



The Kingdom Divided: War Between the House of David and Saul (2 Sam 3-4)

Notes: Week Two

2 Samuel 3-4 (HCSB)

Civil War

3 The war between the house of Saul and the house of David was long and drawn out, with David growing stronger and the house of Saul becoming weaker.

2 Sons were born to David in Hebron:

his firstborn was Amnon,
by Ahinoam the Jezreelite;
3 his second was Chileab,
by Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite;
the third was Absalom,
son of Maacah the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur;
4 the fourth was Adonijah,
son of Haggith;
the fifth was Shephatiah,
son of Abital;
5 the sixth was Ithream,
by David's wife Eglah.

These were born to David in Hebron.

6 During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner kept acquiring more power in the house of Saul. **7** Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah daughter of Aiah, and Ish-bosheth questioned Abner, "Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?"

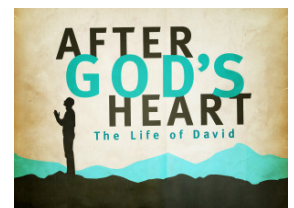
8 Abner was very angry about Ish-bosheth's accusation. "Am I a dog's head^[a] who belongs to Judah?" he asked. "All this time I've been loyal to the house of your father Saul, to his brothers, and to his friends and haven't handed you over to David, but now you accuse me of wrongdoing with this woman!" **9** May God punish Abner and do so severely if I don't do for David what the LORD swore to him: **10** to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish the throne of David over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beer-sheba." **11** Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner because he was afraid of him.

12 Abner sent messengers as his representatives to say to David, "Whose land is it? Make your covenant with me, and you can be certain I am on your side to hand all Israel over to you."

13 David replied, "Good, I will make a covenant with you. However, there's one thing I require of you: Do not appear before me unless you bring Saul's daughter Michal here when you come to see me."

14 Then David sent messengers to say to Ish-bosheth son of Saul, "Give me back my wife, Michal. I was engaged to her for the price of 100 Philistine foreskins."

15 So Ish-bosheth sent someone to take her away from her husband, Paltiel son of Laish. **16** Her husband followed her, weeping all the way to Bahurim. Abner said to him, "Go back." So he went back.



The Assassination of Abner

¹⁷ Abner conferred with the elders of Israel: “In the past you wanted David to be king over you. ¹⁸ Now take action, because the LORD has spoken concerning David: ‘Through My servant David I will save My people Israel from the power of the Philistines and the power of all Israel’s enemies.’”

¹⁹ Abner also informed the Benjaminites and went to Hebron to inform David about all that was agreed on by Israel and the whole house of Benjamin. ²⁰ When Abner and 20 men came to David at Hebron, David held a banquet for him and his men.

²¹ Abner said to David, “Let me now go and I will gather all Israel to my lord the king. They will make a covenant with you, and you will rule over all you desire.” So David dismissed Abner, and he went in peace.

²² Just then David’s soldiers and Joab returned from a raid and brought a large amount of plundered goods with them. Abner was not with David in Hebron because David had dismissed him, and he had gone in peace. ²³ When Joab and all his army arrived, Joab was informed, “Abner son of Ner came to see the king, the king dismissed him, and he went in peace.”

²⁴ Joab went to the king and said, “What have you done? Look here, Abner came to you. Why did you dismiss him? Now he’s getting away. ²⁵ You know that Abner son of Ner came to deceive you and to find out about your activities and everything you’re doing.” ²⁶ Then Joab left David and sent messengers after Abner. They brought him back from the well ^[b] of Sirah, but David was unaware of it. ²⁷ When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab pulled him aside to the middle of the gateway, as if to speak to him privately, and there Joab stabbed him in the stomach. So Abner died in revenge for the death of Asahel, ^[c] Joab’s brother.

²⁸ David heard about it later and said: “I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner. ²⁹ May it hang over Joab’s head and his father’s whole house, and may the house of Joab never be without someone who has a discharge or a skin disease, or a man who can only work a spindle, ^[d] or someone who falls by the sword or starves.” ³⁰ Joab and his brother Abishai killed Abner because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon.

³¹ David then ordered Joab and all the people who were with him, “Tear your clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn over Abner.” And King David walked behind the funeral procession. ^[e]

³² When they buried Abner in Hebron, the king wept aloud at Abner’s tomb. All the people wept, ³³ and the king sang a lament for Abner:

Should Abner die as a fool dies?

³⁴ Your hands were not bound,
your feet not placed in bronze shackles.
You fell like one who falls victim to criminals.

And all the people wept over him even more.

³⁵ Then they came to urge David to eat bread while it was still day, but David took an oath: “May God punish me and do so severely if I taste bread or anything else before sunset!” ³⁶ All the people took note of this, and it pleased them. In fact, everything the king did pleased them. ³⁷ On that day all the troops and all Israel were convinced that the king had no part in the killing of Abner son of Ner.

³⁸ Then the king said to his soldiers, “You must know that a great leader has fallen in Israel today. ³⁹ As for me, even though I am the anointed king, I have little power today. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too fierce for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil!”

The Assassination of Ish-bosheth

4 When Saul's son Ish-bosheth heard that Abner had died in Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. ² Saul's son had two men who were leaders of raiding parties: one named Baanah and the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite of the Benjaminites. Beeroth is also considered part of Benjamin, ³ and the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and still live there as foreigners to this very day.

⁴ Saul's son Jonathan had a son whose feet were crippled. He was five years old when the report about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. The one who had nursed him ^[f] picked him up and fled, but as she was hurrying to flee, he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.

⁵ Rechab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, set out and arrived at Ish-bosheth's house during the heat of the day while the king was taking his midday nap. ⁶ They entered the interior of the house as if to get wheat and stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and his brother Baanah escaped. ⁷ They had entered the house while Ish-bosheth was lying on his bed in his bedroom and stabbed and killed him. Then they beheaded him, took his head, and traveled by way of the Arabah all night. ⁸ They brought Ish-bosheth's head to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here's the head of Ish-bosheth son of Saul, your enemy who intended to take your life. Today the LORD has granted vengeance to my lord the king against Saul and his offspring."

⁹ But David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As the LORD lives, the One who has redeemed my life from every distress, ¹⁰ when the person told me, 'Look, Saul is dead,' he thought he was a bearer of good news, but I seized him and put him to death at Ziklag. That was my reward to him for his news! ¹¹ How much more when wicked men kill a righteous man in his own house on his own bed! So now, should I not require his blood from your hands and wipe you off the earth?"

¹² So David gave orders to the young men, and they killed Rechab and Baanah. They cut off their hands and feet and hung their bodies by the pool in Hebron, but they took Ish-bosheth's head and buried it in Abner's tomb in Hebron.

Footnotes:

- a. [2 Samuel 3:8](#) = a despised person
- b. [2 Samuel 3:26](#) Or *cistern*
- c. [2 Samuel 3:27](#) Lit *And he died for the blood of Asahel*
- d. [2 Samuel 3:29](#) LXX reads *who uses a crutch*
- e. [2 Samuel 3:31](#) Or *the bier*; lit *the bed*
- f. [2 Samuel 4:4](#) Lit *His nurse*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

2 Samuel 3-4

3:1 The phrase long and drawn out suggests the struggle between David and Saul's son lasted awhile, probably at least two years ([2:10](#)).

3:2 Amnon would prove a tragic figure later ([13:1-29](#)).

3:3 Absalom would later die in an attempt to seize his father's throne ([15:1-18:33](#)). The reference to his mother as the daughter of King Talmai of Geshur, a Aramean city-state near the Sea of Galilee, suggests a marriage alliance between David and Talmai to strengthen David's position in the north.

3:4 Adonijah would later try to assume the throne, but Solomon would succeed David as king ([1Ki 1:5-40](#)).

3:6 Ish-bosheth naturally gave his leading general, Abner, a lot of authority. The text may indicate that Abner's intentions were to seize the kingship.

3:7 Having sexual relations with a woman of the harem was obviously the unique privilege of the king and could have been perceived as an attempt by Abner to usurp the kingship ([2Sa 12:8](#); [16:20-22](#)).

3:8 Abner's response does not indicate whether he actually was guilty. He may have been shocked by Ish-bosheth's suggestion of disloyalty after all he had done to support Ish-bosheth's kingship. On the other hand, he may have felt Ish-bosheth should have overlooked his indiscretion with Saul's concubine in light of his loyalty to Ish-bosheth in every other way.

3:9 Ironically, Abner was well aware of God's promise to David, yet he had been advancing Ish-bosheth's cause.

3:10 The two cities, Dan and Beer-sheba, essentially marked the northern and southern borders of Israel, respectively, spanning a distance of about 110 miles ([24:2](#); [1Sam 3:20](#)). Abner thus envisioned the entire nation unified under the throne of David.

3:12 Abner sent messengers... to David because he would have wanted to make sure David accepted him. He did not want to be taken prisoner or executed.

3:13 Saul's daughter Michal was David's first wife ([1Sam 18:27](#)) whom Saul took away and gave to Paltiel son of Laish after David became a fugitive ([1Sam 25:44](#)). By getting her back, David also would reestablish himself as a legitimate relative and heir to Saul's throne. David had never divorced Michal, so she rightfully belonged with him.

3:14-15 Ish-bosheth's compliance with David's demand further highlights his weakness. Perhaps with Abner having deserted to David's side, Ish-bosheth lacked any real power and was trying to ensure that David didn't kill him after becoming king ([1Sam 24:20-21](#)).

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "2 Samuel 3-4".

tov

Hebrew Pronunciation	[TOVE]
HCSB Translation	good, fine
Uses in 2 Samuel	18
Uses in the OT	490
Focus Passage	2 Samuel 3:13

The noun and adjective *tov* denotes *good* ([Gen 1:4](#)), *kind* ([1Ki 12:7](#)), *fair* ([1Ki 2:38](#)), *right* ([Neh 5:9](#)), or *pleasant* ([2Sam 19:35](#)). *Tov* describes *fine* ([2Ch 3:5](#)) or *pure* ([Gen 2:12](#)) commodities. *Tov* connotes *goodness* ([Ps 23:6](#)), *bounty* ([Jer 5:25](#)), *well-being* ([Ps 119:122](#)), *advantage* ([1Sam 19:4](#)), or *prosperity* ([Dt 30:9](#)). *Tov* can imply *well* ([1Sam 25:15](#)). What is "not good" is *wrong* or *unfair* ([Pr 20:23](#); [Isa 65:2](#)). *Tov* encompasses *better* ([Gen 29:19](#)) or *best* ([1Sam 1:23](#)). "What is good in the eyes of" can signify *whatever you want* ([Gen 16:6](#)). "Seeing good" is *enjoying* ([Ec 3:13](#)); "being good" indicates *going well* ([Ec 8:12](#)). "Good day" suggests *feast day* ([1Sam 25:8](#)) or *holiday* ([Est 8:17](#)). *Tov* means *pleasing* ([Ec 2:26](#)), *favorable* ([2Ch 18:12](#)), *gracious* ([Ezr 7:9](#)), *happy* ([2Ch 7:10](#)), or *beautiful* ([Dt 8:12](#)).

3:16 Paltiel, Michal's husband of several years, was perhaps the one who along with Michal suffered the most through this ordeal. Bahurim was located near the Benjamin-Judah border. Abner was probably an imposing military man, so when he bluntly told Paltiel to go back, Paltiel was intimidated into obeying despite his broken heart.

3:17 Abner's words, In the past you wanted David, to the elders of Israel seem to reflect earlier sentiments that may have arisen during days of discontentment with Saul's leadership.

3:18 With his words the Lord has spoken, Abner appealed to the promise of the heavenly King to confirm David as Israel's new king. The Philistines continued to be a threat to Israel during these uncertain days of civil war; the nation desperately needed unifying leadership.

3:19 Abner also informed the Benjaminites because Saul had come from them. David wanted the support of these citizens as much or more than any other, and he wanted to accomplish as much as he could through diplomacy rather than war.

3:21 Abner was ready to coordinate final plans among the northern tribes to gather all Israel to David. Once they made a covenant ratifying his rule over them, David would control the entire nation.

3:22 A raid of foreign populations living close to Judah would yield plunder that would help fund ongoing operations (see note at [4:2](#)).

3:24 Joab expressed his shock (What have you done?) when he heard that David had let the man who used to be his enemy's general leave in peace.

3:25 Joab was certain Abner's motives were impure. It appears Joab's motives were to protect David's interests, though he may have been protecting his own as well since Abner would have been a potential rival to Joab as David's leading general.

3:26 The well of Sirah was a site about two miles northwest of Hebron.

3:27 Joab stabbed him [Abner] in the stomach just as Abner had done to Asahel, Joab's brother ([2:23](#)). Joab may have decided he knew better than David how to handle Saul's former general. If Joab's intentions were to exact revenge for Abner's self-defense slaying of Asahel, he might have needed to submit to the decision of the elders of Hebron, which was a city of refuge ([Jos 20:7](#)).

[3:28](#) David heard about what Joab had done, and he distanced himself from any blame for Abner's death.

[3:29](#) With his words May it hang over Joab's head, David pronounced a series of curses that might fall on his general for his injustice. At the same time, he did not take Joab's life because many people may have felt that Joab's actions were justified, and because Joab was his nephew.

[3:30](#) Perhaps Abishai led the delegation that summoned Abner back to Hebron, thus serving as Joab's co-conspirator. Abner had killed Asahel in legitimate battle, but Joab killed Abner in a time of peace ([1Ki 2:5](#)).

[3:31-32](#) David's public participation in Abner's stately funeral would further distance him from blame for Abner's death. He is also called King David for the first time here. Abner's burial in Hebron may have been David's way of honoring Abner by treating him as one of David's own tribe members. The king wept aloud, something kings did not normally do.

[3:33-34](#) David took his mourning for Abner even further when he sang a lament. He alluded to Abner's killers (Joab and Abishai) as criminals.

[3:35](#) David determined that he would fast the rest of the day in mourning for Abner. His taking of an oath emphasized his determination to honor Abner in this way.

[3:36](#) David's integrity with regard to Abner and with regard to his oaths pleased the people. Ironically, Saul had sought to please the people but went back on his oaths and pleased neither the people nor God (see note at [1Sam 14:45](#)).

[3:37-38](#) David's actions persuaded all the troops and all Israel of his innocence in Abner's death. His designation of Abner as a great leader may have been the king's way of showing he could forgive those Israelites who had challenged his kingship if they were now willing to submit to him.

[3:39](#) Up to this point David had been anointed as king over Judah only ([2:1-4](#)); perhaps he intended his words I am the anointed king to further ingrain this idea in the minds of others as well. At the same time, he considered his position weak in contrast to the fierce nature of Joab and Abishai, the sons of Zeruiah.

[4:1](#) News of Abner's death reached Ish-bosheth, whose courage failed because Ish-bosheth had now lost his strongest general. Probably all Israel who had supported him were dismayed because they feared reprisal following a victory by David that now appeared certain.

[4:2](#) As leaders of raiding parties, Baanah and Rechab performed a role for Ish-bosheth that was similar to what Abishai and Joab did for David ([3:22](#)).

[4:4](#) Mephibosheth, a son of Jonathan, would find favor with David during David's reign ([9:1-10](#)).

[4:6](#) These two men entered the interior of Ish-bosheth's house, something that might not have been unusual for trusted officers ([v. 2](#)).

[4:7](#) Baanah and Rechab beheaded Ish-bosheth because they wanted proof of his death for David. By way of the Arabah took them through the Jordan Valley, the quickest and most direct route to Hebron about 50 miles southwest. They hoped they might receive a reward for eliminating David's rival.

4:8 With their words, Today the Lord has granted vengeance, Baanah and Rechab credited God with their act of murder.

4:10 David reminded the two assassins of the death of the Amalekite messenger who claimed to have killed King Saul ([1:6-10](#)).

4:11 David contrasted the character of Baanah and Rechab with Ish-bosheth, whom he called a righteous man. The words in his own house on his own bed suggested they had committed a cowardly, cold-blooded act (cp. [3:26-30](#)).

4:12 David commanded his men to cut off the hands that had committed the murder and feet that had run to bring the news of the murder to David. Ish-bosheth's head was placed in Abner's tomb in Hebron, uniting him with family in death but also perhaps subtly identifying him with Judah ([3:32](#)).

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

2 Samuel 3-4

3:1-4:12 [Chapters 3-4](#) describe the slow steps of the process whereby **David grew stronger and stronger** ([3:1](#)) and thus became king over all Israel. A major concern of the author is to show that David was not guilty of involvement in the death of Abner or Ish-bosheth.

3:2-5 A list of David's sons born in Hebron. David's sons **Amnon** and **Absalom** come to the fore in [chs. 13-18](#), and the struggle for the succession between **Adonijah** and Solomon is described in [1 Kings 1-2](#). The other sons are not mentioned in the narratives of Samuel-Kings. It is assumed that **Chileab** (called Daniel in [1 Chron. 3:1](#)) died young, since he is not mentioned as a possible successor in [1 Kings 1](#). After the deaths of Amnon ([2 Sam. 13:28-29](#)) and Absalom ([18:15](#)), Adonijah is apparently the eldest surviving son of David. **Geshur** was north of the area controlled by Saul's house, so David's marriage with the daughter of its king was one of the steps in strengthening him against Ish-bosheth ([3:1](#)). Absalom apparently named a daughter after his mother **Maacah** ([1 Kings 15:2](#); [2 Chron. 11:20-22](#)).

3:6-39 Abner, after a quarrel with Ish-bosheth, convinces the elders of Israel that they should go with David. But Abner is killed by Joab. The author repeatedly stresses that David had not consented to this ([vv. 21, 26, 28, 37](#)); indeed, since Abner was plotting to make David king of Israel, it would seem that David would have had nothing to gain and something to lose from Abner's death.

3:7 Saul's concubine **Rizpah** had borne him two sons. She would later protect their bodies after their deaths ([ch. 21](#)). Taking a king's wives seems to have been considered a prerogative of the throne (see [12:8](#); [16:21-22](#); [1 Kings 2:22](#)), though that is not necessarily what Abner had in mind, even if the accusation about his relationship with Rizpah was true.

3:9-10 As Saul's general, Abner must have known about Saul's recognition of David as his successor ([1 Sam. 24:20](#)). People in general also seem to have had knowledge about a promise of God to David ([2 Sam. 3:18](#); see also [1 Sam. 24:4](#); [25:30](#)).

3:12-13 David clearly does not mind taking the Israelite kingdom from Ish-bosheth, and he stresses his closeness to Saul as Saul's son-in-law. In [1 Sam. 18:25-27](#), David gave Saul 200 Philistine foreskins though Saul had demanded only 100 as a bride-price, so the extra hundred was in essence a gift. David here just states that he has legally paid the bride-price. Apparently because David never divorced Michal even though her father Saul had given her to another man ([1 Sam. 25:44](#)), he still describes her as his wife. David presumably expects Abner to support David's argument when the matter is discussed in Ish-bosheth's court.

3:17-19 The Israelites, even the members of Saul's own tribe of Benjamin, seem to think they are getting nowhere with Ish-bosheth as king.

3:22-30 Here, as in [18:14](#) and [20:10](#), the motive for Joab's actions in killing Abner can be seen either as concern for David's position ([3:25](#)), concern for his own position (esp. since David had not told him what was going on, [v. 23](#)), personal revenge ([v. 30](#)), or a mixture. The readers are not told exactly what part Abishai ([v. 30](#)) plays, but he seems to have been a loyal supporter of his brother Joab (see [10:9-12](#); [18:2](#); [20:6-10](#); see also note on [8:13-14](#)).

3:25 **Know your going out and your coming in** mainly refers to military actions (as in [1 Sam. 18:13](#)). In other words, Joab claims that Abner came as a spy.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "2 Samuel 3-4".

3:26 **Sirah** is about 2.5 miles (4 km) north of Hebron.

3:27 **into the midst of the gate.** City gates were elaborate structures.

3:28-39 Joab is apparently too important and useful for David to punish him for killing Abner, so he does the best he can by cursing him, having a funeral for Abner, and publicly mourning and chanting a lament for him. This is the only funeral described in detail in the OT. As elsewhere, tearing clothes, wearing **sackcloth**, and fasting are features of mourning. **All Israel** refers to Abner's own countrymen. It was important for David and his future kingdom that "all Israel" know it was not the king's will to put to death Abner son of Ner (see note on [1 Sam. 14:50-51](#)).

3:29 One who **holds a spindle** is one forced to do the work of spinning, i.e., in that culture, a woman.

3:36 **everything that the king did pleased all the people.** The remarkable result of God's blessing on these initial days of David's reign.

2 Samuel 4

4:1-12 **Chapter 4** relates the death of Saul's son, the rival king Ish-bosheth.

4:2-3 **Beeroth** is about 2 miles south of Gibeon and is one of the cities, led by Gibeon, that tricked Joshua into making a treaty with them ([Josh. 9:17](#)). The Beerothites had probably **fled to Gittaim** (which according to [Neh. 11:33](#) was a city in Benjamin) at the time Saul put the Gibeonites to death (see [2 Sam. 21:1](#)). Apparently after that the Benjaminites, including **Rimmon** and his family, came to live there. If this is correct, it suggests that the incident of the Gibeonites occurred early in Saul's reign, since Rimmon, the father of **Baanah** and **Rechab**, is described as being "from Beeroth." This passage stresses that those who killed Ish-bosheth were not partisans of David but were from Saul's own tribe.

4:4 The information about **Mephibosheth** is probably put here to show why there was no move to make him king after Ish-bosheth's death—he was still a child, and he was **crippled**. He is further mentioned in [9:1-13](#); [16:1-4](#); [19:24-29](#); and [21:7](#). (The Mephibosheth in [21:8](#) is a different person, the son of Saul and Rizpah.) Apparently his real name was "Merib-baal" ([1 Chron. 8:34](#); [9:40](#)). Because "baal" could mean "lord" in general, the name probably referred to the Lord of Israel (as in [2 Sam. 5:20](#)), but at some point, in order to avoid using the name of the god Baal, it was euphemistically changed in Samuel to "Mephibosheth," *boshet* meaning "shame." Similarly, Saul's son Ish-bosheth is called "Eshbaal" in [1 Chron. 8:33](#) and [9:39](#), but "Ish-bosheth" in Samuel; and Jerubbaal ([Judg. 9:1](#), [57](#)) is called "Jerubbesheth" in [2 Sam. 11:21](#).

4:7 This verse is an expansion of the previous verse.

4:8 **Saul, your enemy, who sought your life.** It is true that Saul had sought David's life. Nevertheless, David had already rejected killing Saul ([1 Sam. 24:4-6](#); [26:8-9](#)), and furthermore, that did not provide an excuse to kill a "righteous man" ([2 Sam. 4:11](#)).

4:10-11 This refers to the incident in [1:13-16](#). The Amalekite had at least given the excuse that Saul had requested his own death, but Ish-bosheth's death was outright murder. Yet David says nothing here about Ish-bosheth as the Lord's anointed.

4:12 Unlike the case of Joab, there is no problem with executing the killers of Ish-bosheth. For hanging a body after death, see [21:6](#) and [Josh. 10:26](#).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

2 Samuel 3-4

Chapter 3

3:1 The events recorded in [chapter 2](#) led to a long war between David's followers and the troops loyal to Abner and Ishbosheth. Civil war rocked the country at great cost to both sides. This war occurred because Israel and Judah had lost sight of God's vision and purpose: to settle the land ([Genesis 12:7](#)), to drive out the Canaanites ([Deuteronomy 7:1-4](#)), and to obey God's laws ([Deuteronomy 8:1](#)). Instead of uniting to accomplish these goals, they fought each other. When you face conflict, step back from the hostilities and consider whether you and your enemy have common goals that are bigger than your differences. Appeal to those interests as you work for a settlement.

3:2-5 David suffered much heartache because of his many wives. Polygamy was a socially acceptable practice for kings at this time, although God specifically warned against it ([Deuteronomy 17:14-17](#)). Sadly, the numerous sons born to David's wives caused him great trouble. Rape ([13:14](#)), murder ([13:28](#)), rebellion ([15:13](#)), and greed ([1 Kings 1:5, 6](#)) all resulted from the jealous rivalries among the half brothers. Solomon, one of David's sons and his successor to the throne, also took many wives who eventually turned him away from God ([1 Kings 11:3, 4](#)).

3:6, 7 To sleep with any of the king's wives or concubines was to make a claim to the throne, and it was considered treason. Because Ishbosheth was a weak ruler, Abner was running the country; thus, he may have felt justified in sleeping with Saul's concubine. Ishbosheth, however, saw that Abner's power was becoming too great.

3:7 Ishbosheth may have been right to speak out against Abner's behavior, but he didn't have the moral strength to maintain his authority ([3:11](#)). Lack of moral backbone became the root of Israel's troubles over the next four centuries. Only 4 of the next 40 kings of Israel were called "good." It takes courage and strength to stand firm in your convictions and to confront wrongdoing in the face of opposition. When you believe something is wrong, do not let yourself be talked out of your position. Firmly attack the wrong and uphold the right.

3:8 By saying, "Am I some Judean dog to be kicked around?" Abner meant, "Am I a traitor for Judah?" He may have been refuting the accusation that he was trying to take over the throne, or he may have been angry that Ishbosheth scolded him after Abner had helped put him on the throne in the first place. Prior to this conversation, Abner realized that he could not keep David from eventually taking over Israel. Because he was angry at Ishbosheth, Abner devised a plan to turn over the kingdom of Israel to David.

3:13, 14 Michal had been married to David. Saul had arranged the marriage as a reward for David's acts of bravery ([1 Samuel 17:25](#); [18:24-27](#)). Later, however, in one of his jealous fits, Saul took Michal away from David and forced her to marry Palti ([1 Samuel 25:44](#)). Now David wanted his wife back before he would begin to negotiate peace with the northern tribes. Perhaps David still loved her (but see [6:20-23](#) for the tension in their relationship). More likely, he thought that marriage to Saul's daughter would strengthen his claim to rule all Israel and demonstrate that he had no animosity toward Saul's house. Palti was the unfortunate victim caught in the web of Saul's jealousy.

3:19 Because Saul, Ishbosheth, and Abner were all from the tribe of Benjamin, the support of the elders of that tribe meant that Abner was serious about his offer. There was a strong possibility of overcoming tribal jealousies and uniting the kingdom.

[3:26-29](#) Joab took revenge for the death of his brother instead of leaving justice to God. But that revenge backfired on him ([1 Kings 2:31-34](#)). God will repay those who deserve it ([Romans 12:19](#)). Refuse to rejoice when your enemies suffer, and don't try to get revenge. Seeking revenge will ruin your own peace of mind and increase the chances of further retaliation.

[3:27](#) Abner killed Joab's brother Asahel in self-defense. Joab then killed Abner to avenge his brother's death and also to save his position of military leadership. People who killed in self-defense were supposed to be safe in cities of refuge ([Numbers 35:22-25](#)). Joab showed his disrespect for God's laws by killing Abner out of revenge in Hebron, a city of refuge ([Joshua 20:7](#)).

[3:29](#) David was saying that Joab's descendants would be unclean, unhealthy, and in want. Why did David say such harsh words about Joab? David was upset over Abner's death for several reasons. (1) He was grieved over the loss of a skilled military officer. (2) He wanted to place the guilt of Abner's murder on Joab, not himself. (3) He was on the verge of becoming king over the entire nation, and utilizing Abner was the key to winning over the northern tribes. Abner's death could have revived the civil war. (4) Joab violated David's agreement to protect Abner. Joab's murderous act ruined David's plans, and David was especially angry that his own commander had committed the crime.

[3:31](#) By walking behind the procession (that is, behind the casket), David was leading the mourning.

[3:31ff](#) David ordered Joab to mourn, possibly because few people were aware that Joab had committed the crime and because David did not want any further trouble. If this is true, David was thinking more about strengthening his kingdom than about justice.

[3:39](#) Joab and Abishai were the two sons of Zeruiah David mentioned. David had an especially hard time controlling Joab because, although he was intensely loyal, he was strong willed, preferring to do things his own way. In exchange for his loyalty, however, David was willing to give him the flexibility he craved. Joab's murder of Abner is an example of his fierce independence. While David opposed the murder, he allowed it to remain unpunished because (1) to punish Joab could cause the troops to rebel; (2) Joab was David's nephew, and any harsh treatment could cause family problems; (3) Joab was from the tribe of Judah, and David didn't want rebellion from his own tribe; (4) to get rid of Joab would mean losing a skilled and competent commander who had been invaluable in strengthening his army.

Chapter 4

[4:1](#) Ishbosheth was a man who took his courage from another man (Abner) rather than from God. When Abner died, Ishbosheth was left with nothing. In crisis and under pressure, he collapsed in fear. Fear can paralyze us, but faith and trust in God can overcome fear ([2 Timothy 1:6-8](#); [Hebrews 13:6](#)). If we trust in God, we will be free to respond boldly to the events around us.

[4:4](#) The rest of Mephibosheth's story is told in [chapter 9](#); [16:1-4](#); and [19:24-30](#).

[4:11](#) David called Ishbosheth an "innocent man." As Saul's son, Ishbosheth had reason to think he was in line for the throne. He was not wicked for wanting to be king; rather, he was simply too weak to stand against injustice. Although David knew Ishbosheth was not the strong leader needed to unite Israel, he had no intention of killing him. God had promised the kingdom to David, and he knew that God would fulfill his promise.

When David learned of Ishbosheth's death, he was angry. He had never harmed Saul, and he thought the assassins' method was cowardly. David wanted to unite Israel, not drive a permanent wedge between him and Ishbosheth's supporters. To show that he had nothing to do with the extermination of Saul's royal line, he ordered the assassins killed and gave Ishbosheth a proper burial. All the tribes of Israel, recognizing in David the strong leader they needed, pledged their loyalty to him. No doubt the Philistine threat and David's military reputation ([1 Samuel 18:7](#)) also helped unify the people.



David Defeats the Philistines

The Philistines camped in the valley of Rephaim. David defeated them at Baal-perazim, but they remained in the valley. He attacked again and chased them from Gibeon to Gezer.