



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## Famine: A Judgment from God!

We now commence the study of a very important event in the reign of King David. Somewhere back in the earliest years of this ministry (i.e. 1989-91), we did a seven-lecture series concerning the symbolic meaning of “barley” in the Bible. (It is no longer available, but perhaps we will do a revised version of it some day.) In any event, in that *Barley in the Bible* series, we had made reference to this story, but we had not taken it apart and scrutinized it verse-by-verse as we intend to do presently.

**2 Samuel 21:1 Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.**

Gibeon was a “great city” (Joshua 10:2), and it will be figure prominently in the rest of this study (which will extend beyond this issue of FMS). The first thing we need to note is the chronology. It is unfortunate that the KJV translators used the word *then* to introduce the story, because in our modern understanding, it indicates that what follows occurred after what we have just read. This is not the case here however.

It is almost universally agreed upon by Bible scholars that this event did not occur near the end of David’s reign and life, but rather it happened not too long after David had become king over all Israel. Even at that, it would have been some seven or more years since the death of King Saul.

The reasons why we believe this story occurred early in David’s reign are numerous and some will be

noted as we proceed. From this first verse, there are three reasons: One, we have mentioned a number of times in past lectures about the very compact nature of the Hebrew language.

That means that one word in Hebrew often carries an entire phrase-worth of meaning in English. In verse one here, the English translation says: “Then there was a famine” but in Hebrew the only word in the actual text is *ra-ab*, the word for “famine.” The words “*Then there was a...*” are elliptical. That means they are understood in the Hebrew tongue without being stated. Here is a modern example: “Got milk?” How many have seen those advertisements? That is a very elliptical question. If we were to flesh it out with all the elliptical words added in, instead of “got milk,” we would say: “Do you have any milk?”

You can see some of the problems that this presents to translators, can you not? Not only that, but there is a wide latitude of meanings in most Hebrew words from which translators can choose. There *is* an actual word for “then” in Hebrew, but it is not in the Hebrew text here.

Therefore, when the Revised Version uses “And” instead of “then,” it is just as correct, and in this case, even more so, because “And” does not imply that the story we are about to read occurred *after* the one we just finished reading in 2 Samuel 20.

So, in general then, can you see how someone who wants to use only his English translation and build a doctrine around certain words is skating on thin theological ice? Now this is not to discourage us

in any way, such that we would think that we all have to be Hebrew scholars. Not at all. After all, these are not matters that our salvation rests upon. They are minutiae for those of us who are interested in all the details. And as you know, when it comes to God's Word, I am one of those persons. And I am delighted to know you are as well (or you probably would not be reading FMS).

The second reason we are not forced to place this story at the end of David's life is that verse 1 gives us merely a general statement that it occurred "in the days of David." Frankly, it would have been perfectly understandable if the translators had left the word *then* out altogether. It simply would have read: "there was a famine in the days of David three years...." Then there would have been no dispute whatsoever about this occurring so late in David's life.

The third reason is that if the famine had occurred later in David's reign which was after David had conquered many other nations, then a famine in Israel could have been alleviated by the importation of sufficient food from the subdued nations in the form of tribute. Now before we continue with this story, drop down to verse 15.

**15 Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint.**

The same chronological situation exists here. This war with the Philistines did *not* occur late in David's reign. And I can see that it says that David waxed faint, and so one might suspect that that indicates it was late in his reign because David was getting old? Well, David died at 70, and if he were pushing 70, *sure* he would be getting faint in battle.

But I have to tell you: You don't have to be 70 to realize that you don't have the physical stamina anymore like you did when you were 25. After only 13 years as king over all Israel, David would have been about 50 years old, and I can assure you, I love basketball, but I can't take full court games like I could when I was 25; that's the truth.

Other than what we have just stated, I won't go into all the reasons why this battle occurred much earlier. We would calculate it happened when David was

about 50. But then the text goes on to talk about how Goliath's brothers were sent to—let's just say—hell's gate by David's elite warriors.

Alright—so far, the facts are that after three successive years of famine, David goes to God and inquires why. Notice that the connection between a disaster—in this case, a natural disaster, a weather disaster—a connection between that as the *effect* and God as the *cause* is assumed. In those days, no one questioned that.

Oh, but my, oh my,... how far we have come! Thank God, we who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been able to shed those naïve superstitions! ...as though Gaaawwd controlled the weather! We moderns have really made progress there, haven't we? Not hardly. Instead, we suffer more and more disasters and we wonder why. We blame it on bad luck, coincidence, or bad guys using HAARP technology, but God forbid that we should give God the credit for His disciplinary disasters! Do you get the impression from the news lately that our weather patterns are becoming more and more erratic and severe? It is a fact.

Our people need to realize what David understood; namely, that our Creator is in charge of *all* the weather, even when men actually do manipulate it with advanced technology. We need to reread parts of our Bible, parts which we have perhaps not read in years, and we need to let it sink in again. You see, God does, in fact, take credit for the disasters.

**Amos 4: 6 And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.**

They had clean teeth, not because they brushed after every meal, but because they didn't *have* any meals. It was a famine. They had no food in their mouths. ...*yet have ye not returned unto me*—that is the refrain here. All these things happen in order to force God's people to return unto Him.

**7 And also I have withholden the rain from you, when *there were* yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered.**

Sound familiar? Just a few years ago, we had five years of drought in parts of the Southeast, including Asheville. Then we had a couple of “normal” years. Now, once again, much of the deep South, including parts of the Carolinas, Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama are experiencing very severe drought. Meanwhile, other cities are suddenly deluged with rain so that flash floods are a frequent warning. It goes from one extreme to the other.

**8 So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.**

**9 I have smitten you with blasting [high winds, tornadoes, hurricanes] and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.**

**10 I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt:**

Those are cattle diseases: anybody heard of Mad Cow disease?

**10b your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.**

Two generations ago it was the hellhole of Korea. When I was a young man, my contemporaries and I faced the prospect of being slain in the hellhole of Vietnam. (I was in service, but fortunately did not get sent to “Nam.”) Today it is our sons and grandsons, who are facing slaughter in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

**12 Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.**

Will we as a nation repent before worse calamities befall us? Even after the tragedy of September 11, 2001, our nation has not repented. Unlike today where our national leaders appear to give only lip service to the Almighty, back in about 1,000 B.C., David sought an answer from his heavenly Father as to why the nation had been afflicted with famine. God tells him it is because of what Saul did...in that he had slain the Gibeonites. “Aha,” David thought.

**2 Samuel 21:2 And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.)**

At this point, we should read the story of what actually happened to set the stage for what King Saul had done. The children of Israel had just begun to enter the Promised Land, having played in the sandbox of Sinai in Arabia for 40 years.

God gave them a mandate. God said—although I doubt that He gave any royalties to Woody Guthrie: This land is My land. Now, this land is your land. Go in and take it. The people living there are wicked beyond measure. Either exterminate them or drive them out of the land. Under General Joshua, they began.

They had just conquered Jericho without a shot being fired, so to speak. Then they conquered Ai after having executed Achan for his trespass. The news traveled fast in Canaanland that this powerful God named Yahweh was acting on behalf of the Israelites.

The several million Israelites had set up camp at Gilgal near the Jordan river. The Gibeonites were not idiots. They saw that they could be next on the list and so they devised a clever plan.

**Joshua 9:3 And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai,**

**4 They did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old, and rent, and bound up;**

**5 And old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and mouldy.**

**6 And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us.**

**7 And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make a league with you?**

**8 And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye?**

9 And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt,

10 And all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites, that *were* beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which *was* at Ashtaroth.

11 Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We *are* your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us.

12 This our bread we took hot *for* our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy:

13 And these bottles of wine, which we filled, *were* new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey.

14 And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.

15 And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.

16 And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they *were* their neighbours, and *that* they dwelt among them.

17 And the children of Israel journeyed, and came unto their cities on the third day. Now their cities *were* Gibeon, and Chephirah, and Beeroth, and Kirjathjearim.

18 And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes.

19 But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them.

20 This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them.

21 And the princes said unto them, Let them live; but let them be hewers of wood and drawers of water unto all the congregation; as the princes had promised them.

22 And Joshua called for them, and he spake unto them, saying, Wherefore have ye beguiled us, saying, We *are* very far from you; when ye dwell

among us?

23 Now therefore ye *are* cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.

24 And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the LORD thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing.

25 And now, behold, we *are* in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do.

26 And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not.

27 And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.

So that is how the Gibeonites deceived the Israelites into signing a treaty, a covenant, a contract, which would spare them from genocide or forced emigration. King Saul had later violated the contract by trying to exterminate them after all. Then, *in the next administration*, as it were, the nation experiences famine because of the sin of the previous “president.” Obviously, Saul was not totally successful because David finds some of their remnant still in Israel and he summons them to the White House, as it were.

2 Samuel 21: 3 Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and where-with shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD?

How is that for a humble attitude on the part of national ruler? Would that such a man were elected president of the United States! Is there a lesson here for America today? I think it is obvious.

*(to be continued)*

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