

2 Samuel Chapter 3 Continued

2 Samuel 3:22 "And, behold, the servants of David and Joab came from [pursuing] a troop, and brought in a great spoil with them: but Abner [was] not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace."

He had been either on some expedition against the Philistines, the Amalekites, or other enemies of Judah, or else engaged in repelling some attack from them. In either case, he returned elated with victory and bringing great spoil. But Abner had concluded his interview and gone away before his return.

We remember from a previous lesson, that Joab was the leader of David's military. He was a very brave man. He has been off in a battle, and has come home victor. He has brought the spoil from the battle home with him. David was aware that Abner had killed Joab's brother. David may have sent Abner on this mission to get him away from headquarters, while Abner was there. This is the first that Joab has heard about Abner coming over to David's side. David has made the agreement without consulting Joab. The agreement is set, and David has sent Abner away in peace.

Verses 23-29: For the cause of Abner's murder (see the note on 2:23). Joab's avenging of "his brother" was at "Hebron," a city of refuge (Joshua 21:13). Such an act was against the regulations in the law (Num. 35:22-28), even if "Joab" were acting as an avenger of blood (see the note on Joshua 20:2). Accordingly, because Joab's deed was born of vengeance and jealousy (verses 24-25), Joab does not receive David's blessing, but his curse. "David" leads the people of Hebron in a sincere time of public mourning (verses 31-39).

2 Samuel 3:23 "When Joab and all the host that [was] with him were come, they told Joab, saying, Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace."

To Hebron or rather to David's court, for their coming to the city is before mentioned. This must be understood not of the whole army, of all the common soldiers, but of the chief officers, who with Joab came to court, to wait upon David, and report their success.

"They told Joab, saying, Abner the son, of Ner came to the king": Some of the courtiers informed him of it, who knew it would not be very agreeable to him.

"And he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace": Instead of seizing him, and laying him in a prison as his enemy, he has let him go with all the marks of friendship and good will.

Joab hates Abner for killing his brother. He cannot seem to forget that. The men heard the people of Hebron tell of the visit of Abner. They also relate that David let him live. In fact, he let him go peacefully. This has to bother Joab, who has not forgiven him for killing his brother.

2 Samuel 3:24 "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?"

Joab's somewhat rough remonstrance with David may have been supported by an honest suspicion of Abner, for which there was some ground in Abner's long opposition to the known Divine will and his present revolt from Ish-bosheth. But there was also a personal enmity, due partly to the fear of being himself supplanted by an older and famous warrior, and partly to the desire to revenge the death of his brother Asahel. Joab seeks to poison David's mind against Abner so that he may better carry out his revenge.

Verses 25-27: Whether "Joab" was defending David or looking out for his own position, his act against "Abner" was murder since it was neither an act of war nor a justifiable act of revenge. This is especially true because "Hebron" was a city of refuge (Num. 35:22-25; Joshua 20:6-7).

2 Samuel 3:25 "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."

"Abner ... came to deceive thee": It is ironic that Joab accused Abner of deception in spying on David (in verse 25 when in verse 26 he deceived David), by not telling him of his request to have Abner returned to Hebron. Joab used this deception to slay Abner out of personal vengeance for the death of his brother Asahel (verse 27; see 2:19-23).

David had to be a tolerant king, to let his subordinate speak to him in this manner. Perhaps, Joab thinks that David might replace him with Abner, the military leader of Saul's army. He actually feels that David has deliberately not told him of his plans. Joab tries to say, that Abner cannot be trusted. Whether Joab really believes that Abner is a spy, or whether there is a touch of jealousy, is not clear. He is not satisfied with the way David handled Abner. He feels he had better take care of this himself.

2 Samuel 3:26 "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."

"Well of Sirah": The only mention of this location is found here. The town was located about 2.5 miles northwest of Hebron.

Joab did not get orders from David, to go after Abner. He did this on his own. The scouts that Joab sent out told a lie to Abner, undoubtedly. Abner would not have come back with them at all, if he had known that it was Joab, and not David, that wanted him. The well of Sirah, mentioned here, is about two and a half miles out of Hebron. This is where Joab waited for him.

2 Samuel 3:27 "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."

“Smote here there under the fifth rib”: Abner died in a similar manner to Joab’s brother Asahel, the man he had killed (2:23). However, Abner struck Asahel during battle (2:18-23), in self-defense, while Joab murdered Abner to avenge the death of Asahel.

In a sense, Joab was paying a tooth for a tooth. His brother had been killed by a spear going in under his fifth rib. It was Abner, who had actually speared him. The action of Joab was an act of revenge. The place where Joab killed him was a private place. He possibly, made Abner believe there was something secret he needed to talk to him about. When they met in secret, Joab struck him under the fifth rib and killed him.

Verses 28-29: “David” did not punish “Joab” immediately, perhaps because Joab was too important as a military commander. Solomon eventually punished Joab for his crime (1 Kings 2:5-6; 29-35).

2 Samuel 3:28 "And afterward when David heard [it], he said, I and my kingdom [are] guiltless before the LORD for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner:"

“The blood of Abner”: Since life is in the blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11, 14; Deut.12:23), this expression refers to the life of Abner. David made it clear he had nothing to do with the murder of Abner, and David sought the Lord’s help to punish Joab for his evil deed (verse 39).

The fact that the leader of David's military did this would cause people to believe that David was in on the plot to kill Abner. David immediately denies any part in this deceit. He places the blame clearly at Joab's feet. This act of treachery, if it were done by David, could cost him the agreement he had just made to be the king of all Israel.

2 Samuel 3:29 "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."

That is the blood of Abner, who was the shedder of it; let the guilt of it be charged to him, and let punishment for it be inflicted on him.

"And on all his father's house": On Abishai his brother, and other relations that might be privy to the death of Abner, and advising to it, and ready to assist in it if necessary.

"And let there not fail from the house of Joab": Let there be always in his family, and of his seed, one or other of the persons described as follows.

"One that hath an issue": A gonorrhoea, which was reckoned infamous, and very impure, according to the Jewish law, and rendered persons unfit for society (see Lev. 15:1).

"Or that is a leper": Whose disease was very loathsome and infectious, and shut him out of the company of men (see Lev. 13:1).

"Or that leaneth on a staff": Being blind, as Aquila renders the word; or through weakness of body, not being able to walk without one. Or through some disease of the feet, as the Jewish writers generally understand it; and Isaiah interprets it of the gout particularly. The word for "staff" is rendered "spindle" (Prov. 31:19); and to this sense it is rendered here in, the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions. And then the meaning is, let his posterity, or some of them, be so poor, that they shall be obliged to get their livelihood in so mean a way as by spinning. Or let them be of such an effeminate disposition, as be more fit to handle the spindle, and do the, work of women, than to use the sword.

"Or that falleth on the sword": Not by it honorably in the field of battle, but cowardly destroying themselves with it.

"Or that lacketh bread": And is obliged to beg it. All which David might say, not by a spirit of prophecy, but in a passion; and to show with what horror he resented the action, and how detestable it was to him, and how far it was for him to have any concern in it. But though it was a very wicked action in Joab to murder Abner in this manner, and for the reasons he did; yet it was a just vengeance from the Lord on Abner for fighting against God. And acting against the dictates of his own conscience; for his rebellion against David, and perfidy to Ish-bosheth, and for having been the cause of much bloodshed in Israel.

David is very angry with Joab, for this terrible thing he has done. In a sense, he speaks a curse on Joab and his family. He is very disappointed that the leader of his army would do such a thing. David had a strong feeling of justice to all men. He had just made an agreement that would have brought all of Israel under him as king. This incident could cause the other tribes not to make David their king.

David was an honorable king. He was completely revolted by the sneaky manner that Joab killed Abner to take revenge. Joab never once thought of the good of his country, he just wanted to get even for his brother's murder. This terrible curse was on all of Joab's people. They would be sickly from that day forward.

2 Samuel 3:30 "So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle."

For though Joab only committed the murder, yet Abishai was guilty of it. Because it was done with his consent, counsel, help and approbation. For by these and such-like actions men are involved in the guilt of other men's sins, at least in God's judgment. Abner slew Asahel in the fury of battle, and for his own necessary defense; and therefore, it was no justification of this unnecessary and treacherous murder in a time of peace.

This is simply a brutal revenge on Abner.

2 Samuel 3:31 "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."

“Mourn”: Joab was instructed to lament the death of Abner, as was the custom for commemorating the death of an individual. To further demonstrate David’s condemnation of the killing of Abner, he instructed “all the people” to mourn the death of Abner, including Joab and his men (verses 32-34).

The whole nation must mourn for Abner. David spoke a command, and they must do it, want to, or not. King David showed Abner the respect of a high diplomat in following the bier.

Verses 32-39: David had to distance himself from Joab’s murder of Abner so that the nation would not be divided over it. He was successful in demonstrating his innocence in the matter.

2 Samuel 3:32 "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."

The family home, and therefore the natural burial-place, of Abner was at Gibeon (1 Chron. 8:29; 8:33; 9:33); but this may have been now under Ish-bosheth’s control. And at all events, a burial in the royal city of Hebron was more honorable and a more marked testimony to the grief of David.

King David truly was sorry about the death of Abner. David had given his word. Joab actually broke David's word. Abner was buried with honor in Hebron.

2 Samuel 3:33 "And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth?"

Delivered an elegy or funeral oration, which he had composed on this occasion, as Josephus suggests: for he had cried and wept before, but now he expressed something as follows.

"And said, died Abner as a fool dieth?" The meaning of the interrogation is, he did not. The Targum is "did Abner die as wicked men die?" No, he did not. He did not die for any wickedness he had been guilty of. He did not die as a malefactor, whose crime has been charged and proved in open court, and sentence of condemnation pronounced on him righteously for it. But he died without anything being laid to his charge, and much less proved, and without judge or jury. He was murdered in a clandestine, insidious, and deceitful manner. So the word "fool" is often taken in Scripture for a wicked man, especially in the book of Proverbs. The Septuagint version leaves the word untranslated, "died Abner according to the death of Nabal?" No; but it could hardly be thought that David would mention the name of any particular person on such an occasion.

2 Samuel 3:34 "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."

The people were moved greatly by the sight of David’s sorrow, but still more by this brief poem of serious reflection over Abner. The whole circumstances are summed up in a few significant

words: Abner, so valiant in war, with his hands free for defense, with his feet unfettered, unsuspecting of evil, fell by the treacherous act of a wicked man.

David gave the eulogy for Abner. The thing that disturbed David the most was the fact that Abner had not been given a chance to defend himself. He had not been tried in a court of law, and found guilty. Joab had taken the law into his own hands. He had killed him without a trial.

Verses 35-39: David's feelings and conduct in response to Abner's death tended not only to remove all suspicion of guilt from him, but even turned the tide of public opinion in his favor and paved the way for his reigning over all the tribes much more honorably than by the negotiations of Abner (3:17-19).

2 Samuel 3:35 "And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David swore, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down."

The fasting of David in his grief had already attracted attention, so that the people came to urge him to take food; but he utterly refused "till the sun be down," the usual time of ending a fast. David's conduct had a good effect upon the people, and indeed, they were generally disposed to look favorably upon whatever the king did.

David fasted the entire day, until the sun went down, to show the sincerity of his grief over what had happened.

2 Samuel 3:36 "And all the people took notice [of it], and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people."

Not only of his oath, that he would not eat food till evening, but of his whole conduct at the funeral of Abner; the sorrow he expressed for his death, and the oration he made on account of it, in which he pretty severely reflected on his murderer.

"And it pleased them": That he showed such a concern for his death, and that it was a clear case he had no hand in it.

"As whatsoever the king did pleased all the people": What he did at this time, burying Abner with so much pomp and ceremony. And indeed, he had so much of the hearts of the people, and such a share in their affections, and they had such a high opinion of him, that all that he did in public and private affairs they reckoned well done. They were highly approved of by them, such an interest had he in them.

David's respect for Abner and his actions at his death showed that David was an honorable man. The people were very pleased with the way David handled this situation.

2 Samuel 3:37 "For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner."

Not the people of Judah only, but of Israel also, to whom the knowledge of these things came. They knew and were satisfied by his conduct and behavior, by his words and actions.

"That it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner": It was not by the counsel or advice of the king, as the Targum. It was without his knowledge and consent and was contrary to his mind and will; that he had no manner of concern in it, and that if it had been in his power he would have prevented it.

Not only did the people of Judah understand what happened was not the wishes of David, but all of Israel realized it.

2 Samuel 3:38 "And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

His courtiers, giving a reason why he mourned as he did; or "had said", and so is a reason why the people concluded, and were fully satisfied, he had no hand in his death. But the first is best, because what follows was said not to the people at the grave, but to his servants at court.

"Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? A "prince", being of the royal family, his father was Saul's uncle, and he his own cousin; a "great" man, being general of the army. A very valiant and skillful commander and a man of great wisdom and parts. David says nothing of his grace and virtue, only of his grandeur, his high birth and civil excellences; he praises him in what he was commendable, and proceeds no further. And this was sufficient to show there was just cause of mourning on civil accounts; and this they might easily know and perceive that the fall or death of such a man, which had that day happened in Israel, was a public loss, and matter of lamentation. And the fact that he was employing all his talents in civil affairs and all his interest in the people of Israel; to unite them to Judah and bring them under the government of David.

David speaks high praise of his opponent Abner here. He and Abner had been caught on opposite sides for a long time, but they had settled their differences and decided to live in peace.

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."

"Weak ... hard": David had not yet solidified his power enough to exact his own judgment without jeopardizing his command. He was still "weak" and needed time to consolidate his authority. Once that was accomplished, he no longer needed to fear the strength of Joab and Abishai, who were Zeruiah's sons (2:18).

David blames himself for being too weak to control the actions of Joab. David tries to convince them that what Abner tried to do in uniting them, was the right thing to do. David asks God to punish the evil doers.

2 Samuel Chapter 4 Questions

1. Where had Joab been, while David was talking to Abner?
2. What did they bring back with them?
3. David had sent Abner away in _____.
4. What position did Joab have with David?
5. Why did Joab hate Abner?
6. How did Joab find out about the agreement David had made with Abner?
7. What question did Joab ask David about this?
8. What did Joab accuse Abner of doing, when he came to meet David?
9. How do we know that David was a tolerant king?
10. Who did Joab send to bring Abner back?
11. Where did they bring Abner?
12. Where did Joab kill Abner?
13. Why did he kill him in the manner he did?
14. When David heard what Joab had done, what did he do immediately?
15. What curse did David speak on Joab and his family?
16. Who helped Joab kill Abner?
17. What did David command Joab and all the people to do in verse 31?
18. How did David show his respect for Abner?
19. Where was Abner buried?
20. How did David show his grief over Abner at the grave?
21. Who gave the eulogy for Abner?

22. What disturbed David the worst about Abner's death?
23. What did David do all day long, to show the sincerity of his grief over what happened?
24. Who understood that it was not David, who ordered Abner's death?
25. What did David call Abner in verse 38?
26. Why does David blame himself for what happened?
27. David asks _____ to punish the evil doers.