

2 Samuel 3:1-39

Abner joins David but is murdered by Joab

2 Samuel 3:1 - "Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker."

Already when David was in Ziklag a contingent from Manasseh had joined him. **1 Chronicles 12** lists those who came over to David then. And there was a steady stream of clans switching allegiance to David since then.

One who came with a mixed group from both Benjamin and Judah, was said to speak in the Spirit:

- **1 Chronicles 12:18** - "Then the spirit came upon Amasai, who was chief of the captains, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee. Then David received them, and made them captains of the band."

- **1 Chronicles 12:22** - "For at that time day by day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host, like the host of God."

The antagonism between Ishbosheth and David finally breaks out into open warfare. Pride and resentment cause Ishbosheth and Abner to argue, so Abner proposes to David that he will come over to his side. David requires that he bring him his first wife, Michal, who was given to another man by Saul. Joab, who still harbors resentment toward Abner for killing his brother, secretly meets with Abner and murders him.

This mishmash of treachery, arrogance and vendetta illustrates what the Bible said about the time of the Judges when there was no king - every man did what was right in his own eyes. This would be the case until David was anointed king of both Israel and Judah united in one kingdom.

David's Sons

- **Deuteronomy 17:17** - "[Israel's king] shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself."

We previously reviewed how the rabbis tried to explain away David's many wives, in **1 Samuel 25**. Although David's polygamy is not condemned in the scriptures, the results show that the practice bore bitter fruit.

1) - Amnon raped his half-sister and was murdered by his half-brother.

2) - Chileab is also known as Daniel in **1 Chronicles 3:1**. The few mentions of this son indicate that perhaps he died young or that he was unworthy of mention. (But some

rabbis say he was a great but humble Torah scholar who had no ambition to succeed David as king.)

3)- Absalom murdered his half-brother and led a civil war against his father David, attempting to murder David.

4) - Adonijah tried to seize the throne from David and David's appointed successor – then he tried to take one of David's concubines and was executed for his arrogance.

5) - Shephatiah and Ithream either died young or were ungodly and unworthy men because they are mentioned only once again in the Scriptures – in a generic listing of David's sons (**1 Chronicles 3:1-4**).

(See https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide2017-2Sa/2Sa-3.cfm)

(Later, David's murder of Uriah and then taking his wife Bathsheba as his own would produce a child who died. But then Bathsheba bore Solomon, who was destined to rule and build the Temple).

2 Samuel 3:6 - "And it came to pass, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul."

"made himself strong for the house of Saul" - Or better, "Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul". Abner secured the kingship for Ishbosheth out of loyalty to Saul, but Abner was in charge, while Ishbosheth was merely a figurehead.

2 Samuel 3:7 - "And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?"

This was not Ishbosheth's concubine, but Saul's. To have sex with Saul's concubine would be a treasonous act against Ishbosheth, an attempt to grasp the crown. In fact, later, Solomon had Adonijah put to death on the ground that, by seeking to marry David's concubine Abishag, he was aiming at the crown (**I Kings 1**).

Abner could possibly have been guilty of the charge, since he does not deny it. Or Ishbosheth felt it necessary to invent this accusation as a reason to get rid of Abner. But this was very foolish decision.

2 Samuel 3:8 - "Then was Abner very wroth for the words of Ishbosheth, and said, Am I a dog's head, which against Judah do shew kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to day with a fault concerning this woman?"

The next two verses 9-10 are better translated this way:

2 Samuel 3:9-10 - "May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the Lord has sworn to him; to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba."

He is telling Ishbosheth that he's defecting to David's side.

2 Samuel 3:11 - "And he could not answer Abner a word again, because he feared him."

Abner's Defection

Abner joins David for the wrong reason - because he was offended by Ishbosheth. He knew that "the Lord had sworn to David" that he would be king," but had opposed him anyway all this time.

Sometimes we know things to be true, but we don't live as if they were true.

2 Samuel 3:12 - "And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose is the land? saying also, Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee."

"Who's is the land" if not yours?

"make a league" means make a covenant with me

Some rabbis explain that even in making this proposal to David, Abner still exudes arrogance by placing his name before David's. They say "on his behalf" (*tahat*), which can also mean "under," refers to Abner placing David's name underneath his in the letter: "From Abner, commander of the army of Israel, to king David." This is what brought on his fateful end.

The Return of Michal

2 Samuel 3:13-14 - "And he said, Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face. And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines."

David received Michal in marriage (1 Samuel 18:26-28), but Saul took her away to spite David (1 Samuel 25:44). Now David asks Ishbosheth, not Abner, to deliver her.

2 Samuel 3:15-16 - "And Ishbosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish. And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned."

Not only would this show that David harbored no ill will toward the house of Saul, it

would also give him another link to the throne of Saul as his son-in-law.

But there was a problem. According to **Deuteronomy 24:4**, a woman who divorces and remarries can't return to her former husband. The rabbis point to a ruling that says a woman who was allowed to remarry thinking her husband has died, can return to her first husband if he is found to be alive and well. They apply this to David's case.

[An alternate view suggests that Phaltiel had his own wife and family and was only acting as guardian for Micah on Saul's orders. He cried when she left because he loved her as a daughter].

'Now Then Do It!'

2 Samuel 3:17-19 - "And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you: Now then do it: for the LORD hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies. And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin."

The issue raised in this chapter in the Lordship of Christ.

The Israelite tribes had been noncommittal about David. The great preacher Charles Spurgeon saw this as a type of our response to Jesus.

"The Israelites might talk about making David king, but they would not crown him. They might meet together and say they wished it were so, but that would not do it. It might be generally admitted that he ought to be monarch, and it might even be earnestly hoped that one day he would be so, but they would not do it"

In the natural, we think we are ruling over our own lives, but really it is Satan who controls us, the scriptures say. We might want Jesus to reign over part of our lives, but not all. Or we might want Him to rule over all of our lives, but not right now. The truth was that David was not going to reign over Israel until he was invited wholeheartedly. Abner's entreaty was to "do it now!" and not wait.

2 Samuel 3:20-21 - "So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast. And Abner said unto David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth. And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace."

Joab Returns

The rabbis suggest that David, knowing the animosity between Abner and Joab, arranged for Joab to be gone when Abner arrived, and that Abner would leave before

Joab returned.

2 Samuel 3:24-25 - "Then Joab came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest."

The Septuagint has Joab ask, "Art thou ignorant?"

Joab was justified to suspect Abner of deception. For instance, wouldn't Abner be afraid to return to Ishbosheth's court if he had indeed betrayed him?

But Joab himself is blinded by his vendetta to avenge his brother. He might also have feared Abner would take his place as David's chief military advisor. Instead of trusting David's judgment about Abner, he devises a plan to kill Abner.

There are conspiracies, but not every conspiracy theory is true. Satan has power in this world, but we are under God's protection and His will is going to prevail. When Jesus assures us we are secure, we should believe Him. Our default should be to distrust our suspicions and question our tendency to accuse. Both Joab and Abner demonstrate different aspects of pride and self-delusion.

The Murder of Abner

2 Samuel 3:26-27 - "And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew it not. And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother."

He "smote him under the fifth rib," the same way he had killed Asahel. This should remind us that Christ's death on the cross - confirmed by the lance in his side that let out blood mixed with water - atoned for the kind of violent pride and vengeance displayed during this period of consolidation of David's kingdom, and in the human condition throughout history.

Asahel's death was in battle. And Abner was justified in killing someone who was pursuing him to take his life. Hebron itself was a city of refuge meant to protect against just this sort of revenge honor killing (**Numbers 35:9-28**). The fact that Joab met him just outside the gate of the city. showed Joab knew that Abner had a rightful claim of self-defense and was protected inside the city of Hebron, yet he killed him anyway.

How often have we responded in anger, accusation or self-righteousness, for what we imagine are the "right reasons" thinking we are somehow protecting God's good name, when really we're just being Pharisees?

David's Harsh Curse on Joab's Descendants

The danger here was that since Abner's murder took place under David's protection, the Israelite tribes would believe he was culpable.

2 Samuel 3:28-30 - "And afterward when David heard it, he said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD forever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner: Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread. So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle."

Though David curses Joab's descendants, he doesn't immediately do anything to Joab himself, perhaps because he needed him.

Spoiler: Years later, as David neared the end of his reign, Joab offered his allegiance to David's eldest living son, Adonijah, rather than to the eventual king, Solomon (**1 Kings 1:1-27**). So David told Solomon to have Joab killed, citing Joab's past betrayals and the blood that he was guilty of (**1 Kings 1 & 2**).

David Mourns for Abner

2 Samuel 3:31-32 - "And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier. And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept."

Joab is put in the position of being forced to mourn for the man he just killed.

2 Samuel 3:33-34 - "And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him."

"as a fool dieth" - the Targum has "did Abner die as wicked men die?" i.e. bound as a prisoner.

David's great display of lamentation, while genuine, also showed the Israelite tribes that he was innocent of Abner's death and that he did not want to establish his united kingdom through violence.

2 Samuel 3:35-38 - "And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down. And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner. And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

Although it was David's right (and duty) to punish evildoers, he would leave judgment of Joab up to God, because "vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord."

2 Samuel 3:39 - "And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."

The "sons of Zeruiah" refers to Joab and Abishai. "Too hard for me" means "too much for me to bear!"

David was "weak" because he was so far only anointed king in Judah, and Ishbosheth was still reigning in Israel. So he felt restrained from being able to properly exercise justice for this crime.

Also, because Joab and Abishai were valiant heroes of Judah as well as his own kin - sons of his sister - he could not politically afford to punish them. It had to wait until the end of his reign, when he ordered Solomon to execute Joab (**1 Kings 2:5**).

The rabbis insist that David's motives were for the good of Israel. Another death may have led to further divisions rather than unity.

But his leniency here may have encouraged another murder, that of Ishbosheth in the next chapter.

The Takeaway

The process of consolidating David's kingdom was messy and chaotic, (as it is within us) but was inexorably going forward. The Israelite tribes at first being of two minds and indecisive, eventually coalesced in unity, as we will see.

- **1 Chronicles 12:38** - "All these men of war, that could keep rank, came with a perfect heart to Hebron, to make David king over all Israel: and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king."

Our prayer is that each of us will be "of a perfect heart" and of "one heart" to make the Son of David king and lord over all areas of our life.

As Abner urged: "Now then, do it!"