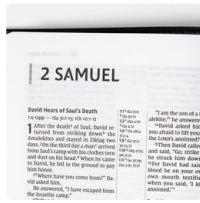


# OpenTheo

## 2 Samuel 3



### 2 Samuel - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg explores the events of 2 Samuel 3, which details the beginning of a long war between the houses of Saul and David. He discusses the issue of succession to the throne and how it factors into the story. Gregg also delves into the controversial topic of David's multiple wives, including his marriage to Bathsheba, and offers his interpretation of biblical teachings on divorce and remarriage. Lastly, he examines the complex relationships between the main characters, including David, Abner, and Joab, and the consequences of their actions.

### Transcript

Alright, we're picking up our story again at 2 Samuel 3 this time. We see that David had become king of Hebron, that is, king of Judah, ruling from Hebron. Apparently the only king for the first five and a half years after the death of Saul.

And then Abner, who had been the head of Saul's armies in Saul's lifetime, and probably the strongest man in the northern confederacy of tribes, had apparently been governing on his own, to whatever degree governing was being done in the northern kingdom. There was not a northern kingdom yet, but a northern group of tribes. And then he set Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, on the throne, who only really ruled for two years, although that wasn't the plan.

The plan was for him to have a lifelong rule. But once Ish-bosheth was on the throne, the idea of uniting the twelve tribes under one rule again made sense. But who would rule? Would it be the house of Saul or the house of David? And so that was to be decided by the armies of the two sides.

David's army led by Joab, and Ish-bosheth's armies led by Abner. And they met at the Pool of Gibeon. Initially, they tried to resolve the differences through a contest of a few champions.

But since that came out of draw, as all the champions fell dead simultaneously at each other's hands, then there did result a war. And in the war, Abner's men were badly beaten. They lost 360 troops, whereas Joab's army lost only 20 people total, one of

whom was Joab's brother, Azahel.

And that's going to cause problems in this next chapter. There's going to be a retribution that Joab feels is owed to Abner for killing his brother, Azahel. And yet, of course, the issue of who's going to rule over the twelve tribes has not been resolved.

There's still Ish-bosheth over the ten tribes and David over the one tribe of Judah. Chapter 3, now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. Now at this point, the house of David is a term that's used a little bit prematurely because David didn't really have a dynasty yet.

And the house of David later came to mean the dynasty of David with his successors. David was, of course, not yet, didn't have a successor. He did have a house of sorts, though he had family.

And so his rule could begin to be spoken of as the house of David. The house of Saul, of course, means the dynasty of Saul. And Saul did have a dynasty.

That is, he left his throne to a successor, one at least. And it says, but David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. There was a long war, apparently cold war mainly, maybe not breaking out into actual battles, but just, you know, pressure to conform to one side or the other.

And Ishbosheth's power was not very great to begin with, and it became weaker and weaker because he was a weak leader. He was dominated by his general Abner, as we shall see. And so he was kind of a puppet king with the military brass really ruling the country behind the throne.

And yet, even with the military leadership of Abner, the northern kingdom was getting weaker and weaker. Ostensibly loyal to the house of Saul, ostensibly loyal to Ishbosheth, but really Abner had his own agendas, as we shall see. It would appear that Abner actually did something that would possibly position him to become the king.

Abner may well have understood that Ishbosheth was never going to be an effective ruler, and it would be better perhaps to replace his administration with a military coup, and have Abner made king, as we shall see shortly. David's house grew stronger and stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. Sons were born to David in Hebron.

His firstborn Amnon by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and his second Cheliab by Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. Now these two women we already have been introduced to. We don't know when David picked up Ahinoam as a wife, but we are told about her at the time when he picked up Abigail to be his wife.

Once he married Abigail after the death of her husband, we're told that in addition to

her, David had taken Ahinoam, this other wife. And Ahinoam, actually about whom we know almost nothing, actually gave David his firstborn, Amnon. This son never succeeded him to the throne, and was in fact murdered by his half-brother Absalom, because Amnon could not control himself, and he actually raped his half-sister, who was Absalom's full sister.

And so after Amnon raped his sister Tamar, Absalom killed Amnon, and we'll see that story later on. So Amnon was the firstborn, but never came to the throne. The secondborn was Cheliab, who was Abigail's son, and he is called Daniel in 1 Chronicles 3.1. He is apparently known by two names, but apart from being known by two names, he never came to anything.

He never was considered as an heir to the throne. He may have died young. I mean, to say that a man had sons doesn't mean that they necessarily came to maturity.

We will see that when it comes to Absalom's family. Absalom had sons born to him, but by the time he was an adult, he had no sons, it says, to carry on his name. So his sons must have died before reaching maturity, and that would be not too uncommon in third world countries, and in ancient times everything was third world.

The infant mortality rate was pretty high, and even today because of bad sanitation and so forth in third world countries, there are many countries where about half the children die before they're five years old, and so that was not uncommon. So Cheliab, or Daniel as he was called, the son of David and Abigail, may never have grown to maturity, and so we never see him factoring into the issues of the succession to the throne. Now the third son was Absalom, and he definitely, after he killed Amnon, we don't find him doing anything to Cheliab, so Cheliab may have already been out of the picture.

Absalom believed he would be the next king, and he took steps to make it happen, and he actually staged a revolt against David. He wasn't content to be the next king by succession through natural processes, he wanted to seize the throne, and he died in that rebellion. He was the son of Meaca, the daughter of Talmi, the king of Geshur.

His grandfather, the king of Geshur, gave him refuge when he fled after he killed his brother Amnon. Absalom went and lived with his grandpa for a while before he came back to Israel. The fourth, Adonijah, the son of Haggith, now he also died at the hand of his brother Solomon, or really Joab probably, but the thing is that Adonijah, after Solomon had become king, Adonijah made sort of a bid for the throne of sorts, and got himself killed.

And the fifth, Shephethiah, the son of Abatol, the sixth Ithriam by David's wife Eglah, these were born to David in Hebron. Now there's no mention of Solomon simply because Solomon wasn't born in Hebron. David reigned for seven and a half years in Hebron, and he had apparently six wives with him at that time.

Each bore one son during that seven and a half years. Later David conquered Jerusalem and moved there, and other sons were born to him, including Solomon. And of course that was by yet another woman.

That was by Bathsheba, who had been the wife of Uriah. And there was one other known wife of David by name, and that was Michael, the daughter of Saul. She was David's first wife, but she had been taken from him by Saul and given to another man.

And David was not in a position to take her back as long as Ish-bosheth reigned, because she was in the territory of the northern tribes and had been given to this other man by Saul. So really the marriage between Michael and her new husband Paltiel was something that was under the authority of Saul, and Saul's house still reigned at this time in the north, so David was not in a position to take her back. But he found a way to get her back when he began to negotiate a merger of the two coalitions with Abner, when Abner decided to defect to David.

One of the conditions David required was that he get Michael back. So altogether we know of eight wives by name, but there is actually reference to David taking more wives who are not named when he was in Jerusalem, so we don't know how many wives he had. But all these sons, the fifth and sixth, Shephethiah and Ithrim, we know their names only because they're in the list, they never figure into the stories.

They're far enough down the family line that they don't figure into the question of succession. Although of course Solomon was younger than they, but David favored Solomon and God did too. It may be that Shephethiah and Ithrim also died young, for all we know.

And we know that Amnon died a violent death, Absalom died a violent death, and Adonijah died a violent death. The others may have died natural deaths at a young age, but David's sons, he suffered a lot in the loss of his sons. And most of that was due to his own sin with Bathsheba, as we shall see later on.

Verse 6, Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul. That is, since Ishbosheth was such a weakling, Abner was strengthening his own position. And Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah.

So Ishbosheth said to Abner, Why have you gone into my father's concubine? 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 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 to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba,

and it's the whole country. And Ishbosheth could not answer Abner another word because he feared him. Well, Ishbosheth was a weakling and Abner was a military man.

He could easily stage a coup any time he wanted to. Instead of doing it that way, Abner apparently had decided to do it the way that Adonijah tried to do it. In those days, there was something very symbolic about sleeping with the previous king's wives or concubines.

When Absalom tried to take over David's kingdom, he deliberately and publicly slept with ten of David's concubines that he'd left behind. Why? Because it was understood that this was a way of saying, I'm in charge now. The old king is powerless.

I'm sleeping with his wife. The old king is gone. And the last thing he would prevent me from doing, or the thing he would be most determined to prevent me from doing if he could, would be to keep me from sleeping with his wife or his concubine.

It's the supreme insult to the previous king that you're sleeping with his concubine because it means he can't stop you, and he certainly would if he could. It's an empowering vis-a-vis the former ruler, a self-empowering. So Absalom, to prove that he was the new king, actually slept in a public place with his father's concubines.

Adonijah, the brother of Solomon, half-brother, once Solomon was king, made a request of Solomon to give Adonijah the woman who had been not a concubine per se, but the woman who had kept David warm in his old age when his body wouldn't generate heat. We're specifically told in Scripture that David didn't have sex with the woman, but she slept next to him to keep him warm when he was an old man. So she was, as it were, sort of the status of a concubine.

I mean, David would have been entitled to have sex with her. I mean, she was like a servant who was there to be like a concubine, but it just so happens David didn't have sex with her. But had he done so, it would have been no different than with a concubine.

And so Adonijah actually requested that Abishag be given to him, this woman, to marry. And Solomon recognized this as a bid for the throne and as treachery and treason, and so he had Adonijah killed. Because if Adonijah had, in fact, gained possession of David's former concubine, that would be sort of like a man having the scepter in his possession.

Something that had been so cherished by the king before now passed to another man was considered to be almost a mark of having succeeded him. Now apparently Abner had done something similar. There had been a concubine of Saul, and Abner, as he gained more and more power over the throne, actually must have slept with this woman, more as a symbolic gesture than just a mere matter of lust.

No, I don't know, maybe it was a matter of lust as well, but the issue was, the complaint here was the political ramifications of it. And Ishbosheth confronts him and says, why did

you go and sleep with my father's concubine? Well, the question answers itself. It would be, I mean, Abner as a commander of the military could sleep with probably any number of women that he wanted to.

But that he would choose a woman who just so happened to be the concubine of the former king is politically significant and suggests that Abner was making a move toward being recognized as king in Ishbosheth's place. And that's what Ishbosheth was complaining about. And Abner just explodes.

He does not deny the charge, which he probably would if he was innocent. It's all likely that he had, in fact, done the thing that he's accused of. And he says, how dare you charge me with fault concerning this woman.

He says, I could turn you over to David, and then you'd be done. And he says, in fact, I'm going to do that. I'm going to turn the kingdom over to David.

I'm going to show that I can do that. Now here, Abner's actions seem to be almost irrational. I mean, if he was already gaining power over the northern confederacy of tribes, why turn it over to David when he himself was within view of being the ruler himself, sleeping with Saul's concubine, controlling the military, being the real power behind the throne? It would be a simple matter for him to simply take total control.

Why would he surrender that to David? Well, it's possible that Abner was still trying to develop the public's acceptance of him as the ruler, and that if he were to, in fact, kill Ishbosheth and take his throne, then he was not quite sure the public would allow that and put up with that. It might backfire on him. Ishbosheth might even be able to order him killed as a traitor or something like that.

Whereas if he negotiated with David, David might give him a high position. He might actually come out better serving under David than he would if he tried to make a grab for the throne in the north. And yet it was still rash.

But he talks like a man who's been caught of something he knows he's guilty of. And instead of denying the charge or giving any kind of rational explanation, he just says, how dare you accuse me of this? I'm going to go now and I'm going to negotiate with David. I'm going to turn your kingdom over to David.

And Ishbosheth feared Abner enough that he couldn't really say anything in answer to him. Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David saying, well, he says on his behalf, probably on Ishbosheth's behalf, but Ishbosheth couldn't oppose it, 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. And David said, good, I will make a covenant with you.

But one thing I require of you, you shall not see my face until you first bring Michael, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face. Now, there'd be a number of motives

for this. I mean, first of all, Abner was the man more than any other who'd be in a position to retrieve Michael from the husband that Saul had given her to.

If David were to receive back Saul's daughter as his wife, it'd have a similar political effect as sleeping with Saul's concubine or something like that. In other words, Saul's family is now in David's possession, at least a part of it. He's got his foothold in the house of Saul through Michael.

Now, he also might have loved Michael. David and Michael had apparently loved each other when they first got married, though we find that in later interaction between them, we don't know to what degree it was characteristic, but Michael, at least on one occasion, mocked David because of his zeal and his open expression of his love for God, and she mocked him. And she actually came under God's curse.

Of course, she may, in fact, have come to despise him because he took her from this other husband who apparently did love her. She had been married to David before and risked her life in helping David escape from the soldiers of Saul when he escaped out the window, and Michael had lied for him and said he was sick and leave him alone, and then they found that she had put something else in the bed instead of David, and they found that she had lied to protect him, and to save her own life, she had to say, well, David threatened my life, I had to lie to you. But she had then been taken from David, who himself was in exile, and she, as good as a widow in many respects, and her father had taken her and given her to this man named Paltiel, who, as we shall see, was quite bonded to her.

There was an affectionate relationship between them, perhaps more so than between her and David, and since David had run off without her, she may have actually become quite fond of her new husband, and the fact that David forced her to leave her new husband may have been one of the things that was exhibited in her anger toward him and her bitterness toward him. We can't say to what degree that is so. But Abner, to show his good faith, should do something that would be politically very insulting to Ishbosheth, to the house of Saul, and that is to nullify a marriage that Saul had instituted and take Saul's daughter and give her to David, who was at this point the opponent of Saul's house, Ishbosheth.

And so for Abner to do this, it would show that Abner was really taking the side of David instead of Saul's regime. And so David said, OK, I won't meet with you, Abner. He just received messengers from Abner initially.

He said, tell him I won't meet with him unless he brings Michael with him. So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth because the message had apparently been sent in Ishbosheth's name, it would appear, and he sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son, saying, Give me my wife Michael, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And Ishbosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel, the son

of Laish.

Now Ishbosheth is just obeying orders. Now from David. But it's because Abner has now sided with David, Ishbosheth is just powerless to do anything.

He can't say no to David about this. He says, OK, if you say so. And Ishbosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel.

Also Paltiel is known as Palti in 1 Samuel 25-44, same guy. So Paltiel is her present husband. And says, Then her husband, which is Paltiel, went along with her to Behurim, weeping behind her.

So Abner said to him, Go, return. And he returned. Abner, of course, would have killed him if he had continued.

After all, this was David's wife. David is a powerful man now, king of Judah. In a sense, Paltiel could be put to death for sleeping with the king's wife.

I mean, there's no question that Michael was the legal wife of David. He had never divorced her. He had never released her.

It was the action of Saul, illegitimately granting her a divorce from David and giving her in marriage to somebody else. Such a marriage was not legitimate. Paltiel actually was committing adultery with David's wife.

And now that David was in power, that was a particularly dangerous position to be in. Paltiel, he apparently loved Michael and was very grieved to see her go and wept after her. But when he was told, You better go home.

You know, it's good for you. I think he understood what was at stake here. He's not going to get her back by weeping.

And he could easily lose his head if he wants to put himself in permanent competition with David for a woman who was clearly David's wife, legitimately. I mean, that would be a real dumb thing to do. So the guy just went back home and lost his wife in the deal.

Very tragic. And yet, you know, this really is illustrative of something. Although not everything David did was right, he seems to have been within his rights in this case.

Because Jesus indicated that a divorce that is not on legitimate grounds is not a legitimate divorce. And therefore, a person who is divorced but not on legitimate grounds, if they remarry, are committing adultery. Now, that means that although this woman was married for some years, maybe as many as 10 years or more to Paltiel, or at this point, very possibly 17 years, a long time.

They had a long life together. It was adultery. It was not a legitimate marriage.



It looked legitimate because it was legal. The king himself had granted the divorce and had granted the second marriage. They had paperwork from the courthouse.

It was real paperwork. It was a real legal deal. It just wasn't a moral deal.

And what this would suggest is that David at least believed, I think that Jesus is on his side in this point, in what Jesus said, that even if the courts should grant a divorce and a remarriage, if the divorce is not legitimate, then the remarriage isn't legitimate either. That's what Jesus said. You divorce for illegitimate grounds and remarry, you commit adultery.

Well, adultery and marriage are not the same thing. They're the opposites of each other. Marriage is sacred.

Adultery is sin. And therefore, even by Jesus' teaching, this man was committing adultery with David's wife. He didn't think of it that way, of course.

He had a legal marriage. She had been legally divorced. And there's many people today in that same position.

They've divorced their spouses without grounds. The court's granted it. It's legal.

They've remarried, illegitimately. But it's legal. The court's granted.

So they've got a legal second marriage. But it's what Jesus would call adultery, not marriage. Now, what should be done upon repentance? Now, we don't know that Michael repented.

But David seemed to believe that he had the right to take his wife back, even from a second marriage. And essentially, I don't see how he could be faulted for that opinion. She was his.

He had never surrendered her. He had never divorced her. He had never given her grounds for divorce.

Now you might say, well, he took other wives. Well, under the law in those days, a man could have other wives. That would be different today, I believe.

I personally believe that if a man, you know, has other women besides his wife, then she does have grounds for divorce. But in those days, there was no understanding of monogamy. It was not a given.

When people got married, there wasn't an agreement, I'll forsake all others and cleave only to you. I mean, the woman had to make that commitment, but the man didn't. The woman couldn't have multiple husbands in that arrangement.

The man could have multiple wives. So by taking additional wives, clearly it was a double standard that the New Testament does not approve of. But David was not renouncing his relationship with Michael when he took additional wives.

And so he was not freeing her from the marriage. That was done against his wishes, and therefore the marriage was not legitimate. It felt legitimate to Paltiel and to Michael, it no doubt felt very legitimate.

They'd been married for 17 years, about. And legally so. It never had occurred to them that their marriage would ever have to break up.

Now, I don't think they had any children, because we're told that Michael was childless all our days, but if they'd had children, it would have been the same. They'd be children of adultery, and an adulterous relationship is adulterous. So it's an ugly thing.

And to think that there may be cases of people who are in that kind of a marriage that's really adultery, but the state has authorized it, and that they may have to repent of that, and in some cases might have to go back, is a very unpleasant thought, extremely unpleasant. Now, there's another case with Bathsheba, where David wrongfully married her. Now, true, when he married her, it wasn't adultery because she was a widow, but it was still displeasing to God, the Bible says, because he had made her a widow.

He had committed adultery, then he made her a widow. And though technically he wasn't then marrying another man's wife because her first husband was dead, he was guilty of the man's death, and it was a wicked thing, and the Bible says that God was angry at David and did not approve of that marriage. David finally repented of it, and if it had been a situation like Palteel, he should have sent the woman back, but it wasn't, because in the case of Palteel's marrying somebody wrongfully, her ex-husband was still alive, and so he had to send her back to her real husband, David.

In David's case, he did not have to send Bathsheba back to Uriah because Uriah was dead. True, it was David's fault that he was dead, but it still remains true. There was no Uriah there to send her back to.

And therefore, God allowed Bathsheba and David to stay together, and even blessed the union eventually and gave them Solomon, who is, of course, the descendant of Christ. I mean, the descendant of David, the ancestor of Christ. So there's like two different situations here, and the morality of the two of them is easily distinguished, if you think about it.

When a man has taken another man's wife from him, even if it's been sanctioned by the state, he's still in adultery. When he repents, if the other man, the original husband, is still wanting his wife, is still available, well, she should go back to him, just like if she was not married to the new man, even if she was just living with him. If a woman just lived

with a guy and didn't get married and had children by him, and then repented, shouldn't she stop living with him and go back to her husband? You'd think so.

So morally, it's not different if the state has, in the meantime, given them an illegitimate license to be married. Still the same moral circumstances. But if such an immoral marriage has taken place, and the first husband is now no longer available, maybe he's died like Uriah had died, or maybe he's moved on.

He's given up on that marriage and taken another wife. Again, David doing so didn't mean the same thing as a man doing so today, because when you take a wife today, you're promising fidelity and monogamy. Therefore, when a man gives up on his departed wife and takes another wife, he's formally giving up his adulterous wife.

He doesn't want her anymore. Then the marriage that was entered into in adultery, I think, could be redeemed without being broken, just as David and Bathsheba's marriage was redeemed without being broken. If Uriah had still been living next door to David when he repented, there's no way David could have kept Bathsheba.

Her faithful husband was living next door and David had stolen her. If David repented and Uriah was next door, he'd have to send her back, just like Paltiel had to send Michael back to David. But since Uriah was no longer there, David could repent, and then they could just ask God to sanctify the marriage that had started out wrong.

It started out in adultery, but it could continue as a legitimate marriage after repentance since there was no restitution that could be made. You see, if you rob a bank and then you repent, you have to give the money back. You have to make restitution.

You can't just keep the money and say, I repented a bank robbery, but I'm still living like a millionaire because I'm living on stolen money. No, you have to give it back. If you steal someone's wife and repent, you have to give the wife back, unless the husband is no longer available, doesn't want her, has renounced her, has died, or something like that.

In a case where the first marriage cannot be restored, then the second marriage, though it started in sin, could become legitimate after repentance of the sin. That's something that a lot of people are, I think, confused about, but it seems to me like the issues are relatively clear if one thinks through them from the standpoint of justice and so forth rather than just the standpoint of emotion. From the standpoint of emotion, David taking back Michael is a really wrong thing to do.

I mean, she had been in what looks like it could have been a happy marriage for a long time, and he breaks it up and causes great grief to her paramour, who was her legal husband, and possibly great grief to her, too. But David just ignores that and says, no, she's my wife. I'm taking her back.

That might seem like it's cruel, and from the standpoint of emotion alone, and feelings, it was not a very nice thing for David to do. But from the standpoint of righteousness, he was not doing something wrong. In fact, he was restoring a situation that had been wrecked by wrongdoing on the part of Saul and Michael and Paltiel, who had illegitimately destroyed the marriage of David and Michael.

Okay, so Abner delivers. Verse 17, Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, 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.

Actually, God had never said that about David to the people of Israel as far as we know. There is actually no record of this statement. God had said something like that about Saul, but he had never said it to the public about David.

However, the anointing of David by Samuel was tantamount to God saying that about him. What had been true of Saul as far as him being the one God chose to deliver the people was obviously transferred to David. And so Abner could speak as if God had said that about David.

And Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin, meaning the tribe of Benjamin, which was of course Saul's tribe. The Benjamites were the ones who had to be treated separately if they were going to be persuaded to come over to David's side. Because the other tribes who had followed Saul were not of Saul's own tribe.

They were just agreeing to follow a king who was of the tribe of Benjamin. The people of Benjamin, the king was of their own tribe. And people were jealous over that kind of thing.

The tribes were jealous over that kind of thing. So Abner, first of all, communicated with all the other tribes of Israel before talking to Benjamin. That way, you see, the other tribes would be more amenable.

Probably no one was real happy with the leadership of Ish-bosheth. Not that he was a bad man, but that he was not the kind of king they should be proud of. He's a spineless man.

A weak man. David was a hero. Everyone knew David was a warrior and a mighty man and so forth.

I mean, he's the kind of guy a nation could be proud of as their king. And so, I don't think Abner had much trouble persuading most of the tribes to say, yeah, you know, maybe we should go with David instead of Saul. After all, they had no more stake in the house of Benjamin than the house of Judah.

These other ten tribes were just, they were neither Benjamin nor Judah. Benjamin had a stake in Saul and Judah had a stake in David. These other ten tribes, it could be a toss-up for them because neither option was in their own tribe anyway.

But the people of Benjamin, they would have more reason to be resistant because then the royal family was passing from their tribe to another tribe. So, Joab, I think, gets the other ten tribes on his side first. That way, when he comes to Benjamin, he's got Judah and the other ten tribes already behind him.

And if Benjamin wants to resist, they're going to have to resist the popular feeling of all the other tribes of Israel. So he saves Benjamin for last. And so it says, he spoke to Benjamin, verse 19, 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 he got Benjamin on their side too. We don't read of what he said to Benjamin, but we just read that he approached them separately. And what kind of deals were struck, backroom deals, in smoke-filled rooms, who knows.

But there was some way he got the official leaders of Benjamin to say, yeah, we're a little ashamed of Ish-bosheth too, why don't we go ahead and go with David in this. So Abner and 20 men with him came to David in Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him.

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. Now Joab had been out on the battlefield or somewhere, he'd been away when this whole feast happened.

This was a merger of two corporate entities, two corporations, two nations were merging. Abner, who is the de facto power of the northern, and David, who is the legitimate and de facto king of the south, they're striking a bargain, having a meal together, they're entering into an agreement formally over a business dinner. And as they leave, the agreement is that Abner is going to go and get all of the leaders of Israel, probably all the armies of Israel he has in mind, that's over 300,000 men who would come under David's authority at this point if that happened.

They're going to come over and make a covenant with David. Sounds like things are going well. It's just the kind of merger that people like to see happen, especially if you're in the position of David.

And yet, Joab is threatened by this. Joab has two reasons to hate Abner. One, and the one that is usually mentioned, is that he was angry at Abner for killing his brother Azahel.

Abner and Abishai, the remaining sons of Zeruiah, both apparently had some hand in

killing Abner, as we shall see. It's mainly attributed to Joab. In all likelihood, they saw themselves as the avengers of blood of a murdered brother.

Under the law, if your brother was murdered, then you were the avenger of blood. You're supposed to go and kill the murderer. You're supposed to be the one who executes capital punishment on the murderer.

Joab and Abishai probably saw themselves in this role, but it's hardly applicable. Azahel had not been murdered. He had been killed in battle.

And Abner had warned him, and said, listen, I'm going to kill you if you don't let up. And Azahel kept coming. And so Azahel got himself killed.

He's just too stupid. He got too close, and bit off more than he could chew, got himself killed in battle. And one could easily say that Abner had killed in self-defense.

That was never considered to be murder. If someone's trying to kill you, as Azahel was no doubt intending to do, and that man who's trying to kill you gets killed by you, well, you're not a murderer. That's self-defense.

I mean, there's really no legitimacy in Joab's complaint against Abner in this matter. It's just a family feud. But there's more to it than that, because if Abner is bringing all the troops of Israel under David, who are already followers of Abner, and Joab has just been leading the troops of Judah, that makes probably Abner a more high-ranking military official in the country than Joab.

At this point, Joab was the chief general of all the armies under David. Soon there'd be over 300,000 new troops who were accustomed to following Abner. And Abner no doubt was making an arrangement with David that he'd turn over the kingdom of the north to David in exchange for some kind of favors that Abner would receive for it.

Obviously, Abner's not just doing this out of the goodness of his heart. This is an opportunistic move on Abner's part, and no doubt what Abner and David were agreeing to, if it had not already been spoken at dinner, it was no doubt in the back of both their minds, is if Abner can deliver all these troops over to David's side, Abner, of course, is their leader. So he'll let him be the chief leader of the armies.

This would, of course, endanger Joab's position, who held that position right now over a much smaller army. And so Joab hates Abner, partly because of a blood feud and partly because there's competition for the highest military post. At that moment, the servants of David and Joab came from a raid and brought much spoil with them.

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. And probably more information was communicated.

Usually these communications are summarized very briefly for us in the scripture, but I'm sure there was more conversation than this. Joab certainly knew what was afoot here. 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 is already gone? Surely you realize that Abner, the son of Ner, came to deceive you to know you're going out and you're coming in and to know all that you're doing. Now, Joab was suspicious of Abner or at least expressed suspicion of him. This suspicion was unwarranted in all likelihood.

Abner was not coming in as a spy, I'm sure. I mean, we don't know for sure, but we're not told that his motives were that way and it does not seem like they were. It seems like his motivation was more to find a high position in David's kingdom while he still had the opportunity to do so rather than be destroyed by David in some future war between David and Israel.

So Abner was just sort of making provision for his future and probably not there to spy out David and so forth, as Joab said. But Joab either believed this or wanted David to believe it. He wanted David to be suspicious of Abner.

And when Joab had gone from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner who brought him back to the well of Siron, but David did not know it. Now, when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside at the gate to speak to him privately and there he stabbed him in the stomach so that he died for the blood of Azahel, his brother. So the motive that Joab has is attributed to this avenger of blood type of situation.

And I'm sure that was a major part of Joab's hatred for Abner. But there was more, of course. And 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 is a discharge, or who is a leper, meaning a seminal discharge, or a leper, someone who is unclean. This is the curse that David called on Joab's house. He didn't ask for them to die necessarily, but that they would be cursed by being always unclean, always there be at least a leper or somebody who is unclean by reason of a chronic discharge of semen.

That's what he's referring to there. And it says, or who leans on the staff, who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread. And it was made bad things happen to Joab's family of different types.

So Joab and Abishai, his brother, killed Abner because he had killed their brother, Azahel at Gibeon, in the battle. Then David said to Joab and all the people who were with him,

tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner. And King David followed the coffin.

Now, you've got to realize what's involved here is not just that David really liked Abner a lot, but this looked really bad for David. One might interpret it, the northern kingdom might interpret it that David had lured Abner down there on pretense of negotiating a peaceful agreement, but had tricked him and had assassinated him while he was here. After all, Joab was David's guy.

And it would be likely that if David had ordered the death of Abner, it would be Joab that would be commissioned to do it. So the fact that Joab did this made it look like David had been treacherous, that he had just used this as an opportunity to get rid of the northern confederacy's general by treachery and by deception. And that's not what David had done.

He wanted to make it plain. He's washed his hands of this. I'm guiltless of this.

May the whole guilt come on Joab. And then he made this ostentatious show of mourning for Abner. Again, it's not because he thought so highly of Abner.

He had actually told Abner once that he deserved to die. Because when David and his armor bearer went in and took Saul's spear while he slept, Abner was asleep nearby and charged with the protection of the king. And David woke up the king from a distance and said, Abner, you deserve to die, because you didn't take care of your king.

I mean, David didn't have a lot of respect for Abner, necessarily. This was just a political arrangement he and Abner were making, not a friendship really. I mean, Abner had no doubt led Saul's armies, chasing David all those times.

Abner was the enemy of David. But David was willing to allow the northern tribes to come over to his side if Abner was going to be his liaison. And so all this mourning for Abner was more, I'm sure, for political show.

Very important that David not let Joab's grudging deed become the end of David's prospects to merge with the northern tribes. So he puts on sackcloth. And David followed the coffin of Abner.

And they buried 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 were your feet put into fetters as a man falls before wicked men, so you fell. As you fell defenseless, your defenses were down. No one had overpowered you.



You were just kind of clueless and naive. And you died like a fool dies. Then all the people wept over him again.

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. And all the people took note of it. And this is the important thing, that it pleased 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.

Now David could have executed Joab for this treacherous deed. He acted without authorization. He murdered a man in cold blood.

It was not something that could be really justified under the law of the avenger of blood. Joab could have been executed. And eventually he was.

When David died, he left Solomon the task of executing Joab for this and other things that David objected to in Joab. But he didn't kill him. And he explained to his own servants, the reason I don't kill him is I'm not really that strong.

Joab, he commands the armies. These sons of Zeruiah, they're harsh men. They're strong men.

I'm anointed as king, but I'm not, myself, I'm not as strong as these guys. I'm weak. So in other words, I really don't have the power to punish him.

I'll let God do that. And David may have said that sincerely, or it may be that he really, you know, in his heart of hearts, it's hard to know what David was thinking. There's an awful lot of ostentatious mourning here for a man that was not really that close to David.

When he mourned for Jonathan, now that's understandable. Or even Saul, who had been his king, and he was the loyal servant of Saul. But Abner, he was never close to David.

And all this weeping, following the beer to the funeral. I mean, David himself, the king, with ashes on his head, following the coffin and writing a song for Abner and saying, a great man is falling. All this far more gush and ostentatiousness than was shown even when Saul and Jonathan died.

And it was so that the people could see that David was, he was innocent of this. It was not his plan to kill Abner. And that was true.

But he might have secretly been a little bit happy that it had happened. After all, Abner

was what stood between him and the throne of the northern tribes. Now David didn't need any criminal deeds done.

God was raising up David, and David would never have committed a criminal act like this. But when it was done, he might not have been altogether unhappy about the result. Abner truly got what he deserved because Abner was treacherous against his own king.

Abner was treasonous against his own legitimate king and had been an evil military commander under Saul chasing David and his men wrongfully. So Abner was a guy who really deserved to die. But it was not convenient for David's political image for people to think that David had brought it about.

So he wants to make it very clear this is not his doing. Okay, we'll stop there. We're out of time.

And we'll pick it up again next time at Chapter 4.