

Bible Study May 22, 2024

2 SAMUEL 2 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

David Anointed King of Judah

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."

Although David knew he would become king (1 Samuel 16:13; 23:17; 24:20), and although the time seemed right now that Saul was dead, David still asked God if he should move back to Judah, the home territory of his tribe. Before moving ahead with what seems obvious, we should first bring the matter to God, who alone knows the best timing.

God told David to return to Hebron, where he would soon be crowned king of Judah. David made Hebron his capital because (1) it was the largest city in Judah at that time; (2) it was secure against attack; (3) it was located near the center of Judah's territory, an ideal location for a capital city; and (4) many key trade routes converged at Hebron, making it difficult for supply lines to be cut off in wartime.

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.

The men of Judah publicly anointed David as their king. David had been anointed king by Samuel years earlier (1 Samuel 16:13), but that ceremony had taken place in private. This one was like the inauguration of a public official who has already been elected to office. The rest of Israel, however, didn't accept David's kingship for another seven and a half years (2 Samuel 2:10-11).

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 sent a message thanking the men of Jabesh-gilead who had risked their lives to bury Saul's body (1 Samuel 31:11-13). Saul had rescued Jabesh-gilead from certain defeat when Nahash the Ammonite had surrounded the city (1 Samuel 11), so these citizens were showing their gratitude and kindness. In his message, he also suggested that they follow Judah's lead and acknowledge him as their king. Jabesh-gilead was to the north in the land of Gilead, and David was seeking to gain support among the ten remaining tribes who had not yet recognized him as king.

Ish-bosheth Made King of Israel

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.

The nation of Israel split in two after Saul's death. Ten tribes followed Ishbosheth, one of Saul's surviving sons; two tribes (Judah and Simeon) followed David. Abner, Saul's general, rallied Israel around Ishbosheth; he was no doubt afraid that he, as the opposing general, would be killed if David became king of all Israel.

Judah pledged allegiance to David (2:4) because (1) he was from their own tribe; (2) he had kept close ties with them; and (3) he had protected their land and shared battle spoils with them (1 Samuel 30:26). In addition, the elders of Judah may have known that Samuel had anointed David as Israel's next king and that therefore he was God's choice (1 Samuel 16:13).

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.

David ruled over Judah for seven and a half years, while Ishbosheth reigned in Israel for only two years. The five-year gap may be due to Ishbosheth's not assuming the throne immediately after Saul's death. Because of constant danger from the Philistines in the northern part of Israel, five years may have passed before Ishbosheth could begin his reign. During that time, Abner, commander of his army, probably played a principal role in driving out the Philistines and leading the northern confederacy. Regardless of when Ishbosheth began to rule, his control was weak and limited. The Philistines still dominated the area, and Ishbosheth was intimidated by Abner (3:11).

- **3:11** By this time Abner realized that it was useless to fight for the weak ruler Ishbosheth. Nothing could prevent David from becoming king of all Israel, because God was with him. Abner designed a deal with David to prevent David's men from seeking revenge against him for being the commander of both Saul's army (1 Samuel 26:5-7) and the northern confederacy (2 Samuel 2:8).

In an effort to reunite all Israel, David agreed to Abner's deal. Ishbosheth was not God's appointed king, as Saul had been; therefore, David accepted Abner's terms.

The Battle of Gibeon

¹² 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.

With Israel divided, there was constant tension between the north and south. David's true rival in the north, however, was not Ishbosheth but Abner. In this incident, Abner suggested hand-to-hand combat between the champions of his army and the champions of David's army, led by Joab. The fact that this confrontation occurred at the pool of Gibeon (located in Saul's home territory of Benjamin) suggests that Joab's men were pushing northward, gaining more territory. Abner may have suggested this confrontation in hopes of stopping Joab's advance.

Twelve men from each side were supposed to fight each other, and the side with the most survivors would be declared the winner. The confrontation between David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) was a similar battle strategy—a way to avoid terrible bloodshed from an all-out war. In this case, however, all 24 champions were killed before either side could claim victory. The civil war continued, but David's troops won the battle.

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.

Abner repeatedly warned Asahel to turn back or risk losing his life, but Asahel refused to turn from his self-imposed duty. Abner was more skilled in battle, but he knew killing Asahel would unleash a cycle of revenge from his brother Joab. Persistence is a good trait if it is for a worthy cause. But if the goal is only personal honor or gain, persistence may be no more than stubbornness. Asahel's stubbornness not only cost him his life but also spurred unfortunate disunity in David's army for years to come (1 Kings 2:28-35). Before you decide to pursue a goal, make sure it is worthy of your devotion.

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.

This battle ended with a victory for Joab's troops (2:17), but war in the divided nation continued until David was finally crowned king over all Israel (5:1-5).

- **5:1-5** This was the third time David was anointed king. First he was privately anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13). Then he was made king over the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 2:4). Finally he was crowned king over all Israel. David's life as an outlaw had looked bleak, but God's promise to make him king over all Israel was now being fulfilled. Although the

kingdom would be divided again in less than 75 years, David's dynasty would reign over Judah, the southern kingdom, for over 400 years.

David did not become king over all Israel until he was 37 years old, although he had been promised the kingdom many years earlier (1 Samuel 16:13). During those years, David had to wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's promise. If you feel pressured to achieve results and success quickly, remember David's patience. Just as his time of waiting prepared him for his important task, a waiting period may help prepare you for whatever God has planned.

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.