

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 2

SECOND SAMUEL

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION

David could not become the king of Israel until and unless God removed Saul. In the previous book, Saul killed himself in a battle against the Philistines at Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:4). David came to know about his death through a young Amalekite who had lied to try and get a reward from David but received a death sentence instead (2 Samuel 1:4).

The way was now open for David to be the next king of Israel but the road was still fraught with conflict, intrigue, deceit and violence. There were opposition from some factions. It was the fulfilment of God's will but it did not mean that there would be no resistance.

Chapter 3 relates how David eventually gained control over all Israel. The main characters included three other powerful men, namely Ishbosheth, the surviving son of Saul; Abner, the chief of the late king Saul's army; and Joab, the chief of David's army. Amidst these adversities, God was working out His plan for David and the nation of Israel.

The chapter opens with a declaration of war between the "house of Saul" and the "house of David". The latter became "stronger and stronger". The next section describes the split between Ishbosheth and Abner, his chief of army. This is followed by Abner's defection to David. Joab, David's chief of army, avenged the death of Asahel his brother by killing Abner. The final part of the chapter gave an account of David's renunciation of the killing of Abner.

COMMENTARY

The House of David Prevailed

—3:1-6

There was civil war in Israel between those of the lineage of Saul and those of the lineage of David. It was a protracted conflict that lasted seven and a half years. The kingdom of Judah in the south was much smaller than that of Ishbosheth's which consisted of Benjamin and the rest of the northern tribes. But there was more patriotic unity in Judah compared to the northern tribes.

The text showed that David's family had expanded. He brought his two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, to Hebron. Ahinoam gave birth to the firstborn, **Amnon**, and Abigail gave birth to **Chileah**. In Hebron, David took four more wives. Maacah gave birth to **Absalom**, David's third son, who was also his favourite. Haggith gave birth to **Adonijah**. Abital gave birth to **Shephatiah**. Eglah gave birth to **Ithream**.¹ David's marriage

1. Meaning of the names: Ahinoam ("my brother is delight"), Abigail ("my father is joy"), **Amnon** ("faithful"). **Chileah** ("like his father"), Maacah ("oppression"), **Absalom** ("my father is peace"), Haggith ("festive"),

to Maacah, the daughter of Talmi the king of Geshur, demonstrated his rising power. Geshur was the name of two districts. One of the districts extended from the northern border of Manasseh on both sides of the river Jordan from Hermon to the Lake of Galilee. The other district was in Syria. It was a great tribute to David's growing power that king Talmi living so far from David was willing to make an alliance with him.

In the midst of the conflict, Abner made himself strong in the eyes of the people of Israel. Like his father Saul, Ishbosheth did not like that very much. Perhaps he was also jealous like his father.

Abner Split from Ishbosheth — 3:7-11

Abner was charged by Ishbosheth with taking Rizpah, a concubine of Saul's harem, to be his wife. This was an act of treason. In those days when a person took the wife of a late king to be his consort, it was seen as a claim to the throne.² Ishbosheth, whom Abner put as king over the northern tribes and all Israel, understood the implication of the charge against Abner. Accordingly, he questioned Abner on why he had "gone unto my father's concubine" (v.7). What an evil act Ishbosheth had done against his own general who tried his utmost to help him. Ishbosheth was made king by Abner. Just because Abner became more popular and was well

liked by the people of Israel did not mean that he wanted to be king. It was an evil thing that Ishbosheth did, following in the footsteps of his father in accusing a just man.

Like every innocent man charged with a sin and a crime which he did not commit, Abner defended himself vehemently with righteous indignation. He declared "*Am I a dog's head, which against Judah do shew kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to day with a fault concerning this woman? So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the LORD hath sworn to David, even so I do to him; To translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba.*" (vv 8-10)

Why do you treat me like a "dog's head"? The "*head is oft put for the whole man in the Latin tongue.*" In short, Abner felt that this insult was like calling him a dog, a vile and contemptible man! Abner reiterated his faithfulness to Saul in establishing Ishbosheth as king and not handing him over to Judah and David! Abner felt that his loyalty to Ishbosheth had been spurned.

Abner invoked the name of God to indicate the deep sense of righteous indignation he felt inside him. He was willing to go against God's will for David when he made Ishbosheth king. Now Abner realised that Ishbosheth did not deserve his loyalty! He would make sure that the kingdom of David would be established from Dan (the northern

Adonijah ("my lord is Jehovah"), Abital ("my father is dew"), **Shephatiah** ("Jehovah has judged"), Eglah ("a heifer"), **Ithream** ("profit of the people"), Talmi ("furrowed"), Geshur ("proud beholder").

² Other examples of such conduct are given in 2 Samuel 16:22; 1 Kings 2:22.

most part of Israel) to Beersheba (the southern most part of Israel).

Ishbosheth, as his name implied, was a man of shame. He had not one shred of evidence but out of envy and jealousy made such a serious charge against his own general. What a foolish thing to do. Now his own general was against him. His kingdom was as good as finished. He was too afraid to do anything against Abner!

The Defection of Abner—3:12-21

Abner decided to defect to David. As was the custom, he sent an emissary to David with his request. Abner said, *“Whose is the land? . . . Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee”* (v.12). The die was cast with this message.

Abner was upfront with Ishbosheth when he said that he would join hands with David to bring about a united Israel. There was nothing Ishbosheth could do as he was afraid of Abner. Abner probably had the army behind him as well.

David replied that he would make a covenant with Abner on the condition that Michal, Saul's daughter, who was his first wife be restored to him. In the meantime, David also sent messengers to Ishbosheth, the purported king of Israel, to restore his wife Michal to him. Michal belonged to him for he had paid the dowry of “an hundred foreskins of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 18:25, 27). This request might seem strange to us. But it was a necessity that Michal be given back to David in order for his kingdom to be a legitimate one. Michal was not only his first wife but also Saul's daughter. To be given

back the daughter of Saul would imply that the kingdom of Saul had been willingly handed over to David. Thus the request was made to Ishbosheth. Also anyone who was to marry Michal would be seen as a usurper of David's kingdom as she was David's wife. Ishbosheth must return Michal to David as a gesture of good faith.

David approached Ishbosheth directly for the return of Michal. Helplessly, Ishbosheth went into action. He had no choice in the matter after what he had done to humiliate Abner. He sent and took Michal from her husband, Paltiel (“God delivers”). Paltiel was heartbroken. He followed behind her weeping. It was a sad scene. Saul had to be blamed for he was the one who gave Michal to Paltiel (1 Samuel 25:44). When they reached a place called Bahurim, a village on the north-east of Jerusalem, Abner told Paltiel to go home and he did.

Abner's next move was to communicate with the elders of the northern tribes. He was very diplomatic. He told them that they had sought David in the past to be their king. Now was the time to do it. He added that the LORD had spoken to David, saying, *“By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies”*. There was no record that the LORD had said these words to David. But these words were true in the sense that the greatest and most immediate danger facing Israel at that time were the Philistines. David was definitely anointed as king by God. This was common knowledge. Abner was very wise to do his homework first before meeting David. He also went to meet

up with the Benjamites. If they would accept David, the handing over would be complete as king Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin.

Then Abner came to David in Hebron with 20 representatives of the northern tribes and Benjamites. David welcomed Abner and the men with a feast. In that banquet, Abner declared his loyalty and allegiance to David -- that he would gather all Israel to serve his lord and king, that they would make a covenant with David so that David might reign over all that his heart desired (v.21). David sent Abner away and he went in peace.

David showed his willingness to negotiate and make a covenant with Abner. It was evident that David considered Abner's overtures as part of God's purpose to make him king over all Israel. However, at this point in time, Ishbosheth was the king over the northern tribes which posed a problem for David. God will ensure that man do not thwart His plan. David passed the first test when he did not lift a finger against Saul. Now David must ensure the same blamelessness in his dealing with Ishbosheth.

David was pleased with Abner's and the 20 representatives' gesture. There would be no bloodshed and the transition would be peaceful.

Joab "Warned" David—3:22-27

When Joab, David's chief of army, returned with his soldiers from a successful military exploit, Abner had left. Joab did not meet Abner but the people of Hebron informed him that Abner, the son of Ner, had been to see David and that David had sent him away in peace.

Joab immediately went to David. He questioned David's wisdom in receiving Abner and sending him away in peace. He insinuated that Abner had come to deceive him and to find out about him and all that he was doing. There was no record of David's response to what Joab said. But from previous chapters, we know that Joab had been waiting for an opportunity to take his revenge on Abner for killing his brother Asahel. Joab had always been an ambitious man who had no qualms about taking matters into his own hands. That he saw Abner as a threat was never in doubt. Imagine a country with two chiefs of staff -- one a general of 11 tribes for 47 1/2 years, and the other a general of one tribe for seven years! Joab's position as chief of staff was in jeopardy.

Joab quickly sent messengers after Abner to call him back to Hebron. They brought him back from the well of Sirah, which was situated about 1.3 kilometres north of Hebron. This action of Joab was not known to David. The text specifically mentioned this fact. Imagine the scenario: Abner met David and left in peace after the deal had been made but unknown to the rest of Israel. Soon after that, Joab met David privately and no one knew what transpired between them other than those present. Then Joab called for a meeting with Abner. It appeared as if Joab was acting on David's orders!

When Abner came back to Hebron, Joab was waiting for him at the gate. He took Abner aside to one of the chambers in the gate under the pretense of speaking to him peaceably. Joab then struck him dead in cold blood to avenge the death of Asahel, his brother. Abishai was also implicated (v.30). Joab

probably justified his action under the ancient system of family obligations which was explained in the Mosaic Law (Numbers 35:16-21) -- the "avenger of blood" who must be a close relative of the victim had to see that the murderer was put to death. Abner was probably also aware of this law but he had killed Asahel out of self-defence in a war. It was therefore questionable whether the Mosaic Law could be appropriately applied to Abner. Joab had committed murder!

David Washed His Hands — 3:28-39

David disavowed that he had any part in the killing of Abner. To further strengthen his disavowal, he laid a curse upon "the head of Joab, and on all his father's house" (v.29). He pronounced that a member of the family of Joab would suffer from "an issue" (a discharge), or become leprous, or "leaneth on a staff" (be disabled), or die a violent death, or become poor (v.29). It was a terrifying curse. David must ensure that he would not be implicated in the murder of Abner. It was not known whether Joab was worried by David's curse.

David forced Joab to participate in the funeral and even to wear sackcloth as though he also grieved for Abner's death. The people would see the sincerity of David's heart and deduce that David had not condoned Joab's action and he had nothing to do with it. David personally followed the "bier" (bed). At the burial ground, David openly and loudly wept at Abner's grave. He burst out in a lament praising Abner who died for nothing "as a man falleth before wicked men" (v.33-34).

David refused to eat the customary meal after the funeral and chose to fast until sundown. All the people took notice and were convinced that David played no part at all in the death of Abner (v.36-37). David addressed his men and again declared the loss of a great man in Israel. At the same time, David confessed that although he was king, he was weak in controlling the "sons of Zeruah," namely, Joab and Abishai. David pronounced that the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness (v.39).

PRACTICAL VALUE

The characters of three men stood out for our learning. Abner displayed great leadership qualities. He was able to persuade the leaders of the northern tribes and the Benjamites to swing from supporting Ishbosheth to David. His success in getting David to agree to make a covenant showed his diplomacy. He was also a man of honour and great loyalty albeit a little misplaced when he made Ishbosheth the next king even though he knew that David was the Lord's anointed.

Joab was a capable military general who was faithful to David, his king. But he could not control his heart. He was a vengeful man who cared only for self. There are many Joabs today even in the ministry. They use their gifts for their own ends. As long as David was of use to him, he would be faithful to David. Joab cared only for himself!

AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 2 Samuel 3:1-6; Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5.

Tuesday: 2 Samuel 3:7-11; Acts 8:9-20.

Wednesday: 2 Samuel 3:12-22; 1 Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9.

Thursday: 2 Samuel 3:23-39; Luke 22:24-27.

Friday: 2 Samuel 3:1-39; Deuteronomy 34:5-12.

Analysis:

Text	Practical Value
2 Samuel 3:1-6	
2 Samuel 3:7-11	
2 Samuel 3:12-22	
2 Samuel 3:23-39	

Discussion Questions

1. Was Abner truly serving the house of Saul or was he serving his own ends? Give reasons.

2. Was Abner right in changing side? Was it right for him to make Ishbosheth the next king when he knew that David was the Lord's anointed?

3. What can you say about Joab's and Abner's character and capabilities?

4. Why didn't David punish Joab for slaying Abner?

5. Why did David praise Abner and call on the people to mourn for him? Was David sincere? What possible benefits could David gain by it?

6. What have you learned about the character and conduct of Abner, Joab and David in this chapter?
