

CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION TO SECOND SAMUEL 4

This chapter relates the concern the death of Abner gave to Ishbosheth, and the men of Israel, (~~1000~~2 Samuel 4:1); the murder of Ishbosheth by two of his captains, who cut off his head, and brought it to David, (~~1000~~2 Samuel 4:2-8); by whom they were rewarded according to their deserts, he putting them to death, and exposing their bodies to shame and ignominy, (~~1000~~2 Samuel 4:9-12).

Ver. 1. *And when Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron*, etc.] By Saul's son is meant Ishbosheth, to whom tidings were soon brought of the death of Abner his general, and that he died in Hebron, where David his rival reigned, and was there murdered by Joab the general of his army:

his hands were feeble: not only in a natural sense, being quite dispirited at hearing such news; but in a civil sense, having lost his main support and strength, he being president of his council, and commander of his forces, and in whom he placed all his confidence: and if he knew nothing of his being at Hebron, it must surprise him to hear of his dying there; from whence he might conclude, that since he was there without his knowledge, it could not be in his favour, some plot was forming, and schemes laying with his rival to dethrone him; or if he knew of it, and understood it in this light, that he was endeavouring to make peace between him and David, and upon advantageous terms to him, of which now he might entertain no hopes; he was dispirited, and might conclude that Joab was against any terms at peace, and therefore had dispatched him:

and all the Israelites were troubled; at the loss of so great a man in their kingdom, and of whose designs to unite them to Judah, and put them under the government David, they were not ignorant; but now were in the utmost confusion, not knowing what step to take, and whom to send to carry on the treaty, in which Abner was concerned; and whether it would be safe for any to go upon it, since he who had the management of it was murdered, and no justice done on the murderer, and therefore might question David's sincerity and uprightness in this affair; these things greatly distressed and

embarrassed them for the present, but Providence opened a way for their future establishment and prosperity.

Ver. 2. *And Saul's son had two men [that were] captains of bands, etc.]* Of troops in the army, or of guards about the person of Ishbosheth son of Saul:

the name of the one [was] Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin; so that these men were brethren in nature, as well as in iniquity; they had the same father, who is described by his name and city, and their names are expressly mentioned and recorded to their infamy; and they were not only the servants of Ishbosheth, who had commissions under him, but were of the same tribe with him; all which is observed as an aggravation of their crime:

for Beeroth also was reckoned to Benjamin; the place from whom Rimmon their father is denominated, and where he dwelt, as well as Gittaim, where they had sojourned, as in (^{<04B>}2 Samuel 4:3). This place, Beeroth, originally belonged to the Gibeonites, and fell to the lot of Benjamin at the division of the land, (see ^{<097>}Joshua 9:17 18:25).

Ver. 3. *And the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and were sojourners there until that day.]* At the death of Saul, when many of the Israelites deserted their cities, and left them to the Philistines, (^{<097>}1 Samuel 31:7); and so the inhabitants of Beeroth forsook their city, which was near the Philistines, and went to Gittaim, a city in the same tribe, though a little further off, (see ^{<01B>}Nehemiah 11:33).

Ver. 4. *And Jonathan, Saul's son, etc.]* His eldest son, who died at the same time with him:

had a son [that was] lame of [his] feet; of both feet, which were broken or bruised by a fall, as later related: and

he was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel: that is, when the tidings of their death came from Jezreel, the place where the battle was fought in which they died, to Gibeah, and the royal palace there; so that he was now twelve years of age:

and his nurse took him up and fled; fearing the Philistines would come thither and destroy the family of Saul; and this child being the son of Jonathan, the eldest son of Saul, was by birth heir to the crown, his father

and grandfather being both dead, and which might make the nurse the more solicitous to save his life by flight:

and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame; in her hurry and fright he dropped out of her arms, and had some bone broken or dislocated, which was never rightly replaced, or had some contusion, of which he was never cured,

and his name [was] Mephibosheth, called Meribbaal, (^{<10B>}1 Chronicles 8:34 9:40); of the change of such names (see Gill on “^{<10B>}2 Samuel 2:8”). This story of Mephibosheth, and of his nurse’s flight with him, and what happened upon it, is here inserted on occasion of the flight of the Beerothites, (^{<10B>}2 Samuel 4:3); but chiefly to observe in what condition Saul’s family now was, and what encouraged the murderers of Ishbosheth to be guilty of the crime they were, since when he was taken off, there was none but this lame child of that family; and as the removal of Ishbosheth would be of so much service to David, they doubted not but it would be very acceptable to him, and they should be greatly rewarded and honoured; and which they might do with the greatest safety, since the nearest kinsman and avenger of blood was so young, and lame of both his feet: or rather this is mentioned to show that Ishbosheth had no right to the throne, his eldest brother’s son being living; so that those murderers might think they did the right thing, to take away the life of an usurper.

Ver. 5. *And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went*, etc.] From Gittaim, where they were sojourners, (^{<10B>}2 Samuel 4:3); or from the army, where they had commissions, wherever it was:

and came, about the heat of the day; the middle of the day, at noon, as follows:

to the house of Ishbosheth; which was at Mahanaim:

who lay on a bed at noon; as was usual in hot countries, especially for great personages, as kings; so the Targum,

“and he was sleeping the sleep of kings;”

or at a time when king’s usually slept; though this is remarked by some as an instance and proof of the sluggishness and inactivity of this prince, who left the management of all affairs to Abner his general, and gave himself to

sloth and sensuality; which, when indulged, bring ruin on princes and their kingdoms.

Ver. 6. *And they came thither into the midst of the house*, etc.] They not only came unto it, but entered into it, and went into the inmost part of it; the guards being asleep also perhaps, or not on duty, so that there were none to obstruct them; or if there were, they deceived them, since they went in

[as though] they would have fetched wheat; out of the king's granaries, for the payment and support of the soldiers under them, who in those days were paid in corn, as were the Roman soldiers^{f76} in later times; and these granaries might not only be in the king's house, but near his bedchamber; for in those ancient ages of simplicity there was not such grandeur in the courts of princes as now; the Targum is,

“as sellers of wheat,”

in the guise and habit of such persons, pretending they came to sell wheat to the king's purveyors, who were at the granaries; or, as others interpret it, they went in along with the wheat merchants as if they belonged to them, and so found their way to the king's bedchamber:

and smote him under the fifth [rib]; (see Gill on “⁴⁰²³2 Samuel 2:23”);

and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped; they got out of the palace after they had committed the murder undiscovered and unsuspected.

Ver. 7. *For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber*, etc.] This is repeated to give a more particular account of the murder; though Abarbinel thinks they went in twice; when they went in first they smote him under the fifth rib, and made their escape; but fearing they had not left him dead, they returned, and did as follows:

and they smote him, and slew him; so that it was out of all doubt with them that he was dead:

and beheaded him; to make sure work of it:

and took his head; along with them, perhaps in one of the sacks they had to fetch wheat in, and so passed undiscovered, to carry to David, to curry favour with him:

and gat them away through the plain all night; through the plain of Jordan; all the way from Mahanaim to Hebron being for the most part a plain country till they came to Hebron, which was mountainous; the way from Mahanaim to Hebron was a space of sixty eight miles, according to Bunting¹⁷⁷.

Ver. 8. *And they brought the head of Ishbosheth unto David to Hebron,* etc.] Supposing it would have been a very acceptable present to him:

and said to the king, behold the head of Ishbosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; all which, his relation to Saul, his enmity to David, and his designs upon his life, are artfully put together to raise the indignation of David against him, and make their present of his head to him the more agreeable:

and the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul and of his seed; for all the evils and injuries they had done him; this being the last of the sons of Saul by a lawful wife, the two remaining were by a concubine; and these men impiously ascribe to the Lord what they with wicked hands had done.

Ver. 9. *And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite,* etc.] In a manner they did not expect:

and said unto them, [as] the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity; spiritual and temporal, especially the latter is meant, and particularly what he had been brought into by the persecution of Saul, while living, and by those that adhered to his house since his death; which he ascribes to the Lord, and doubted not that he would still deliver him, and complete what he had designed for him, and that he needed not the assistance of such wicked hands as theirs; the words contain the form of an oath made to testify the truth of the following narrative, concerning the man that brought the tidings of Saul's death to him, or for the certainty of what he would do those persons for the murder of Ishbosheth.

Ver. 10. *When one told me, saying, behold, Saul is dead,* etc.] No more is related, not that he killed him, or assisted in killing him, only that he was dead; by which it appears, as Abarbinel thinks, that the Amalekite did not slay Saul, and that David did not put him to death on that account, but for what follows:

thinking to have brought good tidings; which would have been very acceptable to David, that he would have rejoiced and exulted at it as he did; but he was mistaken; instead of that,

I took hold of him, and slew him at Ziklag; that is, ordered one of his young men to lay hold on him, and slay him, as he did, (^{<0015>}2 Samuel 1:15);

who [thought] that I would have given him a reward for his tidings; a handsome present, as the Targum here, a gift, or raised him to some post of honour and profit.

Ver. 11. *How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person*, etc.] As Ishbosheth was in comparison of the wicked men that slew him; though not with respect to David, if he knew of his divine designation to the throne; nor with respect to Mephibosheth his eldest brother's son, whose right to the throne was prior to his, which he must know; though with respect to his conduct towards David, in assuming the throne of Israel, it might not be owing to any bad principles of malice and injustice, but to his ignorance of David's having a right to the throne upon his father's death, and by the advice of his friends he took it: the sin of these men in murdering him is aggravated, in that they slew him

in his own palace, upon his bed? in cold blood, and not in the field of battle, not being engaged in war with him; in his own palace, where he might justly think himself in safety; on his bed asleep, and so at an unawares, when insensible of danger, and not in a posture of defence; and now David argues from the lesser to the greater, that if the man that brought him the tidings of Saul's death had no reward given him for bringing what he thought would be reckoned good tidings, then much less would any be given them who had actually slain their master, and that in such a base and barbarous way; and if the above person, who only was a bringer of tidings, was taken and slain, then how much more did they deserve to die, who had been guilty of such a cruel and barbarous murder?

shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hands, and take you away from the earth? avenge his blood on them, by putting them to death, out of the world, and from the land of the living, as men that deserved to live no longer on it.

Ver. 12. *And David commanded his young men, and they slew them*, etc.] He ordered some of his guards about him to fall on them, and put them to death; and they accordingly did:

and cut off their hands and their feet; their hands, which had smote Ishbosheth, and cut off his head; and their feet, which had been swift to shed his blood, and made haste to bring his head so many miles to David; this was what the Jews call measure for measure:

and hanged [them] up over the pool in Hebron; not their hands and their feet, but the trunks of their bodies, thus mutilated; so Theodoret; though others think their hands and their feet were hung up, and not their bodies, because dead bodies were not to hang upon the tree more than a day; they were hung up over the fish pool in Hebron, because a public place, and where they were the more exposed to their shame, and the terror of others:

but they took the head of Ishbosheth, and buried [it] in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron; by order of David no doubt, who it seems had made, or ordered to be made, a sepulchre, for Abner, (see ~~1088~~ 2 Samuel 3:38); all which David did to show his regard to the family of Saul, his abhorrence of such execrable murders, and to remove all suspicion of his being concerned in them, and to conciliate the minds of the Israelites to him.