

The Elevation of the Kings

2 Samuel 2²

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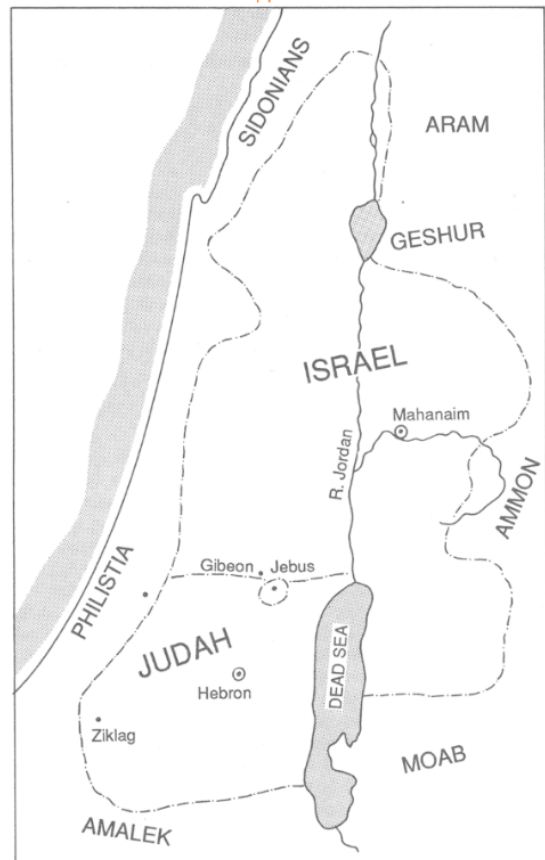
Civil wars are ugly, brutal, bloody things...

The civil war in America was a long, bloody strife that radically changed the United States.

The civil war instigated by Russia that carved off the Crimea from Ukraine and is an attempt to destabilize that country.

The civil war in the Sudan between the Muslims in the north and the non-Muslims in the south.

We are about embark on two chapters that cover the first of two civil wars in Israel's history. The time is between 1007BC and 1000 BC with some evidence putting the events of this chapter in 1005BC. We also might be helped by having some sense of where these things are taking place.



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Two Kings**(v. 1-11)**

The narrator opens by giving us a picture of two kings. For the later reader of Samuel, this is a foreshadowing of the divided kingdom after Solomon...

The Installment of David as king in Judah.**(v. 1-7)**

¹ 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." ² So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³ And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the towns of Hebron. ⁴ And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When they told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul," ⁵ David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him. ⁶ Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing. ⁷ Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

David's humble submission to God is evidenced here. He has regularly sought to know the Lord's will, particularly in the timing of things. He sought the Lord in battles, in dealing with Saul and in dealing with Israel's enemies. Now he inquires of the Lord with a question that actually has two parts. Is this the time to go public with his rule? And should he do so in Judah. So the regency of David begins in Hebron.

David's careful diplomacy has been seen throughout his rise to the throne.

We saw it as he tried to deal with Saul. He never threatened Saul. He tried appealing, shaming, and fleeing.

He had cultivated a relationship and won the respect of the leaders of Judah. He sent to each of the elders over cities some of the spoil he took from the Amalekites. He protected Judah's borders and tried to keep the current battles from taking place in Judah, much as Robert E. Lee fought for Virginia.

He cultivated a relationship and earned the respect of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites. They became a source of supply and support as the years unfolded.

And now, he reaches deep into the heartland of Saul's territory and commends Jabesh-Gilead. They had taken care to properly prepare and bury Saul and his sons.

The Installment of Ish-Bosheth as king in Israel**(v. 8-11)**

⁸ But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, ⁹ and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. ¹⁰ Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. ¹¹ And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

From the text, it appears that the war was more between Abner and Joab than between Ish-Bosheth and David. Abner had been the general under Saul. He had control of the army and probably the hearts of the people. He seems to have opposed the ascension of David.

Unfortunately it does not appear to be because of a well-founded loyalty to Saul's household. Rather, he seems to be pursuing his own place, position and power. As one commentator said, "If Abner started the fire, Joab was to stir the pot that was to boil upon its coals." (Keddie, *The Triumph of the King, The Message of 2 Samuel*, p. 29)

Notice the timelines here...

David rules in Hebron over Judah for 7 years and 6 months. This the period in which he ruled over the Judah before the consolidation of the kingdom and moving his throne to Jerusalem.

Ish-Bosheth rules over Israel for 2 years. This is a shorter period of time.

It appears that Abner waited 5 years to finally put Ish-Bosheth on the throne since we know from later chapters that Ish-Bosheth's murder was immediately followed by all the tribes acclaiming David as king. Abner was consolidating his power in the north and securing the borders against more Philistine incursions. David and Abner do not seem concerned to respond until Abner appoints Ish-Bosheth and move toward Judah (v. 12).

People today are much like the people then. Like Ish-Bosheth, there are weak people who get where they are because they have "connections." Like Abner, there are strong, selfish people, who know how to control, manipulate and use others to advance their own agendas. There are people like David who are prepared, anointed, and equipped but must wait for God's time before they can serve. It is not uncommon for churches and other ministries to bypass God's chosen men and women and put unqualified but "connected" people into places of leadership. Abner got what he wanted, but within a few years, he lost it all. [Adapted from (Wiersbe W. W., p. 23)]

Two Warriors

(v. 12-32)

The narrative is about the civil war through the lens of the battle of Gibeon with the focus on the two great warriors leading each side.

The Armies' Contest

(v. 12-17)

Joab and Abner, the two commanders, agree to a contest, a battle, between a limited number of warriors.

² Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. ¹³ And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out and met them at 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. ¹⁴ And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." ¹⁵ Then they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. ¹⁶ And each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is at Gibeon. ¹⁷ And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

For some reason, Abner decides to move the northern army to Gibeon. This puts them right on the Judean border. Joab responds by moving David's army there as well. Both armies are encamped on either side of the reservoir at Gibeon. This is a difficult day. If you have

ever read letters written during the American civil war, you know what it means to put countrymen against one another.

Joab proposes and Abner agreed to send 12 men from each to battle it out in a contest, presumably to settle the issue and to prevent greater bloodshed. But as the men pair up, every one of them stabs the other to death so that all 24 from both sides lie slain. So the armies engage one another in a fierce battle. Joab's men soundly defeat Abner's and puts them on the run back into northern territory.

The Pursuit by Asahel

(v. 18-23)

As Abner turns to flee, he is followed by the fastest man in Joab's army.

¹⁸ And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. ¹⁹ And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. ²⁰ Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Is it you, Asahel?" And he answered, "It is I." ²¹ Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men and take his spoil." But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. ²² And Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?" ²³ But he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died where he was. And all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still.

Joab, Abishai and Asahel are David's nephews. Asahel was known as a fast runner. He takes out in pursuit of Joab to try to run him down and presumably, to kill him. This leads to the scene of Abner trying to deter Asahel from continuing the pursuit. Abner knows he cannot out run Asahel but also know that Asahel is no match in combat. Asahel will not be deterred nor persuaded. So Abner uses an old and common trick. The butt end of Abner's spear is sharpened so as to facilitate jabbing it into the ground as a spike. Abner allows Asahel to overtake him. Asahel is upon Abner but Abner jabs the butt of the spear back. Asahel is impaled on the spear, tumbles to the ground and dies there. The pursuing army comes upon Asahel dead on the ground and simply stops still in shock and grief.

The Hostilities Cease

(v. 24-28)

Finally, wearied of the slaughter, Abner persuades Joab to a cease fire.

²⁴ But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. And as the sun was going down they came to the hill of Ammah, which lies before Giah on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon. ²⁵ And the people of Benjamin gathered themselves together behind Abner and became one group and took their stand on the top of a hill. ²⁶ Then Abner called to Joab, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be before you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers?" ²⁷ And Joab said, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely the men would not have given up the pursuit of their brothers until the morning." ²⁸ So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight anymore.

The army has stopped at the site of the death of Asahel. The brothers stay on the pursuit, now more focused than ever on killing Abner. On a hilltop, the people of Benjamin rally around Abner prepared to fight to defend the house of Saul. David's men have caught up with Joab. From the hilltop, Abner challenges Joab to halt the fighting. This war between brothers is going to end in a slaughter. How long is this going continue?

We do not know what Abner's motives are. They have the high ground for the battle. But it is a voluntary militia at best that he has and they are facing skilled, battle hardened warriors under a ruthless commander. But his words bring Joab up short. Abner's question causes Joab to blow the trumpet, stop the pursuit and turn his men towards home.

The Armies' Return

(v. 29-32)

Both armies head home to their kings and their families.

²⁹ And Abner and his men went all that night through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, and marching the whole morning, they came to Mahanaim. ³⁰ Joab returned from the pursuit of Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing from David's servants nineteen men besides Asahel. ³¹ But the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin 360 of Abner's men. ³² And they took up 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.

The narrator has arranged this in a mini parallel structure.

Abner's return with his army.

They travel all night and morning to return to the northern capital.

The tally of the dead.

The total loss of Joab's men were the twelve contestants, seven other men and Asahel. But Abner had lost 360 men all of the tribe of Benjamin. Asahel was buried in his hometown of Bethlehem.

Joab's return with his army. Joab marches all night and arrives at Hebron. But in a beautiful, evocative phrase, they arrive just as the morning is breaking.

So, this battle is now over. The division between north and south, between the two kings and the two generals will continue. But for now, a kind of peace will exist until God's sovereign providences unite the tribes under David.

Reflect and Respond

I want us to reflect and respond to several things in this text.

Most of Israel rejected God's anointed and appointed king. They followed Abner and his puppet king. They rejected David and his God-ordained rule. So, it should come as no surprise that from the beginning to the end of His earthly life, Jesus' proper rule and reign was rejected by the Jews.

Rebellion against the Lord may result in division between brothers. The ensuing conflict lead to physical carnage in Israel. Judas had his own agenda for Jesus. When that agenda was not being served, he turned against the Lord and betrayed him. This may happen in the church. Personal agendas and spiritual rebellion bring conflict in the church which may result in spiritual carnage. While we must stand for truth regardless, we must be careful that our "standing" is really just a pursuit of our own agenda.

Joab is willing to break off the battle so as to cease the conflict and to provide for the possibility of a peace. Here two warriors halt the carnage and seek peace between the brothers. Jesus calls us to be at peace among ourselves. This is not necessarily the absence of differences or

discussions or even conflict. But it is certainly a poise to end conflict easily and quickly. We should have a peacemaking orientation.

Until the true King, the Lord Jesus, assumes His rightful throne, there will be conflict. The world is conducting a civil war against the true king. They are following the usurper, the dark prince of this air, the shadow of light. But there will be a glorious day when Jesus will rule and reign and the war will be over. May that day hasten be upon us soon.