

2 Samuel 2 — Civil War

March 12, 2023

Good morning CrossWinds! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. At CrossWinds, we are about “Reaching People With Jesus.” That means we are committed to sharing the good news of Jesus with those who don’t know what Jesus has done for them.

There are many ways we reach people with Jesus, both inside and outside the church. This morning, I want to highlight the team of people who work in the foyer each week at the Gathering Grounds coffee bar. They come early to make coffee because they want CrossWinds to be a warm and welcoming place. (Coffee is especially important this morning with daylight savings since we lost an hour of sleep!) Some bake cookies, others purchase cookies, and others make coffee cakes for the coffee bar. If you are new here, they want you to feel welcome here. That is one of the little ways we work together to reach people with Jesus in our community.

Background

As a church, we are studying through 2 Samuel. We started 2 Samuel two weeks ago. 2 Samuel is a continuation of the story of 1 Samuel. If you are new, let me take a moment to get you up to speed on the story. In 1 Samuel, King Saul was selected as the first king of Israel, but it wasn’t long until God rejected him as king for disobeying God. Halfway through 1 Samuel, after God rejected Saul as king, God anointed a new king named David. It was an awkward time. Saul was rejected but still reigned as king. God anointed David as king but he was not leading the nation. God began ratcheting King Saul down and building David up.

Soon Saul was jealous of David. He spent years hunting and trying to kill David as he was green with envy over the favor God had on David's life. When 1 Samuel closed, King Saul was killed in battle against the Philistines in the north of Israel. David was not part of that battle. At the time, he was a hundred miles south at Ziklag fighting the Amalekites. David had nothing to do with Saul's death.

2 Samuel 1 began when an Amalekite brought news of Saul's death to David. Today, in 2 Samuel 2, David responds to the leadership vacuum left in the nation after Saul's death. Will David jump at the opportunity to be king? What happens next? This morning, we find out.

This chapter is built as a contrast between two men. This contrast will show us the difference between the humble and godly leadership of David, and the ego and selfish ambition found in the leadership of a man named Abner.

That chapter will leave us asking a question we need to think about every day. "What kind of leader am I?" Am I a humble and godly leader, or am I an egotistical, overbearing leader?

Let's see how the story unfolds.

David was a humble leader.

After this David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" And the LORD said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" And he said, "To Hebron." 2 Samuel 2:1 (ESV)

In the last chapter, David learned about King Saul's death. He was in Ziklag, which is in the south of the nation



in Philistine territory. David knew God chose him to be the next king. He was anointed king by the prophet Samuel when he was just a boy in 1 Samuel 16. It would seem logical for David to jump at the opportunity to be king now that Saul was dead. That is not what happened. Instead, David turned to God and asked God what he should do. Should he leave the Philistine territory and return home to Judah? God told him he should. Which city should he go to? God told him to go to Hebron. Judah was the southernmost tribe of Israel and was the closest to Ziklag. That made sense. Hebron was also a natural place to go. This is not random information. It is showing us a contrast.

Years earlier, when King Saul was anointed king of Israel, the prophet Samuel told him the one thing Saul must do was listen to and obey God's words. King Saul didn't do that. He did what he wanted to do. He didn't ask God what he was to do. When God told King Saul what to do, King Saul didn't listen. For example, when God told Saul to wipe out the Amalekites, he didn't obey. Right away, we see David was different. Before he made a move, he checked with God first.

How did God speak to David? These verses do not tell us. Hebrews 1:1 tell us that God spoke to people many times and in various ways. We know God sometimes spoke to David through prophets. Sometimes God spoke to him directly. Recently we saw God speak to David through the Urim and Thummin. Those were stones in the chest pouch of the high priest's garment. We learned about this in 1 Samuel. When Doeg the Edomite, at the command of King Saul, killed all the priests in the land, one young priest escaped the slaughter. His

name was Abiathar. He brought with him the priestly garment called a linen ephod. In the chest piece of the garment were two stones called the Urim and Thummin. We are not sure exactly how they worked. It appears they worked like dice with a black and white side on each one. When you rolled them, you could ask questions of God. The way the two rocks landed revealed God's answer. Two white sides were a "Yes." Two black sides were a "No." One black and one white were "Undecided." This is probably the way David received guidance from God at that time. Ask God a question, have Abiathar, the priest, roll the special dice, and God gave an answer.

Remember, the point is not how David received guidance. The point is that, unlike King Saul, David sought guidance. He wanted to be sure he was living in obedience to God before making a move. David was a humble leader focused on going no further than God wanted him to go.

This is a lesson for us. Many times, we see an opportunity, and we pounce at the opportunity for greater power and control rather than slowing down, checking with God, and asking what he wants us to do. How do we check with God today? We should not roll divine dice as David did with the Urim and Thummin. How do we discover God's will?

Today we discern God's will through the Word of God and prayer.

Before we make a decision, we look at what the Bible says about a decision. The Bible doesn't give us specific information about the name of the person we are to marry, the job we should accept, or the city where we should live. The Bible does tell us what priorities and attitudes honor God and what we

should pursue as a follower of Jesus. For example, when we pursue a spouse, we should not be unequally yoked. Marry a Christian. Proverbs 31 gives a detailed list of qualities a man is to look for in a godly wife. Ephesians 5 teaches us the way a husband and wife are to relate to one another. This tells us how marriage should function. So to find God's will for our life, we look for the general principles and guidelines God gives us in the Bible. God doesn't tell us the specific name of the job we should take, but God's Word does tell us how we are to conduct ourselves at work, and the kind of work that honors God and helps.

Secondly, we seek God's guidance through prayer. Before we make a major choice, we are to pray about the choice and ask God to guide us. Don't expect an audible voice telling us what we should. In prayer, we ask God for two things when making a decision. First, we ask God to give us the wisdom to know what parts of the Bible provide the guidance we need for the decision we face. Second, we ask for God to open or shut doors providentially. If God doesn't want us to do something, we ask God to shut the door of opportunity to keep us from going in the wrong direction. If he wants us to do something, we ask God to keep the door open providentially.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Let's get back to the story.

So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the towns of Hebron. 2 Samuel 2:2-3 (ESV)

This was not a temporary visit. This was a complete relocation package. They had a moving truck. In 1 Samuel, David began with 400 men. Then it grew to 600 men and their families. Now it was several thousand.

David's two wives are also mentioned. In 1 Samuel, David took these two wives while on the run from Saul. Their hometowns were Jezreel and Carmel. Both of those towns were in the Hebron region. David and his wives were returning home. Have you ever moved back to your hometown after living away? If you have, you know what David and his wives felt at this time. David was moving home. David's two wives were his second and third wives. His first wife was Michal, Saul's daughter. Saul took her away and gave her to another man to hurt David. Michal will be back in the picture next week.

This brings up a question we have about the Old Testament, but it is a topic frequently avoided. It is the subject of polygamy. While the Bible is clear in Genesis that God's plan is for one man and one woman in marriage, and that plan is reaffirmed in the New Testament, in the Old Testament, we see polygamy. What seems odd is that we don't see polygamy expressly forbidden in the Old Testament. We even find some heroes of the faith, like David, practicing it. Polygamy at that time was part of many cultures.

While the Bible doesn't directly criticize polygamy in Old Testament times, it does indirectly critique it and show us its dangers. Every single time you see polygamy in the Old Testament, it always leads to disaster.

For example, in 2 Samuel, we will see that in spite of all the good things David has going for him, his kingdom will be destroyed because of his love for

many women and his refusal to deny himself a woman named Bathsheba. David's son Solomon, who was the wisest man ever to live, will have his heart led astray from God because of his love for many wives. The patriarch Isaac, who had two wives, Rachel and Leah, lived in an unhappy home because of the constant fighting between his wives. In the Old Testament, when we see polygamy, while the Bible doesn't come out and directly condemn it in the culture of that day, we see the results are always a mess.

How is this relevant to us? Unless you are a Mormon man in Utah, you probably won't struggle with literal polygamy. Many men struggle with virtual polygamy through the Internet. They fill their minds with women other than their wives. Just as literal polygamy always led to disaster, virtual polygamy will always lead to disaster. It will ruin a life.

If you are struggling with virtual polygamy, commonly called pornography, what should you do? We must begin by admitting it is sin, confessing it to God, and seeking forgiveness through Jesus. If you are single, find an older, spiritually mature same-sex friend that will offer to hold you accountable and pray for you. If you are married, you need to confess your virtual polygamy to your wife and ask her for forgiveness. You have not just sinned against God, but you have sinned against her. Some of you say, "I couldn't do that. She would kill me." That is true. Confessing that sin all hurt. It is always better to confess sin willingly and repentantly than to stubbornly deny our sin and get caught red-handed in our sin. That leaves a wound that is much harder to heal.

And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah... 2 Samuel 2:4a (ESV)

Judah was the southernmost tribe of the twelve tribes of Israel. They did not make David king. The prophet Samuel anointed David king back in 1 Samuel 16. God's anointing of David as king was what mattered, Judah just recognized David as the rightful king of the nation. Later David will be anointed as king a third time when he becomes king over the entire nation.

We have seen two things about David's leadership style that we can learn from. First, he is not trying to follow his own will and ambitions. He is checking with God and very much trying to obey God about choices in life.

Second, he was not grabbing power. He didn't make himself king of Judah. The people wanted him to be king. He was not pushing himself on people. He was serving people and letting God unfold the future.

Now we find one of the first things David does as king.

...When they told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul," 2 Samuel 2:4b (ESV)

David was told about the people of Jabesh-Gilead and what they had done for King Saul and his sons. If you were with us earlier in this series, you will remember the story. After the Philistines killed King Saul and three of his sons, they beheaded them. They hung their bodies on the walls of the Philistine fortress of Beth-shan. This was a way to desecrate their bodies and display them as a trophy of war.



Saul had turned into a godless tyrant over time. When Saul began as king, he was a good and godly man. One of his first acts as king was to rescue the people of Jabesh-Gilead. They were the last city east of the Jordan river that had not been conquered by Nahash the Ammonite. Nahash was a terror in the ancient world. He conquered people and gouged out the right eye of everyone he conquered. He was just brutal. One of Saul's first acts as king was to rally the nation of Israel to save the people of Jabesh-Gilead. The people of Jabesh-Gilead had not forgotten what Saul had done. They were still filled with gratitude to Saul. That is why they risked their lives to travel by night deep inside Philistine territory to get the bodies of King Saul and his sons off the wall of Beth-shan. They brought the bodies back to Jabesh-Gilead and gave them a decent burial.

The point of this story is that the people of Jabesh-Gilead were the most pro-Saul people in Israel. Most kings would consider them enemies since they were so committed to David's predecessor. That isn't what David did. Even though these pro-Saul folks were 70 miles to the north, deep inside Saul's territory, David went out of his way to build a relationship with them and do good for them. David was a different kind of leader. He worked hard to create peace and transform his enemies into friends.

David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "May you be blessed by the LORD, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him. Now may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing. Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them." 2 Samuel 2:5–7 (ESV)

David goes out of his way to commend them for the loyalty they showed to King Saul. The word for "loyalty" in Hebrew means going above and beyond the

call of duty. David prayed that God would also show love and faithfulness to them because they had shown such love and faithfulness to King Saul and his sons in their death.

Then David promised to do good to them because of the good they had done. Remember, these people were considered David's political opponents. Rather than seeing them as enemies, he took the initiative to reach out and try and make them friends.

David is a different kind of leader. He was working for peace, not division in the country. Imagine what David would be like in our government today. Let's not talk about our government leaders. Let's talk about us. How do we treat the people considered our enemies? How hard are we working for peace with them? David took the initiative to pray for these people and do them good. Do we do the same with the enemies we have in our lives?

The last thing David did was invite them to join Judah in recognizing him as the rightful king to replace Saul. Notice David doesn't demand they recognize him as king. He just invites them to recognize him as king. David is a different kind of leader who is not running over people in his leadership style.

Abner was a selfish, egotistical leader.

One of the ways the Bible teaches us is using contrasts. That is what happens next. We have seen the character of David, God's rightful king. Now we will meet Abner. He was the commander of Saul's army. He knew David well. He was at King Saul's side when David slew Goliath. His character was the exact opposite of David's.

While the tribe of Judah recognized David as God's rightful king, Abner, in the north, refused to do that and relinquish power and control. For the next five years, he ruled in the north, not as their king, but he functioned like a king during that time.

What is important for us to know is that Abner was completely aware that God chose David to be the next rightful king to replace Saul. Abner just refused to listen to God. Like Saul, he was committed to doing his own thing, not following God's Words and will. For example, Abner knew King Saul said these words to David before he died.

And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. 1 Samuel 24:20 (ESV)

In the next chapter of 2 Samuel, Abner admits this again.

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." 2 Samuel 3:9–10 (ESV)

Abner knew God wanted David to be the next king, but he refused to step aside. He refused to let David rule over the nation. Abner organized the eleven northern tribes against David and intentionally created a civil war in Israel. Abner did this because of his big ego and self-ambition. He didn't care about obeying God. All he cared about was doing whatever he needed to do in order to stay in power. Have you seen government leaders like that?

But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. 2 Samuel 2:8–9 (ESV)

As we will see later this morning, Abner, who was ruling in the north, took Ish-Bosheth, the remaining son of Saul that was still alive, and installed him as king in order to legitimize his own authority among the northern tribes and to oppose David intentionally. As we continue, we will see that while Ish-Bosheth was king of these northern tribes, he was not in charge. Abner was in charge. Ish-Bosheth was a puppet king, and Abner was his handler. He told Ish-Bosheth what to do. The only reason Abner installed Ish-Bosheth as king was to make his own power and control of the northern eleven tribes look more legitimate.

While in this verse, let's have some fun and teach a little Hebrew. Ish-Bosheth's name is listed in 1 Chronicles as Ish-Baal. In Hebrew, Baal means Lord or master. Ish-Baal means "man of the Lord." That was his original name. It was a complimentary name. The people of the land gave him a nickname that stuck. It was Ish-Bosheth. Bosheth means "shame." This son, whose actual name meant Man of the Lord, was nicknamed by the people the man of shame. Right away, we know this guy doesn't have good character; he is not a man of God when the people of the land nicknamed him the man of shame.

Another interesting Hebrew insight is that Abner made Ish-Bosheth king at Mahanaim. This was done in direct opposition to David. There is some interesting stuff going on. Mahanaim in Hebrew means two camps. This is where in Genesis, Jacob divided his flocks into two camps when he was worried about meeting his brother Esau.

This is what Abner was doing. He was intentionally dividing the nation in to two camps by installing Ish-bosheth as a rival king in the land. Abner wants to

keep power so much that he is willing to split a county in half and plunge a baton into civil war because he will not step aside and recognize God's anointed king. Abner is the exact opposite of David. David seeks and obeys God's will. Abner rebels against God's will. David refuses to force his kingship on others, and Abner forced Ish-bosheth on the people of the northern kingdom. David was working to unite the nation. Abner was working to divide the nation.

Now we get the timeline of what happened.

Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months. 2 Samuel 2:10–11 (ESV)

It was only after five years of reigning in the north by himself that Abner installed Ish-Bosheth, the man of shame, to legitimize his own rule and create deeper divisions between the north and south of Israel to kick off a civil war. Ish-Bosheth's reign will only last two years, but it will be a bloody two years of civil war.

Selfish Ambition Creates Chaos Among God's people.

It is essential to understand that in everything that follows, Abner is the aggressor in the whole thing. He is the one who causes all of the problems and all the heartache we are about to see. He doesn't intend to cause all of it, but it will be his choices that cause all of it. This is an example of what selfish ambition does in the church among the people of God. It creates chaos and division.

Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. 2 Samuel 2:12 (ESV)

This was a foolish act. The Philistines were still a problem in the north. They held most of the country. Abner tried to eliminate them but failed for the last

five years. Rather than focus on the Philistines, which were the real enemy, he decided to send his army southwest to fight the forces of David. This was a bully in action.

Remember that Abner and Ish-Bosheth controlled eleven tribes in the north. David only controlled one tribe in the south. I think



Abner's plan was to wipe out David to retake

control of Judah and hopefully unite all of Israel. Remember, this was completely against God's revealed will. Abner knows it. Abner also doesn't care about the damage he will cause to the nation by unleashing a bloody civil war. Abner gets his army not far from Jerusalem. He invaded the territory of the tribe of Judah. Now we meet, for the first time, the commander of David's army, the man who tried to stop him, Joab.

And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon... 2 Samuel 2:13a (ESV)

Joab had two brothers. Their names were Abishai and Asahel. Their mother, Zeruiah, was David's sister. These three nephews of David were intensely loyal to him. That is good. The problem was that they were hawks, not doves. They loved bloodshed and war and didn't know when to quit. This will cause David considerable trouble in the future.

The pool of Gibeon was where the two armies met. It was a well-known water reservoir cut out of the bedrock outside of the city. Jeremiah 41:12 calls it the great pool of Gibeon. It was large. It kept the two armies apart.

...And they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. 2 Samuel 2:13b (ESV)

This was awkward. Joab and his men were defending their tribe. They were defending it from people they knew, their own relatives in the north. They were staring at one another across the pool. What do we do? Nobody wants to fight.

And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." 2 Samuel 2:14 (ESV)

Abner had an idea. Why don't they try representative combat. We will have a small group from each side battle it out in winner-take-all gladiatorial games.

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. 2 Samuel 2:15–16 (ESV)

That didn't work. It was a draw. Everybody died. Nobody won. With no clear winner, the two sides went to civil war.

And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David. 2 Samuel 2:17 (ESV)

While the victory went to Joab, the commander of the David's army, there was no winner. When God's people fight, all the death and suffering are needless. It is purposeless. All this happens because of one man, Abner. He put himself first. He refused to obey the revealed will of God. He chose to go to war against his own people.

If there is a lesson for us in this, it is to watch out for people with selfish ambitions in the church. They put themselves first and cause incredible needless damage to the body of Christ as they get people fighting one another in the church instead of Satan.

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 3 John 9 (ESV)

John writes about people like this in the church. They do not acknowledge the ones God put in authority because they want to put themselves first. That was Abner. These kinds of people showed up in the New Testament church, and they show up today, causing great division and heartache among God's people.

Now the text zooms in to one part of the battle.

Pursuing conflict always leads to unexpected casualties.

And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. 2 Samuel 2:18 (ESV)

We met these three brothers earlier. Joab was the commander of David's army. Here we learn about Asahel. He was the track star in the family. He was a sprinter. He was described as swift of foot as a Gazelle. That same description was used earlier to describe Jonathan, King Saul's son. Jonathan and Asahel both had amazing athletic gifts. Both of them would hold a starting position in a professional sport today.

And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. 2 Samuel 2:19 (ESV)

Like his brothers, Asahel was obsessive and determined. He decided to go for the big fish. He knew Abner had no right to rule. He knew all of this was because of Abner's ego. He knew that if he could kill Abner, the problem of civil war in the nation would evaporate.

One thing isn't stated in the text, but it is implied. For Asahel to be so nimble on the battlefield, he wasn't carrying a shield. He trusted his athleticism to evade weapons. This made him fast, but it also left him vulnerable.

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. 2 Samuel 2:20–21 (ESV)

This was not what Abner wanted. Abner did not want to fight Asahel. As a seasoned warrior, Abner was sure he could kill the young man, but he didn't want the consequences of killing 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?” 2 Samuel 2:22 (ESV)

Abner was now pleading with Asahel to find somebody else to chase. He knew that killing the brother of Joab, the commander of David's army, would spell trouble. Yet, who put himself in this position? It was all Abner's fault. Abner started the civil war. Abner came to attack. This fight was not what Abner wanted, but it was a consequence of his sinful, rebellious choices.

What a great reminder to us. When we choose to pursue conflicts rather than peace, there will always be unexpected and costly casualties. When we fight with our spouse, rather than humble ourselves and seek peace with our spouse, there will always be unexpected and costly casualties from that fight.

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. 2 Samuel 2:23 (ESV)

Apparently, Abner was running. He stopped in his tracks and drove the blunt point of his spear backward right into Asahel's gut. Remember, Asahel was not carrying a shield, so the blunt part of the spear went right through his stomach. Asahel died a very messy and extremely painful death. Everyone who

came by saw it. Everyone knew they were in for trouble. The conflict went to a new level when Abner killed Joab's little brother.

This is why the Bible tells us to pursue peace, not conflict.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:18 (ESV)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Matthew 5:9 (ESV)

David was the peacemaker with the people of Jabesh-Gilead. Abner was the conflict maker with the people of Israel.

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. 2 Samuel 2:24 (ESV)

That this point, Abner had a family issue on his hands. If you kill one brother, rest assured that the remaining brothers were out to get you. They want blood. That is exactly what happened. Abner was running for his life.

And the people of Benjamin gathered themselves together behind Abner and became one group and took their stand on the top of a hill. 2 Samuel 2:25 (ESV)

Abner was able to get himself to the top of a hill where the people of Benjamin gathered around him to defend him. Joab and Abishai had no chance at overcoming all the men protecting Abner. They were forced to stop their fight.

Now, look what happens. Abner blamed Joab for the civil war when it was Abner who started the whole thing!

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?" 2 Samuel 2:26 (ESV)

Joab, when are we going to call it quits? How many more people need to die? When will you tell your army to back off and stop the pursuit of their own brothers?

What is the problem with this? Joab didn't start any of this. Joab was only defending Judah. Abner was the one who came to invade. Abner was the one who planned to conquer the tribe of Judah. Abner was the one who killed Asahel. Abner was the one with the big ego who wouldn't step down and let David lead.

Talk about blame shifting. Abner is a classic.

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." 2 Samuel 2:27 (ESV)

In this verse, Joab extends mercy to Abner. You need to know there is another way it can be translated. The alternate translation may not be right, but it makes better sense.

And Joab said, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, the people would have withdrawn this morning, each from following his brother." 2 Samuel 2:27 (alternate translation)

Joab says, don't blame me for this mess. You started it this morning by invading our tribe and your speech about a competition between the men. If you had never come and suggested the winner-take-all gladiatorial game, none of this would have happened. This day is your fault, not mine.

So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight anymore. 2 Samuel 2:28 (ESV)

A truce was called.

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. 2 Samuel 2:29 (ESV)

After a hard night's march, Abner and his men arrived home to Mahanaim, the place called two camps. Thanks to Abner, and his attempt at forcibly taking the kingship through civil war, the nation was more deeply divided into two camps than ever.

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. 2 Samuel 2:30–31 (ESV)

On David's side, there were twenty casualties. If that included the 12 from the gladiatorial games at the beginning plus Asahel, that means only seven of David's men died in the civil war. For every man who fell on David's side, there were 18 who fell on Abner's side. This was probably one of the reasons Abner asked for a truce. He was losing and losing badly.

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. 2 Samuel 2:32 (ESV)

Bethlehem was about halfway back from Gibeah to Hebron. There they buried Asahel in the family tomb.

Applications

1. **As a leader, am I more like David or like Abner?** David followed God's will for his life rather than the ambitions of his heart. He didn't force his leadership on others, he invited them to follow. He worked to bring peace to his enemies, not division. Abner was the opposite. He was an egotistical leader who was driven by selfish ambition and had to be first. He forced his will on others. He was eager to create conflict instead of work for peace. We have to ask

ourselves, “What kind of leader am I?” Am I more like David, or am I like Abner?

2. **Whenever we choose conflict instead of peace, there will always be unexpected casualties.** The death of Asahel, Joab’s brother, was not something Abner intended, but it was a problem Abner caused. Asahel’s death will create a level of hostility between Abner and Joab that will lead to both of their deaths. As Paul says, as far as possible, pursue peace with everyone.
3. **Refusing to acknowledge God’s chosen king is pointless resistance that only leads to suffering.** Abner’s resistance to David, God’s chosen king, was futile. It would only be a matter of time until David would rule over all of Israel. Abner couldn’t stop that. His resistance to God’s chosen king only caused suffering for him and others. God has his chosen king today. It is not David. His name is Jesus, the Son of David. He is the one who conquered sin and death on the cross and with the empty tomb. Everyone who resists him as the king of their life is engaged in futile resistance that will only lead to pointless suffering. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess Jesus Christ as Lord, as king. That will either happen willingly for those who trust Jesus and are saved by him, or it will happen unwillingly who will be judged by Jesus. Jesus is God’s king forever. Resistance to him is futile and only leads to pointless suffering. I invite you to repent of your sin and trust him as your savior and king today.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in

heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9–11 (ESV)



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