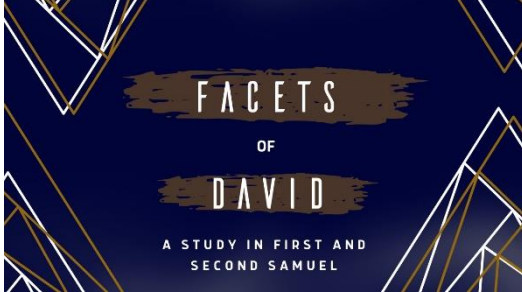


S l i d e 1		Prayer Greeting
S l i d e 2		Today's topic is: Nobody Needs an Avenger. Right now, there is chaos in Moscow. A Russian mercenary chief, Yevgeny Prigozhin, has taken control of the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don near the Ukrainian border, in an armed mutiny. He is threatening to send 25,000 highly trained troops to Moscow with the goal of ousting the Defense Ministry leadership. According to Prigozhin, the Defense Ministry has been incompetent. However, his real axe to grind is that he blames them for killing a huge number of his fighters in an airstrike. Prigozhin wants to avenge these fighters and their families. This is the most significant internal threat that Putin has encountered. Nobody knows how this will turn out. However, it is the perfect introduction to our topic.



First Point

Divided Loyalties

In Sunday School lessons from our childhood, we learned a very simple outline of Israel's monarchy. There were two distinct eras. The United Monarchy consisted of the reigns of Israel's first three kings, Saul, David and Solomon. The ineffective launch of Israel's fourth King, Rehoboam led to the second era: the Divided Monarchy consisting of the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It looks good on maps and timelines, but history rarely follows simple patterns. The truth is that the United Monarchy was not very united during the reign of King Saul and the beginning of King David's reign. A more accurate descriptive would be that this was a kingdom torn by divided loyalties.

King Saul became king of a loose confederation of twelve tribes. Truth be told, the situation was more like Pakistan or Afghanistan today where tribal loyalties far exceed loyalty to the larger state.

And then, early in his reign we saw that despite many impressive military victories, Saul became pride-filled and lost God's confidence. Much of his reign is spent trying to kill David who has been anointed his replacement and has gained the confidence of many of Saul's subjects. We tend to assume that upon Saul's death, all of the divisions would suddenly heal. The United Monarchy would cease to be a "contradiction in terms"; true unity would finally exist. However, the truth is far more complicated. Divided loyalties continue into the reign of King David.

Turn with me to 2 Samuel 2:1-11:

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 So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³ And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived

in the towns of Hebron. ⁴ And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. When they told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul," ⁵ 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. ⁶ Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing. ⁷ 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."

⁸ But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, ⁹ and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ And the time that David was king in Hebron

over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

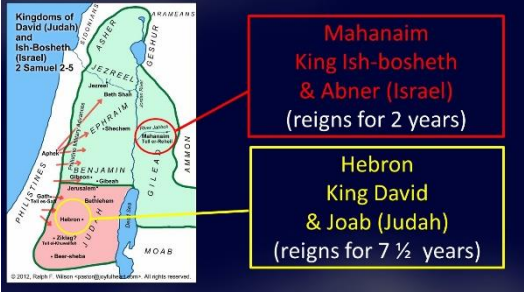
There are a few key observations I would like to make about the opening four verses.

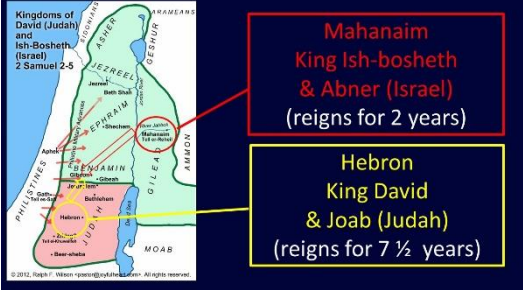
Verse 1 begins the account of David's rise to power with the words, "***And David inquired of the LORD.***" David asked if he should go up to Judah, and then he asked which city he should go to. In all likelihood he summoned Abiathar the Priest whose ephod contained the sacred lots, the Urim and Thummim. Whether guided by God's direct word or by God controlling the fall of the lots, David relied upon God for direction. We didn't see this in Saul, nor will we see it in most of the kings to follow.

Application:

This raises an important question. Do we pray before big decisions? Or do we rely on logic and experience without seeking God? How many bad decisions were avoidable had we sought God. I'm preaching to myself right now!

		A second observation is the way in which David rewarded the men of Jabesh Gilead who valiantly recovered the body of Saul. David may have seen this as an opportunity to start gaining the allegiance of the tribes of Israel, especially Saul’s tribe of Benjamin. However, I think there is more than opportunism. We see here David’s genuine gratitude. He esteemed God’s anointed king and those who showed him kindness. There is no indication that the men of Jabesh Gilead supported David – but David was setting the tone of his future rule over all the tribes.		
S i d e 4	The Family of Saul <table><tr><td> • Ish Bosheth ➢ Fourth son of Saul. ➢ Name changed from Ishbaal (Man of Baal) to Ish-bosheth (Man of Shame) </td><td> • Abner ➢ Son of Ner (Saul’s brother) ➢ Name means (My father is Ner) </td></tr></table> Ish Bosheth and Abner were cousins.	• Ish Bosheth ➢ Fourth son of Saul. ➢ Name changed from Ishbaal (Man of Baal) to Ish-bosheth (Man of Shame)	• Abner ➢ Son of Ner (Saul’s brother) ➢ Name means (My father is Ner)	As we move into 2 Samuel 2, verses 8-11 we see that the conflict that occurs is not a war between two nations. It’s not even, in the truest sense of the term, a civil war. It is a war between two families. The first family is the family of the deceased king – The family of Saul. • Ish Bosheth is the youngest son of Saul. He is the fourth, or maybe even the fifth son, depending on whether he is to be identified with Ishvi, a son of Saul who did not die on
• Ish Bosheth ➢ Fourth son of Saul. ➢ Name changed from Ishbaal (Man of Baal) to Ish-bosheth (Man of Shame)	• Abner ➢ Son of Ner (Saul’s brother) ➢ Name means (My father is Ner)			

		late David is in the birth order, his nephews were probably close to his own age.
S l i d e 6		The next key part of the story is a quick geography lesson. • Ish Bosheth is in Mahanaim, in the eastern part of the tribe of Manasseh in the Transjordan. Why is Ish Bosheth at the fringe of his nation? Because the Philistines control much of the land west of the Jordan River. • King David is in Hebron. This is a very important city. Abraham lived here 1000 years earlier. Sarah is buried here. Joseph's bones were brought from Egypt to Hebron. It is the principle city of Judah in David's day. At this point, 5 years have passed. David has been ruling Judah from Hebron. Abner has been leading the coalition of those loyal to Saul. It's a stalemate.

S l i d e 7		Which brings us to our second point: The Battle of Gibeon. I want to encourage you to follow with me in your Bibles. I can't possibly read all the verses in these two chapters. So, let me summarize. Abner's ambition leads him to break the status quo. He convinces his weak cousin to take on David.
S l i d e 8		Abner and Ish bosheth travel to the southeast and gather in Gibeon, near Saul's stronghold of Gibeah. David perceives the threat and moves due north, and the two armies meet at the Pool of Gibeon.
S l i d e 9	The Field of the Sword Edges 2 Samuel 2:12-17 	The Pool of Gibeon was actually a menacing underground reservoir, over 80 feet deep. Abner comes up with a plan and proposes to Joab that rather than two armies killing each other and hundreds losing their lives, they should each appoint 12 champions. Whichever team won would win the battle and the

		other army would surrender. Similar to what happened with David and Goliath. However, what happens next is a very different outcome. The twenty-four champions run with all their might, and each one grabs his opponent and pulls him into his sword. All 24 die in an instant. The field around the Pool of Gibeon came to be called the “Field of the Sword Edges.” Abner and Joab’s plan fails so the bloody battle they sought to avoid takes place and David’s forces are victorious. However, after the victory, Ish Bosheth’s general, Abner, is retreating in order to regroup. However, he is pursued by Joab’s brother, Asahel. This will set up the vengeance story of these two chapters.
S l i d e 1 0	Asahel vs. Abner 2 Samuel 2:18-23 	Turn with me to 2 Samuel 2 starting in verse 18: <i>18 And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. 19 And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand</i>

nor to the left from following Abner. ²⁰ Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Is it you, Asahel?" And he answered, "It is I." ²¹ 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. ²² 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?" ²³ 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.

It seems that Abner, as the commanding general of Ish Bosheth's army, would have been heavily armored – but he had a head start. Asahel, on the other hand, is described as being as fleet-footed as a gazelle. He was probably carrying a bow, lightly armored and

much faster than Abner. He's gaining and gaining on Abner.

There is an unmistakable contrast between these two men.

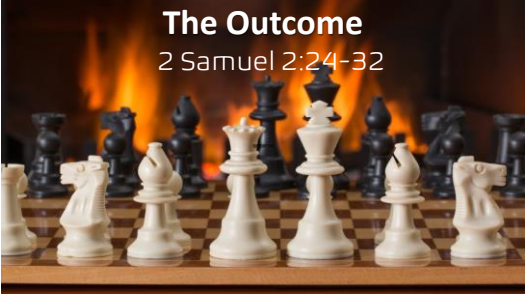
Asahel is relentless. He is probably trying to get close enough to get off an arrow or a spear thrust. He won't stand down, no matter what Abner says.

Abner, although ambitious and ruthless in his own right, is more measured. Asahel wants a war trophy, like Abner's armor... or head! Abner sees the bigger picture. He doesn't want to have to kill Asahel. Although Joab was his enemy, he respected his ability to inflict damage if roused.

The text tells us that Abner struck the rapidly advancing Asahel with the blunt side of his spear. However, the combination of Abner's strength and Asahel's momentum led to the fatal albeit unintended outcome.

Application

Let's pause for a moment. Persistence is good. Jesus encouraged us to be persistent in

		prayer. However, God once corrected Paul for being too persistent in his prayers concerning his “thorn in the flesh.” Paul wasn’t simply persistent. He was relentless. The Bible is filled with far more unfortunate examples of relentlessness. Let me give just two brief examples. • Solomon is relentless in his pursuit of pleasure. • Satan is relentless in his pursuit of power and worship. When we are relentless, we can get so lost in our pursuits that we lose all perspective... all caution... all restraint. Asahel was relentless. It cost him his life. Abner was more measured. But when the men of Judah came to the place of Asahel’s death, they stopped... all but Asahel’s brothers, Joab and Abishai.
S l i d e 1 1	 The Outcome 2 Samuel 2:24-32	2 Samuel 2:24-32 describes the outcome of these events. • Joab and Abishai continue to pursue Abner.

- Both armies regather for a second bloody battle. Turn with me to 2 Samuel 2:26-28:

²⁶ 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?”

²⁷ 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.” ²⁸ So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight anymore.

The Battle of Gibeon ends with an uneven outcome. Joab lost 20 men, including Asahel. Abner lost 360 men. Abner and his army return to Mahanaim and Joab and his men return to Hebron.

S l i d e 1 2		The Third Point that I would like to share is entitled: Abner the Defector In this chapter, we will see betrayal, revenge, arrogance, humility... a cornucopia of the good, the bad and the ugly.
S l i d e 1 3	2 Samuel 3:1 <i>There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.</i>	2 Samuel Chapter 3 begins with an important statement: <i>There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.</i> Although there was a pause in hostilities at the end of chapter 2, we now see that there have been many battles since, and that the Family of Saul is collapsing. Two weeks ago, Mike Platt spoke about these next few verses about David's 6 sons born through 6 wives. We'll skip these verses and resume the main story starting in verse 6.

The Accusation

2 Samuel 3:6-11



In 2 Samuel 3 verse 6 we read that the wars continued and that **“Abner was making himself strong in the House of Saul.”** The biblical text never interprets this statement fully. Was Abner ambitious and positioning himself to replace his weaker cousin? Or was he simply growing in his reputation? It would seem that Ish Bosheth was intimidated and this prompts an accusation. Ish Bosheth accuses Abner of taking up with one of Saul’s concubines named Rizpah. The text is silent on another key detail. It does not tell us whether Abner had done so or was unjustly accused. If he did take one of Saul’s women, this was treason. What we do have is Abner’s response:

⁸ Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, “Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. ⁹ God do so

		<i>to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him,¹⁰ 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.”</i> <i>¹¹ And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.</i> Abner’s question, “<i>Am I a dog’s head of Judah</i>” seems similar to our saying, “<i>You’re treating me like a dog.</i>” I’m the leader of your armies, not the leader of a pack of dogs. Abner comes right out with his intention to support David and Ish Bosheth does nothing but cringe in fear.
S i d e 1 5	 The Agreement 2 Samuel 3:12-25	As the chapter continues, we see that Abner and David come to an agreement. Abner sends messages to David offering to “<i>cut a covenant</i>” with him. However, David sets one pre-condition. He asks for Abner to return his wife, Michal, the daughter of Saul to him. You may remember that he paid a handsome dowry for her – 100 Philistine

	foreskins. Unless Abner does so, there will be no face-to-face meeting or covenant agreement. Saul took Michal away from David and gave her to another man to marry. David already has six wives. Why is he so interested in Michal? Because she is the daughter of King Saul. In re-incorporating her into his family he re-establishes a legitimate claim to Saul's kingdom. Michal's new husband follows her weeping, but Abner finally orders him back home. He then meets with the elders of Israel and convinces them to support David. Abner meets David in Hebron with 20 of his own men. He is ever the General. Abner restores Michal to David and says in verse 21: <i>"I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So, David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.</i>
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		The civil war is as good as over. Peace is around the corner... Enter Joab.
Slide 16		Which leads to my final point: Joab the Avenger This is one of the saddest tales in all the Bible. In it we see the true ugliness of the vengeful spirit.
Slide 17		Joab learns that Abner had met with David in Hebron. In verses 24-25 we see the intensity and audacity of Joab as he disputes with David: <i>²⁴ Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? ²⁵ You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing."</i> Joab dresses King David down like he's an inexperienced school boy. He has a valid concern. There are good reasons not to trust the ambitious Abner. But Joab's behavior gives us a glimpse into his

		dark heart. It also gives us an early glimpse into something we rarely see in David. He fears this nephew.
S l i d e 1 8	 Joab's Revenge 2 Samuel 3:26-27	Joab storms out and gets right to work. In verse 26 we read a dastardly account of Joab's revenge: <i>²⁶ When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know about it. ²⁷ And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.</i> There are a two key observations to be made. 1. First, Hebron was a “City of Refuge.” Under the Law of Moses, it was illegal for Joab to kill someone inside this city, especially one seeking refuge. Notice that Joab meets Abner at the gates. Joab pulls Abner outside the gate and kills him there.

		2. Second, notice where the fatal blow was delivered. To Abner's stomach, the very place where Joab's brother Asahel was struck.
S l i d e 1 9	 David's Response 2 Samuel 3:28-39	The remainder Chapter 3 tells the heartfelt response of David. • David denies any part in Abner's slaying. He says in verse 28: <i>"I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD for the blood of Abner the son of Ner.</i> • He then curses Joab's family. It's a somewhat graphic curse that reveals the depth of David's anger towards Joab. • Finally, David publicly mourns Abner and puts on the ancient Israelite equivalent of a "State Funeral." In this funeral, he writes an ode to Abner. He also humiliates his nephews, making them tear their clothes, wear sackcloth

and walk before the bier
containing Abner's body.

The chapter ends with David fasting, the people expressing concern for him, and all the people see that David was innocent and genuinely remorseful for Abner's death. The closing two verses, 38 and 39, are powerful:

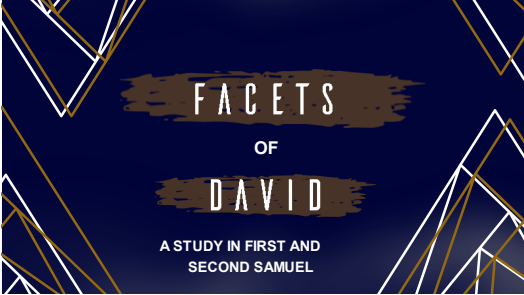
³⁸ And the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? ³⁹ And I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I. The LORD repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!"

These words set up the remainder of David's reign as he continues to struggle with his vengeful nephews and learns the lesson that "Nobody Needs an Avenger."

Vengeance is mine, says the LORD.

S l i d e 2 0	 3 Applications	What do we do with a fractured tale like this? I would like to share three applications – principles that we can apply in our context.
S l i d e 2 1		The first lesson is that Divided loyalties break people and nations apart. We learn this lesson on several fronts. Obviously, our text began with a nation torn between two families, the family of David, God’s chosen successor to King Saul, and the family of Saul that refused to accept God’s choice. But, throughout the story of David’s life we will see the way that David’s divided loyalties at home create a fractured fairy tale. Multiple wives always vying for attention, sons and daughters thrown together with raging sibling rivalries. And we see this in our nation too. Broken families. Children with four last names. Baby mommas... Baby Daddies... we are watching the breakdown of the American Family and reaping the consequences. Do everything you can to live within

		God's moral and social boundaries. Safeguard and invest in your marriage. Be an engaged parent! God's way is the only way that leads to wholeness and health.
S l i d e 2 2	 It's never too late to change the road you're on!	The second lesson comes from Abner. Abner causes great chaos. His unwillingness to accept God's choice of David resulted in great and needless loss of life. However, this very gray and checkered character teaches us that It's never too late to change the road you're on! Today is the day of salvation. Jesus can forgive all your sins. Jesus will forgive years and even decades of rebellion. God's grace is greater than we can begin to imagine, and you can change your eternal destiny right now!

S l i d e 2 3	 Not dealing with vengeful people comes back to bite you!	Finally, the story of David and Joab is not over. Joab will cause David even greater pain, which we will see in coming weeks. David's reticence to deal with Joab and Abishai teaches us that: Not dealing with vengeful people comes back to bite you! Vengeful people never tire of seeking revenge, left to their own devices. Only God can purge the angry heart of its insatiable need for revenge. Will you surrender your pain and anger to God?
S l i d e 2 4	 FACETS OF DAVID A STUDY IN FIRST AND SECOND SAMUEL	Let's Pray.