



FEED MY SHEEP

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Murderous General Joab Regains Power

Let us briefly review the events in the life of David which we covered in recent issues. Absalom, David's son, had led an attempted coup d'état. He gathered many men to fight against David and his loyalists. Absalom had appointed his cousin, Amasa, as his top general. If you still have the genealogy chart of David's family (see FMS #93, Aug. 2006. Note: All but the most recent issues of FMS are available for free downloading at our website.), you will see that Amasa is also then cousin to David's top general, Joab, and Joab's brother, Abishai. David's close counselor, Ahithophel, had betrayed him and when it became apparent that the revolt was going to fail, Ahithophel went out and hanged himself, becoming the type for which Judas was the antitype.

As David's men routed Absalom's forces, Absalom was fleeing on his mule and he somehow got his head entangled between the branches of a huge oak tree. Ron Oja gave us some additional course material on the relationship of the oak tree with idolatry and witchcraft in the church (*The End of Witchcraft*, 60 min. Available on DVD, D-107, \$15 ppd.)

As David came back to Jerusalem, we saw how the various tribes either welcomed him back enthusiastically, or were reluctant to do so. The latter feared David would have them all executed for treason. But we saw in David's forgiveness of *everyone* that it was a type and shadow of our Father's ultimate universal reconciliation. David is now back in his palace at Jerusalem. He has hardly had time to take a shower before he faces another rebellion.

2 Samuel 20:1 And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse:

every man to his tents, O Israel.

This rebel was a son of Bichri. In Genesis 46:21, where the sons of Benjamin are listed, one of them is Becher. It so happens that Saul was also of this particular clan, the Bichrite family of Benjamin. Apparently, there was still much bitterness and resentment among this clan over the fact that the monarchy of all Israel was now in the tribe of Judah. Was it God's Plan for Saul, the Benjamite, to fail and for Israel's dynasty of kings to come from the tribe of Judah? Yes, indeed! Therefore, in rebelling against King David, was Sheba the Bichrite rebelling against God? Yes, indeed! We will rejoin that notion of rebelling against God at some point in the next several issues.

2 So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem.

3 And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.

Recall that when Absalom put his plan into motion to dethrone David, that he followed Ahithophel's advice and raped these women on the rooftop of David's palace in order to publicly humiliate David, not to mention the women themselves. When David returned, he did not divorce them. They were victims. But since he viewed them as defiled, he never again had sexual relations with them. Understand, he did not treat them *cruelly*, as though they were kept in prison, which is the impression one might get from the phrase "put them in ward." Rather, they were kept in a separate

house, probably quite nicely appointed, and were well cared for until their deaths. This was the manner in which widows of Oriental monarchs were treated in those days.

4 Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present.

Remember Amasa, Absalom's top general? The genealogy chart of David's family shows that Amasa was the nephew of David and cousin of Absalom. He was also a cousin to the brothers, Joab and Abishai. David is still seething at Joab for having murdered Absalom and he is determined to replace Joab as head of the armies of Israel. This new rebellion by Sheba provides David the opportunity to make public his promise to Amasa. He commissions him with recruiting an army from Judah and to come back to the palace in three days for further orders.

5 So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him.

We do not know for certain what the problem was; whether the Judahites were reluctant to follow this new man, Amasa, who had so recently been the top general for the bad guys in the attempted coup—that is certainly one possibility. The other possibility is that Amasa himself may have dawdled because he was having second thoughts about serving David loyally. In any case, he did not report back to the palace with the recruits by the time appointed.

David realizes that every day he delays in putting down the rebellion gives Sheba more time to garner more rebels to his cause. Not hearing from Amasa, David turned not to Joab, but to Abishai, Joab's brother, to take the palace guard and other troops and go forth after the rebels. This must have been awkward for David, and embarrassing in front of Joab, because the man he had just appointed to replace Joab, Amasa, evidently could not do the job. He was a no-show. So in a dilemma, David turns to Joab's brother. You can imagine how offended and silently enraged the callous and haughty, old general Joab was as his brother is now appointed to head the mission.

6 And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us.

7 And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

8a When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them [margin:

caught up with them].

Gibeon was located about five miles northwest of Jerusalem. It was an important city. It was the hometown of the Canaanite-Amorite tribe of Hivites, who had deceived Joshua into thinking they were from a distant land so he would not slay them as Israel came into Canaanland. When Joshua divided up the land, Gibeon was allotted as part of the territory of Benjamin, but then it was designated as one of the 48 cities given to the Levites. It was also one of the several places where the tabernacle in the wilderness was placed.

Recall how David took the ark of the covenant up to Jerusalem and built a separate three-sided tent or tabernacle for it there. However, the rest of the tabernacle apparently remained at Gibeon. This would also have given David justification to have two co-high priests in Zadok and Abiathar, one ministering at Gibeon, the other at the tabernacle of David. Later still, Gibeon was the place where God would appear to David's son, Solomon, in a dream and bestow great wisdom upon him. Presently, though, Gibeon is where the respective armies of Amasa and Abishai met up with each other.

8b And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out.

9 And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him.

10 But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.

The fact that Amasa died and that Joab and Abishai pursued Sheba are summary statements. Let us retrace this crime step-by-step. After David had appointed Abishai to head up the army to pursue the rebels, Joab no doubt pretended to be content to fall in line behind his brother's leadership.

They come to the place of the great stone where Amasa and the troops he had recruited catch up. Joab smiles his deceitful and treacherous smile at Amasa. He is walking over to greet him and—oh, how embarrassing for the great general Joab to be so clumsy as to have his sword *accidentally* fall out of its scabbard! — or was it an accident? Joab picks up his short sword with his left hand just before he reaches out with his right hand to grab Amasa by the beard to pull him close so they could kiss each other's beard as was the custom of close friends in that day.

The cunning Joab was probably still smiling as

he punctured deep into the liver and other vital organs of Amasa. That is the significance of the fifth rib, mentioned so often in Scripture. It indicates the victim's vital organs were "sliced and diced," to put it crudely. Twisting the sword up and down and around, Joab held Amasa by the beard and lowered him to the ground as Amasa's strength drained from his body. He lie there in agony as...

11 And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He that favoureth Joab, and he that is for David, let him go after Joab.

This verse indicates that the rivalry between Joab and Amasa was no secret. It was common knowledge that David had intended to demote Joab and to place Amasa as his top general. Therefore, Joab's motive for murdering Amasa was his jealousy of Amasa, but more so, it was Joab's *covetousness* for power and prestige. He was not going to let that little pip squeak David get away with demoting *him*. It was humiliating. Joab's pride could not face it. Thus he murdered his cousin in cold blood, just as he had murdered General Abner and Absalom before them.

Immediately after Joab had slid the sword under Amasa's fifth rib, one of Joab's men yells out to all the soldiers: "Whoever is on Joab and David's side, let him come with Joab." Notice how he links Joab with David, implying or insinuating that Amasa was not loyal to David. The insinuation may have been already stated clearly to the soldiers with Abishai as they were leaving Jerusalem.

Abishai might have slyly spread the rumor that Amasa was disloyal because he did not come back to Jerusalem with an army in three days as David had instructed. I would not put it past Joab to have instructed his man in advance on what to say and when to say it; i.e., "Whoever is on Joab and David's side..." So the recruits of Amasa are now standing there, shocked at seeing their leader now on the ground, dying in agony.

12 And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still.

13 When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

You can imagine that the contingent of men whom Amasa had recruited from Judah were stunned at having just witnessed this murder. They were paralyzed; they just stood there, unable to think clearly, until Joab's henchman threw a sheet over poor Amasa still writhing in torturous pain. Only when Joab's

henchman dragged Amasa off the highway out into a field, only then could the men from Judah mentally shake off what they had just witnessed and thus, like a flock of sheep, they fall in ranks behind Joab.

14 And he [Sheba the son of Bichri] went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Bethmaachah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went also after him.

Sheba was able to gather more and more men to his rebellious cause as he journeyed northward in Israel. Finally, he came to near the far northern border to a place called Abel of Bethmaachah. This Abel, by the way, is a different Hebrew word from the name of the brother of Cain. Cain's brother Abel's name means "vapor" or "breath." The word *Abel* here means a "grassy meadow."

15 And they came and besieged him in Abel of Bethmaachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down.

This compound word Bethmaachah is intriguing. It means "house of pressure" or "house of oppression." From your chart of David's family tree, you might notice that Maacah was one of David's wives. And surprise! She was the mother of Absalom and Adonijah, the two rebel sons!

Given all the sad events which occurred in the family of David, do you think it is fair to say that David lived in a house of *pressure*? Indeed! And that his household was *oppressed* by the evil spirits which had snared Absalom, and Amnon, who had raped his sister, Tamar; and also Adonijah, who is going to "pull an Absalom" before the story of David is complete. Do you agree that David indeed lived in a Beth Maachah, a house of oppression?

I would assume that many of us can identify with a Beth Maachah—certainly with our extended families, if not within our own birth families. Do you sometimes feel like you live in a pressure cooker? Is not your Father a Divine Genius for managing to devise the perfect life challenges for each of us—usually spearheaded by those close to us?

Soon Joab leads his troops to this far northern city and begins the siege. Suddenly a woman grabs a megaphone or a bullhorn and yells at Joab.

16 Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.

17 And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear.

NKJ (for clarity) **2 Samuel 20:18** So she spoke, saying, “They used to talk in former times, saying, ‘They shall surely seek *guidance* at Abel,’ and so they would end *disputes*.”

In other words, the city of Abel was a place noted for the wisdom of its inhabitants, so that is one of the reasons this woman gives Joab why he should sit down and talk with her about the situation. She continues:

KJV 2 Samuel 20: 19 *I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?*

The wise woman is speaking as one representing the city, and she speaks metaphorically. When she says “I am peaceable and faithful,” she is referring to her city. It was so far north that it probably had no part whatsoever in the rebellion of Absalom. When she charges Joab with seeking to destroy “a city and a mother in Israel,” she is again referring to the city of Abel as a type of regional capital. It was a *mother* city. The numerous villages surrounding it were dependent upon it and thus were the *children* of the mother city.

At the same time and although it is not overtly stated, the woman also reminded Joab of the laws of warfare given in Deuteronomy 20. One of those laws was that before an army would besiege a city, they first had to proclaim peace to it; i.e., they had to exhaust all diplomatic measures first. The sage woman reminds Joab that even heathen cities are accorded this opportunity to avoid mass bloodshed; how much more then ought that opportunity be given to a city in Israel! She finally persuaded Joab there might be some way that they could work things out without resorting to the slaughter of every person in Abel. Joab, perhaps a bit embarrassed, if that were possible for him, is then quick to accommodate the woman.

20 And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy.

21 The matter is not so:

Joab is saying: “Look, that really isn’t the case. We’re not coming to conquer your city just so that we can steal your inheritance. The real situation is this:..”

21b but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall.

22 Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city,

every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king.

What just happened here? A city in Israel turned over to the government troops a man who was a rebel against the government. Remember the city of Keilah (which we dubbed “Key-Law)?” This is why David inquired of the Lord when he was hiding out from Saul near Keilah. To refresh our memory...

1 Samuel 23:11 *Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down.*

12 Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up.

In view of what you are going to read in upcoming issues of FMS as we progress in this story, it is important for us to realize that *David was not in rebellion against the government of Saul*. King Saul’s was a wicked government—no question about that—but David, the overcomer type, was **not** in rebellion. Keep that in mind.

After Sheba the rebel Benjamite’s head had been turned over to Joab by the citizens of Abel Bethmaachah, Joab then returned in triumph to Jerusalem and reported to King David. What could David do? Amasa was dead. No doubt Joab informed him that Amasa was a traitor anyhow and deserved to die. Joab went on to recount how *he* had successfully resolved the rebellion of Sheba, and I would suggest that Joab would have been so brazen by this time that he did not *ask* David, he *told* David that he was taking his old job back again.

Joab had already assumed command of the armies. Abishai, his brother, had obviously acquiesced to playing second fiddle again. What could David say? The pattern of the relationship between David and Joab had been deeply ingrained for decades now. David felt helpless to change it. Sometimes things just seem to be out of our control, don’t they? (Er-hem. Well, is God sovereign or what?! *To be continued.*)

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