

Second Samuel

Lesson 4

David had replied to Abner with his demand for his wife's return. In the last passage of the previous lesson, we notice that David did not rely on Abner to complete his demand. He also sent word to King Ish-bosheth. David was thwarting the attempt of snide Abner. Ish-bosheth's response to Abner being lude with one of Saul's wives, that now belonged to Ish-bosheth, must have triggered David's understanding that Ish-bosheth and Abner were now at odds. Ish-bosheth's response to David also communicated to David that Ish-bosheth was willing to do what was right in the eyes of the Law. Michal belonged to David. Ish-bosheth was ready to make that right. He did. He took her from Paltiel's home and sent her to David. Paltiel, who no doubt loved Michal, was unhappy with Ish-bosheth's actions. He wept and followed as they took her away.

Also, notice that Abner was there. It was Abner, not Ish-bosheth, who told Paltiel to go back home. Ah, but in this passage, we see that Ish-bosheth did not attend the repossession of Michal. He, no doubt, had ordered Abner to do this deed. Perhaps Abner volunteered to repossess Michal after trying to make a covenant with David. It only makes sense. Abner has the plan to undermine Ish-bosheth. Ish-bosheth could have stopped Abner because of his previous threat to turn the kingdom over to David. But, no less, Ish-bosheth may not have known about Abner's attempt to complete the deal. Ish-bosheth may have received the request for David and simply sought to make wrong things right. Abner saw Ish-bosheth's desire to return Michal as an opportunity to advance his agenda.

c) Abner's Authority (3:17-25)

(1) The Plan to Make David King (3:17-18)

With Michal returning to David, the writer tells us of Abner's authority and plan to make David king. Verse 17. *"Now Abner had consultation with the elders of Israel, saying, 'In times 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 from the hand of all their enemies.'"*

Now, Abner moved to complete his plan to remove Ish-bosheth and transfer all the northern tribes to David. As a snide, he did this under cover to undermine Ish-bosheth. It was true about David. All of the tribes of Israel knew that David was supposed to be king. Yet, the one who derailed the LORD's plan by putting Ish-bosheth on the throne is now trying to right his wrong, not because he thinks it is correct, but because he knows he is in trouble with Ish-bosheth for being lude with Saul's concubine, Rizpah. We know that Ish-bosheth was afraid of Abner. The Scriptures told us that in this chapter. But, it seems by Abner's actions that Abner may be fearful of Ish-bosheth also.

(2) The Meeting to Make David King (3:19-21)

Brazenly, Abner sets for the meeting to make David King. Verse 19. *"Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin; and in addition Abner went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and to the whole house of Benjamin.²⁰ Then 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 Abner said to David, 'Let me arise and go and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may be king over all that your soul desires.'" So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace."*

Abner was in outright rebellion against King Ish-bosheth. He was planning a mutiny against Ish-bosheth. We do not know if Ish-bosheth had any knowledge of Abner's doings. With Abner helping return David's wife, Abner had successfully helped Ish-bosheth, and Ish-bosheth may have thought Abner had abandoned his threat.

David welcomed Abner with a usual feast. He listened to Abner's plan. But notice David did not agree to Abner's plan. David's character would not have allowed him to join in Abner's plan. David

held to one principle in his life, “touch not the anointed.” We heard it repeatedly in the book of 1st Samuel concerning King Saul. David would not touch Saul, and he would not touch Ish-bosheth. Therefore, he would not enter into the plan with Abner. Instead, he sent Abner away.

(3) The Deception to Make David King (3:22-25)

The writer then tells of the deception to make David king. Verse 22. *“And behold, 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 army that was with him arrived, they told Joab, saying, “Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has sent him away, and he has gone in peace.”*²⁴ *Then Joab came to the king and said, “What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you; why then have you sent him away and he is already gone?”*²⁵ *You know Abner, the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you, learn of your going out and coming in, and find out all that you are doing.”*

Joab did not trust any of the doings of Abner, and rightly so. Joab did not understand why David entertained Abner in the first place. Joab was probably right. Snides are like leopards; they cannot change their spots (Jeremiah 13:23) Neither can someone accustomed to doing evil do good. Abner was accustomed to doing evil; his characteristics were plainly presented in the Scripture. Joab’s intuition was correct. Abner had planned on coming to David’s side and continuing to do as he wished, just like he did with Ish-bosheth. We must remember that Saul had not yet been dead two years, and Abner had already presumed his authority over Saul’s possessions. So, by helping David become the king of all Israel, Abner assumes that he is the power behind David’s kingdom.

But David was a man different in character from Abner and Joab. David was willing to meet with anyone. However, it did not mean that David would agree to every proposal that came his way. Indeed, this proposal to take the kingdom away from Ish-bosheth was wrong in David’s mind because Ish-bosheth had been anointed king by the priests. David would not cross that boundary. David would protect that boundary just as Ish-bosheth protected the boundary of the sanctity of marriage between David and Michal. Abner was a loose cannon in Ish-bosheth’s ranks. Nonetheless, Joab was a loose cannon in David’s ranks.

d) Abner’s Abduction (3:26-30)

After speaking his mind with David, Joab left the king's presence with a plan. The plan was Abner’s abduction. Verse 26. *“When Joab came out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah; but David did not know it.”*²⁷ *So when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the middle of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the belly so that he died on account of the blood of Asabel his brother.*²⁸ *Afterward when David heard it, he said, “I and my kingdom are innocent before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner.”*²⁹ *May it fall on the head of Joab and on all his father’s house; and may there not fail from the house of Joab one who has a discharge, or who is a leper, or who takes hold of a distaff, or who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread.”*³⁰ *So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner because he had put their brother Asabel to death in the battle at Gibeon.”*

Joab had a plan for Abner but did not share it with David. He knew Abner could not be far away. He sent men to capture and bring him back to Hebron, David’s capital, but David was told of this action. Joab killed Abner in retaliation for Abner killing Joab’s brother. When David hears the news of Joab’s action and Abner’s murder, David curses Joab’s family. *“May it [the death of Abner] fall on the head of Joab and on all his father’s house; and may there not fail from the house of Joab one who has a discharge, or who is a leper, or who takes hold of a distaff, or who falls by the sword, or who lacks bread.”* (3:29)

We must not mix up the names of the towns of Gibeon, where Asahel was killed, and Gibeah. Gibeah was the hometown and capital of King Saul. Three towns called Gibeah exist in the Promised Land. Saul’s Gibeah was in the tribal area of Benjamin. Another was in the tribal area of Judah. The last was in the tribal area of Ephraim. Great care must be taken to determine which of the three Gibeahs are being addressed in each Scripture passage; however, the Scripture context usually details

the tribal areas to help discern. On the other hand, Gibeon was a town near Bethel and Ai in the tribal area of Benjamin. Only one Gibeon town existed in the Promise Land. The Canaanite/Hivite men of Gibeon had tricked Joshua into making a covenant with them instead of killing them.

e) Abner's Song (3:31-34)

(1) The Instruction from David (3:31-33a)

David was so distressed by Abner's death that he wrote Abner's Song. Before sharing the song, we hear the instruction from David. Verse 31. *"Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, 'Tear your clothes and gird on sackcloth and lament before Abner.' And King David walked behind the bier. ³² Thus 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 The king chanted a lament for Abner and said...."*

A "bier" is a wood frame used to carry a load. When our Bibles were translated into English, it specifically meant *a frame that was used to carry a corpse to be laid in a grave* (From Old English). Notice that David made Joab mourn as well as the people. No doubt, Joab saw nothing to mourn about. Yet, David made him do so. He also made him walk behind the bier to the grave and participate in the burial. David was not a friend of Abner. But he still wept because of the way of his death.

(2) The Song from David (3:33b-34)

At the grave, the song from David was sung by the king. Verse 33b. *"Should Abner die as a fool dies? ³⁴ 'Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put in fetters; As one falls before the wicked, you have fallen.' And all the people wept again over him."*

The hands of justice had not executed Abner. Abner had died at the hands of hatred and duplicity. Abner did die as a fool dies. His days were cut short by a wicked man, Joab. He should have been arrested, bound in chains, hands, and feet, and brought before a court. Instead, he was denied that privilege by a wicked man, Joab.

But Abner was, in fact, a fool, as David asserts. We think of a fool as someone who makes an unwise decision. But in the Scripture, everyone who is a criminal is a fool for breaking the law. That, too, is foolish. Thus, Abner was a fool breaking the law by being unfaithful to his superior. Nevertheless, in David's mind, he should have stood before a judge to be tried, not cut down by a policeman.

4. David's Pain Increases (3:35-39)

After the funeral, David's pain increases. Verse 35. *"Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was still day; but David vowed, saying, 'May God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun goes down.' ³⁶ Now all the people took note of it, and it pleased them, just as everything the king did pleased all the people. ³⁷ So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the will of the king to put Abner the son of Ner to death. 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 I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too difficult for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil."*

Let it be known that actions are more important than words. Our actions cannot dismiss evil. So, too, David could not dismiss the actions of Joab against Abner. Abner was a prince because he was a relative of Saul and a relative of Ish-bosheth. David had always given honor to the bloodline of King Saul, and this moment in time was no different. After the burial of Abner, David continued to mourn. In the Bible, fasting, intentionally not eating food, is always associated with mourning/grief and sin. In this case, the death of Abner stirred both.

Neither did David know what to do with Joab and his brothers, who helped apprehend Abner and kill him. They were all the sons of Zeruiah. At that moment, mourning the sin of the sons of Zeruiah was more than David could consider. For that, David deferred to the LORD to let him handle the evil of those sons.

In this first section of the Book of Second Samuel which we have entitled David's Throne, we have discovered the death in the kingdom of King Saul, the division in the kingdom of the northern tribes selecting Ish-bosheth to be their king, and the tribe of Judah selecting David to be their king. We have also discovered the development in the two kingdoms that allowed Ish-bosheth to decrease while David increased. We now come to the final stage in this first section, which we will call the decapitation in the kingdom.

D. The Decapitation in the Kingdom (4:1-12)

1. A Summary of Saul's Descendants (4:1-4)

a) Ish-bosheth (4:1)

Our writer begins with a summary of Saul's descendants and the men associated with them, beginning with Ish-bosheth. Chapter 4, verse 1. *"Now when Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel was disturbed."*

Ish-bosheth was the sole living son of Saul after the battle of Gilboa. Abner was Saul's first cousin, the son of his father's brother – Ner. Kish was Saul's father; Ner was the brother of Kish. Therefore, Abner was the first cousin of Ish-bosheth once removed, as our genealogists of today would identify that relationship. However, the death of Abner struck Ish-bosheth to the bone. He was the commander of Ish-bosheth's army, and Abner's death put Ish-bosheth at great risk. His death also struck deep in the hearts of all the men in Ish-bosheth's kingdom. As the story unfolds, Ish-bosheth probably did not take Abner's threat to heart and did not know that he was undermining the kingdom and Ish-bosheth's rule.

Ishbosheth had not taken the threat of Abner seriously. Neither was he careful concerning his commanders.

a) Baanah and Rechab (4:2-3)

Ish-bosheth had two associates who were commanders of bands within the army – Baanah and Rechab. Verse 2. *"Saul's son had two men who were commanders of bands: the name of the one was Baanah and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the sons of Benjamin (for Beeroth is also considered part of Benjamin,² and the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been aliens there until this day)."*

Some minister along the way inserted the words I have struck through because we know from all the ancient copies of Second Samuel that we have today that these words are not in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. Although I have struck the words, the men of Beerothite were of a Canaanite/Hivite tribe that lived in the tribal area of Benjamin (Joshua 9:17). They, along with three other Canaanite villages, tricked Joshua into a covenant of safety; therefore, they were not destroyed by Israel as instructed by the LORD. As for the struck words, "~~the Beerothites fled to Gittaim,~~" we do not know the accuracy of this statement; however, Gittaim is a town in the tribal area of Benjamin (Nehemiah 11:31-36). It makes sense that, at some time, they might have moved from their home in Beeroth to live in another Benjamite town in the tribal area. These two associates of Ish-bosheth would betray him. Baanah and Rechab were Canaanite/Hivite brothers of Rimmon. Our writer is simply introducing them to us so we will know them when we hear them again shortly.

b) Mephibosheth (4:4)

The writer identifies another descendant of Saul but not of Ish-bosheth. He is the grandson of Saul through Jonathan, and his name is Mephibosheth. Verse 4. *"Now Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled. And it happened that in her hurry to flee, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."*

Soon, we will hear David ask about any sole surviving descendants of King Saul, and this crippled child will be identified. He was five when his father and grandfather were killed two years before. He would now be seven at this place in the storyline.