

Lesson 10 30 December 2012

War Between Israel and Judah

Lesson Scope: [2 Samuel 2-4](#)

Lesson Focus

Saul and his three sons had just been slain in battle with the Philistines. David mourned deeply for them, especially for his friend, Jonathan. Only two days before, David and his men had returned to Ziklag after rescuing their families from marauding Amalekites who had taken them captive and burned the city. David's life was full of stressful circumstances that tested his relationships with others.

But as his manner was, David inquired of God about how to proceed in light of Saul's death. In response to God's direction, he moved his family to Hebron. Here the men of Judah acknowledged his leadership and anointed him king over Judah.

During the latter part of David's seven-and-one-half year reign over Judah, Abner, captain of Saul's army, made Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, king over the rest of Israel. This move seemed to heighten the conflict between Judah and Israel. These years of civil strife that occurred before David was anointed king over all Israel were turbulent ones for the nation, and they were laced with the ambitions of selfish men.

Pursuing selfish interests leads to conflict and grief. But humbly following God's direction brings peace and unity.

This lesson details the realities of human warfare. Close family relationships were involved on both sides of the conflict. On the one side, Abner was an uncle to Saul and therefore a relative of Ishbosheth. While he at first remained loyal to Saul's house, his relationship with Ishbosheth suffered strain to the breaking point. It is noteworthy that a man of his rank and age (perhaps sixty years or more) was willing to change his loyalties.

On the other side, David was uncle to Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. His relationship, especially with Joab, suffered because of Joab's personal agenda.

Family relationships are a blessing when each person is committed to the cause of Christ and the church. Contrariwise, they are a hindrance

when self-ambitions override proper judgment and discernment. Since the brotherhood is in essence a family, the same principles apply to relationships among all the members.

Lesson Aim: To identify hindrances to and helps for amiable relationships.

Theme Verse: [Psalm 133:1](#). Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Lesson Text

The Reality of Conflict

[2 Samuel 2:1-4](#) ¹ And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron. ² So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite. ³ And his men that *were* with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. ⁴ And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, *That* the men of Jabesh-gilead *were they* that buried Saul.

[2 Samuel 2:8-10](#) ⁸ But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; ⁹ And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. ¹⁰ Ishbosheth Saul's son *was* forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David.

[2 Samuel 2:18-23](#) ¹⁸ And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel *was as* light of foot as a wild roe. ¹⁹ And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. ²⁰ Then Abner looked behind him, and said, *Art* thou Asahel? And he answered, I *am*. ²¹ And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour. But Asahel would not turn aside from following of him. ²² And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I

smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother? ²³ Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth *rib*, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, *that* as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still.

2 Samuel 3:1 ¹ Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.

The Pursuit of Peace

2 Samuel 3:12 ¹² And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose *is* the land? saying *also*, Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand *shall be* with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee.

2 Samuel 3:17-20 ¹⁷ And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past *to be* king over you: ¹⁸ Now then do *it*: for the LORD hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies. ¹⁹ And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin. ²⁰ So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that *were* with him a feast.

The Betrayal of Confidence

2 Samuel 3:24-26 ²⁴ Then Joab came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why *is it that* thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? ²⁵ Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest. ²⁶ And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew *it* not.

2 Samuel 3:30 ³⁰ So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.

Questions for Study

The Reality of Conflict

1. What events prompted David to inquire of the Lord?

2. How might both sides of the conflict have convinced themselves that they were right?

3. Discuss what happens when selfish interests conflict with kingdom interests.

4. What does God say about strife within the brotherhood?

The Pursuit of Peace

5. What may have convinced David that Abner's overtures were genuine?

6. What is required to bring rest to strained relationships?

The Betrayal of Confidence

7. Why did Joab question David's confidence in Abner?

8. How can we avoid a spirit of competition in kingdom work?

Analyzing the Passage

Hebron is located about twenty miles south of Jerusalem and approximately eighteen miles northeast of Ziklag, where David had been residing.

Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul (2 Samuel 3:6). He had served as captain of Saul's army for forty years. Now, as an older man, this faithful service had gained for him much power and influence. Anointing Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, king over the rest of Israel was a show of loyalty to Saul's house.

During Ish-bosheth's two-year tenure, fighting broke out between the followers of David and the followers of Ish-bosheth. Abner, captain of Ishbosheth's armies, and Joab, captain of Judah's armies, met at the pool of Gibeon. Here Abner proposed a dueling contest between twelve champions from each side. The contest ended in a draw with all the contestants dead. A fierce battle between the two armies followed (2 Samuel 2:12-17). In the battle, Abner lost three hundred sixty men, and Joab lost nineteen and Asahel.

The manner of Asahel's death made Abner a target for revenge in the minds of Asahel's two remaining brothers, Joab and Abishai. Abner had killed Asahel in battle, however, and the brothers had no basis for vengeance.

When Abner came into conflict with Ish-bosheth, Abner determined to switch his loyalties to David.

Unlike Joab, David accepted Abner's commitment as genuine. It seems

as though it was not David's desire to take the northern tribes by force. When Abner was killed in cold blood, David rent his clothes, lamented, and fasted. He asked Joab and all the people to mourn with him (2 Samuel 3:31). He proclaimed Abner a prince and a great man in Israel (see also 1 Samuel 26:15). Also, when Ish-bosheth was killed, David executed his assassins.

Principles and Applications

The Reality of Conflict

1. Living by the Lord's direction is essential for harmonious relationships (2 Samuel 2:1). David was blessed with wisdom from God as he followed His specific commands. Perhaps at times we seek the Lord's direction but then fail to wait till He shows the way. Moving ahead presumptuously jeopardizes good brotherhood relationships and hinders our communion with God. May God help us "to live more nearly as we pray."

2. Refusing to submit to divine appointment fosters disunity (2 Samuel 2:8-10).

God works through the church today to call leaders out from among us. Proper respect for these divinely appointed leaders keeps one's vision clear. Pride and lust of station often lie at the root of insubordination, and they form barriers to accepting God's choice. Resisting God's will often lead to great loss of spiritual vitality in a group.

3. Divided loyalties lead to strife (2 Samuel 2:10). Strife begins with carnality and ends in factions. "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal" (1 Corinthians 3:4)? Such loyalties are like shifting sand. "Therefore let no man glory in men" (1 Corinthians 3:21). "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." That foundation is immovable and undivided in its purpose.

4. Keeping long-standing hostilities alive militates against peaceful relationships (2 Samuel 3:1). Pride causes one to continually water the seeds of discord among brethren. Long-standing grudges serve only to deepen the roots of bitterness. Hostilities remain when none from either side are willing to take the first step toward reconciliation. Forgiveness is the Bible way to "follow after the things which make for peace" (Romans 14:19).

The Pursuit of Peace

5. Good communication promotes amiable relationships (2 Samuel 3:12, 17-18).

Each person in any relationship deserves to know the facts. Such effort involves time and sacrifice. But the reward is worth the effort. Suspicion and supposition cannot easily survive where there is transparent honesty. "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:16).

6. Kindness promotes peaceful relationships (2 Samuel 3:20). David's actions when Abner came were consistent with his commitment in 2 Samuel 3:13. In New Testament language, this certainly was "hospitality ... without grudging" (1 Peter 4:9). Kindness indicates one's level of forgiveness and love. Brotherly kindness is "next of kin" to godliness and charity. It is exercised without partiality or hypocrisy.

The Betrayal of Confidence

7. Supposition and evil surmising add to hostility (2 Samuel 3:24-25). Joab judged Abner's motives as pretentious and smacking of rivalry, while his own heart was full of emulation and murderous intent. We tend to judge others by the evil tendencies we struggle with or give expression to in our own lives. Jesus said, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Evil surmising leads to perverse disputings that are destitute of truth and fall short of realizing the supposed gain (1 Timothy 6:4-5).

8. Taking matters into our own hands when we should be consulting with others makes amiable relationships difficult (2 Samuel 3:26, 30). David's heart cry in 2 Samuel 3:39 reiterates this truth. Since Joab had a personal score to settle with Abner, he purposely avoided any consultation with David about his intentions. Following one's own agenda stifles brotherhood relationships and crosses the line of divine approval.

Important Teachings

1. Living by the Lord's direction is essential for harmonious relationships (2 Samuel 2:1).
2. Refusing to submit to divine appointment fosters disunity (2 Samuel 2:8-10).
3. Divided loyalties lead to strife (2 Samuel 2:10).

4. Keeping long-standing hostilities alive militates against peaceful relationships (2 Samuel 3:1).
5. Good communication promotes amiable relationships (2 Samuel 3:12, 17-18).
6. Kindness promotes peaceful relationships (2 Samuel 3:20).
7. Supposition and evil surmising add to hostility (2 Samuel 3:24-25).
8. Taking matters into our own hands when we should be consulting with others makes amiable relationships difficult (2 Samuel 3:26, 30).

Answers to Questions

1. What events prompted David to inquire of the Lord?

David was left without a proper home for his family and those of his men, since Ziklag had been burned by the Amalekites. Israel was left without a king, since Saul was slain in battle. David did not wish to move ahead presumptuously. As his custom was, he sought the Lord to direct his next move, even though the way may have seemed obvious.

2. How might both sides of the conflict have convinced themselves that they were right?

To Abner and his men it seemed only logical to continue with one of Saul's sons as king. Saul's propaganda against David may have convinced some of them that David was, in fact, intent on usurping the throne and had not been duly anointed. They may have viewed David as incapable and ill prepared.

David had been properly appointed. At God's bidding, Samuel had anointed David to be Israel's next king. But some of David's men, especially his three nephews, were overly aggressive in championing David's cause.

3. Discuss what happens when selfish interests conflict with kingdom interests.

Our spiritual sight is blurred by the barriers of self-will. We lose respect for God, His Word, the church, and it's divinely appointed leaders. We glory in personal ability or accomplishments of another who seems to be a leader in promoting our agenda. Others are often trampled underfoot in the pursuit of our cause. Pride is at the root of it all.

4. What does God say about strife within the brotherhood?

"They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion

and every evil work" (James 3:16). Strife among us comes of our own lusts within us (James 4:1). "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10).

5. *What may have convinced David that Abner's overtures were genuine?*

Abner met David's first requirement of returning Michal to him. Abner also confessed to Israel that he knew God had chosen David to be the next king of Israel and now encouraged them with him to give total allegiance to David. Thirdly, Abner came humbly to David and personally pledged his loyalty and promised to gather all Israel to him.

6. *What is required to bring rest to strained relationships?*

There must be admission of any wrong that was done. There must be an acknowledgement that the Word of the Lord stands in any matter. Forgiveness must be humbly sought and freely given. There must be a removal of all grudges and bitterness. Compassion and love need to be exercised without partiality or hypocrisy.

7. *Why did Joab question David's confidence in Abner?*

Joab judged Abner by supposition and evil surmising. He was sure that Abner's motives were pretentious and full of emulation. He also knew that David was fair and just when a man sought the right way. This ran counter to his evil intent to settle the score with Abner and definitely clouded his vision and ability to make proper evaluation of David's decision to accept Abner's bid.

8. *How can we avoid a spirit of competition in kingdom work?*

We must always remember that the work is the Lord's. All credit goes to Him whenever good is accomplished. When others disappoint us, we should think how God is disappointed too. When others oppose or mistreat us, we must refuse to take it personally. Giving commendation to others who excel will help us to avoid jealousy and rivalry.

Summarizing the Lesson

"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (I Peter 3:8-9). Amiable relationships can be realized when each member is willing to communicate and practice these Scriptural injunctions.

Research Guide

1. Study the Scriptures, especially the New Testament references that mention communication, strife, and emulation. List the blessings of communication and the cause of and remedy for strife and emulation.
2. Studying the chronology of events carefully will create a better understanding of the conflict.