

The Life of David

David Joined by Abner

2 Samuel 3:1-21

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Scripture

In our study of the life of David, we have seen David lament the death of King Saul. Then, David, to whom God had promised the kingdom of Israel, was finally anointed as king—but only over Judah. “And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months” (2 Samuel 2:11).

Abner, the commander of Saul’s army, did not die with Saul and Saul’s three sons in the battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. Abner ruled over Israel, and, after about five and a half years, installed Saul’s surviving son, Ish-bosheth, as king over all Israel. This continued the conflict between Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south). Israel was led by General Abner and his puppet king, Ish-bosheth, and Judah was led by King David.

This is where we pick up the story and learn how Abner joined David. Let’s read about it in 2 Samuel 3:1-21:

¹There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.

²And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; ³and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur; ⁴and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; ⁵and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David’s wife. These were born to David in Hebron.

⁶While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul. ⁷Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, “Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?”

⁸ Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, "Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. ⁹ God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him, 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." ¹¹ And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

¹² And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, "To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you." ¹³ And he said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you; that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." ¹⁴ Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." ¹⁵ And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. ¹⁶ But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned.

¹⁷ And Abner conferred with the elders of Israel, saying, "For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. ¹⁸ Now then bring it about, for the Lord has promised David, saying, 'By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies.' " ¹⁹ Abner also spoke to Benjamin. And then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do.

²⁰ When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. ²¹ And Abner said to David, "I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make

a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires.” So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. (2 Samuel 3:1-21)

Introduction

The Institute for Economics and Peace is a global think tank headquartered in Sydney, Australia with branch offices in New York City, Mexico City, and The Hague. They study the issue of peace around the world and publish their findings in a document called the Global Peace Index. The most recent one I can find was published in 2016, the 10th anniversary of the Institute for Economics and Peace. At that time, they reported:

- Only 10 (of 195) nations in the world are currently not at war.
- Over the previous 10 years, 81 countries have become more peaceful and 79 countries have become less peaceful.
- In 2016, there were 101,406 deaths in battle, an increase from 19,601 in 2008.
- There are 57 million refugees and displaced peoples due to war.
- Violent crimes cost \$1,876 for every person in the world, a total of \$13.6 trillion dollars, which represents 13.3% of the world’s total economic activity.¹

War is a terrible thing. Our world has never known a time without war.

God had promised David that he would be king over Israel. When Saul died, David was anointed as king over Judah. The initial attempt by Abner, Saul’s commander of the armies of Israel, and Joab, David’s commander of the armies of Judah, did not result in peace. In fact, war continued for another seven and a half years.

It is also helpful to keep in mind that Saul was not God’s choice for king over his people. The people of God demanded a

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2017/january/4010917.html>.

king like all the other nations around them, and so God allowed them to choose a king of their choice. But, after some time, Saul showed himself to be sinful and rebellious against God. And so God chose a man of his own choice, or, as the text says, “a man after his own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), to be king over his people. That man was David.

In the early chapters of Second Samuel, David waited patiently for God to direct him to establish his kingship over all Israel. So, David was king over Judah for seven and a half years (2 Samuel 2:11). Then, things began to change.

Lesson

Second Samuel 3:1-21 shows us several features of God’s kingdom.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. God’s Kingdom Is Threatened by Personal Failure (3:1-5)
2. God’s Kingdom Is Helped by Justified Rebuke (3:6-11)
3. God’s Kingdom Is Advanced by Demanded Restitution (3:12-16)
4. God’s Kingdom Is Established by Reconciling Peace (3:17-21)

I. **God’s Kingdom Is Threatened by Personal Failure (3:1-5)**

First, God’s kingdom is threatened by personal failure.

Verse 1 of chapter 3 in Second Samuel states, **“There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.”** As I mentioned, this war had been going on for more than seven years. Those in **the house of**

Saul included Abner, commander of Saul's army, and Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, whom Abner had installed as king over Israel about five and a half years after the death of Saul. Those in **the house of David** included Joab, commander of David's army (although he doesn't appear in today's narrative), and David, who was ruling as king over Judah.

One may wonder, *How did the house of David grow stronger and stronger?* David grew stronger and stronger because of an increase of wives and sons, which are noted in verses 2-5, **“And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.”**

In ancient times, the proliferation of wives and sons meant a growing political strength. **Ahinoam of Jezreel** and **Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel** secured David's political base in the south. **Maacah was the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur**, which was on the northern side of Israel. This apparently political marriage secured for David protection from the north. We don't know anything about David's other wives, but they produced sons for him. So, during David's seven years in Hebron he was growing in political power and strength.

But, while polygamy was an accepted practice in those days, it was in fact a violation of God's word. From the beginning of creation, marriage was intended by God to be a covenant union between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:18-25; cf. Matthew 19:3-6). David's addition of wives was contrary to God's creation ordinance. Moreover, Moses gave clear instructions to the kings over Israel. He said of kings in Deuteronomy 17:17a, “And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away.”

Moreover, David's sons proved to be disloyal and rebellious. **Amnon** raped his half-sister Tamar and was murdered by his brother **Absalom**. We don't hear about **Chileab**, which suggests that he may have died young. **Absalom** later committed treason against David, dividing David's kingdom in civil war. **Adonijah** acted after David died and opposed Solomon, David's designated successor. So, God judged David for his multiplication of wives by his sons' rebellion and sinfulness.

The principle I want us to see is that, at the very outset, God's kingdom was threatened by personal failure. David may have thought it wise to accumulate wives in order to strengthen his position politically and militarily, but it backfired. All the kings in the nations around him accumulated wives in order to strengthen themselves politically and militarily. But, God's king should not have done so.

Let me ask you: where are you acting in ways that are out of accord with God's word? What sin are you justifying because everyone around you is doing it? Your boss asks you to do something that is improper. Your spouse wants you to miss worship on Sunday. You are dabbling in an emotional connection that you know is wrong. Friend, beware of personal failure. You may think that by engaging in a certain behavior you are strengthening your position, but in fact you are caving in to personal failure. And, in time, you *will* reap the result of that failure.

II. God's Kingdom Is Helped by Justified Rebuke (3:6-11)

Second, God's kingdom is helped by justified rebuke.

Even though **there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner, Saul's commander of the army of Israel, was making himself strong in the house of Saul (3:6)**. Even though Abner had installed Ish-bosheth as king over Israel, he was strengthening himself in an interesting way. **Saul had a**

concubine whose name was Rizpah (3:7a). We don't really know the precise meaning of **"concubine."** Most likely, a **concubine** was a slave woman in a wealthy household who provided children but did not share all the privileges of a wife. A king in those days not only accumulated wives but also concubines. One way to challenge the king was to have intimate relations with the king's wife or concubine. And that is exactly what Ish-bosheth accused Abner of doing. He said to Abner, **"Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?"** (3:7b).

Interestingly, **Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth** (3:8a), but did not actually deny the charge. It is likely that Abner was guilty. Abner's basic argument was, "After all that I have done for you, is that how you thank me?" Abner then went on to say that he would now help David to **"accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him, 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"** (3:9b-10).

There is much that we could look at in these comments from Abner. But I want to focus on Ish-bosheth's justified rebuke of Abner. It seems clear that Abner was in the wrong. Ish-bosheth rightly confronted Abner. But Abner's pride would not allow himself to submit to the truth that was in the rebuke.

When we do something wrong, something sinful, there is a tendency to resist a justified rebuke. We don't want to hear it. We may explode in anger, as Abner did. Or, perhaps we deflect the rebuke by saying that we don't want to talk about it.

I remember talking to a much more seasoned pastor when I was going through difficulties in my pastorate in State College, PA. I shared with him what I was going through and what I was encountering. Actually, I would often go to him for counsel and advice. And he always said to me, "First, examine yourself to see if there is any truth in the criticism. Second, if you are in error, repent of your sin. And third, ask yourself what you should learn from

the situation.”

Friends, a justified rebuke can be a great help to us, if we respond correctly to it.

III. God’s Kingdom Is Advanced by Demanded Restitution (3:12-16)

Third, God’s kingdom is advanced by demanded restitution.

Following his interaction with Ish-bosheth, **Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, “To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you”** (3:12). It seems clear that Abner wanted to switch allegiance from Ish-bosheth to David. Because Abner was really in control over Israel—rather than the puppet Ish-bosheth—he told David that he would bring Israel into submission to David.

But David was not simply going to become Abner’s puppet. He countered Abner’s proposal by saying, **“Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you; that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul’s daughter, when you come to see my face”** (3:13). And instead of sending messengers to Abner, **David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, saying, “Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines”** (3:14).

David’s requirement of Abner accomplished two things. First, Abner was put in his place. Abner was no equal to David, and he needed to know that. That is why David communicated with Ish-bosheth, because he was the son of Saul. And second, Michal was still properly David’s wife. Saul had wrongly taken her from David and given her in marriage to Paltiel. Michal’s return to David would strengthen his claim to Saul’s throne, for he was Saul’s son-in-law, after all. Michal’s return would make it easier

perhaps for Israel to transfer their loyalty from Saul to David.

The point we need to note here is the principle of restitution. Restitution is “the restoration of something lost or stolen to its proper owner.”² As I said, Michal was stolen from David by Saul. It was right for David to demand her back.

When we sin, and it involves something that is lost or stolen, we need to pay it back. When I was a brand-new Christian, one of the evidences—at least, to me—of a new heart was that I wanted to make restitution for things that I had stolen prior to my conversion. I remember stealing from the tuck shop in high school. When I was converted, I sent money to the headmaster of my high school to cover far more than what I had stolen. He wrote a nice letter back to me thanking me for repaying what I had stolen, and encouraged me in my walk with Christ.

God’s kingdom is advanced by restitution. In David’s case, he demanded it, rightly. Let us make restitution when we sin.

IV. God’s Kingdom Is Established by Reconciling Peace (3:17-21)

And fourth, God’s kingdom is established by reconciling peace.

After Michal had been returned to David, **Abner conferred with the elders of Israel, saying, “For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. Now then bring it about, for the Lord has promised David, saying, ‘By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies’ ”** (3:17-18). Apparently, all the people agreed, and so **Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do** (3:19).

² Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Quite remarkably, David received Abner and twenty of his men with a feast. There were no recriminations, no tensions, no more requirements. Abner affirmed that he would gather all Israel and bring them to David so that David could become king over all Israel. And the narrator concludes this incident by noting, **“So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace”** (3:20b). And so, as one commentator put it, “Simply by standing firm in his faith in the Lord, avoiding sin, and promoting peace and unity so far as he was able, David was now presented with the kingdom that he had long known to be rightfully his. The civil war was over, David’s coronation was being arranged, and a united Israel could now begin to strengthen herself against her foes.”³

Let us be quick to seek reconciling peace in God’s kingdom. May we be a people who seek unity above personal preference or agenda. May we, as Paul said to the Ephesians, be a people who “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [be] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2–3).

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David joined by Abner in 2 Samuel 3:1-21, let us live in humble and grateful submission to King Jesus.

David’s kingdom is a shadow of Jesus’ kingdom. David’s kingdom points us to Jesus’ kingdom. David’s kingdom has similarities and dissimilarities to Jesus’ kingdom. Let us live as joyful, grateful, grace-filled citizens of Jesus’ kingdom. Let us be thankful for a king who rules us with sovereign wisdom and power. Amen.

³ Richard D. Phillips, *2 Samuel*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 50.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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