

“SHALL THE SWORD DEVOUR FOREVER?”

David was now the official king of Israel. However, Abner, the captain of Saul’s forces, was not in submission to David. He assisted in the establishment of Saul’s son Ishbosheth as king over all but the house of Judah. “But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul’s host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; and made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. Ishbosheth Saul’s son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David” (II Sam. 2:8-10).

The division was strong between the two groups. Fighting would occur from time to time between David’s forces and the forces of Ishbosheth. II Samuel 2:12-17 records one of the battles. Joab, David’s captain, met Abner, the commander of Israel in Gibeon, “And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David” (II Sam. 2:17).

That day Abner fled from the field of battle. A man by the name of Asahel pursued after him. Three times Abner warned this young man to cease his pursuit. Three times Asahel defied the warning. Ultimately, Abner smote and killed the young Asahel: “...wherefore Abner with the end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib, that the spear came out behind him, and he fell down there, and died in the same place...” (II Sam. 2:23).

This death was grievous for Joab, for Asahel was his brother. Therefore, Joab and his brother Abishai pursued after Abner to destroy him (II Sam. 2:24). When they found Abner, his troops from Benjamin were gathered as one troop with their commander. It seems as if more bloodshed was inevitable.

It was at this point that Abner called out to Joab and asked him a sobering question: “Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their

brethren” (II Sam. 2:26)? Abner probably did not know the full extent of the casualties of war at that time. He did know that many had lost their lives. He also knew that both he and Joab could lose their lives. Too, this battle could cause the sword to continue to devour God’s people for many, many years. Thus, he asked the question: “Shall the sword devour for ever?”

In 1977, this writer graduated from high school. At the time, my interest in spiritual things increased greatly. Two brotherhood lectureships were conducted in my home- town. I sat at the feet of great men of God. These men stood very tall in my eyes. Their proclamation of the Gospel impressed and mesmerized this young Christian. It was a joy and a privilege to hear the lessons they presented and to gain so much knowledge and insight from these men who had studied the word of God for years and who had labored diligently in the kingdom of heaven.

Since that time, the sword has devoured many of these good brethren. Today, they are split into so many groups that it is impossible to number them all. It has gotten to the point that one cannot move from one camp to another without being inconsistent and without being alienated from good brethren with whom there is no disagreement. It seems like it is time for the army of God to stop and to give ear to the question asked by Abner. “Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?” A similar teaching was expressed by Paul in his brief epistle to the churches of Galatia. “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:14-15).

Joab, fortunately, gave heed to the inquiry of Abner. “And Joab said, As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother. So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more” (II Sam. 2:27-28). That day the battle ceased. The bloodshed ended. Innocent lives were spared. Would that many of the preachers and leaders within the church would have the disposition of Joab. Far too many

brethren are being alienated. Hatred and wrath fill the pages of sermons, journals and lectureship books. Brethren are growing weary of the fighting. The world is dying in a lost condition. “Shall the sword devour forever?”

This writer realizes that there are some issues that cannot be compromised. Against these, we must stand and fight the good fight of faith (I Tim. 6:12). He also knows that some of the battles that have divided sound brethren should not have reached their present magnitude. Pride, stubbornness, and hatred have filled some hearts. Good brethren have bitten and devoured one another. It has almost reached the point that a preacher can only serve within the local congregation. The moment he ventures into other pulpits, he will be marked and avoided by some. What a shame when brethren are so divided that innocent, sound brethren get caught in the ungodly crossfire of in-fighting. Paul’s words to the Corinthians are most applicable today. “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal” (I Cor. 3:3-4)?

“Then Abner called to Joab, and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren” (II Sam. 2:26)? This is a question that needs to be asked to conservative brethren within the churches of Christ today. Sadly, some will boldly answer: “The sword will never depart as far as we are concerned.” A bitter end and much destruction will be the result of such an attitude. This writer longs for the day when the Bible greets among us can stand arm in arm proclaiming the saving message to a lost world. It was that unity that encouraged this writer to become a preacher of the Gospel. When that unity exists once again, more youth will rise up to become soldiers of the cross of Christ.

Victor M. Eskew *from* **Seek The Old Paths**

BIRTHDAYS

Barbara James, 07-02; Cindy Bright, 07-03.

ILL

Sunday: Kathleen Camp, Gary Cole (PM), Millie Robertson (PM). **Wednesday:** Gary Cole. Kathleen Camp is recovering from her surgery at her apartment.

Those battling cancer: Jamal Abyad, Diane Cannon, David Cole, and Ledgia Campbell. Please remember these in your prayers, as well as: Meredith Greer, Millie Robertson, Allen Scott, and Ralph and Helen Franklin.

HOME BOUND

Bob Adams resides at Room D-4 of the Johnson County Nursing Center in Olathe. Marion Stone is at home. Please remember these in your prayers and visitation.

SYMPATHY

Our sympathy is extended to the family of Carol Tigner who passed away early Saturday, June 30 at Olathe Medical Center. Visitation will be at Desoto, KS on Tuesday evening.

OUT OF TOWN

Tim Dillingham was in Oklahoma City to attend an uncle's funeral. John and Barbara James were in Branson last week. The Scott's were in Creighton, MO last Sunday AM. The Nelson's are on vacation in the Caribbean. The Brown's are in Texas visiting relatives. The Thomas' and Marcum's are on vacation in Colorado.

MEN'S BUSINESS MEETING

Our monthly Men's Business Meeting will be held next Sunday, July 8 following our AM worship.

FAMILY BIBLE STUDIES

Remember our **Family Bible Studies**, "*Neighbors for Jesus*" **July 23-27**. Jim O'Connor will teach the adults.

ATTENDANCE

Sunday AM, 45; Sunday PM, 36; Wednesday PM, 29.

Those To Serve

July 1, 2007

BUILDING AND COMMUNION..... Thrasher

MORNING WORSHIP

ANNOUNCEMENTS..... George Thomas
SONG LEADER..... Trent Thrasher
OPENING PRAYER Gary Cole
PRESIDE..... John Cody Carter
ASSIST.....David Parish
ASSIST.....Allen Scott
CLOSING PRAYER..... John Dodson

EVENING WORSHIP

OPENING PRAYERJeremy Keifer
CLOSING PRAYER.....Jared Nelson
LORD'S SUPPER..... John Cody Carter

WEDNESDAY 4th

SONG LEADER..... Joel Nelson
INVITATIONJared Nelson

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

Sunday

Bible Study 9:30 AM
Morning Worship 10:30 AM
Evening Worship 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Ladies Bible Study 10:00 AM
Bible Study 7:00 PM

Preacher: Ted J. Thrasher

Phone: (913) 764-2325

E-mail: olathecoc@sbcglobal.net

CHURCH OF CHRIST

515 WEST PARK

P.O. BOX 482

OLATHE, KANSAS 66051

www.kc-cofc.org/olathe.htm

www.oabs.org/olathe.asp