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Abner Goes Over to David
Second Samuel 3: 6-21

Abner goes over to David DIG: Why would Ish-Bosheth be mad if Abner slept with one of Sha'ul's concubines? From the way Abner responded to the accusation, do you think he was guilty? If Abner has known all along that God promised to make David king, why had he opposed him up until now? Why didn't Ish-Bosheth resist Abner taking Michal back to David? How do you think Michal felt about leaving Paltiel for David? How extensive was Abner's control over the elders of Isra'el? Why did he want to come over to David's side? In what ways does David's patient waiting on God's blessing foreshadow Messiah's example?

REFLECT: Where in your life do you feel the need to "strengthen your position" as Abner did? David experienced the pain of broken promises from Sha'ul, yet trusted in God's promises. How trusting are you of other's promises? Of the promises of ADONAI? How does a person who is confident in the fulfillment of God's purposes live and respond differently to life's challenges than someone who isn't?

1010 to 1003 BC

The overriding question for **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** at this juncture is how will **David** win the north, which is still loyal to **Sha'ul**? We expect the principles in the conflict to be **David** and **Ish-Bosheth**, the legitimate (but pitiful) heir of **Sha'ul**. This powerful narrative, however, contradicts our expectations and makes clear that neither **David** nor **Ish-Bosheth** would be key to claiming the north. The key was **Abner**.[227]

The Cause of the Betrayal: During the war between the house of Sha'ul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position. Abner was a blood relative to **Sha'ul** and the one who made **Ish-Bosheth king** and kept **him** in power. **Now Sha'ul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah** (the heroine of the tragic story of **Second Samuel 21:7-9** and

14b). **And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, "Why did you sleep with my father's concubine" (Second Samuel 3:6-7).** Why was this a threat? Because ancient law declared that a **king's** harem was passed down to **his** successor. Consequently, to claim a **king's** concubine was to claim the throne. This will come up several more times, for example in **Second Samuel 12:8**, **Sha'ul's** concubines passed over to **David** because **David** claimed the throne. Still later, in **Second Samuel 16:21-22**, **Absalom** will claim **David's** concubines as **Absalom** claimed the throne. Any man who even asked for one of those women was asking for the crown and guilty of treason. This is what lead to the death of **Adonijah** in **First Kings 2:17-22**. It is possible that **Abner** took **Rizpah** just to start an argument with **Ish-Bosheth**. If so, **he** succeeded.

Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said because **his** actions had been discovered. **"What am I," he shouted,** that you treat me with such contempt? **A dog's head in Y'hudah? In the East dogs were chiefly found prowling about towns, half-wild, living on dead bodies and garbage. Hence, this term was one of contempt. Till this moment I have shown only kindness** (Hebrew: *chesed*) **to the house of Sha'ul your father, and to his brothers and to his friends; and I haven't handed you over to David."** But that will no longer be the case. **Yet you choose today to pick a fight with me over this woman? Abner** faked **his** indignation. You will notice **he** didn't answer the question.

The dispute over this **woman** costs **Ish-Bosheth** the loyalty of **Abner** and **his** crown. **Sha'ul's son** couldn't win anymore, than **Sha'ul** could win. Both **Ish-Bosheth** and **Abner** understood that **their** actual roles were reversed from **their** official positions of **king** and **general**. **Abner** had all the power and all the leverage in the relationship. What **Abner** had done was not simply a sex act. It was a defiant public, political challenge that could not be ignored. But **Ish-Bosheth** was helpless and politically impotent; therefore, **Abner** is free to negotiate as **he** pleased.[228] So in retaliation, **Abner** declared: **May God bring terrible curses on Abner and worse ones yet if I don't accomplish what ADONAI swore to David – to transfer the kingdom, from the house of Sha'ul and set up the throne of David over Isra'el and Y'hudah, from Dan to Beersheba.** The word of **Samuel** to **David**, though spoken in the private family gathering (**to see link click Ah – Samuel Anoints David**), and unrecorded except as **Samuel's** instructions from **ADONAI**, had become widely known. Now even **Abner**, who in the past had willingly opposed what **he** knew to be **God's** revealed purpose, found **himself**

helping to fulfill it.[229] **Ish-Bosheth did not dare say another word to Abner because he was afraid of him (Second Samuel 3:8-11).** In the end, the mighty house of **Sha'ul** merely evaporated in **fear**. Cowardly, and powerless, **Ish-Bosheth** could do nothing to stem the tide of **Abner's** rising ambitions.

Abner's Negotiations with David: The preliminary meeting between **Abner** and **David** took place through **messengers** rather than face to face. **Abner immediately sent messengers to David with this** rhetorical question: **Who is going to control the Land? Implying that it was in his power to make whomsoever he pleased king over Isra'el. If you make yourself my ally, I will use my power to hand all Isra'el over to you (Second Samuel 3:12). He** wanted a promise from **David** that **he** would retain a position of **power** as commander of the army in the new government. But **David** was not caught off guard by all of this. **He** knew **he** was being invited to enter into a covenant with a man who was betraying **his** master, and who claimed to have the power to bring **David** the northern **Kingdom**. Such a ruthless man threatened to be a rival to **David** at some point. **He** could not be trusted.

David was willing to accept **Abner's** proposal, but **he** laid down a precondition. **He** chose **his** words very carefully and **sent this reply, "Very well, I will be your ally – on one condition: you will not come into my presence unless you bring Michal, Sha'ul's daughter, with you. Then** to show no ill will toward **the house of Sha'ul**, **David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth** because negotiations with **Abner** needed to be public. **He** would not conspire to overthrow **the king of Isra'el**. **He** demanded: **Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins (Second Samuel 3:13-14 CJB). David mentions the number that Sha'ul had demanded, although in fact David had paid him double. Michal** was still legally the wife of **David** and **David** was still legally the son-in-law of **Sha'ul**. By bringing **her** back it would help to win over the tribe of **Benjamin**, who would be the most reluctant tribe of them all to join **David**. If **David** could have a child through **Michal**, this would mean a successor from both houses and this would help win support from the house of **Sha'ul**. **David** had not seen **her** in about eight years. However, as we shall see later, **she** remained childless.[230]

So Ish-Bosheth gave orders to take her from her husband Paltiel, son of Laish. His fear and subservience to **Abner** kept **him** from protesting. **Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Paltiel** was **her** husband in name only because **David** had never

divorced **her**. But **he** loved **her** nonetheless. **Then** curt, unsympathetic **Abner said to him, "Go back home!"** And the meek, brokenhearted **husband** obeyed **(Second Samuel 3:15-16).** Affairs of state had to take precedence over personal feelings. **The rabbis teach that Paltiel was never intimate with Michal, and placed a sword in between them while lying in bed so as not to be tempted.**

Abner's Negotiations with the elders of Isra'el: Abner first **conferred with the elders of Isra'el** in Mahanaim before accompanying **Michal** back **to Hebron**, which would give **him** a good excuse to talk to **David**. **He** said to **the elders, "For some time you have wanted to make David your king."** But the tribe of **Benjamin** in general, and **Abner** in particular, had overruled **them**. But **Abner's** negotiations with **David** had changed all of that. There was no reason to delay any longer in making **David king** over **Isra'el.** Therefore, **he** declared: **Do it now! For the LORD promised David, "By my servant David I will rescue my people Isra'el from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all her enemies" (First Samuel 9:16). Abner** and the others recognized **YHVH's** will. Secondly, **Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person** because this would be the most resistant tribe**. Then**, having received unanimous agreement, **Abner went to Hebron to tell David everything that Isra'el and the whole tribe of Benjamin wanted to do (Second Samuel 3:17-19).**

Abner's Agreement with David: When Abner, who had Michal and an official escort of **twenty men with him, came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for them. These men** included **Abner's** bodyguard and representatives of the other tribes. **Then Abner** said: **Let me go at once and assemble all the elders of Isra'el for my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires. These must have been the concluding words of a long and detailed discussion between the two men.** Mutual respect and trust between **Abner** and **David** was growing **so David sent Abner away in peace** with **his** blessing **(Second Samuel 3:20-21).**

As Dale Ralph Davis relates in his commentary on **Second Samuel**: **Abner** was not driven to go over to **David** by theology . . . it was politics. **He** did not seek to expand **David's Kingdom** because **he** felt the authority of **YHVH's** promise, but because **he** sought **his** own advantage. If **Ish-Bosheth** was not going to roll over and play dead, then the best option for **Abner** was to swing **his** support to **David** and use **his** influence over the northern tribes as a bargaining chip with **David**,

thereby assuring **himself** of a powerful spot in **David's** regime. **Abner** only quoted Scripture **(First Samuel 3:18)** when it supported what **he** wanted to do. **He** didn't seek a united monarchy because of divine promise, but because of human pride.

Abners don't disappear. We meet more of them in the Bible. Not bearing **Abner's** name – only his disposition. For example **Simon the sorcerer** in **Acts 8** was the first convert in Samaria under Philip's ministry. **He** was all in – profession of faith and baptism. But when **Peter** and **John** came, **he** revealed **his** true colors, offering to pay **them** well if **they** would give **him** the power to bestow the gift of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** when **he** would lay **his** hands on someone **(Acts 8:18-19)**. **He** professed salvation because it would be to his financial advantage. Though both **Abner** and **Simon** made an outward profession of being in agreement with the new power- neither of **them** had any desire to really follow the right path; rather both of **their** hearts were full of greed. Outward profession cannot change a sinful heart. Even if a person dresses up like a lion – he will never be a lion. Inner heart change is what changes a person. Only by following **God** with a heart of love can the sinful heart be washed clean and the person be eternally saved (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**),

Whether it is **Second Samuel 3** or **Acts 8**, we must be alert to our own **Abner**-mentality. Our clichéd line about supporting **Messiah's Kingdom** may only be a cover for using it. As we sing, "Kadosh Atah" in shul or "Amazing Grace" in church, we need to examine our own lives to make sure our attendance is not only an outward form of ritual, but from a true love of **God** and a desire to please **Him**. **Abner** is not far away from any of us.