

Abner moves from Team Saul to Team David

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[0 : 00] Let's stick with Team Saul. And then there's a bit of fighting between the two sides in Chapter 2. Otherwise, Asahel would have killed Abner.

So that's why that's red, because blood was shed. Hopefully, that makes some sense of some of the characters going on when we dive into Chapter 3.

And we're going to read 1 C 6 to 21, and Ray's going to come and read that for us. Thank you so much, Ray. You're at home, and you hold this whilst in front of the TV.

You have control. You have control of what you want to watch on the television. I remember when I was growing up at home, many battles over this between my brother and I.

Because I thought what I wanted to watch was better than what he wanted to watch. And we would rarely disagree on what we wanted. And so we would try and convince our parents, my program's better.

[1 : 32] And of course, my program was better than my brother's. And this morning, I think we read about a man who is in control or thinks he's in control.

Chapter 3, verse 6, we read about Abner. Remember, he's on Team Saul over here. Abner.

Chapter 3, verse 6. During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position.

Abner is a man who wants to be in control, who wants his position to be good and important in Team Saul. And he kind of wants the power, really.

Because he's the one who made Ish-bosheth king over here, this is spark this kind of war, hasn't it?

That we read about in 3, verse 6. This war between the two sides. Team David. Team Saul. Saul. Because Abner appointed his own king.

[2 : 49] But really, he's trying to make himself strong. But things change quite quickly in chapter 3.

Saul's son, the king, Ish-bosheth, says to Abner, you've done something wrong. And Abner, in verse 8, is furious.

And he says, am I a dog's head? Which I assume we all say when we get angry, don't we? Why would he say, am I a dog's head?

Dogs weren't cute pets at that time in this land. Not like now. They were viewed as sort of dirty, unclean animals.

And Abner feels like, because of what his king, Ish-bosheth, has said to him, he feels like he's being treated like something dirty, unclean.

[3 : 49] Hence why he says, am I a dog's head? Things between him and the king that he's put in place begin to change.

It's not all going swimmingly. His position that he's trying to strengthen is suddenly not going so strongly.

So what do we do with Abner? Abner. I'm going to read a few verses from James. James chapter 1. And I think they're helpful when we then think about Abner.

I'll explain why in a moment. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Yes, anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror.

And after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

[5 : 04] And I say that because God's word for us can sometimes be like looking at ourselves in a mirror. We can see ourselves in different ways as we read through some of the people in the Bible.

And I think for some of us at least that might be the case with Abner as we look at him this morning. And I think Abner is also someone who knows God's word and at first doesn't do what it says.

And then we'll see things change with Abner. So, three questions about Abner.

Firstly, what does Abner know? What does he know about God and his word? Well, we read about what he knows in verse 9.

He's accused of doing wrong by his king. And then he says, May God deal with Abner, that's him, be it ever so severely if I do not do for David what the Lord promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul to establish his throne over Israel and Judah.

[6:23] Basically, Abner is thinking, hang on a minute, I know God's words. And all the time back here in chapter 3 verse 6, I've been making myself and my position strong and I've been serving Team Saul and this king Ish-bosheth, but I've all that time known that God's made promises to David that David's going to be king.

And so Abner is now thinking, shall I go over to Team David? which is quite the change, given he was so against being on Team David.

And as we read from James, we can be like Abner. We can listen to the word, but not do what it says.

We can forget what we've heard and decide instead, I'm going to live for myself and I'm going to serve my own king. Or I'm going to try and be in control of what I do.

It's my life, I'll live it my way. And that's what Abner was doing there in chapter 3 verse 6. But now he's thinking, perhaps he's wrong.

[7:50] So that's what did Abner know. Secondly, what does Abner do? What does Abner do? He considers, as we saw in verse 9, maybe I should go on Team David.

And Ish-bosheth, the king over the rest of Israel, who Abner was serving, suddenly got a bit scared of Abner. Verse 11, Ish-bosheth did not say another word to Abner because he was afraid of him. Afraid, thinking Abner is in quite a powerful position in my kingdom. And now he's thinking he should go to another king.

I'm scared of him. What's he going to do next? What's his next move? Really, Abner held all of the control in Ish-bosheth's kingdom.

And losing Abner is going to be a terrible thing for Ish-bosheth. And Abner really does intend to go to Team David.

[9:00] Verse 12, have a look. How does it work out? Abner's been so in control, he can offer to David the rest of Israel.

I've been in control of it myself, Abner's saying to David. And now I'm saying, you can have it.

It can be yours. Let's make an agreement together. And so there's this thing about David testing Abner's loyalty. Is he really changing sides?

Is he really sort of laying down control at the feet of King David? Is he really doing that?

And so David tests him by saying, could you bring back my wife Michal? Now that's a complicated story. I'm not going to get too into it. Technically, David was still married to her, I think.

[10:11] And he says, bring her back to me. And so Abner arranges this. He is proving to David, I'm willing to change sides. I'm willing to go to your team, Team David.

So Abner is making moves. But is he really changing? Or is this all a show? Is he really trying to make himself strong in David's kingdom?

What's going on? Well, I think we see, thirdly, how does Abner change here? How does he change? Verse 17. Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, for some time you have wanted to make David your king.

Now do it. For the Lord promised David, by my servant I will rescue my people from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.

So he goes, the rest of the leaders of Israel, and says, make David king. Turn from Ish-bosheth to God's king, King David.

[11:25] Abner's not making it so much about himself, is he? He's making about the Lord and the Lord's promises to David. He is laying down the remote control and saying, I think I should turn to King David.

He's hearing God's words, and instead of ignoring them, he's listening to them and doing them, which is what James says we should do.

You can look at the word and immediately forget it, but whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

And Abner is certainly now listening and doing what God's word says. He's not trying to build his own kingdom anymore, the kingdom of Team Saul.

He's trying to go to David and God's kingdom. And there's a bit more of his move that he makes in verse 19.

[12:45] Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person. Why would he go to the Benjamites? Well, the Benjamites were a very key tribe for Team Saul.

This was Saul's tribe. Perhaps the hardest people to convince in Israel. And so he goes directly to them and says, turn from Team Saul to Team David.

Make David your king. He is God's man. That's quite a change for Abner.

Someone who was at the beginning of chapter 3, trying to make himself strong. Now trying to make God and his king, the one in control.

Now here's the thing. David was God's king, wasn't he? Abner's finally acknowledging that. But as we sang earlier, all the Bible stories lead to King Jesus.

[13:51] David points us to the greater king, King Jesus, God's own son who came into this world.

And the good news when it comes to us considering Jesus in the words, that Jesus came for people like Abner, for people who like to be in control.

For people who like to think, I'm in charge, it's my life. And really, rather than being holding the right control, we want to hold the crown, don't we? We want to be in charge.

We want to live as we see fit. But King Jesus says, you can come into my kingdom.

Because I have one for you. New life. You don't have to live for yourself because living for yourself is not going to lead you to everlasting life.

[14:58] But I have come as the king who's come to serve you by laying down my life for you so that you can live with me as your king. So stop trying to be in control.

Stop trying to make your own way. Turn to me. And God is very gracious, very gracious with people like Abner who think that they should be in control, that they should be the ones who wear the crown.

I think they know the best way to live. God is very gracious and brings them into his kingdom. And Abner's certainly been brought into God's kingdom. Abner's certainly changing here.

And it is messy. It is messy. I say that because don't forget Abner had killed someone on Team David.

It was in a war. It was part of being in a war. Abner had killed someone. And Abner had been following Team Saul Team Saul and made Ish-bosheth king.

[16:07] It was all a bit messy. But it's okay because God is gracious to messy people. And in terms of King David, trying to rule over all this mess, is he really the king who can lead people through this mess?

Can he keep this messy kingdom together? Well, we'll see a bit more in a moment. But firstly, we're going to sing together. And we're going to sing about... So, we saw Abner, a man who wanted, who liked to be in control.

But remember, he's laid down control and is now following the king, God's king, King David.

That's what's happened. But it's been messy, hasn't it? He had his own king, Ish-bosheth, Saul's son. Never meant to be king in the first place.

He had put him in charge. Ish-bosheth accused him of doing wrong. And don't forget, Abner has also killed Asahel.

[17:17] He's on Team David now, but he's already killed one of their men. And that mess, we're going to see, is going to continue a little bit. But David, David is king.

He's God's king. Is he the best king to hold a messy kingdom together? Let's see. So, this is how messy it gets. Verse 24, Joab, who's also Asahel's brother, said to the king, what have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he's gone. He came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you're doing.

Joab doesn't trust Abner. He's not changed. He's not deceiving you, Joab tells David. David, probably thinking, he killed my brother.

And Team David's just recruited him and at the end of verse 21, Abner goes away in peace. Joab cannot stand this.

[18 : 28] And so verse 27, see what happens? At the end, Joab stabbed Abner in the stomach and he died. It's continuing to be very messy.

And if you want to think about Joab a bit more this evening and it will be a bit more uncomfortable, do come back. It will be good to consider him. But here's a question that seems to be being answered in the rest of this chapter.

Is David guilty of this? Is David himself ruling over his kingdom? Is David and his kingdom guilty of shedding blood?

End of verse 26, no. Joab then left, but David did not know about it. David didn't know anything about what Joab went off to do.

He didn't know that Joab was planning to kill Abner. It wasn't done under the king's authority. And so David speaks and makes sure that people know about this.

[19 : 41] I am my kingdom. This is verse 28. I am my kingdom of forever innocence before the Lord concerning the blood of Abner. and it's important and it's important for David to establish this because don't forget Abner who was getting people on his side, getting all Israel on his side.

And David was meant to be God's king over all Israel. Israel. But it could have fallen down at this point after Joab had killed Abner.

David's saying, no, that's not what my kingdom is going to be like. And so the king leads the people in mourning, grieving for Abner who's died.

And he starts with Joab, verse 31. Then David said to Joab and all the people with him, tear your clothes, put on sackcloth, walk in mourning in front of Abner.

And King David himself walked behind the beard and sort of coffin. King David led them in grieving the death of Abner.

[20 : 59] He leads the people and he also unites the people. There's something going on, I think, in verses 31 to 37.

Let me point out some things to you. So in 31, David said to all the people with him, verse 32, at the end, all the people wept.

Verse 35, then they all came to David. Verse 36, all the people took note. And verse 37, so on that day, all the people there and all Israel knew the king had no part in the murder of Abner, son of Ner. I think that word all is important. All the people are joining around David and saying, no, no, this is the king. He's not been shedding the blood of Abner.

He's not a king who's ruling over a kingdom which is full of bloodshed. He's the king we're happy to unite around. And that makes sense because chapter 3, verse 1 is a summary, sorry, the ones disappeared from the screen.

[22 : 24] Chapter 3, verse 1 is the summary really of what is going on in this whole chapter, I think. Chapter 3, verse 1, the war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time.

David grew stronger and stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker. That's really what we're seeing. The house of Saul was growing so weak, it lost Abner, Ish-bosheth afraid, he's lost his main man, and people are uniting around David.

Uniting around David, God's king. Just as Abner had said, I'm going to follow you as king, I'm going to lead people to you. So the whole of Israel ends up doing the same.

God's king is coming into place. God is building his kingdom, growing David's kingdom stronger and stronger, even bringing enemies onto his side.

So all's going to be happy now, right? David's king, he's always going to be well. But I'm not sure it is.

[23 : 41] Even in this chapter, David is God's king, but two things. Verse 39, he doesn't deal with Joab.

Verse 39, and today though I am the anointed king, I'm weak and these sons of Zeruijah are too strong for me. May the Lord repay the evil doer according to his evil deeds.

He is to show justice. He is to be looking after God's kingdom. And Joab's done wrong. He's murdered someone without the authority of the king.

But David's feeling too weak, too nervous to deal with the evil in his kingdom. And it's going to come back to bite him as we'll see as we go on through to Samuel.

And there's another thing David doesn't do well. So at the beginning of chapter 3, verse 2 to 5, we didn't read this, but this is what it is.

[24 : 59] David has lots of children. Having children is a good thing. But it's not happening in the best way. Because there's also quite a few mums.

Verse 2, sons were born to David in Hebron. His first was Amnon, son of Ahimoam. That's the first mum. His second, Kiliab, son of Abigail, second mum.

The third, Absalom, son of Maacah, third mum. The fourth, Adonijah, son of Haggith, fourth mum. Fourth? Fifth. The fifth, I'm not going to say that name, son of Abathah, fifth mum.

And the sixth, Ithrim, the son of David's wife, Iglah, six. That can't be a good thing for David to have so many wives.

And actually in God's law, in God's words to his people about if they were to have a king, it says this, and he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away.

[26 : 12] The warning in God's word to any king and any people with a king, don't let them have too many wives. God's love. Otherwise, his heart will turn away.

It means his heart's divided. He loves God, David does. But he doesn't just love one wife, he loves too many. And they're pulling him in all sorts of directions, and we'll see that that will cause him issues later on to you.

David's not the perfect king in this chapter. He's doing a fairly good job of bringing all Israel to him, but not the perfect job.

And so we need a better king than David. We really do. We need someone who's going to come and deal with our greatest enemies, someone who's not going to be too weak to deal with them.

And we need someone whose heart is completely devoted to the Lord. And that is King Jesus.

Jesus is the better king. Where David couldn't deal with Joab, a murderer within the kingdom, Jesus dealt with a far stronger enemy, death itself.

[27 : 30] On the cross, he faced it, and then he rose from the grave. Where David's heart was divided, loving too many wives as well as trying to love God and rule God's kingdom, Jesus' heart was perfectly given to his father.

He was tempted in every way and yet obeyed him completely. Jesus is surely the king we need. We started talking about who holds the remote, who's in charge, who's in control.

And David was in charge, but he couldn't quite say, couldn't quite put the remote down entirely and say, I want to be a king who follows God completely.

He also wants to follow his own ways. He was pulled in lots of directions with all these different wives and feeling too weak to deal with evil.

He doesn't quite rule this messy kingdom as we would want. But Jesus is the king who was perfectly and rightly in control all the time as God in the flesh.

[28 : 53] A king who didn't cling to the power of the throne but left it in order to come into our world and give up his life for his people in obedience to his father's plan.

He's a good king who was able to raise up his people to new life in him. He is the king that we need. So which king are you following?

Are you trying to make yourself king? Trying to do what you want? Are you willing to lay down your life and say Jesus is my king. I want to follow him.

Let's pray. Father, let's pray.