



FEED MY SHEEP

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The Greatest of All Idols

We left off in our last FMS where David and his men had been ordered by his protector, King Achish, the Philistine, to accompany Achish to battle against Israel. David was in a serious dilemma. He did not wish to go to war against his own people—he couldn't—and yet, neither could he “chicken out” of it. Fortunately, God was on top of things (chuckle, chuckle) and caused the Philistine lords to object to David's participation in the battle. They feared David would betray them in the midst of the battle. Acceding to their wishes, Achish tells David to take his men and depart.

And at this point, there are two threads of the story to follow. One is the imminent battle between Israel and the Philistines and the other is what happened when David and his men went back to their temporary home in Ziklag. The Sacred Writ gives the narrative of the return to Ziklag first.

1 Samuel 30:1 And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire;

2 And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried *them* away, and went on their way.

Frankly, David got off easy. How so? Because remember that when David attacked the Amalekites, Gezrites and Geshurites, he did an ethnic cleansing, did he not? He killed every man, woman and child in that area. (See FMS #59.)

These Amalekites are seeking revenge for David's slaughter of their fellow Amalekites, but chalk it up to Divine providence again, they kill no one....which is really strange, since the Amalekites had a reputation for atrocious cruelty. However, there is the possibility that they fully intended to fulfill their trait of cruelty by subjecting their captives to prolonged suffering before killing them.

But, by God's Plan, the Amalekites decided of their own alleged free will to merely seize all the property, kidnap the women and children for now, and then torch the town. Bad as that is, Somebody upstairs is looking out for David.

3 So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, *it was* burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives.

4 Then David and the people that *were* with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.

5 And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite.

This is truly a sad spectacle. Coming home to see your entire town burned to the ground. But David must have known that all the women and children were still alive, because if the Amalekites had exacted a complete tit-for-tat, then David would have seen all the corpses of their loved ones lying in the streets. So at this point, he at least knows they were alive when they were carried away.

6 And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in Yahweh his God.

This verse presents one of the major drawbacks of being a leader. When things go well, you're a hero and everybody loves you. But when things go badly, you get the blame for it. And if things turn really bad, your followers are ready to stone you. As a prospective overcomer, David is really on a roller-coaster. One day, he is the target for Saul's spear practice. The next, he is able to sneak into the middle of Saul's encampment and escape unnoticed with Saul's scepter and fancy water jug. Not long after, David is happy offering protection services to Nabal. The next day Nabal spits in his face. Up and down like a roller coaster.

Then nasty, nefarious Nabal dies and David takes the farmer's wife and he is riding high once again. Then it's off to the land of the Philistines for over a year. There, it is more of the same, culminating in his almost being forced to take up arms with Achish against his own people, followed by a marvelous Divine deliverance. Now on a downward plunge again, he faces this horrid spectacle of the homes of David and his men all burnt to cinders.

His men are muttering about stoning him. What does this say about David's followers, his fellow overcomer candidates? It says that they, too, have their personal spiritual battles against the "Philistines" within. In certain desperately trying circumstances, it shows that they can be just as nasty as old Saul ever was. Would you rather die by a spear in the chest or by being pelted with stones for an hour or two?

But here's a difference between Saul and David. Saul expected the men around him to put him on a pedestal and serve his every whim. In contrast, David was a leader with a servant's heart. He wanted to serve God first and foremost and he realized that one of the best ways to do that was to serve the people whom God had brought to him.

After a few years of being in a leadership position, Saul came to *expect* being served and obeyed, and yet he himself would not submit to the authority of God. Over the years, Saul gradually lost his "comlink" with the heavenly Father, so that when

things went badly and he didn't know what to do, he turned to the witch of Endor to open a channel with the dead prophet Samuel. He'd show God!

"If you won't talk to me, then I'll just have the witch of Endor here dial up the spirit of Samuel and she can channel him for me." And we know from recent issues of FMS what happened then.

David, on the other hand and as we know from the record of the Psalms, kept his comlink with Yahweh open at all times. When times were good, he praised Father and credited Him for the blessings bestowed. However, when things went badly, he also went to the Father, sometimes to complain—admittedly, but also to humbly ask for Father's guidance on what to do next. And that is the case here. No necromancy, no witch of Endor, no communication with spirits, other than with the *Holy Spirit* of God through the means which God had provided, the Urim and Thummim.

7 And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David.

The ephod is a figure of speech called metonymy where one thing is put for another. In this case, the ephod, which was an outer garment of the high priest, is put for the breastplate which was attached to it. The Urim and Thummim were inside the pouch of the breastplate. With these, David inquired.

8 And David enquired at Yahweh, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake *them*, and without fail recover *all*.

9 So David went, he and the six hundred men that *were* with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed.

10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor.

All 600 of them had just marched two or three days from up way up north in the land of Issachar, so it would not be surprising that they were exhausted. David has only two-thirds of his army left to actually do battle with the Amalekites. But there is no indication that this fact troubled David in the least. Why

not? Because he had heard directly from Father Yahweh that he would be 100 percent successful, so it did not matter if he had to leave one-third of his army back at the staging area.

After all, do you think this loss of men caught Yahweh by surprise and that God was now up in heaven wringing His hands and pacing back and forth desperately saying to Himself: “David, pick up the phone. Can’t you hear it ringing? It’s me, Dad. Please, pick up the phone. You’ve lost a third of the army; I’ve got to change the plans, now.”

No, with predestination in place, there was no chance of that scenario. So David and his men proceed south across the brook Besor, looking for the marauders. Shortly, they found an Egyptian who had been a servant to an Amalekite. When the servant took sick, the Amalekite left him for dead. He had had no food or water for three days. David promises not to turn him back over to his master if the Egyptian will help them track down the kidnapers. (1 Samuel 30: 11-15)

The Amalekite master had been utterly cruel in leaving his servant in the wilderness to die. However, this act was exactly that which God had foreordained to be the means by which David would be able to locate the marauders. Consequently, many Amalekites would perish because of the cruelty of one. The Egyptian slave is now leading David and his troops to the location of the Amalekites.

16 And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah.

No doubt, prior to making their raids, these Amalekites had intelligence and reconnaissance sources which had reported to them that David and his troops had gone way up north toward Jezreel and were going into battle, so that the Amalekites thought they were totally safe from any immediate retaliation. Hence, they were celebrating—probably getting drunk—and with no expectation whatsoever of being attacked.

17 And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled.

The way this is phrased, “nobody escaped except 400 of them,” implies that 400 was just a small fraction of the total number of Amalekites. How many men did David attack with? 400. He might have been going up against a force four or five times or more larger than his own. Even though they attacked under cover of darkness, it still indicates that David had to possess a great deal of faith to proceed against those odds.

18 And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives.

19 And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any *thing* that they had taken to them: David recovered all.

That’s important. It tells us twice that David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken...and then some additional loot to boot.

20 And David took all the flocks and the herds, *which they drave before those other cattle*, and said, *This is David’s spoil*.

The additional loot was that which was taken by the Amalekites from the Philistines and the other Judahites. So all David’s men recovered their own cattle and goods, and then the rest of it they called David’s spoil. As their leader, it was up to him to decide what to do with it.

21 And David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that *were* with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them.

Can you imagine the wonderful reunion of these 200 men with their wives and families? But their joy soon turned to frowns of displeasure and anger as they heard some of the 400 men who went with David demanding that none of the spoils be given to them.

22 Then answered all the wicked men and *men* of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them *ought* of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children,

that they may lead *them* away, and depart.

Now, that's a nasty attitude, isn't it? They don't even want to give back to these 200 men their own cattle and goods, just their wives and children. David would have none of it.

23 Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which Yahweh hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand.

The sovereignty of God practically leaps out of this verse! In a very kind and gentle manner—notice the character mark there—in a *loving* and *gracious* manner, David tells these wicked men that they don't deserve anything *either*. It is all by the grace of Yahweh. It was Yahweh who preserved them in battle. It was Yahweh who delivered the victory. It was Yahweh who gave them all things—their wives, their children, all the spoils.

Notice that these men are called wicked. Are they the cursed Amalekites? No, they are Israelites! They are wicked because they are selfish. But that's just the superficial reason. It goes deeper than that. Why are they selfish? Because they think that *they* have a *right* to the spoils because of what *they* had done. But David gently corrects them.

Even though they played their parts in the battle, it was all Yahweh's doing. God is sovereign and he gets credit for everything. That's what David was telling them. Anticipating the apostle Paul's words to the Ephesians, David was plainly trying to get his overcomer candidates to understand that "It is not of their works, lest any man should boast."

They were in effect boasting that they deserved the spoils because of the work of their hands! These are marks of Sauls, the works-of-their-hands-crowd. It amounts to idolatry. It is worship of the greatest of all idols—self! The works-of-the-hands (we deserve...because we did...) is characteristic of *many* non-overcomer believers, but it is *not* the attitude of a true overcomer. *For how can a person be trusted to administer in loving-kindness in God's kingdom when that person thinks he deserves this or that because of what he has done!*

But David lets them know that they have no cause for boasting; it is all the work of God. Can we

apply that to our lives today? Oh, I should think so. Those readers who were on our tape ministry about seven years ago might recall how I began the ten-tape series on the sovereignty of God. (Album A-102, \$30, plus \$3 s+ h.)

We began with a secret ballot-type of quiz. It was a multiple-choice question that went something like this: "I believe that my salvation is brought about (A) by myself alone, or (B) by myself and God working together, or (C) by God alone."

All three of these beliefs are found in Christianity today. Choice A is found primarily in the liberal denominations. It is also the belief of non-believing humanists who contend that man is getting better and better and someday we will attain to perfection by our own works. In theological circles, they are called Pelagians, after the fourth century British monk, Pelagius, who taught such unscriptural claptrap.

Choice B is semi-humanism or semi-Pelagianism. It is also called Arminianism, named after the 16th century Dutch Protestant, James Arminius. Billy Graham and most other modern evangelists and evangelicals are Arminians. They believe that God offers you the opportunity to get saved, and that God really *wants* you to get saved, but in the end, it's all up to your own free will decision whether or not to get saved.

Choice C is Calvinism, named for the great Reformer. He taught that our salvation was a work of God alone. We are saved only because the Father draws us to Him and whatever we do is simply a response to the work of the Father, through the Holy Spirit. If we *choose* to "get saved," it is only because He caused us to desire to choose that way.

Thus, even in the little example here with David and the boys, even though they all were active in conquering the Amalekites and recovering their families and their possessions, David reminded them that it was all God's doing.

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.