

# Second Samuel

## Lesson 3

Abner, the commander of Ishbosheth's army, was on one side of the pool of Gibeon. Joab, the commander of David's army, was on the other side. Abner made a terrible and tragic suggestion in order to end the conflict between the two. The contest suggested by Abner ended in the tragic slaughter of the lives of twenty-four men. Then, Abner and his men ran for their lives. Joab and his brothers chased Abner as he ran. Joab's army chased after Abner's army as they ran. The meeting at the pool of Gibeon was senseless.

### **b) The Continuation of the Conflict (2:18-25)**

#### **(1) The Boys of Zeruiah (2:18-23)**

The deaths of the twenty-four men did not end the conflict. As the writer tells us of the continuation of the conflict, we are introduced to the boys of Zeruiah. Verse 18. *"Now the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab and Abishai and Asahel; and Asahel was as swift-footed as one of the gazelles which is in the field."* Zeruiah was David's sister; therefore, these three sons were nephews of David. Joab was David's commander.

#### **(a) The Swiftmess of Asahel (2:19)**

We are told by Gad of the swiftmess of Asahel, David's nephew. Verse 19. *"Asahel pursued Abner and did not turn to the right or to the left from following Abner."* In this line, Gad also tells us of the dominance of David's men which caused Abner to run to try to escape. Asahel followed him closely and quickly.

#### **(b) The Death of Asahel (2:20-23)**

Even though Asahel was determined to catch up with Abner, it did not mean that Asahel would overcome him. We come to the death of Asahel. Verse 20. *"Then Abner looked behind him and said, 'Is that you, Asahel?' And he answered, 'It is I.'" 21 So Abner said to him, 'Turn to your right or to your left, and take hold of one of the young men for yourself, and take for yourself his spoil.' But Asahel was not willing to turn aside from following him. 22 Abner repeated again to Asahel, 'Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?' 23 However, he refused to turn aside; therefore Abner struck him in the belly with the butt end of the spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died on the spot. And it came about that all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still."*

Abner knew that Asahel was determined to kill him. He knew that Asahel could overcome one of the soldiers running with him, therefore, he offered one of his soldiers to die in his place and allow Asahel to take that soldier's spoils. But Asahel would not have it. He wanted Abner. Abner then killed Asahel. He ran his sword through Asahel until the butt of the handle stopped at Asahel's belly. Then Abner left the scene. When all the rest of the men in pursuit of Abner arrived at the dead body of Asahel, they stopped the pursuit.

#### **(2) The Band of Abner (2:24-25)**

As the men pursuing Abner stopped to gaze at Asahel's dead body, his two brothers did not. But what they soon found was the band of Abner. Verse 24. *"But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner, and when the sun was going down, they came to the hill of Ammah, which is in front of Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. 25 The sons of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became one band, and they stood on the top of a certain hill."*

Somewhere down the road, all the Benjamite soldiers assembled with Abner as one force. They stood together on the top of a hill. This location means that Joab and Abishai were lower in the valley.

### **c) The Halt of the Conflict (2:26-32)**

#### **(1) What Abner Said (2:26)**

With Abner and his men on the top of the hill, and Joab with his men below, cooler heads prevailed and we hear of the halt of the conflict. It came with what Abner said. Verse 26. *"Then Abner called to Joab*

and said, “Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the end? How long will you refrain from telling the people to turn back from following their brothers?”

In these words, Abner admitted to Joab that more men would die “today” if this conflict kept up.

#### (2) What Joab Said (2:27-28)

Joab heard the words of Abner, and Gad recorded what Joab said in reply. Verse 27. “*Joab said, “As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely then the people would have gone away in the morning, each from following his brother.”* <sup>28</sup> *So Joab blew the trumpet; and all the people halted and pursued Israel no longer, nor did they continue to fight anymore.”*

Taking the whole conflict into context, Joab blames Abner for all the deaths that day. Abner had suggested the cruel remedy of the twenty-four men killing each other. With that blood bath, the conflict escalated. When Joab and Abner sat at the pool, the negotiations should have been able to settle the dispute. We must remember at this point that David would not have dared approve anything that would have ended the rule of Ish-boseth with conflict, but that was where this conflict was headed. Ish-boseth had been anointed the king of Israel, and David dared not “touch the anointed.” It was the theme in First Samuel. Joab knew David well by this time. He knew his orders. If Abner had stuck to the negotiation table, and not suggested the brutal contest, all the soldiers on both sides would have safely gone home in the morning. Many were dead because of Abner, at least in Joab’s mind.

#### (3) Where Abner Went (2:29)

The conflict was halted. Then the writer tells us where Abner went that night. Verse 29. “*Abner and his men then went through the Arabah all that night; so they crossed the Jordan, walked all morning, and came to Mahanaim.”*

Abner and his army did not pause one moment once the conflict ended at Gibeon. They took their bags and marched down to the Jordan River that night, marched up the Arabah, the west bank of the Jordan River, until they came to the river’s crossing, where they made their way to the east side of the Jordan River and on to the town of Mahanaim. It took them all night and all morning. As we are about to see next, Abner had lost three hundred and sixty men that day in death.

#### (4) Where Joab Went (2:30-32)

The writer concludes this part of the story by telling us where Joab went. Verse 30. “*Then Joab returned from following Abner; when he had gathered all the people together, nineteen of David’s servants besides Asahel were missing.* <sup>31</sup> *But the servants of David had struck down many of Benjamin and Abner’s men, so that three hundred and sixty men died.* <sup>32</sup> *And they took up Asahel and buried him in his father’s tomb which was in Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men went all night until the day dawned at Hebron.”*

Of David’s army, under the command of Joab, only nineteen men died, not including Asahel, David’s nephew whom Abner killed. Therefore, twenty men died that day from David’s side. Twelve of those men died in the senseless challenge of Abner. The other seven died in the fierce battle that ensued after the challenge. On the way back to Hebron, Joab and the army stopped in Bethlehem to bury Asahel in the grave of Jesse, David’s father. Then, they marched all night to arrive at Hebron in the morning, where David was residing. Joab had a report to give to David, but we are not told how David responded. But knowing David, he was deeply grieved.

The short war between the northern tribes under Abner’s control and Judah’s tribe under Joab’s control did not bring the war to an end in this divided kingdom. Ish-boseth was king of eleven tribes; David was king of one tribe. The fire of Abner’s and Joab’s skirmish was not extinguished. The coals of their war were stoked and became a complete bonfire again. But, in that new fiery war, the development in the kingdom continued. David increases; Ish-boseth decreases.

### C. The Development in the Kingdom (3:1-39)

#### 1. David’s Power Increases (3:1)

In the opening of chapter 3, verse 1 tells us how David’s power increases. “*Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew steadily stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker continually.”*

Our writer gives this short sentence as a summary of the hostile state of relationship between the northern tribes and Judah. We have to wonder about Saul's old kingdom now in the hands of Ish-bosheth. To our knowledge, he had never led one thing. He ended up being the king by default as the last surviving son of Saul. It was Jonathan who would have led the north to great heights. He was a proven warrior and leader, but he had died with his father. No doubt, time was on David's side. He was a proven leader and warrior. David knew when to fight and when to wait. And wait he should for the promise of the LORD that he would eventually be the king of all Israel.

If we back up in the story to when David was still in Ziklag, we discover in 1 Chronicles 12:20-22 that six captains of the tribe of Manasseh had already defected to David from the northern tribes. These six were captains over thousands, and they helped David and his band of six hundred men with their families through those early two years. The Chronicles passage ends by telling us, *"For day by day men came to David to help him, until there was a great army like the army of God."* (1 Chronicles 12:22) Time was on David's side. Each day, more and more men defected to the army of David, leaving the army of Ish-bosheth.

How many left the north daily to join David's increase in Hebron? 1 Chronicles 12:23 – 40 tells us that answer. All total, from all the northern tribes, 333,400 warriors defected from the north and moved to Hebron with the intent of making David king over all of Israel. As David started his run from Saul, David had six hundred men. By the death of Saul David had 6,800 men. But two years later, David had more than a third of a million men.

## 2. David's Posterity Increases (3:2-5)

Our author also gives us a summary of how David's posterity increases. Verse 2. *"Sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, by Abinoam the Jezreelitess;<sup>3</sup> and his second, Chileab, by Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah, the daughter of Talmi, king of Gesbur;<sup>4</sup> and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;<sup>5</sup> and the sixth, Ithream, by David's wife Eglah. These were born to David at Hebron."*

Here the writer introduces us to David's first six sons, each born to one of six of David's wives. For clarity, the six sons in order of birth were Ammon, Chileah, Absalom, Adonijah, Shephatiah, and Ithream. The six wives who bore David these sons were Ahinoam, Abigail, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah. These six sons were born to David during his seven years in Hebron. Here is an interesting point. This summary proves that the book of Second Samuel was written well after the events. In the storyline, we are still in the first two years of David's reign as king of Judah – not Israel. But in this summary, we are given information concerning the seven years of David's family life.

## 3. David's Politics Increases (3:6-34)

### a) Abner's Arrogance (3:6-11)

The writer tells us how David's politics increases because of the actions of Abner in the north. We are told of Abner's arrogance in the north. He, as we may remember, was the cousin of the dead King Saul and the commander of Saul's armies. Verse 6. *"It came about while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David that Abner was making 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?" <sup>8</sup> Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, "Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show kindness to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hands of David; and yet today you charge me with a guilt concerning the woman. <sup>9</sup> May God do so to Abner, and more also, if as the LORD has sworn to David, I do not accomplish this for him, <sup>10</sup> to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba." <sup>11</sup> And he could no longer answer Abner a word, because he was afraid of him."*

Abner, as the commander of the northern armies, was taking advantage of his position for his personal prosperity in all things. Simply put, he was a snide. A snide is a person who does devious and underhanded things in their position of power. It was Abner who convinced the people to appoint Ish-bosheth as their king, but Abner undermined the king's kingdom and family. We have all known people who are like Abner. At first, we do not recognize that everything they do is for personal gain rather than the good of the people

they are around. But, even at first, the Holy Spirit will tell us that there is just something wrong with their motives. We all must trust people to help us. We all place people in power positions when we need their help. And, for the most part, those people help without personal desires, and they do not take advantage of us. They are not snides. Yet, some snides, like Abner, take every opportunity to undermine authorities above them and take advantage of the own positions. I know two men whom I worked with for thirty years. Throughout those years, I always felt something was wrong with their intentions. They were in power positions but also seemed to be conniving for personal gain. In the end, my suspicions proved true.

From the onset of Abner coming on the scene in First Samuel, something seemed wrong with him too. Here, Abner shows his true colors. He, in his arrogance, took advantage of Ish-bosheth and the death of Saul. Abner undermined Ish-bosheth by supposing himself to be the true power behind the king. However, in the culture, the king's property always became the property of the successor king. In this case, the harem of Saul became the harem of Ish-bosheth. If anyone took one of the king's wives, that person was advancing the pretension of the crown. This point comes out later in the book of First Kings when Adonijah has Bathsheba ask Solomon for the last concubine wife of David. Adonijah was executed for his snide attempt. (1 Kings 2:13-18) Abner was incensed by Ish-bosheth's question about his relationship with Rizpah, Saul's concubine. Abner decided to remove Ish-bosheth's kingdom from him and transfer it to David. Abner's threat struck fear in Ish-bosheth, and rightly so. Abner was a snide and an evil killer.

#### **b) Abner's Abdication (3:12-16)**

##### **(1) Abner's Request for a Covenant (3:12)**

The writer tells us of Abner's abdication to the side of David. He tells us of Abner's request for a covenant with David. Verse 12. *"Then Abner sent messengers to David in his place, saying, 'Whose is the land? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel over to you.'"*

It is interesting that Abner sent a messenger with the message and did not go himself. Abner undoubtedly realized that he could not be snide with David because of Joab whom he had already faced. Abner is offering David something he does not have the ownership to give. He is presumptions. Nevertheless, Abner has opened up a conversation with David, and David will use it to reclaim his property. Abner's arrogance grew in the face of Ish-bosheth's objection for the relationship of Abner with a wife of the dead King Saul. Abner had decided to switch his loyalty to King David. He requested a covenant with David. David saw the opportunity to make a request in return.

##### **(2) David's Request for His Wife (3:13-16)**

The writer tells us of David's request for his wife, Michal. Here is the message David sent word back to Abner and Ish-bosheth through Abner's messenger. Verse 13. *"He said, 'Good! I will make a covenant with you, but I demand one thing of you, namely, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see me.'"* <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 a hundred foreskins of the Philistines.'"* <sup>15</sup> *Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. <sup>16</sup> But her husband went with her, weeping as he went, and followed her as far as Baburim. Then Abner said to him, 'Go, return.' So he returned."*

If you will remember, Michal, the daughter of Saul, devised the plan for David's escape from Gibeah when Saul sent the men to get him from his home. At that time, Michal was his only wife. If our calculation is correct, Michal had David slip out of the house more than three years before this point in the story. In addition, unless David saw Michal at the funeral of Samuel, which he probably did not, David had not seen Michal since she sent him from the house on that fateful night more than three years before. In the meantime, Saul had taken Michal and given her to Paltiel for a wife. But, according to Levitical law, Michal was David's first wife, and he had not divorced her. Therefore, he had the right to make this claim.