

A Rocky Start to David's Reign

The Making of a King: Part 17

2 Samuel 2:1-32

We have now officially entered the reign of King David! Saul (and even more unfortunately his son Jonathan as well) has died in battle and now it is David's time to reign as king over God's people. But unfortunately for David, his reign hasn't exactly begun with all sunshine and roses. Despite being anointed by the prophet Samuel, David faced resistance from certain groups within Israel, likely due to him not being a descendant of Saul.

As a result, David begins his reign in the city of Hebron, where he rules over the tribe of Judah, the first group to accept him as their king. Abner, one of Saul's military generals, takes one of Saul's sons (Ishbosheth) and makes him king over several of the other tribes of Israel. From here, a type of civil war breaks out. But before we dive too deep into the conflict, there is one event that we must make particular note of, and it is basically David's first official act as king.

Discussion Question: A leader's first actions in power often set the tone for the rest of their time in power. Read verses 3-7. How was David establishing what kind of king he would be? What was David showing to be very valuable to him to the people?

Sadly, despite David's completely legitimate claim to the throne, the conflict continues. But why would Abner risk such open rebellion to the king? The answer was simple: for Abner, this was about more than just his position in leadership, it was about his family. One small detail you may not have known about Abner, not only was he the commander of Saul's army, but according to 1 Samuel 14:50, he was Saul's cousin! Clearly, this was about more than just holding a particular position, Abner refused to let his family yield the throne, an ambition which clearly clouded his judgement when making important decisions.

Discussion Question: Read verses 12-17 detailing the interaction between Abner and Joab. Then skip down and read verses 30-31. How had Abner's sin and resulting poor judgement greatly hurt others?

Follow-Up Question: We must always remember that our decisions affect not only ourselves, but those around us. Why is it so important that we understand that our actions, whether positive or negative, can have a domino effect on others? How could our actions have a ripple effect on others that perhaps we hadn't anticipated?

Clearly, Abner made a poor decision here. Not only did Abner lose the fight, but his poor decision-making cost 360 of his men their lives. Our actions, especially when we are in a position, have an effect on others whether we realize it or not. While our actions may not cause life-changing effects on others, we must always remember that no man is an island. Even as church members, our actions effect those that God has placed within our sphere of influence. But what we are about to witness is someone who took good and appropriate action for those under his leadership.

Discussion Question: Read verses 25-32 about Joab's decision in the midst of their pursuit of Abner and his men. How does Joab display good leadership in this case? How does a good leader not only exercise ambition and initiative, but also discernment in knowing when to pursue and when to retreat?

Sometimes we can get the idea that good leadership is always about surging forward, but this is not always the case. Perhaps one of the saddest stories in this regard is the story of Alexander the Great. Alexander is famously known for never losing a battle he led despite being very young to be a commander and even at times being outnumbered. Despite having conquered several of his opponents, his unyielding ambition caused him to continually push forward at the expense of his men. History tells us this ambition had damaged his men's loyalty to him and, had he not tragically passed away in his 20s, likely would have cost him future defeats and potentially his ability to lead. A good leader, yes, possesses ambition, but must also possess enough wisdom and discernment to know when it is best to pull back.

For Personal Reflection: What is the biggest lesson you personally learned from this lesson? Write it out below.