

Prayer

Lord Jesus, meet us today wherever we are and wherever we go; may we recognise Your voice, feel Your touch and be warmed in our hearts. May we therefore make a conscious effort to do what is right in Your eyes; not because You might condemn us for what goes wrong, but because You empower us to do Your will. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your real presence which makes this possible. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Finance

It is possible to use money for great good or great evil. Pray that the Lord will bring godly people into the financial professions so that the wisdom of Christ might guide us.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for scientists who work to find medical cures
- Pray for those who risk their lives to help keep international peace
- Pray against corruption in high places, in politicians and leaders

Meditation

Start believing in Christ your God;

Not because you must, but because you have been saved!

Start praying to Jesus Your Lord;

Not just when you need to, but when He prompts you!

Start listening to the voice of God;

Not because you ought to, but because He is speaking!

Start rejoicing in the Holy Spirit;

Not only in church on Sundays, but as Your spirit prompts you!

Start living the life of Christ;

Not for your own sake, but as a witness to the Kingdom of God!

Start expecting the Lord's return;

Not because the world is waiting, but because Christ is coming!

Bible Study - 2 Samuel 3:20-27

²⁰ When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. ²¹ Abner said to David, 'Let me go and rally all Israel to my lord the king, in order that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires.' So David dismissed Abner, and he went away in peace.

²² Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for David had dismissed him, and he had gone away in peace. ²³ When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, 'Abner son of Ner came to the king, and he has dismissed him, and he has gone away in peace.' ²⁴ Then Joab went to the king and said, 'What have you done? Abner came to you; why did you

dismiss him, so that he got away? ²⁵ *You know that Abner son of Ner came to deceive you, and to learn your comings and goings and to learn all that you are doing.'*

²⁶ *When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah; but David did not know about it.* ²⁷ *When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gateway to speak with him privately, and there he stabbed him in the stomach. So he died for shedding the blood of Asahel, Joab's brother.*

Review

In a previous study from 2 Samuel 2, we read the verses which described the anointing of David over Judah in Hebron, and Ishbaal (Ishbosheth) over the northern tribes of Israel in Mahanaim (2 Samuel 2:1-10). There was no peace in the land, however, and in the second half of that chapter, we read about what seems to be a 'civil war' between Joab's army (representing David and the south) and Abner's army (representing Ishbaal and the north). It appears that Abner finally gave up on Ishbaal, and came to David to attempt to find peace, but whilst he may have been sincere, these was 'bad blood' between Joab and Abner which yet again overshadowed the possible reunification of all Israel.

At the beginning of our passage, the first two verses describe a very positive meeting between Abner, the commander of the Israelite army, and David, the king of Judah. Abner now despaired of Ishbaal's ability to lead the northern tribes of Israel, and had decided to bring these tribes under the authority of David. The story is plain and simple, and David had plenty to be happy about at the end of verse 21. Abner left him with a firm mandate to effect the unification of all Israel. It seems that this was what everyone wanted.

The life and times of God's people in the Old Testament is sometimes very messy and unpleasant. Yet this is reality, and if scripture did not record it as so, then God's people could forever be accused of doctoring the truth. Scripture does record truth, and our job is to search for the meaning of that truth even when the stories are unpleasant.

However, unfinished business between Joab and Abner was about to interfere with the whole process of unification, and would hold it up for a little while yet. When you read verses 22 to 27 of our passage, it is clear that Joab did not trust Abner at all; it is not surprising, each were high ranking army commanders, and if the kingdoms were to be united, then there could only be one army commander. In addition, Joab was bound by what for him was a sacred duty to obtain vengeance for the death of his brother Asahel, killed by Abner during one of the early episodes of hostility between the armies of Abner and Joab (see 2 Samuel 2:8f.). Asahel had pursued Abner even when asked by Abner to leave him alone, and eventually, Abner had killed him in what was then regarded as a quite shocking incident (2 Sam 2:23). Indeed, it eventually led to a stalemate between the two armies of Israel (2 Sam 2:24f.) and a truce which did not last long!

Today's passage contains the dreadful tale of Abner's murder by the vengeful Joab as an act of revenge (there are rules about this in Numbers 35 and 36). The tragedy of the whole story is that greater things were at stake, and Abner appears to have been the person who might help bring much needed reconciliation after the death of Saul, but it was ended because of this personal feud. We are left wondering whether David should have anticipated the difficulties between Abner and Joab, but as it was, David managed to keep himself out of the personal issues that drove Joab. Nevertheless, the whole incident deeply affected David. Despite his faithful service to David throughout his life, Joab was one who David regarded as a man of blood who had 'killed in peace to right a wrong done in war'. David therefore instructed Solomon, at the end of his life, to deal with Joab. Solomon's

sworn duty was to have him killed (2 Kings 2:28) both for this and his support for Solomon's rival for the throne, Adonijah, against the will of David.

It may well be that scripture is asking us to contrast the actions of Joab and others with those of David. David was undoubtedly living like a king, which indeed he was, and the writer of God's Word only records the things David did which helped to bring about the unification of God's people. He sat aloof whilst personal issues compromised everyone else in the story, including Joab and Abner; but David remained true to the covenant. God had said that he would make David king over all Israel, and David trusted this. He was able to remain focussed and uncompromised in his task, despite the civil war going on all around him.

In our work for the Kingdom, the question we face is whether we are focussed on the purposes of God as was David in this passage, or are we consumed by worldly affairs which sap our time and emotional energy, and eventually our time and our effort. This was what happened to Joab and Abner, and their personal vendettas prevented God's will from being done, not ultimately, but certainly in the short term. The story we have read is hard and cruel and unlikely to happen in such a way today. However, it is a salutary warning about how our personal issues can hold back God's purposes.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways can personal issues stand in the way of doing God's work today?
2. In what ways do personal battles between leaders of God's people stand in the way of the work of the Kingdom of God?
3. How can God's people remain focussed, like David, on doing God's will?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I cannot escape the challenge of my own words, because they come from an examination of scripture. From time to time, I find myself distracted from what the Lord would have me do because my own feelings are pulling me in another direction. This can be totally disruptive of God's work in my life, and this can be true for all of us. How do we guard against it? Only by working hard to ensure that we keep our personal lives close to the guidance of our Lord.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Over a period of a week, take time to reflect on your personal life, the people you get on with and those you do not. Is there anything which prevents God's work from being done through you? If you feel there is, then discuss this with someone else, so that they can minister God's grace to you.*
- *Pray against the wars which divide people across the world even to this day, especially the long term effect of the national hatreds which can arise and affect generations to come.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, You have called each of us to our home, our families, our places of work and our places of worship. May we honour You by respecting Your call, and all who share these blessings with us, and by fulfilling Your command to 'love one another'. Hear our prayer, Lord Jesus, and establish Your Kingdom in our midst. AMEN