

Rise and Fall of Abner

2 Samuel 3

Lesson Outline

I. House of David: 2 Samuel 3:1-5

- A. David's Strength: 2 Samuel 3:1
- B. David's Sons: 2 Samuel 3:2-5

II. Hope for the Nation: 2 Samuel 3:6-21

- A. Abner and Ishbosheth: 2 Samuel 3:6-11
- B. Abner and David: 2 Samuel 3:12-21

III. Hardship For the Nation: 2 Samuel 3:22-39

- A. Joab's Vengeance: 2 Samuel 3:22-27
- B. David's Vexation: 2 Samuel 3:28-39

House of David

2 Samuel 3:1-5

David's Strength: 2 Samuel 3:1

David's House

David looked to the LORD and was blessed. He was promised to be king and patiently waited to take the throne (Isaiah 40:3; Psalm 27:14, 37:7). In the meantime David's house became stronger, gaining men and great respect (1 Chronicles 12:23-40). People began to look to David as their leader and were willing to follow after him. David's army won battles and earned a good reputation. David did nothing out of the ordinary; he simply trusted the LORD and his house grew stronger.

Saul's House

As David grew stronger, Saul's house grew weaker. With Saul and Jonathan deaths, the strength was taken away. It was only a matter of time before Saul's dynasty was gone, but his house would not fall without a fight. Abner and Ishbosheth did their best to maintain the dynasty, but with Ishbosheth as king, the house lost men, power, influence, and reputation. It was declining rapidly and Abner may have recognized this.

David's Sons: 2 Samuel 3:2-5

David's Polygamy

Contrary to scriptural teaching, David had many wives. Before he arrived in Hebron he had no sons but over the years his house was blessed with children (Psalm 127:3-5).

1. *Amnon* – mother was Ahinoam the Jezreelitess. He was a wicked and sensual man that was murdered by Absalom (2 Samuel 13).
2. *Chileab* – mother was Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite.
3. *Absalom* – mother was Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur. He would prove to be a hindrance, revolting against David and attempting to overthrow the government (2 Samuel 14-18).
4. *Adonijah* – mother was Haggith. He attempted to take the throne before it went to Solomon and was put to death (1 Kings 1:5, 2:22-25).
5. *Shephatiah* – mother was Abital.
6. *Ithream* – mother was Eglah.

David's Problems

The Bible provides the accurate record of David's life and never condones his sinful actions. Polygamy is unscriptural; Adam was only given one wife, Eve (Matthew 19:8). Kings were strictly forbidden from the error of polygamy (Deuteronomy 17:17). David's actions were probably excused by the nation because polygamy was common in Old Testament times, but popularity does not make it correct. Today, many live according to the world's standards instead of God's direction. Society may accept sinful behavior but the LORD will hold the sinner accountable (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:12-13). Taking many wives was a poor decision that tarnished David's testimony.

The mistake of polygamy would produce disruption in David's family; three of his six sons mentioned were murdered. Sadly, David's family never seemed to be in harmony. Instead of being a place of joy, his home remained in disarray and produced heartache. He may have been a commendable king but struggled to be a good husband and parent. Without a doubt David loved his children but apparently he failed to raise them after the LORD (Proverbs 22:6). His failure at home directly affected his leadership of the nation. The morality of a leader is important because the nation will be affected by their conduct. A morally strong leader, with respect for the LORD, will be a blessing to those he leads, whereas an immoral ungodly leader will burden a nation with corruption and wickedness. Never underestimate the moral character of a leader, because his or her decisions will be based upon their beliefs.

Hope for the Nation

2 Samuel 3:6-21

Abner and Ishbosheth: 2 Samuel 3:6-11

Abner Offended

Abner became the might of Saul's house. He made himself strong. Abner found Ishbosheth and placed him on the throne. At first all went well, but eventually the king accused Abner of immoral behavior with Rizpah, one of Saul's concubines. According to ancient eastern custom, the king's harem belonged to the palace and reigning king (2 Samuel 12:7-8). Perhaps Ishbosheth cared less about the issue of immorality but believed Abner threatened to take the throne. He probably had little or no trust for the captain of his host (James 1:8).

Abner became wroth and acted deeply offended by the accusation. He believed it was a slap in the face – akin to being called an animal. He claimed to be upset, implying he was being mistreated after all he had done for Ishbosheth and the nation. Abner made a ruckus but never denied the charge. Perhaps he was innocent and rightly insulted by the accusation or was guilty and covered it up with anger. Either way, he was furious and intent on letting Ishbosheth know.

Abner Outraged

Abner understood the LORD promised David would be king and implied he would not continue against his conscience for nothing (1 Samuel 15:28-29, 16:1-12). Abner was fine with helping Ishbosheth when he believed he was the authority, but when Ishbosheth attempted to hold him accountable, he was prepared to forsake him. Proud men want nobody to question their actions, and often despise accountability.

Abner threatened Ishbosheth with failure. He helped him claim the throne and would assist in taking it away. Abner planned to transition the throne from Saul's house to David's by leading the people away from Ishbosheth and after David. The motive was clear; Abner became Ishbosheth's enemy, not to help David, but to have revenge against Ishbosheth.

1. *Abner was stubborn* – he knew God's promise to David, yet did his best to assist Ishbosheth and prolong Saul's dynasty.
2. *Abner was selfish* – he was willing to betray Saul's house when it no longer benefited him.

The weak and cowardly Ishbosheth was filled with fear and had no response for Abner. He probably realized Abner's threats were real.

Abner and David: 2 Samuel 3:12-21

Abner Reached Out to David

Abner sent messengers to David enquiring about the land, implying he knew David was the rightful king of the nation. He asked for an alliance and promised to lead Israel after David. A reply was sent; David would not meet Abner until his first wife Michal was returned. She was his first wife but was given to another man in David's absence (1 Samuel 18:20, 27-28, 25:22). Perhaps he loved her or else it was a political move, believing it wise to bring Saul's daughter with him into the palace. David made his demand to Ishbosheth, perhaps after consulting Abner, and Michal was returned to him.

Abner reached out to Israel's leaders, reminding them how they sought David to be king. Apparently, many would have looked to David, had Abner not interfered. David was known throughout the land, his victories were legendary and he was the kind of king the people desired. It was also mentioned that David was chosen by the LORD to be the next king and would be used to deliver the people from their enemies. He challenged them with a good question, why fight against what God has already determined? Abner also addressed the tribe of Benjamin, Saul's tribe, knowing with their recommendation David would certainly be accepted as king.

Abner Feasted With David

Abner went to Hebron with twenty of his men and was met by David. There in the city of Ishbosheth's rival, Abner feasted with David. Joab was conveniently absent from the meeting. It was probably planned, to avoid controversy, but his absence proved to be a problem. Joab had been faithful to David and may have been upset at not being consulted or invited to the feast.

Abner offered to deliver all of Israel unto David. This bold proposition may have excited David. An alliance with Abner would unite the nation while propelling David to the throne as rightful king. The details of the meeting are not provided but Abner left in peace, implying they agreed together and prepared to move forward. Wisely, David looked to end the fighting so he could assume the throne.

Hardship for the Nation

2 Samuel 3:22-39

Joab's Vengeance: 2 Samuel 3:22-27

Joab Disagreed with David

David's commanding general returned following a successful venture against enemy forces. Joab arrived with great spoil immediately after Abner left the city. To Joab's surprise David and Abner had met, feasted, and parted ways as allies. Joab was probably taken off guard by this news.

Joab immediately addressed David, asking why he met with Abner his biggest opposition to the throne. Joab also accused David of being taken, he believed Abner planned to deceive David and that

his reason for coming was a lie. Joab's anger at being left out of the meeting may have been justified but his conclusions concerning Abner were faulty.

1. *Joab was spiteful* – he had a personal vendetta against Abner for slaying his brother Asahel.
2. *Joab was speculative* – he was not present at the feast and based his assumptions on Abner's past actions.

Joab furiously and incorrectly implied that David was foolish and naïve for meeting with Abner. He allowed his emotions to cloud his judgment.

Joab Deceived Abner

Evidently, Joab was unhappy with David and discontent with how Abner was received. Joab left David's presence and unbeknownst to David, sent messengers to retrieve Abner, who returned without hesitation believing himself to be safe at Hebron. Perhaps he didn't know that Joab would be waiting for him.

Joab met Abner at the gate of the city and took him aside for a private meeting. Abner might have expected to talk about Asahel's death, but was clearly unaware of Joab's wicked plot. Joab surprised Abner and in an act of revenge murdered him in cold blood. Joab was unable to let the LORD deal with Abner, so he took things into his own hands and committed a terrible crime (Proverbs 24:29, 20:22; Romans 12:19). Sadly, Abner reaped what he had sown (Galatians 6:7-8). His deception was often used to his advantage, but in the end, he lost his life being deceived.

David's Vexation: 2 Samuel 3:28-39

David Reacted

Once David heard of Abner's death at the hands of Joab, he proclaimed his innocence by placing the blame where it belonged, on Joab and his family. It was evident Abner was wrongly murdered because of his action against Asahel.

1. *Asahel was killed in battle* – that same day Joab and Abishai probably slew many of Abner's friends.
2. *Asahel was killed in self-defense* – Abner warned Asahel and gave him opportunity to leave.

It is possible Joab was jealous of Abner's new friendship with David and resented Abner's influence among the people. Perhaps Joab feared Abner would threaten his position as commanding general. Whatever the motive, Joab proved to be a murderer (1 Kings 2:5).

David demanded Joab and the others mourn for Abner while he personally followed the bier as chief mourner. David wept and wrote a poem reflecting upon Abner's death. Being deceived, Abner was not given opportunity to defend himself, so he died as a man that falls before the wicked. This poem caused the people to weep again for Abner. We are left to wonder if Joab was affected by the words.

Perhaps his hardened heart remained untouched. David fasted for the day and the people recognized his innocence.

David Reflected

In honoring Abner, David declared a great prince had fallen in Israel. Abner was a mighty, influential leader who served the nation for many years. Abner, who was preparing to help Israel as David's new ally, would be greatly missed. The peace treaty was put on hold as the nation mourned for its ambitious military leader. The future of Israel remained uncertain.

David also recognized his personal weaknesses. He was king by title but without power. With Abner gone, David remained king of Judah but not of Israel. He was overcome by the actions of the sons of Zeruiah, who acted independently instead of under David's direction or authority. They were rebellious. Perhaps, David understood he could not stand against them without starting a civil war in Judah. So for the moment they were above the law, favored and protected by their positions, Joab the commanding general and Abishai a leading officer. David probably should have executed Joab but it would have been difficult because Joab was powerful, influential, and faithful. On top of all this, Joab was family, David's cousin. David benefited from their ambitious attitude in battle but was hindered by their vengeful hearts. These tough men eventually became a problem for David. Be careful whom you associate with (1 Corinthians 15:33). He left the matter in God's hands, believing the LORD would deal with the wicked. The nation remained divided, but with Abner gone Saul's house was all but finished.