

### 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL

#### Week 4, chapter 3

Chapter 2 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel established David, God's man, as King over Judah and he set up headquarters in Hebron but he had by no means consolidated his power over all of the clans that represented even the Hebrews living in the south of Canaan. While much of Judah instantly accepted him as their monarch the tribe of Simeon was also undoubtedly brought under David's sphere of influence, although Simeon is not mentioned and is thus treated as an afterthought.

The Tribe of Simeon was alive and well but because their territory was (as a result of a curse upon them by Jacob) completely surrounded by Judah's territory, as is a bull's eye in middle of a target, they had virtually no chance to establish themselves as a tribe of any consequence. Thus we will get only snippets of information about Simeon from time to time in the coming books as their significance as a viable independent tribe of Israel ebbed and flowed (but generally remained precarious) until sometime after Hezekiah when they more or less disappeared altogether. It was not that some genocide upon them happened; rather a variety of circumstances caused them to slowly assimilate mostly into Judah as a matter of practicality. Many of Simeon hung on to their tribal heritage as a matter of family pride but their allegiance and livelihood was generally attached to Judah.

At the end of chapter 2 we saw a blood feud established between **Avner** (**Ishbosheth's** military commander and the de facto power of the northern tribal coalition) and **Yo'av** (David's military commander, son of David's sister **Zeruiah**). Yo'av's younger brother **Asahel** was killed by Abner when (after an incident at a place called the Pool of Gibeon that lay on the border of Benjamin and Judah) Asahel chased Abner with intentions to end his life, but Abner came out the victor. Thus was established a family vendetta against Abner.

I want us to pay special attention and note that in this chapter (and really all the books that lay ahead of us) we will see a steady degradation and corruption in how the Torah is applied in the

national life of Israel and in the lives of individuals such as David. This is why studying the Torah is so important in the first place because how can one recognize the corruption and misapplication of something we know nothing about? Even behind this blood feud between Abner and Yo'av we see a twisted logic emerge that causes Yo'av to view his intention to seek revenge on Abner as a legal duty and perhaps even pious before the Lord. When we get to Abner's death at Yo'av's hand we'll discuss this a bit more extensively, but for now let me just say that Yo'av takes on the role as his family's **go'el hadam**, the blood avenger, which within certain boundaries is sanctioned by Yehoveh and the Law. Recall that 6 cities of refuge were ordained by the Lord and set up throughout Canaan so that people could escape to the nearest of these sanctuaries and be protected from the wrath of the blood avenger who could, legally, kill this person who had caused the death of the avenger's family member.

The other thing we need to take notice of is how the Lord uses the will of men to achieve His will, even though they aren't aware of it. We really don't see the narrator of these chapters about David making it a regular point to say that the Lord caused this or the Lord caused that; rather we see men taking actions that (on the surface) appear to be totally independent and personally willful with the intent of fulfilling their own agendas. And yet as this all unfolds we see the divine Master weaving these decisions and actions of various men into a perfect fabric, and advancing His purposes with the participants largely unaware. This is a mysterious Biblical pattern that we have seen since Genesis. We observed it in dramatic fashion as the Lord used Pharaoh's stubborn heart (that was thoroughly against God) to achieve the deliverance and liberation of His people Israel. And as I was reminded at dinner with friends the other evening, this dynamic of God is really the most prevalent and operative manifestation of Him in our lives and in the world today, just as it has always been. What routinely goes on daily in our own lives, in the lives of those who govern us, in the lives of those who teach us, and in all who we come into contact with, is in one way or another playing a role in an outcome predetermined by the Lord in eternity past. It is just invisible to us UNLESS we occasionally pause to look back and recognize it for what it is. And then when we do, we also need to pause and give praise, and honor, and glory to Him who alone could do such a thing.

Let's read 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel chapter 3.

### **READ 2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL CHAPTER 3 all**

Verse 1 sets the stage. Many commentators will say that what verse 1 is describing is civil war; that is a gross mischaracterization in my view. Indeed there was an ongoing hostility between

those loyal to David and those loyal to Ishbosheth but generally speaking there was not a declared state of war whereby armies were pitted against armies in pitched battles. Even the conflict between Abner's men and Yo'av's men at the Pool of Gibeon started as more of an impulsive and rash Gladiator-like competition (as deadly as it was) that got quickly out of hand; not as enemies happening upon one another as they were on a seek and destroy mission.

A cold war of sorts was underway between the north and the south. Certainly skirmishes between the two sides happened but they ought to be visualized more as raids of one clan upon another with the purpose of stealing food and supplies and valuable items from the other side. Yes people were killed, but this was a battle of wills for the hearts and minds of the people and it required an intimate knowledge of the culture and a heavy helping of finesse more than military force. This is because there were unspoken limits on the actions could be taken and just how wide or permanent any kind of disaffection between the Israelite clans and tribes might be. After all, all Israelites shared a common family bond and in the end that had much to do with their ability to kill one another or pillage from each other on one day and become allies the next. That is tribalism.

Let me see if I can give you an illustration of those circumstances in David's day by using one in our time. Notice how in the Middle and Far East our modern militaries are forever stymied by these tribal armies who have little technology, use primitive strategies, and employ mostly basic armaments to fight with. And also notice how on the diplomatic side we see this constant frustration and bewilderment of our Ambassadors and government officials who, although trained at our elite universities like Harvard, Princeton and Berkley, find themselves constantly out maneuvered by these primitive tribal leaders who seem to change loyalties at the drop of a hat. Everything is a moving target that can morph from friend to foe, and back to friend again with little more than the right words uttered and a customary bribe. Or just as problematic some sacred site is violated, or some cultural custom or family honor is stepped on (none of which we even knew mattered), and loyalties shift yet again. Westerners have little regard or respect and even less understanding for the centuries of history and long standing blood feuds and immutable cultural traditions and vague family ties that are the driving force behind all of these decisions and actions. Thus as our generals are discovering there are limits as to what pure force can achieve, and the outcome is never going to be well defined and neat as were World Wars I and II. Rather what we are witnessing is a never ending process of jockeying for position that is part of the very fabric of tribal society, and until tribalism is replaced with something else nothing is going to change.

Thus we are told that as the war dragged on the house of **Sha'ul** diminished and the house of David grew stronger. This is speaking of relative strength, an ebb and a flow, not a clear cut victory or a permanent shift in power and control from one government to another. What this means is that the clans were positioning themselves to side with the eventual winner. They

needed to be allied with the current strongman (Ishbosheth) but were ready to change over to the emerging one (David) in a heartbeat. From an earthly standpoint this so-called war between David and Ishbosheth was not a contest between ideals and philosophies or a way of life; this was about prosperity, security and status. And the weak and ineffectual Ishbosheth could not measure up to what the charismatic and highly regarded David had to offer.

From a heavenly standpoint the Lord was allowing men's evil inclinations to bring about His determination that David would become God's earthly representative over all of Israel, God's earthly kingdom.

Verse 2 starts to trace the establishment of David's house (family). It has gone through a number of stages beginning with his marriage to **Michal**, Saul's daughter, only to have her taken from David and given to another man by a vengeful Saul. Later, during David's self-imposed exile from Canaan as Saul sought to kill him, David married the widow of **Nabal (Avigayil)** and also another woman named **Achino'am** of Jezreel. Now that David is king and has taken up residence back in Judah at Hebron it is time to assemble a royal harem. Thus all of these sons we see mentioned come from various women, but they are all born in Hebron David's capital city.

The pre-eminent son was **Amnon**, his firstborn whose mother was **Achino'am**. **Amnon** means "faithful". True to form the second son was born to his other wife **Avigayil** and his name was **Ki'lav**, which means "the father prevails". Next was the infamous **Avshalom** (the father is peace) who was born to **Ma'akhah**, a Geshurite woman, a foreigner. Let me pause to remind you that the kingdom of Geshur was currently under Ishbosheth's influence and Geshur was prominent in Abner's step by step plan to re-establish Saul's kingdom for Ishbosheth. So here we see David marry this woman for obvious political reasons, to establish a political and familial bond with Geshur in order to out-manuever Ishbosheth. This is why we are told that **Ma'akhah** was the daughter of the King of Geshur.

Next born was **Adoniyah** (Yehoveh is Lord), then **Shefatyah** that means "Yehoveh is judge", and finally **Yitre'am** (and there is no real assurance on just what that name means so I'm not even going to venture a guess). We're told that **Yitre'am** was born to **Eglah**, David's wife. So while we can't be 100% certain it is likely that some of these women mentioned were wives and others were concubines. Those who were official wives were so for the purpose of creating political alliances; the concubines may have been personal handmaidens of some of those wives or simply women that David found especially appealing to him, or some combination of both. In any case constructing a harem was the Middle Eastern custom; it was expected if David was to have proper status as a king and while having a harem doesn't necessarily

violate the letter of the Torah Law, it certainly violates the spirit of it.

Let me also point out that while each mother is associated to a specific son for David, this in no way means that this is the only child each one produced. Each woman would have bore several children; it's only that these listed were the firstborns (meaning the first males) born to each of these mothers. And understand that this also means that David would have had many children in a very short time, and several would have been around the same age. And this will play quite a role in some of the antics we see in later chapters about David's unruly family.

Verse 6 explains that as the hostilities continued Saul's house was weakening, and thus the already powerful Abner gained even more control in Ishbosheth's administration. And in a show of his absolute power that was greater than that of King Ishbosheth we get a brief story about Abner having a sexual relationship with a concubine of Saul's harem that had now been inherited by Ishbosheth (it was standard that when a king died or was deposed that his harem became the property of the next king). **Ritzpah** was a prominent woman and played a prominent role in the harem. In fact in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel chapter 21 we'll read about her as concerns the story of the Gibeonites' revenge against the house of Saul. No doubt it was her visibility and status that is why (of all the women in Saul's old harem) Abner went after **Ritzpah**.

This thing that Abner did was terribly serious. For a person to indulge in the king's exclusive harem, and especially with a woman of **Ritzpah's** status, was a claim to power. Recall that Jacob's son Reuben did essentially the same by having sex with Jacob's concubine **Bilah**, and the result was that Jacob removed the firstborn inheritance rights from Reuben. By the taking of Bilah Reuben essentially announced that he was taking control of Jacob's family. This was treason and Jacob reacted very harshly.

Abner was letting everyone know unequivocally that he may not have held the title of King, but he was the unassailable power of the northern tribes, not Ishbosheth. So when, at the royal court, Ishbosheth called out Abner publically for doing his deed Abner became enraged and literally shouted at the king (something that is just not done). Our CJB and many other Bible versions say that Abner screamed: "What am I....the head of a dog of Judah?" Even though we can kind of get the gist of this (that these words mean that Abner is deeply insulted), much of that phrase doesn't even exist in the original. It does speak of Abner saying, "What am I, the head of a dog...", but there is nothing at all in it about Judah. In Hebrew Abner asks if he's a **rosh kelev** and that is an unusual epithet unique in the Bible. So some early translators thought that it was an error and it should have said **rosh Kalev** (head of Caleb). And since Caleb was a prominent clan within the tribe of Judah they just kind of twisted it all around to come up with "head of a dog of Judah".

Now we'll often see this derogatory meaning of the term "dog" in the Bible. The best way to understand its intent is that it is to be seen as the opposite of "lion". A lion was regal, strong, proud, to be feared (all good attributes). A dog was unclean, weak, worthless, and fit for nothing but to roam the streets and to eat garbage (all bad attributes). So "dog" also became a common term applied to a homosexual male in that era (which was one of the greatest taboos for the Hebrews and most Middle Eastern cultures).

In any case Abner went on to say that he had shown Saul and his house only *chesed*, the greatest unmerited kindness and grace, by allowing Ishbosheth to be king. What an amazing put down! But then Abner goes on to make an even more amazing confession: he knew (as many knew) that the Lord intended David to be king over all of Israel! In verse 9 Abner speaks of knowing that Yehoveh made some well known pronouncement that David was His choice as king over both Judah and Israel and all the territory from Dan (who was now residing at the foot of Mt. Hermon) all the way to Be'er Sheva (in the southern Negev). Further that Abner says that he now intends to give David Ishbosheth's kingdom. Ishbosheth was so intimidated that he uttered not a word in response; he knew full well that Abner was absolutely able to do everything he threatened and there was nothing he could do about it.

We are going to see other references in this and later chapters to people being aware of the Lord's decree that David is to be king over all of Israel. However we don't find such a decree made public, or one even made directly to David, in the Bible. So it is probable that for some reason this divine decree was announced by Gad or Samuel and written in a document that (although well known in that era) has become lost to history (like the Book of Jasher). We see that Abner was aware of it, Ishbosheth was aware of it, and it was apparently common knowledge among the people (or the elders at the least) of both Judah and Israel. So why wasn't David immediately installed as king upon Saul's death? Because people don't always want what God wants. We have our own goals and agendas and schedules and sometimes the Lord's ways and His timing are a fly in the ointment; we irrationally think that perhaps we can postpone the inevitable, or advance His schedule, or that the Lord will look the other way and make an exception for us.

Everyone who had the ability to install David as king seemed to know about this divine decree and so all bore guilt for not fulfilling it immediately. On the other hand David who of course knew about it as well sensed that he was not to take extreme measures to put himself into power even though the Lord had ordained it. Rather David figured that if the Lord ordained it the Lord would accomplish it; and it is this attitude that was one of several of David's characteristics that (although not ALWAYS present in David nonetheless) endeared him to The Father.

Now this is not a Biblical principle that essentially demands our passivity where God's will has been made known. That is, we don't just pray and then sit on those same prayerful hands and wait for God to move. David was anything but a passive man; heaven may be our future but earth is where we are now and on earth physical action is required of us. If David was going to be king much was going to have to be lined up and ready for him to rule. And since King Saul wanted him dead the first thing he had to do was remain alive. So David moved around to survive, he made alliances and built coalitions, he severed some relationships, he learned the art of warfare and taught it to his army, he brokered treaties and gained the favor of powerful men who supported him, and he ruled fairly and steadfastly over the relatively small group in his charge; this was all in preparation for him to become king. But he never took the step of deposing the current king or killing a king to take his place. How the throne became vacant and the circumstances came together that finally sat him on that throne were in the Lord's providence. So the principle David demonstrates for us is this: pray, actively prepare, be still and be available, and then boldly step across the threshold when God opens the door.

In verse 12 Abner wastes no time in carrying out the vow he made against himself (that if he failed to act to install David as king of the north that the Lord should do terrible things to him). He sends emissaries to David to see if the King of Judah is open to a treaty. David responds that he will be Abner's ally on one condition; that Michal is returned to him.

David uses a phrase that was rather standard for the Middle East for that time, but has a wonderful (and I am certain, intended) parallel to something David's greatest descendant would say 1000 years later. The phrase is: "You will not see my face", and then goes on to precondition receiving Abner's overture by saying Michal must be returned to him. Face is *panim* in Hebrew; and it means "presence". It is a term that those in authority and who are royalty use. Here David is saying that he will not allow Abner into David's royal presence without this great wrong (that was done to him by Saul) being righted by Saul's successor.

Listen to this interesting parallel that Messiah Yeshua, of the required line of David, will mouth as recorded in the Book of Matthew.

***(Mat 23:37-39 CJB)***

***<sup>37</sup> "Yerushalayim! Yerushalayim! You kill the prophets! You stone those who are sent to you! How often I wanted to gather your children, just as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you refused!"***

**<sup>38</sup> Look! God is abandoning your house to you, leaving it desolate.**

**<sup>39</sup> For I tell you, from now on, you will not see me again (not see my face) until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of ADONAI.'"**

David was coming as Israel's king in God's name, ordained and set in place by God.

Jesus Christ was coming as Israel's king in God's name, ordained and set in place by God.

David wanted his bride returned to him by the representatives of Saul the Anti-King who held her hostage.

Yeshua wanted his bride (all of redeemed Israel) to return to Him after they had been held hostage by representatives of Satan the Anti-King.

David would not accept peace with his brethren until his bride was returned as a show of good faith.

Yeshua will not accept peace with His brethren until His bride returns as a show of good faith.

Patterns, loved one, patterns. There is the key that unlocks so many Bible mysteries that really were not meant to be so difficult or contentious for us.

And yet since in David's case, even though a show of good faith is the primary issue (just as it is for Yeshua), David is after all an earthly king and so the ways of the flesh are necessarily involved. Getting Michal back solved an interesting political problem. Recall that David did not divorce her but rather the Anti-King forcibly took her and gave her to another man. In David's eyes although there was a forced separation, and Michal was indeed given to another, Michal was still legitimately his bride. Getting Michal back would serve the practical purpose of making David once again part of Saul's house (Saul's family and dynasty) through marriage. This of course was the whole point of Saul taking Michal away from David so that David was no longer King Saul's son in law with all the rights associated with that position. By being legally bonded to Saul's family through Michal David would add to the legitimacy (by earthly custom) of having a right to the throne of Saul's old kingdom as a successor.



Thus we read that David demanded Ishbosheth as the sitting king to return her and he complied (no doubt because Abner told him to). We see Michal's husband, **Phaltiel**, following her until he can go no further, weeping uncontrollably over her loss. Did he love her that much? Possibly; but **Phaltiel** has also just lost his connection to Saul's family that David is gaining back. So there are a number of elements in play here.

The Rabbis have had some interesting debates about this incident. And it centers on whether or not David violated the Torah Law by marrying a woman who was already married. After all, **Phaltiel** didn't divorce Michal she was merely delivered back to David in her current condition. There is no way that Michal wasn't having sexual relations with **Phaltiel** and certainly some sort of ceremony had taken place to make it a marriage.

But in the end, neither had there ever been a divorce by David. Basically Michal and David were still married. David had paid the bride price and it is salient that no mention is ever made of betrothal and payment by **Phaltiel** to Saul for Michal. The betrothal ceremony had occurred and consummation was accomplished. That she was removed from David and given to another was more akin to kidnapping (although it certainly would not have been termed so in that era). Now had she REFUSED to come back to David, that is another issue; the Law would not have forced her to return and there is no hint that she didn't want to come back to David.

Now that Abner has made the overture of peace to the King of Judah and shown good faith by arranging for Michal to be returned to him Abner has to lay some groundwork by talking with the various tribal leaders of the north to see where they stand on the issue of David becoming their king, and for the reluctant ones finding a means to win their approval. So in verse 17 we have Abner saying to the various leaders of Israel, "In the past, you wanted David to be king over you.....so now do it."

This translation misses the emphasis. What is usually translated as "in the past" is in Hebrew **temol shilshom** and it literally means, "yesterday and the day before". But here the phrase is **gam temol, gam shilshom** and it means, "time and again yesterday and the day before". Or in our Western way of speaking, "over and over again you asked for this". So the idea is that the northern tribes had been constantly complaining in Abner's ear for some time that they wanted David as their king (and probably well before Saul died and certainly before Ishbosheth was appointed king by Abner the complaining had started). Abner says that the opportunity is finally here, so do it.

Once again Abner quotes some commonly known prophetic decree about David becoming king; then he goes to talk with the people of Benjamin. Though little is said, probably no one else but Abner (himself a Benjamite) could have convinced the elders of Benjamin to at least not openly oppose David. After all; the throne had belonged to the Tribe of Benjamin up to now and there was much benefit and status that was associated with such a thing. For Benjamin to voluntarily turn the kingdom over to David of the tribe of Judah (especially when Judah had never supported their man, Saul, and still didn't support his son Ishbosheth) would have been a bitter pill to swallow.

With his political ducks in a row, Abner returned to David with a contingent of men to deliver to David the throne of Israel. A state dinner was held to celebrate the event and seal the deal. With the agreement complete all that was left was for Abner to return to the northern territory and assemble the recognized leaders who could speak for each tribe, so that a formal covenant could be cut to unify the leadership of all 12 tribes under one king for the first time in history. David bid Abner farewell and guaranteed his safe passage home. After all, this was a very delicate time and not everyone was going to be so pleased with this momentous new arrangement, despite the fact that Yehoveh had decreed it and the people were aware of it.

We'll examine the tragic aftermath of this meeting the next time we meet.