

# Joab: David's Weak Strongman



## SABBATH—NOVEMBER 13

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 2 Samuel 2:17–23; 2 Samuel 3:23–27; 2 Samuel 11:15–25; 2 Samuel 20:7–11; 1 Kings 1.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Everything a man does might seem right to him. But the Lord knows what he is thinking” (Proverbs 21:2, NlrV).

**THE STORY OF JOAB IS A STORY OF POWER POLITICS, MISGUIDED LOYALTIES, JEALOUSY, AND STUBBORNNESS.** It takes place at a time when the ability of a nation to survive (continue) does not depend on strong government and a good retirement plan. Strong people survive. But weak people quickly fade away. It is during the time when Joab serves as David's strongman and caretaker that Israel truly becomes a nation.

The period of the judges was filled with fighting in and among the tribes. It is the king (beginning with Saul and continuing with David and Solomon) who unites Israel. But the Bible makes it clear that hundreds of years of fighting between tribes will not go away in thirty or forty years. The life of Joab, as shown in the Bible, is filled with wars, feuds, and even murder.

We might not be involved in the kinds of things that Joab was. But we may face some ugly sides of our own character<sup>1</sup> when we read Joab's story. The negative example of Joab—the weak strongman of David—helps us to understand some of our own character faults and seek the only answer to them: Jesus.

1. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves; who someone is.

**SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 14****A FAMILY AFFAIR  
(2 Samuel 2:17–23)**

Joab was connected to the family of David (read 1 Chronicles 2:13–17). He was in charge of David's soldiers. But we first get a hint of the true character of Joab in 2 Samuel 2. Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. Judah quickly appointed (chose) David as king. Joab's equal in the army of King Saul was Abner, who somehow survived the battle in which Saul and his sons were killed.

Abner and David shared a history. It was Abner who led Saul's troops on many manhunts for David. Abner was not about to accept the man he had been hunting as king. So, Abner puts Ishbosheth (verses 8, 9), the only remaining son of Saul, on the throne of Israel. Then he starts a war against Judah and David. Israel had more men. But David's kingdom was stronger.

**Read 2 Samuel 2:17–23 and write a short comment on what happens.**

Asahel, the younger brother of Joab, unwisely chases Abner during the fighting. Abner warns him several times to back off. But the stubborn young man will not listen to him. So Abner kills him in self-defense. Joab never forgets this event.

After a while, Abner realizes that things are not well under Ishbosheth, who is a very weak king. So, he defects

(deserts; goes over) to David and offers to bring over the other tribes (2 Samuel 3:1–22). Joab is away during this time. When he returns and finds out what has happened, he is very upset.

**According to 2 Samuel 3:23–27, how does Joab handle this change that upset him so much? Compare<sup>2</sup> what Joab says to David with the real reason why Joab finally kills Abner. Also read 2 Samuel 3:30. What does Joab say about Abner's reasons for doing things? What does this show about Joab?**

Perhaps Joab truly believed he was helping David when he killed Abner. This brings up an important point. Think about your actions. What are the real reasons for some of the things you do? What about the reasons you use to excuse your actions? How can you learn to know the difference between the two when they really are different?



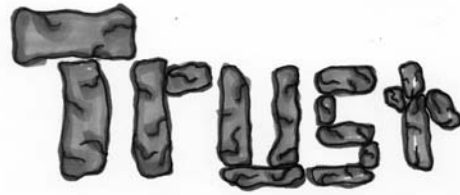
**Think before you act.**

2. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

**MONDAY—NOVEMBER 15****THE COST OF SIN  
(2 Samuel 11:15–25)**

It seems that David is not able to do anything about the murder of Abner right away. But David publicly mourns for Abner and scolds Joab for his actions (read 2 Samuel 3:28–35). To avoid future problems, Joab tries to put himself on the good side of David as much as he can. He tries hard to make himself useful to David. He always is ready to do the dirty work for David. But working to win favor from someone rather than truly trying to do the right thing often ruins the conscience of a person. If that happens again and again, the voice of our conscience becomes duller and duller. In the end, we will not be able to stand up when it really is important.

Sin also destroys the ability of other people to trust us. This principle (rule) shows up several times in the life of David. Because of his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah, David is unable to discipline (control) his sons. It is true that David has been forgiven. But his character is damaged. David's oldest son rapes his own half sister (2 Samuel 13), and his second son becomes a murderer (2 Samuel 13:23–39). But David stands by and does nothing. This is because he knows that he is guilty of almost the same sins.



Sin also destroys the ability of other people to trust us.

**Read 2 Samuel 11:15–25. What do these verses tell us about Joab?**

Joab has the same problem. Having the blood of Abner on his hands keeps Joab from saving the life of a good man. And so Joab adds to his list of crimes by becoming the assassin of Uriah. Notice in 2 Samuel 11:17 that Uriah is not the only victim. Joab sends some other men along on this foolish attack in order to make the whole thing seem more real to others. We know from the life of David that God is merciful (kind) and forgives us when we repent.<sup>3</sup> But the results of a ruined character and a lack of honesty are something that we will have to carry with us.



Having the blood of Abner on his hands makes Joab unable to help save a good man's life.

3. repent—to say you are sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**In the previous example, Joab obeyed David's orders. Now read 2 Samuel 18:5–15. What do the actions of Joab tell us about him? How might he have made an excuse for his actions?**

It is interesting to note that Joab follows David's orders even when they break God's commands. But he has no trouble disobeying orders when he has a chance to gain something. After all, if Absalom succeeded in his rebellion (war), Joab probably would have been killed (2 Samuel 19:5, 6). Joab seems to be thinking about no one but himself.

How often do we fall into the same trap?

## TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 16

### JOAB THE POLITICIAN (2 Samuel 14)

Second Samuel 13 tells the story of how Absalom murdered his half brother Amnon. After murdering Amnon, Absalom leaves the country and waits for the right time to return. David is in a very difficult situation. Amnon was guilty of the rape of his half sister Tamar, Absalom's sister. It seems that David is "paralyzed"<sup>4</sup> by the memory of his own sin. David is unable to punish Absalom. By taking things into his own hands, Absalom gets even with Amnon for the rape of his sister and restores the family honor. (Honor and shame were very important ideas in

the Jewish culture during the time of David.) Amnon, David's oldest son, is dead. This means Absalom is now in line to inherit the throne upon his father's death. David is torn between his grief for his dead son, his love for Absalom, and the understanding that all of this mess began with his own sin.



David's heart is torn between his grief for his dead son, his love for Absalom, and the guilt that everything is his fault.

And now Joab decides to get involved. But Joab cannot think of a direct way to discuss this matter with King David. So Joab uses a wise woman of Tekoah.

**Read 2 Samuel 14. What does the woman of Tekoah's story in this chapter tell us about God's love and forgiveness? At the same time, what does this chapter also tell us about Joab?**

The story that Joab puts into the mouth of the woman suggests that Joab knew about God's great love

4. paralyzed—unable to move or act.

toward the sinner. Joab's theology<sup>5</sup> was correct. But he knew it only in his head and not in his heart. His own life was still filled with revenge and a lack of forgiveness. Joab had become hardened to God's love in his own life. For him, everything, even religion, had a political goal that could improve his position in life. Joab understood that Absalom might become king. So, Joab wanted to win his favor. But it seems that Joab met his match in Absalom. Joab is not thanked for his help in bringing Absalom home. Absalom simply wants to use him. He quickly shows Joab that he can be as clever and dangerous as Joab can be. Absalom burns Joab's fields in order to force him to arrange a meeting with David (2 Samuel 14:28–33). Thanks to the actions of Joab, the kingdom of David was now headed for an awful rebellion that would lead to civil war.

**It is very easy to let personal ambition, pride, and desire influence<sup>6</sup> our actions. How can you learn to notice these things in yourself? How can you through God's grace<sup>7</sup> defeat them before they lead to your ruin?**

### WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 17

#### LIVING BY THE SWORD (1 Samuel 20)

**Read 2 Samuel 20. What part do we find Joab acting once again?**

5. theology—the study of, or knowledge about, God.

6. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

7. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

#### **How was Joab punished for his actions?**

Amasa and Joab were cousins (2 Samuel 17:25). Amasa was the commander of Absalom's forces. After Joab disobeys orders and kills Absalom (2 Samuel 18:5, 14), David wishes to rid himself of Joab. David promises Amasa the high command of his army (2 Samuel 19:13). After all, it was Joab's planning that started the rebellion. David gave this order not only because of his anger toward Joab for killing his son but also for a political reason. The appointment of Amasa would bring peace to the rest of the army who were loyal to Absalom.

#### **What does 2 Samuel 20:1, 2 tell us about the political situation in Israel?**

David ignores Joab and promises the command to Amasa. And now David sends Amasa to round up the troops in order to deal with the new rebellion. But Amasa is not able to do this in time. David then sends for Abishai, the brother of Joab, and depends on him rather than on Joab. When Joab and Amasa finally meet, Joab murders Amasa. The writer of this story shows that the attack on Amasa was completely unexpected (2 Samuel 20:8–10). Joab coldly murders his cousin, simply because Joab has been passed over and is no longer number one.

One of Joab's men tries to make Joab's actions seem right by saying that Joab has been helping King David. He makes the people believe that loyalty to David means loyalty to Joab even though David has separated himself from Joab. He makes them believe that being loyal to Joab means that he has the "right" to kill Amasa.

**Joab used lies to betray Amasa. We must be careful that we do not betray someone who trusts us by using a dirty trick. Notice how Matthew 7:12 can be used in this case.**

## THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 18

### JOAB'S LAST STAND (1 Kings 1:1)

The timing seems to be perfect. David is a very old man who cannot keep warm at night. A beautiful young woman is found who becomes King David's personal nurse. The writer of this story clearly shows that David does not have sexual relations with her (1 Kings 1:1–4). This shows how very weak he was. David does not "know" young Abishag, and he has no idea of what is happening in his kingdom. Adonijah, as the oldest remaining son, now decides that it is time to arrange for himself to become the new king.

**Read 1 Kings 1. What is Joab up to in this chapter? What more does it tell us about him?**

First Kings 1:7 shows us that Joab is one of the key players in this rebellion against David. As he has done several times before, Joab simply goes ahead and acts. He thinks that old King David will not have the power to do anything about it. But this time, David does act with the help of Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan. He prevents Joab and Adonijah from carrying out their plans. David stops them by publicly declaring Solomon as his co-king.

Joab seems to take God completely out of his life. While he may have a great deal of knowledge about God, God does not seem to have a true part in Joab's life. Joab thinks that he always can live as he pleases and escape punishment. He forgets that God is not David. God cannot be fooled. Punishment may not come right away. But it will come, if not in this life then in the final judgment. At the end of the day in this life, even a very long day, "a man reaps [gets] what he sows [does]" (Galatians 6:7, NIV).

Before final judgment, there always is mercy.<sup>8</sup> Joab gets a last chance. Solomon does not punish Joab for working with Adonijah. He even lets Joab keep his position. But Joab does not repent and makes no apology. He is involved in a second rebellion. When this fails, Joab finally understands how serious his situation is. He flees to the sanctuary (house of God) and takes hold of the horns of the altar.<sup>9</sup> But he forgets that the altar gives safety

8. mercy—kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly.

9. altar—a raised place on which sacrifices (offerings) and gifts are given to God.

only to those who have killed by accident (Exodus 21:14). Joab's past has finally caught up with him. The man who lived by the sword now dies by the sword (1 Kings 2:28–35).

**No matter how evil Joab was, everything he did could have been forgiven by the Lord if Joab had come to God in faith and repentance.<sup>10</sup> What about you and your faults? Forgiveness is there if you are willing to claim it for yourself.**

### FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 19

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “We should take hold of the truth and let it take hold of us. By doing so, we have the truth in us, and we are in the truth. Our lives and characters will show the fact that the truth is doing something good for us. It is making us more righteous [holy]. And it is giving us a fitness for the society of heavenly angels in the kingdom of heaven. The truth we hold is from heaven. When that religion finds a home in the heart, it begins its work of making a person pure. This is because the religion of Jesus Christ never makes a man rough or rude. It never makes him careless or hard-hearted. The truth, which comes from God, makes a man pure and noble. It makes him courteous, kind, affectionate, and pure. It takes away his hard heart, his selfishness, and his love of the world. And it makes him pure

from pride and ungodly ambition.”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 9, 1878.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How far should we go in showing our loyalty to our families, bosses, and country? What are the limits to these important relationships?
- ② Reread the Ellen G. White quote in today's lesson. What proof can you find in your own life that the truth has changed you? While it is important to focus on Christ and not on ourselves, we also need to be honest with ourselves about where we stand in our faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).
- ③ Many evil acts have been done over the years by people who said, “I was only following orders.” How are we, as Christians, to deal with situations in which we are ordered to do things we know are wrong? More important, how can we develop the kind of faith we need to stand strong? This may mean disobeying orders when it could be very costly to ourselves and to our loved ones.
- ④ Is it possible to forgive and forget when we have been hurt? What principles can we learn from our study this week about forgiveness, lack of forgiveness, and the results of not forgiving?

<sup>10</sup> repentance—the act of feeling sorry for your sins and turning away from sinning with the help of the Holy Spirit.