

A Tale of Two Leaders: Abner and Joab

The Making of a King: Part 18

2 Samuel 3:1-39

February 22, 2026

As our lesson title states, this lesson focuses on two people that, though both have played important roles, have largely been in the background. These two men are Abner, the cousin and main general of the former king Saul, and Joab, who was King David's main general. As we look at the choices and eventual interactions of these two men in this chapter, we must remember there is already a history between these two. In **2 Samuel 2**, not only did Abner crown Ishbosheth (one of Saul's sons) to be king in open defiance of David's claim to the throne, but he murdered Joab's brother, Asahel, when Asahel pursued him after his (Abner's) defeat.

Now we enter this chapter, where the Bible describes in **verse 6** that Abner's power and influence in the house of Saul was growing. There is much speculation behind the relationship between Abner and Ishbosheth. Some suspect Abner crowned Ishbosheth as a way for him (Abner) to be able gain power and run things behind the scenes. Some suggest that Ishbosheth began to fear Abner's rise in influence and sought to get rid of him through his accusation in **verse 7**. An accusation like this would have been considered a high crime and could have potentially given the king reason to have Abner executed. While the Bible doesn't tell us if the accusation was true, it certainly caused a rift in the relationship between Abner and Ishbosheth.

Discussion Question: Read verses 6-8 detailing the conversation between Abner and Ishbosheth. What is the Bible showing about what happens when we unite with others in sin? What is Abner showing the relationship to be built upon? Why are these relationships so dangerous and destructive?

Follow-Up Question: Read verses 9-10 of Abner's response. What is Abner revealing about what was in his heart? What truth did Abner know and openly deny? Why is this such a dangerous thing to do for Christians?

Clearly anytime we build a relationship on the foundation of a shared sin, we are on unstable ground. Abner and Ishbosheth quickly turned on each other when their selfish interests were no longer aligned. This is the danger of living in and amongst sin, it seeks nothing but its own betterment and doesn't think of others. But regardless of his improper reasoning, Abner makes the right decision to defect to David's side and help him become king over the rest of the land. Abner not only comes to David in humility but keeps his word in helping to recruit the rest of the tribes of Israel in accepting David as king.

But unfortunately, though David has handled Abner's change of heart with grace, mercy, and forgiveness, not everyone under David's command was able to do the same. Joab, David's general, hears that David has made peace with Abner and refuses to accept it. Not only is he disrespectful to his king in **verses 24-25**, but he then goes behind the king's back and murders Abner, using the trust Abner had for David and his men to ultimately kill him.

Discussion Question: Joab, despite normally being a loyal and godly man by David's side, made a terrible mistake here. There are multiple ways/red flags the Bible tells us Joab was in the wrong in verses 23-27. List those ways below.

Follow-Up Question: Read David's response to Joab's actions in verses 31-39. Why was it so important for David to openly condemn Joab's actions? What message was David trying to send to the people of Israel?

For Personal Reflection: What is the biggest lesson you personally learned from this lesson? Write it out below.
