

David Anointed King of Judah (c. 1010 – c. 1003 BC)

2 Samuel 2:1–7

Judah Anoints David King at Hebron

1 Afterward David inquired of the LORD, “Should I go up to one of the cities of Judah?” The LORD told him, “Go up.” David asked, “Where should I go?” The LORD replied, “To Hebron.”

2 So David went up, along with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail, formerly the wife of Nabal the Carmelite.

3 David also brought along the men who were with him, each with his family. They settled in the cities of Hebron.

4a The men of Judah came and there they anointed David as king over the people of Judah.

David Reaches Out to Saul’s Supporters

4b David was told, “The people of Jabesh Gilead are the ones who buried Saul.”

5 So David sent messengers to the people of Jabesh Gilead and told them, “May you be blessed by the LORD because you have shown this kindness to your lord Saul by burying him.

6 Now may the LORD show you true kindness! I also will reward you, because you have done this deed.

7 Now be courageous and prove to be valiant warriors, for your lord Saul is dead. The people of Judah have anointed me as king over them.”

David’s Sons Born at Hebron (c. 1010 – c. 1003 BC)

2 Samuel 3:2–5

1 Chronicles 3:1–4a

2 Now sons were born to David in Hebron. His firstborn was Amnon, born to Ahinoam the Jezreelite.

3 His second son was Kileab, born to Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite.

His third son was Absalom, the son of Maacah daughter of King Talmai of Geshur.

4 His fourth son was Adonijah, the son of Haggith.

His fifth son was Shephatiah, the son of Abigail.

5 His sixth son was Ithream, born to David’s wife Eglah.

These sons were all born to David in Hebron.

1 These were the sons of David who were born to him in Hebron: The firstborn was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel;

the second was Daniel, whose mother was Abigail from Carmel;

2 the third was Absalom whose mother was Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur;

the fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith;

3 the fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abigail;

the sixth was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah.

4a These six were born to David in Hebron,

Civil War (c. 1004 – c. 1003 BC)

2 Samuel 2:8–32; 3:1, 6–39

Abner Makes Saul’s Son Ish-bosheth (Abner’s Nephew) King Over Israel

2:8 Now Abner son of Ner, the general in command of Saul’s army, had taken Saul’s son Ish-bosheth and had brought him to Mahanaim.

9 He appointed him king over Gilead, the Geshurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel.

10 Ish-bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he began to rule over Israel. He ruled two years. However, the people of Judah followed David.

11 David was king in Hebron over the people of Judah for seven and a half years.

Conflict Erupts at Gibeon

12 Then Abner son of Ner and the servants of Ish-bosheth son of Saul went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon.

13 Joab son of Zeruiah and the servants of David also went out and confronted them at the pool of Gibeon. One group stationed themselves on one side of the pool, and the other group on the other side of the pool.

14 Abner said to Joab, “Let the soldiers get up and fight before us.” Joab said, “So be it!”

15 So they got up and crossed over by number: twelve belonging to Benjamin and to Ish-bosheth son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David.

16 As they grappled with one another, each one stabbed his opponent with his sword and they fell dead together. So that place is called the Field of Flints; it is in Gibeon.

17 Now the battle was very severe that day; Abner and the men of Israel were overcome by David’s soldiers.

Abner Kills Joab's Brother Asahel

18 The three sons of Zeruiah were there—Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. (Now Asahel was as quick on his feet as one of the gazelles in the field.)

19 Asahel chased Abner, without turning to the right or to the left as he followed Abner.

20 Then Abner turned and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?" He replied, "Yes it is!"

21 Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right or to your left. Capture one of the soldiers and take his equipment for yourself!" But Asahel was not willing to turn aside from following him.

22 So Abner spoke again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me! I do not want to strike you to the ground. How then could I show my face in the presence of Joab your brother?"

23 But Asahel refused to turn aside. So Abner struck him in the abdomen with the back end of his spear. The spear came out his back; Asahel collapsed on the spot and died there right before Abner. Everyone who now comes to the place where Asahel fell dead pauses in respect.

24 So Joab and Abishai chased Abner. At sunset they came to the hill of Ammah near Giah on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon.

Abner Appeals to Joab to End the Battle

25 The Benjaminites formed their ranks behind Abner and were like a single army, standing at the top of a certain hill.

26 Then Abner called out to Joab, "Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will turn bitter in the end? When will you tell the people to turn aside from pursuing their brothers?"

27 Joab replied, "As surely as God lives, if you had not said this, it would have been morning before the people would have abandoned pursuit of their brothers!"

28 Then Joab blew the ram's horn and all the people stopped in their tracks. They stopped chasing Israel and ceased fighting.

29 Abner and his men went through the Arabah all that night. They crossed the Jordan River and went through the whole region of Bitron and came to Mahanaim.

30 Now Joab returned from chasing Abner and assembled all the people. Nineteen of David's soldiers were missing, in addition to Asahel.

31 But David's soldiers had slaughtered the Benjaminites and Abner's men—in all, 360 men had died!

32 They took Asahel's body and buried him in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Joab and his men then traveled all that night and reached Hebron by dawn.

Conflict Between Ish-bosheth and Abner

3:1 However, the war was prolonged between the house of Saul and the house of David. David was becoming steadily stronger, while the house of Saul was becoming increasingly weaker.

6 As the war continued between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was becoming more influential in the house of Saul.

7 Now Saul had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. Ish-bosheth said to Abner, "Why did you have sexual relations with my father's concubine?"

8 These words of Ish-bosheth really angered Abner and he said, "Am I the head of a dog that belongs to Judah? This very day I am demonstrating loyalty to the house of Saul your father and to his relatives and his friends! I have not betrayed you into the hand of David. Yet you have accused me of sinning with this woman today!

9 God will severely judge Abner if I do not do for David exactly what the LORD has promised him,

10 namely, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah all the way from Dan to Beer Sheba!"

11 Ish-bosheth was unable to answer Abner with even a single word because he was afraid of him.

Abner Offers to Hand the Throne of Israel Over to David

12 Then Abner sent messengers to David saying, "To whom does the land belong? Make an agreement with me, and I will do whatever I can to cause all Israel to turn to you."

13 So David said, "Good! I will make an agreement with you. I ask only one thing from you. You will not see my face unless you bring Saul's daughter Michal when you come to visit me."

14 David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth son of Saul with this demand: "Give me my wife Michal whom I acquired for a hundred Philistine foreskins."

15 So Ish-bosheth took her from her husband Paltiel son of Laish.

16 Her husband went along behind her, weeping all the way to Bahurim. Finally Abner said to him, "Go back!" So he returned home.

17 Abner advised the elders of Israel, "Previously you were wanting David to be your king.

18 Act now! For the LORD has said to David, 'By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the Philistines and from all their enemies.'"

19 Then Abner spoke privately with the Benjaminites. Abner also went to Hebron to inform David privately of all that Israel and the entire house of Benjamin had agreed to.

20 When Abner, accompanied by twenty men, came to David in Hebron, David prepared a banquet for Abner and the men who were with him.

21 Abner said to David, "Let me leave so that I may go and gather all Israel to my lord the king so that they may make an agreement with you. Then you will rule over all that you desire." So David sent Abner away, and he left in peace.

Joab Murders Abner

22 Now David's soldiers and Joab were coming back from a raid, bringing a great deal of plunder with them. Abner was no longer with David in Hebron, for David had sent him away and he had left in peace.

23 When Joab and all the army that was with him arrived, Joab was told: "Abner the son of Ner came to the king; he sent him away, and he left in peace!"

24 So Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Abner has come to you! Why would you send him away? Now he's gone on his way!"

25 You know Abner the son of Ner! Surely he came here to spy on you and to determine when you leave and when you return and to discover everything that you are doing!"

26 Then Joab left David and sent messengers after Abner. They brought him back from the well of Sirah. (But David was not aware of it.)

27 When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside at the gate as if to speak privately with him. Joab then stabbed him in the abdomen and killed him, avenging the shed blood of his brother Asahel.

David Proves His Innocence Concerning Abner's Death

28 When David later heard about this, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD of the shed blood of Abner son of Ner!"

29 May his blood whirl over the head of Joab and the entire house of his father! May the males of Joab's house never cease to have someone with a running sore or a skin disease or one who works at the spindle or one who falls by the sword or one who lacks food!"

30 So Joab and his brother Abishai killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel in Gibeon during the battle.

31 David instructed Joab and all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes! Put on sackcloth! Lament before Abner!" Now King David followed behind the funeral bier.

32 So they buried Abner in Hebron. The king cried loudly over Abner's grave and all the people wept too.

33 The king chanted the following lament for Abner:

"Should Abner have died like a fool?

34 Your hands were not bound,
and your feet were not put into irons.
You fell the way one falls before criminals."

All the people wept over him again.

35 Then all the people came and encouraged David to eat food while it was still day. But David took an oath saying, "God will punish me severely if I taste bread or anything whatsoever before the sun sets!"

36 All the people noticed this and it pleased them. In fact, everything the king did pleased all the people.

37 All the people and all Israel realized on that day that the killing of Abner son of Ner was not done at the king's instigation.

38 Then the king said to his servants, "Do you not realize that a great leader has fallen this day in Israel?"

39 Today I am weak, even though I am anointed as king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too much for me to bear! May the LORD punish appropriately the one who has done this evil thing!"

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Chronological Notes

- 1) "At the age of forty Ish-Bosheth would have been qualified to have fought in the fateful battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa with his father and three brothers (cf. 1 Sam 31; Num 1:36). Perhaps he had been purposely exempted, however, in order to assure a direct heir to the throne in case of a battlefield catastrophe like the one that actually occurred. Ish-Bosheth laid claim to Israel's throne 'two years' before he was murdered. These two years may correspond to the sixth and seventh years of David's reign at Hebron. Two textual reasons support this contention: first, David was said to have ruled over only the house of Judah while he lived in Hebron (v. 11; 5:4); and second, 5:1–9 suggests that David moved his capital city to Jerusalem

almost immediately after being anointed as king over all Israel. If the tribes of Israel apart from Judah were in fact without a king for more than five years, this would suggest that the Philistines controlled the region completely enough during that time to prevent the rise of any Israelite to the throne. In this scenario Abner, as the leading military figure in the northern tribes, would have functioned as the de facto head of state. Yet instead of installing himself as king, he—nobly—put a direct descendant of Saul on the throne when he sensed Israel’s situation had sufficiently improved. Ish-Bosheth’s kingship was not recognized in the territory of Judah because they ‘followed David.’ After all, David was one of their own and had made the southern Judahite town of Hebron his capital city. In fact, Hebron remained David’s royal city for ‘seven years and six months’ (v. 11), apparently the amount of time it took for David to gain undisputed control of all Israel as well as to conquer Jerusalem.”¹

¹ Robert D. Bergen, “1, 2 Samuel,” *New American Commentary*, 300.