

## "MARCHING TO ZION"

2 Samuel 3:1-5:25

Lesson 15

One of the questions in this week's lesson was about "tumultuous relationships." This lesson was *full* of them, wasn't it? The bad guys acted like good guys; the good guys acted like bad guys. Much like our world now!

Even when we study events that happened *thousands* of years ago, Romans 15:4 says: "everything written in the past was written to teach us." I've learned so much from this year's study in the Old Testament and I'm blessed to share with you about a portion of King David's life.

David goes from a lowly shepherd to being in charge of an entire nation – it's the classic *rags to crowns* story. And the nation he ruled was not just *any* nation, it was the land *God* chose for His people. Being crowned king of all Israel required many years of David waiting for God's promise to be fulfilled.

These three chapters focused on the events that *led* to David's anointing as king of Israel *and* the establishment of God's City – Jerusalem!

Let's pray.

A short review....

Ish-Bosheth was king of the northern tribes of Israel. I feel kind of sorry for ol' Ish. He was a puppet king; put in power by a man, not by God. Everyone knows his dad, King Saul, but no one says, "I want to be like King Ish-Bosheth". He doesn't even have a cool name. Actually, his name meant, "Man of Shame." Ish-Bosheth was no match for King David's divinely given power and as David's kingdom grew stronger, Ish-Bosheth's weakened.

Abner was King Saul's cousin. He was commander of *Saul's* army and continued as commander of Ish-Bosheth's army. Abner put Ish-Bosheth on the throne and Abner was the power-hungry schemer *behind* the throne.

In Hebron, David fathered six sons with six wives and concubines. Having multiple wives reflected wealth and power and had political benefits when the wives were from foreign kingdoms. Neither in Chapter 3 or Chapter 5 did the narrator address God's Law about multiple wives. David's growing household was noted here only to reflect his growing strength and power as King of Judah.

If we could have picked up a copy of the newspaper, the "Israelite Register", the headlines would have read THE RIZPAH INCIDENT, or, RIZPAH GATE. Rizpah was King Saul's concubine. Concubines were considered *secondary wives*, inferior to *primary* wives. Among their duties was to

provide children and often represented political treaties with other kingdoms. If a man wanted to seize the authority of a ruler, he would take the ruler's concubine.

Ish-Bosheth did something he may not have thought out too well. He accused Abner, the man who made him king, of taking Rizpah to bed. Abner's livid reaction *seemed* to indicate he had not committed the offense but verse six said Abner *was* strengthening his position in the kingdom, so it may have been true. Regardless, Abner didn't *deny* it.

Abner's anger escalated and he asked Ish-Bosheth if he thought he was a "dog's head." Interesting reference because dogs are humans best friends aren't they? But in ancient Israel, comparing a human to a dog implied they were of very low status. Abner was basically saying, "You insulted me by calling me a unclean, vile animal - and a Judean one at that!" Abner was also offended to be accused of disloyalty to King Saul, over a *woman* – a *concubine*!

Abner continued his tirade. He vowed to become God's instrument in bringing about God's promise for David to be the king of all Israel. What was the *real* reason Abner defected to David's kingdom? Some possibilities are:

Abner may have *really* believed it was God's will for David to be king over all Israel, which meant Abner opposed God's will for *years*!

Abner may have wanted revenge for being accused of doing something he didn't do. It's difficult to believe he *didn't* because he *was* seeking more power.

Abner may have been looking for some reason to abandon the northern kingdom and Ish-Bosheth provided it.

Abner sent messengers to David to tell him he was *at his service* to bring the northern kingdom to David. Why would David trust a man who had been his enemy, who opposed the known will of God and who set Ish-Bosheth on the throne? Because David likely believed Abner could help him unite the nation and end the war between the tribes.

When Abner, through messengers, asked David, "Whose land is it?" Abner was either bragging the land was *his* to give or, it was a clumsy way of flattering David saying that after all, the land really belonged to David because of God's promise.

Whose land is it? That is a hot question in today's world. Nations are *still* trying to decide that about Israel as the fight continues to control that land.

*Whose* land is it? The answer is found in Genesis 12:7: "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "I will give this land to your descendants." Sounds like God gave Israel to *His people*, doesn't it?

Abner insists as part of their deal that David and he have “an agreement.” Likely it was for Abner to secure an important position in David’s kingdom. But, there already was another high-ranking person in the kingdom – and he *hated* Abner. With both in one kingdom, it’s going to get ugly.

David had *one* condition before accepting Abner's proposal. He demanded Michal, his first wife, be returned to him. Remember, that after David fled from King Saul, Saul gave Michal to Paltiel in marriage. Out of respect for King Ish-Bosheth, David made his demand to him for Michal’s return. *Saul* took Michal and it was his *son’s* responsibility to return her. Ish-Bosheth didn’t argue with David. Remember, he was weak.

David wanted Michal back for more than just his love for her. Commentators believed it - “wasn’t love; it was politics.” Michal was King Saul’s daughter. Having Michal with David could help tribes loyal to Saul unite with David’s kingdom.

God used all this political drama to advance His plans for Israel. Isn’t it wonderful that God can use our *very* flawed plans to advance His *very* perfect plans for our lives?

Abner began making good his promise to bring Israel over to David. He met with elders of the northern tribes, especially the tribe of Benjamin, Saul’s tribe, and encouraged them that David as their king, was in their best interest. Abner had considerable influence and his counsel to them was straightforward – *just do it!* There was no reason to delay any longer in making David king over Israel. The tribes agreed and Abner returned to Hebron to tell David the good news.

When Abner arrived in Hebron, he and David sealed the agreement and had a feast. With peace and goodwill between them, these former enemies parted and Abner began his trip back to Israel to finalize arrangements with the northern tribes. Everything looked like it was in order for a peaceful transition for David to be king of all Israel, but... there were hidden land mines in the political field and they were ready to explode.

Enter Joab, David’s nephew and general of David’s army. Joab was not in town when David and Abner met, but he heard about it and his anger erupted.

Joab burst into the throne room and confronted David. He didn’t speak to David as his king or even as his equal, but as an inferior. Joab demanded, “What have you done? What do you mean by letting Abner get away? *Surely* you know he came to spy on you and find out everything you’re doing!” Joab stormed out of the room without a response from David. Joab would do what *he* thought was necessary.

Joab felt Abner was the enemy and he didn't trust him. He felt threatened by Abner, suspecting he would lose his position in the kingdom. *And*, Abner killed Joab's brother. Joab's anger was fueled by revenge.

Without David's knowledge, Joab sent his men to bring Abner *back* to Hebron, perhaps under the ploy that further negotiations with David were needed. Abner didn't suspect anything devious because David had sent him away in peace, but "peace" was not in the heart of *all* David's men. Joab was waiting for Abner at the city gate and he may have acted like he was going to greet Abner warmly. He drew him close - then stabbed Abner in the stomach –just as Joab's brother had been killed. Joab didn't care that Abner's death could have jeopardized unification of the tribes. Joab and his brother Abishai wanted revenge for the death of their brother.

Abner's murder was a revenge murder, yet David neither imprisoned nor killed the murderers, Joab and Abishai. Instead, he pronounced a terrible curse on their family. Their descendants would have skin diseases; be crippled; die violent deaths; starve. And David *did* leave Joab and Abishai to the judgment of God to repay them for their evil deed. But, future lessons will show that not punishing those *close* to him was a serious character flaw and weakness in David's leadership.

To honor Abner and to show the kingdom he was innocent of his murder, David arranged a funeral for Abner. He *ordered* Joab and his soldiers to wear scratchy sackcloth, to *lead* the funeral procession and to *mourn* their dead adversary – the man they just killed! David wept as he followed behind the body and he further honored Abner by burying him in the royal city of Hebron. He also sang a lament for him. He sang that Abner died, not bound up, or as we would say, handcuffed, like a criminal but because *wicked* men murdered him. Following funerals, the people would eat together but David chose to fast because of his grief. David's public censure of Joab, and his mourning for Abner, earned respect from the people and they believed David was innocent of the whole sinful event.

Away from the funeral and public, David confessed to his men how he felt about the loss of Abner - a *great* commander. They say it takes one to know one and David certainly would have related to the military greatness Abner had possessed. David also exposed something personal about himself. He admitted he was "weak" and Joab and Abishai were "strong." Commentators believed that here, "weak" meant "tender, sensitive." David was emotionally affected by Abner's murder. He did not want to oppose Joab and Abishai who were "strong", meaning "cruel" and "ruthless" because they were mighty warriors and had enough supporters in the army to tear the kingdom apart. David

didn't want to risk division in the kingdom by taking *the* action against them they deserved. As Lin said last week, "David wanted unity and peace, not division and war."

Joab shows up many times in future lessons. We'll learn he played by his *own* rules and continued to make life difficult for David. The pardon for Abner's death was *only* temporary because years later on his deathbed, David instructs Solomon to.... Sorry, that's a *future* lesson! Think about these words though, from Matthew Henry, "Evil pursues sinners, and will overtake them at last."

When Ish-Bosheth heard Abner was dead, what little courage he had, left him. He was too weak to rule the country without Abner. The northern kingdom became terrified about what would happen to them. Circumstances were *ripe* for intrigue and violence.

Enter Baanah and Rekab, two fraternal thugs and military leaders in Ish-Bosheth's army. Knowing Ish-Bosheth was powerless, these two opportunists felt the collapse of the northern kingdom was imminent and they thought they had a solution - one that would help David become king of Israel *and* land them plum government jobs. They devised a plan and took a stab at it.

Rekab and Baanah entered into King Ish-Bosheth's house and as he slept, they brutally stabbed him in the stomach. Stabbing seemed to be the preferred method of murder in this lesson! They then sliced off his head. Nice guys, right? But they weren't done yet.

Soon after the grizzly scene at Ish-Bosheth's house, Rekab and Baanah arrived at *Camp David* in Hebron. I wondered what the encounter was like between them and David so let's be a fly on the wall in King David's throne room.

It was announced to King David that Rekab and Baanah were there to see him. They carried a burlap bag and began telling David about their "heroic act", hinting for a reward. When they mentioned King Saul, whom David had loved and whom David would not have raised his hand against, *and* referred to Saul as David's *enemy*, everyone stopped what they were doing and looked over at David.

The two men continued on with their gruesome story, how they crept into Ish-Bosheth's bedroom, pounced on him while he slept, then stabbed him. Many in the throne room gasped. The brothers finished the story of their shocking crime by telling David they cut off Ish-Bosheth's head, which they then proudly produced from the burlap bag - as if giving David a gift!

Rekab and Baanah should have noticed David's body language as they related what they had done including that they had acted as servants of the Lord to bring about His justice. Everyone in the room remembered what David had done to the Amalakite who just *lied* about killing King Saul, and they looked at each other as to say, "Ok, *they're* goners!"

David proclaimed, "As surely as the Lord lives, *He* has delivered me out of every trouble!" rejecting their claim that God used *them* to do His justice. David's voice rose with every sentence in his stern, confident, rebuke as he continued, "Ish-Bosheth was a king of God's people. *And*, he was the *son* of King Saul whom *God* appointed king of Israel. King Ish-Bosheth was in a place where he should have been safe - his home and his bed. Did you not know, did no one tell you, I executed someone who only *said* he killed King Saul? But *you* produced the head of his *son* – A King of *Israel*! You are wicked men – wicked men who should no longer be living on this earth!"

Rekab and Baanah's actions received what God's Law prescribed - instant death. David ordered the two to be executed; their hands and feet cut off; their bodies hung out in the open in Hebron. These men murdered a king of Israel so David honored King Ish-Bosheth by burying his head in Abner's tomb.

The narrator told the reader that the only other possible heir to the throne was King Saul's crippled grandson, Mephibosheth. Because Mephibosheth was unable to fight in battles for the kingdom, he was not suitable to be king.

Even though wicked men made wicked choices, God used the circumstances they created to bring about His *perfect* plans according to His *perfect* timing and David had waited for God's *perfect* promise.

Chapter 5 jumps right in to one of the most exciting and noteworthy times in Israel's history - the anointing of King David as king over all of Israel! Elders from all the tribes came to Hebron to see David. They acknowledged *he* was the hero of Israel. They knew God wanted *him* to shepherd them and be their ruler.

1 Chronicles 12 records that 300,000 fighting warriors volunteered to serve King David. And the rest of the Israelites were united in their desire for David to be king. The tribes held a three-day party! There was joy in Israel! That was King David's inauguration day.

For our nation, tomorrow is *our* Inauguration Day - a ceremony that marks the beginning of the term of a new President of the United States.

As Christians, we are called to pray for our leaders. As Christians, our *ultimate* allegiance doesn't belong to a political party or even a country, but to the Kingdom of God.

The narrator summarized the length of David's entire reign in Israel - forty years and six months. Under David's kingship, Israel entered a great period of prosperity and expansion. But first, David needed a capital.

Jerusalem, then known as Jebus, was an ancient city when David chose it for Israel's capital. It was still controlled by Canaanite people, the Jebusites, and it was strongly fortified. Jerusalem was a wise choice for the capital. It sat on the top of a steep hill and the city had a high wall around it, which would make it easy to defend against enemies.

Choosing Jerusalem was also an important political strategy. Hebron, where David had been ruling as king, was in the south. Jerusalem was just within the northern area of Benjamin, which made it centrally located for all the tribes. And most importantly, Jerusalem didn't belong to either the southern or northern tribes, which made it appealing for all of them to embrace it as their capital. There was only one problem. Jebus, or Jerusalem, had *never* been conquered.

The Jebusites believed their city was impregnable. So secure were they that they engaged in a bit of local Jebusite *chutzpah* by taunting David, "You'll never get in here. Even our blind and lame can fight you off." David's reply goes one further. He likened the *Jebusites* to *being* the blind and lame ones.

David knew Jerusalem had a weakness. From *inside* the city, there was a long water shaft carved into rock, which led directly to the city's water source *outside* the city. Most commentators feel David's men may have found this water shaft and used it to gain entry into the city.

David succeeded in capturing the fortress, Zion, located on top of the hill. From that vantage point he easily captured Jerusalem. God handed the most fortified city in all Israel over to David.

David made Jerusalem his permanent residence and Zion was renamed the "City of David." Jerusalem was an old city with old structures so David initiated many building projects. His reputation and strength continued to increase and foreign rulers saw David grow more powerful. God placed favor toward David in the heart of a foreign king, Hiram of Tyre. King Hiram provided David with timber and skilled labor to build a palace. As always, David attributed his success to the Lord God Almighty.

David fulfilled another of God's promises from back in Genesis 15. God told Abraham one of the lands He would give his descendants was *the land of the Jebusites!* God made that promise *a thousand years before*, and David fulfilled that promise!

Jerusalem! In all the earth, there is no city more unique. It holds the distinction of being the only place on earth God chose as His eternal home. "For the Lord has chosen Zion, he has desired it

for his dwelling, saying, This is my resting place forever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it." Psalm 132:13-14

How will Jerusalem be transformed from what it currently is to a city that shines brightly before the whole earth? When *Jesus* establishes His throne in Zion! Isaiah 62:7 says God will make Zion, Jerusalem "the praise of the earth."

As David's success expanded, so did his household with multiple wives, concubines and children. Chuck Swindoll said that during David's reign he fathered *twenty-one* children with *eight* wives and *ten* concubines. I'm sure that was a noisy household! We'll learn in future lessons that having children from multiple wives, some of which were from foreign kingdoms, created sibling rivalry, murder, and caused strife and heartbreak for David.

The new king of Israel had another task - to face Israel's persistent and longstanding enemy, the Philistines. They didn't bother with David when his rule was *only* over the tribe of Judah, but when they learned David was king over the *whole* nation of Israel, they started to fret. They wanted to get David before he could get them, so they came in "full force" after him.

The Philistines were so numerous that they "spread out" in the large Valley of Rephaim. They were a formidable presence – experienced and bloodthirsty. Dale Ralph Davis said *this* about the encounter in the valley: "The place of miracles is usually a place where you're in over your head."

As he did for past battles, David asked the Lord what he should do. The Lord told David He would *assuredly* deliver the Philistines to him.

The victory God gave to David over the Philistines was crushing.

David likened the Lord's power in this battle to a massive torrent of water breaking down everything in its path.

But, the Philistines returned for round two! Their commander in charge of battle plans must have been on vacation because the Philistines thought the Valley of Rephaim was *still* the best location for an attack, even though they were thoroughly defeated there in the prior battle!

David didn't assume to use the same tactic for the second confrontation, even though the first was successful. He again asked the Lord what to do. God gave David a *new* battle plan. David was to circle around *behind* the Philistines and when David and his men heard "marching" in the treetops – he was to execute a surprise attack!

Explanations have been offered for what that sound was in the treetops. The wind might have produced a rushing noise but no natural phenomenon could have caused the sound of a great marching army. The enemy was probably thrown into a panic, *but for David's men*, it would have

been assurance that *Yahweh, the Lord of the Heavenly Armies*, was marching in front of them to lead them to victory. David attacked and so completely were the Philistines annihilated they no longer dominated the land promised to Israel.

On that victory day, perhaps God inspired David to write the words of this Psalm: "Praise be to the Lord my Rock who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me." Psalm 144:1-2

David knew God established him over Israel and exalted his kingdom - not for David's sake, but for the sake of God's people - Israel. David was *over* Israel, *for* Israel.

The Bible always tells the truth about people. Even the best men and women in Scripture had their faults and failures - just as we do. And yet the Lord in His sovereign grace can use our faults, failures and ungodly actions to accomplish His purposes. We saw that truth in today's lesson.

Just as *David* surely did, we *too* may have unanswered questions. Many probably start with "Why?". Until we reach heaven, we might never know why God allowed certain things to happen, but God sees the *totality* of our lives from the beginning to the end and He knows what is best for us. His plans are to prosper us, not harm us. Nothing happens without God's permission.

God is the Master Conductor in the orchestra of our lives.