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Ish-Bosheth, King of Isra'el, Murdered
Second Samuel 4: 1-12

Ish-Bosheth, King of Isra'el, murdered DIG: Why would Abner's death cause Ish-Bosheth to lose courage? What is significant about Baanah and Rechab being Benjamites (First Samuel 9:1-2)? What motivation to kill Ish-Bosheth does this reveal? What is the meaning of Mephibosheth in relation to David's kingship? Why do Rechab and Baanah cut off Ish-Bosheth's head after killing him? What serious miscalculation did they make in doing so? How was Rechab and Baanah like, and unlike, the Amalekite (4:5-8 and **1:1-16)? How does David's treatment of the remains of Rechab, Baanah and Ish-Bosheth say about David?**

REFLECT: "Those who live by the sword die by the sword" – how has the sword of revenge backfired on you? Where has mercy prevailed instead of such "justice" and "revenge?" David was tempted to profit from someone else's demise, but he refused. When you are so tempted, how do you overcome such thoughts?

1003 BC

As we have observed in the opening stories of **Second Samuel**, in order for **David** to secure power in the north, people had to die. First, there was **Sha'ul** and **Y'honatan**, then there was **Abner**. Once **Abner** was dead, the end of resistance to **David's** rule came quickly. **Ish-Bosheth** was next. **His** death would be a turning point for the northern Kingdom, and **Isra'el** as a whole. There was nothing to stop ruthless men from taking advantage of the power vacuum, and asserting their own will upon the nation for selfish purposes and **Rechab** and **Baanah** were certainly ruthless. **They** were so unscrupulous that **they** didn't mind possibly starting a war with the southern Kingdom for personal gain. If **David** were to be implicated in any way in **Ish-Bosheth's** death, the north would have rebelled, and **he** would have lost all his credibility to govern in the southern Kingdom of Judah as well.[241]

An obvious fact of **Second Samuel** is that violence produces more violence, each

killing points toward a counter killing. With **Sha'ul** and **Y'honatan**, it was the Amalekite messenger who had to die **(Second Samuel 1:15-16)**. With **Abner**, **Asahel** died. In this chapter with **Ish-Bosheth**, it was the ruthless **Rechab** and **Baanah** who would pay with **their** lives. **Their** deaths were necessary for the narrator to establish the innocence of **David**. **He** caused none of these deaths. **He** didn't appreciate **them** or celebrate **them**. No blood was on **his** hands.

The Murderers: These verses move quickly into the drama. **When Ish-Bosheth,** the youngest **son of Sha'ul, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage** because **he** was a mere puppet in the hands of **his general**, and now that **general** was **dead** (**to see link click Ck – Joab Murders Abner**). **And all Isra'el became alarmed. The tribes** in the north knew **his** Kingdom had come to an end and **they** no doubt expected a swift invasion by **David** and **his** army. **The common people** knew nothing of **David's** intentions or of **his** recent meeting with **Abner**. It was a day of distress for **Ish-Bosheth** and **his people (Second Samuel 4:1)**.

Now Ish-Bosheth had two men who were leaders of raiding bands under **Abner's** authority**. One was named Ba'anah and the other Rekab; they were sons of Rimmon the Beerothite from the tribe of Benjamin – Beeroth is considered part of Benjamin, because the people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim and have resided there as foreigners to this day (Second Samuel 4:2-3).** The account of **Baanah** and **Rechab** reminds us of **the Amalekite** who claimed to have killed **Sha'ul** (see **Bx – David Hears of Sha'ul's Death**). These two men were minor officers in **Abner's** army who thought **they** could earn rewards and promotion from **David** if **they** killed **Ish-Bosheth** and like **the Amalekite**, **they** were wrong. Dead wrong.[242]

Mephibosheth: This parenthetical note has the purpose to explain that the only heir to Sha'ul's throne was a lame boy of thirteen, and the conspirators could feel confident that their assassination of Ish-Bosheth would lead to David's succession to the throne. Y'honatan son of Sha'ul had a son named **Mephibosheth who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Sha'ul's and Y'honatan's** death **came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell,** broke **both feet** that were never set, **and** as a result, **became disabled (Second Samuel 4:4). His** actual name was **Meriba'al (First Chronicles 8:34) it** was changed to **Mephibosheth,** meaning *shame* **(Second Samuel 9:3-13).**



The Murder of Ish-Bosheth: **Ish-Bosheth** appeared to have no suspicion that **he** might have traitors among **his** troops. **Now Rechab and Ba'anah set out for the house of Ish-Bosheth** at Mahanaim, **and they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noonday rest.** At this hour **his** guard would likewise be asleep, or at least insufficiently alert. **They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat.** But **while Ish-Bosheth was lying on the bed in his bedroom, they stabbed him in the stomach. And after killing him they cut off his head and took it with them** as a prize to show **David** who **they** obviously thought would be pleased. **They slipped away and traveled all night by way of the Arabah,** the dry valley of the Jordan and Dead Sea to avoid meeting other travelers. **They brought the head of Ish-Bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Sha'ul, your enemy, who tried to kill you. This day the LORD has avenged my lord the king against Sha'ul and his offspring" (Second Samuel 4:5-8). Their** motivation, like that of the Amalekite, was one of **reward**.

But **they** had completely misread the policy of **David**, who immediately disowned **them**. **David answered Rechab and his brother Ba'anah, "As surely as ADONAI lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, when someone told me, 'Sha'ul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave them for his news** (see **Ca – David Hears of Sha'ul's Death**)**.** Now, **David** declared, "If **the Amalekite** only claimed to kill **Sha'ul**, **how much more** punishment should **you wicked men** receive when **you have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed? Ish-Bosheth,** though **he** was **Sha'ul's son,** was not

personally involved in **his** father’s guilt, and had done nothing to deserve **death**.” Then the king questioned, **“Should I now not demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you?” Their** guilt was clear and **their** cold-blooded murder deserved the same sentence. **So David gave an order to his men, and they killed them.**

The contrast between the treatment of the remains of the assassins and of Ish-Bosheth could hardly be more striking. **They cut off their hands** because **they** were used to assassinate **Ish-Bosheth**, **and feet** because they ran seeking a reward, **and hung their bodies by the pool in Hebron** as a public warning**. But they took the head of Ish-Bosheth and buried it in Abner’s tomb at Hebron** who had been **his** father’s cousin **(Second Samuel 4:9-12).** The murder of **Ish-Bosheth** removed any opposition to **David** becoming king over all **Isra’el**. After so many years running from **Sha’ul**, the promise that **YHVH** made to **him** was about to be fulfilled.[243]

The murder of **Ish-Bosheth** is another example of the interference of opportunists who prevented **David** from carrying out the desires of **his** heart. Nevertheless, **the LORD** blessed **him** and extended **his** Kingdom to include all **Isra’el**, uniting the northern Kingdom of **Isra’el** and the southern Kingdom of **Judah**. Evidently **David** was cleared of any suspicion in connection with the death **of Ish-Bosheth** and, in the absence of any suitable survivor from the house of **Sha’ul, he** was the obvious choice to be **the king**.[244]