

## LIFE OF DAVID

### STUDY 5 - ABNER AND JOAB MEET IN BATTLE

#### 2 SAMUEL 2

##### V8 BUT ABNER THE SON OF NER, CAPTAIN OF SAUL'S (ARMY)

Abner was Saul's uncle, being a brother of Kish, Saul's father. He had been captain of Saul's army (1 Sam 14:50). He was a man of power and influence, but he wanted more. He was personally ambitious, and would have been very embittered by the death of Saul and the disintegration of Saul's army. His power and his influence were consequently diminished. Now word had reached him that David had been made king of Judah. In the Truth, the Word and experience teach us that things do not always go well. We suffer personal reversals from time to time. How do we react? We have to continue in faith. Out of the defeats in life often come the victories of faith. But Abner had no appreciation of this. He was a power-man - a power-broker - through and through, a man of the flesh.

##### TOOK ISHBOSHETH, THE SON OF SAUL

Notice that this verse says that Abner "took" Ishbosheth. So Abner is the one pulling the strings. His attempt to install Ishbosheth as king may have been seen by some as an act of loyalty, patriotism, and dedication to the family of Saul; and while it is all well and good to be loyal and dedicated in a right cause, Abner would have known that Yahweh had decreed that David was to follow Saul on the throne, and consequently what he did was totally wrong. Ishbosheth's name means "man of shame". He was not necessarily a man of shame personally in this particular matter because here he was being manipulated by Abner, but in 1 Chron 8:33, Ishbosheth is called Esh-baal meaning "man of baal". By way of contrast Jonathan's son was called Mephibosheth or Merib-baal, Merib-baal meaning "strife or contention **against** baal" (2 Sam 4:4; 1 Chron 8:34).

##### AND BROUGHT HIM OVER TO MAHANAIM

On the face of it, this seems an astonishing thing to do, because Mahanaim lay well east of the Jordan River (see map on page 20). So why go there? There are a number of reasons: 1. Mahanaim was a fortified city and being well east of the Jordan it lay away from incursions by the Philistines; 2. It also lay on the border of the territory of the tribes of Gad and Manasseh, and consequently those tribes were likely to support Abner's appointment of Ishbosheth as king; 3. It was a levitical city and consequently associated with the priests whose support Abner may have thought it necessary to have; and 4. It was only about 25kms (15 miles) from Jabesh-gilead, and Abner, being a 'political animal', he would have seen the need to try and counter David's influence with the men of Jabesh-gilead as established in verse 4. Abner probably interpreted David's contact with the men of Jabesh-gilead as an attempt by David to unite the nation under him. David was a man of God doing what was right and honest and just, but Abner is moved by the lust for power, and in seeking to satisfy that lust, he saw the need to install Ishbosheth in Mahanaim.

##### V9 AND MADE HIM KING

So the nation is now divided into two camps with two kings. Mahanaim means "two camps", and so it was an appropriate place for Abner to do what he did. So instead of uniting together with David against the common enemy - the Philistines - we now have two kings - two fellowships - in Israel. But this is not

## 2 SAMUEL 2

what Yahweh wanted. And Abner did not appreciate the truth of Proverbs 21:30 "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh". The fact that David was appointed by Yahweh to be the next king (1 Sam 16:12) was well known in Israel, but Abner ignores this, and fails to seek the counsel of Yahweh or spiritually minded brethren before taking this precipitous action. In life we need to seek Yahweh's way by a deep personal study of the Word of God and prayer. What we see here is Abner's spirit in stark contrast to the spirit of David. David's spirit is exhibited for example in Psalm 25:4 "Show me thy ways, O Yahweh; teach me thy paths." Abner like Saul, did not do this.

### V12 AND ABNER...AND THE SERVANTS OF ISHBOSHETH...WENT OUT FROM MAHANAIM TO GIBEON

What is happening here is that Abner is becoming impatient. He was not prepared to wait any longer and so he decides to promote a show-down with David, whom he saw as the rival king. He has developed a degree of **self-confidence**. It is a great mistake to have this fleshly attitude of mind. He wanted to increase his power and influence over the relatively weak Ishbosheth. Abner is now showing the same lust for power which was ultimately going to corrupt Joab as well. The lust for power has destroyed many men in the Truth. Abner was continuing the same persecution of David that Saul did. So ~~Saul~~<sup>Abner</sup> brings his men back across the Jordan to Gibeon. Gibeon dominated the road which led to the pass of Beth-horon (approx 6kms W.N.W. of Gibeon) which in turn gave access right into the heart of the territory of Judah (see map on page 20). Abner saw Gibeon as a strategic point from which he could defeat David.

### V13 AND JOAB

Abner and Joab were similar men in many ways. They were ruthless when their self-interest required that. Neither Abner nor Joab sought the throne for themselves, but they liked the power, influence and prestige that came from being close to the seat of power. These were not good characteristics for men who should have been the humble servants of Yahweh.

### AND THE SERVANTS OF DAVID, WENT OUT, AND MET TOGETHER BY THE POOL OF GIBEON

It seems astonishing that the two armies should arrive at the same place at the same time. Perhaps this was a Providential meeting or perhaps there was some prior arrangement between Abner and Joab to meet at this place. The Pool of Gibeon lay 10kms (6 miles) N.W. of Jerusalem (see map page 20). Abner had come a considerable distance to meet Joab and his men.

### AND THEY SAT DOWN

"Sat down" is from the Hebrew *yashab* being a primary root meaning inter alia "to sit down as judge, to sit down in **ambush** ...". This was the mind of **both** parties. Both sides were ready; alert; and ready for combat.

### THE ONE ON THE ONE SIDE OF THE POOL, AND THE OTHER ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE POOL

There was no fellowship between them. They represented a divided ecclesia.

### V14 AND ABNER SAID TO JOAB

What prior discussions may have taken place we do not know.

## 2 SAMUEL 2

### LET THE YOUNG MEN NOW ARISE, AND PLAY BEFORE US

One thing was absolutely certain, and that was that Abner was not interested in playing. He may have been smiling, but he was deadly serious. The atmosphere would have been electric. "Play" is from the Hebrew *sachaq* - a primary root meaning to laugh in pleasure **or detraction** (Strong). It can also have the meaning of "to mock or deride". So Abner is making light of the whole thing, while at the same time he and his men are seething within, and deriding Joab and his men. The Jerusalem Bible translates it as "Then Abner said to Joab, 'let the young soldiers come forward and hold a contest before us'". What Joab is suggesting here, is an introduction to the main battle - a curtain raiser as it were, before the main game. There are wars which are waged by Divine decree (e.g. with Amalek Exod 17:16; with Russia Ezek 38:21; etc) but this is not one of them. David is absent and Abner instituted this battle on the grounds of passion; lust for greater power; and self-confidence. Abner types those who will oppose the Greater David - see Psalm 2 which fits the case here "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh, and against his anointed..". It was Yahweh's "anointed" (David) was in Hebron waiting to be recognised by all the Tribes of Israel. And so Abner instigates the battle. His personal ambition had made him blind to the consequences of his actions. Abner cared nothing for the lives of the men who would fight and die. He had no love for his brethren in that sense.

#### V15 VERSE 15

As the representatives of the two camps face each other across the pool, and then join in battle, we have is a frightful display of fleshly lust and passion.

#### V16 BY THE HEAD

The fact that they could catch each other by the head would indicate that they did not have shields - shields normally being carried in one hand and swords in the other. But none of these men were interested in defence, but this was very unwise because every one of them lost his life.

#### AND THRUST HIS SWORD IN HIS FELLOW'S SIDE

Rotherham - "And they caught every one his fellow, by the head, with his sword in his fellow's side, so they fell together..."

#### HELKATH-HAZZURIM

Authorities differ as to the meaning of this name. The Jewish Targum gives the meaning as "the inheritance of those who were slain". The inheritance of those who war according to the flesh is a place among the dead.

#### V17 AND THERE WAS A VERY SORE BATTLE THAT DAY

The initial slaughter of the twenty-four men led to outright war between the forces of Abner and Joab. Abner and Joab were two men who were very much alike. Neither wanted to settle this any other way than by the sword. Joab lost 20 men while Abner lost 360 (2 Sam 2:30-31). The Psalmist declares in Psalm 55:23 "But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee." There needed to be recognition of the fact that when you killed a man you took away his hope of eternal life if he was not already in covenant relationship with Yahweh. This is one of the reasons that the Law said "thou shalt not kill"...

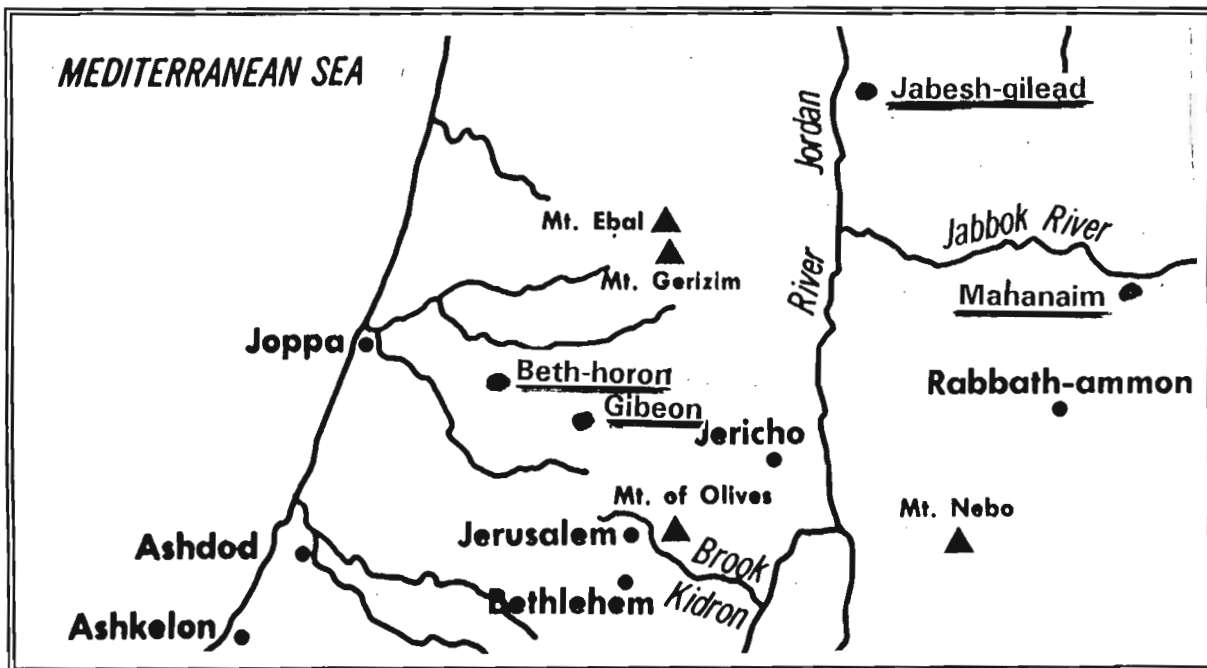
## 2 SAMUEL 2

### V17 AND ABNER WAS BEATEN

Abner, who was the instigator of the battle, needed to realise that he could not just take things into his own hands without any reference to Yahweh's will.

### BEFORE THE SERVANTS OF DAVID

David was an entirely different man to either Joab or Abner. So far as David was concerned he left **his** wars to Yahweh to fight. He hid from Saul. He avoided Saul. He **WAS** a man of war - a man of Yahweh's wars - and while he did fight Yahweh's wars, he did not fight his own.



LIFE OF DAVID

STUDY 6 - THE DEATH OF ASAHEL

2 SAMUEL 2

V18 ZERUIAH

She was David's sister. The reason that she is mentioned rather than her husband is because she was a godly woman. Furthermore her husband was apparently dead - see 2 Sam 18:32.

JOAB, AND ABISHAI, AND ASAHEL

These were three nephews of David who had prominent positions in his army. They all had a stroke of ruthlessness about them. They were difficult men to deal with. They were men who believed in their own assessment of things, and often they showed lack of true spiritual perception. David's assessment of them is given in 2 Samuel 3:39 - "and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me"

V19 AND ASAHEL PURSUED AFTER ABNER

Asahel decided that he must kill Abner. He pursues him in a spirit of anger because of the appalling blood-letting that had taken place at the Pool of Gibeon (2 Sam 18:12-17). Maybe Asahel had in mind that if he could destroy Abner, then an end would be made to the useless blood-shed and strife that had taken place up to this point, because the death of Abner would clearly demoralise the army which he led.

V20 THEN ABNER LOOKED BEHIND HIM

Abner is older, wiser and more experienced than Asahel. He does not want to kill Asahel (David's nephew), not that he would have had any moral scruples about killing him, but politicaly it would have been inopportune (see verse 22), and so Abner suggests that Asahel pursues someone else.

V22 AND ABNER SAID AGAIN TO ASAHEL, TURN THEE ASIDE

In our mind's eye we can see these two men running flat out with Asahel, the younger, pursuing Abner the older - verse 18 telling us that Asahel was "fleet of foot as a wild roe". So in due time he would have overtaken Abner.

HOW THEN SHOULD I HOLD UP MY FACE TO JOAB THY BROTHER

Abner knew that if he slew Asahel, there would be an end to one of his political options, because he would then have Joab and Abishai to deal with, to say nothing of what David might do in these circumstances. Abner also knew that Joab was as ruthless as himself, and he didn't want this to become a blood-feud between the House of Saul and the House of David.

V23 HOWBEIT HE REFUSED TO TURN ASIDE

Asahel would not stop the pursuit. Both Abner (who went to the Pool at Gibeon and started this battle) and Asahel (who now pursued so vigorously after Abner) show that once we set the processes of evil intent in motion, it is not always easy to call a halt even if we desire to do so.

WHEREFORE ABNER WITH THE HINDER END OF THE SPEAR SMOTE HIM

In those days the reverse end of the spear was often pointed (or sharpened) so that it could be driven into the ground near where its owner slept. So it appears that in this hot pursuit Abner simply stopped and Asahel ran onto the back end of Abner' spear perhaps helped by a backward thrust by Abner. Asahel's vigour and eagerness had blinded him to possible dangers.

## 2 SAMUEL 2

### V23 UNDER THE FIFTH RIB

This expression simply means the abdomen. Rotherham "in the belly"; LXX "on the loins"; Jer. Bible "struck him in the belly"; N.I.V. "into Asahel's stomach".

### AND HE FELL DOWN THERE, AND DIED IN THE SAME PLACE

From a logical and rational point of view Asahel's cause with regard to Abner was just, but his self-confidence, zealousness and impetuosity brought about his undoing. Zealousness and eagerness need to be tempered with wisdom, and while Asahel's pursuit of Abner was fearless and courageous, it was also rash, and his death would have brought great grief to his family. Asahel would have done better to seek Yahweh's guidance AND wait for his brethren. So often in times of crisis we need to be with our brethren and seek their help. Asahel's recklessness cost him his life. We are not called to the Truth to throw away our lives needlessly. Asahel was one of the top thirty men in David's camp (2 Sam 23:24). He could have been of great help to David in establishing the Kingdom, but now he was dead - his life thrown away.

### THAT AS MANY AS CAME TO THE PLACE.....STOOD STILL

As men from Joab's army come to the place where Asahel lay deceased, they stop dead. With the exception of Joab and Abishai, they are all stunned.

### V24 JOAB ALSO AND ABISHAI PURSUED AFTER ABNER

Joab and Abishai did not stay stunned by grief by the body of their dead brother. They would grieve later. This is emphasised by the R.V. and N.I.V. which have "**But** Joab and Abishai pursued Abner".

### V25 VERSE 25

When the remnants of Abner's army, who were of the Tribe of Benjamin (Saul's own tribe), had fled towards the east away from the men of Joab and the men of Judah, and when they had put a sufficient distance between themselves and their pursuers, they came together around Abner on the top of a hill and turned to look back on their pursuers, who were most probably on a nearby hill.

### V26 THEN ABNER CALLED TO JOAB, AND SAID, SHALL THE SWORD DEVOUR FOR EVER?

Abner "the Aggressor", has now become Abner "the Pious", because he has lost the battle and wishes to sue for peace. We wonder what his attitude might have been if he had been victorious this day! Would he not have ruthlessly pursued his advantage? Abner's words here do not reveal his true disposition. He was not a godly man. He was not moved by the things of the Spirit that he might honour Yahweh above all other considerations. Being in a losing situation he simply wanted a truce. As long as men are dominated by unrestrained lust and personal ambition, war will continue between brethren. Abner is a classic example of people who call for peace when on the losing side, but ruthlessly pursue war when they think that is to their advantage. It is only when the righteous Prince of Peace, reigns on earth that wars of all kinds will cease.

### V27 VERSE 27

The R.V. has "And Joab said, As God liveth, if thou hadst not spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone away, nor followed every one his brother". This reply of Joab refers not to Abner's call for a truce, but to his initial words which had triggered off the bloodshed in the first place - see verse 14. War was not David's method of winning the remaining tribes of Israel over. Rather he hoped to win them over by his honesty, integrity, and sound

## 2 SAMUEL 2

leadership. This is seen for example in his dealings with the men of Jabesh-Gilead (2 Samuel 2:4-7).

### V28 SO JOAB BLEW A TRUMPET, AND ALL THE PEOPLE STOOD STILL

So Joab agreed to this truce, because he knew that it was not profitable to pursue the warfare any further at this particular time. But he had no intention, in the long term, of allowing Abner to get away with killing his brother Asahel. There was to be no real truce between Abner and Joab - Joab would only be satisfied when Abner was dead. But Joab's ultimate action in killing Abner was not in accordance with David's wish or will (2 Sam 3:30-39).

### V29 AND ABNER AND HIS MEN WALKED ALL THAT NIGHT.....TO MAHANAIM

So Abner retired with his army disconsolate and defeated to Mahanaim. As he proceeded he would have been constantly looking behind him because he would not have trusted Joab's agreement for there to be a truce.

### V30 THERE LACKED OF DAVID'S SERVANTS NINETEEN MEN AND ASAHEL

Because Asahel had been numbered among the top thirty men who surrounded David and supported him, he is given a special mention.

### V31 SO THAT THREE HUNDRED AND THREESCORE MEN DIED

In all 380 men (360 of Abner's men plus 20 of Joab's) lost their lives that day through Abner's self-confidence, and his ambition. The Benjamites were renown fighting men, so the disparity in the number of deaths between the two armies is quite remarkable. Abner and his Benjamites are ignominiously defeated. The hand of Providence was protecting David and his interests. Yahweh had promised David the throne and Yahweh was going to see that he got it. No matter what Abner and his forces planned against David, they were not going to win. But for the moment Abner and his forces were the single biggest factor in preventing David from uniting the Kingdom. Very often in crises we do not know what to do and we have to wait on Providence and not trust in ourselves. Because we can read ahead in the record we know that Abner was going to be removed from the scene. But as James 4:1 says "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

### V32 AND THEY TOOK UP ASAHEL AND BURIED HIM IN THE SEPULCHRE OF HIS FATHER, WHICH WAS IN BETHLEHEM

Asahel's father was David's brother-in-law. He came from Bethlehem, the same town that David came from. He was possibly a good friend of David, and perhaps this is how David's sister Zeruah (verse 18) met him. But his name is never mentioned in Scripture, and this verse would tend to suggest that he was already dead.

## 2 SAMUEL 3

### V1 NOW THERE WAS LONG WAR BETWEEN THE HOUSE OF SAUL AND THE HOUSE OF DAVID

This is a sad, tragic statement. Sometimes it is imagined that David's coronation over Judah was something of a triumph, but he still had many trials and tribulations to face before becoming king over the twelve tribes. This was not a time of peace but a time of war! One consolation for David was that as time went on he became stronger and stronger, while the House of Saul became

weaker and weaker. But throughout all this period Abner continued agitating - he kept things on the boil. Why did David tolerate this state of affairs for so long? Why did he not force a showdown in the best interest of the Nation? Why not? The answer is because David had learned to wait on Yahweh - he waited for Yahweh to manipulate events to bring him to the position He had promised. He knew that the angels of Yahweh oversee the affairs of God's ecclesia. And so he patiently waited. Had he not done so, he might have had to annihilate the whole House of Saul in order to become king over the twelve tribes. And so the integrity that David had shown to Saul himself, is also extended to his family. The warfare of faith needs both faith and patience. Trials, difficulties, dangers, and discomforts are to be borne with fortitude and in faith. Abner was showing great folly in trying to prop up Ishbosheth on the throne. His motivation was the same as that of Saul - to keep David off the throne.