

After Saul and Jonathan's deaths, David, guided by God, moved to Hebron. Here, he was anointed king by his tribe, Judah, his second anointment following that by Samuel. He thanked those who buried Saul in his first royal act. Today we explore David's challenges as king and his eventual recognition by all of Israel.

DAVID'S GROWING FAMILY (2 SAMUEL 3:1-5)

The "house of Saul" in verse 1 refers to puppet king Ishbosheth, with Abner, his guard's captain, holding the power. This chapter depicts a war between Judah, led by David, and Israel, led by Ishbosheth.

David's first son, Amnon, will later cause significant family conflict. Chileab, David's son with Abigail, Nabal's widow, doesn't appear much in scriptures unlike David's other sons. David's third wife, Maacah, daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur, gave birth to Absalom. Absalom's rebellion against David causes turmoil in the kingdom.

David's fourth son, Adonijah, son of Haggith, declares himself king in David's old age, leading to a power struggle resolved by Solomon. David's fifth son, Shephatiah, and his sixth son, Ithream, along with their mothers, Abital and Eglah respectively, don't play significant roles in later narratives. Some suggest Eglah is another name for Michal, David's first wife, adding complexity to David's family dynamics.

SHIFTING ALLEGIANCES (2 SAMUEL 3:6-21)

THE FATEFUL ACCUSATION (2 SAMUEL 3:6-11)

Ishbosheth, Saul's son and Israel's puppet king, accuses his commander Abner of violating royal rights, which angers Abner (v. 7). In response, Abner switches allegiance to David, pledging to fulfill God's covenant to make David ruler over all of Israel (v. 9-10). This marks a shift in power towards David. Ishbosheth, rendered speechless and fearful by Abner's declaration, can't respond, signaling the beginning of the end for his rule (v. 11).

THE ABNER NEGOTIATIONS (2 SAMUEL 3:12-21)

Abner negotiates with David, offering a covenant and the rule of Israel. David, in return, demands his first wife, Michal, back, symbolizing his royal rights. He sends a message to Ishbosheth, who complies, signaling his weakening power. Abner meets David after Michal returns, plans to shift the elders' allegiance to David, and receives David's blessing. Abner, who had used Ishbosheth as a puppet king, now spitefully pledges allegiance to David.

JOAB'S REVENGE (2 SAMUEL 3:22-30)

JOAB'S RETURN AND CONFRONTATION (2 SAMUEL 3:22-25)

Joab, David's nephew, returned from a raid to learn of Abner's agreement with David, which upset him due to Abner's past actions, including the killing of his

brother Asahel. He expressed concern to David about possible ulterior motives, suspecting Abner of using the peace deal to gather intelligence for the war. While Abner may have had hidden intentions, he could have also genuinely supported David due to his issues with Ishbosheth and David's rising power. However, Abner's true motives remain speculative.

MURDER AT THE GATE (VV. 26-27)

Driven by personal vengeance, Joab summoned Abner back from his journey, acting independently of David. Joab met Abner at Hebron's complex city gate, a hub for various activities and a place that offered privacy. In a secluded chamber, Joab lured Abner away and struck him similarly to how Abner had killed his brother Asahel. However, while Abner's act was arguably self-defense during battle, Joab's action was deliberate and premeditated revenge.

DAVID'S RESPONSE (VV. 28-30)

David quickly distanced himself from Joab's murder of Abner, declaring his kingdom innocent and blaming Joab (v. 28). He knew Abner's death was a political assassination that could affect his delicate relations with Saul's house.

He consequently cursed Joab and his descendants (v. 29), predicting physical ailments, economic hardship, and social disgrace. He wished for a leper, a cripple, a warrior's death, and a pauper in Joab's lineage, reflecting his strong disapproval of Joab's crime.

The passage ends by identifying Joab and Abishai as Abner's killers, who acted out of revenge for their brother Asahel's death (v. 30). Abner had killed Asahel in battle, but Joab's act was premeditated, occurring during peace.

The Bible doesn't detail Joab's family's afflictions as per David's curse. However, Joab met a violent end (1 Kings 2:28-34), killed by Benaiah under Solomon's orders for his crimes and for supporting Adonijah's claim to the throne. This, and Benaiah's consequent military promotion, can be seen as divine retribution and partial fulfillment of David's curse.

LAMENTING ABNER (VV. 31-39)

In verse 31, David displays mourning for Abner by asking his people to tear their clothes and wear sackcloth, traditional signs of grief in ancient Israel. He also fasts until evening, an additional sign of personal sorrow. Despite previous conflicts, David sincerely mourns Abner's death, referring to him as "a prince and a great man" (v. 38), and distancing himself from Joab's act of vengeance.

"The sons of Zeruiah" (v. 39) are Joab and his brothers, David's nephews. David expresses frustration over his inability to control their vengeful actions, which threaten his kingdom's unity.

The people of Judah's refusal to blame David for Abner's death (v. 37) signifies their recognition of David's integrity and their loyalty to him. Furthermore, their agreement with David's lament for Abner (v. 36) affirms their support for him and his commitment to justice and peace.