

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

June 19

MONDAY

After making a final plea to the leaders of the tribe of Benjamin, Abner, with twenty of his men, went to Hebron where David was ruling over Judah. He assured David that everything was going well in his plan to establish David as the king of all Israel. David threw a great feast for them and sent them on their way.

READ: II Samuel 3:19-21

We have already acknowledged that in all this, God is working out His purposes. But do you see how Abner is thinking that he's the one who's pulling the strings? He's been sneaking around making arrangements - a traitor and a schemer. Now he presents to David how capably he has put everything together and assures him that it's all about to work out to David's advantage. When in actual fact, the only advantage he really cares about is his own. And he imagines that David is ambitious as himself. He tells David that he shall *reign over all that his heart desired*. He was measuring David by himself. Do not be surprised when others miss the point of what drives you. The unsaved person cannot possibly understand what motivates us to live for God: to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. It will be impossible for us to make them see that we live to please the Lord! Our goal is to honor Him with all we do and say.

TUESDAY

No sooner did Abner leave the palace than David's own general, Joab, returned. He and his army brought back the spoils from a recent victory. When Joab learned that Abner had been there, that David had 'wined-and-dined' him, and then sent him on his way, he confronted David. He tried to convince him that Abner had only come in order to deceive him. He told David that Abner was not to be trusted and that he had, in fact, only come to spy out the land for a future attack.

READ: II Samuel 3:22-25

This passage is a commentary on hate. Joab's hatred of Abner (remember, Abner had killed Joab's brother) caused him to push his own personal agenda to the front, ahead of even what was good for his King. His hatred led him to openly chide and reproach King David. In effect, he was calling David a fool. This does not seem the same Joab of old. It's not. The hate in his heart - the passion for revenge - has damaged his judgment. No wonder we are warned of the dangers of anger. No wonder we are urged to be peacemakers. No wonder we need, today, as much as possible, to live peacefully with all.

WEDNESDAY

Without telling David, Joab sent messengers to Abner urging him to return to Hebron. When Abner showed up, Joab asked to speak to him privately. When they were alone, he stabbed him, under his fifth rib, the text says, killing him. It was his revenge upon Abner for killing his brother Asahel.

READ: II Samuel 3:26-27

Between the lines, we understand that Joab used David's name in getting Abner to return. That's the point of telling us: *and David knew it not*. How convenient it is, at times, to do something in another's name. How devious we can be with that technique! And, at the same time, what a blessing and privilege we have to do things in the name of Jesus: giving someone a cup of water, for example! What a sobering reminder that today we live and breathe and have our being in Jesus' name.

THURSDAY

We learn in these verses that Joab's brother Abishai was somehow involved in the treachery and murder of Abner. Later, when David learns of Abner's murder, Abishai protests his own innocence and declares that Abner's murder will rest upon Joab and his descendants. David actually calls for God to punish Joab by bringing some terrible misfortune - a genetic disease, leprosy, being a cripple, suicide, starvation, or some other such thing - upon his family.

READ: I Samuel 3:28-31

David's hands are clean. Despite any rumors that he was somehow involved, David knew, and declared, that he was not. It was his great comfort for him to say that he was guiltless in this evil. He slept at night. He awoke in the morning with a clean conscience. We can do that! Thanks to Jesus' work for us and in us! Lord, keep me from sin; keep my hands clean and my heart pure.

FRIDAY

David ordered Joab to publicly mourn the death of Abner. David himself followed along behind the bier in the funeral procession. They buried Abner in Hebron and King David led the people in a national mourning. He asked the question, "Did Abner die as a fool?" (Part of the answer was YES. He was fooled by one who acted the part of a friend, or at least a fellow-soldier respecting the rules of warfare, but who betrayed that trust. Part of the answer was NO. He died not as a criminal who was caught in his crime, and therefore sentenced for his foolish actions.)

READ: II Samuel 3:31-34

How could it be said today that a person would die as a fool? He might mean that he was foolish in the matter that caused his death. Carrying a metal ladder around a golf course during a lightning storm would fall into this category. Perhaps it would include any way in which a person knowingly shortens his own life. It most certainly includes coming to the end of life in this world and making no provision for the world to come. It would include being totally concerned about the things of this world and totally unconcerned about the things of eternity. It includes saying that there is no God and no day of accountability. *The fool has said in his heart that there is no God...*

SATURDAY

Those around David were alarmed at his excessive mourning for Abner and concerned about his own well-being; they urged him to eat something. David swore that he would not eat for the rest of the day. As always, the people of Judah were greatly pleased with David's actions, and they recognized that his sorrow was genuine. As far as they were concerned, it was the final proof that he had played no part in Abner's murder.

READ: II Samuel 3:35-37

David's efforts to shower deep respect upon Abner won him the respect of his people. And they understood that day that truly David had nothing to do with Joab killing Abner. In other words, at first, they probably thought he had been involved somehow - at least, behind the scenes. (a typical, sleazy politician, you might say) But if they thought that way, they totally misjudged David's motives and methods. Do you think that might happen to us sometime? Absolutely. And how shall we then deal with it? As David did - by continuing to live for God and doing always the right thing.

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