



FEED MY SHEEP

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Blindness and the Serpent

Last month we gave reasons why all Christians should want to study the characters of Saul and David. They represent two types of believers: the “saved” but non-overcomer Christians versus the overcomers. There are special privileges which accrue only to the overcomers which therefore should motivate all believers to strive for this high calling.

As we commenced the story of Saul in the last FMS, we saw that Saul is a type of leadership in Israel. On one level, he represents civil leadership but we demonstrated that he is clearly also a type of church leadership in the age of Pentecost (i.e., the so-called “church age,” since 33 A.D.). While Israel at the time of Samuel desired to have a king, it was God, not the people, who actually selected the individual known as Saul to be Israel’s first human king. This is an important fact to remember for when we later review the results of Saul’s reign.

Israel was initially a theocracy. Yahweh-God was their only king. But God had ordained long beforehand that Israel would have a human monarchy and so hundreds of years before Saul came to the throne, God had warned Israel in Deuteronomy 17 about the “downside” of having a human king. Samuel also warned the people (1 Samuel 8) about the natural inclinations of a human king. He will tend to desire riches, to draft men into his armies, to grow and grow and grow the government and then to tax the people to support it, etc. To forestall this tendency, God gave future kings a good “suggestion:” Study my Word.

Deuteronomy 17:20 That his [the king’s] heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn

not aside from the commandment, ...

That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren... This is one of the chief character marks of the Saul-types in the age of Pentecost. It’s the spirit of Saul that proudly asserts: “Listen here, you people, God chose *me* to be the leader, so you folks, you herd of asses—oops, I mean, you flocks of sheep, you watch me because I’m holy, and God tells me what to do.

“And God told me that you are supposed to do whatever we leaders tell you to do; and if you don’t, well,.... you’re going to burn in hell forever;” or “you’re going to be killed when the enemy attacks us,” or “we’re going to come and destroy your property”.... or whatever threats and fear tactic work best for the time and place. We find that King Saul does this very thing time after time as his heart becomes lifted up above his brethren. He threatens, he demands, he bullies, he uses fear to motivate the people.

Some of Saul’s good side

King Saul was not totally wicked. He occasionally displayed some positive character traits. For example, from the day he was anointed king, he had his supporters and detractors. Notice how he treated his detractors.

1 Samuel 10:27 But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.

Saul held his peace. He exhibited forbearance

towards those who despised him. This is elaborated upon in the next chapter. After Saul had led Israel to a great victory in battle, some of his supporters were advocating executing some of their countrymen who lacked confidence in Saul's leadership.

1 Samuel 11:13 And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day YHWH hath wrought salvation in Israel.

Saul was able at this time to practice the virtues of forbearance and mercy towards his political (and personal) enemies. This was undoubtedly because upon his selection as king "God gave him another heart" (1 Samuel 10:9). It was God's plan for the first king of Israel to get off to a great start, just like it was His plan to get the (New Testament) church off to a great start in 33 A. D. Unfortunately for Saul and for the people of Israel, these virtues will be short-lived in him. Historically true to the Saul-type, the NT church also went astray before long. Let us now go back and examine this first great martial victory of the new king.

Enter the serpent

1 Samuel 11:1 Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee.

Jabeshgilead is on the east side of Jordan, about halfway between the Sea of Galilee on the north and the Dead Sea on the south. Recall that the land on the *east* side of Jordan was settled by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They had driven out the Ammonites several centuries before. Now the Ammonites saw that the Israelites in Jabeshgilead were vulnerable. The tribes were not unified and they were militarily weak. So the men of Jabesh, knowing their chances of beating the Ammonites is pretty slim, decide to sue for peace and to accept becoming tributaries to Nahash and the Ammonites.

2 And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel.

Pluck out the right eyes?! This was probably not the kind of peace treaty the Israelites had in mind. These sound like quite cruel terms of surrender. To

say this would be a reproach, that it would be humiliating is an understatement, but from the Ammonites' perspective, it served several purposes.

In those days, warriors held their shields with their left hand and so the left eye was generally covered. A soldier would try to shield as much of his face as possible, so that only the right eye was used primarily on offense. So if the Israelites had their right eyes plucked out, it would be very difficult for them to wage any kind of effective warfare, but they could still see well enough with one eye to be able to be servants for the Ammonites. That's the strategy of Nahash and his Ammonites here.

Let us look symbolically at a couple of the elements in the story. First, realize that in Scripture, *the left side stands for judgment and the right side symbolizes mercy and blessing*. Secondly, this leader of the Ammonites has a most curious name: Nahash (pronounced *Naw-kawsh'*). It means *serpent*, and it is the same word found in Genesis 3 which was the tempter in the Garden of Eden. So here in 1 Samuel, symbolically, we have the serpent wanting to take away the right eyes of all the men of Israel. Why?..... So that Israel would be *partially* blind!

Does that sound familiar? Even though it did not happen here at the time of *King* Saul, the *apostle* Paul (whose name had been Saul) tells us in Romans 11 that blindness in part did happen to Israel. It is a metaphorical blindness. How did it come about? Back in Deuteronomy 28, God had warned the nation of Israel that if they would not obey his law covenant, that many curses would fall upon them. In addition to war, famine, pestilence, etc., another of the curses is this:

Exodus 28:28 YHWH shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart:

This can have at least a dual fulfillment. It could be fulfilled individually, of course, but it can also be speaking of the nation as a corporate body and thereby refer to national blindness. This is verified by the word of the Lord in Isaiah....

Isaiah 43:8 Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.

Clearly, it is not speaking of physical blindness. And now in Romans 11 we find Paul writing to the

Christianized Israelites in Rome and he says:

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

Of course, this has reference to salvation and to the grafting in of the House of Israel to the stock of Jesus Christ of the House of Judah. But we see another application here as it relates to the *right* eye.

Romans 11:25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

Many Christians are taught that this means that the people today known as “Jews” are blind to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. That interpretation cannot be true for reasons we have covered elsewhere and which space precludes here. It does not apply to “Jews.” Rather, the partial blindness has indeed happened to the *true* descendants of Israel in the world today; namely, the Caucasian people (to use a shorthand term). In other words, most (but not all) Caucasians for the past 20 centuries have been “ignorant of this mystery;” they have been blinded—not to the fact that Jesus is their Messiah (they are overwhelmingly Christian)—but they have been blinded *to their own identity as being those very people of Israel*.

That is the correct interpretation. Now, in the context we are studying here, we can see the following application. *Who* is it that blinds people’s eyes? One could answer: satan does; the serpent does. And that is sometimes true. But satan only follows orders. If the serpent blinds some one, it is because *God ordained it*. God is the ultimate cause, either directly or indirectly. This is confirmed in

Exodus 4:11 And YHWH said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I YHWH?

By the same token, who is responsible for *opening* the eyes of the blind? The very same God, of course. Is that not why we find numerous cases in the gospels where Jesus—the very same God in the flesh—went about healing so many people of blindness?

Psalm 146:8 YHWH openeth *the eyes of the blind*: ...

But there is yet another application of the blindness theme. If some person—or let’s talk corporately here—if a large percentage of the church under Pentecost, the church today—if they are blind in part, we would say they are blind in their right eye. Symbolically, being blind in the right eye means *they cannot see mercy*. Is that not the case with most of the church today? Oh, they *think* they understand mercy, but they have a *very limited* view of mercy; accordingly, they are partially blind. They see God’s mercy on the five percent who “get saved,” (according to their understanding), but they cannot see that God’s mercy will ultimately be applied to *all* his creation, that God will ultimately save 100% of his creation. That is the truly good news! That is the gospel! But Nahash wants to pluck out the *right* eyes. The serpent wants to blind Israel to truth of God’s great mercy.

Being blind in the right eye has caused (part of) the church to be able to see only with the *left* eye, which is judgment and condemnation. That is why they generally have the attitude: “Let those sinners be dammed! They had a choice. They had free will and they didn’t choose to get saved, so let them burn for all eternity (or be exterminated). It’s their own fault. They don’t deserve mercy! They had their chance!”

Excuse me?! They don’t deserve mercy?? Did you and I deserve God’s mercy?? No! No one deserves God’s mercy! But God has elected some to receive his mercy now; others later. Did Esau have a choice or was his course set for him before he was even born? Paul said he had no choice (Romans 9:11). And so it is with every one. *We all make our choices under the illusion of free will, but our courses have been set for us as well.*¹ Praise God that he has chosen you to come to him now to receive a special salvation.

Continuing with the story now in 1 Sam. 11...the men of Israel, being threatened with partial blindness, stalled for time.

3 And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if *there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee.*

Nahash was so confident that Israel was so dis-

organized that he allowed them the week to try to put together some kind of army.

4 Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept.

5 And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; ...

There is Saul the cattleman again, as opposed to a shepherd. God continues to reinforce this theme, this mark of Saul, this attribute of many church leaders under Pentecost...the attitude that the people are herds, not flocks; and as herds, they need to be *driven* like cattle; i.e., *forced* to obey the dictates of the oppressive Saul-types in the church system.

...and Saul said, What *aiileth* the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh.

6 And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly.

There is such a thing as righteous anger. Here it is the spirit of the Lord which empowers Saul to do what needed to be done. But one of the results of anger in a man like Saul is impulsiveness; sometimes with good results, like here, but oftentimes, leading to disaster.² Here Saul's impulsiveness results in hacking some oxen in pieces and sending them all over Israel to impel them to join him in battle. It worked.

7 And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent *them* throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of YHWH fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.

It is curious that up until this time, even though Saul had been publicly selected as king, he apparently did not have much to do, so he was back working on the ranch when the call for help came from the men of Jabeshgilead. But God was using this enemy invasion as the means by which Saul would "make a name for himself" and thus lead to his public acclamation as king in fact, not just in word.

8 And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand.

Notice here the way the writer splits the nation in two, into Israel and Judah, foreshadowing the split coming about 120 years later. And the ratio of fighting forces is ten to one, which is quite consistent throughout Scripture. Then came the day of battle and Saul and his conscript armies were eminently victorious (vv. 9-11). Thus Saul is off to a good start, and the Scripture has given us a few of his admirable qualities. But as the story of Saul and David unfolds, we will see him falling soon and falling hard from the grace of God which had previously upheld him.

In the Old Testament there is a tragic and bitter end for Saul as he commits suicide by falling on his own sword. But thank God, that in the New Testament, there is another Saul who gets converted to become Paul. This former Saul, who, like his namesake, had been an oppressor of God's people, then struggles hard through tribulations the rest of his life, so that he might attain to overcomership. So Saul in the New Testament becomes a "David" in that sense. We all have Saul traits in us to some extent, and our struggle as Christians is to be rid of the Saul in our character so that we, too, can be overcomers like David and Paul.³

ENDNOTES

1. We realize this may be an astonishing concept to those who have never heard it (let alone studied it). We do not expect acceptance of it without deep study. That is why we spent four audiotape albums of teaching it in a progressive manner: A-101 through A-104, 38 tapes. Special discount price: \$99 for the set. See syllabus page "God's Plan for Man" and the SKM catalog for further information.

2. ... as we covered in our two-part study of Jonathan eating honey. Tapes #385, 386. \$10.

3. This FMS is condensed from a message in our current series of studies going out to those on the tape ministry. The series (now up to #18) consists of stand-alone messages, meaning that one need not necessarily have heard all previous messages to understand the latest one. These FMS monographs necessarily only scratch the surface rather than plumb the depths which we attempt to do in the taped teachings. To receive a two-part message each month, simply write and request to be on the tape ministry.

Feed My Sheep is a part of the teaching ministry of James W. Bruggeman and is sent out freely upon request. The tithes and gifts of those who are fed by it make it possible for us to continue in ministry. Gifts may be sent to P.O. Box 6388, Asheville, NC 28816.