



## about Abner

1. Abner, King Saul's military commander, is mentioned often, beginning in 1 Sam. 14:50. Therefore his name is shown in larger print on the cover page. Mostly, however, he is seen in Second Samuel chs. two and three.

2. Until the very end of his life, when he turned to David in Second Samuel ch. three, Abner was a partisan Benjamite (3:8) and on the wrong side in the struggle for power. Yet, he was not a totally dark character, since he sought to avoid unnecessary killing (2:21-22, 26) and finally agreed with other Benjamites in accepting David's leadership (3:19).

3. The most interesting question about Abner is why he suddenly turned to David. Joab said that Abner was only trying to deceive David (3:25), but that was obviously not the case. Joab was the deceptive one (3:27).

4. Superficially, the conflict in 3:7-11 with Abner's puppet king, led to the change of heart toward David. However, the fact that the house of Saul, which Abner controlled (3:6), was gradually losing the war with the house of David (3:1) also may have played a key role.

5. Abner twice said that it was the Lord's declared will for David to be king (in 3:9-10 and 3:18). Does this indicate that he truly repented or that he simply gave up trying to keep the crown in Benjamin?

6. Note that ch. three ends by stressing that David had nothing to do with Abner's murder and that he regarded Abner far more highly than he did Joab.

## descriptive terms

The list below will help you describe Abner as seen in 2 Sam. 3:6-39. Some terms fit him well, while others do not; so mark them as correct, incorrect or partly correct. You may also wish to put a question mark beside some phrases and terms because there is insufficient information to decide. Then use the list below to help fill out the worksheet on the opposite page.

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a great man / leader (3:38)

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Saul's general (1 Sam. 14:50, 26:15)

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a political leader (3:6-21)

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a kingmaker (2:8-9, 3:6, 9-10, 17-19)

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more powerful than Ishbosheth (3:11)

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aware of David's popularity (3:17-18)

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aware of slowly losing the war (3:1)

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seeking power for himself (3:6-7)

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unwilling to admit doing wrong (3:7-10)

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loyal to Saul's house (3:8-10)

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overconfident in himself (3:9-10)

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a peace maker (2:26, 3:20-21)

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aware of God's will (3:9-10, 17-18)

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doing God's will (3:9-10, 17-18)

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highly regarded by David (3:31-39)

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doing right for the wrong reasons

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a true believer, repentant, saved

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hated by Joab (3:27)

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murdered by Joab (3:27, 1 Kings 2:5)

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killed as David commanded (3:26-39)

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mourned by all, even by Joab (3:31)

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deceptive like Joab (3:25, 27, 34)

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wicked like Joab (3:34, 39)

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## Abner

Abner was King Saul's cousin and commander-in-chief (1 Sam. 14:50), just like Joab was David's cousin and military commander. From this we might expect that Abner would be bad like Saul and Joab would be good like David. At the crucial turning point in Israel's history, in Second Samuel three, however, the opposite was the case. Joab was wicked, murderous, and deceptive while Abner was truthful, helpful, and respected (3:39). How could this be? To understand we must review earlier chapters.

In First Samuel ch. 26 Abner was too closely connected to King Saul's perverse desire to kill David to be considered good. Yet, Abner is never mentioned in First Samuel chs. 13, 15, 22, and 28 when Saul committed several other great sins. Perhaps he was not present. More likely, he simply wasn't mentioned to stress Saul's personal responsibility. Doeg, alone among Saul's servants, is singled out for blame (1 Sam. 22:9-23), while Abner is only accused of failing to carefully guard Saul on one occasion (26:14-16). Thus, Abner was not so bad, after all.

In Second Samuel Saul was gone and Abner was more responsible. Therefore he is named more in Second Samuel chs. two and three than in all of First Samuel. He was the one who made Ishbosheth king (2 Sam. 8-10) contrary to God's will. Yet, he apparently knew that this was wrong (3:9-10) and when it became clear that this effort would fail he turned to David. His anger at Ishbosheth in 3:8, then, probably reflects the bitter realization, through losses in war (3:1) and conflict with Ishbosheth, that all his efforts to keep the crown in Benjamin were in vain.

Does 2 Sam. 3:6-7 show that Abner was seeking to be king, himself? Ishbosheth may have thought so, but perhaps that was not what was really happening. Above all, Abner's actions show that he did not regard Ishbosheth as Saul's legitimate successor. That was the problem. Theoretically he should have been seeking to establish Ishbosheth as the king, but he didn't really believe in Ishbosheth. He believed in himself more than in Saul's son. Yet, he, himself, was losing the long war with the house of David (3:1). Thus, it's no surprise that he was inconsistent and that when this was pointed out (3:6-7) that he repented and turned to David.

**(3:31-39)**

**To David Abner was...**

**a respected leader**

**helpful, not a rival**

**a great loss, mourned**

**not wicked like Joab**

Did Abner truly repent when he turned from Saul's son to the king that the Lord had chosen? Joab claimed that he did not (3:24-25). Abner's actions, words (3:9-10, 18), and even his misplaced trust in Joab (3:26-27), however, indicate that he did. Abner trusted David and this explains why he also trusted Joab. Sadly he was killed by David's wicked general, but when he died Abner was on the right side.

As God worked through failure to turn Abner to David, so also he is still working to turn individuals from worldly self-interest to the Lord Jesus. God is good!