SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 3

**The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. 2Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; 3his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; 4the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; 5and the sixth, Ithream the son of David’s wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron.**

**3:2–5** The list of six sons born to David in Hebron is given as an evidence of the strengthening of David’s house in contrast to that of Saul (v. 1). That these six sons were each born of a different mother indirectly informs us that David married four additional wives (see 2:2) during his time in Hebron. The writer does not offer any direct criticism of this polygamous practice (see 5:13), which conflicts with Dt 17:17, but he lets the disastrous results in David’s family life speak for themselves (see chs. 13–19; 1Ki 1–2). (CSB)

*Ahinoam* … *Abigail*. From southern Judah. These marriages may have helped secure the support of the people there. *Geshur*. Small Aramean kingdom in Upper Bashan, east of the Jordan. By marrying Maacah, David formed an alliance with a people east of the Jordan and north of Ish-bosheth’s capital. (TLSB)

 *Amnon.* Later raped his sister Tamar and was killed by his brother Absalom (see ch. 13). (CSB)

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

**3:3** *Kileab.* Called Daniel in 1Ch 3:1. (CSB)

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

 *Absalom.* Later avenged the rape of Tamar by killing Amnon, and conspired against his father David in an attempt to make himself king (see chs. 13–18). (CSB)

 *Maacah daughter of Talmai.* David’s marriage to Maacah undoubtedly had political implications. With Talmai as an ally on Ish-Bosheth’s northern border, David flanked the northern kingdom both south and north. (CSB)

 *Geshur.* A small Aramean city kingdom (see 15:8) located northeast of the Sea of Galilee (see Jos 12:5; 13:11–13). (CSB)

**3:4** *Adonijah.* Was put to death for attempting to take over the throne before Solomon could be crowned (see 1Ki 1–2). (CSB)

*Abner Goes Over to David*

**6 During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. 7 Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, “Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine?” 8 Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said and he answered, “Am I a dog’s head—on Judah’s side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven’t handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman! 9 May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the Lord promised him on oath 10 and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David’s throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.” 11 Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him. 12 Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, “Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you.” 13 “Good,” said David. “I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me.” 14 Then David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, demanding, “Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins.” 15 So Ish-Bosheth gave orders and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish. 16 Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, “Go back home!” So he went back. 17 Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, “For some time you have wanted to make David your king. 18 Now do it! For the Lord promised David, ‘By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.’ ” 19 Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person. Then he went to Hebron to tell David everything that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin wanted to do. 20 When Abner, who had twenty men with him, came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and his men. 21 Then Abner said to David, “Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a compact with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires.” So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.**

**3:6** *making himself strong*. Taking over rule of the kingdom. (TLSB)

**3:7** *Rizpah.* See 21:8–11. (CSB)

 *Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine?* Ish-Bosheth suspects that Abner’s act was part of a conspiracy to seize the kingship (cf. v. 6). Great significance was attached to taking the concubine of a former king (see note on 12:8; see also 16:21; 1Ki 2:22). (CSB)

Ish-bosheth believed Abner was trying to take over the kingdom. He accused Abner of sleeping with his father’s (Saul’s) concubine, a privilege reserved for the king and thus an act of betrayal. (TLSB)

**3:8** Abner protests that he is not on Judah’s side. (TLSB)

 *dog’s head of Judah?* Dogs were despised and considered unclean by Israelites (cf Lv 11:27). (TLSB)

**3:9–10** Abner vowed to help make David king over all of Israel. (TLSB)

**3:9** *May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely.* A curse formula (see note on 1Sa 3:17). (CSB)

 *what the Lord promised him on oath.* The knowledge of David’s divine designation as successor to Saul had spread widely (see notes on 2:4; 1Sa 16:13; 25:28). (CSB)

**3:10** *transfer the kingdom.* Abner was the real power behind the throne. (CSB)

 *Dan to Beersheba.* See note on 1Sa 3:20. (CSB)

**3:12** *Abner sent messengers*. Sensitive mission; Abner had led campaigns against David for two years and had killed Asahel. (TLSB)

 *Whose land is it?* Possibly a rhetorical question that presumed that the land belonged either to Abner or to David. The former seems more likely from the following sentence. (CSB)

 *Make an agreement with me.* Abner wants assurance that he will face no reprisals for his past loyalty to the house of Saul. (CSB)

**3:13** *Michal daughter of Saul.* Although Saul had given Michal to David (1Sa 18:27), he later gave her to another man after David fled from his court (1Sa 25:44). In the minds of the northern elders, the reunion of David and Michal would strengthen David’s claim to the throne as a legitimate son-in-law of Saul. (CSB)

**3:14** *David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth.* David wanted Michal returned as an open and official act of Ish-Bosheth himself, rather than as part of a subterfuge planned by Abner. David knew that Ish-Bosheth would not dare to defy Abner’s wishes (see v. 11). (CSB)

 *Give me my wife Michal*. David asserts his connection to Saul’s family and rule. Ish-bosheth’s compliance shows that he recognized his own political and military weakness. David considered himself still legally married to Michal because he had never divorced her. (TLSB)

 *bridal price*. Cf Gn 34:12; Hos 2:19–20. (TLSB)

 *a hundred Philistine foreskins.* See 1Sa 18:25. Saul had required 100 Philistine foreskins; David presented him with 200 (1Sa 18:27). (CSB)

**3:16** *Bahurim.* The last Benjamite city on the way to Hebron (see 16:5; 17:18). (CSB)

Near the border between Benjamin and Judah. (TLSB)

**3:17** *elders of Israel.* The collective leadership of the various tribes comprised an informal national ruling body (see notes on Ex 3:16; Joel 1:2; Mt 15:2; Ac 24:1; see also 1Sa 8:4; 2Sa 5:3; 1Ki 8:1, 3; 20:7; 2Ki 10:1; 23:1). (CSB)

 *you have wanted to make David your king.* Apparently Ish-Bosheth’s support came mainly from the tribe of Benjamin (see 2:15 and note) and from Gilead in Transjordan (see 2:8; 1Sa 11:9–11; 31:11–13). (CSB)

**3:18** *the Lord promised David.* By this time Samuel’s anointing of David must have become common knowledge (see 5:2). Abner probably interpreted the anointing as a promise from the Lord, since Samuel was the Lord’s much-revered prophet. (CSB)

No such promise concerning David is recorded in 1 and 2Sm. The Lord promised this regarding Saul (1Sm 9:16). Abner’s point was that the promises made to Saul now belonged to David. (TLSB)

**3:19** *Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person.* Because Saul and his family were from the tribe of Benjamin, Abner was careful to consult the Benjamites concerning the transfer of kingship to the tribe of Judah. Apparently they consented, but Abner was not above representing matters in a way that was favorable to his purpose. (CSB)

Tribal leaders of Benjamin, probably the main supporters of Ish-bosheth. (TLSB)

**3:21** *make a compact with you.* See 5:3 and note. (CSB)

 peace. Hbr *shalom*. David approved of Abner’s plan. (TLSB)

*Joab Murders Abner*

**22 Just then David’s men and Joab returned from a raid and brought with them a great deal of plunder. But Abner was no longer with David in Hebron, because David had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. 23 When Joab and all the soldiers with him arrived, he was told that Abner son of Ner had come to the king and that the king had sent him away and that he had gone in peace. 24 So Joab went to the king and said, “What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! 25 You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing.” 26 Joab then left David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. 27 Now when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the gateway, as though to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died. 28 Later, when David heard about this, he said, “I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the Lord concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner. 29 May his blood fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father’s house! May Joab’s house never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food.” 30 (Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.) 31 Then David said to Joab and all the people with him, “Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner.” King David himself walked behind the bier. 32 They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner’s tomb. All the people wept also. 33 The king sang this lament for Abner: “Should Abner have died as the lawless die? 34Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. You fell as one falls before wicked men.” And all the people wept over him again. 35 Then they all came and urged David to eat something while it was still day; but David took an oath, saying, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets!” 36 All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them. 37 So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner. 38 Then the king said to his men, “Do you not realize that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day? 39 And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the Lord repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!”**

**3:22** David may have relied on raids for income. (TLSB)

**3:24–25** Joab regards Abner as a spy seeking out David’s military plans. (TLSB)

**3:25** *he came to deceive you.* Joab despised Abner for killing his brother (2:18, 23; 3:27) and sought to discredit him in David’s eyes as a mere opportunist. Perhaps he also sensed that his own position of leadership would be threatened if Abner joined forces with David, since Abner was obviously a power among the northern tribes. (CSB)

**3:1–25** The relationship between Ish-bosheth and his general, Abner, deteriorates until, finally, Abner aligns himself with David. How easy for us to use dishonest methods as we strive for position and power. Self-interest and self-glory are sins that plague us all. Jesus, on the other hand, selflessly left His throne on high, died to pay for our sins on the cross, rose, and took the Church as His Bride. • Lord Jesus, praise be to Your holy name for Your supreme sacrifice on our behalf. Amen.

**3:26** *cistern of Sirah*. Still in Judah. (TLSB)

**3:27** *into the midst of the gate*. Into the recesses of the fortified city gate. (TLSB)

*Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.* Joab’s murder of Abner is not to be excused either as an act of war or as justifiable blood revenge (cf. Nu 35:12; Dt 19:11–13). Asahel had been killed by Abner in the course of battle (see 2:23; see also note on 2:21). (CSB)

In revenge for the bloodshed Abner had caused. (TLSB)

**3:28–29** As king, David was obligated to punish evildoers. Later, on his deathbed, David called for his nephew Joab’s execution (1Ki 2:5–6). Yet now, for the sake of peace, David lessened the punishment and instead cursed him. See p 6. David tolerated Joab, as a member of his family and perhaps due to his military skills. (TLSB)

**3:29** *May his blood fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father’s house!* After disclaiming any personal or official involvement in the plot to assassinate Abner (v. 28), David cursed Joab and thereby called on God to judge his wicked act. In this crucial hour when David’s relationship to the northern tribes hung in the balance, he appears not to have felt sufficiently secure in his own position to bring Joab publicly to justice (see v. 39). The crime went unpunished until early in the reign of Solomon (1Ki 2:5–6, 29–35). (CSB)

*spindle*. Lit, “stick” or “crutch.” (TLSB)

**3:30** *Abishai*. Somehow an accessory to the murder, perhaps by leading the delegation that summoned Abner to Hebron. (TLSB)

 **3:26–30** Without David’s knowledge and in a time of peace, Joab murders Abner to avenge the death of his brother Asahel. King David curses Joab and all his father’s house because vengeance rarely settles matters. When wronged, you will naturally experience thoughts of vengeance. Arrest these thoughts by crying out to the Lord in prayer. Entrust your judgment to Him and to the legitimate authorities. The Lord of justice and peace, who sent His Son to bear all injustice for your sake, is your hope in all circumstances. • Grant us grace, merciful God, that we may flee from evil and do what is good, that Your mercy may crown Your goodness in us, for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)

**3:31** *Joab.* He too was compelled to join the mourners. It may be that Joab’s involvement was not widely known and that David hoped to keep the matter secret for the time being. (CSB)

*King David*. First time David is referred to as “king.” Tragic events ironically brought the kingdom to David. (TLSB)

**3:32** *Hebron.* David’s royal city at the time. (CSB)

*the king wept aloud at Abner’s tomb.* Because Abner’s murder had the potential of destroying the union of the nation under David’s rule, David did everything possible to demonstrate his innocence to the people. In this he was successful (see vv. 36–37). (CSB)

Abner was given an honorable funeral at David’s capital. (TLSB)

**3:33–34** Abner had died at the hands of criminals. The lament begins and ends with this thought. (TLSB)

**3:33** *lamented*. Lit, “chanted a lament. (TLSB)

**3:34** *not bound* … *not fettered*. Abner was a free man. (TLSB)

**3:35** *May God deal with me, be it ever so severely.* A curse formula (see note on 1Sa 3:17). (CSB)

*taste bread*. Fasting is a biblical expression of grief. (TLSB)

**3:38** *prince*. Lit, “a leader,” esp a military commander, not necessarily the son of a king. (TLSB)

**3:39** *May the Lord repay the evildoer.* See note on v. 29. (CSB)

*sons of Zeruiah*. Joab and Abishai. David contrasts his gentle leadership with their blood vengeance. As king, David has responsibility for punishment of the wicked. (TLSB)

 **3:31–39** Although Abner has been his enemy, David leads the mourning at Abner’s funeral. Our sinful nature tends to delight in the misfortune of our enemies. How differently God treats us! “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rm 5:10). • Lord, help me always to love my enemies as You have loved me in Your Son, my Savior. Amen. (TLSB)