

CROWNED

2 Samuel 3:8-21

We listen to the news and sometimes we conclude that the whole world is in total confusion and chaos and “God only knows what is going on.” While it may be questionable about how total the confusion and chaos are, we can be sure that God does know what is happening and He will use whatever is happening for His purposes. God is sovereignly “in control.”

Following the death of Saul and Jonathan and the rest of Saul’s sons except for Ish-bosheth, much of northern Israel west of the Jordan River remained under the control of the Philistines. David and his supporters moved back into Judah to the town of Hebron where he was recognized as king by the people of Judah. In the meantime, Abner (a cousin of Saul) who was commander-in-chief of Saul’s army had rallied the other tribes of Israel to support the surviving son of Saul as their king. As it so happened, Ish-bosheth was not a strong leader and Abner was the actual head of the alliance of the northern tribes. The headquarters of this loose confederation was located in the portion of Ephraim on the east side of the Jordan River. A state of war existed between Judah and the rest of Israel which led to minor skirmishes between the two armies but there were no major decisive battles. However, those who supported David became stronger and those who were supporting the family of Saul became weaker.

Abner was very aware of the fact that the Lord had chosen and enabled David (he was there when David killed Goliath) and while he resisted the Lord’s will in this matter for his own personal desires of wanting to be in control, he saw that it was just a matter of time when God’s choice was going to prevail. Being the ambitious person that he was, he saw that it was time to change his support from the son of Saul to David. There was an incident that created a rift in the relationship Abner had with Ish-bosheth. Some suspect that Abner deliberately planned a quarrel with Ish-bosheth, in order to have a good excuse for abandoning him. It was not recorded that he did have sexual relations with Saul’s former concubine, but he did not deny the accusation. Such an act would amount to a claim to Saul’s throne, and it is not surprising that Ish-bosheth protested and a quarrel resulted.

A New Ally – 3:8-11

⁸ Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, “Am I a dog’s head that belongs to Judah? Today I show kindness to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hands of David; and yet today you charge me with a guilt concerning the woman.” ⁹ “May God do so to Abner, and more also, if as the LORD has sworn to David, I do not accomplish this for him, ¹⁰ to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba.” ¹¹ And he could no longer answer Abner a word, because he was afraid of him. 2 Samuel 3:8–11 (NASB95)

Political intrigue driven by personal ambition or agendas can create new alliances and destroy old associations. The kinds of interactions and the formation of opposing factions that we suspect are happening in the political world today have been in operation since people have been around. Such behaviors are not limited to what goes on between nations, but occur in businesses, universities, state and local governments, churches and even in families. While we could argue that this is “just fallen human nature” (which it is), we can see evidence that the Sovereign Lord of the Universe can use even that which was intended for evil and selfish purposes to accomplish His will and plans.

Apparently, in his accusations of Abner, Ish-bosheth had overplayed his hand in saying that Abner was a vile person (dog’s head) because of the supposed action with the concubine and

that Abner was interested in seeing Judah become more prominent in the area since Abner's army was not winning the skirmishes with the army of Judah. From Abner's point of view, he was the best friend Ish-bosheth had and was responsible for his being in the position of king. Matthew Henry observed, "Proud men will not bear to be reprov'd, especially by those they think they have oblig'd."

Abner went further and essentially told Ish-bosheth that he was the one who had enabled him to be king and he would be the one to topple him from his position. Abner even reminded Ish-bosheth that God had chosen David to be the king in place of Saul and that he would do whatever he could to make it happen. This was not a new revelation to Abner. He knew all along that David was the Lord's choice, but he allowed his selfish ambitions to defy the will of the Lord as long as it suited his own purposes. At first, he was driven by ambition when he supported Ish-bosheth. Now, he was driven by revenge as well as ambition as he switched his support to David. Matthew Henry noted that "Those that are slaves to their lusts have many masters, which drive, someone way and some another, and, according as they make headway, men are violently hurried into self-contradictions."

As we examine the erratic behavior of Abner, it helps us understand why we see so much inconsistency in the political realm today. We find that a group that was very much in support of controlling our borders, requiring people to be doing something to help themselves before receiving government assistance, and demanding that we control spending two decades ago are now on the opposite sides of all these arguments and accusing anyone who takes the same position they did in the past of being evil people. Abner was like many present day politicians who seek to be in control, they have no foundational moral principles that are based on truth but they operate from ideas of what can benefit their present situations and agendas.

Ish-bosheth was totally shocked at the boldness of Abner and he knew that his kingship was over without Abner's support. In hindsight, it would have been to his advantage to have avoided challenging what Abner had done. The truth of the matter was that both these men were operating from worldly values and, as we shall see as the account develops, that God used even these human faults to accomplish His purpose to have David as king over Israel.

A Restored Relationship – 3:12-16

¹² Then Abner sent messengers to David in his place, saying, "Whose is the land? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel over to you." ¹³ He said, "Good! I will make a covenant with you, but I demand one thing of you, namely, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see me." ¹⁴ So David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, to whom I was betrothed for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." ¹⁵ Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. ¹⁶ But her husband went with her, weeping as he went, and followed her as far as Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." So he returned. 2 Samuel 3:12-16 (NASB95)

Abner's ambition provided him with an incentive to carry out what he had promised Ish-bosheth he was going to do. The first step was to make a deal with David by setting up a summit meeting so they could work out the details of having all of Israel recognize David as their king.

Commentators are divided over what was meant by the rhetorical question (Whose is the land?) that began the negotiations. Some think that the message being sent was that Abner was in control of all of Israel except Judah and he was, therefore, in position to make a covenant with David. Others think that the message was that Abner recognized that all the land of Israel was already determined by God to be under the control of David and, since that was the case, Abner was wanting to work to see God's will accomplished. It could be that Abner intended the first option and David assumed the second option. Of course, the right answer to the question was (and is) that all the land belongs to God.

David then entered into the negotiations with a conditional requirement that his first wife Michal (Saul's daughter) be restored to him. We recall that when David was in hiding from Saul that Saul gave his daughter to Paltiel (Phalti) to be his wife in an effort to sever all relationships with David and maybe to cause David some emotional grief. In the meantime David had married six other women and had six sons born during the time he was at Hebron. One of David's wives (Maacah) was the daughter of a king of a neighboring area and this marriage may have been for the purpose of establishing a treaty with this king. We can speculate (as have others) as to why David wanted Michal to be reunited with him as another wife. It may be that he thought it was the right thing to do since she was still his wife regardless of what Saul did. Another reason could have been that David recognized that Michal was a daughter of royalty and she deserved to be in a better environment than Paltiel could give her. A third possibility might have been that restoration of the marriage would have strengthened the alliance with the other tribes of Israel since many of these were still loyal to the family of Saul.

There was no mention in this account that Abner made any requests or demands for his own benefit. Some have speculated or suspected that Abner wanted to be assured of a significant position in the military forces of the combined kingdom. As we might imagine, such a move would have caused a lot of jealousy among the leaders of the army who had been supporting David for the past seven years.

It is interesting that David did not leave the details of this restoration to Abner but sent messengers directly to Ish-bosheth requesting (demanding) the return of his wife to her rightful place. In doing this, David recognized the position Ish-bosheth had as ruler of the northern tribes and was also showing respect for him as the son of Saul and brother of Michal. This could have been an act of graciousness by David toward Ish-bosheth. Apparently, Ish-bosheth knew that his reign as the puppet king was over or rapidly coming to an end and he did what David requested.

The separation of Michal from Paltiel was difficult for Paltiel and likely for Michal. Michal's reaction was not mentioned, so we have no idea how this move affected her after having been with Paltiel for around eight years. Paltiel was emotionally distraught and followed after Michal weeping as he did so. Abner intervened and sent him back to his home and the protest ended.

A Consolidated Kingdom – 3:17-21

¹⁷ Now Abner had consultation with the elders of Israel, saying, "In times past you were seeking for David to be king over you. ¹⁸ "Now then, do it! For the LORD has spoken of David, saying, 'By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.' " ¹⁹ Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin; and in addition Abner went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and to the whole house of Benjamin. ²⁰ Then Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. ²¹ Abner said to David, "Let me arise and go and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may be king over all that your soul desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. 2 Samuel 3:17-21 (NASB95)

In 1 Samuel 18:5 we see these words: "Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well." It would seem from this account that all of Israel as well as Saul's military leaders were ready to accept David as their king more than a decade before this time. That may have happened naturally if it had not been for the ambition-driven intervention of Abner in setting up Saul's only surviving son as a puppet king. Not only did Abner create the mess of a divided kingdom for Israel, now he was ready to take credit for solving the problem he had created. Such a convoluted, inconsistent logic results from those who ignore the will of God and

are focused on their own agenda and fame. They create chaos which results in disunity and then claim credit for having saved everyone from a nonexistent threat which (as we know) was what God had originally intended for the nation.

Such practices are typical of the ways of the world and we see such things happening in both national and international politics in the world today. We have heard some who prescribe to such tactics say (with regard to implementing their agendas) “take advantage of every crisis” to advance the agenda. We have seen this to be the case whether that agenda is uncontrolled abortion, same gender marriage, disarming citizens, open borders, socialism, or government control of health care. The unspoken tactic is that if no crisis exists, then we need to create one.

Abner would have fit very well into the political climate and methodology of today in that he had several town-hall meetings. If there had been email or social media in that day, he could have gotten word out to everyone as he went about “solving” the problem he had created. He was successful in getting the word out to the various tribes encouraging them to agree to accept David as their king (which was what God had already determined to be the eventual outcome).

After having gone through all the preliminaries of gathering support for his position, Abner brought a delegation of leaders of the northern tribes with him to Hebron and David welcomed them with a lavish feast which usually accompanied the institution of a new covenant. Abner promised David that he would be king over all his soul desired. That was a promise that would be fulfilled – not because Abner said it – but because that was included in God’s choice of David to be the king of Israel. Not only did Abner initially rebel against God for his own fame and glory, now he was seeking to supplant God in taking credit for what God was doing in bringing the nation of Israel under the king whom God had chosen nearly two decades before.

As we examine this account, it should be evident that what we do matters and even beyond that, why we do things matters just as much or maybe even more so. Abner initially had bad motives and that resulted in bad decisions and wrong actions. Later on, Abner changed and started doing the right thing in unifying Israel, but his motives were still selfishly based because he saw that he would benefit from this change. God allowed this rebellion and reconciliation to happen over the course of time, but Abner did not reap any benefit of all his scheming and manipulation. After the agreement of the northern tribes to accept David, Abner was killed by Joab (David’s top military leader) and he did not live to see the consolidation of the kingdom of Israel under David’s leadership.

If we look for “life lessons” from the events that followed the death of Saul until Israel accepted David as their king we could conclude the following: If we know the Lord’s will in a matter, it is best to do only that and not attempt to manipulate events so that we can personally benefit from what happens. Going against the will of God will eventually result in disaster for those who rebel and the will of the Lord will come to pass.