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# The Bumpy Coming of the Kingdom

2 Samuel 3:1-39

*The Third Sermon on Second Samuel*

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In Daniel 2 we read that Daniel interprets a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar in which a stone is cut out of a mountain but not by human hands and then rolls down the mountain to crush the giant statue with a gold head, silver chest and arms, bronze middle and thighs, iron legs, and feet of clay. The meaning of it is that God's kingdom cannot be stopped and that it will triumph despite all obstacles in its way.

I mention this because 2 Samuel 3 is all about God's new king, David, and the new phase of God's kingdom in the life of David, that faces one obstacle after another: yet it continues to roll on. This story is of tremendous encouragement to us, brothers and sisters, in our discouragements as we seek to establish an outpost of Jesus' kingdom here in this place. Despite whatever obstacles come in our way, King Jesus will reign and will triumph!

So we read the summary of this period in God's kingdom in verse 1: **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** (v. 1). I want you to see, then, *The Bumpy Coming of the King*:

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1. *The Bumpiness of David Himself*
2. *The Bumpiness of Abner & Ish-bosheth*
3. *The Bumpiness of Joab*

May the Holy Spirit leads us into the truth of his Word today.

## **The Bumpiness of David Himself**

As we saw in chapter 2, the new king has been installed in Judah and his kingdom began with a gesture of grace, mercy, and peace. Yet there are bumps in the road. But just like Jesus reminds us to remove the stick from our own eye before pointing out the speck in another's, I want you to see first *the bumpiness of David himself*. What do we read in verses 2–5? He has six wives in his royal herem, and this is not including Michal, his first wife, whom he will reclaim in just a few short verses. And he has six sons—better, the story only mentions the *sons* and not the daughters, so he has more. What's wrong with this? He is living in the son of polygamy. Not only did God say in the beginning that *a man shall cleave to his wife* (Gen. 2:25)—singular—but the Lord also said in Deuteronomy 17:17 that Israel's king was forbidden from polygamy, which the kings of the nations around were known for. Further, one of his wives, **Maacah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur** (v. 3), is a Gentile from Syria to the north (2 Sam. 15:8). What's wrong with this? David is unequally yoked as a member of God's covenant people with one who is outside the covenant family. Let me remind those of you who are not married that the Word of God says over and over again in both Testaments that

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God's people are not to marry unbelievers, and by implication, we are not to be involved emotionally and romantically with an unbeliever.

So here's the amazing thing about this part of the story: God knows David struggles with sin and in full view of that God uses David to extend his kingdom of righteousness! "I'll never step foot in a church again; it's so full of hypocrites."

You've heard that before, haven't you? Here's your response: "Yes, and that's why it's the perfect place for me and *you!*"

## **The Bumpiness of Abner & Ish-bosheth**

The scene then shifts over the border of David's kingdom in the south in Judah to the kingdom of Ish-bosheth, which is really the kingdom of Abner. As verse 6 says, **Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul**. So notice here that the kingdom of God continues to roll on despite *the bumpiness of Abner & Ish-bosheth*.

We learn in verse 7 of a conflict between Abner and Ish-bosheth. So you have two guys and a conflict. Guess what it's over? Doesn't always seem to be over a woman? There's nothing new under the sun! Ish-bosheth accuses Abner of taking one of Saul's concubines, Rizpah, and sleeping with her (v. 7). In reality, this was an accusation that Abner was setting up power to be king, as in ancient cultures to take a deceased king's concubine was to assert your right to take his kingship.<sup>1</sup> Of course Abner is **very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth**, and

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<sup>1</sup> See Davis, *2 Samuel*, 43.

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asks, “**Am I a dog’s head of Judah?**” (v. 7) meaning, am I a worthless thing? Sorry, dog lovers!

Abner then asserts that he has done nothing but show **steadfast love**—there’s that word again—**to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends**, and in fact, he’s evidenced this to Ish-bosheth as he had **not given you into the hand of David** (v. 8) What’s this bump on the road of God’s kingdom all about? Notice what Abner says in verses 9–10: “**God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not 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.**

“But I thought in chapter 2 and here in chapter 3:6 Abner was opposed to the Lord because he was opposed to David?” We’re starting to see what our theologians call “the invisible hand” of God’s providence guiding history to his goal, not what we want. And now it gets better as Abner **sent messengers to David** and asked, “**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**” (v. 12). What a reversal! Do David replies, “**Good; I will make a covenant with you**” (v. 13), and he asks for one thing as evidence of whether Abner is being honest or not: his wife Michal, whom Saul had stolen (vv. 13–16). So notice that Abner tells Ish-bosheth what he is going to do, then he sends a messenger to tell David what he is going to do, then in verse 17 he’s actually with **the elders of Israel**

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recounting the promise of God (v. 18), and finally he's with David himself in verses 19–21.

Brothers and sisters, marvel at the power of your God here with me! You see, David was the Lord's anointed king but Abner stood opposed. Yet the Lord was invisibly without Abner knowing it preparing the way to get the North under David's kingship by using Abner's desires against him. How? Abner rallies the North behind him in chapter 2 and now in chapter 3 his desire for power by taking Saul's concubine becomes the occasion for King Ish-bosheth, even as weak as he is, to start a conflict with Abner. Did Abner actually take Saul's concubine and was he genuinely incensed at Ish-bosheth's insinuation, or did he intentionally get too close to Rizpah so that he could then lead a revolt against Saul's weak son? Whatever the case, the Lord used it all to bring the kingdom under David. Our God is powerful! Our God is wise! Our God's kingdom will conquer!

## **The Bumpiness of Joab**

But then there was Joab, David's commander. Just as we see the kingdom coming together despite the bumps on the road that David contributed and that Abner and Ish-bosheth contributed, I want you to see *the bumpiness of Joab*. Remember, he was the one who fought against Abner in chapter 2 and Abner killed his brother Asahel. Ever since, Abner and his other brother Abishai have not only been fighting David's war, but have been plotting revenge against Abner.

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And in verse 22 Joab and his men return from a raid only to hear the news that **“Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace”** (v. 23). Joab’s response, **“What have you done?”** (v. 24) can be loosely translated into our terms as, “Are you kidding me?” After his meeting with David Joab sends the equivalent of his special forces to capture Abner, which they did (v. 26). **But David did not know about it** (v. 26). That’s going to be the key to this part of the narrative. So what did Joab do? He took Abner **aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother** (v. 27) and just like Asahel had died. The irony is that Hebron was a city of refuge that the Law of God gave to Israelites who accidentally killed a neighbor. Abner was safe inside the city walls, so Joab takes him outside and kills him intentionally. And this means that Joab should not be allowed to go back in because he has not unintentionally killed Abner, but intentionally. What a mess!

Remember how verse 26 said David knew nothing about this? That’s what David asserts, **“I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD for the blood of Abner the son of Ner”** (v. 28), and then goes on to curse Joab and his house: **“May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father’s house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle or who falls by the sword or who lacks bread!”** These are serious, especially the curse about a discharge and leprosy, as these were reasons the Law said would keep you from tabernacle (Lev. 13–15). And

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further, David then shows his innocence publically by leading a funeral procession for Abner to have him buried in Hebron (vv. 31-34), which we saw in connection with chapter 2 was the burial place of the patriarchs. This is a burial with full military honors! Because of this, we read, importantly, that **all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner** (v. 37).

Why is that such an important point here? Joab was just another bump in the road to the Lord's coming kingdom through David. And if the North would not have been persuaded that David was innocent, there would have been more war and humanly speaking, no kingdom for David. Yet this is God's kingdom! As one writer said in all of this, "Through all the bloodshed, Yahweh was working His will to deliver Israel into the hands of his chosen king."<sup>2</sup>

So here we are, with our Bibles proclaiming to us that Jesus Christ is Lord and King, that his kingdom has come, that he has all authority in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18), and that he is head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). Amen? But here we are living in a world full of bumps and opposition. We read about city ordinances being used against church's gathering in homes to study the Word. We hear the mocking all day long in the media. We see the militant agenda of those whose God is sex. And beyond our borders, we know that God's people elsewhere have it so much worse. Christ is King, but the world seems so strong. Christ is King, and dare I say, he looks so weak. Christ is King, and his church looks so

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<sup>2</sup> Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 194.

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small. I want to encourage you that your Almighty God is working out his sovereign will according to his perfect plan and providence. Remember, Christ alone has the authority to open the scroll of God's plan for human history in Revelation 5. The kingdom has come; that little rock is moving down the mountain; it cannot be stopped. The world may delay this kingdom by putting bumps in its way, but it cannot be not defeated. Amen!