



## **Studies in the Life of David**

Text

Second Samuel 2:12-32

Topic

Abner opposes the rightful king and we see a little similarity in our own lives in areas where we are not fully submitting to Jesus

Title

*"There's a Li'l Abner in All of Us"*

Introduction

Jesus has said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

One man who opened that door, who was saved, was Robert Boyd Munger. He set out to write a tract describing the Christian life based on the analogy of Jesus coming in to your life as if He were really entering your heart as His home.

The title of the tract is *My Heart, Christ's Home*. In it Munger takes Jesus on a tour of his heart-home. They go from room-to-room. They go from the library to the dining room to the workshop to the rumpus room to the hall closet.

(Does anybody really have a rumpus room? *I want to bring it back as a term!*).

In each room the author realizes there are aspects of his life he has not really submitted to the Lord. He concludes by saying to Jesus, "Lord, you have been a guest, and I have been the host. From now on I am going to be the servant. You are going to be the Lord."

The tract remains popular because we can relate so well to it. In our own lives, if we're honest, there are areas in which we struggle or even refuse outright to let the Lord reign. For sure we can see this in the lives of others - especially when we are the recipients of their failing to submit to the Lord.

This idea of where the Lord is really reigning in my life and where He might not be is illustrated in our text in the activities of Abner. After King Saul died, paving the way for David to become king, Abner instead promoted one of Saul's remaining sons, Ishbosheth, to be king. If David wanted to reign as king in Hebron, over the tribe of Judah, that was fine with Abner. But he was not willing to allow David to be king over all Israel - even though, as we'll see, Abner knew that it was God's will that David be enthroned.

We don't want to be like Abner. To encourage us to examine ourselves for Abner-like thinking, we'll see that Abner cannot make any progress and, in fact, finds himself retreating. We'll apply that to our spiritual lives, to our walk with the Lord.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Take A Look At Areas In Which You Are Not Making Spiritual Progress And Ask Yourself Who Is Really Ruling There, and #2 Take A Look At Areas In Which You Are In Spiritual Regress And Ask Yourself Who Is Really Ruling There.

#1 Take A Look At Areas In Which  
You Are Not Making Spiritual Progress  
And Ask Yourself Who Is Really Ruling There  
(v12-16)

Abner knew that God had chosen David to be king. In chapter three, verse eighteen, he says to the elders of Israel,

2 Samuel 3:18 "... 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 the hand of all their enemies.' "

Abner represents a man who knew who the rightful king over all the nation was but acted to limit the king's authority. David could rule part of the land but Abner would set up his own king and rule the rest.

Abner is the poster-boy for the guy nonbelievers often throw in your face when witnessing, the guy who goes to church on Sunday but lives like the devil the rest of the week.

While that guy may not even be saved, I think there is application for us as believers. There may be areas in our lives we are holding back from the Lord, ground we refuse to concede to Him for whatever reason.

One way to know if that is the case is to take a look at areas in which we cannot seem to make any spiritual progress.

2 Samuel 2:12 Now Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon.

Abner intended to take Gibeon and further his progress. In the ensuing events we see he was not able to make any progress there.

2 Samuel 2:13 And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down, one on one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool.

Joab was King David's general. Joab and his forces offered passive resistance to Abner. They did not initiate any conflict; they simply stood in his way.

2 Samuel 2:14 Then Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men now arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise."

This idea of "compete" is variously understood by scholars and Bible teachers. Some say it was just that, a competition of sorts that got out of hand.

It seems most likely it was a way of settling the potential conflict by having champions represent each side rather than everyone engaging in the fight.

2 Samuel 2:15 So they arose and went over by number, twelve from Benjamin, followers of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David.

2 Samuel 2:16 And each one grasped his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called the Field of Sharp Swords, which is in Gibeon.

Twelve champions from each army were chosen to battle one-on-one. Each set of combatants killed each other so there was no winner!

Doesn't that strike you as odd? That in twelve matches each time the combatants killed each other? It suggests that the text, though historical, is trying to teach a spiritual truth or two.

From our vantage point, looking at Abner, we'd have to say that he was not able to make any progress. He and his false king, Ishbosheth, may be ruling over a large portion of the nation, but he could not gain any additional ground.

Is there an area in your life where you seem to be unable to make any spiritual progress? Among the possible reasons for it might be the fact you are not allowing Jesus to have full reign of either that area or some other.

In terms of an example, the rich young ruler Jesus encountered in the New Testament comes to mind. He'd been following the Law all his life and wanted to follow the Lord. He could not put his finger on what was holding him back.

Jesus knew what it was.

Matthew 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

Matthew 19:22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Knowing the young man's heart, Jesus was able to point out that his possessions had taken possession of him. In our context we would say

that he could not make spiritual progress in his walk with the Lord because he refused to allow Jesus to rule over his financial life. The Lord gave him a direct command - "Sell what you have and give to the poor." He refused his King's command. He would continue to 'rule' that part of his life.

Whenever we talk about the rich young ruler we accurately point out that it is *not* Jesus' command to each and every believer that we "sell what [we] have and give to the poor." It was the rich young ruler's stumblingblock. Mine and yours may be something different.

Nevertheless, your financial life may be an area in which you are reigning instead of Jesus.

- There are numerous warnings to all Christians who are well-off to be generous and not allow the love of money to become an obstacle in your spiritual progress.
- All of us are called upon to give to the Lord of our finances and to do so regularly, generously, and sacrificially.

So, if I'm not giving to the Lord regularly, generously, and sacrificially, is He really Lord of my finances? If He is not, it may be the reason I am making little spiritual progress and why I cannot gain certain spiritual ground.

We could say similar things about any area of our lives. It may be we are refusing to submit to the Lord in our marriage, or at work, or in the church, and thus keep hitting a wall.

As Christians we believe God's Word is alive and powerful. This morning it can expose such areas if you will allow it to examine you. You need not walk away from it sorrowful! Today can be the day you submit to the Lord and make progress.

In some cases it's not just a matter of failing to make spiritual progress. You can actually see a regression!

#2 Take A Look At Areas In Which  
You Are In Spiritual Regress  
And Ask Yourself Who Is Really Ruling There  
(v17-32)

Since there was no clear champion, no clear winner, in the competition, a battle broke out between Abner's forces and Joab's.

2 Samuel 2:17 So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

The writer lets you know from the get-go that Abner was "beaten" that day. He was forced to retreat, regressing.

One particular incident during Abner's retreat is highlighted. It will have historical significance in a chapter or so. It also has thematic significance for us this morning.

2 Samuel 2:18 Now the three sons of Zeruah were there: Joab and Abishai and Asahel. And Asahel was as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle.

Zeruah was David's sister. It's unusual to mention the mother and not the father. It tells us she was a remarkable gal and had raised three notable boys.

2 Samuel 2:19 So Asahel pursued Abner, and in going he did not turn to the right hand or to the left from following Abner.

2 Samuel 2:20 Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Are you Asahel?" He answered, "I am."

2 Samuel 2:21 And Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and lay hold on one of the young men and take his armor for yourself." But Asahel would not turn aside from following him.

From a strategic point of view you always wanted to go after the general. Asahel did, but it seems he did so unarmed! Abner encouraged him to get a weapon from one of his fellow soldiers.

Doesn't it strike you odd that Asahel would pursue Abner with no weaponry? Yeah, it does, and again it puts us on notice there's a spiritual lesson.

2 Samuel 2:22 So Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab?"

Before you give Abner any credit for showing mercy, understand his motives. If he killed Asahel, then in their culture Joab would become what was called 'the avenger of blood.' Joab would hunt Abner down and kill him for killing his brother. In fact, Joab *will* eventually kill Abner!

2 Samuel 2:23 However, he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, so that the spear came out of his back; and he fell down there and died on the spot. So it was that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still.

It was the old 'blunt end of the spear' trick. Abner, being pursued, simply stopped suddenly and let Asahel run into his spear.

Doesn't it strike you as odd that the "blunt" end of a spear could so pierce a man?

Here is one spiritual application in keeping with our 'point' (pun intended!). If you are a Christian, but are regressing (retreating) spiritually, God sees to it you are being pursued. It might be through a person who is trying to tell you the truth. It could be from a message you hear. It could even be from the mouth of a nonbeliever.

For your part, don't run from it. And don't try to 'blunt' the message. It won't kill you. Remember, Asahel had no weapons.

No, it won't kill you, but it will take you captive and return you to your rightful king.

2 Samuel 2:24 Joab and Abishai also pursued Abner. And the sun was going down when they came to the hill of Ammah, which is before Giah by the road to the Wilderness of Gibeon.

2 Samuel 2:25 Now the children of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became a unit, and took their stand on top of a hill.

2 Samuel 2:26 Then Abner called to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?"

2 Samuel 2:27 And Joab said, "As God lives, unless you had spoken, surely then by morning all the people would have given up pursuing their brethren."

Don't give Abner any credit. Sure, he called for a truce - but only in defeat. Plus Joab indicated that Abner had instigated the fighting by trying to gain possession of Gibeon where he was the one who suggested the young men fight. The phrase, "unless you had spoken," really means, "because you suggested it."

Abner was safe in his own territory. It's too bad for him he was because it only reinforced his decision to refuse to submit to the rightful king. It was a fall-back position that kept him in perpetual regress.

It's better, really, to not have fall-back positions if you want to make progress in your walk with Jesus. Don't be planning a way out of a situation or circumstance God has designed for you in order to grow you, to mature you.

2 Samuel 2:28 So Joab blew a trumpet; and all the people stood still and did not pursue Israel anymore, nor did they fight anymore.

2 Samuel 2:29 Then Abner and his men went on all that night through the plain, crossed over the Jordan, and went through all Bithron; and they came to Mahanaim.

2 Samuel 2:30 So Joab returned from pursuing Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel.

2 Samuel 2:31 But the servants of David had struck down, of Benjamin and Abner's men, three hundred and sixty men who died.

2 Samuel 2:32 Then they took up Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb, which was in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at daybreak.

Considering twelve of Joab's men died in the initial competition, he only lost eight more against losses of three hundred and sixty by Abner. It was a slaughter!

Still, the losses were significant especially since they directly affected Joab's family.

It reminds us that when we are regressing spiritually, not only does it take a tremendous toll on us. It also affects our brothers and sisters in the family of God. The 'losses' can be significant on several levels.

- Obviously there is a loss of fellowship with one another.
- The person in regress can be the cause of others stumbling.
- The work of furthering the Gospel gets put on hold.

Are you in a spiritual regression in one or more areas? It may not be evident or obvious. It may not be manifesting itself in massive backsliding. It may be subtle, private, personal.

Today's portion of God's Word may be the Asahel pursuing you. Admit it and give the Lord rule over it. He's your rightful King.

Be willing to say, "Lord, you have been a guest, and I have been the host. From now on I am going to be the servant. **You** are going to be the Lord."

