

2 SAMUEL—WEEK 3

CONSOLIDATION



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

Israel is troubled over the death of Abner, and then Ish-bosheth is assassinated. David mourns him, and, surprisingly, has the assassins put to death. He then conquers Jerusalem and sets up headquarters there. Israel is unified under the LORD's anointed. David even has another great victory over the Philistines.

But David's getting a little too big for his britches. He accumulates too many wives, concubines and sons.

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2 Samuel, Week 3 — F
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1 2 Samuel 4:1–7

When Saul's son heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost heart, and all Israel was troubled. Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of troops. The name of one was Baanah and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin. (For Beeroth also was part of Benjamin, because the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been sojourners there until this day.)

Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son who was lame in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel; and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.

Then the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out and came at about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, who was lying on his bed at noon. And they came there, all the way into the house, as though to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. For when they came into the house, he was lying on his bed in his bedroom; then they struck him and killed him, beheaded him and took his head, and were all night escaping through the plain.

The death of Abner is troubling to Ishbosheth and all of Israel, not just because of the death of their captain, but because his mission was to make peace with David, and he came home in a box. This shows another reason behind David's great mourning for Abner—to salvage the peace.

But despite David's well-timed mourning, that peace is now fragile, and palace intrigue will make it even more so. Ishbosheth is killed for no apparent reason, which sounds like a line-of-succession assassination.

Scripture doesn't waste words. Here, we read, in detail, how Ishbosheth's assassins are, technically, Benjamites. This is for good reason—to minimize tribal rivalries. Benjamites killed one of their own.

Meanwhile, Mephibosheth's nurse realizes that he might be next. So she scurries him off to safety, though she manages to further injure him in the process.

Today's reading sounds like a series of train wrecks, but it's actually a beautiful part of God's glorious plan. It sets up David showing grace towards Mephibosheth, which keeps a promise he made to Jonathan.

So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. — 2 Samuel 9:13a

The Old Testament shows the grand sweep of history in a way that displays the hand of providence. Sometimes it directly states how God implemented His will.

But, more often, we just witness the pieces slowly coming together. Only in retrospect does the grand design become visible.

This is a lesson in how to view current events. Don't rush to judgement.

It takes time for the patterns to emerge.

2 2 Samuel 4:8–12

And they brought the head of Ishbosheth to David at Hebron, and said to the king, “Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul your enemy, who sought your life; and the LORD has avenged my lord the king this day of Saul and his descendants.”

But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said to them, “As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from all adversity, when someone told me, saying, ‘Look, Saul is dead,’ thinking to have brought good news, I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag—the one who thought I would give him a reward for his news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous person in his own house on his bed? Therefore, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and remove you from the earth?” So David commanded his young men, and they executed them, cut off their hands and feet, and hanged them by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ishbosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner in Hebron.

Yikes. Is killing Ishbosheth so far away from what they’re supposed to do that it’s a capital offense?

Yes. Military command structures are authoritarian for this very reason—to prevent junior people from doing immature things with possibly international significance. Ishbosheth did nothing deserving death.

Wars have started over things like this.

This is analogous to many mistakes Christians make in the service of God. These two guys thought they were doing something David wanted them to do, but they didn’t ask David. Remember when David checked with the LORD in 1 Samuel 30:8 before going after the Amalekites who had captured his family?

So David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?” And He answered him, “Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all.”

Of course, we don’t have access to the ephod, so we can’t use the Urim and the Thummim to inquire of the LORD. So, what do we do? The standard answers are:

1. Check Scripture. If the Bible says anything relevant to our decision, then we have a clear answer.
2. Pray. Ask God for guidance. Ask for Him to open doors and close doors, and then keep your eyes open. Also, ask others to pray for you. This is important for many reasons. First off, it fosters deeper relationships with other Christians. For many Christians, this needs shoring up anyway. Second, it sets the stage for the next method.
3. Seek the advice of others. When asking others to pray for us, we can also ask for their advice. Of course, some prayer requests aren’t requests for advice, and that must be respected. But in seeking prayer for decisions, often advice is good too. Sometimes the advice combines with God’s response to prayer in wonderful ways.

These are pretty familiar. This is all just a reminder to never assume.

3 2 Samuel 5:1–9

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, “Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, ‘You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.’ ” Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, “You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you,” thinking, “David cannot come in here.” Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David).

Now David said on that day, “Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites (the lame and the blind, who are hated by David’s soul), he shall be chief and captain.” Therefore they say, “The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.”

Something’s wrong here. They’re trying just a bit too hard to make the case for David to be the king. That shouldn’t be necessary. Why even bring this up? Who are they trying to convince? Themselves?

The terrible truth is that a natural division has developed between the northern and southern tribes. This division will prove to be even more enduring than the slave state vs. free state division that led to the US Civil War.

Right now, the elders are desperately trying to unify a divided nation.

It won’t last.

Jerusalem is on the border between the two Israeli kingdoms. Thus, it’s the ideal place for David to set up the capital of a unified Israel. Just one problem—it’s a fortress with a defensive structure so strong that it has never been conquered by the Israelites.

So, the Jebusites that live there mock the Israelites saying, “*You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you.*” They’re saying that repelling invaders is so trivial, even a disabled soldier can do it. They’ve put their faith in the city walls.

But ancient city walls always have one weakness—the water source. The opening that lets in enough water to supply a city is easily big enough for people to get through. David offers a reward to whoever gets in that way and defeats the Jebusites.

After Joab accomplishes this (see 1 Chronicles 11:6), the Israelites repay the Jebusites’ mocking.

They call them *the blind and the lame*, and say that they *shall not come into the house*.

4 2 Samuel 5:10–16

Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. And David built all around from the Millo and inward. So David went on and became great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.

Then Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters and masons. And they built David a house. So David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted His kingdom for the sake of His people Israel.

And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he had come from Hebron. Also more sons and daughters were born to David. Now these are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

Jerusalem's structure as a stronghold is now a precious asset. David establishes Jerusalem as the capital city and then proceeds to develop the suburbs. His glorious reign has finally gotten underway, and he is blessed with the LORD's presence.

Except that the text doesn't just say, "*the LORD was with him.*" It says, "*the LORD God of hosts was with him.*"

That's a curious phrase. What are hosts? Is the LORD the God of a bunch of servants who say things like, "Would you like one lump or two with your tea?"

The Hebrew here is glorious. The word that's translated as "hosts" (צְבָאוֹת, tseh-vah-oat) means "armies." Yikes. So, why doesn't anyone translate it as armies?

Because the verbal root for tseh-vah-oat is tsah-vah (צָוָה), which means to wage war, to serve, or even just to go out. Here, tseh-vah-oat refers to angels. The Hebrew word for them is the word for messenger. So, the heavenly host is an army of angels. Angels can be very powerful when they need to be.

So, with all this going for him, David's neighbors want to get on his good side. The king of Tyre has access to the great cedars of Lebanon and also to the best workmen.

So he builds David a magnificent house that shows off his royal status to everyone.

Of course, David's "super alpha" status leads to lots of wives and kids. That sounds great to the secular mind, but it's not righteous. Other than Solomon, these sons don't do anything besides show up in lists.

Matthew Henry says it best—"*David had many wives, and yet that did not keep him from coveting his neighbor's wife and defiling her; for men that have once broken the fence will wander endlessly.*"

However, a glorious plot twist is coming that will display God's amazing creativity and grace.

David's son Nathan appears in the genealogy of Christ. (See Luke 3:31.)

5 2 Samuel 5:17–25

Now when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to search for David. And David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. The Philistines also went and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. So David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?”

And the LORD said to David, “Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand.”

So David went to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there; and he said, “The LORD has broken through my enemies before me, like a breakthrough of water.” Therefore he called the name of that place Baal Perazim. And they left their images there, and David and his men carried them away.

Then the Philistines went up once again and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. Therefore David inquired of the LORD, and He said, “You shall not go up; circle around behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees. And it shall be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then you shall advance quickly. For then the LORD will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines.” And David did so, as the LORD commanded him; and he drove back the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.

The consolidation of Israel under David shocks the Philistines. They’ve been asleep. They were happy to see Abner and Ishbosheth killed. Israel was in tatters. David’s troops could never conquer Jerusalem. Now Israel unified under David is more powerful than ever. They need to hunt this guy down.

David hears of this and goes *down to the stronghold*. That can’t mean Jerusalem. The Hebrew idioms for going to Jerusalem are always a form of “to rise.” So, this has to refer to some kind of stronghold outpost, presumably in Judah. Meanwhile, the Philistines are *in the Valley of Rephaim*, southwest of Jerusalem, not far away.

As always, David does nothing without checking with the LORD first. This time, the LORD’s instructions are much more than a simple yes or no.

So, how did David get such detailed instructions for the LORD? The Urim and Thummim yield yes/no type answers. What God told David is way too creative for him to guess in a game of 20 questions. Something else has to be going on. But what?

Scripture doesn’t specify this exactly, but it gives us two huge clues that lay the foundation. First, David is a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). He doesn’t just know about God; he knows God. Second, David, as an author of scripture, has the Holy Spirit.

Okay, but so do we. How can we get so tight with God that we can know His will this well?

This gets back to knowing God instead of just knowing about Him. I highly recommend two things. Read J.I. Packer’s book *Knowing God*, and make prayer a big part of your life.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What is the most powerful example you've seen of someone keeping a promise?
2. What's the best advice you've ever gotten?
3. Have you ever noticed someone trying suspiciously hard to make a case?
4. Are great royal palaces good or harmful?
5. How have you made progress in knowing God?

Items for prayer: