**March 20/21 - 2 Samuel 2:1-3:14**

**Introduction**

Last week we saw David mourn the deaths of Saul and Jonathan as well as Israel’s defeat at the hand of the Philistines. This week we see the vacuum of power that comes with the death of a king and the continued struggle of a divided Kingdom. Abner steps in to fill that vacuum, using the family of Saul as a platform to increase his own influence and position. The great irony here is that Abner recognizes that God has promised the kingship to David, yet still chooses to fight against God’s plan and purposes.

**Read 2 Samuel 2:1-11**

(Verses 1-7) To discern what is next, David does what he has done before, he inquires of the Lord. (*Past examples of David inquiring of the Lord are in 1 Samuel 23:1-6, 23:9-12, and 30:7-8*) We aren’t given specifics in v. 1 of how David inquired of the Lord here, but in earlier references to inquiring of God, David used similar “methods” each time. **What were the ways that David inquired of God in the past?** (*Abiathar the priest and the ephod*) **What might be the similarities and differences of how David inquires of the Lord and how we inquire of the Lord?** It might be tempting to be jealous of David that he had Abiathar and an ephod and the clarity he was given at points in his life. **Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Why is the access that we have so much better than the access that David had with Abiathar?**

He then moves in obedience to Hebron, putting Ziklag behind him. Ziklag was where David made a good number of poor decisions. The town of Hebron is full of reminders of God’s covenant with his people, considering that Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah were all buried there. (Gen. 23:17-19, 25:9-10, 49:29-32,50:13) **Have you ever had a time of rebellion or apathy in which you finally saw the need to turn back to God and His promises? What are the hardest parts about leaving past patterns and turning to God?**

In 2:4 David is anointed for the second of three times. The Judeans who anoint him tell of the valiant men from Jabesh Gilead that retrieved Saul’s body for burial. David then sends messengers to thank the men. Even as he honors these men for honoring Saul, David leads in a way Saul never could – he is humble, secure, encouraging, and wise. **In his address to the men of Jabesh Gilead (v. 5-7), what about his words and approach stand out to you as wise, godly leadership?**

In verses 8-11, we see a tale of two kingdoms - one established by divine guidance and another inaugurated by human ambition. And that ambition is provided by Abner, a man we met in 1 Samuel. **What do we know, remember about Abner from 1 Samuel?** (*Allow a moment to see if anyone remembers anything, then share each prompt about the 3 places he appears.)*

In **1 Samuel 14:50** we have the introduction of Abner as the commander of Saul’s army.

In **1 Samuel 17:55-58** Abner assists in finding out who David is and bringing him to Saul.

In **1 Samuel 26** Abner is chastised by David for not being alert to protect Saul when David and Abishai sneak into camp and take Saul’s spear and water jug.

Using his position as Saul’s long-time commander, Abner takes on a power he has not been given as he alone installs Ish-Bosheth asking. As we will see more of in the verses to come, the re-introduction of Abner in 2 Samuel gives us pictures of manipulation, abuse of power, and provoking conflict.

**Read 2 Samuel 2:12-23**

The rest of chapter 2 is intense. We have representatives of the two anointed kings sitting down for a parley and a fierce battle breaks out. The 12 on 12 fight suggested by Abner seems odd, but representative combat (individuals fighting as a representation of the whole army) was common. **Where have we seen representative combat before in our studies this year?** (*Goliath’s charge to send a man to fight and David’s acceptance of the challenge)* Abner’s words in 2:14 sound almost like a flippant suggestion to have them fight for entertainment. It ends horribly, with all 24 men being killed. The ensuing battle brings heavy losses for Abner and the Israelites. It also places Abner in an even more difficult situation as he is chased by Asahel. **Abner had been a military commander for years - why was he so reluctant to engage Asahel in combat?** (*Most likely because he had some degree of friendship with Asahel and his brothers)* Abner is running literally and figuratively. He can’t outrun Asahel and he can’t outrun his bad decisions that in his pride and greed lead him to make more bad decisions. **Have you ever, like Abner, followed one sin with another to “cover up” or “double down” because you weren’t willing to repent from the first sin? What was that experience like? How did God get your attention to deal with those sins?**

**Read 2 Samuel 2:24-32**

Here we see Abner show reluctance towards fighting Joab, as he knows his own men have suffered great losses. He tries to mask his fears of David’s army by a speech about brotherhood and the tragedy of war, even though he had instigated the fight in the first place. Looking upon Abner’s speech, we see that he is trying to seem wise only when it benefits him. **What does it say about our belief if we only remember the parts of the Bible that suit us rather than convict us? Read Matthew 4:1-11.** Even the Devil himself uses scripture to tempt Jesus. **What is the distinction between how the Devil quotes scripture and how Jesus quotes scripture in this encounter?** (*The devil used scripture only in the direction of sowing doubt, putting God to a test, and misplaced worship. Jesus quoted scripture that emphasized God’s character and design and our call to obedience.)*

**Read 2 Samuel 3:1-14**

Verse 1 indicates that ehe house of David is slowly growing stronger while the house of Saul is slowly diminishing. Meanwhile Abner is strengthening himself (v. 6) in the house of Saul so that he can gain political authority and be the true power behind the throne of Ish-bosheth. **What can we learn from Abner’s self-exalting motives in the text? What have you learned in your own life about putting yourself over God?**

Abner is confronted by Ish-Bosheth for taking Saul’s concubine for himself. He doesn’t repent, but lashes back in anger. **In Abner’s lashing out at Ish-Bosheth, what does he reveal that he believes about David?** (*That David is under the Lord’s promise to receive the entire kingdom*) This truth of what is happening here is mind-blowing – Abner spent years protecting the Lord’s anointed (Saul). Now that Saul is gone, Abner believes that David is the new anointed one. Despite this, Abner would set his life in opposition to God’s promises and purposes in vain hopes that he can grab some glory for himself. This macro-level rebellion drips with selfishness and Abner will soon reap the fruit of that rebellion. **Are our “micro-rebellions” that seek our own pride and glory any less offensive to God? What are some of the tiny, almost imperceptible ways that in common daily events we can attempt to take God’s glory and his rightful place on the throne of our lives?**

**Conclusion:**

The rebellion of Abner is tragic to watch, both for the damage it causes to so many, including his own soon-to-come demise later in this chapter. Abner’s story is one more reminder of the need that all of us have. Jesus died so that we may die to ourselves, take up our own cross, and follow him. To know Christ and to follow him is to know that we are not doing it to elevate ourselves. Abner had abandoned all humility and walked in a manipulative power that sought only his own desires. Consider this week how you can walk in humility, reflecting on how we try to take from God’s glory when we are prideful.

End Notes:

2:1 – As stated earlier, we don’t know how David inquired of God here, but other times this involved the priest and the ephod. The ephod was a priestly garment associated with seeking to hear from God. It also unfortunately had a history of people making it a focus of worship, turning something intended for seeking God into an instrument of idolatry. (See Judges 8:27 and Judges 17:5-6)

2:1 – Not only is Hebron significant as the burial place of Abraham and his next two generations, it was also the allotment of the promised land assigned to Caleb (Joshua 15:13-15)

2:4 – David is first anointed in 1 Samuel 16:12-13 and will be later in 2 Samuel 5:3

2:10-11 – This summary of the life and kingship of Ish-Bosheth (and the Judean kingship of David) is common way of describing a king’s reign and is seen frequently in Kings and Chronicles. Where this is placed gives a couple spoiler alerts. One, his “2 years” tell us Ish-Bosheth’s exit from our story will be very soon. Second, for those who already know that David becomes king of a unified Judah and Israel, his “7.5 years” tell us that there are a few more years of struggle before the unified kingdom is realized.

3:10 – Dan was near the northern border and Beersheba was near the southern border of Israel, so Abner was referring to the entire nation being under the rule of David.