Old Conflict**

But then there's conflict. We have a new king and a new kingdom, but a conflict with him and it right off the bat. You know how this goes. When you have a two-party system like we do people can't keep their mouths shut long enough for the other party to try and do anything. It's been that way for a long time. Now, this conflict is new because we haven't seen David as king yet and we haven't seen the particular opposition to him before. But at the same time I want you to see that this conflict is *the old conflict* that we've seen before: “I will put enmity between

---

<sup>4</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible (1999; repr., Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2013), 34 n8.

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

So we read that **Abner...commander of Saul’s army** set up a puppet king when he **took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul...and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel** (vv. 8, 9). So unlike David, who prayed, and the men of Judah, who publicly anointed David, Abner unilaterally without any direction from the Lord takes Saul’s son and makes him “king”—really his puppet—to keep power. You have to see that while one kingdom was set up by the Lord himself the other was set up by the ambition of man. And this was an open rebellion to the Lord’s will. Do you think you are lord over your own life? Do you think nations that do not acknowledge God will last? Do you think nations that acknowledge false gods will last forever? Just read the pages of history. Only one kingdom will stand and that is Jesus Christ’s!

In verse 12 we learn that **Abner** took **the servants of Ish-bosheth**—notice who is pulling the strings here—and **went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon** (v. 12). Translation: he’s aggressively approaching the border of Judah. So **Joab...and the servants of David went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon**, or better, a small reservoir or lake, with each army on opposite sides (v. 13). Again, Abner takes the aggressive posture by challenging Joab: “**Let the young men arise and compete**, literally, “play,” **before us**” (v. 14). Then we read in verses 15–16 of a hand to hand conflict, *mano-a-mano*, and that each killed the other. It’s interesting that there were twelve from each side, possibly symbolizing that this was a battle

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

of who was the true king over the true Israel. After this there was a fierce battle in which **Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David** (v. 17), and we read the body count in verses 30–31 with 360 of Abner’s men dead to just 19 of David’s men. The conflict continued in verses 18–23 with the retreat of Abner and his army, but the pursuit of Abner by Asahel, and the eventual death of Asahel. Then Asahel’s body is found and his two brothers, **Joab and Abishai pursued Abner** (v. 24), until there is an eventual conversation between Abner and Joab. Joab has the audacity to say, **“How long will it be before you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers?”** (v. 26) To which Joab replies in verse 27, in effect, “Abner, if you had not opened your mouth at the pool of water, none of this would have happened!” Eventually it all ends with David’s men back in Hebron (v. 32), just as they began.

The big question that should be running through your mind is this: “How could Abner reject the Lord’s true king?” And the answer is that this conflict and rejection is just the latest episode in a story that begin with Satan’s rebellion against the Lord in heaven, continued through with Adam and Eve’s rebellion against their Creator in the Garden, manifested itself in Cain killing his brother Abel, in the nations gathering in rebellion against the Lord at the Tower of Babel, and the list goes on. How is it that people engage in conflict against the God who made them, who is preserving them, and who offers his grace to them? Just look around and you’ll see it every day! Just look into your own heart and you’ll know why.

*This is not a fully written or transcribed manuscript, but the extended notes written in preparation.*

This conflict is an age-old conflict. Yet God's grace is greater. Yet God patience is longer. Yet God's love is deeper. Yet God also shows us in his Word that from time to time he sends judgment. He did it in the Flood. He did it at the Tower of Babel, confusing the nations' speech. He did it in the days of the prophets to both his own people as well as the nations. And he warns you that he will do it again when he sends Jesus Christ back to earth to judge the living and the dead. This old conflict will end. Whose side will you be on? Will you be on the side of the new king and his new kingdom? Or will you be on the side of the old rebellion that is going nowhere but to end in horrific judgment? Just as Israel was called to choose sides, the Lord calls upon you today to choose whom you will serve. Amen.