

The Doctrine of Joab

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Preface: Joab, the nephew of David, is one of the most fascinating persons in the Bible, although we do not tend to associate him with the great names of Scripture. At his greatest, he was commander-in-chief of David's army, responsible, in part, for the *establishment, unification and consolidation of David's kingdom*.¹ As a diplomat, he worked out some personal difficulties between David and his son Absalom. As a war hero, he defeated the Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites and the Edomites. However, David dragged Joab into the middle of his two great sins and Joab himself twice got involved in high-level political intrigue, which eventually led to his execution by Solomon.

- David has 3 nephews by his sister Zeruah: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. 2Sam. 2:18 1Chron. 2:16
- His name means *whose Father is Jehovah* or *Jehovah is [my] Father*.
- Although Joab's mother is mentioned on many occasions, we do not know the name of his father. However, his father's tomb is mentioned in 2Sam. 2:32, which suggests that his father died early (although one can purchase a tomb without actually using it). Josephus² tells us his name is Suri of Bethlehem, and that he died when his boys were quite young.
- Joab was in charge of David's army. 2Sam. 8:16 1Chron. 18:15a 27:34
- The first time we meet Joab, it is incidentally. David was going to go down into the camp of Saul and he asked for a volunteer to join him. The person who joined him was Abishai, Joab's brother. This was when King Saul was chasing after David, desiring to kill him, and David was on the run. At this point in time, David knew where Saul and his camp were, but King Saul did not realize where David was. 1Sam. 26:6
- After Saul died, David became king over Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Saul's son, Ishbosheth, became king over Israel (the Northern Kingdom). A civil war ensued, and Ishbosheth's top general, Abner, met David's top general, Joab; along with their respective armies. Joab is victorious over Abner, so Abner retreats. Joab's brother, Asahel, gives chase, and is killed in the pursuit. Abner, from a distance, managed to sort out a temporary peace with Joab. 2Sam. 2:12-32
- Joab made several mistakes in this passage in dealing with Abner.
 - First, whatever the older soldier, Abner, suggested, Joab agreed to. He should have realized that Abner made suggestions which favored himself and his army.
 - Joab treated the death of his brother on the battlefield as extraordinary, more so than the deaths of his other men. Even though this is normal human nature, Joab made several decisions based upon the death of his brother, which were not necessarily the same decisions that he would have made had others of his army fallen.

¹ From <http://www.answers.com/topic/joab> accessed April 26, 2009.

² Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* - Book VII Chapter 1.3

- c. Although he clearly defeated Abner in battle, Joab did not exploit this victory.
8. Abner and Ishbosheth had a falling out, and Abner transferred his loyalty to David, with the intention of helping David rule over all Israel (the north and the south). To verify that Abner was really acting in David's best interest, David had Abner to fetch David's first wife, Michal, whom her father Saul took back from David. Abner did this, and did some campaigning for David on the way. This clinched the alliance between David and Abner. Without David's knowledge, Joab arranged a meeting with Abner and killed him at this meeting. 2Sam. 3
9. In 2Sam. 3, we learn that Joab was a hothead and David had a very difficult time reeling him in. Although Joab being upset about the death of his brother in combat by the hand of Abner was understandable, David still needed an objective general in charge of his troops. David should have acted and at least temporarily removed Joab from his position as commander-in-chief, but he did not. 2Sam. 3:22–25
10. Joab was able to catch Abner off-guard at this time, so it may be worthwhile seeing how this happened:

A reasonable question to pose at this time is, *why did Abner not realize what Joab was doing? Why was he at least not suspicious, having his guard up?*

How is it that Joab is able to Catch Abner Off-Guard?

1. Abner expects to go back and to iron out a detail or two with David. His mind did not have time to process the idea that he was facing any sort of a trap (with his small force of 20 men, David could have killed Abner at any time, so Abner has no reason to be suspicious of a message from David).
2. Abner had spent a great deal of time at war; he had spent a great deal of time organizing Israel behind David; he had just made a long trip to bring Michal to David, which culminated with a long feast; and he was on the go again, to complete the details for bringing all Israel under David. He was, no doubt, exhausted after all this (bear in mind that Abner is an old man—at least 60 and possibly 70).
3. Abner's keen instincts are honed for war; he has just feasted, possibly drunk a bit, and his instincts are not as keen as they normally are.
4. Joab meets Abner in a very public place. Even though Abner is called aside privately by Joab, Joab could have said, "David would like us to work together" or "We should clear the air, as we are working together" or "We should call a personal truce, as we are now on the same side" or words to that effect. The public place, seeing Joab suddenly, but hearing the few words from Joab put Abner at ease. No doubt, he is thinking, "Joab is not going to kill me here, in a public place, with David not but a few hundred yards away."
5. No doubt, one of the topics discussed by David and Abner during the feast was Joab; David probably gave Abner assurances, like, "I'll take care of Joab. He is my nephew after all." The problem is, as we have observed, David did not take care of his nephew (recall that I presented several theories concerning what David did or did not say to Joab when Joab confronted him).

These are all theories, of course, simply offered to make the fact of Abner relaxing his guard here reasonable.

This was taken from the [exegesis of 2Sam. 3](#).

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6. Joab killed Abner, in part, to avenge the death of his brother.

In reading this, you must bear several things in mind. Therefore, here is a list as to why...

Joab is Wrong

1. Joab was filled with mental attitude sins. He wanted revenge, he hated Abner, he was bitter toward Abner. No matter what the circumstances, acting out of rage or acting with mental attitude sins as being your motivation will result in sin. You cannot do anything in a wrong way and for the result to be good.
2. David was the recognized authority at this time. David could have, as the judge of the land, executed

Joab is Wrong

- Abner. David had most of the facts, and they were from the perspective of Joab and his brother; therefore, any decision that David made with regard to Abner would be naturally weighed in favor of Joab's desire. However, David chose not to execute Abner or to even suggest such a thing. This indicates that, despite Joab's description of what happened,* David did not seek the death of Abner.
3. It was also probably clear to David that Abner could have killed his other two nephews as they came up over the hill and stood before Abner and a small army of Benjamites (2Sam. 2:24–25). This indicates to David that Abner did not kill Asahel for sport or to make a point, but out of necessity.
 4. David, as the law of the land, has the authority to excuse Abner for this incident, and apparently, this is what David did. When Joab chose to kill Abner, he was taking the law into his own hands.
 5. David is the authority in Judah; therefore, Joab is under his authority. There was obviously a truce between David and Abner and Joab should have observed this truce.
 6. Although killing in war is allowed, murder apart from war is not. Joab and Abner, despite Joab's hatred for Abner, are allies now. Joab does not get to treat Abner as an enemy combatant.
 7. Joab obviously acted on his own. He sent messengers to bring Abner back to Hebron, and David was unaware of this; he privately pulls Abner aside as he is about to enter into Hebron. All of this speaks of duplicity and secrecy. Joab is acting on his own as judge, jury and executioner, and he has no such authority.
 8. We have to distinguish when killing is allowed and when it is not. Had Joab chose to continue the fight against Abner and had Joab killed Abner when they first met, that would have been legitimate. David might still mourn, but this would have been a legitimate killing. However, since Abner defected to David's side, Joab no longer has the authority to kill Abner.
 9. The Bible clearly allows for killing in war and as capital punishment; and the Bible just as clearly forbids murder outside of these two situations. Joab is not at war with Abner, nor has Abner been tried for and convicted of a capital offense; for this reason, Joab has murdered Abner, and should actually be tried and executed himself.
 10. Finally, even Scripture condemns Joab; in 1Kings 2:5, David, in his last instructions to his son Solomon, says that Joab should pay for what he has done, and that Solomon needs to take care of that.
 11. Let me come to a close, and quote two Scriptures: Deut. 27:24: [Cursed is the one who kills his neighbor in secret](#). Psalm 55:20–21: [He acts violently against those at peace with him; he violates his covenant. His buttery words are smooth, but war is in his heart. His words are softer than oil, but they are drawn swords](#). It sounds just as if David is thinking about Joab as he pens these few words.
 12. David will curse Joab and his house in v. 29 for this act, indicating that what Joab does is reprehensible.

No matter what you do, when you act on mental attitude sins, your action will be wrong. Now, I want you to keep your eye on Joab over the next several chapters, and see if it is right for David to give Joab a pass here.

Now, you may think, *you're a lot harder on Joab than on Abner*. Both of these men have serious failings; however, being as close to David as Joab is, Joab should know better.

* I am assuming that Joab told David exactly what happened when his brother Asahel was killed by Abner on the battlefield (see 2Sam. 2:19–23).

This was taken from the [exegesis of 2Sam. 3](#).

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13. David pronounces a curse on Joab's father's house because Joab killed Abner. 2Sam. 3:29
14. Given the circumstances, David probably should have prosecuted his nephew Joab and then executed him. Unfortunately, this was too hard for David to do (2Sam. 3:39). Although Joab will be a successful and mostly loyal general in the future, he will kill another of David's generals and then back one of David's sons as king of Israel even before David dies.

15. When David took Jerusalem, Joab volunteered to lead his men against them, thus making him commander-in-chief of David's army. 2Sam. 8:16 1Chron. 11:4–6
16. Whereas, Joab was commander-in-chief of David's army; his brother Abishai was either the leader of David's elite force or chief among them. As commander-in-chief of the army, Joab would not be in such a list any more than David would be. 1Chron. 11:20–21
17. Joab apparently had skills as a contractor, as he either did many of the repairs needed for Jerusalem or he supervised these many repairs. 1Chron. 11:7–8
18. Joab helped David crush the Philistines and subdue several of the neighboring nations, including the Aramæans, Moabites Edomites (2Sam 5:17-25 8:1 10:6-19 1Kings 11:23-24 1Chron. 14:10-16 18:1-8).³
19. Joab's loyalty to David was exemplary, at times verging on self-effacement. When, after fierce battles with the Ammonites and their allies, he was about to capture Rabbah, he asked David to come and lead the siege so as to receive credit for the conquest (2Sam 12:27-28).⁴
20. As the head of David's army, Joab originally had an armor bearer (Nahari the Beerothite); and he had ten men who carried his equipment. 2Sam. 18:15 23:37
21. He possessed a house in Jerusalem and a house in the country, not far from Jerusalem, with barley fields. 2Sam. 14:30 1Kings 2:34
22. When the king of the Ammonites died, David sent men to the king's son, Hanun, to express his sympathy. However, Hanun's advisors turned him against David, and the ambassadors from David were humiliated, but sent back alive. He knew that this was a provocative action and David sent Joab to battle the Ammonites. Hanun allied himself with the Syrians, so that when Joab marched against Hanun, the Syrian army closed in behind him. Joab was able to put his best men against the Syrians and they retreated. The end result of Joab fighting the Ammonites is not spoken of in this incident (2Sam. 10); but 2Sam. 8:11–12 and 12:26–27 seem to indicate that David defeated the Ammonites (by means of Joab, of course). Also, 1Chron. 19:6–15, a parallel account, tell us that when the Syrians retreated, then the Ammonites retreated.
 - 1) When Joab set his brother Abishai against the Ammonites, Joab said, "If the Syrians are too strong for me, then you shall help me. But if the sons of Ammon are too strong for you, then I will come and help you. Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people and for the cities of our God. And may Jehovah do that which seems good to Him." (2Sam. 10:11–12).
 - 2) Fausset⁵ speaks of bad men making Godly oaths. Quite obviously, I have been critical in this doctrine of Joab, noting his mistakes and missteps. However, this does not make Joab an unbeliever nor does it mean that Joab is a terribly carnal believer.
 - 3) This oath suggests that Joab believed in Jesus Christ, the God of Israel, and that he understood that God had given Israel this land.
 - 4) As for putting Joab at the bottom of some scale of believers, bear in mind that he was the head of David's army for about 40 years, he had 10 men who carried his equipment, and he had a house out in the country. This suggests to me that, despite many of the mistakes that he made (and some could easily be justified), God still blessed Joab. Even though he has executed at the end of his life, God gave him a fairly long and successful life.
23. During a war with the Moabites, Joab saw to it that every male was slain. However, one young male, Hadad, escaped, and God used him against Solomon, because of Solomon's apostasy. When he heard that both David and Joab were dead, he moved north to Syria and ruled there, and was a thorn in Solomon's side. It is important to note that, David's success as a king and Joab's success as a general kept Hadad from returning to Moab. 1Kings 11:11–25
24. Joab's army led a successful assault against the Edomites, killing 12,000 of them in the Valley of Salt. Psalm 60 inscription
25. It should be added that, once David became king, there are several wars mentioned. Even though Joab's name is not mentioned in connection with each and every war, he would have been the commanding general in almost every case.

³ Point taken from <http://www.answers.com/topic/joab> accessed April 26, 2009.

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⁵ Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*; from e-Sword, topic: Joab.

26. David got Joab tangled up in his affair with Bathsheba. David sent Joab out to war against the Ammonites, but remained at home. He had an affair with Bathsheba, and it turned out that her husband, Uriah the Hittite, was fighting on the front lines in David's army. When it turned out that Bathsheba was pregnant, David had Joab fetch Uriah and David attempted to get Uriah to go home and to sleep with his wife. Joab was in the middle of this, since he was asked to bring Uriah off the frontlines to chat with David. No doubt, Joab had an inkling as to what was going on (*why would his Uncle David pull some random grunt off the field?*). Although, it does not appear that Uriah knew what was going on; it is very likely that Joab figured it all out when David sent a letter, by the hand of Uriah himself, for Joab to put Uriah out where the fighting was most intense, so that Uriah would die in battle. Joab sent a messenger back to David, after Uriah died in battle, to inform him of this loss. No doubt, this considerably changed Joab's adoration for his uncle. 2Sam. 11
- 1) As a post script, once Joab had defeated the city of Rabbah of the Ammonites, then David joined him for the plundering of the city and the taking of slaves. This actually gave great glory to David, even though he did not fight in this war (insofar as we know). 1Chron. 20:1–3
 - 2) Also, Fausset⁶ speaks quite negatively of Joab for his participation in killing Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba. Joab was under David's authority. David did not tell Joab to personally kill Uriah nor did he necessarily risk Uriah's life for no reason. Uriah was put at the front of the battle—and someone has to be there—and he died defending his country. Quite obviously, David was wrong to tell Joab to do this and, in particular, to pull back when the battle got fierce. David received tremendous discipline for his hand in all of this; there is no indication that Joab did. Although he followed orders which resulted in the death of Uriah, someone would have died out there on the battlefield. His obedience to David's authority in this situation was not wrong and is never presented as such in the Bible. Any military man with authority in war is going to send some men out to battle where he knows some of them will die. We are simply looking at a related action (the positioning of Uriah on the battlefield so that he dies there) and the different motivations of David and Joab. David's motivation was wrong and Joab's was right.
27. Since David had so many sons and daughters, there ended up being conflicts between them. One conflict involved rape and then Absalom, David's son, killed his half-brother for the rape. Joab acted as a go-between for David and Absalom, finally bringing them together. 2Sam. 13–14
28. This reconciliation involved hiring a woman from Tekoa to go to David with a phoney, trumped up story, in order for David to forgive Absalom for killing his half-brother. 2Sam. 14:1–23
29. Because David refused to see him, Absalom set fire to Joab's field to get his attention, and was finally brought into the presence of King David for a more full reconciliation. 2Sam. 14:25–33
30. Some years later, Absalom rebelled against David (as a part of David's discipline). What appears to be the case is, when Absalom rebelled against David, much of David's army remained intact as Absalom's army. However, Absalom replaced Joab with Amasa, Joab's cousin (2Sam. 17:25). Joab is clearly with David's army in 2Sam. 18:1, although we are not given any details as to what happened; i.e., did Joab simply desert Absalom for this snub and go with David? Why did Joab appear to be loyal to Absalom in the first place? This snub could have been the deciding factor in Joab personally killing Absalom.
31. When Absalom rebelled against David, Joab defeated his army and killed Absalom. David specifically wanted Absalom's life spared, but Joab recognized that Absalom would be trouble for David for the rest of his life. Only Joab had the nerve to take Absalom's life. Again, the snub of Absalom could have played a part in this decision as well. 2Sam. 18
32. David was quite upset about this, and Joab had to speak to him rather harshly to make him realize that his own army supported him and should receive appreciation for what they did. David's army could potentially desert him if he showed no appreciation or gratitude for what was done. 2Sam. 19:1–7
33. At David's personal request, after this rebellion, Amasa not only returned to David, but he was put over Joab. 2Sam. 19:8–22
34. Joab and Abishai put down another rebellion led by Sheba ben Bicri against David. However, David had first sent Amasa to gather the troops, and, when he took too long, then David sent Joab and Abishai. Joab,

⁶ Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*; from e-Sword, topic: Joab.

- apparently did not like playing 2nd fiddle to Amasa, and he killed him. Quite obviously, you did not want to be one of Joab's enemies or rivals.⁷ 2Sam. 20
35. Joab is mentioned in the deeds done by David's mightiest men in 2Sam. 23:18
 36. David had Joab spearhead the census, which Satan motivated David to take. Joab advised against this census, but David overruled him and Joab followed orders. 2Sam. 24:1–9 1Chron. 21:1–6 However, this census was never completed, as God put a stop to it. 1Chron. 27:24 Like the David's sin with Bathsheba, David was disciplined, but Joab was not. 2Sam. 24:13–19
 37. In his old age, David became weak, and his son after Absalom, Adonijah, secured the help of Joab, along with the support of Abiathar the priest, among others, to boost him into power. In fact, while David was still alive, Adonijah set up a government in his stead—again, his most prominent supporters included Joab (in all fairness, Joab did not necessarily know that David had already picked Solomon as Israel's next king). David, in hearing about all of this, made Solomon king. 1Kings 1:7, 16–19, 38–52 Clearly, Joab should have gone to David and backed whomever David said would be the next king.
 38. While David is in dying grace, he tells Solomon that Joab killed Abner and Amasa, although there should have been peace between them. David was unable to deal with this, but he puts this situation into Solomon's hands. Solomon executes Joab by the hand of Benaiah after Joab fled to the altar at Gibeon. He was buried at his own house in the wilderness. Benaiah took Joab's place as general over the Israeli army. 1Kings 2:1–12, 28–35
 39. Joab is mentioned among several others who dedicated some of his wealth (probably that taken in battle) to the Lord. 1Chron. 26:20–28
 40. Joab was nearly a great man. A few passages seem to indicate that he was a believer in the God of Israel, Jesus Christ. He had great military prowess and was probably the greatest military general during the time of David, apart from David and Jonathan. He was also authority-orientated and never tried to usurp David's power, or to take power when David was dying. However, Joab made a number of bad decisions throughout his life—he murdered Abner and Amasa, and it appears as though he did this in part to preserve his own position. Although he was generally loyal to David, he seemed to twice jockey to retain his position of power with Absalom and Adonijah, which would have involved his turning against David's authority. My opinion was, he did not know a lot of doctrine (although it is hard in David's administration to avoid it altogether), so that he either had areas where he lacked the spiritual information to make good decisions, or he simply went against what he knew was right to do.

Joab, the nephew of David, is one of the most fascinating persons in the Bible, although we do not tend to associate him with the great names of Scripture. At his greatest, he was commander-in-chief of David's army. As a diplomat, he worked out some personal difficulties between David and his son Absalom. As a war hero, he defeated the Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites and the Edomites. However, David dragged Joab into the middle of his two great sins and Joab himself twice got involved in high-level political intrigue, which eventually led to his execution by Solomon.

A Condensed View of Joab

1. David has 3 nephews by his sister Zeruiah: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. 2Sam. 2:18 1Chron. 2:16
2. Joab was in charge of David's army, having led a successful campaign against the Jebusites. 2Sam. 8:16 2Sam. 8:16 1Chron. 11:4–6 18:15a 27:34
3. After Saul died, David became king over Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and Saul's son, Ishbosheth, became king over Israel (the Northern Kingdom). A civil war ensued, and Ishbosheth's top general, Abner, met David's top general, Joab; along with their respective armies. Joab is victorious over Abner, so Abner retreats. Joab's brother, Asahel, gives chase, and is killed in the pursuit. Abner, from a distance, managed to sort out a temporary peace with Joab. 2Sam. 2:12–32
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A Condensed View of Joab

- executed Joab for this crime, he did not, cursing his father's house instead. This was a mistake on David's part, and Joab would go on to murder another man and to rebel against David when David gets becomes very old. 2Sam. 3
5. Joab is named specifically when Israel fought against Syria and the Ammonites (2Sam. 8:11–12 10 12:26–27 1Chron. 19:6–15); the Moabites (1Kings 11:11–25) and the Edomites (Psalm 60 inscription). However, we may assume that Joab would have led the armies of Israel against all the enemies of David as David's commander-in-chief.
 6. David got Joab tangled up in both of his major sins.
 - a. Joab was at war with the Ammonites when David had an affair with Bathsheba. David eventually ordered Joab to put Bathsheba's husband on the frontlines to die in battle. 2Sam. 11
 - b. David had Joab spearhead the census, which Satan motivated David to take. Joab advised against this census, but David overruled him and Joab followed orders. 2Sam. 24:1–9 1Chron. 21:1–6 However, this census was never completed, as God put a stop to it. 1Chron. 27:24
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 11. While David is in dying grace, he tells Solomon that Joab killed Abner and Amasa, although there should have been peace between them. David was unable to deal with this, but he puts this situation into Solomon's hands. Solomon had Joab executed after Joab fled to the altar at Gibeon. 1Kings 2:1–12, 28–35
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The complete Doctrine of Joab may be found at <http://kukis.org/Doctrines/Joab.htm>

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