

Ascension

2 Samuel 2:1-5:25

Key Verse 5:4

“David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years.”

For many years people told David that he would be the next king of Israel. Samuel anointed him as king when he was but a boy. King Saul saw him as a threat to his throne. Jonathan gave up his right to the throne because he knew that God has appointed David. The people of Israel and even the Philistines knew that David was next in line for the throne. Everybody knew that when Saul died David would become king. Here in this passage, we can see that God fulfilled his promise to David and made him king over all Israel. However, the transition in power from Saul to David was not as smooth as you would expect. We like to think that because something is God's will, then it will be easy, but more often than not, the way God does things is vastly different than from what we expect.

After the death of Saul, the road appeared to be clear for David to take the throne. His enemy was vanquished, but David was still living in Philistine territory, the town of Ziklag. He could have marched out and taken the crown for his own, but instead, he asked God what to do. **“In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD. ‘Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?’ he asked. The LORD said, ‘Go up.’ David asked, ‘Where shall I go?’ ‘To Hebron,’ the LORD answered.”** (2:1) David asked God what to do because, although David knew what God was going to do, he did not know how it was to be done. David asked if he should return to his own tribe. It was a smart move because they would be more accepting of their own tribesman. Israel had just suffered a resounding defeat, if David had just swooped in, it would look like he orchestrated the whole war to gain power. Therefore, David had to come in slowly. God told David to go to Hebron. Now, Hebron was one of the six cities of refuge that God set up throughout Israel. The cities of refuge were places where someone who accidentally or unintentionally kill someone could flee and not be hunted down by someone who was seeking revenge. That fact made Hebron a perfect place for David to reenter Israelite territory. By having David go to Hebron, God was signaling that David did not play a part in Saul's death. After David settled in Hebron, the people of Judah crowned him king over Judah.

What was going on in the rest of Israel was not quite as noble. **“Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel. Ish-Bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The tribe of Judah, however, remained loyal to David.”** (2:8-10) If you remember, Abner was the commander of the army under Saul and Saul's relative. After Saul's death, it looks like Abner gained control of Israel during the mourning and confusion that ensued. Even though Abner was related to Saul, he had no claim on Israel's throne. Instead, he installed Saul's son Ish-Bosheth as a puppet king. If you read the passage, it is as if Abner is the one with real power, and Ish-Bosheth is only a figurehead in Abner's eyes.

Because of Abner, there were now two sides: the house of David and the house of Saul. Each side had their zealots. Abner was fervent to the house of Saul and Joab was zealous for the house of David. Now, these men weren't so passionate because they dearly loved their masters, but because of their own selfish ambition. Abner and Joab actually started a war between the two sides because of their own pride. They were sitting across from each other at the pool of Gibeon. **“Then Abner said to Joab, ‘Let's have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand in front of us.’ ‘All right, let them do it,’ Joab said. So they stood up and were counted off—twelve men for Benjamin and Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve for David. Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent's side, and they fell down together.”** (2:14-16) It was a strange thing that started the war. It's like something

out of a movie or anime or something like that. Twenty-four young men died for what seemed to be the pleasure of two proud men. It's like two mob lieutenants getting their kicks at the death of their own men.

After that, fighting broke out and Joab's brother Asahel began to chase Abner. Now, Abner pleaded with Asahel to go attack another man, but Asahel would not give up his pursuit. **"So Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot."** (2:23) At that, Joab and his other brother Abishai continued to chase after Abner, but eventually the battle ended. This war lasted for a long time, maybe up to two years: the entire reign of Ish-Bosheth. I find it funny that neither David nor Ish-Bosheth are mentioned as being directly involved in the war, but the war was between their houses. The personal ambition of Abner and Joab were driving the war.

In fact, it looks like Abner was using the war to strengthen his position in the house of Saul. (3:6) The king became a little threatened by Abner's positioning and accused Abner of sleeping with one of Saul's concubines. When a new ruler came to power, he would sleep with the previous king's concubines as a sign of taking over the kingdom. When Ish-Bosheth accused Abner of doing this, he was actually accusing Abner of trying to seize the throne. The Bible doesn't say whether or not Abner actually did sleep with the concubine, but at any rate he is upset with the accusation. He answered, **"Am I a dog's head—on Judah's side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven't handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman! May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba."** (3:8-10) With Ish-Bosheth's accusation, Abner saw that his position was threatened and that he had no lucrative future with the house of Saul, so he made an oath to give the tribes of Israel to David.

He, then, went to David and offered the kingdom to him. **"Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, 'Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you.'"** (3:12) Abner was carrying out his threat against Ish-Bosheth. David, however, has no intention on prolonging the war. If the divisions were to continue, then there would be little hope in being able to become king over a united Israel. David wanted to find a peaceful way to bring his people together. In that regard, David sidesteps Abner and asks Ish-Bosheth to return his wife Michal to him. While this is going on, Abner starts talking with the elders of Israel about making David king. Then, Abner went to Hebron and told David about what the elders of Israel said. While Abner was in Hebron, there was a feast and all was being prepared for David's ascension to the throne of Israel.

Now, Abner left Hebron in peace to continue the reunification of Israel. But when Joab found out that Abner had been in Hebron, he went ballistic. **"So Joab went to the king and said, 'What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing.'"** (3:24-25) His personal pride and selfish ambition cause Joab to forget that he is talking to his king and Joab just berates David. Then, in a huff anger Joab goes off and kills Abner for killing his brother Asahel. Now remember, Hebron was a city of refuge. It was a place where someone could flee to if they killed someone accidentally, like Abner did in killing Asahel. Within the walls of the city, Abner should have been safe from any person seeking revenge, but Joab called Abner back under false pretenses and carried out his revenge in a city of refuge.

When David found out what had happened, he cursed Joab and his family and mourned Abner. Abner's death was tragic and David saw it for what it was. It was a national event not merely a personal loss. David sang a lament, "Should Abner have died as the lawless die? Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. You fell as one falls before the wicked." (3:33-34) For all the faults that Abner had, David saw that he did not deserve to die in this way and he mourned Abner's death fully. Additionally, David would not eat anything until after the sun had set. He could find no joy and he showed the people that he had no involvement in Abner's death.

Just when things look like they couldn't get any worse, they do. After Abner's death, Ish-Bosheth and all Israel lose all strength. Abner was probably the main driving force of Israelite policy, but now he was gone. In this power vacuum, two men snuck into the palace and murdered Ish-Bosheth while he was taking his noonday rest. Because of the own ambition, these two men killed an innocent man in his own home hoping to gain some reward from David. The men assume that all men are like themselves and bring to David the head of the king. David tells the men, "As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, when someone told me, 'Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news! How much more—when wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed—should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you!" (4:9-11) And he had the men killed for their actions. Justice was swift.

Not long after King Ish-Bosheth's death, the elders of Israel came to David and said, "We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'" (5:1-2) The tribes of Israel were lost without leadership. Their kings were dead and the commander of the army Abner was murdered. Everybody who led them was gone, but they remembered David and God's promise that David would lead all Israel. So they came and made David king of all Israel. "David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years." (5:4) With these actions, God had fulfilled his promise to David and made him king over all Israel.

Even though it was a long road to the kingship, God was not quite done. Even though Israel had one king, it wouldn't exactly be perfectly united if David were to rule it from Hebron. The northern tribes might begin to resent him and think him playing favorites. However, in the land there was a city that was centrally located and was not currently in the hands of either Israel or Judah, the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the fortress on a mountaintop with strong defenses. Since it lie on the border of Judah and the rest of Israel, it was like Washington, D.C. when the founding fathers were setting up this country. The founding fathers didn't want the capital of the United States to be in any one state. To truly unite all the states, the capital had to be separate from every state, so they set up the District of Columbia to serve that purpose. In the same way, Jerusalem would make the perfect center of power for David. Like was said earlier, Jerusalem was essentially a fortress and the Jebusites thought it to be impenetrable. They even chided David. "You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off." (5:6) But in the very next verse it says, "Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David." (5:7) With the capture of Jerusalem, God was continuing his work that began in Joshua's time. He was giving the land to his people and removing those who opposed him in the process.

As David became successful as king, other nations began to take notice, some positively, some negatively. The king of Tyre wanted to build David a palace. Tyre was a port

city on the Mediterranean that relied on inland routes through Israelite territory for goods that would come through the port city. In order to maintain good relations, Hiram the king of Tyre sent the best wood and craftsmen to fashion a palace for David. It was a grand gesture that reaffirmed that God had established David as king in Israel. On the other hand, David's rise to power caught the notice of the Philistines. A strong king in the region would upset their power base, so they went up to go find David. At this time, David asks God what to do. "David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands?' The LORD answered him, 'Go, for I will surely deliver the Philistines into your hands.'" (5:19) Sure enough, David goes out and he just thrashes the Philistines. A little later they come back to the same place and David, again asks God what to do. This time, God's words contain a little more strategy. "Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move quickly, because that will mean the LORD has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army." (5:23-24) Again, David put the smack down on the Philistines and they ran off without their idols. The gods they cherished so much were left behind. By this point, David has firmly established as king internal to Israel and externally, too.

That's a long narrative with so much craziness, but by the end of these four chapters, David is firmly enthroned as the king of Israel. He has a capital that is strong and centrally located. The people love him. Plus, the surrounding nations know that he is king over a united Israel. Honestly, that's a long road to the kingship. David was king over Judah for seven and a half years before becoming king over all Israel. Think about this: When Saul died, why didn't God just make David king of everything? Why did he work in this crazy way? Remember, even though everyone apparently knew that David was to be the next king, he was still living in exile for over a year. David was living in enemy territory while Saul was saying some pretty mean things about David. The people may have been wondering if what Saul said was true. If David had come full force, he would not be acting like a man who sought after God. Instead, it would show that David had been secretly manipulating things to put himself in the kingship.

Still, during the time between David becoming king of Judah and becoming king over all Israel, most of the people mentioned are following their own agendas. Abner and Joab seemed to only care about themselves and not the people they served. The two men who killed Ish-Bosheth were trying to get some reward from David. Because of all the selfishness, so many people died. There was the war between the houses of Saul and David that started with the death of twenty-four young men, Abner was murdered, and Ish-Bosheth was killed in his own bed by a couple of thugs. Why in the world would any of these things be a part of God's plan to bring David to power?

Well, think about this: the people were not ready for the king that would unite their people under God's banner. Abner was too strong of a person. His personal ambition drove the policy of Israel. It was because of what Abner said that Ish-Bosheth was installed as king. It was because of Abner's pride that the war between the houses was started. And it was because of Abner's hurt pride that he defected to David. In effect, the people of Israel were pulled in all directions because of Abner. Their hearts were not ready to follow God. They learned from Abner how to follow their own ambition. Only after their whole nation is broken do they personally come to David. Only after Israel had lost all sense of leadership did the elders come to David and crown him king. God was waiting for the perfect time to make David king over Israel. God was waiting for the people to be ready and David didn't aggressively pursue the prize.

That's actually kind of amazing, too. With all the selfish ambition and power grabbing going on in the passage, David remains level headed and continues to trust that God will establish his kingdom. David only seems to try to use peaceful methods to bring the nation together. He neither condones Abner's nor Ish-Bosheth's murder, and when the war between the houses was going on, David was trying to pursue a peaceful solution through the duplicitous Abner. Plus, there are three occasions written down that David asked God directly what to do. Even in such trying times, David does not waiver in his devotion to the Lord. David was seeking after God and by seeking God, the Lord was continuing to mold David into the type of king that Israel would need and look up to for ages to come.

This is not the only time that we see such puzzling methods to God's way. Look at Jesus. Jesus died on the cross to save all humanity from their sins. Peter wrote about Jesus, "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake." (1 Peter 1:20) Before God created the world, he knew what would have to be done to perfect his creation. When Adam and Eve first sinned – when they first walked away from God – God started to reveal his plan while cursing the one who tempted the new people to sin, that serpent Satan. "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; ☐he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15) At that point in time, God promised that he would send someone through a woman to destroy Satan's power and that Satan would still try to strike at him.

For thousands of years, God revealed more and more of his plan to save the world. God revealed a crucial part to a man name Isaiah. "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, ☐yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; ☐the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5) According to these words, the way that we would be healed from our constant depravity would be because God's servant would be crushed and pierced in our place. The Lord's promised savior would have to die a horrible death in order to save us.

When the time came for God's promise to be fulfilled, he sent Jesus to this earth and just the right time to carry out the mission. Peter says of Jesus, "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." (Acts 2:22-24) It was God's deliberate plan to have Jesus be nailed to the cross, but it was also God's deliberate plan to raise Jesus from the dead.

Paul gives a good summary of the meaning behind what Jesus went through as God's servant. "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." (Romans 3:22-26) Jesus' death on the cross is the means by which our shortcomings and sins are rectified. Jesus' death and resurrection are the cure to the disease of sin. God promised salvation from the creation of the world right after the first sin, and he was working out that

promise from that day until the day Jesus came and died. It took thousands of years to fulfill that promise and it is still being fulfilled thousands of years later.

The Jews didn't expect that their savior would die for them. They didn't expect the Messiah to suffer so much. He was to be a conquering hero. When the Messiah arrived, he was to usher in a new era of the might of Israel, but at the time of Jesus, the Romans were oppressing the Jews and Jesus didn't change that. Around 40 years after Jesus died, Jerusalem was demolished and the temple destroyed. However, Jesus came at the perfect time when the people were ready to hear the good news of their salvation. It was a method that nobody expected, but it was God's plan.

Now, you might be wondering how to apply this to your life. I really implore you not to look at David and desire to be like him, but look at God in this passage and desire to know him. The Lord is the great orchestrator. The Lord was faithful to his promise to David. As the promise was being carried out, it looked like everything was going haywire. War and death were everywhere, but God was working to prepare Israel to serve him under David. The people were broken, and when they were broken they knew that they needed God.

In the same way, we can look at our lives and wonder where God is. Our lives as followers of Christ can be filled with horror, grief, and despair because of our situations. I know that there are a lot of people here wondering about their future. There are people concerned about how to provide for their families. And people wondering if all their effort was useless because it hasn't changed a thing. These situations become frustrating and we can lose heart so easily. But, our God is faithful. When we are in hard times, it's like standing in front of a brick wall with our nose to the wall. All we see is the wall and it looks like it has no end. You know, God didn't put that wall there to freak us out. He put it there to lead you down the right path – the path that comes to him. David sought the Lord and sought to do things the Lord's way. He didn't try to take down the wall any way he could.

For the past couple of weeks, I have felt very overloaded. Work has been stressful and concerns at home become stronger as the baby gets closer. Plus, I had to write a message on four huge chapters. I just wanted to shut down and leave it all behind. I wondered when it was all going to end. Is there ever going to be a time of peace in my life? Would I always have to struggle in every aspect of my life? Nevertheless, God is faithful. David went through trying times during the process of becoming king. Yet, the Lord was faithful to David and he became a strong king over a united Israel. When you are filled with despair and loss, when you are frustrated and angry with what is going on, remember God who worked in people for over seven years after Saul's death to give David the throne. Remember that God worked for thousands of years to bring Jesus into this world to bring salvation to all mankind. Remember that God loves you and he is drawing you to him.