

# **Bible Study May 29, 2024**

## **2 SAMUEL 3 (AMPLIFIED VERSION)**

### **The House of David Strengthened**

***<sup>1</sup> There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; but David grew steadily stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker [to the point of being powerless].***

The events recorded in 2 Samuel 2 led to a long war between David's followers and the troops loyal to Abner and Ishbosheth. Civil war rocked the country at great cost to both sides. Israel and Judah had lost sight of God's vision and purpose for them: to settle the land (Genesis 12:7), to drive out the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7:1-4), and to obey God's laws (Deuteronomy 8:1). Instead of uniting to accomplish these goals, they fought each other. When you face conflict, step back from the hostilities and consider whether you and your enemy have common goals that are bigger than your differences. Appeal to those interests as you work for a positive outcome.

***<sup>2</sup> Sons were born to David in Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, by Ahinoam of Jezreel; <sup>3</sup> his second, Chileab, by Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of [his wife] Maacah, daughter of Talmai the king of Geshur; <sup>4</sup> the fourth, Adonijah the son of [his wife] Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of [his wife] Abital; <sup>5</sup> and the sixth, Ithream, by David's wife Eglah. These [sons] were born to David in Hebron.***

David suffered much heartache because of his many wives. Polygamy was a socially acceptable practice for kings at this time, although God had specifically warned against it (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). Sadly, the numerous sons born to David's wives caused him great trouble. Rape (2 Samuel 13:14), murder (13:28), rebellion (15:13), and greed (1 Kings 1:5-6) all resulted from the jealous rivalries among the half brothers. Solomon, one of David's sons and his successor to the throne, also took many wives, and they eventually turned him away from God (1 Kings 11:3-4). Although most people don't practice polygamy today, people who divorce or remarry also must guard against rivalry among their children.

### **Abner Joins David**

***<sup>6</sup> Now while war continued between the houses of Saul and David, Abner was proving himself strong in the house of Saul. <sup>7</sup> Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah the daughter of Aiah; and Ish-bosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?"***

To sleep with any of the king's wives or concubines was to make a claim to the throne, and it was considered treason. Because Ishbosheth was a weak ruler, Abner was running the country; thus, he may have felt justified in sleeping with Saul's concubine. Ishbosheth, however, saw that Abner's power was becoming too great.

Ishbosheth may have been right to speak out against Abner's behavior, but he didn't have the moral strength to maintain his authority (3:11). Lack of moral backbone became the root of Israel's troubles over the next four centuries. In the coming centuries, very few kings in Israel and Judah would be called "good." It takes courage and strength to stand firm in your convictions and to confront wrongdoing in the face of opposition. When you believe something is wrong, do not let yourself be talked out of your position. Firmly deny the wrong and uphold the right.

***8 Then Abner was very angry at the words of Ish-bosheth, and he said, "Am I a dog's head [a despicable traitor] that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty and kindness to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and his friends, by not having you handed over to David; and yet you charge me today with guilt concerning this woman.***

By saying, "Am I some Judean dog to be kicked around?" Abner meant, "Am I a traitor for Judah?" He may have been refuting the accusation that he was trying to take over the throne, or he may have been angry that Ishbosheth was scolding him after Abner had helped put him on the throne in the first place. Prior to this conversation, Abner had realized that he could not keep David from eventually taking over Israel. Because he was angry at Ishbosheth, Abner devised a plan to turn over the kingdom of Israel to David in return for being made general of David's army.

***9 May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David just as the LORD has sworn to him, <sup>10</sup> to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and establish the throne of David over Israel and Judah from Dan [in the north] to Beersheba [in the south]."***

***<sup>11</sup> And Ish-bosheth could not say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.***

***<sup>12</sup> Then Abner sent messengers to David [who was] in his place [at Hebron], saying, "Whose is the land? Make your covenant (treaty) with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel over to you." <sup>13</sup> David said, "Good! I will make a covenant (treaty) with you, but I require one thing of you: you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see me."***

By this time Abner realized that it was useless to fight for the weak ruler Ishbosheth. Nothing could prevent David from becoming king of all Israel, because God was with him (3:18). Abner designed a deal with David to prevent David's men from seeking revenge against him for being the commander of both Saul's army (1 Samuel 26:5-7) and the northern confederacy (2 Samuel 2:8).

In an effort to reunite all Israel, David agreed to Abner's deal. Ishbosheth was not God's appointed king, as Saul had been; therefore, David accepted Abner's terms.

***<sup>14</sup> So David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, to whom I was betrothed for [the price of] a hundred foreskins of the Philistines."***

***<sup>15</sup> So Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish [to whom Saul had given her]. <sup>16</sup> But her husband went with her, weeping continually behind her as far as Bahurim. Then Abner told him, "Go, return." And he did so.***

Michal had been married to David. Saul had arranged the marriage as a reward for David's acts of bravery (1 Samuel 17:25; 18:24-27). Later, however, in one of his jealous fits, Saul took Michal away from David and forced her to marry Palti (1 Samuel 25:44). Now David wanted his wife back before he would begin to negotiate peace with the northern tribes. Perhaps David still loved her (See 2 Samuel 6:20-23 for the tension in their relationship). More likely, he thought that marriage to Saul's daughter would strengthen his claim to rule all Israel and demonstrate that he had no

animosity toward Saul's house. Palti was the unfortunate victim caught in the web of Saul's jealousy and David's political maneuvering.

***17 Abner talked with the elders (tribal leaders) of Israel, saying, "In times past you were seeking for David to be king over you. 18 Now then, do it [and make him king]! For the LORD has spoken of David, saying, 'By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and the hand of all their enemies.'" 19 Abner also spoke to [the men of] Benjamin. Then he also went to tell David at Hebron everything that seemed good to Israel and to the entire house of Benjamin.***

Saul, Ishbosheth, and Abner were all from the tribe of Benjamin. So Abner's work to gain the support of the elders of that tribe proved that he was serious about his offer to help bring unity. There was now a strong possibility of overcoming tribal jealousies and uniting the kingdom.

***20 So Abner came to David at Hebron, and [brought] twenty men along with him. And David prepared a feast for Abner and the men with him. 21 Abner said to David, "Let me stand up and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant (treaty) with you, and that you may reign over all that your soul desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.***

***22 Then the servants of David came with Joab from a raid and brought a great quantity of spoil with them; but Abner was not with David at Hebron, because David had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. 23 When Joab and all the army that was with him arrived, they told Joab, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has sent him away, and he has gone in peace." 24 Then Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you; why did you send him away, so that he is already gone? 25 You know Abner the son of Ner, that he [only] came to deceive you [with flattering words] and to learn of your going out and coming in, and to find out what you are doing."***

### **Joab Murders Abner**

***26 When Joab left David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah; but David knew nothing [about Joab's action]. 27 So when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside to the middle of the gate to speak to him privately, and there he struck Abner in the abdomen so that he died, to avenge the blood of Asahel, Joab's brother.***

Abner had killed Joab's brother Asahel in self-defense. On top of that, Abner actually had been trying to run away from Asahel (2:17-23). But Joab treacherously murdered Abner to avenge his brother's death and to save his position of military leadership. Joab killed Abner in Hebron, a city of refuge (Joshua 20:7), where Abner should have been safe from an avenger (Numbers 35:22-25). Although Asahel's death was not accidental, Hebron was a place of refuge and the most inappropriate place for revenge, but Joab did not care and did as he pleased. Joab was later executed at Solomon's command (1 Kings 2:28-34), fulfilling the punishment required under the law for murder (Exodus 21:12-14).

***28 Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. 29 Let the guilt fall on the head of Joab and on all his father's house (family); and may there never disappear from the***

***house of Joab one who suffers with a discharge or one who is a leper or one who walks with a crutch [being unfit for war], or one who falls by the sword, or one who lacks food.”***

Joab took revenge for the death of his brother instead of leaving justice to God. But that revenge backfired on him (1 Kings 2:31-34). God will repay those who deserve it (Romans 12:19). Refuse to rejoice when your enemies suffer, and don't try to get revenge. Seeking revenge, even when you feel justified, will ruin your own peace of mind and increase the chances of further retaliation.

Why did David say such harsh words about Joab? David was upset over Abner's death for several reasons: (1) He was grieved over the loss of a skilled military officer. (2) He wanted to place the guilt of Abner's murder on Joab, not himself. (3) He was on the verge of becoming king over the entire nation, and having Abner's support was important for winning over the northern tribes. Abner's death could have revived the civil war. (4) Joab had violated David's agreement to protect Abner. Joab's murderous act ruined David's plans, and David was especially angry that his own commander had committed the crime.

***<sup>30</sup> So Joab and Abishai his brother murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.***

### **David Mourns Abner**

***<sup>31</sup> Then David said to Joab and to all the people with him, “Tear your clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn before Abner.” And King David walked behind the bier. <sup>32</sup> They buried Abner in Hebron; and the king raised his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept.***

By walking behind the procession (that is, behind the casket), David was leading the mourning.

***<sup>33</sup> And the king sang a dirge (funeral song) over Abner and said,***

***“Should Abner [the great warrior] die as a fool dies?***

***<sup>34</sup> “Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put in fetters;  
As a man falls before the wicked, so you have fallen.”***

***And all the people wept again over him. <sup>35</sup> All the people came to urge David to eat food while it was still day; but David took an oath, saying, “May God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets.” <sup>36</sup> And all the people took notice of it and it pleased them, just as everything that the king did pleased all the people. <sup>37</sup> So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the will of the king to put Abner the son of Ner to death. <sup>38</sup> Then the king said to his servants, “Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? <sup>39</sup> Today I am weak, though anointed king; these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too difficult for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer [Joab] in accordance with his wickedness!”***

David ordered Joab to mourn, possibly because few people were aware that Joab had committed the crime and because David did not want any further trouble. If this is true, David was thinking more about strengthening his kingdom than about justice.

Joab and Abishai were the two sons of Zeruiah who David mentioned. David had an especially hard time controlling Joab because, although he was intensely loyal, he was strong-willed, preferring to do things his own way. In exchange for his loyalty, however, David was willing to give

Joab the flexibility he craved. But in the long run David was too soft on Joab. This leadership flaw would cost David dearly.

Joab's murder of Abner is an example of his fierce independence. While David opposed the murder, he allowed it to remain unpunished because (1) to punish Joab could cause the troops to rebel; (2) Joab was David's nephew, and any harsh treatment could cause family problems; (3) Joab was from the tribe of Judah, and David didn't want rebellion from his own tribe; and (4) to get rid of Joab would mean losing a skilled and competent commander who had been invaluable in strengthening his army.