

Abner Murdered And Mourned

2 Samuel 3:1-39

2/26/23

- Good morning. At this time, our children are dismissed for Kingdom Kids.
- And as they are leaving the sanctuary, please turn with me to 2 Samuel 3, which will serve as our text for this morning, 2 Samuel 3.
- If you are using the pew Bible, you can find that on page
- As you are turning there, I thought it would be helpful to let you know that this will be our last message on David for a few weeks.
- Over the next three weeks, we will be hearing from a few different guest preachers from various ministries that we support, and then will resume our series on March 26.
 - And actually, how it was lined up initially was that when Pastor Matt came back, his first sermon was going to be chapter 5, which is when David becomes king of Israel.
 - However that didn't happen so now he will come back to the triumphant account of Ish-Bosheth being slaughtered. Still an important point, but slightly different from Chapter 5.
- However, that will be a few weeks from now because today we are dealing with chapter 3.
- And last week, we looked at chapter 2 where we clearly see the tension between the house of David and the house of Saul.
- And this tension eventually led into a battle between these two armies, with Joab leading the charge for the house of David, and Abner leading the charge for the house of Saul.
- And the climax in chapter 2 happens when Abner begrudgingly kills Asahel, who is the brother of Joab.
- As this chapter comes to a close, we see that this initial battle at Gibeon has finally ended, and the chapter ends with the funeral for Asahel.
- However, this is not even close to the end of the fighting between these two houses.
- Chapter 3 begins by saying in verse 1 that "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David."
- As Bill Arnold notes, this statement serves as a "Summary of the war years."¹
- These war years persisted for a while!
- 2 Samuel 2:10 says that Ish-Bosheth was king over Israel for 2 years, so we know that there was most likely at least these two years of persistent battle.
- And if you have been paying attention to our study, you have noticed that David's path to become king over Israel is really paved with blood;
 - not of his own doing, and not of his approval either as we will clearly see in this chapter, but nonetheless, there is a lot of violence that takes place before David becomes the king of Israel.
 - A lot of blood that has been shed! And chapter 3 is no exception!
- And this chapter in particular really focuses on Abner quite a bit.
- I would say Abner and David really serve as the main characters in this narrative.

¹ NIV Application Commentary, 436

- In fact, Abner's name is mentioned **28 times** in this chapter, showing how important he is here.
- In this chapter, we will see **Abner leave the house of Saul and join David, we'll see Abner then be murdered by Joab, and then we will see Abner mourned by David and by all of Israel.**
- And as we dive into this section of Scripture, I think it would be beneficial to read this account in its entirety, so go ahead and follow along with me as I read, starting in **verse 1**. (READ CHAPTER) Let's pray!

"Lord, as we continue our worship service we ask that you will be with us. God, help us to grasp the truths that you have for us in your Word. We pray that you would speak to us now through your Word. We ask this in your name, AMEN!

- As we look at this first section, we see that after this ongoing fight, Abner finally joins David.
 - "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." And this is what Abner will attempt to do.

Abner Joins David (vv. 1-21)

- Again, the chapter opens with this summary statement about the long war that persisted.
- And then in **verse 2**, we read that "David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker."
- This is the massive contrast that we see between the house of David and the house of Saul.
- David continues to gain strength while the house of Saul continues to lose strength.
- And not only did David's house continue to grow stronger, but as we see in **verses 2-5**, his family grew larger as well.
- In these verses we read of **6 sons** that were born to David, but we also read that they were from **6 different wives** of David.
- We know from Scripture that David had many wives. **8** of them are mentioned in the Bible, but we know based on **2 Samuel 5:13** that David had many more wives and concubines than just eight.
- It is very important to see that this is not looked upon with favor by the Lord, and this is certainly not evidence for the support of polygamy in Scripture.
- David is guilty of two offenses here:
 - Not only is he guilty of going against God's command in **Genesis 2:24** to become one flesh with one woman...
 - He is also directly violating the command of the Lord in **Deuteronomy 17:17** regarding kings where it says that "He shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away..."
- So this is no small offense here, and as we continue to see David's life unfold, these decisions will prove to be very costly.
- John Calvin says in reference to this, "A man must be the husband of one wife only. Here is the sentence that God pronounced on the matter: "It is not good for a man to be alone, let us make a helper fit for him." He does not say, "Let us make two or three women," but

simply one. Thus it is a direct overturning of the ordinance of God and the institution of marriage when a man takes several wives. David committed a double sin, for in addition to the common law that speaks to everyone it is stated particularly that the king should not take several wives. These are most serious and inexcusable offenses.”²

- It is a long quote, but I think it really helps to point out the severity of David’s offense. This was not a small deal and while I don’t want to belabor this point I do think it is worthwhile to point out that this is not commended anywhere in Scripture.
- And so now, after mentioning David’s growing strength and his growing family, the narrative shifts to Abner and the house of Saul.
- Verse 6 says that “While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul.”
- Abner, who was the general of Ish-Bosheth’s army was growing in political influence and strength in the house of Saul.
 - In other words, Abner was growing stronger and stronger in an increasingly weak kingdom.
 - And note that he was making *himself* strong, not the house strong.
- And what seems to be true about Abner is that he only cares about Abner. He will do whatever he can to further his cause, no matter what that may be.
- Even Ish-Bosheth seems to catch onto his schemes in verse 7, where he accuses Abner of having relations with Rizpah, who was one of Saul’s concubines.
 - This was no small matter
- In the Near East back then, the man who took the wife or concubine of the deceased king asserted their claim to the throne.³
 - If guilty, this was a power move that would put Abner next in line to be king.
- While we do not know how far Abner would have taken this or if he was even guilty (the text simply does not tell us), Ish-Bosheth seems to be onto whatever Abner is doing.
- Ish-Bosheth may have been a puppet and a weakling, but he was not stupid.
- And Ish-Bosheth’s accusation causes Abner’s strength to turn into frustration, causing him to decide both out of spite and logic to bring the north into the arms of David.
- Look at what he says in verses 8-10: “Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-Bosheth and said, “Am I a dog’s head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.”
- Simply put, Abner seems to be sick and tired of Ish-Bosheth. He wants out!
- That first phrase he uses is interesting: “Am I a dog’s head of Judah?”
- What he is basically saying is “Am I a worthless traitor who has not been faithful to you?”⁴

² Church History Study Bible, 2 Samuel 3:2-5 note

³ Dale Ralph Davis: 2 Samuel, 43

⁴ Believer’s Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, page 326

- And to double down on his loyalty, he says that he has continued to show “steadfast love” to the house of Saul and has not given them into the hand of David.
- And I personally find it very interesting that he uses “steadfast love”, to describe his loyalty to the house of Saul.
- “Steadfast Love” is the Hebrew word “hesed” and it doesn’t just mean love; It doesn’t just mean loyalty.
 - “Hesed” is an incredibly strong word that has the meaning of covenant love, or covenant faithfulness.
 - An example of “hesed” between two people would be the picture of Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi where she says in Ruth 1:16-17, “Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”
 - And the biggest example of “hesed” is seen in God’s covenant love for His people where He promises He will never leave them, and He will never forsake them!
 - That He will be their God and they will be His people.
 - Even though the people may flee, God never will abandon them
- This is “hesed”! And I’m sorry but Abner is not showing “hesed” here!
- “Hesed” would mean Abner stayed, but he doesn’t. In the same breath, he is saying that he is leaving Ish-Bosheth to join David.
- Now my argument is not that Abner should have stayed with Ish-Bosheth and it was wrong for him to join David. (though I do think he joined for the wrong reasons)
- That’s not the point I am trying to make; I am just saying that this clearly was not a picture of steadfast love.
- And it wasn’t a picture of future loyalty to David either. As we have already established, Abner is in it for Abner.
- He wasn’t driven to this decision by theology but rather by politics.
- He didn’t want to expand David’s kingdom because he recognized the weight of the Lord’s promise, but because he was seeking his own advantage.
- If Ish-Bosheth was not going to roll over, then his next best option would be to show his support for David and use his influence over the northern tribes as a sort of bargaining chip with David, seeking to gain a powerful position in David’s kingdom.

- Me and my wife recently started watching the show “Survivor”
- For those of you wondering, yes that show is still going on. I think they are on like season 46 or something.
- And I’ll be honest the first time I saw her watching “Survivor” I laughed because I thought who watches this show anymore??
- But before the first episode I watched was over, I was already hooked.
- And in Survivor, for those of you who are unfamiliar with it, there are two tribes that people are separated into, and at a certain point, both of those tribes will merge together and form one big tribe.

- However often times the two tribes that are now one will stay loyal to their original tribe, and so what happens a lot is one tribe, if they have more members will begin to dominate the game and vote out all of the other tribe.
- When this happens, it causes those left on the other tribe to try and make a desperate move to get back into the game, so to speak.
 - To get back into a position of power.
- And this is what Abner is doing here. Recognizing that his “tribe” is crumbling, he is trying to make a big move to regain power for himself.
- And he will do whatever it takes to get back into the game.
- He will even quote scripture if it supports a pro-Abner move.
- And he is seeking the kingdom now not because of a love for the Lord, but rather a concern for his own position. That is all that matters to him.
- And unfortunately, Abners don’t disappear.
- We see many more of them in Scripture.
- Of course not the name “Abner” but rather the character of Abner.
 - I think one of the biggest examples is Simon the Magician in [Acts 8](#).
 - Here was a man who appeared to be the premiere convert in Samaria under Philip’s ministry. And Simon had professed faith in Christ and was even baptized
 - And then when Peter and John came, he quickly offered to pay them as much as they wanted if they would give him the power of the Holy Spirit to heal people, clearly misunderstanding what being a disciple of Christ meant.
 - Rather than recognizing that God is the one who deserves the glory, Simon saw this as an opportunity to make a name for himself!
- Whether we look at Simon the Magician or Abner, we must be alert as followers of Christ to our own Abner-like mentalities.
- Even the most faithful servants of the Lord know that there are times when it is very tempting to be more concerned with whether God’s people will be impressed with them, will like them, and congratulate them rather than giving praise to the Lord.
- If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that Abner is not far from any of us, and we must guard our hearts so as not to fall into that dangerous trap!

- As this narrative continues, Abner continues his quest to join David.
- [Verse 12](#) tells us that Abner sent messengers to David offering to turn over all Israel to him.
- David responds to this by accepting Abner’s request on the basis that Michal, David’s wife and Saul’s daughter would be returned to him, hoping to strengthen his claim to Saul’s kingdom.
 - If you are confused by the second half of [verse 14](#), that story is found in [1 Samuel 18](#) where Saul hoping to have the Philistines kill David, tells David that he must bring him a hundred Philistine foreskins in order to marry Michal.
 - (I understand that sounds very bizarre, so if you would like to know more about that particular story like I said, you can find it [in 1 Samuel 18](#).)
- In [verse 15](#), we see that Ish-Bosheth does oblige and return Michal back to David.

- As one commentator points out, “This scene reeks with sadness as we watch Paltiel, her husband at the time, heart-broken and helpless, turn back for home.”⁵
- We will not hear from Michal again until later on in **chapter 6**, and the story of Michal is not a happy one.
- But at this point, the scene shifts from Michal back to Abner, who is now on the side of David and among “the elders of Israel.”⁶
- And **verses 17-21** really highlight Abner’s continued efforts to bring all of Israel under David’s rule.
- In **verse 20**, Abner gets to Hebron, and to celebrate David has a feast for him and all of the men who were with him.
- All things seem to be going according to plan for Abner up to this point!
- But in **verse 21**, we read a very key phrase. At the end of the verse it says, “So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.”
- That phrase “in peace” is repeated two more times in the next two verses and all three instances are referring to Abner, a former rebel of David who had caused so much trouble.
 - And it says that there was now “peace”⁷
- This here is a glimpse of the nature of God’s king and His kingdom. Where former rebels find peace.
- And so the history of Abner’s relationship with David could be described as “once... alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.” (cf. **Colossians 1:21**)
- Just a short time ago, he was the force behind the war that started this chapter.
- But now he was reconciled, not because of any goodness in him, but rather on the goodness of David.
 - At this point, the important change for Abner was the change in who his king was.
 - Now as we have already seen, Abner’s story will very soon take a terrible turn.
- But we shouldn’t miss here the picture that we see how the kingdom of David in many ways is a shadow of the kingdom of Christ.
- Similar to Abner, we “who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present us holy and blameless before Him.”
- We serve an incredible God and Savior who has reconciled sinners to Himself!
- But unlike the kingdom of Christ that promises eternal security, the kingdom of David is not able to make the same promises and Abner will soon find out that this reconciliation does not last very long.
- As we shift to our next point, like I just stated we see Abner’s life take an awful turn where we see Abner Murdered in cold blood in **verses 22-30**.

Abner Murdered (vv. 22-30)

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis: 2 Samuel, 45

⁶ John Woodhouse: Your Kingdom Come (2 Samuel), page 158

⁷ John Woodhouse: Your Kingdom Come (2 Samuel), page 162

- Verse 22 begins by saying, “Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace.”
- I believe this serves as the turning point in the passage.
 - “Just then” I see as the warning that something is about to happen; A sort of foreshadowing.
- And as Joab returns, Abner is nowhere to be found, because David had sent him away, and once again Abner had “gone in peace.”
- Upon hearing this news that David and Abner are now allies, Joab is to put it mildly, not happy.
- Verses 24-25 says “Then Joab went to the king and said, “What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing.”
 - Joab is not a fan of Abner and is very skeptical of Abner, accusing him of spying on David, deceiving him with his words.
 - And we actually don’t see a response from David.
 - However, this was definitely not for the same reason that Ish-Bosheth who out of intimidation and fear of Abner had not responded when confronted.
 - Abner was able to defy Ish-Bosheth to his face.
 - But as we have clearly seen, David is no Ish-Bosheth; David is the farthest thing from a pushover! (If you need any evidence of that, just read any story about him ever in Scripture!)
 - And what is ironic is that Joab because of this had to proceed with his actions behind David’s back.
 - As John Woodhouse puts it, “[Joab] had to do what he had accused Abner of doing: deceive the king.”⁸
- And so similar to Abner earlier in the chapter, Joab, frustrated with his king, took action by sending messengers to bring Abner back to Hebron.
- We do not know what message was used to bring Abner back, but whatever it was, it worked because Abner returned.
- It is very key to see the ending of verse 26, “But David did not know about it.”
- One commentator wants us to see that “A major concern of the author is to show that David was not guilty of involvement in the death of either Abner or Ish-Bosheth later on.”⁹
- Verse 27 shows us the result of this wicked action: “When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.”
- It was said three times that Abner had gone “in peace,” which in other words meant “in security.”

⁸ John Woodhouse: Your Kingdom Come (2 Samuel), page 171

⁹ ESV Study Bible, 2 Samuel 3-4 note

- David had essentially promised Abner immunity, which shows that Joab in this action had really committed the most sinister form of treachery here.
- And as we look at Joab's motives for killing Abner, we see in verse 27 as well as verse 30 that it was "For the blood of Asahel."
 - Joab and Abishai were avenging their brother's death.
 - Abner had killed Asahel; now Joab had killed Abner.
 - However, Asahel's death should not have been avenged because Abner had killed Asahel in battle and reluctantly at that.
 - If it was murder, then Joab would have grounds for vengeance, but it wasn't.
 - Abner killed Asahel during a time of battle; Joab killed Abner during a time of peace.
- While I think that is a huge reason why Joab killed Abner (the text tells us it is), I think there was more to it. I think Joab was concerned about Joab as well.
 - I think part of it was (although the text doesn't say this so I am speculating here) that Joab saw a rival in Abner and he was afraid that Abner may replace Joab as commander of the army.
 - And so I see envy playing a major role in Joab's dealings with Abner and using personal vengeance as a sort of cover up for the real motive.
- And if Abner is not far from us, then I would say that Joab is not either.¹⁰
- While we may profess that our desire is to build the kingdom of God, we can often times get caught up and become far too concerned about our position and what we need to do to be recognized rather than being concerned about Christ's name being proclaimed.
 - Instead of saying, "He must increase; I must decrease" we say in our hearts, "He must decrease; I must increase."
- I would encourage us all to examine our hearts and recognize where our Joab tendencies lie, and pray that the Lord would give us the strength to remove this dangerous mindset from our minds and from our hearts.
- In his own mind, Joab believed he was fiercely loyal to David. However, his ways were not the king's ways.
 - After all, the only reason he was able to carry out this deed is by keeping it a secret from David. But this secret would not last long, as David hears about it in **verse 28**.
- The time that passed between **verse 27 and 28** does not seem to have been long, but it is nonetheless significant, as David doesn't hear about what has happened until it is too late.
- And once he hears of this news, David becomes greatly distressed.
- And to show not only his further innocence in this crime, but also where his loyalty lies, David actually invokes a curse on the house of Joab showing that first and foremost, David's loyalty belongs to the Lord, not Joab.
 - And the details of this curse are not as important as the horror of it.¹¹
 - David's words are charged with intense emotion here.
 - Joab had set himself against the will of the king, and so he has made himself in this instance, an enemy of the king.

¹⁰ Dale Ralph Davis: 2 Samuel, 47

¹¹ John Woodhouse: Your Kingdom Come (2 Samuel), page 174

- And in **verse 30**, we get a summary of what has happened: “So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon.”
- And as we move on we see that after Abner is murdered, he is then mourned.

Abner mourned (vv. 31-39)

- In **verse 31**, David says “To Joab and to all the people who were with him, “Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner.”
- David put Joab in his place by ordering him to take part in this official mourning for Abner.
- Since Joab was the cause of his death, it would be strange for Joab to then wear sackcloth as though Joab himself grieved for the man he willingly murdered.
 - And this would not be lost by the crowds who would clearly see as **verse 37** says, “That it had not been the king’s will to put to death Abner the son of Ner.”
- And David’s desire to honor Abner was shown by his place as the first mourner in the funeral, also by the fact that he led the expressions of grief, and by the poem that he wrote for this occasion.
- In this poem, David likens the death of Abner to the execution of a criminal.
- He starts the poem off by saying, “Should Abner die as a fool dies?”
- This seems like a strange way to begin this poem, and I think there are multiple interpretations as to why he says this.
- And one way that I interpret this as saying is the manner of Abner’s death.
- If you remember how Abner dies, it says that Joab takes him out to the “midst of the gate.”
- And again, there are different interpretations to what that means, and I think either one is fine, but how I interpret that is that Joab went to talk with him outside of Hebron.
 - Granted, right on the edge, but still outside the city.
- Hebron was a city of refuge.
- In that city Joab could not have touched him. (Now of course, he could have just ignored that altogether, but I see this as a strategy to draw Abner outside of Hebron so he wasn’t guilty of killing within Hebron.)
- And so I think Abner willingly stepped outside of the city of refuge, and that is when Joab killed him.
 - And that is part of why David said that Abner died as a fool.
 - Abner was a fool to leave Hebron. To leave his refuge.¹²
- Isn’t that a message for us today?
- There is a refuge for every sinner in Christ.
- Regardless of how smart a man is, how powerful they are, or what position they may hold, if they are outside the place of refuge, they are lost!
- And Christ is the sinner’s refuge!
- It is He who we run to for security, for protection, and for comfort!

¹² Thru the Bible: J. Vernon Mcgee, page 194

- It is why we sang just a little while ago, “Your name is a strong and mighty tower; Your name is a shelter like no other, Your name, let the nations sing it louder, because nothing has the power to save, but your name!”
- Christ is our shelter!
- If you are in Christ, cling to Him! Rest in Him! In Him you will find rest from the endless, fruitless efforts to save your own self. It is why Jesus says in **Matthew 11:29-30**, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
- And if you are not in Christ, run to Him! Recognize that He is the only way you can have security in this world.
- If you try to live your life apart from resting in Christ, the Bible would say you are a fool. All of your efforts will be in vain! Jesus says in **John 14:6** that He is “The way, the truth, and the life; and that there is no one who comes to the Father except through Christ!”
- There is no other way but through Jesus.
- And as we wrap up this chapter, we see that God has a plan through this messy situation.
- We have been looking at chapter 3 today, but it is hard not to look forward to what is coming in the next couple chapters or look at what has taken place up to this point.
- And I do think it is fair to say that things have been pretty messy and they will only get messier in the next chapter.
- And yet, even in this messy, we read these very telling words in **verse 36**, “All the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased the people.”
- We have not seen David become king over all of Israel yet, but we know it is coming.
- And I think it would be worthwhile to look at chapters 2 and 3 (and even chapter 4) in the light of the grand picture for our own encouragement.
- **Chapters 2 and 3** really cause us to stand in awe as we see God’s promise regarding David’s kingship coming to fruition, because all we have really seen up to this point with the exception of David is people who
 - resist the kingdom by force (cf. 2 Samuel 2:12-32), or who
 - seek it for the wrong reasons (Abner at the beginning of the chapter), or who
 - are only concerned for their own “kingdom” (Joab in the middle of chapter 3).
 - Some even see David as contributing to this mess because while he did have severe words for Joab, he did not take any action against him.
- And yet for all of the opposition, the scheming, and the foolishness, God’s promise comes to pass anyways.¹³
- This is why for our Transformative Truth (I know you are all dying to write it in because it isn’t in the bulletin, and that’s because I didn’t know what it was until late yesterday.)
- But our Summary statement for this passage and for this message is that “**God’s plans will come about despite people’s (and our) sinful actions.**” (repeat) (TT)

¹³ Dale Ralph Davis: 2 Samuel, 48

- What came about for David was, as Karl Gutbrod puts it, “According to God’s decree and sworn promise; but not because Abner lent God his arm, but because God, against and without Abner, makes the deed to follow His word.”
- As God’s people, we must remember these earlier displays of faithfulness from the Lord.
- Often times, it can look like we are losing. We can be discouraged into thinking that God’s coming kingdom will never come.

- But we must take confidence in the truth that it is coming, for God has decreed it, and we can have faith knowing that because the Lord has promised, there will be no Abner or Joab or any other man or nation that will be able to thwart God’s plan. That is good news indeed! Let’s pray!

“Father, we praise you for the confidence that your word brings us. Help us to believe that what you have said will come to pass because you are a trustworthy God. Lord help us when we are prone to doubt. Like the man in Mark 9 who cried out “Lord I believe, help my unbelief!” Would you help us in our weaknesses. We pray that you would go before us today and that we would leave with your Word on our hearts and on our minds. We thank you and we pray this in your name, AMEN!