SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 2

*David Anointed King Over Judah*

**In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord. “Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked. The Lord said, “Go up.” David asked, “Where shall I go?” “To Hebron,” the Lord answered. 2 So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. 3 David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. 4 Then the men of Judah came to Hebron and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. When David was told that it was the men of Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul, 5 he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead to say to them, “The Lord bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master by burying him. 6 May the Lord now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favor because you have done this. 7 Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.”**

**2:1** Because Saul had died, David wondered whether he should seek a leadership role among the Israelites. (TLSB)

*David inquired of the Lord*. By means of the ephod through the priest Abiathar (see notes on Ex 28:30; 1Sa 2:28; 23:2). (CSB)

*one of the towns of Judah.* Even though Saul was dead and David had many friends and contacts among the people of his own tribe (see 1Sa 30:26–31), David did not presume to return from Philistine territory to assume the kingship promised to him without first seeking the Lord’s guidance. *Hebron.* An old and important city (see Ge 13:18; 23:2; Jos 15:13–15; see also note on 1Sa 30:31) centrally located in the tribe of Judah. (CSB)

**2:2** *Ahinoam of Jezreel.* See note on 1Sa 25:43. (CSB)

*Abigail.* See 1Sa 25. (CSB)

**2:3** *men who were with him.* See 1Sa 22:2; 23:13; 30:3, 9. (CSB)

The large group was probably more than the walled city of Hebron could hold, so they settled in unwalled villages in the area. (TLSB)

**2:4** *anointed David king.* See notes on 1Sa 2:10; 9:16. David had previously been anointed privately by Samuel in the presence of his own family (see note on 1Sa 16:13). Here the anointing ceremony is repeated as a public recognition by his own tribe of his divine calling to be king. (CSB)

Marked as king. See note, 1Sm 10:1. David had been anointed by Samuel (1Sm 16:5–13). At first, David reigned only over the tribe of Judah (cf v 10). As a result, Israel was divided. (TLSB)

*over the house of Judah.* Very likely the tribe of Simeon was also involved (see Jos 19:1; Jdg 1:3), but the Judahites in every way dominated the area. (CSB)

*men of Jabesh Gilead.* See notes on 1Sa 11:1; 31:12. (CSB)

*buried Saul.* See note on 1Sa 31:13.

**2:5–7** Early in Saul’s reign, he rescued Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonite army. The citizens remembered his aid, and later they rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons from the walls of Beth-shan, burying the remains in their own city. David commended this courageous act. Their burial of Saul mirrored David’s own loyalty and respect for Saul and his family. Because David was known as Saul’s enemy, his promise to do good to them must also have comforted them. (TLSB)

**2:7** *your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.* David’s concluding statement to the men of Jabesh Gilead is a veiled invitation to them to recognize him as their king just as the tribe of Judah had done. This appeal for their support, however, was ignored (see 1Sa 2:8–9). (CSB)

**2:1–7** David inquires of the Lord, moves to the area of Hebron, and is anointed by the men of Judah as their king. When told that the men of Jabesh-gilead have buried Saul, David blesses them and promises to treat them well. We, too, should inquire of the Lord in His Holy Word and seek reconciliation with our enemies. Through the reconciliation of Christ’s cross, God blesses us and shows us His steadfast love and faithfulness. • Lord, in Your Word, show me Your will for my life and Your reconciling love. Amen. (TLSB)

*War Between the Houses of David and Saul*

**8 Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul’s army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. 9 He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel. 10 Ish-Bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. 11 The length of time David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months. 12 Abner son of Ner, together with the men of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. 13 Joab son of Zeruiah and David’s men went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. One group sat down on one side of the pool and one group on the other side. 14 Then Abner said to Joab, “Let’s have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand in front of us.” “All right, let them do it,” Joab said. 15 So they stood up and were counted off—twelve men for Benjamin and Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve for David. 16 Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent’s side, and they fell down together. So that place in Gibeon was called Helkath Hazzurim.17 The battle that day was very fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David’s men. 18 The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. 19 He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him. 20 Abner looked behind him and asked, “Is that you, Asahel?” “It is,” he answered. 21 Then Abner said to him, “Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the young men and strip him of his weapons.” But Asahel would not stop chasing him. 22 Again Abner warned Asahel, “Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?” 23 But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit; so Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel’s stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot. And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died. 24 But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner, and as the sun was setting, they came to the hill of Ammah, near Giah on the way to the wasteland of Gibeon. 25 Then the men of Benjamin rallied behind Abner. They formed themselves into a group and took their stand on top of a hill. 26 Abner called out to Joab, “Must the sword devour forever? Don’t you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?” 27 Joab answered, “As surely as God lives, if you had not spoken, the men would have continued the pursuit of their brothers until morning.” 28 So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men came to a halt; they no longer pursued Israel, nor did they fight anymore. 29 All that night Abner and his men marched through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, continued through the whole Bithron and came to Mahanaim. 30 Then Joab returned from pursuing Abner and assembled all his men. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David’s men were found missing. 31 But David’s men had killed three hundred and sixty Benjamites who were with Abner. 32 They took Asahel and buried him in his father’s tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and arrived at Hebron by daybreak.**

**2:8** *Abner son of Ner.* See note on 1Sa 14:50. (CSB)

*Saul’s army.* His small standing army of professionals loyal to him and his family (see 1Sa 13:2, 15; 14:2, 52). (CSB)

*Ish-Bosheth.* The name was originally Ish-(or Esh-)Baal (1Ch 8:33) but was changed by the author of Samuel to Ish-Bosheth, meaning “man of the shameful thing” (see note on 4:4). Evidently Baal (meaning “lord” or “master”) was at this time still used to refer to the Lord. Later this was discontinued because of confusion with the Canaanite god Baal, and the author of Samuel reflects the later sensitivity. (CSB)

*son of Saul.* See notes on 1Sa 14:49; 31:2. (CSB)

*brought him.* Abner takes the initiative in the power vacuum created by Saul’s death, using the unassertive Ish-Bosheth as a pawn for his own ambitions (see 3:11; see also note on 4:1). There is no evidence that Ish-Bosheth had strong support among the Israelites generally. (CSB)

*Mahanaim.* A Gileadite town in Transjordan and thus beyond the sphere of Philistine domination—a kind of refugee capital. (CSB)

Ish-bosheth’s capital city. (TLSB)

**2:9** *He made him king.* As a nephew of Saul (see note on 1Sa 14:50), Abner had both a family and a career interest in ensuring dynastic succession for Saul’s house. (CSB)

*Gilead … all Israel.* This delineation of Ish-Bosheth’s realm suggests that his actual rule, while involving territory both east and west of the Jordan, was quite limited and that the last entry (“all Israel”) was more claim than reality. David ruled over Judah and Simeon, and the Philistines controlled large sections of the northern tribal regions.

**2:10–11** Ish-bosheth apparently did not fight in the battle at Mount Gilboa, perhaps in order to assure an heir to the throne in case disaster struck. He was murdered at the end of two years (4:7). David enjoyed a more stable rule, reigning over Judah at Hebron for 7½ years. The writer anticipates Ish-bosheth’s downfall. (TLSB)

**2:11** *seven years and six months.* Cf. Ish-Bosheth’s two-year reign in Mahanaim (v. 10). Because it appears that David was made king over all Israel shortly after Ish-Bosheth’s death (5:1–5) and moved his capital to Jerusalem not long afterward (5:6–12), reconciling the lengths of David’s and Ish-Bosheth’s reigns is difficult. The difficulty is best resolved by assuming that it took Ish-Bosheth a number of years to be recognized as his father’s successor, and that the two years of his reign roughly correspond to the last two or three years of David’s reign in Hebron. (CSB)

**2:8–11** Abner makes Saul’s son Ish-bosheth king over the northern tribes of Israel, while David reigns over Judah. David may want to reign over all Israel right away, but that is not to be. Sometimes, God’s promises call for patience. We have inherited the full kingdom of heaven through the innocent sufferings and death of Jesus, our Savior. We wait patiently to possess it. • Heavenly Father, give me patience as You fulfill Your promises in Your time. Amen. (TLSB)

**2:12** Abner initiates an action to prevent David’s sphere of influence from spreading northward out of Judah. Gibeon was located in the tribal area of Benjamin, to which Saul and his family belonged, and which the Philistines had not occupied. (CSB)

**2:13** *Joab son of Zeruiah.* See note on 1Sa 26:6. Joab became a figure of major importance during David’s reign as a competent but ruthless military leader (see 10:7–14; 11:1; 12:26; 1Ki 11:15–16). At times David was unable to control him (3:39; 18:5, 14; 1Ki 2:5–6), and he was eventually executed for his wanton assassinations and his part in the conspiracy to place Adonijah rather than Solomon on David’s throne (1Ki 2:28–34). (CSB)

David’s nephew and commander of his army. (TLSB)

*pool*. Natural place to meet. Archaeologists have found it to be c 36 ft in diameter and nearly as deep, carved from solid rock. Water would have pooled at the bottom of this deep, broad shaft. It was reached by a series of steps. (TLSB)

*David’s men.* Some, at least, of David’s small force of professionals that had gathered around him (see 1Sa 22:1–2; 23:13; 27:2; 30:9). (CSB)

**2:14** The standoff at the pool was delayed by Abner’s suggestion that there be a competition. (TLSB)

*young men*. Nu 1:3 describes military service beginning at age 20, though conflicts may have brought adolescents into service. (TLSB)

**2:15** *Benjamin.* At this time Ish-Bosheth seems to have been supported mainly by his own tribesmen. (CSB)

**2:16** *down together*. May mean all 24 men died due to inexperience and zeal. (TLSB)

**2:17** *The battle that day was very fierce.* Because the representative combat (see note on 1Sa 17:4) by 12 men from each side was indecisive, a full-scale battle ensued in which David’s forces were victorious. The attempt to use representative combat to avoid the decimation of civil war failed (see 3:1). (CSB)

Rather than preventing further bloodshed, the contest caused a fierce battle from which Ish-bosheth’s army retreated. (TLSB)

**2:18** Three sons of David’s sister Zeruiah wanted to eliminate Abner, making it possible for David to become king of all Israel. (TLSB)

**2:19–23** *Asahel*. David’s youngest nephew foolishly believed he could overtake and kill the commander of the enemy forces. (TLSB)

**2:21–22** Aware of his own superiority in combat, Abner advised Asahel to be content with fighting a soldier of lesser rank. He likely realized that Asahel’s death would make the feud worse. (TLSB)

**2:21** *Turn aside.* Abner tried unsuccessfully to avoid the necessity of killing Asahel. (CSB)

**2:22** *How could I look your brother Joab in the face?* Abner did not want the hostility between himself and Joab to be intensified by the practice of blood revenge (see note on 3:27). (CSB)

**2:23** Apparently, Abner stopped quickly and pierced Asahel with a backward thrust of his spear. (TLSB)

*stood still*. From amazement. (TLSB)

**2:24** *Joab and Abishai*. Asahel’s brothers continued to pursue Abner. (TLSB)

*hill of Ammah* … *Giah*. Location is difficult to identify. Apparently it was a short distance northwest of Gibeon. (TLSB)

**2:25** *hill*. At Ammah, a defensible position. (TLSB)

**2:26** *Must the sword devour forever?* Abner proposes an armistice as a means of avoiding the awful consequences of civil war. (CSB)

Abner requests peace, based on tribal kinship. Cf Jgs 21:16–24. (TLSB)

**2:27** *As surely as God lives.* An oath formula (see note on 1Sa 14:39). (CSB)

**2:28** *nor did they fight anymore.* For the present the open conflict ceased, but the hostility remained (see 3:1). (CSB)

**2:29** *Arabah.* See note on Dt 1:1. (CSB)

**2:29** Abner’s forces withdrew by cover of darkness. (TLSB)

*Arabah*. Wilderness of the Great Rift Valley. (TLSB)

**2:30** *nineteen*. Loss of c 3 percent, if David’s army was still c 600 men (1Sm 27:2). (TLSB)

**2:12–32** Competition at Gibeon leads to a fierce battle. The Benjaminites are defeated, but David’s nephew Asahel is slain by Abner. Sadly, those fighting and killing one another are all members of God’s people Israel. May God prevent us from quarreling unnecessarily with fellow Christians, especially those of our own congregation or family. “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rm 5:1), so let us be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). • Lord Jesus, grant me peace with all people, especially those who confess the same faith. Amen. (TLSB)