

## 2 Sam 1-2 “Proper Pursuits”

Good evening and thank you for joining us. We now start our study in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel so would you please turn there in your Bibles?

First Samuel records David's preparation. Second Samuel records his reign. I'm calling this study 'tribulations and triumph' because that's really what we'll discover each week.

We're gonna study chapter 1-verse 1 of chapter 3, and the title of tonight's message is Proper Pursuits

Let's pray

1 Samuel ends with the sad death of King Saul and 3 of his sons, including Jonathan. **1 Samuel 31 3 The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers.**

**4 Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me."**

**But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. 5 And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. 6 So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.** It was the sad ending of a tragic life. Saul died hardened and bitter against both God and man.

This is where we pick up...

**1 Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had stayed two days in Ziklag, 2 on the third day, behold, it happened that a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust**

on his head. So it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself. Torn clothes and a dust bath were tell-tale signs of grief, agony, and loss. David sees this walking telegram and knows this guy was in deep distress and has some news.

3-5

3 And David said to him, “Where have you come from?”

So he said to him, “I have escaped from the camp of Israel.”

4 Then David said to him, “How did the matter go? Please tell me.”

And he answered, “The people have fled from the battle, many of the people are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also.”

5 So David said to the young man who told him, “How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?” now there’s much debate over the next several verses, we just saw in 1 Samuel that Saul fell on his own sword. But that’s not what is described here...

6-8

6 Then the young man who told him said, “As I happened by chance to be on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. 7 Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, ‘Here I am.’ 8 And he said to me, ‘Who are you?’ So I answered him, ‘I am an Amalekite.’ Remember the sin that caused God to withdraw the Holy Spirit from Saul and anoint David as king? It was Saul’s failure to kill all the Amalekites.

9 He said to me again, ‘Please stand over me and kill me, for anguish has come upon me, but my life still remains in me.’

10 So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord.” So, is the Amalekite making this all up? Quite possible. It’s also possible that the events in 1 Samuel 31 had already transpired and this also happened. Some think that Saul fell on his sword, but his suicide attempt failed, so he asked this Amalekite to finish the job.

If this story from the Amalekite is true, it’s ironic that it’s an Amalekite who finishes off Saul.

So as he’s telling David this story, I’m sure the Amalekite thought Saul’s death would be reason to celebrate for David, and bring a reward-perhaps a post in David’s new government. But the Amalekite made a critical mistake- he didn’t know the heart of David...

11 Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. Out of pure jealousy, hatred, spite, and ungodliness, Saul took away David’s family, home, career, security, and caused David to be on the lamb for many years of David’s life. On top of that Saul was utterly unrepentant to the end.

Yet David was heartbroken when he learned of Saul’s death.

This contrast between David and Saul reveals a critical truth for all of us. It proves that any hatred, bitterness, and unforgiveness we may have are chosen by us, not imposed on us. As badly as Saul treated David, David refused to be bitter or full of resentment.

12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the

house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.”

Remember what Saul's death now meant for David.

He could finally go home, and be reunited with family and friends. The throne God anointed him to occupy was vacant - waiting on him to claim. And, Saul's death meant David's life was no longer in constant threat. David could now settle and live in the land that he loved.

But rather than celebrate, David rips his clothes, fasts and mourns.

Here's an important example for us... David takes no joy in another man's sorrow. I'm afraid a lot of Christians would celebrate at the death of certain political leaders-but clearly that's wrong.

13 Then David said to the young man who told him, “Where are you from?”

And he answered, “I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite.” The young Amalekite probably thought that David was preparing to reward him.

14 So David said to him, “How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?” Despite many opportunities to legitimately defend himself, David refused to reach out and destroy Saul. David knew that since God put Saul on the throne, it was up to God to end Saul's evil reign.

15 Then David called one of the young men and said, “Go near, and execute him!” And he struck him so that he died. 16 So David said to him, “Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the LORD's anointed.’” The Amalekite's actions didn't reflect David's attitude.

If David lets this man live, it'll be seen as his stamp of approval on Saul's death.

17 Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son, 18 and he told them to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow; indeed it is written in the Book of Jasher: The Book of Jasher is an ancient text that no longer exists. Apparently, it was an extra-biblical Jewish history.

Several books written in the Middle Ages were given this name – even modern Mormons have a book by this title - but none of them are the original.

So the rest of the chapter contains the psalm David composes “The Song of the Bow”.

19 “The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places!

How the mighty have fallen! 3 times in this psalm David will say how the mighty have fallen.

20 Tell it not in Gath,

Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon—

Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,

Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. David doesn't want the news shared with Israel's enemies, giving them an opportunity to rejoice over Saul's death.

21 “O mountains of Gilboa,

Let there be no dew nor rain upon you,

Nor fields of offerings.

For the shield of the mighty is cast away there!

The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. The implication here is that Saul was not prepared for battle. The ancient Hebrews saturated their shields in olive oil to help deflect the arrows.

Of course, olive oil was not the only oil that Saul lacked. In a spiritual sense the oil of the Holy Spirit had departed from King Saul long before this battle. Saul lacked God's help and assistance - and was defeated.

22 From the blood of the slain,

From the fat of the mighty,

The bow of Jonathan did not turn back,

And the sword of Saul did not return empty. Both Saul and Jonathan fought valiantly.

23 "Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives,

And in their death they were not divided;

They were swifter than eagles,

They were stronger than lions. What an insight into David's heart. He assumes the best about his enemy. Saul's reign as king did start out well-it started out "beloved and pleasant" but of course, it ended tragically and bitterly.

24-26

24 "O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,

Who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury;

Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

25 "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!

Jonathan was slain in your high places.

26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;

You have been very pleasant to me;

Your love to me was wonderful,

**Surpassing the love of women.** As we talked about a couple of weeks ago – this language is not evidence of a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan. David is declaring that he had never had a friend as loyal and true as Jonathan. Not even his own wives had been as faithful a friend to him.

27 “How the mighty have fallen,

And the weapons of war perished!”

All this is a powerful testimony of how David kept his heart free from bitterness, even when he was greatly wronged and sinned against. David fulfilled **1 Corinthians 13:5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;**

This is why the Bible tells us in **1 Peter 4:8: And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”**

## Chapter 2

1 It happened after this that David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?”

And the LORD said to him, “Go up.”

David said, “Where shall I go up?”

And He said, “To Hebron.” With Saul’s death, the door seems open for David to return home to the land of Israel and immediately take the throne. But instead of barging full-steam ahead, David first consults the Lord.

Verse 1 gives the key to David's triumphs, specifically, his dependence on God. Verse 2 gives the key to his tragedy, his insatiable appetite for multiple wives...

**2 So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite.**

Michal, David's first wife, is not mentioned, because Saul had taken her from David and had given her to another man-she pops back up on the scene next week.

3-4

**3 And David brought up the men who were with him, every man with his household. So they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.**

**4 Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, "The men of Jabesh Gilead were the ones who buried Saul."** David actually gets anointed king 3 times. The first time was by Samuel while David was still living in his father's house. The second time is here when he returns to Judah and the city of Hebron.

The third time he's anointed will occur 7 years later when he becomes king over all Israel.

Its interesting one anointing was not enough. David received a fresh anointing every time God enlarged his sphere of influence. I think this is a great picture of our need for multiple fillings of the Holy Spirit. New challenges demand fresh empowerment.

**5 So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead, and said to them, "You are blessed of the LORD, for you have shown this kindness to your lord, to Saul, and have buried him. David showed gratitude to the men who risked their lives to honor the memory of Saul and Jonathan by burying them. Their bodies were hung on walls in the city of Bet Shan**



6 And now may the LORD show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing. 7 Now therefore, let your hands be strengthened, and be valiant; for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.” Just as David punished the Amalekite’s disregard for Saul, here David rewards Jabesh Gilead respect for Saul.

But there’s trouble brewing...8-9

8 But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul’s army, took Ishbosheth<sup>[fn]</sup> the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim; 9 and he made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, over Benjamin, and over all Israel.

Saul had three sons who died with him in battle, yet there is no previous mention of Ishbosheth among the sons of Saul. This has led to many theologians believing Ishobosheth was an illegitimate son or the son of a concubine. Ishbosheth’s name means “man of shame”.

General Abner tries to continue Saul’s dynasty by installing Saul’s son Ishobesheth as king– and now rival kingdoms result.

And now Abner rallies almost all of Israel, and says that Ishbosheth is the new king.

10 Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. Only the house of Judah followed David. For two years David allowed Ishbosheth to reign over most of Israel. These two years showed remarkable patience, longsuffering, and trust in God will on David’s part.

David seemed to have every right to crush this man who stood in the way of his calling. Yet out of trust in the LORD and respect for Saul's memory, David waited.

Think about what would've happened if David didn't wait upon the Lord here. An all out civil war could've erupted if David hadn't shown restraint. As usual David decided to trust the Lord to settle the dispute and reunite the kingdom.

Wiersbe said: "There's a modern touch to this scenario, for our political and religious worlds are populated by these same three kinds of people. We have weak people like Ish-Bosheth, who get where they are because they have 'connections.' We have strong, selfish people like Abner, who know how to manipulate others for their own personal profit. We also have people of God like David who are called, anointed, and equipped, but must wait for God's time before they can serve."

**11 And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.** David shares the kingdom with Ishbosheth for two years - then reigns 5½ more years in Hebron, before eventually moving his capitol to the city of Jerusalem.

Sadly this division in Israel is a preview of what will happen 80 years later during the reign of David's grandson, Rehoboam. The kingdom will divide north and south.

The rest of chapter 2 describes a skirmish that took place between the two armies of Ishobeshth and David.

12-13

**12 Now Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. 13 And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them**

by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down, one on one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool. Joab was apparently one of the 400 men who joined David at the cave at Adullam.

So let's recap the players here. In the left corner, you have Abner was Saul's general and is the one hey, Ishobsheth is king. Joab is David's commander. And we're about to see a fascinating confrontation between two similar men.

Abner and Joab were each tough, military men who were completely devoted to their cause.

14 Then Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men now arise and compete before us."

And Joab said, "Let them arise." Now remember the scene-there's no ongoing war within Israel at this time. Here are two armies on border patrol who end up at the same watering hole. I'm sure the soldiers are bored. When Abner says let them compete, in the Hebrew it's 'sahaq', which means to sport or play.

Abner decides to break up the boredom with a competition. He challenges David's general, Joab, to a friendly challenge. **SHOW PIC** This isn't war – this is the Army-Navy football game. Give the soldiers something to do in peacetime. **CLOSE PIC**

15-17

15 So they arose and went over by number, twelve from Benjamin, followers of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. 16 And each one grasped his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called the Field of Sharp Swords,[fn] which is in Gibeon. 17 So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were

beaten before the servants of David. Well, that escalated quickly. A sporting event ends up a “very fierce battle.” Two dozen soldiers square off for a friendly competition-but tempers flare - competitors get carried away - someone draws blood. Before you know it, an innocent competition turns into a bloody brawl.

Two dozen men end up dead in the field, and both armies jump into the fray. And when Abner sees that David’s men are winning he tries to escape.

18 Now the three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab and Abishai and Asahel. And Asahel was as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle. Joab, David’s general, has a brother named Asahel, and he’s known for his running speed.

19-22

19 So Asahel pursued Abner, and in going he did not turn to the right hand or to the left from following Abner.

20 Then Abner looked behind him and said, “Are you Asahel?” He answered, “I am.”

21 And Abner said to him, “Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and lay hold on one of the young men and take his armor for yourself.” But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. 22 So Abner said again to Asahel, “Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab?” Abner knows what’s about to happen. A young, inexperienced Asahel is no match for a battle-hardened warrior general. Abner doesn’t want to kill Asahel – it’ll make Joab mad.

23 However, he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, so that the spear came out of his back; and he fell down there and died on the spot.

So it was that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still. This whole story is a pointed reminder that there are some battles in life not worth fighting. Rather than push on it's just better to back off.

I like the quote that says "A bulldog can whip a skunk, but is it really worth the effort?"

Certainly, there are causes in life so important they're worth dying for – they're deserving of sacrificial effort.

But other campaigns are better off abandoned. Tragically, people all around us have spent their entire lives chasing an Abner... Perhaps its fame, or money, or success. They're in hot pursuit, they've thrown caution to the wind. But have they truly considered what it'll cost them to catch Abner? And if they ever catch him, will the results be worth the sacrifice?

It's amazing how the pursuit of a dream can become a nightmare if it is not directed by God. We all need to evaluate our motives.

**24 Joab and Abishai also pursued Abner.** It's not just David, now they wanted to avenge the killing of their brother Asahel.

...**24 And the sun was going down when they came to the hill of Ammah, which is before Giah by the road to the Wilderness of Gibeon. 25 Now the children of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became a unit, and took their stand on top of a hill.** Asahel's brothers, Joab and Abishai, take off after Abner. The Benjamites—Saul's tribe—show up on the scene with fresh reinforcements.

**26 Then Abner called to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?"** This will go on and on," Abner called to

Joab. "It will be a feud that will never be resolved. Let's stop now before it becomes a bitter burden to both of us and to our nation."

27-31

27 And Joab said, "As God lives, unless you had spoken, surely then by morning all the people would have given up pursuing their brethren." 28 So Joab blew a trumpet; and all the people stood still and did not pursue Israel anymore, nor did they fight anymore. 29 Then Abner and his men went on all that night through the plain, crossed over the Jordan, and went through all Bithron; and they came to Mahanaim

30 So Joab returned from pursuing Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel. 31 But the servants of David had struck down, of Benjamin and Abner's men, three hundred and sixty men who died. . V 17 told us Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David, but V31 provides more detail. Abner and the army of Ishbosheth lost 360 men to 20 in the army of David.

32 Then they took up Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb, which was in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at daybreak.