

Abner Shifts Loyalty to David and is Killed by Joab

2 Samuel 3

2 Samuel 3 - *"Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. But David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.*

² Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; ³ his second, Chileab, by Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur; ⁴ the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; ⁵ and the sixth, Ithream, by David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron.

⁶ Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul. ⁷ And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So Ishbosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?"

⁸ Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, "Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman?" ⁹ May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the LORD has sworn to him— ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ And he could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

¹² Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, "Whose is the land?" saying also, "Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you." ¹³ And David said, "Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." ¹⁴ So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." ¹⁵ And Ishbosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. ¹⁶ Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping behind her. So Abner said to him, "Go, return!" And he returned.

¹⁷ Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, saying, "In time past you were seeking for David to be king over you. ¹⁸ Now then, do it! 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 And Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin. Then Abner also went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and the whole house of Benjamin.

²⁰ So Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. ²¹ Then Abner said to David, "I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

²² At that moment the servants of David and Joab came from a raid and brought much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. ²³ When Joab and all the troops that were with him had come, they told Joab, saying, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, and he has gone in peace." ²⁴ Then Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone? ²⁵ Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing."

²⁶ And when Joab had gone from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. ²⁷ Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother.

²⁸ Afterward, when David heard it, he said, "My kingdom and I are guiltless before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. ²⁹ Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread." ³⁰ So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle. ³¹ Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner." And King David followed the coffin. ³² So they buried Abner in Hebron; and the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. ³³ And the king sang a lament over Abner and said: "Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound nor your feet put into fetters; as a man falls before wicked men, so you fell." Then all the people wept over him again.

³⁵ And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, "God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!" ³⁶ Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, since whatever the king did pleased all the people. ³⁷ For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's intent to kill Abner the son of Ner. ³⁸ Then the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? ³⁹ And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too harsh for me. The LORD shall repay the evildoer according to his wickedness."

Background Notes

2 Samuel 2 records the victory of David's army under General Joab over Abner, the general of Ishbosheth's army. Although this battle was clearly a victory for David's forces, it was not decisive enough to end the state of war between the house of David and the house of Saul. A long state of cold war, without a lot of open decisive battles, existed for this time period.

It was during this time that Abner and Ishbosheth had a falling out. Ishbosheth accused Abner of having taken Rizpah, one of Saul's former concubines. Abner was so furious about this accusation that he told Ishbosheth that he was going to deliver the kingdom over to David, and he proceeded to lay the groundwork to do just that. Abner and 20 officials from northern Israel came to David at Hebron to arrange for David to become king over all of Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. He who sows to the flesh will reap destruction.

This doctrinal point listed is found in Galatians 6:8 *"Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."* This is true of everyone, even of believers. When believers sow to the flesh, they reap the consequences by destroying what could have been a lifetime of committed service and glory to the Lord.

Where do we see this biblical truth presented in 2 Samuel 3? It's at the beginning of the chapter, where we read of David's polygamy. God's Word had clearly stated that kings of Israel were not to practice polygamy, Deuteronomy 17:17 - *"He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold."* David certainly knew this law, but he disobeyed it. He "sowed to the flesh" by having several wives and concubines. The eventual consequences were heartache after heartache in David's family. His life and reign were marred with terrible scars because of his "sowing to the flesh."

Later in 2 Samuel we will see David "sowing to the flesh" when he committed adultery and murder. Also, because David sowed to the flesh by taking multiple wives, his son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar; then her brother Absalom killed his half-brother Amnon. Because David sowed to the flesh by not disciplining Absalom for committing murder, Absalom became even more proud and usurped the throne. Then Absalom was killed by Joab. Why all of this bad fallout?

Answer: He who sows to the flesh will reap destruction.

We see this lesson illustrated also in the life of Paltiel (v13-16). *"Ishbosheth sent and took her [Michal] from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping behind her. So Abner said to him, "Go, return!" And he returned."* We might feel sorry for Paltiel as his wife was taken away from him, but he should have refused to marry her in the first place. Saul offered Michal to Paltiel when David was in the wilderness, but Paltiel should have refused his fleshly desire to be married to the king's daughter, because Michal was already married. She was David's wife. Paltiel reaped what he had sown.

We must resist the wrong desires of the flesh. The desires of the flesh must be held in check. He who sows to the flesh will reap destruction.

2. The wrath of man shall praise God.

Abner decided to defect from Ishbosheth, and he went to Hebron to confer with David. When Joab heard that David was making a deal with Abner, he was not pleased. Abner, remember, had killed Joab's brother Asahel. In addition, Joab likely felt that Abner, Saul's former general, would threaten his position as general of David's army. So, when Joab came back to Hebron, he lured Abner into the gate at Hebron and killed him there. David was not pleased with this turn of events, as you can well imagine. In fact, he pronounced a curse on Joab and his descendants.

David forced Joab to publicly mourn Abner's death, because even though Abner had killed Asahel, Joab was not justified in taking revenge. Abner had killed Asahel in self-defense during a time of war, and only after he had warned Asahel and given him an opportunity to escape. Furthermore, Hebron was a city of refuge, and Abner was entitled to safety and a fair trial there. When the people of Israel saw that David was genuine in his sorrow, and that Abner was buried with full military honors, the way was paved for David to become king over all Israel.

This event illustrates our doctrinal point. "The wrath of man shall praise God" is found in Psalm 76:10. When we think of all the sin and war and intrigue that are presented in 2 Samuel 3, we're amazed to realize that God was working through it all to accomplish His good plan and purpose of bringing David to the throne over all Israel. And this is true today as well. Think of all the sin and war and intrigue that is going on between nations in the world today - and yet God is working through all of this to bring about the worldwide kingdom of Christ in the future. The wrath of man shall praise God!

Practical Application

Hope that the sermon text at your funeral is "in context"!

Would you want 2 Samuel 3:38 to be the sermon text at your funeral? "...a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel..." It sounds good at first - but when you look at the context, I doubt you'd want this as the biblical text at your funeral!

Abner was a self-seeking, power-hungry individual. He was a shrewd schemer, and he was out for "Number One." He joined David only when he saw the handwriting on the wall that Ishbosheth's kingdom was doomed. And David pronounced this accolade about Abner primarily to win favor with the northern tribes of Israel! Using this as a text at a funeral of a godly leader today (as I have actually heard it used!) is taking the verse way out of its context. So - you should hope that the sermon text at your funeral is selected and used "in context"!