

The Doctrine of Ishbosheth

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Preface:

1. In Hebrew word is ʿĪysh-Bôsheth (אִישׁ-בֹּשֶׁת) [pronounced *eesh-BOH-sheath*], which means *man of humiliation* and is transliterated *Ishbosheth*. It seems very unusual for someone to name their son this. A *man of Baal* could be understood as a *man of a lord (one in authority)*, as *Baal* does not have to have a strictly heathen application. Saul is the *lord of Israel*; and he calls his son here, *man of the lord*; such an understanding makes sense and does not mean that Saul, even at the birth of this son, was worshiping Baal (although that is not out of the question—however, we are never told anything like this in Scripture). Strong’s #378 BDB #36.
2. The son was also known as Esh–Baal, which simply means a *man of Baal* (1Chron. 8:33 9:39). It is possible that, his listening to Abner and becoming king, even though God anointed David as king over Israel, changed him from a *man of Baal* to a *man of shame [humiliation]*. I may need to examine this further, but this is the opinion of Strong and BDB. It is possible that he took this name when he chose to become king; that is, he was always known as Eshbaal; however, the Bible calls him Ishbosheth at the point that he chose to be king of Israel. Sometimes, *Bosheth* is used instead of *Baal* in order to insult the god Baal. See, for instance Jerub–baal and Jerub–besheth (Judges 8:35 Hosea 9:10)
3. Ishbosheth is also considered to be equivalent to Ishvi from 1Sam. 14:49.
4. Saul had 4 sons that we know about (Jonathan, and Malchishua, and Abinadab, and Eshbaal 1Chron. 8:33 9:39), along with two daughters (Michal and Merba—1Sam. 14:49).
5. Scriptural references: 2Sam. 2:8, 10, 12, 15 3:8, 14–15 4:5, 8, 12. Also see: 1Chron. 8:33 9:39
6. Abner, Saul’s uncle, who apparently survived the Philistine attack, uses his position as commander to install Ishbosheth as ruler over northern and eastern Israel. There is every indication that Abner was close enough to Saul to realize that God had anointed David king over Israel. I realize that I have offered some alternate explanations as to why he might have installed Ishbosheth as king, but I think that it is most likely that this is a nefarious operation on Abner’s part.
7. We do not know how it is that Ishbosheth survived the Israeli-Philistine war; or Abner for that matter. Let me suggest that this could have even been the idea of Saul. He and 3 of his sons fought in this war, but he told Abner and Ishbosheth to go east and set up a dynasty in the east. This is only speculation, but it does explain why Abner, the commander of the Israeli forces, is alive; and why Saul’s 4th son, who is at an age where he should be at war, but he survives nevertheless (even though Saul and 3 of his sons die).
8. A civil war between the house of David and the house of Saul broke out, which was prolonged, and David slowly gained the upper hand. [Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: and David grew stronger and stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker](#) (2Sam. 3:1).
9. The war did not come to a close until Abner, angry on account of the rebuke he suffered from Ish–Bosheth for his unlawful intimacy with Rizpah, Saul’s concubine, joined David (2Sam. 3:6). For Abner to have an affair with a mistress of Saul could be seen as an attempt to consolidate power for himself, and Ishbosheth was accusing him of treason (2Sam. 3:6–12).

10. David's condition to return to him Michal, his wife before peace could be made, was fulfilled by Ish-Bosheth (2Sam. 3:13–14), but it was not until after Abner's death that Ish-Bosheth seems to have given up hopes of retaining his power (2Sam. 4:1).¹
11. Interestingly enough, David is said to rule over Judah for 7½ years (1Sam. 2:11), whereas Ishbosheth is said to have ruled over Israel for only 2 years (1Sam. 2:10). It is possible that Abner spent 5 years gathering support for Ishbosheth.
12. I hate to ruin what is coming up, but Ishbosheth will be assassinated by his own guard in 2Sam. 4:5–7. The guard will find him asleep midday on the couch (or, on his bed), and he will kill him. The guard cuts off Ishbosheth's head off and takes it to David, expecting a reward. Presenting it to David, as though it would be a welcome gift because Saul the father had been David's "enemy who sought his life," and suppressing mention of their own murderous treachery, they with hypocritical profanation of God's name said: "Behold ... the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul and his seed." But David reproached them with their wicked murder of "a righteous person in his own house upon his bed," and commanded his young men to slay them, and to hang up over the pool in Hebron their severed hands and feet. The head of Ishbosheth was duly buried in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron (2Sam. :4:9–12).
13. From Smith's Bible Dictionary: Ish-bo'sheth. (man of shame). The youngest of Saul's four sons, and his legitimate successor. (B.C. 1068). Ish-bosheth was "forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years." 2Sam. 3:10.

During these two years, he reigned at Mahanaim, though only in name. The wars and negotiations with David were entirely carried on by Abner. 2Sam. 2:12; 2Sam. 3:6; 2Sam. 3:12. The death of Abner deprived the house of Saul, of its last remaining support. When Ish-bosheth heard of it, "his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled." He was murdered in his bed.

Nave's Topical Bible gives us the abbreviated version:

Nave's Abbreviated Doctrine

Ishbosheth
Son of Saul.

Called Eshbaal
1Chron. 8:33; 1Chron. 9:39

Made king by Abner
2Sam. 2:8–10

Deserted by Abner
2Sam. 3:6–12

Restores Michal, David's wife, to David
2Sam. 3:14–16

Assassinated
2Sam. 4:5–8

Avenged by David
2Sam. 4:9–12

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¹ Portions of these last two points are taken directly from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Ish-Bosheth.