**Death of a War Hero**

Not long after becoming the third king of Israel, Solomon ordered the execution of the man who had commanded the Israelite army through most of the reign of Solomon’s father, David. Joab the son of Zeruiah was a mighty man of valor and an effective military leader. His mother Zeruiah was actually one of David’s sisters making him a member of the royal family. What in the world would prompt Solomon to have such a man killed? Was he, as some have suggested, simply consolidating his political power? An examination of the facts reveal that Solomon was executing a criminal, not murdering a political rival.

About thirty-five years earlier, the forces of David were in conflict with the forces of Saul, the first king of Israel. In one of the battles, Joab’s swift-running brother, Asahel was pursuing Saul’s commander, an honorable man named Abner. It is apparent in the Scriptures that Abner did all he could to dissuade Asahel from hand-to-hand combat, but the man was persistent. In an effort to protect himself without killing Asahel, Abner used the butt-end of his spear but the force was great enough to impale Asahel anyway.

Two years later, with Saul dead and David with God’s approval to lead, Abner took action to unite all of Israel under David’s leadership. In spite of the reconciliation, Joab took advantage of the opportunity to murder Abner in peacetime as vengeance for the death of his brother in wartime. Although David mourned the death of Abner and was angry with Joab for his murderous act, for some reason he did nothing.

Some years later, David replaced Joab as commander of the army with Amasa, the son of another of David’s sisters. Once again Joab was overtaken with murderous rage but, this time, he was motivated not by a need for revenge but by jealousy. Another man occupied the position that he felt was rightfully his. He approached Amasa as a friend, took him by the beard with his right hand as if to kiss him and stabbed him to death. Once again David was heartbroken and angry, yet he reinstated Joab as commander. It appears that Joab had gotten what he wanted.

Joab drove the final nail in his own coffin when David was old and was preparing for his son, Solomon to reign after his death. Adonijah, one of Solomon’s brothers decided he should be king instead of Solomon and Joab was part of the treasonous plot. When David was reminded of God’s choice of Solomon to reign, he thwarted Adonijah’s plan by having Solomon declared king immediately. At that point the conspirators knew that they were in trouble.

Why David left the punishment of Joab to his son Solomon is a question for the ages, but in his instructions to his son, he made it clear Joab’s execution was for murdering two men better than himself in peacetime for his own selfish reasons. Although Joab’s death sentence was greatly delayed, it was nonetheless righteous.

Joab accomplished a lot of great things in his life, but he allowed his corrupt character to define him. David made some serious mistakes in his life, but his willingness to sincerely repent made him a man after God’s own heart. There is no indication that Joab felt even a hint of remorse for his actions and his stubborn pride made all the difference.

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