

# 2 SAMUEL—WEEK 2

## FORGIVENESS



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)  
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

The war is over, but the nation is split. Abner gets in a snit over nothing, and, amazingly, that leads to a great reuniting—of the nation and of David and Michal. David is happy to reconcile with everyone.

But Joab isn't and kills Abner. David is genuinely heartbroken but will ultimately reconcile with Joab too.

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2 Samuel, Week 2 — Forgiveness  
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1 2 Samuel 3:1–11 (ESV)

*There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.*

*And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.*

*While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul. Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?" Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, "Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba." And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.*

This passage seems curiously sexual—in the sense of alpha males having more mating opportunities.

David is blessed with many sons, but the house of Saul is in conflict. Abner is obviously the alpha male when Ish-bosheth asks him, "*Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?*"

Beta males aren't supposed to question alpha males. Ish-bosheth doesn't "know his place."

So Abner throws a tantrum and announces he's leaving. He's decided to hitch his wagon to a bigger star.

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Abner's actions and allegiances aren't based on any first principles. He's governed by desire and temper. One little slight and everything changes. There's a great lesson in that.

The Latin poet Virgil (70–19 BC) wrote, "*Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,*" which translates to, "Fortunate, who was able to know the causes of things."

<https://academic.oup.com/qjmed/article/104/2/179/1579085>

Virgil is pointing out the value of understanding things in terms of first principles. It's one of the chief things that separates man from the animals. We do things for reasons, not because of feelings.

This includes confessing Christ. We should be familiar with the first principles underlying the faith we profess. Faith is emotional, but faith that's rooted in emotion is as unstable as our emotions. Thus, here's a four-week DEEP series that gives the first principles reasoning undergirding Christianity:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/item/14728-faith-in-what>

2 2 Samuel 3:12–16

*Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to David, saying, “Whose is the land?” saying also, “Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel to you.”*

*And David said, “Good, I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you: you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul’s daughter, when you come to see my face.” So David sent messengers to Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, saying, “Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines.” And Ishbosheth sent and took her from her husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. Then her husband went along with her to Bahurim, weeping behind her. So Abner said to him, “Go, return!” And he returned.*

It hard not to feel sorry for Paltiel. His marriage is suddenly ripped asunder. One minute he’s happily married (we assume) and the next his wife is taken from him.

But Paltiel had to know that his marriage to Michal wasn’t legitimate from the get-go. Neither David nor Michal did anything to destroy their marriage. Saul was wrong to give her to Paltiel in 1 Samuel 25:44.

Paltiel is learning a tough lesson the hard way. Participating in evil can get painful.

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But what about Michal? She’s being tossed around like a poker chip. What about her feelings?

Scripture is remarkably clear on this. David is her first love and her one true love.

*Now Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved David. — 1 Samuel 18:20a*

*Thus Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul’s daughter, loved him; and Saul was still more afraid of David. — 1 Samuel 18:28–29a*

*Saul also sent messengers to David’s house to watch him and to kill him in the morning. And Michal, David’s wife, told him, saying, “If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.” So Michal let David down through a window. And he went and fled and escaped.. — 1 Samuel 19:11–12*

David demanding her return is further evidence that their bond remains after many years apart.

This isn’t the end of their love story either. Later we will see Michal mocking David for what she perceives as a misbehavior.

*And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, “How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!” — 2 Samuel 6:20b*

This is compelling evidence, not of weakness, but of strength in their marriage.

In that era, very few people could talk like that to the king.

3 2 Samuel 3:17–21

*Now Abner had communicated with the elders of Israel, saying, “In time past you were seeking for David to be king over you. 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 the hand of all their enemies.’ ” And Abner also spoke in the hearing of Benjamin. Then Abner also went to speak in the hearing of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and the whole house of Benjamin.*

*So 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. Then Abner said to David, “I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires.” So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.*

It is important to understand this passage in context. Given that there is not even a hint of repentance in anything Abner is doing here, we must assume that he’s still a snake. Even when Abner speaks truth, he’s just using that truth to advance himself.

Abner makes a good case to the elders of Israel that it’s time for them to align with David. There’s not a false word to be found anywhere in his argument. The fact that we can’t trust him any farther than we can throw him doesn’t change that. He sounds like he’s come around to the right way of thinking, but he’s just being shrewd.

Next, Abner takes off to see David, along with enough men to be safe. David treats him and his entourage like they’re important, and Abner responds in kind. He even talks like he has authority over all Israel.

Who knows? Maybe all Israel will fall for his act.

David certainly did.

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Don’t get me wrong here; people can change. Abner can change. There’s just no evidence that he did.

The gospel is all about change. We’re never done changing.

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. — Romans 12:2*

But today’s lesson is about fake change. Abner didn’t repent of anything; he got offended (for no good reason) and switched sides. So, how can we tell when someone’s change is sincere?

A daily devotional is far too short for a topic like that, but one obvious rule is, “Be skeptical.”

Also, one sign of true repentance is doing something costly or impractical. Even the cost of a simple apology counts for something. Conversely, Abner’s actions here are all to his advantage.

Or so he thinks.

4 2 Samuel 3:22–30

*At that moment the servants of David and Joab came from a raid and brought much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. When Joab and all the troops that were with him had come, they told Joab, saying, “Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, and he has gone in peace.” Then Joab came to the king and said, “What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone? Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing.”*

*And when Joab had gone from David’s presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother.*

*Afterward, when David heard it, he said, “My kingdom and I are guiltless before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father’s house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread.” So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.*

Joab just can’t believe that Abner has deceived David. “Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing.”

But then come the twist—Abner ends up being the one who is most deceived. He returns and lets himself get separated from his twenty-man guard, which makes it easy for Joab to kill him.

Joab obviously has plenty of reason to hold a grudge against Abner. Why did Abner let down his guard?

One might suspect that David was being dumb like a fox in making peace with Abner, but his reaction to his death rules that out. His condemnation of Joab (even the house of Joab) is astonishingly strong.

The real answer to why Abner let down his guard is that he assumed David had control over Joab. David really did want peace with his phony, unrepentant former enemy.

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David’s forgiving attitude is why he’s called a man after God’s own heart. David models the gospel here.

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. — Romans 5:8*

God’s forgiveness does not wait for our repentance. We run from God, but the hound of heaven chases us down.

Forgiveness comes first.

5 2 Samuel 3:33–39 (ESV)

*Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, “Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner.” And King David followed the bier. They buried Abner at Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept.*

*And the king lamented for Abner, saying,*

*“Should Abner die as a fool dies?  
Your hands were not bound;  
your feet were not fettered;  
as one falls before the wicked  
you have fallen.”*

*And all the people wept again over him. Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was yet day. But David swore, saying, “God do so to me and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!” And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people. So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king’s will to put to death Abner the son of Ner. And the king said to his servants, “Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I. The LORD repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!”*

This isn’t an act. David is genuinely mourning Abner. How can this be?

This is a difficult subject, but it is well treated in the literature because of its context—war.

If civilization is to endure, wars must end. Really end. Whatever issue the war was fought over must be settled and the combatants honored for their service. Forgiveness must be real and it must not be partial.

This is easy to say but hard to do. Still, it’s at the core of how to live as a Christian. C.S. Lewis put it best in his chapter on forgiveness in Mere Christianity. “Everyone says that forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive, as we had during the war.”

People have excellent reasons for not forgiving. Forgiveness isn’t logical. It isn’t fair. In some cases, it’s at odds with the best public policy.

But it’s always Christian.

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Okay, but then what about Joab? If David can forgive Abner, why doesn’t he forgive Joab?

He does. David cursed what Joab did but left that to God. David will ultimately promote Joab.

*So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people. Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; — 2 Samuel 8:15–16*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. In one sentence, why do you believe?
2. What's a sign of a strong marriage?
3. How can you tell genuine repentance from fakery?
4. How can we model the gospel without being suckers?
5. Have you seen total forgiveness?

*Items for prayer:*