



FEED MY SHEEP

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Issue #107

October 2007

Death of Rebellious Sons

The stories of the lives of King Saul and King David are thrilling and fascinating stories even when studied only for their historical value. After all, these were the first two kings of the people whom the Lord of the universe has chosen for a special purpose.

But as our progressive studies over many issues has demonstrated, the lives of Saul and David have provided numerous types and shadows, i.e., patterns, of the church throughout history. Thus we speak about “the Saul church” as referring to the church as a whole in the past two millennia. And we speak of “Saul-types” as being non-overcomer Christians. David represents the elite body of totally submitted overcomer Christians throughout the past two thousand years. (Of course, there were both classes in Old Testament times as well, but our focus in these studies is on applications to the church since the cross.)

The last issue concluded with the disastrous end of the rebellion of Absalom against his father, King David. Countermanding David’s explicit orders not to harm his son, General Joab stabbed Absalom three times in the chest and then had ten of his men finish the murder. We pick up the story immediately thereafter.

2 Samuel 18: 16 And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people.

“Israel” here refers to men of Israel who had followed Absalom in the rebellion. The trumpet blast here was a signal to stop the war and the slaughter. Trumpet (*shofar*) blasts were used as communication devices. Indeed, until modern radio communication, the bugle

retained a prominent place in military communication. In ancient Israel, a solo trumpet sounding was a call for the leaders to assemble. Two trumpets called the entire congregation. Obviously, as in the case of Joab here, there was a specific sound given which was utilized to signify the end of hostilities.

There was no pomp and circumstance, no dignified burial for the former prince of Israel.

17 And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent.

This method of burial was for one who had been disgraced. It is reminiscent of the story of Achan (Joshua 7). In that case also, they had piled a heap of stones over the bones of Achan. The name *Achan* means *troubler* and Achan had indeed caused a lot of trouble for Israel. Similarly, Absalom was a troubler of Israel and fittingly, they heaped a large pile of stones over his grave as well. Incidentally, we did a two part study on the story of Achan many years back. Ask for *Achan’s Heart Troubles* (Specify CD or tapes # 232 & 233; \$10 ppd.).

Let us take notice of the divine method in which his death came about. He was first hanged in a tree and then ended up with a heap of stones over him. Was Absalom a recalcitrant [*stubborn and obstinately defiant of authority*] and a rebellious son? Absolutely. Let’s read God’s law concerning a rebellious son.

Deuteronomy 21:18 If a man have a stubborn

and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and *that*, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them:

19 Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place;

20 And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard.

21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

22 And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:

23 His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged *is* accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

Thus we see that Absalom was in a manner of speaking, both hanged and stoned. How fitting for a rebellious son.

In our lawless society today (We refer to God's laws; heaven knows we are inundated with man's laws.), and including the generally antinomian (anti-law) Christian church, such laws as that quoted above seem harsh and unreasonable. Capital punishment is relatively rare in America today, but that is certainly not due to a lack of murders being committed. In this case, capital punishment is meted out on one's own son! How cruel and unreasonable—or thus even many nominal Christians would think. But is it? Is our God cruel and unreasonable? Or have we as Christians departed so far away from His standard that we would so characterize our Creator?

Even while many ministers and denominations declare that “the law was abolished at the cross,” they will often admit that “well, okay, the ten commandments are probably still valid.” After all, who of them would stand up and preach that it is now okay to lie,

steal, murder, fornicate, etc.? Therefore, if the ten commandments are still in effect, then such ministers, priests and preachers stand convicted of their ignorance and folly. For the law of the rebellious son just quoted is part of the ten commandments. It falls under both the first commandment and the fifth commandment.

The first commandment declares the preeminence of God and His divine authority over all things. Rebellion against God and His divine authority is a capital offense. God instituted civil government to enforce the divine decrees, strictly limited by the bounds of His laws, statutes and judgments. God also instituted the family and His authority is likewise delegated to the parents, but again strictly delimited by His law. The fifth commandment requires that children “honor” their parents. This does not permit parents to become tyrants and/or to be abusive of their children. That in itself is an abuse of godly authority. But notice the remainder of the fifth commandment.

Exodus 19: 12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Clearly this is correlates to Deuteronomy 21:18-23 in that the one who does not honor his parents will have his days cut short by capital punishment. Is such a punishment cruel or unreasonable? Not at all. The divine law is severe, but not cruel. Nor was it without divinely-established boundaries. As Howard Rand states in *Digest of the Divine Law* (248 pgs., hardback, \$13 ppd.): “Both the father and mother had to be in agreement, indicating that their son was absolutely depraved and a perpetual drunkard.”

Imagine to what an abominable state the son must be sunken for his parents to finally give up on him. They might even have put up with frequent bouts of drunkenness, but the last straw might be when he is a threat to the lives of his family members. We hear often in the news of tragedies where one family member kills one or sometimes all of his family in a drunken (or drugged-up) rage. God's law saves the lives of the many non-drunkard family members by executing the one drunken rebel. Is God unreasonable? The incorrigible son suffers the death penalty because his rebellion against his parents is in fact rebellion against God.

Well, what about wicked parents just wanting to

get rid of a godly son by lying about him, someone might be thinking. There again, the divine boundaries and safeguards are in play. As Rand explains: "The case had to be heard in open court where all the people of the community could be present at the hearing and who would know if the charges were true or false."

Yes, it is a severe penalty, but behind it is God's motive of love for the family and community as a whole.

2 Samuel 18:18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.

So here is a man who is so stuck on himself, so proud, that he erects a monument to himself. The reason he did this, we are told, is because he has no sons. Yet we are told in...

2 Samuel 14:27 And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance.

So either all the sons had died or he had erected this monument before they were born. That seems unlikely though. In any event, it seems to be an example of divine justice that just as Absalom was a son who was rebellious and would have killed his father, so he became a father without sons. Once more, how fitting! The aftermath of the battle with Absalom brings us now to one of the most touching scenes in the Scriptures.

2 Samuel 18: 19 Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies.

20 And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead.

21 Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran.

22 Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet

again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?

23 But howsoever, *said he*, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cush.

24 And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone.

25 And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he *be* alone, *there is* tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near.

26 And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold *another* man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings.

27 And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings.

28 And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed *be* the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.

29 And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and *me* thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what *it was*.

30 And the king said *unto him*, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.

31 And, behold, Cush came; and Cush said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.

32 And the king said unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do *thee* hurt, be as *that* young man is.

33 And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

This is such a poignant verse! We are there in his presence. We can hear David's woeful lament as it pierces our hearts. We are almost impelled to weep with him, and yet we are puzzled. Sometimes love is inexplicable. How could he have such love for Absalom? He was a man who was possessed of just about every rotten character trait there is—including attempted murder of his own father—and yet his father David wails and mourns for him in great bitterness of soul.

One 19th century commentator summarized it perfectly when he said: "Absalom and David did each to his utmost, and showed what he could do; how bad it is possible for a child to be to the best of fathers, and how good it is possible for a father to be to the worst of children; as if it were designed to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God, and God's mercy towards man, of which it is hard to say which is more amazing."

Several other thoughts come to mind regarding David's strange grief for Absalom: First, recall that David is acutely aware that it was his own sin with Bathsheba many years ago which has resulted in this rotten fruit in his family: from the rape of his daughter, Tamar, by his son, Amnon, to the murder of Amnon by his son, Absalom.

From those familial tragedies, it only degenerates further into the actual attempted coup d'état and murder of the father-king, and finally culminating with the execution of Absalom by the hand of David's nephew and top general, Joab. So perhaps some or even most of David's brokenhearted weeping is out of recognition that he himself is responsible in a great way for these tragedies. Hence, he cries: would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

A second possibility is that David's weeping is a type and shadow. Do you remember when Jesus wept? Not over Lazarus, but when He wept over the city of Jerusalem. It says in...

Luke 19:41 And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,

Notice the parallels: Jerusalem was a wicked city just as Absalom had been a wicked son. Absalom tried to kill his father. Jerusalem tried to kill the son... of God, and though they succeeded for three days; Jesus was raised from the dead. Jerusalem had been

the place where the *glory* of God had abode in the temple. The temple's holy of holies was now a dark and empty cube. What does the apostle Paul say about a woman's long hair? He says it is her *glory*. It is her beauty.

Did not Absalom have long hair and was he not a physically beautiful specimen of mankind? Yes. And David no doubt initially would have wanted this glorious-appearing son to succeed him on the throne, but it was not to be.

In the same way, Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem because the glory had departed and the city was evil. Jesus foresaw its destruction by the Roman armies in 70 A.D. The glory was ultimately not to be in the *physical* city of Jerusalem but in the *New Jerusalem* which is inside the bodies, the temples of individual believers.

You, my dear Christian readers, are the embryonic New Jerusalem. The evangelical Christian world is deceived when they are looking for a third temple to be built in the Israeli state. They will be disappointed because even if it does get built; the glory of God will never inhabit it. God dwells within His people, no longer in buildings of wood and stone.

And so David wept over Absalom because even though he was extremely evil, David had thought he had seen a glimmer of potential goodness in him. Alas, now he was dead and David mourned for the potential that was lost. Jesus likewise wept over the city because it was a case of potential glory that was lost. There is a time to mourn and a time to weep. For now, darkness descends upon the spirit of David and he mourns for what might have been.

Have you been in that state, dear brother or sister? Can you say at times like that that you trust completely in the good and sovereign plan of your Father and Creator? I hope so. Let us bow before the King! Amen!

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