

*Read also Mark 10:35-37, 42-45. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

In one of the Chronicles of Narnia, *The Last Battle*, the scene opens with an old, ugly, wrinkled but very clever ape named Shift. He had one friend who was a donkey called Puzzle. Really, though, Puzzle was more like Shift's servant than friend. One day the two of them found a lion's skin. Shift decided to tailor it to fit Puzzle so that he could pretend to be Aslan.

Puzzle resisted, but he was not as smart as Shift so Shift's idea prevailed. He cut and sewed until he had the perfect lion-skin coat for his friend. Now if you were not very familiar with lions and you were standing a long distance away and the light was not too good, and Puzzle didn't let out a bray or stomp with his hooves, you would never know it wasn't a real lion.

So the ape told the donkey, "You look wonderful, wonderful! If anyone saw you now they'd think you were Aslan the Great Lion, himself."<sup>1</sup> And, the ape convinced Puzzle that in this disguise he could convince people to do whatever he told them.

Puzzle, however, didn't think that was right; he didn't want to tell people anything.

But Shift was quite a coercive friend. Shift would be his adviser, giving orders for Puzzle to give as the fake Aslan. And everyone would have to obey them, even the King of Narnia, who served Aslan.

So the ploy begins. Shift convinces the Narnians that Aslan has returned; he gives orders to collect money for "Aslan's" account; and he engages the Narnians to work for him on the pretext that it will be for their good.

As you can imagine, that's not exactly how it turns out. Shift is a lying, cheating manipulative ape, using the fake Aslan (a.k.a. Puzzle, the guy who doesn't have a clue) as a front so that Shift could gain control over Narnia.

We are familiar with this sort of story. It's played over and over again in books and movies and in history—there's the good guy who desires to rule justly and the bad guy who ambitiously seeks his own glory.

It's amazing that we find this same story in the Bible.

Perhaps you think, hey, I just want to hear the good news about Jesus! I want to read about miracles and good people, not people who take advantage of others; opportunists who promote themselves whenever they get the chance. Why is this junk in the Bible?

It's there because it's reality. It is the reality of history and reality today—at work, in the community, sometimes even in our own families. So let's hear the story of what happened and how David was crowned king. You will notice the connection right away. READ 2 Sam. 2:1-11

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<sup>1</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1956), 13.

Did you notice a difference in the two men?

*The men of Judah came to David and crowned him king over the people of Judah.*

*But Abner, Saul's cousin and the commander of Saul's army, had already gone to Mahanaim with Ishbaal. There he proclaimed him king.*

Abner was an opportunist. He just sort of took control. He took Saul's son all the way across the Jordan River to the east to proclaim him king over the Hebrew northern territories. Ishbaal had no military record. He wasn't proclaimed king by the people. He wasn't chosen by God.

He was nothing more than a figurehead, controlled by Abner.

Ishbaal was like Puzzle; he was weak; he let himself be manipulated. That's why Abner was able to take control. He was just like that crafty old ape, Shift.

And, just for the record, Israel did not have control of the northern territories—the Philistines had just defeated Saul in the battle over them! So Abner took Ishbaal past the Jordan River, far from the contested territory and pronounced him king without the people's consent. It's pretty hilarious, really.

It would be like proclaiming yourself Mayor of Duncanville but you live in Midlothian and the people never voted you in. But you want to take over, which was Abner's intention.

Do you see an ulterior motive?

Does it sound like James and John asking Jesus if they can sit on Jesus' right and left when He comes into power?

Does Abner seem a little power hungry?

At least James and John were forthright about their ambitions!

David, in contrast, was anointed first by God. Then, because of his actions the wilderness of Judah of being helpful, protecting people; the people came to him and anointed him king.

And, we don't hear of Philistine resistance to this idea, even though David's domain included Gath. That's probably because David had made an alliance with King Achish of Gath. David had wisely built relationships.

David waited on God. He lived praying; and having reverence for God and compassion for others.

What worked out better? Let's look at the contrast:

*~ David Prayed*

*~ David was Reverent toward God*

*~ Abner Controlled*

*~ Abner was Ambitious*

~ *David was Compassionate*  
~ *David Waited on God*  
~ *David was Respectful*

~ *Abner was Manipulative*  
~ *Abner was Opportunistic*  
~ *Abner was Violent*

And that's exactly where it went next. Abner was not satisfied with his puppet kingdom in the east. He wanted more. So he challenged David's army to a skirmish. Let's hear the story. READ 2 Samuel 2:12-17

In those days, it was customary to have a preliminary skirmish between twelve men on either side to settle an issue, rather than calling out the whole army. Whichever side won would have the victory.

But here, it got out of hand.

The two leaders, Abner on one side, and Joab, the leader of David's army, were both into power. Joab thought David should be king and he wanted to get rid of the opposition. He, too, is a violent man. And out of this terrible skirmish came not only the massacre of twenty-four men but civil war. You will hear about that next week.

It was motivated by the desire for supremacy. They each wanted to assert their own power and indulge their pride. Eugene Peterson called them "boneheads." They fight first and think later.

Have you seen this in our world? Have you seen ambition out of control? It's not only in war that this happens but it is played out in many other arenas—sports, government, business, religion—when ambition is unchecked, you have these kinds of problems.

So what does God think? What is God doing in all of this?

In this particular situation, God's plan is to shift the kingdom to David. God's plan is to bring redemption through David's kingdom, not Saul's. Saul's kingdom had ended because he was impatient with God and God's ways. He couldn't wait. He couldn't trust God. Saul took matters into his own hands and did what he wanted to do.

That attitude does not result in success in the long run.

In the story of Narnia, Shift fought for control. But those who figured out that his Aslan was a fake called on the real Aslan who came and helped them at once. After a terrible battle, Shift was exposed and the real Aslan prevailed.

We must ask ourselves, was David naïve in his approach?

Is it better to try to "strong man" your way through?

That depends on how you see this story. What worked out better?

Fighting and killing? Or a kingdom coming into power little by little, generous and honoring to God?

How you answer the question reveals your own attitude. But we have the mind of Christ. Shall we live into it?

AMEN