

## ***Background Characters in the Old Testament***

### ***Joab: David's Weak Strongman***

Lesson #8 for November 20, 2010

Scriptures: 2 Samuel 2:17-23; 3:23-27; 11:15-25; 20:7-11; 1 Kings 1.

1. Joab, the son of David's sister, was the head of his military for virtually David's entire time as king. It was David and Joab working together with their military men and David's 37 special soldiers that finally raised Israel above the clan-thinking that had predominated in the days of the judges. But, getting the nation above that level did not necessarily mean that every person was above that kind of thinking. In Joab, we will discover that focusing on "number one" was Joab's theme almost his entire life. He did what was right in his own eyes. (Compare Judges 17:6; 21:25)
2. It was Joab's plan to place himself on the side of whomever seemed to have the upper hand at the time.
3. The first mention of Joab in the Bible is soon after David had become king in Hebron. Remember that after Saul died David was invited by the tribe of Judah to be their king, and to live in Hebron. It was two full years before David became king over all of Israel. We do not know if Joab was with David during all those years of running from Saul. Saul's older three sons had died with him in battle. Ishbosheth was Saul's fourth son and was the heir. Abner, who was in charge of Ishbosheth's forces from the 10 tribes of Israel, came to face David's forces. So, the two generals decided to place 12 young man from each side in hand-to-hand combat to see what the results would be. All 24 of them died. (2 Samuel 2:12-16) Then, the two armies began fighting.
4. While Joab was related to David—he was the son of David's sister, Zeruiah—Abner had been the general for King Saul for a number of years. Abner had been the leader of many groups that had been sent out to try to capture David during Saul's reign.
5. After the incident at the pool where all 24 young men died, a battle broke out and David's men ended up pursuing Abner and his soldiers. One of Joab's brothers—Asahel by name—was a fast runner and thought he would make a name for himself by catching Abner and killing him. Abner warned him twice to turn back and chase someone else, but he refused; and so, Abner killed him. (2 Samuel 2:17-32)
6. A short time later, Abner realized that Ishbosheth was never going to be a great leader, and he decided to leave Ishbosheth and take his military to join David. Abner came to David while Joab was away. David was of a mind to appoint Abner as the general of his army. David received him cordially and agreed to Abner's terms and then sent him away with his blessing. When Joab found out about it, he pursued Abner and pretending to be a friend got close enough until he whipped out his sword and killed Abner. No doubt in Joab's mind, that was in payment for the death of his brother. (2 Samuel 3:6-30) Or was he just eliminating the competition?
7. How often do we justify some action we take or have taken? How do we distinguish between a reason and a justification? How often do we rationalize our behaviors? How good are we at judging our own motives? We need to remember that God will judge based on motives. (Proverbs 21:2; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Revelation 20:12,13; compare 1 Samuel 16:7)
8. If you review carefully the principle people in David's kingdom, you will notice that nepotism

is not new! Many of his chief advisers and other associates were family members.

9. After Joab killed Abner, David embarked on a public display of mourning for Abner and a rebuke of Joab's actions. (2 Samuel 3:28-35)
10. The next major story that we come across involving Joab is his complicity with David in killing Uriah and those soldiers who were with him. These two military men had come to the place where even close friends were dispensable for what they considered to be "the greater good." (2 Samuel 11) Review the story of Uriah and Bathsheba. Did Joab know that Bathsheba was pregnant? Why did Joab go ahead with that plan?
11. Both David and Joab had to live with the consequences of their sins. A little while later, David's oldest son, Amnon, fell in love with his half-sister, Tamar. Amnon faked an illness and arranged to have her come to feed him. When they were alone, he seized her and raped her. When she protested, he detested her. Tamar's brother, Absalom, later arranged to kill Amnon for what he had done to his sister. (2 Samuel 13)
12. Why do you think Joab promoted Absalom to David? Was he hedging his bets thinking that Absalom would be the next king? What do you think of the story that Joab fabricated to give to the woman of Tekoa? (2 Samuel 14:1-20) David suspected that Joab was behind that! As a result, Absalom was brought back to Jerusalem and finally was reconciled to David. This only set things up for the terrible rebellion which was to follow. (2 Samuel 14:21-33)
13. Joab had been directly involved in getting David to accept Absalom back to Jerusalem. When the final battle came with the forces of David versus the forces of Absalom, it was Joab who stabbed Absalom in the heart! Remember that Absalom was his first cousin! (2 Samuel 18:1-18)
14. After Absalom's death, David wept and mourned for him. (2 Samuel 18:32-33; 19:1-8)
15. Perhaps because Joab had disobeyed his orders and killed Absalom, David determined to use Amasa—the son of a different sister of David, and thus, another cousin of both Absalom and Joab and the man who had been Absalom's general—to be the general of his armies in place of Joab. As you might suspect from what we know about Joab already, he managed to kill Amasa as well. (2 Samuel 20:4-10)
16. In some of our stories in this series, David was the good guy; and in some of them, he was the bad guy. When compared to Joab whom he apparently associated with very closely for many years, there was one clear distinction. When David's sins were pointed out to him, he repented immediately and sought ways to restore as far as possible. (2 Samuel 12:1-15) On the other hand, Joab seemed to go from one disaster to the next! Were David's motives different from Joab's?
17. However, that was not always true. When David decided he wanted to number the military men in Judah and Israel to see if he could take on additional enemies, (see 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21—read both of these passages and decide for yourself who was behind this story) Joab strongly advised against it. Of course, being king, David overruled; and as a result, 70,000 of the Israelites died! Remember that God was the first one to advise Israel to number their fighting men! (Numbers 1 & 26)
18. This story reminds us that even if our sins are forgiven, we often have to live with the consequences.
19. We know that one's thoughts mold one's character. (Jeremiah 17:9; Proverbs 4:23)

Considering what we know about Joab so far, what kind of character do you think he had? God told David that he would not be allowed to build the temple of God because he had shed too much blood. (1 Chronicles 22:8) What do you suppose God would have had to say about Joab?

20. Read 1 Kings 1. As David was finally reaching his last days, Joab looked over the prospective new kings. He decided that David's oldest son, Adonijah, would most likely be the next king. Adonijah appealed to Joab and to Abiathar the priest to support him in become the next king. But God had other plans. So did David and Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon.
21. Adonijah made a move and declared himself the next king and held a feast in Jerusalem. Bathsheba was notified almost immediately. With the help of Nathan the prophet and others, she convinced David that he should declare Solomon the next king. It seems that once again David forgave Joab for his support of Adonijah.
22. But after David was dead, Adonijah and Joab were not finished. Through some intrigue that we perhaps do not fully understand, Adonijah requested permission to marry David's "hot water bottle"—Abishag. This beautiful young woman of high metabolism had kept David warm in his final days. (1 Kings 1:1-4) Now, Adonijah wanted to marry her.
23. To Solomon's mind, Adonijah requesting permission to marry one of the concubines of his father was tantamount to declaring himself the next king. So, Solomon arranged for Adonijah to be killed. (1 Kings 2:13-25) It appears that Joab was involved in this scheme for Adonijah to become king as well. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Joab fled to the tabernacle where he took hold of the horns of the altar. Benaiah, the new strongman under Solomon, was instructed to kill him right there. (1 Kings 2:28-35)
24. What do you think of David's final words to Solomon? (1 Kings 2:5-9) Does that sound like a real Christian talking? Hadn't David learned his lesson by that time? How could David suggest to Solomon that he follow all of the Lord's commands (including the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment?) and be sure to kill Joab and Shimei!
25. Where would you have fit into these various stories? Would you do what was right on every occasion according to the truth as revealed by God? Or, would you be inclined to operate like Joab, thinking first and almost exclusively about "number one"? How good are you at rationalizing your behavior even when it is wrong?
26. It is quite clear that human life was considered to be fairly cheap in those days. Even men of great prominence could have their fate shift almost instantly. People who were rising to fame and fortune suddenly died because someone else did not like them or they were perceived as a threat to that person's position!
27. What are we supposed to learn about God from all of this? In the midst of all these human foibles, can we see anything clearly taught about God and how He wants things to be done?
28. If all of these sordid things actually happened—and we certainly believe they did—why did God have to record them for posterity to wonder about? Wouldn't it have been better to do what the Egyptians did and only record the good stories and the victories?
29. Is your trust in God strengthened when you read these stories and realize that the Holy Spirit—the real Author of Scripture—was not trying to cover up anything? Does it make the Bible more believable? Certainly, these stories were not recorded to encourage us to go

out and do likewise! (Luke 3:11)

30. What should we learn from the experiences of David and Joab? Should we learn that people will reap what they have sown? (Galatians 6:7) That God is very gracious and forgiving even to some pretty evil people? That God chooses to work with the best of us that are available, and sometimes, the best of us are not very good? (See Judges)
31. In light of the great controversy theme in Scripture, we certainly have a great deal to discover and learn about how God dealt with all of these Old Testament characters. No doubt, there are many lessons that we have not even thought of yet!
32. Does it give you courage to realize that both Jesus and Paul suggested that David will be in heaven? We do not know about Joab, but the two of them were a lot alike!
33. What was Satan saying to the universe as all of these events were taking place? Did God look good as David who had been described as a “man after God’s own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14) was doing all of these things? What are Satan and God saying about us?

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