

David: Excerpt for Website

“What news of my brother-in-law?” Ish-Boshet asked Abner, adjusting the thin royal circlet of gold he’d taken to wearing upon his head as a sign of his princely rank.

Blinking, Abner returned his focus to the present. “Interesting news, Sire, very interesting! It seems that when David returned to Ziklag, the Amalekites had sacked the town and taken all the women, including David’s wives, in revenge for David’s slaying of the Amalekite leader who’d brought him news of Saul’s death.”

Full of anticipation, Ish-Boshet sat upright and leaned toward Abner. “And...?” he said.

“They say David and his men wept until they could weep no more and then their grief, turned to anger and their anger turned on David. They began to murmur and mumble and blame David for leaving Ziklag unguarded and thus allowing the Amalekites to enter the city.

“As he had in the past, David, prayed. Faced with a mutinous Army, David, told them that he would ask God what they should do. The men grumbled but allowed him to pray. Kneeling down, David claimed his oneness with all that is and spoke of the Lord as his Shepherd.”

“The Covenant....” Ish-Boshet mumbled.

“Yes, my Lord. It is said your brother-in-law frequently prays this way both in public and private, tho he also honors the priests and Laws as the Scrolls require.”

“Yes, yes,” Ish-Boshet said, irritated, thinking of what his grandmother and aunt had told him and urged him to do. “Go on. And then, after praying?”

“He told them that God would direct them through the casting of lots. They would be guided by a simple Yes or No. Some grumbled, but as this was what they had been done when the warriors were too frightened to carry out a raid on the Philistines at Keilah, so the majority acquiesced.

“‘Shall I pursue? Shall I overtake them?’ he asked and the lots were cast. ‘Pursue’ came the answer. Thus assured of victory, David’s warriors quickly forgot their anger.” Abner smiled and shook his head. “Apparently his covenant with God, saved him once again.”

Ish-Boshet was angry. If Abner had been a different kind of man, he might have cowered from the Prince’s anger. But he was General of the Armies and Saul’s first cousin had served the House of Saul loyally for more than a decade. Besides, Ish-Boshet needed Abner more than Abner needed the Prince. Tho Ish-Boshet might very well be King one day, if Abner chose to make him one, the Army, or what was left of it, was loyal to Abner. “Go on,” the Prince said.

“Within the hour they had gathered food and water for two days march and set off. So filled with hope and the promise of God were they, that they sang as they marched. Near the end of the first day’s march, they found a young Egyptian boy with a broken arm and dislocated shoulder. Only David spoke the boy’s language. After binding him up, David

told his warriors: “This Egyptian boy has been a slave to the Amalekites who raided our village. In exchange for our good treatment of him and his eventual freedom, he will show us the way to their encampment.” The warriors cheered; the Lord’s promise to David was unfolding as promised.”

Ish-Boshet refilled his cup. “Is this not like the Exodus in reverse?” He said.

“Indeed!” Abner said, smiling. “While the Egyptians enslaved and abused us, David healed and freed the Egyptian.

“Three days later, the boy led them to the Amalekite camp. That evening, David and his warriors fell upon the raiders slaughtering all of them and freeing their prisoners.

“David is no ordinary tribal chieftain, Ish-Boshet,” Abner warned. “He is blessed by both God and Yahweh, and is able to use both the Covenant and the Scrolls. He radiates an attractive inner power as well as great physical strength and sensuality. You know how close he and your brother Jonathan were.” Ish-Boshet scowled. “David is a fierce warrior, poet, musician, and politician.” Abner stared challengingly into Ish-Boshet’s eyes. “You, Prince, are none of those things.”

Ish-Boshet stared back for as long as he could then looked down and away. “You would not dare say those things to my father,” he said in a whiny voice.

Abner continued staring. “I had no need to say those things to your father. King Saul was a great and remarkable man.” The general swallowed hard. “It was my great privilege to serve him and fight at his side.”

“Yes, yes, I know,” Ish-Boshet said, waving his hand as if shooing a fly. “Alright. David is no ordinary chieftain. What do you recommend?”

“David is above all a Judean,” Abner said. “His mid range goal will be to consolidate his power in Judea, make alliances by war and marriage and bribery, with the other chieftains in that country.” Ish-Boshet nodded. “My recommendation, Prince, is that you too begin making alliances. That you climb down from your aloof perch and become more of a politician and more personable, more like you brother Jonathan.” Tho Abner was sensitive to Ish-Boshet’s sore spot about his brother, he was none-the-less surprised by the Prince’s reaction.

“Get out!” The Prince screamed, face red, hands clenched into fists. “Get out, traitor! My brother is dead and I’ll hear no more talk about him. Get out!”

“You know, Prince,” Abner said, his voice cold and measured. “If it were not for the love and admiration I bear your father....”

“Get out! Get out!”

Disgusted, Abner did get out, wanted to have nothing to do with Ish-Boshet, but for the moment knew he had to stay with him. He also knew that a time would come when he would no longer have to serve the likes of Ish-Boshet; knew that David would be properly appreciative and know how to make the best use of a great general’s skills and talents. After all, it had been he who had escorted David as he carried Goliath’s head, back to Saul.

A few paces from the royal tent, the general stopped walking. Ish-Boshet would have to be crowned, he realized. David would surely become King of Judea and so to increase his bargaining position, Abner needed to be General of the north under a King of the north, Ish-Boshet. Abner waited an hour and returned to the Prince's tent. The general was gratified to find Ish-Boshet in a more conciliatory mood.

"Forgive me, General," Ish-Boshet said. "I am too sensitive about my brother Jonathan and the deaths of the King and my other brothers." The Prince poured wine into a silver goblet and offered it to Abner. Abner nodded and took the goblet.

"David will surely make himself King in Judea," he said.

Ish-Boshet nodded, head tilted, staring cannily into Abner's face. "And..." He said.

"And if you wish to live a little longer and not soon be assassinated, you must declare yourself to be King of the north and rally the northern tribes to you."

Ish-Boshet nodded. "And you will do this with me?" he said.

"Yes." Abner drained his goblet and returned it to the table. "King Ish-Boshet," he said.

"Do you like the sound of that, Sire?"

Ish-Boshet drained his goblet and put it on the table beside Abner's. "Yes," he said. "I do."

“Good!” the General said, clasping the Prince’s hand and arm. “Very good! We will strike camp here and move to Machanaim where we will hold your coronation and establish your capital.”

Even as Abner and Ish-Boshet made their plans, David was making his. In a meeting with his nephew and General, Joab, his mother’s sister’s son, and Dathan, his personal aide, David talked of the return of Saul’s daughter Michal, David’s first wife, and of occupying Hebron to consolidate his power in Judea.

“Is this the right time to leave Achish’s service, Master?” Dathan asked, leaning his tall, muscular frame across the rough-hewn table toward David.

“Perhaps,” David answered, leaning back. “What do you think, Joab?”

Joab knew David had decided to return to Judah. “I think you have already made your mind up, Sire,” the general said, glaring at Dathan.

David smiled. He knew the two men were jealous of each other and their relationship with him, and he wanted it that way. Both were proud and loyal, physically imposing and skilled in the arts of war, but each had an eccentric twist, a kind of flaw, the other lacked that David allowed them to use in his service. Without a man like David to serve and to use their unique talents, both Dathan and Joab would have been bereft. For Joab it was

pride. He had to be the best; had to control other men by having them be weaker and more dependent on him. For Dathan it was sensuality. He had to control men by helping them discover and become enslaved to their own erotic urges. Both men used their positions of power around David to indulge their predilections.

David reached out and patted Joab's shoulder. "Indeed I have, Joab. You are always astute." He stood and Joab and Dathan stood also. "There is a power vacuum in the land now," he said. "I will reassure Achish by having a conversation with our Captain Hafiz, explaining my need for Philistine support in exchange for my promise not to attack them...yet!"

Joab frowned. "You will not say 'yet' will you, Uncle? Why risk everything by being undiplomatic?" Joab was growing angry. "That has failed in the past."

David smiled enigmatically. "I may, nephew. We will see. Hafiz and Achish are not stupid. They surely know that any peace between them and us can only be temporary."

"But why deliberately antagonize them, Uncle?" Joab said.

Dathan saw the gap between nephew and uncle and seized upon it as an opportunity to ingratiate himself with David. "Yes, Master," Dathan said. "Very wise. And while you have an understanding with the Philistines, and know they will not attack, you will tell the Judeans that you are protecting them from them."

David nodded. "We will still have to win over the Judean chieftains," he said. "But with a few gifts the way can be made smooth." He puffed himself up. "Besides, am I not beloved by the people already?"

Both men nodded. "True, Sire," Joab said. "But you will always be only a tribal chieftain as long as Saul's son claims the crown."

A cloud passed across David's face. "Indeed, Joab. But we shall not let that bother us. We will still maintain contact with the tribes and chiefs of the north and with Abner as well." David looked into Dathan's face. "Abner is the real power there.

"Dathan, I will use you as my liaison with Abner and the tribes of Asher, Dan, Zebulun, Ishcar and Manasseh in the north. Your special skills and talents will serve me best there."

Dathan dipped his head. "It will be an honor, Master."

"I will miss you, my friend and companion," David said resting a hand on the man's shoulder. "You will be travelling a great deal. But when you are here, you shall be warmly received."

"Thank you, Master," Dathan said. "I think Bennu will miss me as well."

Joab's lips curled at the mention of Dathan's wife. But David grinned. "Ah, yes," he said.

"Bennu! The sensual, hypnotic Bennu. I'm sure she will not lack for companionship in your absence, my friend."

"Yes, Master, you are right. She is quite interesting and powerful in her way, is she not?"

David nodded. "You've had a number of conversations with her, I believe."

David smiled wickedly. "She is an excellent conversationalist, indeed."

"Yes, Master. Jonathan was much enamored of her," Dathan said.

At his royal friend's name, David sighed, shuddered and tears came to his eyes.

"Wonderful was thy love to me, passing the love of women," he said.

Joab, who felt no desire for men, looked away. "Truly, Sire," Joab said.

Inhaling deeply to calm himself, David continued, "I will have Michal back."

"But she is married, Uncle," Joab said.

"What does that matter to me! She was my wife, my first wife, and of royal blood. Shall I not take what belongs to me?"

“What of her husband, Sire? What if she has affection for him and none for you?”

“She is mine and I will have her! The details you speak of will be worked out.”

“The fresh supply of plunder from our route of the Amalekites will help smooth the way, Master,” Dathan said.

David nodded. “We must dole it out carefully, Dathan. We will make generous gifts to the elders of Judah. But it will take time to make them forget we once raided their lands. The gifts will have to go a long way; to Beth-el and Ramoth and the Kenites as well.”

“The share of the spoils you allocated to the rear guard who did not fight in our recent engagement with the Amalekites, was not well received by our fighters, Sire,” Abner said.

David scowled. “We are one Army, Joab. Well, not an Army yet. But we will be. And in that Army all will share and share alike.”

Joab nodded and smiled grimly. “That too, will take time to be accepted, Sire,” he said.