

Resistance is Futile

2 Samuel 2:12 - 3:39

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me to 2 Samuel chapter 2. We have a lengthy, marathon reading tonight. We are hoping to get through not just the rest of this chapter 2 but also three particular incidents in chapter 3. You'll remember from two weeks ago, Abner, who is Saul's surviving military commander, has set up Ish-bosheth, who is Saul's fourth son and only surviving son — Saul and three of his sons were killed on Mount Gilboa in a battle with the Philistines — and now Ish-bosheth has been set up as a puppet king in the north, in a place called Mahanaim. And then in the south, David at Hebron, has been established formally as king over the southern kingdom of Judah.

Now before we read from verse 12 let's look to God in prayer.

Father, we ask now for Your blessing as we read the Scriptures together. Without the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we cannot in and of ourselves understand or profit from the Scriptures in the way that we desire and in the way that we ought. So come, O Lord, come by Your Spirit. Help us to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest, and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruah and the servants of David went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. And they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." Then they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. And each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is at Gibeon. And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

And the three sons of Zeruah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Is it you, Asahel?" And he answered, "It is I." Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men and take his

spoil." But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. And Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?" But he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died where he was. And all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still.

But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. And as the sun was going down they came to the hill of Ammah, which lies before Giah on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon. And the people of Benjamin gathered themselves together behind Abner and became one group and took their stand on the top of a hill. Then Abner called to Joab, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be before you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers?" And Joab said, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely the men would not have given up the pursuit of their brothers until the morning." So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight anymore.

And Abner and his men went all that night through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, and marching the whole morning, they came to Mahanaim. Joab returned from the pursuit of Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing from David's servants nineteen men besides Asahel. But the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin 360 of Abner's men. And they took up Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father, which was at Bethlehem. And Joab and his men marched all night, and the day broke upon them at Hebron.

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.

And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.

While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul. Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?" Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, "Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the

house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba." And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, "To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you." And he said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you; that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned.

And Abner conferred with the elders of Israel, saying, "For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. Now then bring it about, for the LORD has promised David, saying, 'By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies.'" Abner also spoke to Benjamin. And then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do.

When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. And Abner said to David, "I will arise and go and will 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.

Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace." Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing."

When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did

not know about it. And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle or who falls by the sword or who lacks bread!" So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon.

Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner." And King David followed the bier. They buried Abner at Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. And the king lamented for Abner, saying,

'Should Abner die as a fool dies?
Your hands were not bound;
your feet were not fettered;
as one falls before the wicked
you have fallen.'

And all the people wept again over him. Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was yet day. But David swore, 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 notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people. So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner. And 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 was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I. The LORD repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!"

Well, amen. May God bless that long reading.

Four things very quickly tonight — four cameo sketches here.

I. Hostility between Israel and Judah

The first is that section at the end of chapter 2 from verse 13 all the way down to verse 30. It's a prolonged period of hostility. In the final years of Ish-bosheth's reign in the north, while David is in Hebron, Ish-bosheth has been set up by Abner, Saul's military commander. In the final years Abner goes south. He goes

south to Gibeon, twenty three miles or so from Hebron. We're not told why. It looks as though it could be one of several reasons — to perhaps attack David's stronghold in Hebron; perhaps to get some of David's men to come over to Saul's side; perhaps to establish a base, a stronghold, a military base near to Hebron. Whatever the reason, David's nephew, Joab, leads David's men to confront them. And they meet around a pool of water, one on one side, one on the other. It's a standoff. And Abner, perhaps in a moment filled with testosterone, suggests a battle, a contest — twelve men from each side in a battle that would decide the victory. And all twelve are dead. All twenty-four are dead. Each one kills the other.

It solved nothing, and the battle, in fact, gets worse. And Ish-bosheth's men do badly, very badly, so that Abner begins to go home, pursued by these three brothers — Joab and Abishai and Asahel. Asahel is a tri-athlete. He's swift. He's like a gazelle. And he just won't quit! Abner says, "I don't want to kill you, so go after one of the young men and kill him and plunder him," but Asahel continues. And then with the blunt end of his spear, he prods Asahel, Abner prods him in the stomach, perhaps in a self-defensive move designed perhaps simply to wind him. But the blunt end of the spear goes right through him and kills him and Asahel is dead. And the two brothers, Joab and Abishai, now continue to pursue after Abner and they meet at a certain point where the men of Benjamin have sided with Saul's side. And there's a standoff. And Abner convinces Joab that there's nothing to be gained here, and in the cover of night, both sides retreat — Abner back up to the north and Joab and Abishai and his men back to Hebron. 360 Benjaminites of Saul's side are dead. Nineteen of Joab's men are dead, including his brother Asahel.

It's just one incident. We read in verse 1 of chapter 3, "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." That's just one incident in that long war, that period of hostility between the north and the south.

II. Shifting allegiances.

Then there's a second cameo portrait and it's one of shifting allegiances. Oh, there's a little aside; actually, it's a big aside. David has six wives. All of a sudden, we knew there were a couple, and now there are six, and six sons had been born, not to mention Michal, the wife that he had, Saul's daughter. He's not Jesus you understand. He may be a type of Jesus every now and then, but the writer's putting something in here. He's saying this man, this man has feet of clay.

There's some — well, let me be delicate here — there's some nefarious incident in Abner's bedroom with a concubine of Saul by the name of Rizpah. Whether it's true or not, it sounds as if it's true, Ish-bosheth, the king, questions Abner. Abner says to him, he doesn't comment on what we might think he'd comment on - we

think he might comment on the ethics of what went on in the bedroom, but that's not what Abner says. Abner says, "I am loyal to Saul. I am loyal to Saul's house." And Abner, Abner is ticked off. You understand, Ish-bosheth is only king because Abner made him king. He's only king because Abner has fought for him. And Abner says to him, "Look, I made you and now I'm going to break you." He is ticked off. He has a moment of peak — now you understand, he's just killed Joab's brother, and he's now saying, he's now saying to Ish-bosheth, "I'm going to deliver Israel, the north, to David."

Now, bells need to be going off in your head here, right, because that's God's promise. God has promised to David that he will be king and that he will reign. And in a covenant that David will make with David, that reign will be from Dan to Beersheba. Right, God, I love your promise. It's a beautiful promise. Now how are You going to fulfill Your promise? Well, an angel all dressed in white is going to come down from the sky — no. It's Abner, who's having an affair with Saul's concubine who's now ticked off because Ish-bosheth has challenged him and now he's saying as a piece of revenge to Ish-bosheth, "I'm going to deliver Israel to David." That's how God is fulfilling His promise. Ish-bosheth is a weak, vacillating, pathetic, foil for Abner's ambitions. He's no Hamlet.

So Abner sends emissaries to David. And David lays down terms — not before Michal, Michal is brought back to me. Now Jewish commentators just spend pages and pages and pages arguing this way and that way whether this was legal according to Torah. Was Michal still his wife? Technically, perhaps, she was. She had been taken from David. You remember Michal had helped David escape. She told a lie to Saul's men, remember, saying that David was ill. She had led him down through the window. She put teraphim in the bed pretending that David was sick in the bed, you remember, and then Saul gave Michal to a man called — he has an Indian sounding name, Paltiel, Paltiel. Was it a legal marriage? I have no idea. I'm not sure. Maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. Six wives weren't enough; he wants Michal. There's a seventh wife, and I know seven is the perfect number but it's not perfect here! (laughter)

I don't think David is having a romantic moment. You see, I don't think he's saying — and remember, maybe fifteen or twenty years have passed. It's difficult to be precise but a long time has passed since he's last seen Michal. And Michal will not be the supportive little wife at home when she comes back because she'll be a little snooty with David. I don't think this is a romantic moment. This is David saying, "I want the transition to be a smooth one, and the best way to assure a smooth transition is for Saul's daughter, my wife, to be brought back to me."

I think David's first thought here is on the political exchange of power, that David is not only the king of the southern kingdom in Hebron, but he's now becoming king of the southern and northern kingdom, and that Saul's men will fall into line when Saul's daughter is in David's house.

III. A surprise attack.

And then there's a third cameo. And it's a surprise attack. Things have gone well. Abner is dismissed in peace. Joab comes back from a raid. He's petulant, he's rude, cheeky; says to David — David is king — and he says to David, “Why did you let him go?” He sends a message to Abner to come back, to come back to the gate of the city of Hebron. Now Hebron, Hebron was a city of refuge. You understand what that means? It's a city of refuge. If you had been caught in some kind of crime and you were innocent, you could run from the avenger of blood into the city of refuge and no one could touch you. You could not kill someone, an avenger of blood. And Joab is not an avenger of blood here. Asahel had probably died — it wasn't murder with intent. It doesn't look as if it was murder with intent, so Joab is technically not an avenger of blood. He could not possibly do what he did at the gate of the city. The gate is where you got justice, the gate is where the elders met, and there at the gate of Hebron — a city of refuge — Joab kills Abner in the stomach, just as Abner killed, though probably accidentally, Asahel. David had received him and negotiated with him. Joab, David's nephew, has killed him. And you think you've got problems in your family? I mean, you think you have first dibs on dysfunctionality?

IV. Sackcloth and ashes.

And then there's a fourth cameo — sackcloth and ashes. It's not the first time. 2 Samuel began with sackcloth and ashes - David lamenting for the death of Saul. Now we're only in chapter 3 and he's lamenting for Abner, Saul's military general. A mighty warrior has fallen in Israel, a war hero, a soldier, a decorated soldier has fallen — killed, murdered, in the city of refuge. David says in his lament, “One who falls before the wicked” — before the wicked! This is his nephew, Joab. David will rue the day that he dealt so leniently with Joab. Joab will turn around to bite David again. Just as Ish-bosheth found it difficult to deal with Abner, David finds it difficult to deal with Joab.

Okay, what have we seen here? Sex, nefarious goings-on, murder, an accidental killing, intrigue, war games, greed, dysfunctionality, power plays. It's like daytime TV.

But this is the Bible. Folks, this is the Bible. This is the story of David. This is the story of how God is going to fulfill His promise to send a Savior, Jesus. Jesus comes from this story. Everything that happens to David has something to do with Jesus, the Promised Seed of the woman, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Prophet, Priest, and King. This mess, this unholy mess — you think your office is bad?

This is an unholy mess — but folks, I only have one point. I only have one point.

The story of redemption isn't the story of enchanted woods and beautiful handsome princes and princesses and magic.

The story of redemption — you know this is like reality, isn't it? This is reality. This is the world we live in. Just pick up — no don't — if you were to pick up a newspaper, a tabloid newspaper tomorrow, what are you going to read in it? This stuff? Yes? Glance through the headlines of a national newspaper in America, in Britain. What are you going to find? This sort of stuff? Yes, exactly.

God — you know, did you catch it? When Abner says to Ish-bosheth, “I'm going to deliver the kingdom to David as God had promised,” — now Abner's not a knight and shining armor. Abner's no saint here.

God in His sovereign providence uses people like that. Out of messes like that, out of appalling messes like that, God fulfills His purpose.

If you ever wanted confidence that God's purposes are inviolable, if you want proof that God is on His throne, I mean you wouldn't write this story. If you were trying to write the story of redemption, it would be a fantasy tale. It would be about knights and shining armor and enchanted woods, and not about a story in which there's all this lurid, horrible mess.

Read this story and see the astonished hand of a sovereign God, and then don't find yourself saying, “Where is God in our world today?” I mean, don't say that, because the world is in a mess. Where is God's promise? It was right here. God using even the wicked to fulfill His purposes.

Let's pray together.

Father, we stand amazed in the presence of what You accomplished in the pages of history, that in the middle of a Roman Empire with murder and killing, even the killing of little babies in Bethlehem, You brought a Savior, You brought the Lord Jesus, You brought our Prophet, Priest, and King. You are in complete control. Even when things seem to us to be breaking apart at the seams, You rule and reign and every single promise of Yours will be fulfilled. Help us to stand under the umbrella of Your providence and trust it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand and receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

©2013 First Presbyterian Church.

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript conforming to an established style template.

Should there be questions regarding grammar or theological content, the reader should presume any website error to be with the webmaster/transcriber/editor rather than with the original speaker. For full copyright, reproduction and permission information, please visit the First Presbyterian Church Copyright, Reproduction & Permission statement.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).