

Second Samuel

Lesson 2

With the news of the death of Saul, David was truly heartbroken. The theme of David's life in the book of First Samuel was "You shall not touch the LORD's anointed." It was within David's nature that anyone, anointed by God by the hands of one of His prophets, should never be harmed by anyone. When David learned the details of Saul's ultimate death, David sat down and did what David seemed to always do, he wrote a Psalm.

b) The Expression of David's Chant (1:19-27)

With David's new Psalm, we hear the actual expression of David's chant, the words he wrote for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. The song can be broken down into three stanzas, three verses each. The theme of the first stanza is "The Great Loss of the King." The second stanza is "The Great Lament of the King." The last stanza is "The Great Love of the King."

(1) The Great Loss of the King (1:19-21)

We begin with the great loss of the king, Verse 19. *"Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How have the mighty fallen!"*²⁰ *"Tell it not in Gath, Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, Or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice, The daughters of the uncircumcised will exult."*²¹ *"O mountains of Gilboa, Let not dew or rain be on you, nor fields of offerings; For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil."*

We must remember that these lines are of a song and are not intended to tell the whole story. Instead, as with all music lyrics, they are designed to express David's wishes and emotions. He wants Israel to understand the great tragedy that has taken place in the land. Israel's beauty, her king, and his family have been slain on a mountain. The once victorious king with his army lost a battle. David does not want the story told in the lands of the victors. He cannot stop it but wishes they would not tell it. He knows the women of the victor's land will rejoice when they hear the news. As for the place of the deaths of the mighty of Israel, David wishes that the mountain would not sprout with growth; instead, he wishes it would show on its slopes death just as it was the soil of the death of Israel's beauty with her king.

(2) The Great Lament of the King (1:22-24)

From the great loss of the king, David serenades with the great lament of the king, verse 22. *"From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, And the sword of Saul did not return empty."*²³ *"Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, And in their death they were not parted; They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions."*²⁴ *"O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, Who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel."*

In David's lament, he sets forth the unity of the King and his son – Jonathan. Together they fought to the end. Together they lived. Together they died. In the first stanza, David wishes that the women of the Philistines would not rejoice. In this second stanza, David wishes that the women of Israel would weep. David knew that Saul had not been an exemplary king. Yet, even David had to admit that during the life of Saul, things were good in Israel, and the LORD blessed all the members of every family. The LORD did not punish Israel because of Saul's sin. For all that, the women of Israel should see the value of David's statement. The LORD has used Saul to bless Israel.

(3) The Great Love of the King (1:25-27)

In his last stanza, David reveals the king's great love for Jonathan, verse 25. *"How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places."*²⁶ *"I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful, Than the love of women."*²⁷ *"How have the mighty fallen, And the weapons of war perished!"*

In this last stanza, David takes the song to a personal level. He made it about himself and his best friend. David and Jonathan's souls were knit together after David killed Goliath. Jonathan, who was old enough to have been David's father, accepted David, recognized his personage, and loved him like a brother. David did the same with Jonathan. Jonathan never betrayed David, as he had been betrayed by his first wife, Jonathan's sister, Michal. Then there were the other wives of David who never offered David the great loyalty that Jonathan showed, at least nothing in the Scripture tells us they did. He does not have Bathsheba yet, so at this time, Jonathan had been the closest and most influential person in David's life. David also recognizes that Israel's army is now severely impeded. David is almost without hope for the army of Israel. He thinks it has perished. Who will protect the nation now? What body of men will defend Israel now? He cannot answer those questions when he writes his expressions in this song.

As the page turns to chapter 2 in the book of Second Samuel, David finds himself without the constant enemy found in King Saul, who was dead. David had joined the Philistine king of Gath and was loyal to him. At the time, David had to wonder how the Philistine/Israel war was going on in Gilboa. He was back in his home at Ziklag, no doubt waiting for the news. He did not expect the word that came to him of Saul's death. His reaction to the information from the Amalekite messenger with the crown and bracelet that belonged to Saul implies much without saying a word about it. Now David had the crown of the nation of Israel in his hand. David, being David, cannot just put it on. But why not? He was officially anointed the next king of Israel by Samuel many years before. The same hands anointed Saul as David. David was the official king of Israel designated by the LORD. David knew it. Saul had known it. Jonathan had known it. All of Israel knew it. But David was a man of order. Just as we saw in First Samuel, David rarely made a big move without intreating the LORD, which he will do again in his current situation.

B. The Division in the Kingdom (2:1-32)

1. The Crown of One Side – David (2:1-7)

a) Whom David Must Ask (2:1)

Even with David's anointing by Samuel as the next king, the change from Saul will not be easy. Factually, David's kingship caused division in the kingdom. He will only become the crown of one side – David's family side. But who must David ask to proceed? Chapter 2, verse 1. *"Then it came about afterwards that David inquired of the LORD, saying, 'Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?'" And the LORD said to him, "Go up." So David said, "Where shall I go up?" And He said, "To Hebron."*

How did David make his inquiry of the LORD? We are not told here, but we are told how David did it in First Samuel several times. He did it by asking Abiathar, the priest, the sole surviving male descendant of Eli, currently in the priesthood, to entreat the LORD for David. Abiathar was with David and his men constantly. David had him there to protect Abiathar, as we found out in First Samuel, because Saul wanted him dead. David had protected him for years. In some ways, Abiathar was David's private priest, although he was the priest of all of the men and their families with David in the village of Ziklag.

After inquiring of the LORD, the word came to David that he was to go to Hebron, the capital city of the tribe of Judah, David's tribe. This point is interesting. We would think that the LORD would send David to the capital city of the Nation of Israel. It would seem natural to crown David where the seat of power of Saul rested before his death. But no. David was to go to Hebron, his tribe's capital city. We must wonder if David even thought about the repercussion of what was about to happen when he was officially anointed and crowned king in his tribal area without the other eleven tribes.

b) Whom David Must Take (2:2-4a)

Now we wonder how the decision was made for whom David must take with him to Hebron. Verse 2. *“So David went up there, and his two wives also, Abinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. ³ And David brought up his men who were with him, each with his household; and they lived in the cities of Hebron. ⁴ Then the men of Judah came and there anointed David king over the house of Judah.”*

In essence, David allowed his town of Ziklag to be deserted. Everyone moved to Hebron with David. Moreover, once David arrived, word must have been sent to all the inhabitants of the tribe of Judah because all the men of Judah came to be present at the anointing of David to be their king, the king of their tribal area. Notice it does not say that David was king of the Nation of Israel. Gad was very specific in this record. His words tell us that not one person from the other eleven tribes participated in the anointing and crowning of David in Hebron.

c) Whom David Must Bless (2:4b-7)

Crowned as the king of Judah, Gad tells us whom David must bless, verse 4b. *“And they told David, saying, ‘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 of the LORD because you have shown this kindness to Saul your lord, and have buried him. ⁶ Now may the LORD show lovingkindness and truth to you; and I also will show this goodness 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 also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.”*

David’s letter must have brought great comfort to the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had walked all night after they heard the word of the death of Saul to retrieve his headless body. They cremated it and bury the bones under a tree. The Philistines had taken Saul’s head and sword as prizes back to a temple in the Philistine area. For their actions, David praised them and blessed them. His letter also let them know that he had been anointed king over the tribe of Judah, not the other tribes. The Jabesh-gilead people were members of the tribe of Manasseh. Indeed, they had already heard the news of David’s anointing, but the letter must have brought them a calm assurance that David, being the David they surely knew, would not come to bring harm to them even though he was only the king of Judah, and not the whole nation.

2. The Crown of the Other Side – Ish-bosheth (2:8-11)

Sure enough, the other eleven tribes of Israel would not follow the lead of the tribe of Judah. Ish-bosheth would be the crown of the other side –their king. Verse 8. *“But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul’s army, had taken Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. ⁹ He made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, even over all Israel. ¹⁰ Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he was king for two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. ¹¹ The time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.”*

Just as Gad and Nathan did in First Samuel, in the style of their writing and recording the chronicles of the kings, Gad gave a summary of the next two years and included the time David lived in Hebron as his capital. In this summary, Gad tells us that Saul’s cousin, Abner, decided to make Ish-boseth, the forty-year-old son of Saul, who was not in the battle of Gilboa, king of the eleven tribes of Israel in opposition to making David king over the entire nation. This summary indicates by Ish-boseth’s age and that he was born to Saul in the first year of Saul being anointed as king, forty years before. As a forty-year-old son of Saul, why was he not in the battle with Saul? We are not told. However, in First Samuel, we are told that three of Saul’s sons were in battle and killed with him on Gilboa. Did Ish-boseth retreat and run for his life when his father and brothers were slain? Possibly. However, Nathan told us there was an Israeli army regiment across the valley from Gilboa, and they saw the fierce conflict on Gilboa from a distance. Who was across this valley watching from a distance? Abner is still alive, so he is not commanding the battle of Gilboa. Saul and Jonathan were

probably in command of the Gilboa regiment. Abner was probably with Ish-boseth across the valley in command of that regiment. We are not told they were there; however, that was where the other half of the Israelite army had been posted. It only makes sense that the two were there. That regiment survived the Philistine attack as recorded in First Samuel.

Ish-boseth would be king for two years. During that time, David would be the king residing in Hebron, and then David would continue to live in Hebron for five years, after the reign of Ish-boseth.

3. The Conflict of the Two Sides – Abner and Joab (2:12-32)

a) The Contest of the Conflict (2:12-17)

(1) Where They Met – the Pool of Gibeon (2:12-13)

But the divided kingdom was not cordial to each other. We hear of the conflict between the two sides – Abner and Joab. We also hear of the contest of the conflict and where they met – the Pool of Gibeon. Verse 12. *“Now Abner the son of Ner, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon with the servants of Ish-boseth the son of Saul.”¹³ And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon; and they sat down, one on the one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool.”*

Abner was the commander of Ish-boseth’s army; Joab was the commander of David’s army. One day, the two sat down with each other at the pool of Gibeon and made a plan.

(2) What They Decided – Twelve Men Against Twelve Men (2:14-15)

At the pool of Gibeon, Abner and Joab made a plan. We come to what they decided. It will be twelve men of Israel against twelve men of Judah. Verse 14. *“Then Abner said to Joab, “Now let the young men arise and hold a contest before us.” And Joab said, “Let them arise.”¹⁵ So they arose and went over by count, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-boseth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David.”*

The twelve men who represented Israel were not from all the even tribes. They were all from the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of King Saul. The twelve men fighting for David were from his tribe, Judah. As such, this initial deadly conflict symbolically continued the struggle between Saul’s followers and David.

(3) Where They Died – The Field of Swords (2:16-17)

(a) The Place (2:16)

Now Gad reports to us where they died – the field of swords. It was the place. Verse 16. *“Each one of them seized 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 in Gibeon.”*

After this conflict was over, the Jews, who were famous for nicknaming specific locations where important things happened, nicknamed the place “Helkath-hazzurim.” The translation means *the field of the sharp edges*. We would use the word *swords*.

(b) The Outcome (2:17)

What was the outcome of this conflict? Verse 17. *“That day the battle was very severe, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.”*

The outcome was more than just twenty-four men killing each other. The agreement did not hold. After the men’s deaths, all-out war began between the two forces, which was severe. Abner’s forces did not prevail that day.