

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

David, by the direction of God, goes up to Hebron, and is there anointed king over the house of Judah, 2 Samuel 2:1-4. He congratulates the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead on their kindness in rescuing the bodies of Saul and his sons from the Philistines, 2 Samuel 2:5-7. Abner anoints Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel; over whom he reigned two years, 2 Samuel 2:8-10. David reigns over Judah, in Hebron, seven years and six months, 2 Samuel 2:11. Account of a battle between Abner, captain of the Israelites, and Joab, captain of the men of Judah; in which the former are routed with the loss of three hundred and sixty men: but Asahel, the brother of Joab, is killed by Abner, vv. 12-32.

Verse 1

David inquired of the Lord - By means of Abiathar the priest; for he did not know whether the different tribes were willing to receive him, though he was fully persuaded that God had appointed him king over Israel.

Unto Hebron - The metropolis of the tribe of Judah, one of the richest regions in Judea. The mountains of Hebron were famed for fruits, herbage, and honey; and many parts were well adapted for vines, olives, and different kinds of grain, abounding in springs of excellent water, as the most accurate travelers have asserted.

Verse 4

Anointed David king - He was anointed before by Samuel, by which he acquired *jus ad regnum*, a right To the kingdom; by the present anointing he had *jus in regno*, authority Over the kingdom. The other parts of the kingdom were, as yet, attached to the family of Saul.

Verse 5

David sent messengers unto - Jabesh-gilead - This was a generous and noble act, highly indicative of the grandeur of David's mind. He respected Saul as his once legitimate sovereign; he loved Jonathan as his most intimate friend. The former had greatly injured him, and sought his destruction; but even this did not cancel his respect for him, as the anointed of God, and as the king of Israel. This brings to my remembrance that fine speech of Saurin, when speaking of the banishment of the Protestants from France by the revocation of the edict of Nantes. He thus at the Hague apostrophizes Louis XIV., their persecutor: *Et toi, prince redoutable, que j'ai honorai jadis comme mon roi, et que je respecte encore comme le fleau do Seigneur.* And thou, O formidable prince, whom I once honored as my king, and whom I still reverence as the scourge of the Lord!

Verse 7

Now let your hands be strengthened - David certainly wished to attach the men of Jabesh to his interest; he saw that they were generous and valiant, and must be of great service to him whose part they espoused; and he was no doubt afraid that they would attach themselves to the house of Saul, in consideration of the eminent services Saul had rendered them in rescuing them from Nahash, king of the Ammonites.

Verse 8

Abner the son of Ner - This man had long been one of the chief captains of Saul's army, and commander-in-chief on several occasions; he was probably envious of David's power, by whom he had often been out-generalled in the field.

Verse 9

Made him king over Gilead - These were places beyond Jordan; for as the Philistines had lately routed the Israelites, they were no doubt in possession of some of the principal towns, and were now enjoying the fruits of their victory. Abner was therefore afraid to bring the new king to any place where he was likely to meet with much resistance, till he had got his army well recruited. Who the Ashurites were is not generally agreed; probably men of the tribe of Ashur.

Verse 10

Ish-bosheth - reigned two years - It is well observed that Ish-bosheth reigned all the time that David reigned in Hebron, which was seven years and six months. Perhaps the meaning of the writer is this: Ish-bosheth reigned two years before any but the tribe of Judah had attached themselves to the interest of David. Some think that Abner in effect reigned the last five years of Ish-bosheth, who had only the name of king after the first two years. Or the text may be understood thus: When Ish-bosheth had reigned two years over Israel, he was forty years of age. Houbigant, dissatisfied with all the common modes of solution, proposes to read x©x©x™x<sup>a</sup>

שש"ש (shishshith shanah), six years, for the שש"ש שש"ש (shetayim shanim), two years, of the text, which he contends is a solecism; for in pure Hebrew the words would be שש"ש שש"ש as they are everywhere read in the first book; and שש"ש is the reading of eleven of Kennicott's MSS., and nine of De Rossi's; but the number two is acknowledged by all the ancient versions, and by all the MSS. yet collated. The critical reader may examine Houbigant on the place. After all, probably the expedition mentioned in the succeeding verses is that to which the writer refers, and from which he dates. Ish-bosheth had reigned two years without any rupture with David or his men, till under the direction of Abner, captain of his host, the Israelites passed over Jordan, from Mahanaim to Gibeon, and being opposed by Joab, captain of David's host, that battle took place which is described in the following verses.

#### Verse 14

Let the young men - play before us - This was diabolical play, where each man thrust his sword into the body of the other, so that the twenty-four (twelve on each side) fell down dead together! But this was the signal for that sanguinary skirmish which immediately took place.

#### Verse 16

Caught every one his fellow by the head - Probably by the beard, if these persons were not too young to have one, or by the hair of the head. Alexander ordered all the Macedonians to shave their beards; and being asked by Parmenio why they should do so, answered, "Dost thou not know that in battle there is no better hold than the beard?"

Helkath-hazzurim - "The portion of the mighty;" or, "The inheritance of those who were slain," according to the Targum.

#### Verse 18

Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe - To be swift of foot was deemed a great accomplishment in the heroes of antiquity; ἵπποπόδες, ἵπποπόδες...ἵππο, ἵπποπόδες...ἵππο, the swift-footed Achilles, is an epithet which Homer gives to that hero no less than thirty times in the course of the Iliad. It has a qualification also among the Roman soldiers; they were taught both to run swiftly, and to swim well.

#### Verse 21

Take thee his armor - It seems Asahel wished to get the armor of Abner as a trophy; this also was greatly coveted by ancient heroes. Abner wished to spare him, for fear of exciting Joab's enmity; but as Asahel was obstinate in the pursuit, and was swifter of foot than Abner, the latter saw that he must either kill or be killed, and therefore he turned his spear and ran it through the body of Asahel. This turning about that he might pierce him is what we translate "the hinder end of his spear." This slaying of Asahel cost Abner his life, as we shall find in the next chapter.

#### Verse 27

And Joab said - The meaning of this verse appears to be this: If Abner had not provoked the battle, (see 2 Samuel 2:14), Joab would not have attacked the Israelites that day; as his orders were probably to act on the defensive. Therefore the blame fell upon Israel.

#### Verse 29

They came to Mahanaim - So they returned to the place whence they set out. See 2 Samuel 2:12. This was the commencement of the civil wars between Israel and Judah, and properly the commencement of the division of the two kingdoms, through which both nations were deluged with blood.