

JOAB AND THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR

“And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar” (1 Ki. 2:28 KJV).

Joab, like most of us, was a mixture of good and bad. He had moments of honor, bravery and courage, and also times of cruelty and selfishness. Here is a brief overview of his life.

- He was the son of Zeruah, David’s sister, and became the captain of the host under David (2 Sam. 19:13). We first meet him at Gibeon when there was a struggle to the death between 12 men from the Northern Kingdom under Abner, and 12 men from the Southern Kingdom under Joab. Joab’s army was victorious, many died, and in the aftermath Abner killed Asahel the brother of Joab (2 Sam. 2:8 - 32).
- Abner defected from King Ish-Bosheth and came to David in Hebron with plans to unite all 12 tribes under David. Joab was not present at the time. When Joab returned he ascribed bad motives to Abner and sent word for him to return. Then Joab murdered the unsuspecting Abner in cold blood. Fortunately David was innocent in this cruel and deceptive murder.
- When Hanun became king of the Ammonites he mistreated representatives from David’s Kingdom. In the war that followed Joab led the armies of David to victory (2 Sam. 10:7).
- 2 Sam. 11 records a resumption of the war with the Ammonites and it was then that David committed adultery with Bathsheba. When David realized that Bathsheba was pregnant he plotted the murder of her husband and Joab cooperated in the crime. Sadly, not only was her husband killed, but also other brave men from David’s army died as well.
- Next Joab worked behind the scenes to heal a rift between David and his son Absalom.
- Then Absalom revolted against his father and David fled for his life. In the battle that followed, Joab led one third of David’s army and the forces of Absalom were defeated.
- In spite of David’s plea to deal kindly with Absalom, Joab killed him (2 Sam. 18:14).
- David mourned so much for Absalom, however, that his victorious army was ashamed. Joab rebuked the king and then David sat in the gate and encouraged the people (2 Sam. 19:5- 8).
- David made his nephew Amasa the captain of his army in place of Joab (2 Sam. 19:13).
- Joab later treacherously murdered Amasa at Gibeon while pretending to give him a kiss (2 Sam. 20:9, 10). Apparently the blood of Amasa spurted out on Joab’s girdle, loins, and shoes (1 Ki. 2:5). Later Joab was right about not numbering Israel (2 Sam. 24:3)
- Adonijah, David’s son, sought to usurp the throne of his father and Joab conspired with him.
- Solomon, however, was crowned king and David told him to not let Joab’s gray head go down to the grave in peace. When Joab heard this he fled to the tabernacle and grabbed hold of the horns of the altar (1Ki. 2:28).
- Solomon sent Benaiah to kill him, but Joab refused to leave the altar. Benaiah brought this word back to Solomon and he gave instructions to kill him there, which he did.
- Solomon justified his execution by saying that Joab had killed two men more righteous and better than he was (1 Ki. 2:32).

Again, Joab was someone to whom we can all relate. Yes! He sinned but all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Joab, however, did at least set a good example in the way he died. He died holding on to the horns of the altar. He wouldn’t let go of his only hope for forgiveness (Lev. 4:30, 31). While the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, the blood of Jesus could. Remember! Jesus died for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15). Therefore, Joab died holding on to the only hope he had for the forgiveness of his sins. Let us also hold fast our confidence unto the very end (Heb. 3:6).