Who was Abner in the Bible?

Abner is a prominent figure in 1 and 2 Samuel. Abner was, in fact, both the cousin of Israel's first king, Saul, and the commander of Saul's army (1 Samuel 14:50). He was respected by the king and was granted a place next to Saul at meals (1 Samuel 20:25).

Throughout Saul's reign, the people of Israel were embroiled in a war with the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:52). In one memorable battle, the Philistines sent forth a giant champion named Goliath, who taunted God's people and remained unchallenged for 40 days due to his great height and strength. However, a young man named David accepted Goliath's challenge and, through God's power, defeated the giant with only a sling and a stone. Abner was at King Saul's side when Goliath fell, and Saul asked him who David's father was. Abner did not know, since David was not a part of his army. So Abner brought young David, who was still holding Goliath's head, before the king (1 Samuel 17:55-58).

Eventually, Saul became bitterly jealous of David. Not only was David well-loved, but he had been anointed by the prophet Samuel as the next king. This jealousy would enflame Saul to war against David and his followers, and, in spite of the ongoing war with the Philistines, Saul pursued David with the intention of killing him. One night, David went to the place where Saul's army was camped and sneaked down to where Saul and Abner were sleeping. Rather than killing God's chosen king, David stole a spear and water jug from beside Saul's head. David then woke the army and taunted Abner for failing to guard the king.

Some time later, Saul and three of his sons were killed in a battle with the Philistines, and David took the throne of Judah. But, instead of swearing fealty to God's anointed, Abner took Saul's son Ish-Bosheth across the Jordan River and set him up

as king. When Abner returned, he was forced to flee from the commander of David's army, Joab, after a fierce battle at Gibeon (2 Samuel 2). Abner continued to support Ish-Bosheth as king until Ish-Bosheth berated Abner, accusing him of treachery due to the fact that Abner had slept with Saul's concubine Rizpah. Incensed that his loyalty was being questioned, Abner defected to David's side and vowed to bring all of Israel under David's control (2 Samuel 3:8-12).

When Joab found out that David had made an agreement with Abner, he was angry. Joab felt that David should not have let Abner go. Joab believed that Abner was a spy whose intention was to report David's movements to Ish-Bosheth (2 Samuel 3:24-25). But Joab had another reason for hating Abner: the former commander of Saul's army had killed Joab's brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon (verse 30). Joab met Abner in Hebron and pulled him aside under the pretext of a private conversation; when in private, Joab stabbed Abner in the stomach, killing him (verse 27).

David was grieved by Abner's death and called down a curse on Joab's house for the murder (2 Samuel 3:28-29). David mourned Abner publicly, fasting all day, writing a dirge in Abner's honor, and lauding him as a great military leader (verses 31-37). Speaking of Abner, David said, "A commander and a great man has fallen in Israel this day" (verse 38).