

The Story of Abner

I'm going to tell you a story tonight about one of your forefathers, your sabba. It's about a man from the tribe of Benjamin, and all of you are of the tribe of Benjamin, so it's directly related to you. This man was a prince and a great man. The reason I know that is because a prophet said that he was, so I've no doubt that he was a prince and a great man.

His name is Abner, and he was the cousin of King Shaul of the tribe of Benjamin. He was right there when the prophet Shemuel came, just "out of the blue," and picked his cousin to be the first king of Israel. It was shocking because Shaul was really a humble person, and he didn't think he'd be chosen for something so great, because he didn't think of himself as that great of a person.

Abner and Shaul had grown up together, so they knew each other very well. When Shaul was chosen to be king, he chose his cousin to be the head of the army. He knew he was going to need a great army because at that time, the Philistines were over Israel so strongly that they didn't even have a sword or a spear in Israel. Shaul was planning on going to war, so he picked out the wisest man he knew to be the head of the army.

What was his cousin's name? Abner. "Ab" means "father" or "source" in Hebrew, and "ner" means "light" in Hebrew, as in "Let there be light." So *Abner* means "source of light." A lot of times, he would bring light on the subject.

So Abner was there when Shaul started ruling. He was there by King Shaul when he was told by the prophet to wait seven days. He heard Shaul saying, "It's seven days already." Shaul was very nervous, trying to keep the men together. "I know the Philistines are out there. We've got to get ready. We've got to get the army ready. But I've got to wait for Shemuel to get here, and he said seven days." So Abner was right by Shaul when he was going through all this, and he saw what happened. He saw that at

one point, Shaul said, “I can’t wait any longer. Get the burnt offering! I’m going to offer it myself. I cannot wait for the prophet. The army’s scattering.”

Abner was there. He saw his cousin. He thought, “I wonder whether this is a good idea... I mean, if he said seven days...” What should you do when the prophet tells you to wait seven days?

Shaul was disobedient. As soon as he finished making the burnt offering, and Abner was right there when he looked over the hill and said, “Uh, oh, here comes Shemuel. Why didn’t I wait?” It was just five more minutes, and he was going to be there. Then he tried to justify going ahead of the prophet. Abner realized that his cousin Shaul had done something wrong because things didn’t go well in the conversation that followed. Even if he couldn’t hear it, he could see that Shemuel didn’t look as if he was happy with the new king. And it’s true, he wasn’t happy.

But they went on, they fought against the Philistines, and they started winning. Abner had Yonathan with him. They had the best army. They were just going and going. Then came the time when they were to go against the Amalekites and kill them all — every single one of them, even the women and children and animals. So Abner said, “Let’s go!” They went to war against these terrible, terrible enemies (really bad people), and they were winning the war.

But then, some of the men started saying, “Let’s save some of this good stuff from the villages. Let’s save it and bring it back with us.” But the command was to utterly destroy every single thing, and don’t bring anything home. So at some point in there, Shaul must have said, “Abner, you know they shouldn’t be gathering anything. They should be destroying it.” And Abner saw Shaul deciding whether to let the people do it or not. Then Shaul said, “OK, Abner, just let them go ahead and bring it.” This was disobedience and trouble.

When they got back, Shemuel came walking up. Abner could see that Shemuel was not happy one bit, and at some point he got so upset that he turned around to walk

away. Shaul grabbed his coat and it ripped. Shemuel turned around and said something to the king, and Abner could tell that something was really wrong. And it was. Shemuel had said that the kingdom was being ripped from Shaul and given to another person better than him. Abner still stuck with King Shaul, but he could tell that something wasn't right. Yahweh was sorry that he had made Shaul king, because he disobeyed Him.

So here in the story we see Shaul and Abner talking together for the first time. Shaul is watching David kill Goliath, and Shaul says to Abner, "Abner, whose son is that over there, fighting against Goliath?" Why did he want to know that?

Abner said, "I don't know whose son it is."

"Well, find out!" Shaul said.

So Abner walks over there to David. David has just killed Goliath. He's got his head. He wanted to make sure the enemy was finished so he cut off his head. Abner said, "Come on, David, let's go see Shaul. He wants to see you." So he brought David to Shaul and said, "Here he is."

Shaul says, "Wow! That is amazing! You just went right against that giant and you won. Come and stay at my house." And sure enough, David moved in. That's when David and Yonathan came to love one another. Do you remember that part of the story? But the story goes on. Abner gets a first-hand view of the fatal flaw working in his cousin Shaul. That sweet boy that he brought to be in his house should have been his best soldier, but instead of Shaul saying, "This is my best soldier," something else happened. This is where the fatal flaw comes in, because Shaul had cut himself off from the Almighty who heals us from the fatal flaw. Do you remember that rip?

David started being the best soldier. Everyone would clap for David when he came back from the battles. They would also clap for Shaul, but they would clap really loudly for David. That's when the fatal flaw came out. Jealousy! And what did jealousy make him want to do? Kill him. They should have been best friends, but all of a sudden, they became enemies. Abner was there. He was the head of the army, and he was

wishing he could keep David in the army, because the army was always winning with little David in there. But all of a sudden, he sees his cousin, King Shaul, saying, “Kill him! Get him! Run him out!” Why? He is our best soldier. The fatal flaw is at work in King Shaul. So poor David is running as fast as he can.

Well, Abner saw things firsthand right up until the time when that terrible battle happened the day after Shaul visited the medium. Shaul died. Who else died? So many people in the army died. It was a horrible battle. The king died, Yonathan died, and soldiers were dying everywhere. Remember who was the head of the army? Abner. What has happened to his victorious army, the one that Yahweh leads forth into battle? He’s seeing his men dying everywhere. The Philistines are just beating them down.

So Abner sees King Shaul, his cousin, die. He sees Yonathan die. He sees Shaul’s other son die. He manages to rescue Ish Bosheth, the second son of King Shaul. He tells him, “You stay with me, Ish Bosheth, and we’re going to try to figure out what to do because you’re going to be the next king. I’m going to protect you, and I’m going to make you the next king, because you’re the only son of Shaul left, and the kingship always goes down to the son.” In the back of his mind, he remembers David. The kingdom was ripped from Shaul, and it probably should go to David, that nice young man who had the head of Goliath that day. But he is out in the woods running right now.

The Philistines came down on them, so that all Abner could do for the next five years was fight the Philistines back from flooding into Israel. Abner was strong, so finally he managed to secure all the borders around Israel. Then he said, “OK, Ish Bosheth, now is the time. We’re taking you home, and we’re going to put you on the throne, and we’re going to make you the king.” Ish Bosheth was kind of quiet and not outstanding in any way. Abner put him on the throne and said, “Israel, Ish Bosheth is your new king!”

Part of Israel didn’t believe it. In fact, one tribe in particular, the tribe of Yehudah, had gotten David out of the wilderness. They said that he should be the real king. So the tribe of Yehudah had already had set up David as their king. But now there are two kings

in Israel. There is David and there is Ish Bosheth, the son of Shaul. He has a crown on, and David has a crown on. David is calling himself the King of Judah and Ish Bosheth is calling himself the King of Israel. Ish Bosheth has eleven tribes. Which is bigger?

It doesn't seem right that there are two kings. So one day, Abner and his men are going off to fight and he meets King David's men. They had never actually met each other face to face like this before. They are at a pool, Abner and his men, and Joab and his men. David was smart. He had made his cousin Joab the commander of his army just as King Shaul had. Shaul's cousin was Abner, and David's cousin was Joab. Joab was riding along with some of David's men, and Abner was riding along with some of Ish Bosheth's men. They met each other at a pool.

Abner sat down, and across the pool, Joab sat down. They weren't fighting. It was just an odd situation. Abner said to Joab, "Let's have a wrestling match to show who's greater. Your men are over there, and mine are over here — strong young men from the tribe of Yehudah, and strong young men from the tribe of Benyamin and the other tribes. You pick twelve, and I'll pick twelve, and we'll see who is better." It was a bit playful, but with a little edge to it. You wouldn't believe it, but the twelve men came together, and somehow the fatal flaw was so strong in them that they didn't recognize their brothers. Each one had a knife, and so when they came out to fight, the twelve and the twelve all grabbed each other, and immediately all of them stabbed one another so that they all died at once. What a terrible thing!

Abner saw that it was bad, so he got up with his men and said, "Men, let's go really fast. Let's get out of here." He could see what was working in Joab, that fatal flaw of just being mean. Joab had two brothers with him that were just the same. Abner said, "Let's go, men!" But it was too late. Everyone started fighting because everyone was mad. They had just seen twelve of their men get killed, so everyone was mad. The fatal flaw was at work to just hurt other people that you should be loving. A terrible battle happened between our tribes.

Now just imagine us coming together for a big festival with all the tribes, and all of a sudden, something happens and everyone starts fighting each other. That's what happened. A massive battle happened between our tribes. Abner was running, and the men of Yehudah were really after him. Abner looked back and noticed one of Joab's brothers right behind him. His name was Asahel. Abner said, "Go back! Don't chase after me!" Abner is a strong and very good warrior. Remember what he did to the Philistines. He warned Asahel not to come after him. "Don't come, or you're going to be sorry. Turn back and go back with the other men. Don't come after me."

He didn't listen. And of course, Abner was much stronger. He couldn't just let the man attack him, so Asahel, Joab's brother, died. When Joab came along with his other brother, and saw that Asahel was dead, that fatal flaw that makes people do something mean rose up. All the men of Yehudah went after Abner and his men. Finally, Abner and his men stood at the top of a mountain, and the men of Yehudah were rushing up. And Abner called out, "Must we always solve our differences with swords? Don't you realize that the only thing we will gain is bitterness toward each other? When will you call off this senseless chasing of your own brothers from the tribes? When will you stop? Joab, stop! When will you stop chasing your brothers from the other tribes?"

Somehow, Joab heard Abner's words, and he said, "Yahweh only knows what would have happened if you hadn't spoken, for we would have chased you all night." That fatal flaw was just at work in them. They would have chased them all night. Then Joab blew his shofar, and all the men of Yehudah turned and went back down the mountain. As they were going down, they counted twenty men of Yehudah who were killed that day, and three hundred and sixty of the other tribes that were dead. There were dead bodies all along the way. Senseless murder between brothers... why? They had the fatal flaw at work in their hearts.

So Abner went home and went to see Ish Bosheth, and he began telling him what happened at the pool. And Ish Bosheth said, "Abner, I want to ask you about something."

“Yes, King Ish Bosheth.”

“I’ve been hearing people say that you are a really great and mighty warrior. Everyone is talking about you.” This is King Shaul’s son, Ish Bosheth. What do you think that he is thinking at this time? King Shaul’s son is the king. Do you remember what King Shaul thought when everyone was saying that King David was such a great man? Ish Bosheth went on, “Abner, you’ve been a good commander and a good soldier, but I’ve got something to say to you. I heard that you’ve been doing bad things with one of King Shaul’s concubines. I’ve heard that you are planning on taking over. Do you know what that means when you go into someone else’s house, and you start taking over their things and their concubines? It means you’re planning on taking over. So Abner, what do you have to say about this?”

And Abner, this prince and great man, said, “What? Am I a Judean dog that you want to kick me around like this? After all I’ve done for you and your father’s house by not betraying you to David, is this my reward, that you find fault with me about some woman? May Yahweh deal harshly with me if I don’t help David get all that Yahweh has promised him! I should just go ahead and give David the rest of Shaul’s kingdom right now! I should set him on the throne over all of Israel as well as all of Judah!”

Ish Bosheth realized that he overstepped his boundaries by accusing this man of something when he had been a faithful man all these years. Abner walked out the door and took action right away. “Men of Israel, it’s David who is anointed your king. Men of Benjamin, remember that Shemuel called for David to be your king. Turn your hearts to David!” This is Abner, King Ish Bosheth’s main man. He is announcing to all the tribes to turn to David.

Abner sends a message, “David, I want to see you.”

David said, “Bring him over. I remember Abner. I remember so well that day he came over and said, ‘Whose son are you?’ I remember that! He was big and strong, and I was small. I had Goliath. I remember Abner. I’ve loved Abner since I was so young. He

wants to see me? Bring him on!” And sure enough, they opened the gates, and twenty men walked in with Abner.

Abner said, “I want the kingdom to be turned over to you, David. The tribes can’t be disunited like this. You know the battle we had down by the pool? All those men died. Can we be divided like this? Can we be divided, the twelve tribes of Israel? No. Let me go. I’m going to get all the other tribes, and we’re going to come together to you. Let me go. Send me on my way.”

David made a big feast for him and said, “Abner? He’s coming over to my side from Benjamin. He’s bringing the whole tribe of Benjamin to the tribe of Yehudah. Great news! Go your way. We’ll be waiting for your return. Shalom!” They parted ways. But get ready. Through the gate come Joab and his brother.

“We’ve been out raiding. What’s happened here?”

“You’ll never believe who came to see us today!” said David. “It was Abner.”

“Abner, from King Ish Bosheth, came here?” Rage starts to build up. What is this rage? Why is he not happy? Abner is the head of all the other tribes. Why isn’t he happy? Why doesn’t he say, “Good, good! No war. Peace again in Israel.” Why is he grumpy? He’s not happy.

“So what did Abner want?” says Joab.

“This great man wants to come and be with us. Who could be a greater commander of the forces than Abner?”

The fatal flaw is not just in Benjamin. Who is the commander of the forces for David? Joab. Who did he say would be the greatest commander of the forces? Abner. If Abner came over with all his men, David had the plan of making him the leader of the combined forces. With Abner at the head of the twelve tribes, together they could defeat all of the Philistines, because this man was very great. But what is working in Joab?

“I’ll see you in a little while. I want to go somewhere. Come on, Abishai, let’s take a little walk.”

Where's he going? He's going to find Abner. Unity is going to happen. "Hey, Abner! It's Joab!"

"David must have sent Joab." He's trusting.

"You need to come back over here for just a minute," says Joab to Abner. This is really sad, because Abner is a good man.

Abner walks up and says, "Yes, I'm on my way. I'm going to bring all the tribes to David, and we're going to be in unity again."

And then that low-down fatal flaw rises up in Joab. The cousin of David takes a sword and kills Abner. Abner is not even defending himself. He's just standing there, trusting, and he is tricked. Joab could never have gotten Abner any other way. This man is the greatest warrior, the smartest man. But he was trusting.

Horrible, the news comes back to David, "Joab, your main man, has killed Abner." David comes out in front of all the people, and he cries and says, "Should Abner have died as fools die? His hands were not bound, his feet were not chained. He was open, trusting, and loving. He died as a fool dies. He was tricked. The greatest man of the tribe of Benjamin died as a fool." At that point, David just fell apart and said, "I'm not going to eat." He cried and cried. People said, "You need to eat something." But he said, "No, may Yahweh strike me dead if I eat one bit of food. Abner, a prince, a great man of Israel, has fallen."

Can you see how the fatal flaw hurts, divides, and kills senselessly? It has emotions that make you jealous. So that's the story of Abner, your great, great, great, great, great grandfather of the tribe of Benjamin. He was called a prince and a great man in Israel by the prophet David. He fell that day from the fatal flaw.