

Power Politics and the People Who Suffer

2 Samuel 3:6-16

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-5-2012

Introduction – the ugliness of power politics

Politics can definitely get ugly. Even on our side there are people who sound like they could kill with their words, or who demean a person's character. Unfortunately, anything seems to be fair game so long as it helps our side to win. Some of the exaggerated caricatures of Obama are totally uncalled for. I don't think there is any justification for the lies and slander that have been said about him; the truth about him is already bad enough. We don't need lies and slander. But power politics goes on in all the parties. When presidents get into trouble there are often scapegoats who can take the fall for them. In Iowa, we have recently seen alleged scapegoating in the Bachman campaign. And certainly the battles we have seen to keep Ron Paul out of the Republican primaries and caucuses are amazing - *and* ugly. Power politics seems to be everywhere. I've seen it in the Douglas County Convention. I've seen it with both the bad guys and the good guys. And we will see the same in this chapter. David starts to play the same game of power politics that Abner has been playing.

It kind of reminds me of the game we used to play as kids, called "King of the Hill" or "King of the Castle." You would find a sofa to stand on (well, until your mom would chase you off the sofa) and then would find a mound of dirt or something that would make you elevated above the rest of the kids – that was the name of the game. And of course, they are pulling and shoving and trying to get you off the mound so that they can be King of the Hill. And that is a parable that describes at least part of the lust for power and control that we see in at least Abner. David really does try hard later in the chapter to avoid this grasping for power. But for some people, it is the prized possession. It is *the* thing that they live for. And it was certainly Abner's goal for life:

I. Rizpah, Saul's concubine – symbol of inheriting Saul's kingdom

A. Abner's intentions clearly stated (v. 6)

Look at verse 6:

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2Samuel 3:6 Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner was strengthening *his hold* on the house of Saul.

Let's divide the verse into two parts. The first part summarizes the long war of northern aggression against David. Abner was not satisfied to be king of Northern Israel. He did not agree with the right of Judah to secede. He wanted to be king of Judah too. That is a controlling spirit. And so the first part of the verse highlights a thirst for more power that is expressed in wars of aggression. If you study the years leading up to the War Between the States, it was an illustration of power politics to the max. We are not talking about something new here. You really ought to read the discussions that went on in the Congress in the 60's. They manifest an unbelievable spirit of control.

But Abner also had an internal war going on within his own administration, and this internal conflict revolved around his push for more control over the northern government. It is summarized in the second part of the verse, "**Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul.**" He's trying to take over. Now, there was resistance to his grasping for power, but he was gradually able to get more and more power. By the way, where did that resistance come from? It's not mentioned in our text, but if you take a quick look at verse 17, you will get a little bit of a hint. It says, "**Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, saying, 'In time past you were seeking for David to be king over you.'**" Over the past seven and half years, there were discussions among the elders about putting David in charge; giving the kingdom to him. So it was not an easy thing for Abner to gain more power. The elders weren't so keen on it. Now, he was a strong man, and he could have easily killed an opponent, but it seems that he played power politics instead. He played one party off against another party. He used political intrigue. He used the threat of external enemies. Because of the threat of annihilation by the Philistines, he no doubt pushed them into giving him emergency powers. Everything in the first three chapters points to that. And chapter 2, verse 10 says that within two years, Abner had enough power that Ishbosheth was no longer calling the shots on anything. He was a puppet king in every respect. But even that wasn't enough. Abner's ultimate goal was to replace Ishbosheth as the next king, but he couldn't do it all at once. So he was a grasping, conniving man. He was the perfect image of the power hungry politicians in Washington DC who gain a stronger and stronger hold on the house of Washington.

In his speech to the Virginia Constitutional Convention, James Madison spoke of this constant grasping for power as being a threat to any government. Those guys were not naïve. Madison said that you especially needed to be on guard against this problem during times of national emergency, when tyrants can ask for power while looking like they are defending your liberty. It's a fascinating speech. Anyway, he said in one part of the speech,

The essence of Government is power; and power, lodged as it must be in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse. In monarchies, the interests and happiness of all may be sacrificed to the caprice and passions of a despot. In aristocracies, the rights and welfare of the many may be sacrificed to the pride and cupidity of the few. In republics, the great danger is, that the majority may not sufficiently respect the rights of the minority."

So he said that this power politics had to be chained down by checks and balances – most of which (by the way) have been sadly removed in America, all in the name of efficiency. The Abners have been very successful. And over the past 150 years we haven't just given unconstitutional powers to the president; we have ceded unbelievable amounts of power to agencies and committees, some of which are utterly unaccountable. And so verse 6 is a great descriptor of our country. Because of constant declarations of war and emergencies (verse 6a) we have enabled a few to strengthen their hold on the house of Washington (verse 6b). It's the classic play, and even Republicans have succumbed to this power politics.

B. The symbol of his intentions (v. 7a)

The final step of Abner's control, while somewhat shocking to us in the twenty-first century, was universally recognized in those days as a symbolic declaration of kingship. He took Saul's concubine, Rizpah and went in to her. This was as literal a laying hold of the house of Saul as you could get. Verse 7:

2Samuel 3:7 And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So *Ishbosheth* said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?"

Abner never denies the charge. In fact, commentators believe that he slept with Rizpah in a very public way to deliberately show that he was the ruler. Kenneth Chafin notes,

Since a king's wives and concubines became the property of his successor...

And actually, let me stop there and point out that this was *not* true in Biblical law. Abner was simply following the common customs of virtually

all of the pagan nations of the world in that day. It was *worldly* wisdom, *not* Biblical wisdom. And interestingly, Absalom would do much the same thing when he tried to overthrow David. Let me read that. It is chapter 16:22. It says, “**So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.**” In the then current pagan world, that was a symbol of taking over the kingship.

Isn’t it amazing how far professing believers will compromise the word of God and still call themselves believers? We know Abner was not, but he pretended to be. We know Absalom was not, but he pretended to be. You couldn’t be in his position without claiming to be a believer. That’s what de Tocqueville meant when he said in the early 1800’s, “In the United States the sovereign authority is religious, and consequently hypocrisy must be common.” He meant that politicians will pretend to be anything they need to be to get into power. And that is exactly what Abner did. But we digress. Back to what this commentator was saying... Chafin said,

Since a king’s wives and concubines became the property of his successor, for Abner to take one of Saul’s concubines was an act of treason. It meant that he was claiming to be king.

This was a declaration of a coup. So Rizpah becomes the symbol of his intentions. And she stands in tension then to David’s taking of Michal. The text is deliberately juxtaposing those two women. Abner and David are doing exactly the same thing. Let’s move on to the second half of verse 7.

C. This forces the “king” to challenge Abner (v. 7b)

This public action of Abner immediately forced Ishbosheth’s hand. He wouldn’t even be a king in name if he didn’t object to this blatant challenge. “**So Ishbosheth said to Abner, ‘Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?’**” Ishbosheth is finally standing up to Abner, but it is too late. Abner has already orchestrated things so that Ishbosheth has zero power. Who is going to defend him? The military won’t. The elders are too fearful to do so. And in any case, they don’t like Ishbosheth. They would rather have David. So using this tirade, Abner not only intimidates, but he also is able to make Ishbosheth look like an ungrateful wretch:

D. Though Abner never denies the charge, he uses the charge as an excuse to complain about Ishbosheth’s ingratitude (vv. 8-9)

Verses 8-9:

2Samuel 3:8 Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, “*Am I a dog’s head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the*

house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman?

2Samuel 3:9 May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the LORD has sworn to him—

He's angry that Ishbosheth even dared to challenge him. In terms of turning over the kingdom, the evidence shows that he had planned to do this all along, and that this was all just a big public show, and I'll explain that in a bit. But let's just dig into what these verses reveal on the surface.

They show first of all that Ishbosheth had no power. That's clear. He was a puppet. He may have looked like he was running the country, but for at least the last five and a half of the previous seven and a half years, everyone knew that Abner ran the show. That's why chapter 2:10 said that Ishbosheth only reigned two years of the past seven and a half years. Abner called all the shots after that.

And when you are analyzing American politics, you shouldn't look only at the pretty faces that are running for public office. Look at the people behind the scenes. They are the controllers; they are the Abners. And those controllers have for the most part governed the same staff in DC and in the agencies no matter who is in office. There are unelected people who really run this country, with elected officials only making surface changes to a tiny percentage of government issues. And Congressmen will tell you that this is true and that it is "impossible" to change this. The bills are massive – so massive that few can read any of them and get any work done. And our elected officials have (for the most part) been forced trust others to vet the information for them and give them the most important stuff. The workload is impossible for our elected officials to manage. Not all paperwork even gets to the Supreme Court Judges. A couple of years ago a Supreme Court judge complained that he never got the paperwork for an important case that he wanted to introduce that related to the administration. They don't have the time to read all the paperwork themselves. It's physically impossible. The paperwork gets vetted by people who have political agendas. Why are the same handlers that were behind Carter, Reagan, Bush senior, Clinton, Bush junior still showing up at the same meetings? I recognize them. I see them at the same planning meetings.

The point is that we shouldn't look at Ishbosheth. He's the illusion. He's the puppet. We need to pray against and work against the Abners who are behind the scenes. Is this conspiratorial? Yes it is. I'm guilty as charged. I'm a conspiratorialist – but not the kind that helplessly thinks that they will

win. No way. I recommend Gary North's book, *Conspiracy: A Biblical View*. It gives a far more balanced view of the conspiracies that have always been out there, and points out that Psalm 1 says these conspiracies will always fail. They will fall just like Abner fell. So the first thing that we see in these verses is that Abner was the real power behind the scenes for many years.

The second thing these verses show is that Abner thinks that Ishbosheth should just shut up and be grateful that he isn't dead. This is the extent of graciousness in power politics – go along to get along; upset the cart, and you get shot or run out of office. Here is the implied message that an Abner gives to every elder who goes to Washington, DC: “If you go along with my agendas I will let you get along in Washington, DC, but if not, I will sic the media, the advocacy groups, and the FBI on you. You will get investigated and slandered. You'll have the IRS do audits. I will play every power play I can against you until you are absolutely miserable and want to quit.” That's Abner. He pretends that he has been a hero for the last seven and a half years in not turning him over to David. But what does that imply? That there has always been the possibility that he could be turned over to David – “Shut up or I'll turn you over to David.” He says, “I've been loyal to you,” when in reality he was only using Ishbosheth to gain his own power. And in power politics, people are used, and then discarded all the time. It's one of the reasons I hate politics so much. Even the Republicans do this. Even Reagan did it.

Those two verses show thirdly that Abner knew all along that God had prophesied that David should be king. And actually, in verses 17 and 18 he repeated this information that both he and the elders had known this for a long time. So he has had the revelation for a long time, and has ignored it, but now is using it. Even though he hypocritically pledged faithfulness to his “one nation under God,” (yeah, right!) he was flagrantly disobeying God's revelation concerning David all along. The weird thing is that he now uses God's revelation that he has been disobeying against *Ishbosheth*. He was a living hypocrisy.

But I think many Christians do the same today. They flagrantly violate the Bible, but they sure know how to quote “judge not that you be not judged.” They are Abners. And politicians do this all the time. They will appeal to the Constitution when it suits them (often taking it out of context) when they know full well that most of the time they are flagrantly violating it. They are Abners. Abners feel no tension whatsoever in using a constitution, a law, the Bible, or some other authority when it suits them and

ignoring it when it doesn't. Now, David will try to play this political game too, but he won't be as skilled at it. And later in the chapter he gives it up. You have to be a psychopath to be able to lie, manipulate, and live in hypocrisy as constantly as an Abner does.

Fourth, these verses prepare us to realize better than David did that Abner had no respect for David whatsoever. Joab could see through the conniving of this grasping man, but David apparently took Abner at his word. Why do I say that he had no respect for David? It's his words, "**Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah?**" As far as Abner is concerned, "dog's head" and "Judah" are equivalent, and are equally derogatory terms. He looks down on the South and all that it stands for. And the word "dog's head" refers to David. So his opinion of David and the South is obviously very, very low. But boy, can he be as sweet as peaches when he negotiates with David! Hypocrisy. We cannot be taken in by Abners, even if they present themselves as our only options. You are falling into the game of power politics when you let the establishment force you to pick between two equally disastrous options. Now, if you want to vote for one of the options they give you, fine – I won't argue with you, but don't let them give you the illusion that the lesser of two evils is your only choice. Vote your conscience.

OK, fifth, he sees no ethical issue with his sleeping with the woman. He treats it as trivial, and something that Ishbosheth should not complain about. He was in effect saying, "How dare you challenge me?! I'm the one who gives you every privilege you have. And anyway, why are you upset that I am now declaring myself to be king. I've been ruling for the last five years, and you know it." None of this speaks well of Abner's character. And it prepares readers to not feel too sorry for him when he gets murdered by Joab later on in this chapter. Joab was at fault in murdering him (we are not going to justify that), but at the same time, God used two different conspirators to frustrate each other and to accomplish God's purposes. David is not a good player in this power politics game, and God mercifully spares him later in this chapter. And if God can overrule the intricate conspiracies of an Abner, and use the sinful rashness of a Joab, He can overrule and promote his kingdom even during the messes that we live in in America. But it is important that we keep our hands clean in the process.

E. Abner's rebellion against Ishbosheth flowed from an earlier rebellion against God (vv. 9-10)

In verses 9-10 we see that Abner's rebellion against human authority flowed from an earlier rebellion against God. And this is as it has always been in history. If you reject the first commandment ("You shall have no other gods before Me"), you will logically have no reason to keep any of the others. And this is why I have always said that the state must submit not just to the last six commandments. The state must submit to the one true God as Lord and King of the nation, or the rest of the commandments will always be negotiable. This is why Justice Roy Moore's Ten Commandments movement is not a trivial thing. It is foundational. The Lord of a nation determines the ethics of that nation. And I've already talked about these verses plenty, so I won't say much more. Verses 9 and 10:

2Samuel 3:9 May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the LORD has sworn to him—

2Samuel 3:10 to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba."

The author records this speech to make it clear that David had been in the right all along, and even his enemies have come to agree with that.

F. It becomes clear who was calling the shots in Israel is (v. 11, 12a)

In verse 11 and the first part of verse 12 it is crystal clear who was calling the shots in northern Israel. It says,

2Samuel 3:11 And he could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

He feared him. Fear is a part of the game of power politics. It's what the GLBT movement is trying to do when it picks on Chick-fil-A. It is trying to put all corporations on notice that they will be in trouble if they don't cave in to the GLBT cause. But fear is at the heart of all power politics. It can be generating fear of enemy countries, or terrorism, or fear of the media ganging up on you, fear of losing your chair in the Senate, fear of the homosexual lobby making life miserable for you, etc., etc. There are any number of fears that Abners will use to get their way. Ishbosheth knows whose in charge. He backs off, and Abner knows that he won't have any resistance from Ishbosheth. Ishbosheth will keep his mouth shut, just like most Americans will keep their mouth shut on the most important issues. They don't want to get the flak; they don't want to get the pushback. But we are not called to be Ishbosheths, are we? Fear is contrary to faith, and we must live by faith. Moving on, verse 12 says,

2Samuel 3:12 Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, “Whose is the land?”

Abner declares with that statement that the land belongs to Abner, not Ishbosheth. I’m in charge here, and from now on you will be dealing with me. It goes on...

saying *also*, “Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand *shall be* with you to bring all Israel to you.”

You make a covenant with a king. So in effect Abner has declared himself to be the ruler of Israel, and rather than approaching David as a loser, he is approaching David as an equal ruler who can negotiate with David and who can offer David a kingdom or take it away. But he is still calling the shots. It is amazing how many principles of Machiavelli’s book, *The Prince*, Abner has put in place. This is Machiavellianism masterfully played out.

G. Why did Abner immediately hand over the kingdom as soon as he had asserted his power? (cf vv. 17-18)

But what has confused some people is the question, “Why did he try to get absolute power and then immediately hand the kingdom over to David? It seems like a contradiction.” But it is not. From a humanistic perspective, one commentator pointed out that it was brilliant maneuvering from a man who had an impossible situation, but who knew how to still keep himself as king of the Hill. First of all, why would he find it necessary to hand over the kingdom if he wants power and if he already has power?

There were a number of things that were forcing Abner to do something new. If you look down at verses 17-18 once again, you will see that one of his power bases was getting very restive. They were tired of Abner’s tyranny. Verse 17:

2Samuel 3:17 Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, saying, “In time past you were seeking for David *to be* king over you.

Interesting! Over the past seven and a half years there had been at least some murmuring among the leaders of his country that they really ought to make David king. This was the beginnings of contemplated interposition. They were thinking of resisting Abner, and the exclamation mark in the first phrase of verse 18 shows that Abner was a bit exasperated over this frustration of his aims. But he gives them their wish – *on his terms*. Machiavellians always make sure that even concessions are on their terms and to their favor.

But I want to briefly comment on that unrest. We are having the stirrings of such discontent in America. Praise the Lord! States are beginning to pass laws to protect the citizens against Obamacare and other tyrannical Federal mandates. New Hampshire has just passed a number of interposition laws including a law reinstating jury nullification – a reaction against the tyranny of judges. Several states are standing up to Abner in other ways. The elders of America are expressing the restiveness that the whole population is feeling. So what does Abner do? He does some of the same things that RINO republicans have been doing in the last couple years. In verse 18 Abner sees the writing on the wall and acts like he is in agreement with them. He says,

2Samuel 3:18 Now then, do *it!* For the LORD has spoken of David, saying, “By the hand of My servant David, I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and the hand of all their enemies.’ ”

Wow! What a switcheroo! In private he has just told Ishbosheth that David is a dog’s head, but in public here he is a cheerleader for David and a cheerleader for what God says. He has licked his finger like a good politician and realized that the wind is blowing a different direction than he has been going, and suddenly he is a tea party advocate. Didn’t you know that? He founded the tea party? Abner no longer mocks the tea party publically. He goes to the tea party rallies and acts like he shares their ideals. And I have facetiously phrased it that way because I think you can see some of the obvious applications to politicians all around us who are RINOS and don’t even remotely hold to the economic principles of the tea party. It just turns my stomach to see these modern Abners in the Senate and in the Congress. And Joab is probably thinking, “Yeah right. You’ll try to treat David just like you treated Ishbosheth. No way. I’m having nothing to do with that.” Unfortunately, we will see that Joab, who *was* a true tea party guy, did not always follow God’s law in the *way* in which he resisted tyranny. He took care of the problem by murdering Abner. No – wrong methodology. Even our methods in politics must be informed by the Scriptures. So the problems aren’t just with the enemy. In politics we are our own worst enemies because we don’t know and live by the full law of God. But in any case, this verse spoke of the restiveness of the elders. So he’s got trouble within one of his essential power bases.

But in addition to that, Abner is recognizing that he has military problems. That is his second essential power base. 1Chronicles indicates that some of his own troops have been defecting to David; his army is getting weaker, and he is steadily losing the war that he started against David. It’s

only a matter of time before David overruns them and he loses *everything*. So Abner, being the sly fellow that he is, realizes that he needs to quickly make a bold move. He doesn't like losing. He needs to make a public statement that he is the new king (that was his taking of Rizpah) so that he can negotiate a sweet deal with David in the United Kingdom that is inevitably going to happen anyway. He anticipates the worst, and he tries to make the best of it by stepping in as the country's leader. *That's* what's going on. Sometimes when you were playing king of the hill, you had to go down, while pulling people with you so that you could use the momentum to swing yourself back up on top.

The last thing that I see in those two verses is that Abner's pretended generosity in giving Israel to David is not only hypocritical, it is liberal to the core. I define a modern liberal as a person who gives away everything that he doesn't own. Abner didn't legally own Israel, but he gave it away anyway. He took what was not his (whether it be a woman or a country) and he gave away what was not his. By the way, there is a verse later on in this book that indicates that Abner gave away Rizpah and all the other concubines of Saul. It wasn't his to give, but he gave it. He was a Republican liberal; a RINO.

H. But think of the human pain that came from Abner's manipulation

And who got hurt in the process? Obviously Ishbosheth did. But I don't feel sorry for him at all. He had willfully been a part of the conspiracy from the beginning. He got what he deserved. The one I feel sorry for is Rizpah. It was Rizpah who was violated by Abner as a pawn in a political game. She was the one who would feel defiled and would be crying out to God, "Why? Why me?" This was a huge humiliation. Abner didn't marry her. As the next king, he simply took her and slept with her, no doubt in a public ceremony much like Absalom would do in chapter 16. I cannot imagine the grief that Rizpah would feel at this violation.

But is this any different from the way our nation's leaders have metaphorically raped and pillaged our country? They have violated the states, have violated the constitution, have metaphorically slept with anyone and anything that would advance the cause of absolute centralization of the federal government and integration of our once great country into *world-federalism*. And boy have they been successful. Have our unconstitutional leaders on occasion made concessions to Davids? Yes, but only out of necessity. They have not relinquished power, and have not really changed

their philosophy of government, and we are still headed toward the cliff no matter which party's president has been in power. Very few (even in the Republican Party) hold to the strict constitutionalism and small government of King David or George Washington, for that matter. I'm not confident that Mitt Romney will be any more constitutional than Obama. He will take away something else that isn't his and give back something that isn't his to give. His history, rhetoric, and campaign show it. I'm not telling you how to vote. If you feel that this lesser of two evils is a better vote, I can give you two verses that can justify that on occasion. I'm just saying that I am utterly cynical that anything good can come from Abners and the continued power politics that conservatives have bought into. We need to completely reexamine our approaches to politics.

II. Michal, Saul's daughter and Ishbosheth's sister – symbol of inheriting Saul's kingdom

A. The true contestants for the kingdom are Abner and David - Ishbosheth is now out of the question (v. 12)

OK, Roman numeral II. As we will see in this chapter, even David succumbs to playing these political power plays. He tries to avoid it later in the chapter, but here, I think it is evident. He acts just like modern Republicans do. We've already seen in verse 12 that Abner and David are the true contestants for the kingdom. Who knows what Abner has up his sleeve later on? But for *now*, the offer is given to David, and it looks to David like an answer to prayer. He's probably thinking, "Praise God, we are having two steps forward." Verse 12:

2Samuel 3:12 Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, "Whose is the land?" saying also, "Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you."

What could be better? David probably thinks, "Here's the answer." It would have been tempting to get into this game with Abner. Joab has become less and less cooperative. And David is thinking that if he replaces Joab with Abner, he can have his cake and eat it too. Now, Joab has other ideas, and we will get to that in another sermon.

B. David demands a difficult challenge to Abner that answers Abner's claim to the throne (v. 13) – this deliberately humiliates Abner.

But in verse 13 David agrees:

2Samuel 3:13 And David said, "Good, I will make a covenant with you..."

Abner has driven a hard bargain. He wants David to treat *him* as king, and to covenant with *him* as if the whole land belongs to *Abner*. This puts Abner in a better position to negotiate a strong office for himself – to be the leader of all David’s armies. But David is a tough negotiator as well. Verse 13 shows that he gives Abner a test.

And David said, “Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall not see my face [That’s showing that he is in charge and putting Abner in his place – “you shall not see my face”] unless you first bring Michal, Saul’s daughter, when you come to see my face.”

Now, last week I explained why I don’t agree with what David did, but symbolically you can understand it. Abner had used sexual possession of Saul’s concubine as a symbol that he was heir to Saul. It would take some swallowing of his pride for him to fulfill David’s demand because it would nullify the significance of what he had just done. David is one-upping Abner. He is saying, I insist that the *daughter* of Saul, princess Michal be given back to me as my rightful due. That’s a step up above a concubine of Saul. Since there were no other heirs to the throne except for Mephibosheth, who was a cripple, this symbolically solidified David into the position as the only rightful heir. So you can understand why David did it, even if it was wrong.

C. David refuses to acknowledge Abner as the true king (v. 14)

But David did one more thing to humble Abner. He negotiated with *Ishbosheth* on this matter, not with Abner. Verse 14 was a put down to everything Abner said in verse 12. This is a tacit statement that Abner is not the legitimate heir. David is willing to make Abner the chief commander, but it is going to be on his own terms. He’s a tough negotiator. Verse 14:

2Samuel 3:14 So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, saying, “Give *me* my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines.”

Though Abner is the agent who actually brings Michal to David, and negotiates a deal with David, David has made his point to all of Israel. His point was, “I am the only legitimate surviving heir to the throne of Saul.”

D. Michal becomes another pawn of politics (vv. 15-16)

But though David scored huge points in this exchange, Michal and Paltiel (sometimes called Palti for short) are two more casualties to David’s willingness to temporarily play the same power politics as Abner. His compromise would treat people as pawns to be used, sacrificed, and

discarded. And you will have to review my sermon from last week to see that this is an accurate interpretation of the situation with Michal. It's not a bright spot in David's life. Verses 15-16:

2Samuel 3:15 And Ishbosheth sent and took her from *her* husband [Notice that it is God Himself who says that she was really Paltiel's husband. Some people think that it wasn't a legitimate marriage. No, no. God says that she really was married to him and he really was her husband. So it says, "And Ishobsheth sent and took her from her husband"], **from Paltiel the son of Laish.**

2Samuel 3:16 Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping behind her. So Abner said to him, "Go, return!" And he returned.

From one perspective I can understand what David did. He had never agreed to the divorce in the first place. For the first time in Israel's history, Saul had let Michal have a no-fault divorce. It wasn't Biblical. But you don't solve an unbiblical divorce and remarriage with another unbiblical divorce and remarriage. Tragic as Saul's giving of Michal to Paltiel was, Deuteronomy 24 forever forbade David from retaking Michal. He was violating the law of God, and Jeremiah 3:1 says that it defiled the land. And the pain to both Michal and Paltiel were that they had been married to each other for somewhere between 16 and 17 years. It was a long established marriage that he was breaking apart. Palti was in sin in taking Michal as well, but once the marriage had happened, it was best to leave it that way. And so they are both illustrations that there will always be pawns and sacrificial lambs in power politics. Machiavelli's book, *The Prince*, is being lived out in this story.

Conclusion – Will we have pragmatic power politics forever?

So in conclusion, I want to say that power politics must be shunned by Christians, and we should pursue the application of Biblical law with all our hearts. That is the only thing that will help us to sort through the sticky jurisdictional questions, the tough ethical problems, and the puzzling methodological issues of government. If there is one thing that this passage drives home to me very strongly, it is the Scripture's strict warning: "**To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.**" Don't look to pagan philosophy for light; don't look to the Republican political playbooks for light; look to the Scriptures.

We need that light, and I want to end by encouraging you that Scripture promises an increase of that light in everyday living, including politics. Hard as it may seem to believe, that light has already come. God told Jesus, "**I will ... give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to**

the Gentiles” (Is. 42:6). Jesus said, **“I am the Light of the world.”** But Scripture says that this light started in darkness, then it began to dawn, then to grow brighter, and it is destined to completely fill the world with the light of Christ through the spread of Scripture. But it is a gradual process that can only happen when Christians take the application of all Scripture seriously - or as the great commission words it, they teach the nations to live by everything that Jesus commanded. God says, **“For law will proceed from Me, and I will make My justice rest as a light of the peoples”** (Is. 51:4). Peter says, **“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts”** (2Peter 1:9). God has chosen to transform the world as the church is willing to believe and apply the light of the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible.

Humanistic politics will never bring in the peace that the United Nations longs for. Only Christ’s grace, applying His Word, by the zeal of God can accomplish it. And that’s exactly what Isaiah 9 promises will happen. Isaiah 9:6 says, **“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given** [that’s the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ – the greater David. It goes on...] **And the government will be upon His shoulder.** [That’s Matthew 28-“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” He has the government on His shoulders. Isaiah 9 goes on.] **And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end** [gradual growth] **upon the throne of David** [which Acts 2 says Christ is presently sitting on and ruling from] **and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.** [And here is the key phrase:] **The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.**” Not the zeal of power politics, but the zeal of the Lord of hosts.

This is what gives us confidence to do the right thing in politics and to trust God for the outcome – because it’s not just us doing it – the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. If you are not convinced that God’s zeal is all that is needed to transform this world, you will be constantly tempted to use power politics. That’s where evangelicals have gone wrong. They trust in a Messianic state. And those seem to be the only two options before us – the spiritual power of God or the humanistic power of man.

It is as the light of Christian politics penetrates the darkness of pagan politics more and more that we will eventually find power politics completely replaced with Romans 13 servant-politics. We will find respect

for life. We will never again find individuals needing to be sacrificed for the general good. Law will rule, not pragmatism. Isaiah 11:9 prophecies, **“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”** Let’s be a part of pouring out of the knowledge of the Lord as waters upon our nation. What each of you adds may only be a bucket, but as we convince other Christians to go back to the Law of God and to pour it into our nation, the water level of Christ’s Kingdom will keep increasing. It is the only answer to the perpetual problems of humanistic power politics. God’s grace and His law must transform it all. And to Him be the glory. Amen.

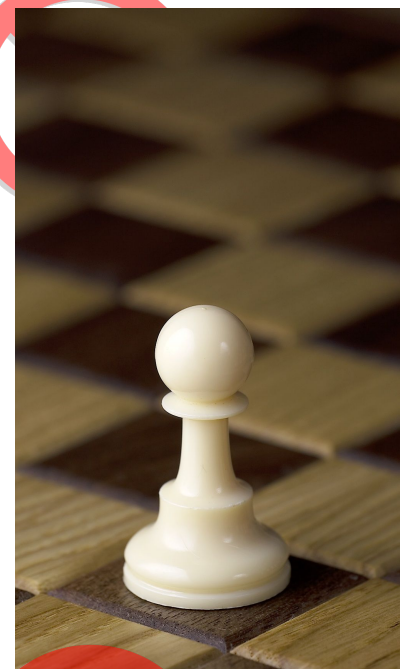
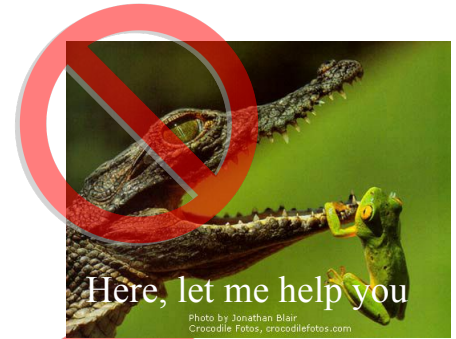
Power Politics and the People Who Suffer 2 Samuel 3:6-16

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 8-5-2012

Introduction – the ugliness of power politics

I. **Rizpah, Saul's concubine** – symbol of inheriting Saul's kingdom

- A. Abner's intentions clearly stated (v. 6)
- B. The symbol of his intentions (v. 7a)
- C. This forces the "king" to challenge Abner (v. 7b)
- D. Though Abner never denies the charge, he uses the charge as an excuse to complain about Ishbosheth's ingratitude (vv. 8-9)
- E. Abner's rebellion against Ishbosheth flowed from an earlier rebellion against God (vv. 9-10)
- F. It becomes clear who was calling the shots in Israel is (v. 11, 12a)
- G. Why did Abner immediately hand over the kingdom as soon as he had asserted his power? (cf vv. 17-18)
- H. But think of the human pain that came from Abner's manipulation



II. **Michal, Saul's daughter** and Ishbosheth's sister – symbol of inheriting Saul's kingdom

- A. The true contestants for the kingdom are Abner and David - Ishbosheth is now out of the question (v. 12)
- B. David demands a difficult challenge to Abner that answers Abner's claim to the throne (v. 13) – this deliberately humiliates Abner.
- C. David refuses to acknowledge Abner as the true king (v. 14)
- D. Michal becomes another pawn of politics (vv. 15-16)



Conclusion – Will we have pragmatic power politics forever?

