

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight. We've got a.....it's one long story. That's the reason we're doing three chapters. Next week we'll do one chapter because it's one story. So we want to take it in stride.

If you've been with us, the historical books are written in narrative, as we've told you several times. They are meant to be read, and the stories that you are given, you are meant to place yourself into - stand with the characters, stand in the situation, think about what you would do and how the Lord would have you to react. And from that we learn. The New Testament epistles are more difficult in the sense the theological presentations require a lot of thought and application. But narratives.....you can read them, and I think there's a lot to learn from. And so we are currently, on Wednesday nights, going through the Old Testament books, and we'll finish those at some point. But we're going to continue on through the Old Testament until we get all of the historical books done.

Well, if you haven't been with us, let me give you just a quick update as to where we're at. In 2 Samuel 2, David, after many years of running from Saul (who wanted to eliminate his competition, though Saul and everyone knew God had chosen David to be the next king), was made king over Judah in a place called Hebron. He was not allowed to rule over all of Israel because, though Saul had been killed in battle, his family and those that were involved with him - the Benjamites and all - had done all that they could to maintain their power. And we'll see that a little bit tonight. It was led by a fellow named Abner. Abner was Saul's cousin. And, for the next seven-and-a-half years (now understand David had already been on the run for seven-and-a-half years), he will literally be restricted to ruling over Judah, and that was about it. So it had been a long road for David. In the North, where Abner was strongest (he was Saul's general), he put one of Saul's sons, Ishbosheth (he's also known as Esh-Baal in a couple of places; it just means a "man of Baal"), he was kind of a figurehead. He didn't have much power; that was run by the military, if you will. But after the death of Saul, as David came to rule from the throne in one place there in Judah, Abner came out to oppose him militarily. David's men, though, at least initially, prevailed in the initial battle. There was a young man named Joab, who was one of David's nephews from his sister's boys. She had three sons - Joab, Abishai and Asahel. And so they were helping David in his fledgling, I

guess, rulership, if you will. And in one battle, Abner was being chased on foot by this young man, Asahel, who was kind of inexperienced. But he was young, and he was a go-getter, and he was quick and kind of unrelenting as a rookie. And he finally corner this hardened (kind of) Marine, Abner, and Abner gave him a chance to walk away. He said, "You don't want to mess with me. I'm gonna kill you. Just be smart. Let this go for another day." And he wasn't hearing any of it, so he tried him on for size, and Abner killed him. So the death of this young man, Asahel, weighed heavily upon both his brothers and Uncle David as the battle would go on over the next seven-and-a-half years.

But tonight we get to chapters 3, 4 and 5 which tell us David's moving from limited rulership to finally being the king over Israel that God had called him to and that God had said would take place. All of Israel, by the time we get to chapter 5, will be recognizing David. He is 37 years old, as we begin chapter 3, if you will. He has ruled over Judah since 1011 B.C., when he was 30. He had been on the run since he was 23. So we continue with him tonight. It is David at 37 years old. He will rule thirty-three more years; so he'll be 70 when he passes away. But tonight, all of the chapters we're looking at, you can put the date on them - it's 1004 B.C., and David is about to come to the throne.

All right. Let's start in chapter 3:1, where we read this, "Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. But David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker." Great picture, and I think it's one that you should probably take to heart because God has a way of establishing you where He wants you, in a slow manner. The word "Hebron" means "fellowship." And, as David came to the throne (what was limited to him), he had to wait upon the LORD to remove all of these other obstacles that now it wasn't just Saul, but it was a whole tribe of people that had gathered together that refused to let him be king. But notice, from verse 1, that David's seven-and-a-half years of waiting now were not spent aimlessly. God was strengthening David for this task that he would have to take on. God was slowly removing the enemy, if you will. They were times of growth for David so that he would be prepared for what the LORD had for him. They were times of defeat for the enemy that was weakened in their position to stand against the will of God. I think that we oftentimes, and I know just speaking for me personally, fail to see the benefits of delay. How can delay ever be any good? If the Lord is with me, let's do this now. And let's just face it. The Lord very rarely works like that in the Bible or in these narrative books, where we come to learn how God deals with us in everyday life. It is a truth

that has to be learned. And I think that if you look at David's life, especially since it is so laid out for us, to wait seven-and-a-half years as a young man of 23 years old just to get to the throne - only to get there and find that 90% of the nation still doesn't want anything to do with you, that's fifteen years of your.....that's 30% of your life! And he has just been waiting upon the LORD, and yet he doesn't get to immediately take over as, I think, he would desire. And, certainly, how can you blame him? But, over time, God strengthens David for the work, removes the enemy, and I think the delay times are beneficial to us. They certainly should be. "God, why are You waiting?" And maybe the Lord's answer, if He gives you one, isn't satisfactory to you because you want it now. We want it now. Now is good. But waiting is the way that God, more often than not, works.

We read, in verse 2, (on the downside), "Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; his second, Chileab, by Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur; the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, by David's wife Eglah." But notice, in verse 5, "These were born to David in Hebron." Now, on the positive side, God strengthened David in his spiritual relationship with the LORD, with his understanding of the heart of God, with his rulership capabilities. On the downside - and one of the glaring weaknesses in David's life (and it's mentioned three times in this chapter, beginning here) - David raised the number of his wives to six. Many were gained through allegiances - treaties, if you will - which was a pretty common practice in those days. You can read about them there in Deuteronomy 7. However, the LORD's word to His king - to a king that was yet to come - in Deuteronomy 7:2-3 was that, "Be sure, when God delivers your enemy into your hand, that you don't make any covenants with them, that you don't intermarry with them, that you don't give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons." And later on in chapter 17, the LORD says the same thing to the nation.

So David - there's a blind spot here, and it's a bad one. And it is something that you will find David struggling with. It would cause him tremendous sorrow over the years and a tremendous amount of grief. It's kind of a dichotomy, isn't it? On the one hand, verse 1 tells us he's being strengthened, and God is raising him up; there're a lot of good things going on. But, on the other hand, there is this open door to problems, and there are a lot of problems to be gotten, even though it was

common practice (I said that already) in his day. It was a besetting sin of David's. His son, Solomon, would follow it down the road.

And the Bible spells out - and we can point out to you as we go through - some of the consequences. For David, his first wife, Michal, had been taken from him (she was Saul's daughter) when David was Saul's (all of a sudden) enemy. And that was one way that Saul could reach out against him and strike out. And he took his daughter back and gave her to another man who, by the way, from what we read tonight, really loved her. But he lost that first wife in that whole fiasco with Saul. In fact tonight, when Abner returns to support David (though he's been his enemy), one of the things David will say to Abner is, "I want Michal back as my wife." "Yeah, but you already have six wives!" "Yeah, but this was spite." And she comes back because that culture would allow that to happen. However, she would leave again. And it is David who just can't be, it seems, satisfied with one wife. His daughter, Tamar, will be raped by a half-brother. His son, Amnon, will be murdered. Two others of his sons, Absalom and Adonijah, will plot to overthrow their father. And it just goes on and on. He's not a strong father, he's not a strong leader in his home. He has a lot of spiritual excellence in his life. This sad weakness results in just kind of overshadowing some of the things in his life.

And I think it's a pretty good warning to us because we're reading the narrative that you don't want to give the Lord 50% of your life. "Well, I'm pretty faithful in most stuff." You know, we're in a battle, and we shouldn't, I think, be satisfied with sectors of growth, if that makes any sense; like this part of my life is really together, and this one not so good. That the Lord would warn us, I think, through David's life that there's an enemy who looks for any chinks in the armor, any compromise, any spiritual weakness. And if he can find one, then I think he's gonna exploit it. Peter would write, years later, "You be sober and be vigilant; because you have an adversary, the devil, who walks around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he can devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

And this weakness, this glaring weakness, in David's life is gonna make great difficulty for him in the years that would follow. You can go back and then look at these choices that he makes early on and see how it affects him. Look, the law of God is for our benefit. Right? So when the LORD says to the king, "Don't do this," and the king goes, "I'm gonna do that," then you would expect problems to follow. It was, no doubt, David's tolerant, liberal attitude in this very area that might very well have led to his insensitivity to God's moral standards with Bathsheba; because

he's used to having a lot of women around and not having to be devoted to one. And so the Bathsheba incident, by the time you get there, I don't think he and his family ever recovered from it. He's forgiven, certainly, immediately. God is good at forgiving. But there are consequences that come with sin. So, here we have a list of some wives and of the names of a bunch of kids. Not a good thing and certainly in contrast to verse 1.

Then we read, in verse 6, "Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner" (remember that's that cousin to Saul's, the general in the North who had put Saul's son in place) "was strengthening his hold" (there in the North) "on the house of Saul. And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So Ishbosheth said to Abner, 'Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?' Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, 'Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman? May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as 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,' " or, really, from the north to the south. "And he" (Ishbosheth, Saul's weak son) "could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him."

Now, while David is marrying all of these different women, Abner is in the North making a name for himself, putting the muscle to the throne. And, in the process, Saul's son (and the puppet that Abner had established), Ishbosheth, accuses him of sleeping with one of Saul's concubines. Concubines literally, by definition, were women (to men) who....you had a woman to clean the house, you had a woman to cook the food, you had another woman to raise the children. It was a horrible situation all around. Awful practice. Now, he was accused of sleeping with Saul's concubine. It would be tantamount to saying, "You're just trying to take the throne. You're trying to move into his space and all." It's exactly, by the way, what David's son, Absalom, will do later (in chapter 16 of this book), in sleeping with one of his father's concubines to try to make a move on the throne. So Abner doesn't deny this. I suspect he's mad because he got caught. You certainly wouldn't put it past him, what you know about Abner in the Scriptures. But, needless to say, he gets angry, he doesn't like being challenged by this young man that he has put in a place of authority (but really has none). And so he says to him, "I've been your protector all along, but I'm gonna change now. I'm gonna do what God has wanted all along."

Which is an interesting thing. Which means that Abner knew that God wanted David to be the king. "I'm gonna do what the LORD has sworn to him," verse 9. "I'm gonna agree with God's assessment of David. I'm gonna join his side and no longer protect you and the family of Saul for your accusations against me." It tells me clearly that Abner knew the will of God - he was defying Him; that Ishbosheth was a weak, wicked man who shuddered at the words of Abner. But I love the fact that even though these are wicked people wanting to do what they want, God is still getting His way. And I would point that out to you because we have a political climate today that is a bunch of wicked people. I don't care who you're for or not, it's just crazy, isn't it? Nobody cares for you anymore. So, we look at all the mess and go, "Oh, what are we gonna do?" Here's my piece - God's still gonna have His way. We're gonna pray and seek His face, but God is gonna have His way. And He does so with Abner, who is a powerful, tough military guy who thinks that he's just getting even with people that he doesn't think are very thankful for his care. But in so doing, he does exactly what God wants because the heart is in His hand, isn't it? God can turn it wherever He wants (Proverbs 21:1). And if nothing else, the minute you begin to panic, just go back and read these kinds of verses. Because here's a guy doing - he thinks he's doing what he wants, but he's not. He's doing what God wants, and I like that idea.

So we read, in verse 12, that Abner made good on the threat. "Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, 'Whose is the land?' saying also, 'Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you.'" So David gets an offer from Abner. It was made (kind of) in spite, out of hurt feelings, if you will. But no doubt it was offered with a caveat that Abner could find a place for himself. Now here's the interesting picture of David: David says to himself, "This makes a lot of sense. This will save a lot of lives. This will save a lot of battles. I'm gonna have to make a deal with this guy." This is the guy that killed his little nephew in battle. This is a man that has championed the cause of Saul, this wicked man that had died several years earlier. And David could have said, "I will never make a deal with you. You're the devil!" But David is not a guy like that. As quick as he is to make these foolish mistakes, he's a soft-hearted guy that doesn't keep much record of wrongs. And he does, more often than not, what is right for everyone else and not for himself, which is a pretty good example. Right? That the LORD had David's heart, and he was soft in this area. And David accepts this offer.

And then he turns right around, in verse 13, and he says this, " 'Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face.' So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son, saying, 'Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines.' And Ishbosheth sent and took her from her husband," (her current husband), "from Paltiel the son of Laish. Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim," (to the border) "weeping behind her. So Abner said to him, 'Go, return!' And he returned." So, on the one hand, David's very conscious of the people he's caring for, he's very merciful, he's very quick to not be self-serving. And yet, in the very next verse, in pride and in flesh, he asks for wife number seven! I guess the flesh doesn't really have enough, does it? He should have left her with a husband who must have loved her; he cried to the border, "Don't take her!" And he had to be threatened by the army guy, Abner, "Go away!" And so he did. David got what he wanted. And is this really what he wanted?

Well, we read, in verse 17, "Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel," (those are in the North) "saying, 'In time past you were seeking for David to be king over you. Now then, do it! For the LORD has spoken of David, saying, "By the hand of My servant David, I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and the hand of all their enemies."' And Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin. Then Abner also went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and the whole house of Benjamin." So Abner goes on this diplomacy tour among the leadership, mostly of the northern tribes, to win support for David. And he says, "The LORD called him. I recognize that the LORD called him," which means that he lived all those years in direct rebellion against God. He knew better. He spends a lot of time, notice, with the Benjamites, Saul's tribe. I think that he knew that it would require some special kind of attention. And Abner uses spiritual arguments with each group. He reminds them that there was a time that they really wanted David to be their king, and now somehow he'd talked them out of it; that they had wanted David to rule over them, that the LORD had said to David, "I'm gonna save Israel through you. You're gonna be the king." He brings the arguments that are scriptural, and they're correct. And you want to say, "Does he mean it?" And the answer is I don't know. I know that verses 9 and 10 say that he's a really vindictive guy. I know that the things that will follow in the story will tell us that he's not a very nice man or a very godly man. And yet, for now in his political correctness, he uses scriptural arguments and then says to the people, "Let's do that. Let's make him king. Do it now. This is

the will of God. It is vital." And I would say no matter where you hear the truth from, when it's the truth, it's the truth. So I don't know about his heart, but I know that, again, behind the scenes, here's God working to make David the man that He wanted him to be. Despite his flaws, despite his weaknesses, despite his inconsistency, and just like us, we call on Jesus' name and.....big deal with Kanye West right now. Right? I hope he got saved. I watched Bob Dylan write three beautiful Christian albums in the 70's, and then he just kind of walked away. So you're always kind of, "Hmmm. I hope he's saved." But if he is, man, praise the Lord. We could use more of that and less of everything else. Is he sincere? I don't know. But I'll tell you what - when the gospel message goes out no matter who speaks it, God will use it. He'll use you and me; He'll use a donkey. Right? God'll have His way. So I'm encouraged. Paul used to say, "When Jesus is preached, I don't care what the motive of the person behind it is as long as Jesus' name gets out there" (Philippians 1:18). So I'm good with that. And I'm not sure I understand Abner's motivation other than vindictiveness. But he could be....he's been losin' the war for seven years, losin' a lot of people, and losin' his grip, so I suspect that he saw the handwriting on the wall. But whether it is in his heart, I don't know.

But notice, again, that the enemies of God know the will of God for their lives. Whenever we have counseling appointments - and the pastors get them quite often - in counseling I usually say to people, when they ask, "What should I do?" I usually say, "What do you believe God wants you to do?" And I'm amazed at the fact that they usually know the answer. It's not like we live in a society that doesn't have access to a Bible. Right? Or the heart of God or good churches that will teach us the Scriptures. Most of the time people will tell you exactly what they believe God wants them to do, and I would say most of the time I go, "That's exactly right." So then my next question's this, "So what're you doin' here?" And I think what they're doing is they're looking to get someone that will tell them it's okay to do something else because they're not willing to do what God says. It isn't a matter of not knowing; it's a matter of not, so often, wanting to do what the Lord has said.

So I'm not sure what's goin' on with Abner, but I know that, again, the big picture for me is God's having His way, and His boy's gonna be the king. You know? And regardless of who's around and who's opposing and who's strong and who's weak and who's lying and who's telling the truth, God's way is getting done, and that's a good thing. And so David hears from him, they met together. "This is good for Israel. This is how we're gonna deal with Benjamin and all."

And so we read, in verse 20, "So Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him." (So I guess it was a successful trip.) "Then Abner said to David, 'I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires.' So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace." Twenty delegates, Abner with him, representative from the northern kingdom, and the big powwow. David greets them. There's a state dinner. And, again, I think we pointed out last week, David is really good at forgiving. He's so much like God in the forgiveness aspect. That's what the Lord asks us to do as well. So, he doesn't give way to vengeance for his nephew Asahel's death that was at the hands of Abner. In fact, so impressed with Abner's commitment and his labors and bringing these twenty guys that David sends him out the door with a peace treaty and kind of a handshake and, "Awesome! Thanks. You're gonna bring all the rest of the people to the table."

About that time, verse 22, however, Joab, who was one of his brothers that was killed, "the servants of David and Joab came from a raid and brought much spoil with them." (They had great victory.) "But Abner was not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. When Joab and all the troops that were with him had come, they told Joab, saying, 'Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, and he has gone in peace.' Then Joab came to the king and said, 'What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone? Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing.' And when Joab had gone from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother." Not quite so forgiving. Abner had been there and had been accused, and he knew what he had done. Joab accuses David of being naïve and Abner of being a liar, and without David's approval, he takes matters into his own hands to seek vengeance for Asahel's death. Revenge, really. The problem for David is he's just made peace with all these folks through Abner - shook hands, met with representatives. There was finally going to be peace in the kingdom, and now this! Another family member causing great distress.

Verse 28 says, "Afterward, when David heard it, he said, 'My kingdom and I are guiltless before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread.'" (So David cursed this family.) "So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle." Imagine being David now, and you're trying to be the king, and you've done a good job, and your heart is pure, and you've been merciful to someone that has hurt your family greatly. And now Abner, without your approval, has been killed by your nephew. So David does what you would expect. He renounces the actions of Joab. He curses them. It's interesting. Pronounces a curse on them. Which, by the way, God will honor. We're gonna see this as we go, to kind of remember the curse. You reap what you've sown. David did not kill Joab. And I don't know why because he certainly was not hesitant to do it to others. I can't explain to you why other than to say it's his nephew, and maybe that's the issue. But for whatever reason, he didn't put his hand on him.

Now here's what he did do. He took Joab, and he demoted him from being the head of his army to a smaller place. It didn't change Joab's heart at all. Joab is a bad guy from the get-go. He's gonna cause a lot of grief in David's family in the years to come. He would eventually be killed by Solomon's men as he clung to the horns of the altar for protection. "Oh, God, save me." Well, it's a little late at that point. He had lived a life that really didn't care for the LORD.

But here's King David. Fifteen years of waiting, finally made a deal, "Ah, we're gonna have peace in the kingdom. We're gonna get to God's business." And this happens. And so now David is truly grieved. He's signed a peace treaty. He's given his word that he believed would save lives. Joab has this unauthorized act. Abner's influence. And now, in the North, there's great suspicion that David had his hand in this. Right? "You had to have been a part of this." It was a low day. And maybe ministry with the family members is not a good idea. Don't know. If you take the Bible together, most family members in ministry don't do very well. But David is crying, "It wasn't me." And it wasn't him.

So David does what he can do in his place of leadership. Verse 31, "Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, 'Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner.' And King David followed the coffin." (He called for a day of fasting and mourning, and he gave him a full military funeral. He

demanded his entire army, including Joab, to show up, and he leads the funeral procession himself.) "So they buried," verse 32, "Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. And the king sang a lament over Abner and said: 'Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound nor your feet put into fetters; as a man falls before wicked men, so you fell.' Then all the people wept over him again." So David buries him in Hebron which, by the way, is a place for heroes in the Bible in terms of who was buried there. David gives him a very touching eulogy. He lays the guilt and responsibility, notice in verse 34, at the feet of Joab and Abishai; calls them "wicked men."

And then, in verse 35, "And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, 'God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!' Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, since whatever the king did pleased all the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's intent to kill Abner the son of Ner. Then the king said to his servants, 'Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness.' " So David declares a day of fasting. His sincere reaction to the murder left an impression on the people. And God continued to watch over David. But, again, there's the enemy, man, trying to uproot and undercut the work of God in putting David in a place of leadership. Notice what he says in verse 38, "I am weakened today even though I've been made king." Sometimes difficult people in your lives can make your life hard, can't they? And these were difficult people. But David just turns to the LORD and says, "You get even, You deal with it. I'm not gonna go after this." And he didn't.

Chapter 4, verse 1, "When Saul's son" (Ishbosheth) "heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost heart, and all Israel was troubled." (They knew trouble was coming or so they thought because they'd been rebellious for so long.) "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.)" Purely historical, filling in; the Beerothites were now part of Saul's tribe of Benjamin. They had originally belonged to the Gibeonites. If you've been with us for any length of time, way

back in the days of Joshua - when the children of Israel were being led into the Land of Promise - the LORD said, "Everyone that lives in the land should be destroyed. Everyone that lives outside the borders of the land, you can make a deal with. But in the land, you wipe them out." And there was a group of people - these Gibeonites - who lived in the land but took an occasion to come to Joshua with old clothes and dirt on their heads and moldy bread and said, "Hey, we're here to make a deal. We hear God gave you everything, and we don't want to be wiped out." And Joshua said to them, "Where do you come from?" They went, "Oh, we come from a long way away." They only just came from over the hill, though. They were slated to be wiped out. Without praying, Joshua signs a deal with them, shakes hands, and sends them home. And they went, "All right! We'll be your servants for the rest of our lives." And from that day until this day, they were part of the tribe of Benjamin, serving the LORD as just servants. They had very lowly jobs, but yet they were alive, and they had survived it and all. And so Joshua made a league with them, made them slaves. Saul had violated the league of Joshua by massacring many of them (we'll see that later on in this book). But they felt they had a score to settle, just with Saul's family but not with the nation itself, which is where these two guys now enter in.

We read, in verse 4 (and it's just a side note that you just kind of have to file for later), "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." Now we're not gonna deal with him at all right now, but suffice it to say he is a surviving member of Saul's family that we are going to know well down the road as David has interaction with him. Right now it's just a one-word comment that tells us there's another surviving son.

Well, back to our two friends here who used to be Gibeonites who had, for years now, been with Saul. Verse 5, "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. 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.' " Well if they'd been readin' their Bible, they'd know this is a bad idea. As head of his troops, these men had access to King Ishbosheth, if you will, and they killed him, they beheaded him, and then they traveled with his head 50 miles all the way to Hebron to tell the good news to David. Again, number one - driven by revenge, 2 Samuel 21 will tell you how badly Saul treated this particular group of people. And second of all - to try to make a name for themselves in the current government with David. Lots of shenanigans. People go, "Oh, the Bible's so boring." No, this is pretty amazing. This is rated R tonight, isn't it? I don't think I want to see this on the screen. I'll just read about it. But, anyway, it turned out to be a very bad idea.

Verse 9, "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." David's real good at not getting even. He doesn't really put up with this kind of nonsense. And quite a ruler. But I love what he says, "As the LORD lives, I don't need your help." David never desired or sought the kingdom through deceitful means or through.....even when he had a chance to kill Saul himself, he never did it. Right? Didn't raise his hand. So David deals very justly with these men. It was the law of the land. It sounds brutal to us, but that was the culture. And he hung these two guys out there for everyone to see. "Don't do this here." And I guess the lesson would be driven home. But, as with Joab's sin, David knew the only way to rule was to gain trust and be honest, and he was. Be careful when you throw in with people who aren't playing by the rules. Because it's just gonna hurt you, isn't it? His reputation, and the LORD's reputation, will bring David favor for years to come. But it's because he's willing to walk the right path. And let's face it, there're a lot of opportunities to walk the wrong ones, aren't there? But only a few to walk the right one.

Chapter 5. And see? You didn't think we'd get here, but look at us. Verse 1, "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," (that would have been seven years earlier) "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."

So, at 37 years old, the elders of the North gathered together in Hebron to finally acknowledge God's man. If you read 1 Chronicles 12 (and, by the way, if you're into reading through these books, you have to kind of mix them together; a lot of the information is found in Chronicles and in Kings), 1 Chronicles 12 tells us that, at this particular ceremony of recognizing David as the king, 337,600 people showed up. That was quite a rally. Twelve hundred princes from the various tribes came to a three-day celebration. It was the day David had longed for. Notice what they said to him, after all these years. "We're family. We acknowledge that even when Saul was in charge, you were the one caring for us. You protected us in battle. You watched over us." (David had a good reputation.) "We want you to be king." Now, I read this, and I say, well, if you really believe that, why didn't you make him king seven-and-a-half years ago? But that's how politics works, isn't it? People get pressured, they don't know what to do. Fear of reprisal, no doubt, with Abner for so long. Yet now the men of Israel saw David's life and calling and recognized it, and they swore allegiance to him. I think they were tired of their own ways. Things weren't, certainly, working out for them, and all of the threats are now removed. So David comes to the throne, and notice we have the numbers, again, in verses 4 and 5 to kind of keep us in place.

Notice the big word in verse 1. "Then." God shows the hearts of these towards David, who would be one of the most loved rulers ever, and they would identify with him. But it was God's timing. Seven-and-a-half years earlier, "Oh, where's the LORD? We finally get here, and we're goin' nowhere." But when God says, "Now is the time," then now is the time. Look, David hadn't arrived, and I've tried to kind of walk you through this because I know that years pass so quickly in some of these narratives. But David hadn't shown up here without cost. I mean, he's 37½ years old. Right? He'd been in his mid-20's - 22-23 years old - when the LORD had first told him about these things, and he had begun to run. He was probably in his teens when the LORD first sent Samuel to his house. So it has been a long road.

He has suffered exile and despair and assassination attempts, several coup attempts, delays, and tyranny and personal loss, and then there're all those spiritual symbols that he's created for himself. Here's what he gets out of it, though. They get a king that can be touched with their hurts because he's hurt. Right? He's a king that can be touched with their infirmities. It's going to make him a great king.

Well, first things first. Verse 6, "And the king and his men went to Jerusalem" (from Hebron) "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)" (Jerusalem). "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.' 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." So David moves his capital; not from Hebron, which was in the South. It was really a Judah city, where everybody was there from his tribe. He seeks to move it to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, in proximity or in position, is kind of in between the North and the South. Right? It was a border town, and it was a virtual fortress. I mean, to this day Jerusalem, at that time, was protected by very deep valleys on three sides. It had a good water source outside the walls - the Gihon springs - which fed the water under the city walls. The only problem in taking Jerusalem was the Jebusites had lived there since well into history, since the days of Joshua and beyond. So they were cocky, very self-assured. They mocked David. "Even the blind can protect us from you. As tough as you are, we're in Jerusalem, man. This is the place that nobody messes with." Right? And they taunted him there, even in verse 6.

According to 1 Chronicles 11, Joab responded to David's "whoever attacks the city becomes the captain of the armies," and he said, "I'd like to do that." Joab, the one who had been kind of censored by David and all, responds to the challenge, takes the army up the waterways into the city. The city falls. David quickly shores up the city's most vulnerable side - the north. The Millo is the word for landfill. Everything else was very steep, but David kind of shored it up. And he began to rule from Jerusalem, the place that God would put His name and, to this day, the

place where the LORD will return to. So David takes the city, and he begins to rule, and for now, the kingdom's going to grow. He went on to become great.

Verse 11, "Then Hiram the 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." What???!!!! Now you read, in verse 12, "The LORD has established me. He's opened the door. He's really blessing my life. And now I think I'll get some more wives." Even beyond the ones in Hebron. Verse 13b, "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, Ithar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet." So what follows, to me, is odd but enlightening. On the one hand, there is David the devout, obedient, godly man. And then, on the other hand, there is this ongoing weakness that isn't corrected, even being aware of God's blessings. You know, he's not satisfied in the flesh. He has to take a stand against it, but he doesn't. He adds more wives to the ongoing list, more concubines, and here there're names of eleven more kids. It is a problem that just doesn't go away. But it's always presented in the middle of, "God is blessing, God is moving, God is good." Isn't God good, that He would bless the likes of people like us?! We do so many dumb things, and yet the Lord is there to help us.

Verse 17, "Now when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel," (they weren't happy) "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." Though there were a lot of people glad David was in charge, obviously the Philistines were not. They had left the South to David when he had come to power. But now, with this new unity in Israel, they saw it as a threat, and so they began to come against David from the north (at the time) with a lot of troops. Verse 18, they spread themselves in the Valley of Rephaim. The word "Rephaim" means "giants." But what

he did was cut David off from the north. Remember, the North had just joined him; now he's kind of isolated to the people in the south again. David, though, verse 19, notice, calls on a bigger Helper. He turns to the LORD, a lesson he had learned very well in the last many years. God was always faithful to answer David when he sought the LORD in regards to his battles. The LORD told him to go and to fight, that He would doubtlessly deliver him even though he would have been disadvantaged militarily because he was cut off from his own people for the most part. He goes to fight them in the woods that he grew up in, if you will, that he learned to trust the LORD in. It was a miraculous battle. We aren't told much of it except we are told, in verse 20, that David named the place to honor the LORD, a memory that lasted for years into their history. And they burned the idols. Deuteronomy 7:5 says, "When you deal with the enemy, burn down their altars, break down their pillars, cut down their images and burn their idols with fire." And I suspect David did that as well. So, victory was given to David as he began to rule.

We then read, in verse 22, "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." So, next battle. And the enemy doesn't always leave but for a little while. Right? I remember reading that Scripture in Luke 4:13 where, after the temptation in the wilderness, you read of the devil that he left tempting Jesus for a while, then he came back at an opportune time. So one battle gets over doesn't mean it's the end of the battles, for sure. Notice the Philistines regroup. David is really smart. He doesn't presume to fight like the last battle. God is ever-present, so we have to turn to Him for every step of faith, I think. And so the LORD this time tells him to do something which I think would require greater faith. He said, "Circle around behind them." If he does that, he cuts himself off from the city in which he lives. Now he's not only separated from the north, he's separated from his own troops. He's literally isolating himself in this battle plan. But, again, the LORD is with him, and the LORD says, "When you hear the sound of marching in the mulberry trees," (I'm sure the wind blowing and all) "then run hard, and I'll give you victory." And the LORD, indeed, gave him victory, and they pushed the Philistines back out of their land.

Here's my take on it. Never presume upon the Lord. It is so easy to try to live by yesterday's blessings. Right? Seek Him every day. Don't settle into a pattern. I fear the words, even in ministry, "That's the way we've always done things" because that means you haven't sought the Lord every week, I guess, or every year. So this time God says, "Wait until you hear Me tiptoeing in the tops of the trees, and then go." Very specific. And God blessed. We read in 1 Chronicles 14:16 (this battle again), "So David did as God commanded him, and they drove back the army of the Philistines from Gibeon as far as Gezer. Then the fame of David went out into all lands, and the LORD brought the fear of him upon all nations." David is honored as he honored the LORD with his obedience.

So you have this dichotomy in many ways. A man of God who waited so long. So many lessons to learn about waiting upon God, how good it is. And yet this constant warning: don't drop your defenses in portions of your life where you're having trouble. Because they can ruin you and what God wants to do with you. God is gracious. He covers a lot of our foolishness, doesn't He, constantly. But the best way to go is to give it all to Him, all to Him, not some.

Well next week we plan on slowing down to one chapter, and it's a great chapter. It is a chapter that speaks about the spiritual focus of the nation which is, for the first time in years, going to go back to worshipping God at the ark and letting the LORD be the center of their national life. So, if you'll just read chapter 6 next week, you'll be ready for us. And, hey, how 'bout inviting someone to come to church with you next week? If you all brought one person to church, we couldn't fit 'em all in here. All right? Pray. I'll bet you have a friend that needs to go to church. Why not ask them?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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