

## **Abner Defects to David**

Call to Worship: Psalm 47

1st Scripture: Judges 9

2nd Scripture: 2 Samuel 3:6-12

Hymn #216- *Crown Him With Many Crowns*

Hymn #109- *This is My Father's World*

Hymn #50- *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*

### **Introduction:**

David is reigning over Judah. In rebellion against the revealed will of God, Abner has set Ishbosheth up, as king over the rest of Israel. There is ongoing war between Judah and Israel for the duration of Ishbosheth's reign, but David's house is growing stronger and stronger, while Saul's is growing weaker and weaker. God is gradually bringing David to his rightful reign over all Israel. And at Hebron, David begins to have sons, securing a legacy for his reign.

This morning, we move on to consider an event, which ultimately leads to David reigning over all Israel. For Abner, the commander of Ishbosheth's army, and the real power behind his reign, following a contentious disagreement with Ishbosheth, will defect to David, ultimately bringing the entire kingdom over to David. And this morning, we begin to consider the contention that arises between Abner and Ishbosheth, leading to this defection.

### **I. Abner Defects to David**

"Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul" (vs. 6).

Here, we find that as David's men and Ishbosheth's men were continuing to battle, Abner, the commander of Ishbosheth's army (and the one who had set Ishbosheth up as king), was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul. That is to say, that Abner was the one who was really running the show, and he was increasing his power over all Israel. As we have mentioned in the past, Abner had set up Ishbosheth, as a puppet king, really to serve his own interests. Ishbosheth had the name; he was the authentic son of Saul, but Abner aimed to use him as a means of securing his own control of the kingdom. And that is exactly what was happening. Abner already had the favor of the army; he gained more and more of the confidence of the general population, and he was really the one who was calling the shots on behalf of Ishbosheth. And all of this, Abner had done, in willful rejection of the revealed will of God.

Well, finally, Ishbosheth begins to grow suspicious of Abner, as he comes to believe that Abner had had sexual relations with one of his father's (Saul's) concubines. Such an act, if true, could very easily be perceived as an act of attempting to usurp the kingdom from under Ishbosheth's rule. We are told in verse 7, "And Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So Ishbosheth said to Abner, 'Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?'" "What is going on Abner? Why have you had sexual relations with my father's concubine? What is your intent here? Come on now, come out with the truth."

Being greatly insulted by Ishbosheth's question, and the assumption implied by it, we are told in verse 8, "Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, 'Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman?'"

Now, this response by Abner, does not tell us whether or not he really slept with Rizpah; in other words, we still do not know if Ishbosheth's accusation is true or not, and the text will not answer this question for us. What Abner is doing, however, is saying, "Look, I have been nothing but loyal to your dad and his family and his friends, all of this time, and though I have had the power to deliver the kingdom over to David, from the beginning, I did not. I have stood by you, and I have remained loyal. And yet, you charge me with a wrong, concerning this woman; concerning a concubine? What am I, a dog's head to you? Am I that worthless and untrustworthy in your sight; am I a dog's head, found among our enemies in Judah?" You see, the implication of Ishbosheth, attached to the accusation [regardless if Abner actually slept with Rizpah or not], was greatly insulting to Abner. For Ishbosheth to find any fault in Abner, especially concerning a fault related to a concubine woman, was deeply insulting to Abner, so insulting, that he further responds with these words, from verses 9 and 10:

"May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as 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."

"After all I have done, when I could have very easily turned the kingdom of Israel over to David (at anytime), you charge me with this fault! Now, may God destroy me in some horrible and painful way, if I don't turn the kingdom over to David, in accordance with the Lord's oath,

concerning David; that he should reign over all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba [From the northern most point, to the southern most point of Israel--the whole land!]."

Indeed, all of these things confirm that Abner was the one really running the show, and that Ishbosheth was merely a puppet king. And now, Abner was going to remove the puppet from his hand, using his power to turn the kingdom over to David, seeking to secure David's favor in the process. And how does Ishbosheth, the king, respond? Could anyone dare speak in such a way to the king? Well, again, Ishbosheth's response (or lack there of, I should say, is very revealing):

"And he could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him" (vs. 11). Ishbosheth just shut his mouth, and let the accusation stand where it did, without pressing it any further. For, he was afraid of Abner, and what else he might do.

"Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, 'Whose is the land?' saying also, 'Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you" (vs. 12).

"Hey David, the land is yours, isn't it? Didn't God promise you the kingdom? Make your covenant with me, and I will bring all of Israel over to you. Ishbosheth should not be reigning. The kingdom is rightfully yours. Covenant to do me good; let me join with you, and I will help you get what is rightfully yours!"

Brethren, we will stop here in the narrative, for this morning, before getting to David's response, because there are some telling things about Abner here, which we ought to consider and learn from, especially concerning the nature of his heart. Right from the outset, we ought to be thinking, "Wow, this man is a piece of work, isn't he?" Notice, how he cunningly appeals to David, as if he was not the cause of all that has transpired in the splitting of the kingdom. "Whose land is this, David? Doesn't it belong to you, according to God's promise? Make a covenant with me, and I will bring it over to you, as is right and proper." Well, wait a minute here. Wasn't Abner the one who had taken Ishbosheth over to Mahanaim, and set him up as king, from the outset? Wasn't he the one who came down and initiated war with Judah, when he (and the Israelite army under him) met with Joab (and the army of Judah) by the pool of Gibeon? Now brethren, while David is not presently aware of all that has happened between Abner and Ishbosheth, we have been given access to the whole picture here, and we are meant to see the utter treachery and deception of Abner's heart. And what we find here, if we are honest, is quite

the reflection of the self-serving, self-absorbed, selfishly ambitious Saul. Abner is very clearly, all about Abner. Abner is a placard; indeed, a billboard of what we see in every rebellious heart throughout all of Scripture, and what God wants us to see about mankind, in general: Abner is man in rebellion against his God. And though he will get over on David here (David is beyond gracious and believes the best of Abner), he will not get over on God. God will use even the insubordinate, vengeful heart of Joab, to deal with the deceptive Abner.

You see, brethren, Abner has no real interest in honoring God at all; though he knows the revealed will of God, concerning David. And Abner has no real concern about David receiving what is rightfully his, in coming to reign over all of Israel. Abner is about serving Abner, and working unto his best advantage, when it is convenient for him. He orchestrated an entire plan, contrary to the will of God, seeking to secure Israel's throne for himself, using the impotent Ishbosheth as his puppet king, in order to serve his own covetous desire for power. And as he increased his own hold on the kingdom, the moment that Ishbosheth becomes suspicious, he defects to David, with the hope of securing favor and a high position from David. In many ways, Abner is not unlike the Amalekite messenger, who sought to exploit the death of Saul for his own gain, when he brought news to David, of Saul's death. And although David will not execute Abner, as he had done the Amalekite (again, David does not see what we now see), God will step in and deal with Abner, lest he poison the kingdom of David, with his own ambitious pursuits.

## **II. Closing Thoughts and Applications**

Brethren, having examined this morning's text, let us move on to consider two relevant thoughts and applications, which might benefit our own hearts, in light of what we have just gone over:

1) Brethren, take note again, of the mysterious outworking of God's providence, in the event that has transpired here in our text. While there is no direct reference to the sovereignty of God here, we don't want to miss its reality, found in the text. In His perfect timing, God begins now to bring the entire kingdom over to David, in accordance with His promise, many years earlier, by Samuel. David sufficed to reign in Judah alone, waiting patiently for 7 1/2 years, unsure of when or how God would act, to fulfill the promise. But God, who was grooming David and preparing him for the full reign; and God, who often has multiple reasons for delaying, and bringing His will to pass at just the perfect time, begins to trigger the process for

fulfilling His promise to David. By use of a "side dish" as it were; by use of one of Saul's concubines, God sovereignly plants a seed of contention between Abner and Ishbosheth. And this leads to David receiving the kingdom, the death of the deceptive Abner, and the death of Saul's son, Ishbosheth. And though unrighteous acts are committed throughout this process (as we will see in the upcoming weeks), God uses all of it to clear the way for his anointed king, David, who is to reign over all of Israel.

Earlier, in our first Scripture reading, we found that Abimelech, one of Gideon's sons, had murdered all of his brothers, so as to set himself up as king over the people of God. He had formed a wicked alliance with the people of Shechem, so as to advance this evil scheme. Only one brother (the youngest, Jotham) had escaped, and pronounced a curse upon him and the people of Shechem, for their wicked alliance and conspiracy. And although Abimelech reigned for three years over Israel, God brought about the fulfillment of Jotham's curse. What happened? The people of Shechem and Abimelech wound up turning on each other, and both were destroyed at the hands of the other, in keeping with the curse, in accordance with God's sovereign and irrevocable will!

And so, brethren, let us see here again that hidden and certain reality of God's sovereign hand, governing and controlling all things, unto His own ultimate ends. And He may allow wickedness to prevail for a time (Abimelech reigned for three years before he was removed, 7 1/2 years had transpired before David obtained rightful reign over all Israel), but He will act, and He will accomplish every iota of His intended will, with not a single promise, left unkept! And so, brethren, let us revel, yet again, in the glorious sovereignty of God here, carrying it over to our own circumstances and our own day, recognizing that no matter what things look like on the outside, God is forever reigning on the throne, ordering all things unto the fulfillment of His will, which includes the best, *true* interests of all of His people! And at the very center of this will, which is unfolding right in the melting pot of man's corruption and wickedness; at the high point of every single act performed by man, who thinks he is wise and getting over on others, is God's glorious plan of exalting His Son, The Lord Jesus Christ! All of history, and every event in history is a group of innumerable river channels, which are all spilling (every last one of them), into the ocean of exalting *not* David, but David's greater Son, The Lord Jesus Christ. And here, we see that, in some small way, with the events transpiring in our text!

2) Let us witness again, the wicked, selfish and deceptive nature of the human heart, in rebellion against God. Look again at Abner, and see the inner workings of a heart that is unregenerate and bound to idolatry. Abner intentionally rebelled against the very clear, revealed will of God. And only when it was convenient for him, did he appeal to that will, all the more aggravating his sin against God. He acknowledges God's will for David, when he sees that Saul's kingdom will no longer serve his self-seeking purposes. Ishbosheth offends him; Ishbosheth infringes upon Abner's pride, and then, he develops a deceptive plan to swing himself over, into the benefits of David's reign, which could make Abner prominent in Judah and all of Israel. And so, he conveniently brings out God's promises, and calls for a covenant with David, so that he can maneuver his way into that promising, personal interest, casting Ishbosheth under the bus, in the whole process. Indeed, in many ways, without justifying the actions of Ishbosheth, one might properly deduce that he was a victim of Abner's wicked, self-serving desires, raised up and cast aside, when it was most beneficial for Abner.

But brethren, such is the state of the heart of the natural man, apart from Christ. Where Christ's glory is not sought, the glory of the individual creature prevails, in his own heart, and the wicked treachery of pursuing self glory, is seen in such heinous acts, as that which we witness here in the life of Abner. Do you see the ugliness here, friends? We are meant to see it here, first, because we are very slow to see it in ourselves. We are such natural masters of deception, that we even deceive ourselves, all too well! Indeed, the heart of man is deceptive and desperately wicked, and who can know it? Only God, who searches the heart and recompenses each man according to His ways. God sees, what we hide and what we suppress! And He exposes, and He judges righteously! And so, as we see the utter heinous nature of Abner's wicked, deceptive and destructive heart; as we see him rampaging through life, hunting down his own interests at the expense of everything and everyone else in his path, we are meant to view, yet again, the wicked and destructive heart of man, apart from God! Do you see that here, friends? You see, we were meant to know, love and serve Christ! The interests of God, are meant to rule over all other interests. And when He is out of place, as it were; when other idols rule in our hearts, see then the terrible destruction that ensues in the process! See the ways in which we selfishly trample over the interests of others and cry "foul" when they do the same to us, failing to recognize that the problem, universally, is that we are a created people, who are in rebellion against our All-glorious Creator!

And see as well, that if we flee not to Christ now; if we do not repent and seek forgiveness, salvation and refuge in Christ, there is a day appointed unto us, where God will strike us down and bring us to a judgment reckoning, for all that we have done in these bodies on loan! There is a Joab waiting for us, ready to intrude upon our plans, unexpectedly, as he takes us innocently aside by the gate to speak with us, only to thrust us through with a knife, sending us off to meet the Maker, whom we have so greatly offended. [Read 2 Samuel 3:27]. The plan seems to be working so well, until God steps in and says, "Come, Come and give an account!" Friend, if you are outside of Jesus Christ this morning; if you have not repented of your sins and embraced Christ by faith (desperately calling upon Him for His free grace, forgiveness and salvation, secured by His own shed blood on the cross), then do so now, before it is too late! See in Abner, see in Saul, see in every wicked character in Scripture, the utter folly and severity of living life in rebellion against God! Your heart will only beat so long...don't come to your last breath, unprepared...for there is an eternity of suffering and agony to follow, for all who die outside of Jesus Christ!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25