

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

A Tale of Two Rivals II Samuel 2:12 – 3:39

Intro: Last time, we made note of a significant historical event that occurred in vs4. When the elders of Judah anointed David as king over the tribe of Judah, for the 1st time in history, the kingdom of God had become a visible, tangible thing on the earth. It wasn't visibly large or powerful but God's anointed king was visibly ruling on this earth. Of course, this provides us with the spiritual identity (or parallel) of David's kingdom but when David's kingdom is immediately opposed by the kingdom of Abner, its not immediately clear what the spiritual parallel is to this usurper.

Is Abner's kingdom a reflection of the kingdom of darkness? You could say that, but to what degree? Is it a parallel to the kingdom of Satan or this wretched world that we live in? I don't think so b/c, as we'll see, Abner's opposition of David, though violent & drawn out, doesn't last very long. As we proceed through our text today, I believe were going to discover that Abner's kingdom represents something that hits a little closer to home for all of us.

12-17- Mahanaim- Its important to understand that in this whole episode, Abner is the aggressor. How do we know? B/c geography doesn't lie. The exact location of Mahanaim is debated amongst scholars but it is believed to have been well east of the Jordan River. To leave HQ east of the Jordan, cross over the river & come within 5 miles of Jerusalem indicates that **Abner is on the offensive**. No doubt David & his men got wind of these troop movements so Joab's advancing his troops to Gibeon is simply a logical defensive move. The carnage that takes place in the rest of this chapter is not the result of a chance encounter of 2 opposing armies. It is Abner's deliberate attempt to impose northern rule on David's Judean kingdom. Abner is on the attack!

Joab- a nephew a David, the son of his sister Zeruah; he has 2 notable brothers: Abishai (who accompanied David on his raid of Saul's camp ground) & Asahel. Joab will have a long & troubled career as David's chief military assistant & we'll hear a lot about him thru the rest of the book but **ch3** will really expose his true character 4 all 2 see.

17-23- Asahel- Talk about being tenacious, this guy just wouldn't give up! What was Asahel doing? He may have figured that killing Abner, the enemy general, would confuse & scatter the enemy army. Or maybe he just coveted the glory that came from killing the top guy. Whatever the reasons, Asahel kept pursuing, in spite of Abner's fair warnings. Asahel had the speed but Abner had the spear & in the end, the spear won. It was Asahel's last race. As horrible as this story is, we need to know these gory details in order to understand what happens at the end of **ch3**. But, we also must understand that Abner was acting in **reluctant self-defense**. He had no desire to harm or kill Asahel but the guy just wouldn't let it go. Yet Abner's concern about facing Joab was entirely justified b/c Joab will make it his life's passion to avenge his brother's death.

24-32- pursued- Now the fight is on! Abner got rid of 1 brother & picked up 2 more & they are motivated by more than just the cause of David. Basically, Abner's getting his head handed to him so naturally, he calls for a truce: "All that I'm saying, is give peace a chance." There were a few unfortunate things that happened here that Abner didn't plan on, things he never intended to happen but that shouldn't distract us from the fact that Abner was still at fault: he was the 1 who came on the offensive; he suggested the battle of the 12. Nearly all of the bloodshed in **ch2-3** is the result of Abner's opposition to David & none of it would have happened had Abner never opened his mouth in the 1st place. As it was, Abner lost – badly: **360 – 20**.

In ch3 we'll learn that Abner knew full well that **YHWH** had promised the throne to David (9-10; 17-18) so his armed opposition against David's kingship seems baffling. What does he hope to gain against **YHWH**? When you look at humanity & history thru the perspective of original sin, Abner's actions aren't baffling; they're just wicked. Never mind **YHWH**'s promise to David or the fact that Abner can quote the promise. Never mind that YHWH has already established David as king in Judah. Abner will try to impose his own authority. It's absurd; but really, it's just sin!

Abner's not far from any of us. We all possess an Abner-like nature that clings to sin's foolishness, wickedness & twistedness. Let Abner instruct us. Let him show us that it is possible to know the truth but not embrace the truth; to quote the truth but not submit to the truth; to hold the truth & yet,

still oppose it! That's us when we say, "I w/b king!"

3:1-5- long war- maybe it wasn't so smart for Joab to accept Abner's appeal 4 peace, it only delayed the inevitable. In the midst of this drawn out war, David grew stronger while Abner (ie: house of Saul) grew weaker. **Vs2-5** give a sample of David's growing strength in reviewing the number of wives taken & sons born to him in Hebron. The author doesn't moralize at this point, his only literary concern here is to highlight David's growing strength. Having multiple wives was common for royalty in those days. Adding many wives was 1 of the ways kings displayed their power & status. But David was clearly in error here: his multiple wives went against God's command 2 kings in **Deut 17:17** & was against God's original intent 4 marriage (**Gen 2:24**). In the end, David got nothing but trouble from all of this.

6-11- Abner's also trying 2 make himself strong in the house of Saul by claiming 1 of Saul's concubines as his own. That might not seem like much to us but in that Near East culture, any man who took over the harem of a deceased king was publicly asserting his claim as successor to the throne. Quite naturally, Ishbosheth took offense! He raised such a stink over Abner's ploy that Abner's strength turned to anger 2 the point that, out of spite (& logic) he decided 2 deliver the rest of Israel into the hands of David & there wasn't 1 thing that Ishbosheth could do to resist him.

Understand, Abner's move is political, not theological. He wasn't looking 2 expand David's kingdom out of obedience to **YHWH**'s promise, he was looking for his own advantage. He hopes that by throwing his support over to David & by using his influence over the northern tribes as a bargaining chip w/ David, he can land a powerful position in David's administration. See, Abner only quotes scripture when it's to his advantage. He's looking to help David's kingdom, not b/c of **divine promise** but b/c it's a smart **political move**; not love for **YHWH**'s plan but 4 his own benefit.

This Abner-attitude shows up in NT in Samaria. Simon the magician ran the spiritual show but when Philip brought the gospel, everybody jumped on board – even Simon (the works). But when Peter & John arrived, Simon showed his true colors. He offered 2 pay them 4 the power 2 grant the gift of the Holy Spirit on whoever he laid hands on. All he really wanted was 2/b top dog again, even if it was w/in the framework of the church.

As believers, we must beware of our own Abner-attitude. There's a big difference between **supporting** Christ's kingdom & **using** it. We need to realize that there are a lot of mercenaries w/in the ranks of the army of the Lord. Even among faithful servants, those that desire 2 live out & make plain God's truth, there are times when we're more concerned w/ whether people w/b impressed w/ us, like us, appreciate us. Abner's not far away from any 1 of us.

12-16- Michal- Why? She was David's 1st wife & by claiming the daughter of Saul, he's claiming the entire kingdom. Abner bringing her to Hebron was a public declaration of his break w/ the house of Saul & his allegiance w/ David.

17-27- pursued-Now, come on; how naïve can you be? Why would Abner return so unsuspectingly to Hebron? We read 3Xs that **David sent Abner away** & that Abner had **gone in peace**. That's why he came back – he'd been promised immunity! Why should he be suspicious? He didn't see Joab's blade until it was too late – it was hidden behind David's promise. Thus, Joab committed the most sinister form of treachery. What was it that moved Joab 2 kill Abner & potentially ruin David's opportunity 2 win over the allegiance of the northern kingdom? Why risk all that?

The official reason is given in **vs27 (30): avenging Asahel's death**. Abner killed Asahel, now Joab kills Abner: simple!

Not really: Asahel's death shouldn't have been avenged b/c he died in battle, after receiving gracious warnings. Had it been murder or manslaughter, Joab would've had grounds for vengeance but it was neither of those. Besides, Hebron was a city of refuge; a sanctuary city were an accused murderer could get a fair trial but the 2 brothers didn't give the city elders a chance to hear the case. Joab settled a public battle w/ a private vendetta but is that all it was?

There may be more to it than just that. It appears that Joab was as concerned about himself as he was Asahel. The text doesn't say it hear but I think Joab saw Abner as more than just an enemy – he saw him as a rival! Abner was a highly experience military man & Joab may have feared that he might replace him as commander of the army. That may even have been part of the deal David made w/ Abner. Thus, maintaining his privileged

position may have been Joab's primary motive w/ avenging Asahel acting as a useful justification. As it stands, Joab was more than willing to risk the advancement of David's kingdom in order to retain his own position in that kingdom.

In the end, Joab's not that different than Abner & his attitude is equally alive in the kingdom. At the Last Supper, the disciples were arguing about who would be greatest in the kingdom while they questioned who could possibly betray Jesus (Lk 22:24). That attitude isn't far from us today when we constantly petition the Lord for His many blessings yet refused to honor Him w/ those very blessings. When were more concerned w/ what we have or what we can get than we are w/ expanding His kingdom in our community & around the world. Joab's also not far from any of us.

28-39- pursued- David bend's over backwards to show he had no part in Joab's actions. Logic would recognize that David wouldn't have received any benefit from Abner's death, in fact; it only lengthened the process of reunification.

Our title "A Tale of Two Rivals" might lead 1 to think it is about the Abner/Joab rivalry but that's only on outward appearances. Inwardly, both men are the same. They're in different kingdoms but they're playing on the same team.

The real rivalry in this text is spiritual & it's characterized in **3:1 There was a long war...** Abner had just asked 4 a cease fire in 2:26 but that didn't help – it only prolonged the inevitable. The truth was – they couldn't just get along. There could be no lasting peace between God's anointed king & man's appointed king. It's the same in our lives.

You see, when we try to make peace between **King Jesus** & **King Self** in our hearts, the result is a long, exhausting war of attrition. It saps our physical strength, stunts our spiritual growth & wastes our precious time. It's so much better to simply surrender & submit to the authority & reign of Jesus Christ. There's a literal civil war raging in so many believer's lives today. The **flesh** struggles against the **spirit** & the conflict is bitter. We do everything we possibly can 2 prop up that crumbling kingdom so that it can exist just a little bit longer. We want to retain some rights, we want to have at least part of our own way, we want to hang on to this or that – no matter what the cost or the damage to Christ's kingdom. We must see that that's a **counter-**

productive, losing battle. We're no more capable of resisting God's kingdom in our hearts than Abner was. So, why do we try 2 hang on? Sin! Its sin to resist God's will, its sin 2 assert our own will. But, when we accept Jesus Christ as Savior, He gives us the power to resist & rise above sin. He gives us the power & presence of His Spirit to effect change in our lives. He wants to do it, He delights to do it! **Phil 2:13** *For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

