



# FEED MY SHEEP

PUBLISHED BY JAMES W. BRUGGEMAN  
STONE KINGDOM MINISTRIES  
P. O. BOX 6388  
ASHEVILLE, NC 28816 U.S.A.

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## God Deceives!

For the sake of any new people on the *Feed My Sheep* mailing list, just a word of introduction: We have been exploring the lives of the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. We are paying special attention to their character qualities because these men are types and shadows of two kinds of believers: Saul symbolizes believers who are not overcomers. David represents the believers who attain to the high calling of overcomers. Since we all want to be overcomers, it behooves us to see what it is that makes one an overcomer.

Last month, we discussed the issue of witchcraft in the church. In that monograph, we observed how Saul had sunk so low in his rebellion against God, that when he sees the Philistine armies massing on nearby hills, he is desperately seeking guidance on what to do.

His early mentor, the prophet Samuel, is dead and when Saul tries to get a hold of Yahweh, Saul either gets a busy signal or no answer. God didn't even leave the voice mail on for him. So Saul concludes that God is ignoring him.

Saul then consults the witch of Endor to try to get advice from the dead Samuel. Such a practice (called "channeling" today) is called necromancy in the Bible and it is absolutely forbidden. Ironically though, God uses it to inform Saul that on the morrow he and his sons will die in the battle with the Philistines and Israel will be defeated. Among thoughtful Bible students, the question might then arise: So if God forbids necromancy, why did He answer Saul via necromancy? The answer is that God was answering Saul according to the idols of his heart.

What was the idol in Saul's heart? It was multifaceted, of course, but the primary culprit was (and with all of us it always seems to be traceable to...) pride. After Saul became king, the power, the prestige and the pinnacle of the social ladder all went to his head. He came to believe that he was autonomous, that he was actually in charge—in charge of himself as well as the whole nation. His pride blinded him to the reality that *God* is sovereign, not man.

This idol of pride then manifested itself in Saul's belief that he could obtain guidance from the dead. However, since the dead are dead, they cannot give *any* advice. Nevertheless, since that was Saul's idol, God went ahead and answered Saul according to that idol. He gave Saul a prophecy that turned out to be true, but oh, what bad news it was for Saul and his sons! This doctrine of God answering according to the idols of one's heart is found in the book of Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 14:3 Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face: should I be enquired of at all by them?**

In other words, God asks Ezekiel: Should I answer the prayers of people who have idols in their hearts? Surprisingly, the answer is yes.

**4 Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord YHWH; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I YHWH will answer him that cometh according to**

**the multitude of his idols;**

Many Christians today do not recognize the depth of Christian idolatry. Protestants like to point at the Catholics and their praying to statues as proof of their idolatry. However, idolatry is much broader and deeper than such simple external objects. Idolatry is *anything* which a person puts first in their life ahead of God, be it money (or anything money can buy), or be it power, or fame, or sex, or career, or sports, or TV or music, etc. *ad infinitum*. All have sinned; there is none righteous. Not one of us is always and entirely clean. God now restates the situation to Ezekiel.

**7 For every one of the house of Israel, or of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separateth himself from me, and setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concerning me; I YHWH will answer him by myself:**

**8 And I will set my face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will cut him off from the midst of my people; and ye shall know that *I am* YHWH.**

This is precisely what happened to King Saul. He was literally cut off from his people by death in the battle with the Philistines.

**9 And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I YHWH have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel.**

In those days, people sought God via the prophet as an intermediary. While many Christians today are still stuck in that mode of thinking—that they need some “holy man/woman” to intercede with God for them—other Christians realize they can go directly to the Father in prayer.

Notice in the above verse that God declares that He deceives prophets. Since in the New Testament, we approach God without the need of a prophet or priest (other than Jesus the Christ), then it follows that if we have idols in our hearts, either (a) God will eventually stop answering us, as He did with King Saul, or (b) God will answer us according to the idols of our heart. In other words, God will deceive us in His answer to our prayers! God deceives carnal Chris-

tians. I have seen numerous instances of this among various groups of Christians. It is especially prevalent among the more pentecostal, charismatic-type denominations and groups. I state that not to be condemnatory of them, but simply as a point of fact. It is fact because other Christians have not even “graduated” yet to the level that they can hear directly from God. At least the aforementioned groups believe they *can* hear from God.

However, because these types of believers are also by and large woefully ignorant of God’s laws, statutes and judgments (believing the law has been “put away”), they become licentious. They feel they have “license” to do just about anything, as long as they “get a word from the Lord” about it. For instance, if the idol in their heart is a lust for money, they may “hear from the Lord” that some unethical deal they are involved in is “God’s will.” Mind you, these are Christian believers we are talking about—believers with idols in their hearts.

Or to borrow an example from today’s headlines, a person may insist it’s alright to be involved in a homosexual “partnership” because he prayed about it and God told him it was okay because the relationship is based upon “love.” Other Christians can see clearly that it is based upon lust not love, but the homosexual may honestly believe he has heard from God about it. And according to Ezekiel, he has heard from God—a deceiving word!

Upon a few moments of reflection, numerous similar examples will come to the reader’s mind. And in each case, yes, God very well may have caused that person to perceive that God was approving of their sin. But this is the left hand of God in action, the hand of judgment. God answers them (or you and me) according to the idols of our heart, so that we will learn righteousness by the things we suffer. That is the essence of the following verses in Ezekiel.

**10 And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity: the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh *unto him*;**

**11 That the house of Israel may go no more astray from me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be my people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord YHWH.**

Thus, when we have idols in our heart, shocking as it may sound, in reality, *God deceives us for our own good*. The homosexual “shall bear the punishment of his iniquity” possibly by contracting AIDS “that the house of Israel may go no more astray” from God. God’s ultimate purpose in judgment is always correction.

While King Saul was coming to his “end-door” by consulting the necromancer at Endor, David and his army of 600 men and their families have been living under the protection of Achish, king of the Philistines of Gath. After having experienced Saul trying to kill him on numerous occasions, David finally tired of it and sought asylum among the Philistines. After living next door to the king in the city of Gath for a while, David gets very tired of that, too, and requests a place in the country. So Achish gives David and his retinue the deserted city of Ziklag.

Although this is now many years after David had killed the Philistine giant, Goliath, there were still many Philistines who remembered David and who did not have the trust in David that Achish had. So as we continue the story, the Philistines are preparing to attack Israel. This will present quite a predicament for David because he and his men are right there with the Philistines in their encampment. The women and children, of course, had been left behind in Ziklag.

**1 Samuel 29:1 Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel.**

There are two cities called Aphek, one is in the territory of the tribe of Asher close to the Mediterranean Sea. The location of the other Aphek is in the territory of Issachar not far from the town of Jezreel. Jezreel is located on the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa. Saul and his armies were up on Mount Gilboa and the Philistines had encamped up on the southern slopes of Shunem, almost directly north of Saul and his army.

The enormous and wide valley between the Philistines and Israel is called by several names: the Plain of Esdraelon, the Valley of Jezreel and most famously today, the Valley of Megiddo; which is where fundamentalist prophecy preachers believe the so-called Battle of Armageddon is going to take place. Armageddon is the Anglicized form for Har-Megiddo.

**2 And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish.**

If you recall from a previous FMS, Achish had told David that he liked him and trusted him so much that he was going to make David and his men his personal Secret Service detachment.

**3 Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?**

This word “fell” in this context probably would have been better translated “deserted.” From a military perspective, David could have been considered a deserter. The Hebrew word here is *naphal* and “to desert” is one of its many definitions. Isn’t it interesting how the English verb “to fall” sounds so similar to the Hebrew verb *naphal*?

**4 And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? *should it not be* with the heads of these men?**

**5 Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?**

The princes of the Philistines were angry— Fortunately, they apparently had not yet heard of David’s destruction of a village of the Geshurites, Gezrites, and Amalekites, which we discussed in FMS #59, because if they had heard, they certainly would have been even more angry and would have locked them up as POW’s for the duration. What we are seeing here is God’s providential protection for David and his men, even while they must, for a time, live among their own nation’s enemies.

We see God’s providence playing out magnificently here as David up to this point was facing a very

difficult dilemma. Either he would actually have to go and fight against his own king and country, or he would have to betray Achish, the man who was more than kind to David and his men. This latter scenario is exactly what the lords of the Philistines feared the most. They demanded that David be sent back to Ziklag—far from the scene of the forthcoming battle.

The lords said: (v. 4) “for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? *should it not be with the heads of these men?*” In other words, “Look, Achish, what better way for David to get back into the good graces of Saul than to take off our heads and bring them to Saul?”

**6 Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, as YHWH liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day: nevertheless the lords favour thee not.**

This is most amazing! ...Not only in how God is orchestrating events here, but the fact that the Philistine king is swearing by the name of Yahweh! Has any *Philistine* ever done that?! It is equally amazing that a heathen king discerns and appreciates the many virtues displayed in David's character whereas David's own king despised him. One might suspect that during the course of his sojourn in Gath, that David might have “shared the gospel” with Achish and taught him many important truths. He might have told Achish about the mighty deeds of Yahweh on behalf of Israel in the Exodus and afterward.

And if David got to the part telling about the blessings for obedience and the curses upon Israel for disobedience, then if old Achish had a brain in his head, he would have figured out that Israel at this time would be vulnerable to his armies because of Saul's general disobedience to Yahweh.

Like his lords and barons, Achish himself *also* was ignorant of David's military slaughters of the Gezrites, Geshurites and Amalekites, otherwise he would not have spoken these glowing accolades of David, saying that he had not found evil in David from the day of his seeking asylum until now. Looks to me like David's Father (and I don't mean Jesse) has been at work again, clogging up the phone lines from the Amalekites to the Philistines, so that Achish is still

in the dark about David's actual military forays in the southlands where Arabia borders Judah.

It is clear that Achish did not have absolute authority among the Philistines, but he had some kind of checks and balances system with his lords, and in this case, it appears he was obligated to accede to their wishes. We have seen Achish identified as the king of Gath, not as the king of the Philistines. It may have been that these lords were the chiefs of some of the lesser cities and areas of the Philistines and they joined the expedition against Israel, but did not give up their autonomy. Thus, Achish tells David:

**7 Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displeas not the lords of the Philistines.**

Can't you just picture David here? Acting his part to the hilt...looking sad and sympathetic to the feelings of Achish, and now feigning a bit of indignation, as though he is really crushed and hurt that the dukes and barons don't trust him. Continuing the charade, David protests his disappointment in not being permitted to go to battle on the side of the Philistines.

**8 And David said unto Achish, But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king?**

In fact, David was practically forced by circumstances to put on this charade. Had he not done so, it might have appeared to Achish that David was not really as loyal to him as Achish thought he was. So for the sake of his own safety and that of his men, David played a variation of the old “Br'er Rabbit” trick: “Oh, please don't throw me in the briar patch.” Except in this case: Oh, please let me come with you and fight against your enemies, my lord the king.” And God in His providence for David continued to keep Achish blind to the true situation. God is sending David and his men to the sidelines now while God prepares to use the Philistines to judge Saul and bring his reign to an end. (*To be continued.*)

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