

As we read these bloodstained accounts of murder and revenge, we may at first have trouble seeing the hand of God. But upon reflection a simple fact emerges: The death of Abner and Ish-bosheth, and the crippling of Mephibosheth some seven years earlier, clear the remaining obstacles in David's path to the throne of Israel. We know from James 1:13 that God tempts no one to sin. But we can see throughout Scripture that He can and does use the acts of wicked men (and fallen angels) to further His purposes. Joab, Rechab, and Baanah are His instruments.

But while David plainly benefits from the deaths of Abner and Ish-bosheth, he does not participate in them. He refused to let Abishai kill Saul, even though God had promised him the throne on which Saul sat. For seven years he has refrained from personally going to war against Ish-bosheth, even as the fulfillment of God's promise seems tantalizing near. And now David vehemently denies complicity in Abner's death and later avenges Ish-bosheth.

Dr. Rossier notes, "Evil will be judged, but it will have served to advance God's counsels ... and now, if God

uses these means do I have the right to use them? In no way, for God is sovereign and I am not. He may make use of evil, even of Satan himself, as He will; I am a creature, dependent upon Him, and I must obey." David's refusal to ally himself with evil to gain the promised throne does not show a lack of faith. It shows an abundance of obedience.

We may think, or even passionately believe, that God is working His will through a wicked person. We may possibly be right. But God *does not* and *will not* ask us to join Him in that work by supporting or even associating ourselves with wrongdoers. We are to obey God, to seek good and turn from evil. 2 Timothy 3:5 has a simple instruction in regard to the proud and ugody of this age: Avoid such people. Even when God Himself is using them.

Notes

4:3 Beeroth was near Gibeon. Its inhabitants may have fled to Gittaim at the time Saul was killing the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21). The main point is that the brothers were Benjaminites like Saul.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. Why is it important for David to disavow the murder of Abner?
2. Does Joab suffer any consequences for killing Abner?
3. Read 1 Kings 2:5. What makes Joab's act especially blameworthy?

4. Why is Ish-bosheth safe from David?
5. Who is the nurse fleeing from when she accidentally drops little Mephibosheth? Is her panic justified?
6. What mistake do Rechab and Baanah make regarding David? How do some make a similar mistake with Christ?
7. Who else besides Rechab and Baanah has their hands cut off as punishment? Is the offense similar to this one?