

SECOND SAMUEL

Chapter 3

Abner Joins David

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker. 2 And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; 3 and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; 4 and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; 5 and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron. 6 While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul. 7 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?" 8 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. 9 God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him, 10 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." 11 And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him. 12 And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, "To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you." 13 And he said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you; that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." 14 Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." 15 And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. 16 But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned. 17 And Abner conferred with the elders of Israel, saying, "For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. 18 Now then bring it about, for the LORD has promised 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.'" 19 Abner also spoke to Benjamin. And then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do. 20 When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. 21 And Abner said to David, "I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. 22 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. 23 When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace." 24 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? 25 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."

3:2–5 The list of six sons born to David in Hebron is given as an evidence of the strengthening of David's house in contrast to that of Saul (v. 1). That these six sons were each born of a different mother indirectly informs us that David married four additional wives (see 2:2) during his time in Hebron. The writer does not offer any direct criticism of this polygamous practice (see 5:13), which conflicts with Dt 17:17, but he lets the disastrous results in David's family life speak for themselves (see chs. 13–19; 1Ki 1–2). (CSB)

Ahinoam ... Abigail. From southern Judah. These marriages may have helped secure the support of the people there. *Geshur.* Small Aramean kingdom in Upper Bashan, east of the Jordan. By marrying Maacah, David formed an alliance with a people east of the Jordan and north of Ish-bosheth's capital. (TLSB)

Amnon. Later raped his sister Tamar and was killed by his brother Absalom (see ch. 13). (CSB)

3:3 *Kileab.* Called Daniel in 1Ch 3:1. (CSB)

Abigail. See 1Sa 25. (CSB)

Absalom. Later avenged the rape of Tamar by killing Amnon, and conspired against his father David in an attempt to make himself king (see chs. 13–18). (CSB)

Maacah daughter of Talmi. David's marriage to Maacah undoubtedly had political implications. With Talmi as an ally on Ish-Bosheth's northern border, David flanked the northern kingdom both south and north. (CSB)

Geshur. A small Aramean city kingdom (see 15:8) located northeast of the Sea of Galilee (see Jos 12:5; 13:11–13). (CSB)

3:4 *Adonijah.* Was put to death for attempting to take over the throne before Solomon could be crowned (see 1Ki 1–2). (CSB)

3:6 *making himself strong.* Taking over rule of the kingdom. (TLSB)

3:7 *Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?* Ish-Bosheth suspects that Abner's act was part of a conspiracy to seize the kingship (cf. v. 6). Great significance was attached to taking the concubine of a former king. (CSB)

Ish-bosheth believed Abner was trying to take over the kingdom. He accused Abner of sleeping with his father's (Saul's) concubine, a privilege reserved for the king and thus an act of betrayal. (TLSB)

3:8 Abner protests that he is not on Judah's side. (TLSB)

dog's head of Judah? Dogs were despised and considered unclean by Israelites (cf Lv 11:27). (TLSB)

3:9–10 Abner vowed to help make David king over all of Israel. (TLSB)

3:9 *May God do so to Abner.* A curse formula. (CSB)

what the LORD has sworn to him. The knowledge of David's divine designation as successor to Saul had spread widely. (CSB)

3:10 *transfer the kingdom.* Abner was the real power behind the throne. (CSB)

3:12 *Abner sent messengers.* Sensitive mission; Abner had led campaigns against David for two years and had killed Asahel. (TLSB)

to whom does the land belong? Possibly a rhetorical question that presumed that the land belonged either to Abner or to David. The former seems more likely from the following sentence. (CSB)

Make your covenant with me. Abner wants assurance that he will face no reprisals for his past loyalty to the house of Saul. (CSB)

3:13 *Michal daughter of Saul.* Although Saul had given Michal to David (1Sa 18:27), he later gave her to another man after David fled from his court (1Sa 25:44). In the minds of the northern elders, the reunion of David and Michal would strengthen David's claim to the throne as a legitimate son-in-law of Saul. (CSB)

3:14 *David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth.* David wanted Michal returned as an open and official act of Ish-Bosheth himself, rather than as part of a subterfuge planned by Abner. David knew that Ish-Bosheth would not dare to defy Abner's wishes (see v. 11). (CSB)

Give me my wife Michal. David asserts his connection to Saul's family and rule. Ish-bosheth's compliance shows that he recognized his own political and military weakness. David considered himself still legally married to Michal because he had never divorced her. (TLSB)

bridal price. Cf Gn 34:12; Hos 2:19–20. (TLSB)

a hundred Philistine foreskins. See 1Sa 18:25. Saul had required 100 Philistine foreskins; David presented him with 200 (1Sa 18:27). (CSB)

3:16 *Bahurim.* The last Benjamite city on the way to Hebron (see 16:5; 17:18). (CSB)

Near the border between Benjamin and Judah. (TLSB)

3:17 *elders of Israel.* The collective leadership of the various tribes comprised an informal national ruling body (cf. Joel 1:2; Mt 15:2; Ac 24:1; see also 1Sa 8:4; 2Sa 5:3; 1Ki 8:1, 3; 20:7; 2Ki 10:1; 23:1). (CSB)

you have been seeking David your king. Apparently Ish-Bosheth's support came mainly from the tribe of Benjamin (see 2:15 and note) and from Gilead in Transjordan (see 2:8; 1Sa 11:9–11; 31:11–13). (CSB)

3:18 *the LORD promised David.* By this time Samuel's anointing of David must have become common knowledge (see 5:2). Abner probably interpreted the anointing as a promise from the Lord, since Samuel was the Lord's much-revered prophet. (CSB)

No such promise concerning David is recorded in 1 and 2Sm. The Lord promised this regarding Saul (1Sm 9:16). Abner's point was that the promises made to Saul now belonged to David. (TLSB)

3:19 *Abner also spoke to the Benjamites.* Because Saul and his family were from the tribe of Benjamin, Abner was careful to consult the Benjamites concerning the transfer of kingship to the tribe of Judah.

Apparently they consented, but Abner was not above representing matters in a way that was favorable to his purpose. (CSB)

Tribal leaders of Benjamin, probably the main supporters of Ish-bosheth. (TLSB)

3:21 *peace*. Hbr *shalom*. David approved of Abner's plan. (TLSB)

3:22 David may have relied on raids for income. (TLSB)

3:24–25 Joab regards Abner as a spy seeking out David's military plans. (TLSB)

3:25 *Abner...came to deceive you*. Joab despised Abner for killing his brother (2:18, 23; 3:27) and sought to discredit him in David's eyes as a mere opportunist. Perhaps he also sensed that his own position of leadership would be threatened if Abner joined forces with David, since Abner was obviously a power among the northern tribes. (CSB)

3:1–25 The relationship between Ish-bosheth and his general, Abner, deteriorates until, finally, Abner aligns himself with David. How easy for us to use dishonest methods as we strive for position and power. Self-interest and self-glory are sins that plague us all. Jesus, on the other hand, selflessly left His throne on high, died to pay for our sins on the cross, rose, and took the Church as His Bride. • Lord Jesus, praise be to Your holy name for Your supreme sacrifice on our behalf. Amen. (TLSB)

Joab Murders Abner

26 When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know about it. **27** And 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. **28** Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the LORD for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. **29** May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle 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 Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon.

3:26 *cistern of Sirah*. Still in Judah. (TLSB)

3:27 *into the midst of the gate*. Into the recesses of the fortified city gate. (TLSB)

Joab struck him in the stomach so that he died. Joab's murder of Abner is not to be excused either as an act of war or as justifiable blood revenge (cf. Nu 35:12; Dt 19:11–13). Asahel had been killed by Abner in the course of battle. (CSB)

In revenge for the bloodshed Abner had caused. (TLSB)

3:28–29 As king, David was obligated to punish evildoers. Later, on his deathbed, David called for his nephew Joab's execution (1Ki 2:5–6). Yet now, for the sake of peace, David lessened the punishment and instead cursed him. See p 6. David tolerated Joab, as a member of his family and perhaps due to his military skills. (TLSB)

3:29 *May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house!* After disclaiming any personal or official involvement in the plot to assassinate Abner (v. 28), David cursed Joab and thereby called on God to judge his wicked act. In this crucial hour when David's relationship to the northern tribes hung in the balance, he appears not to have felt sufficiently secure in his own position to bring Joab publicly to justice (see v. 39). The crime went unpunished until early in the reign of Solomon (1Ki 2:5–6, 29–35). (CSB)

spindle. Lit, "stick" or "crutch." (TLSB)

3:30 *Abishai.* Somehow an accessory to the murder, perhaps by leading the delegation that summoned Abner to Hebron. (TLSB)

3:26–30 Without David's knowledge and in a time of peace, Joab murders Abner to avenge the death of his brother Asahel. King David curses Joab and all his father's house because vengeance rarely settles matters. When wronged, you will naturally experience thoughts of vengeance. Arrest these thoughts by crying out to the Lord in prayer. Entrust your judgment to Him and to the legitimate authorities. The Lord of justice and peace, who sent His Son to bear all injustice for your sake, is your hope in all circumstances. • Grant us grace, merciful God, that we may flee from evil and do what is good, that Your mercy may crown Your goodness in us, for Jesus' sake. Amen. (TLSB)

David Mourns Abner

31 Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner." And King David followed the bier. 32 They buried Abner at Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. 33 And the king lamented for Abner, saying, "Should Abner die as a fool dies? 34 Your hands were not bound; your feet were not fettered; as one falls before the wicked you have fallen."

And all the people wept again over him. 35 Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was yet day. But David swore, saying, "God do so to me and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!" 36 And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people. 37 So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner. 38 And the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? 39 And I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I. The LORD repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!"

3:31 *Joab.* He too was compelled to join the mourners. It may be that Joab's involvement was not widely known and that David hoped to keep the matter secret for the time being. (CSB)

King David. First time David is referred to as "king." Tragic events ironically brought the kingdom to David. (TLSB)

3:32 *Hebron.* David's royal city at the time. (CSB)

the king lamented for Abner. Because Abner's murder had the potential of destroying the union of the nation under David's rule, David did everything possible to demonstrate his innocence to the people. In this he was successful (see vv. 36–37). (CSB)

Abner was given an honorable funeral at David's capital. (TLSB)

3:33–34 Abner had died at the hands of criminals. The lament begins and ends with this thought. (TLSB)

3:33 *lamented*. Lit, “chanted a lament. (TLSB)

3:34 *not bound ... not fettered*. Abner was a free man. (TLSB)

3:35 *taste bread*. Fasting is a biblical expression of grief. (TLSB)

3:38 *prince*. Lit, “a leader,” esp a military commander, not necessarily the son of a king. (TLSB)

3:39 *sons of Zeruiah*. Joab and Abishai. David contrasts his gentle leadership with their blood vengeance. As king, David has responsibility for punishment of the wicked. (TLSB)

3:31–39 Although Abner has been his enemy, David leads the mourning at Abner’s funeral. Our sinful nature tends to delight in the misfortune of our enemies. How differently God treats us! “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son” (Rm 5:10). • Lord, help me always to love my enemies as You have loved me in Your Son, my Savior. Amen. (TLSB)