



# FEED MY SHEEP

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Issue #105

August 2007

## Absalom's Big Hang-up

David has been forced to flee the palace and Jerusalem. His son, Absalom, has entered the city with his armies. He took his father's ten concubines and forcibly committed abominations upon them in the sight of all the people. Then Absalom turned his attention to preparing his volunteer and draftee army for the inevitable battle with David and his loyalist troops.

**2 Samuel 17:25** And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother.

If you keep the back issues of FMS, you can refer to the chart of David's family tree which was page 2 of FMS #93, August 2006. Otherwise, you can find it archived on our website (see masthead). David had a wife named Abigail, but this is another Abigail here. She is quite likely a *half-sister* to David. The text says she was sister to Zeruiah. It does not say she was sister to David. Therefore, we conclude that this Abigail and Zeruiah were daughters of David's mother, but fathered by the man named Nahash, not by Jesse.

Note that it says that Ithra had "gone into" Abigail. This is another way of saying that he seduced her and it means that Amasa was therefore born out of wedlock. Legitimate or not, Amasa is then David's nephew and first cousin to Joab and Abishai. Just as important, though, is the fact that Amasa is the first cousin of Absalom.

Let us look now at 1 Chronicles 2, and analyze this Ithra fellow further, because normally one does not

find individual men identified as "an Israelite." Such is usually assumed to be the case.

**1 Chronicles 2:13** And Jesse begat his first-born Eliab, and Abinadab the second, and Shimma the third,

**14** Nethaneel the fourth, Raddai the fifth,

**15** Ozem the sixth, David the seventh:

**16** Whose sisters were Zeruiah, and Abigail. And the sons of Zeruiah; Abishai, and Joab, and Asahel, three.

**17** And Abigail bare Amasa: and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmeelite.

Jether is another form of Ithra. But here it identifies him as an Ishmaelite (progenitor of the modern Arab peoples). That would make more sense in 2 Samuel 17, that it should have been written—and no doubt was in the original—as Ithra the Ishmaelite.

Since Absalom followed Hushai's advice and gathered a huge force from all the tribes of Israel, it must have taken some several days, if not weeks, to *amass* that army with General Amasa at its head—oops, I'm sorry....right behind wannabe king Absalom, of course.

**2 Samuel 17:26** So Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead.

Gilead is on the east side of the Jordan.

**2 Samuel 17:27** And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon,

and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim,

**28 Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse,**

**29 And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.**

Here is the providence of God at work, preserving David and all his company, in their forced flight into the wilderness. It is certainly noteworthy that once again—just as he had found succor from king Achish of the Philistines during his flight from King Saul, so now David finds succor from another stranger in his flight from Ab-saul-om.

Here the stranger is none other than an Ammonite...one of those peoples with whom Israel was forbidden to intermarry. Recall from our tape/CD lecture, I think it was the one entitled *The Wars of David*, [CD/tape # 419, 420: \$10 ppd.] that after Nahash, the king of the Ammonites died, that David sent ambassadors to pay their respects, but Nahash's son, Hanun, cut off half the beards of the ambassadors and cut off their garments at the waist so that they were left to walk in public with their buttocks exposed. (I wonder if there is any—perhaps an inverse—correlation in that today some young men seem intent upon wearing their baggy blue jeans so that half their buttocks is exposed. Shameful, but a self-inflicted shame, in my view.)

After Joab conquered the Ammonites, it is probable David appointed Hanun's brother, Shobi, as the new king and was generous to Shobi in granting him a great measure of self-government as long as they paid their tribute to David and Israel. Thus, it is likely that Shobi is now remembering this kindness and gladly lending assistance to David in his hour of need. We need to remember these things as we have relationships with those not of our kind. Let David in his righteous acts be our guide and model.

**2 Samuel 18:1 And David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them.**

Thousands? Did you imagine that such a huge entourage followed David as he fled Jerusalem? Plus,

remember, they had their families with them as well. I think it is also possible that some of the people in the area, both of the Israelites and perhaps even Shobi lent David some of his Ammonite troops to help quell the rebellion of Absalom.

Shobi probably knew Absalom, at least by reputation, and Shobi recognized that he and his Ammonites were much better off with David on the throne than with Absalom. Regardless of the composition of the army, in typical Hebrew military strategy, it says David separated the army into three parts.

**2 And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also.**

The Holy Writ records another man named Ittai (2 Samuel 23:29) who was from Gibeah and a Benjamite. This is not the same man. This one is a Gittite, i.e., from Gath. Thus, here again is an example of a non-Israelite, a military leader so loyal to David that David has him command one-third of the army. One would have to surmise that this Philistine of Gath surely worshiped the God of Israel as well. So David is ready to lead the troops out to battle.

**3 But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city.**

**4 And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.**

**5 And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom.**

**6 So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim;**

**7 Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men.**

I cannot here convey how deeply I was moved when many years ago I visited two of the most bloody battlefields of our own Civil War—Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and Antietam/Sharpsburg, Maryland.

While in those museums, just looking at the scale models of the terrain: where the troops concentrations were, how they moved against each other, how they slaughtered each other, and then driving through the actual battlefield and reading the various plaques; it was an intensely emotional experience.

As you first see the overview in the scale model and then you stop at the actual locations, you can see the battle, playing like a movie in your mind. It was at Antietam/Sharpsburg where on September 17, 1862 that 87,000 Union troops confronted not more than 40,000 Confederates under General Robert E. Lee. There were 21,000 killed in one day.

Now here in our Bible text, we look at one of our people's ancient civil wars where David's troops routed Absalom's armies with almost the same number killed in one day. What great tragedy, what great folly! ...all brought about because of the pride of one man who thought he could rule better than his father!

**8 For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.**

What that means is that the terrain was so rugged and so full of ravines and craggy precipices and marshes that the fighting was made all the more difficult. The advantage was sure to go to David's veterans as opposed to Absalom's draftees.

The land was also heavily wooded with huge oak and terebinth trees. Many thick branches remained low on the trunks of the trees. This led to great confusion among the draftees and many were probably going in circles and eventually killed by David's vets.

Thus when David's skilled troops began to cut down Amasa's inexperienced draftees rather early in the battle, it is likely that they and their cowardly king Absalom panicked and decided to beat a quick retreat to the Jordan. But just as his troops had been, so Absalom's retreat had been cut off.

**9 And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule**

**went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away.**

Many of you have probably seen the children's picture bibles where it shows Absalom hanging there with his long hair having been snarled in the tree. But chances are his hair was all tucked inside a helmet. I believe his head was literally caught in the fork of a thick branch and as he reached his arms up to try to free himself, the mule moved out from under him.

**10 And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak.**

**11 And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten *shekels* of silver, and a girdle.**

The girdle was a finely wrought leather belt and combination money pouch which was given as a great honor. It usually signified a person had just been promoted from the enlisted ranks to become an officer.

**12 And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand *shekels* of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.**

**13 Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me.**

In addition to doing the right thing, the man was not stupid either. Had he killed Absalom, then Joab could have pretended as though he himself certainly would never have approved of killing him. But Joab now takes matters into his own hands.

**14 Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak.**

These darts would be short, sharpened sticks, and for some reason, even after they penetrated Absalom's chest cavity, he was still alive. Therefore...

**15 And ten young men that bare Joab's ar-**

**mour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.**

So Absalom dies in the oak tree. This is highly significant and we will come back to that later, but first let us notice that Joab expressly disobeyed King David's orders in not bringing Absalom back alive. Our first thought might be: "Why, that terrible and cruel man, Joab!" But there is another side to this. You see, Joab was as *politically* savvy as he was militarily, and he realized that if Absalom were *not* executed, David's throne would *never* be safe.

David was soft, perhaps,... no, there is no perhaps about it...he *was* weak when it came to dealing with his own children. We have seen that weakness in great men time after time in the Scriptures...from Jacob dealing with his sons, to Judah and his sons, to Eli the high priest dealing with Hophni and Phinehas. David is no different in this respect.

He is so soft and weak in that area of his character that Joab correctly worries that David will ultimately and very foolishly pardon Absalom and thus endanger the throne once again. David thinks Absalom is just a boy who has "made some bad choices."

Moreover, what Joab might have taken for David's leniency may in fact have been David's knowledge of his own guilt which has been the root cause of all these events, events prophesied long ago by Nathan. For the record, here it is again (God speaking through Nathan to David):

**2 Samuel 12:9 Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.**

**10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife.**

**11 Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.**

**12 For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.**

But Joab knows Absalom for what he is: a proud megalomaniac with a lust for power and no real love for the people whom he pretends to wish to serve. Joab therefore knows that he himself will have to suffer the consequences for this deliberate act of disobedience in killing Absalom, but that in doing so, he is actually putting the welfare of the nation ahead of his own safety at this juncture.

All that having been said, Joab was not lily-white in this either because he undoubtedly harbored a grudge and a desire for vengeance ever since Absalom had angered and humiliated him by burning his barley field. Joab is the kind of person who seeks revenge. Remember how he cunningly assassinated General Abner after Abner had unwillingly killed Joab's brother Asahel?

One also has to suspect that God was meting out justice to Absalom very fittingly when *ten* of Joab's armor bearers finished him off, which could be seen as balancing Absalom's ravishing of the *ten* concubines.

In verse 6 it tells us that this battle ranged over a large territory and it is described as occurring in the forest of Ephraim. Where is that? No one knows for sure. There are some who think that there must have been a forested area on the east side of Jordan by that name.

The reasoning is that David was staying in Mahanaim and it has already been stated that Absalom has crossed Jordan into the land of Gilead, so the case is made that the battle occurred *east* of Jordan.

However, there are other Bible scholars who make an excellent case for the forest of Ephraim being in the territory of Ephraim which is *west* of the Jordan. We will not take space to provide all the evidence for that, but if that were the case, then a very fascinating and significant connection is possible.

*(To be continued)*

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