



# FEED MY SHEEP

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## Spoiled by Success?

We have now reached a milestone in our studies of the character qualities of Saul and David. Saul is dead. David and the nation have mourned. It is now time to move on with the practical business of everyday life. However, we recall that in David's case, he and his entourage hardly enjoyed "an everyday life." They had been on the run for years, trying to avoid Saul's "Gestapo." Finally, they took exile under the protection of their national enemies, the Philistines. From this point on in these studies, David's character becomes nearly our sole focus with only flashbacks of comparison with Saul.

When the Amalekite brought news of Saul's death, David and his men were still in Ziklag, a town which was still under the control of the Philistines. Now that Saul is dead, David is eager to return to his countrymen and begin to assume his role as king. After all, the prophet Samuel had anointed him as the king-elect some ten or twelve years ago. David sensed that now was the time to move. But let us notice some striking differences between the character of Saul and David.

Even though he knew he was slated to be the next king, David did not have an attitude such as "Alright, Saul's dead. I'm in charge here now. Pack the bags; we're going back to Hebron in Judah." In fact, David takes no steps whatsoever to seize by force that which the Lord had promised him. Having been in the Lord's apprenticeship program by means of the persecutions of Saul, David has learned to put all his trust and hope in the Father. Therefore, he is not rash and impetuous like Saul had been. His sterling character is evident as he follows God's leading to the throne.

David does not attempt to remove rivals by evil means such as murder and deceit. He did not assume that since he was king that everything was up to him now, that he could act independently, that he could issue the orders and everyone else must comply. No, David first consulted God to find out exactly what God wanted him to do.

**2 Samuel 2:1 And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of YHWH, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And YHWH said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron.**

This mass evacuation of 600 families from Ziklag would not have gone unnoticed by the Philistines, and they were undoubtedly pleased. David had been anticipating this day for many months and we have seen in previous studies how the political talents of David played into preparing the people of Judah to accept him as their leader. After all, David had fought for them against the Philistines in the battle of Keilah. Then, he had fought against Judah's enemies in the form of the Geshurites, the Gezrites and the Amalekites. And after the sacking of Ziklag and David's subsequent rout of the Amalekites, he gave gifts and shared the booty with the cities of Judah.

So, even though he was temporarily living under the protection of the Philistine King Achish, this sharing of the wealth was one of many demonstrations of his loyalty to his fellow Judahites. So that now, when David and his contingent of 600 men move to Hebron, the elders of Judah are eager to proceed with a solemn ceremony to anoint David as their king.

**4a. And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.**

There is a parallel between Saul and David in that both were anointed three times. Both Saul and David's first anointings were in secret by Samuel the prophet. Saul's second anointing was by Samuel in a public ceremony. Saul's third anointing was on the day of Pentecost itself (1 Samuel 12:17). There appears to be a connection here between the three anointings and the three major feasts of Israel (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). Saul had three, but curiously, his third anointing was completed on Pentecost, the *second* feast, thus indicating insufficiency and incompleteness. Compare that to David. His first anointing was also secret. Only his family were aware. The feast of Pentecost represents the insufficient, the "in-part" realm because we receive only a down payment of the Holy Spirit under Pentecost. (See 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:14.)

Appropriately, David's second anointing is "in-part;" in that he was anointed king over only *part* of the nation, over Judah. His third anointing was over all twelve tribes of Israel, which signifies in type that Christ becomes king over all His people.

**4b. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabeshgilead were they that buried Saul.**

David is king over Judah, whose territory was practically all the southland from just below Jerusalem all the way to the southern border at Beersheba. Jabesh-gilead was located up north and on the east side of the Jordan river. It was in the territory of the tribe of Gad. (It would be helpful to the reader to have a study Bible map section open while reading this issue of FMS.)

**5 And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabeshgilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of YHWH, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him.**

**6 And now YHWH show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing.**

On the one hand, this message from David is yet another example of the fact that David harbored no bitterness towards his late persecutor, Saul. Here he demonstrates it to the men of Jabesh-gilead by

commending them for their action of recovering Saul's body and giving his bones a decent burial. Furthermore, David asked God to bless them for this deed and he himself promised to reward their kindness to their fallen lord, Saul.

But on the other hand, there is more going on than the simple kindness in David's message. Would it be fair to say that this is politics in action? That is not meant as criticism of David. Truly, many of us have been so disgusted all our lives with the evils done by many politicians that we think all politics is bad. It is not. Let's call it diplomacy. David was indeed being wisely diplomatic in probing for any openness on the part of the northern Israelites to accepting him as their king also. This is even more evident as we read the rest of David's message to the Gadites.

**7 Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.**

It's almost as though David is saying: "Er-hem, your master Saul is dead now, and uh, er-hem, uh, I have been crowned king down here in Judah; and, uh, in case you hadn't noticed, I'm ready, willing and able to serve your tribes as well. Just whistle and I'll be there for you." Is that evil on David's part? I don't think so. But, the plot now thickens.

**8 But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim;**

A rivalry is manifesting. Remember that Abner was Saul's first cousin and held the position equivalent to our chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It is very difficult from the paucity of information given in the narrative to establish with any degree of certainty just exactly how the following events played out, timing-wise. It is clear, however, that Abner saw Ish-bosheth as a useful puppet whom he could install on the throne. General Abner plotted that he himself could rule from behind the scenes. He did not look favorably at all on the idea that the monarchy would be transferred from his kinfolk in the tribe of Benjamin to that *stranger*, David, from the tribe of Judah. Such a turn of events would probably force him into early retirement. So Abner took Ishbosheth over to Mahanaim. It, too, was in the territory of Gad, east of Jordan and relatively close to the city of Jabesh-

Gilead. This action appears to be General Abner's countermove to David's not-so-subtle offer to be king over Gad, as well as over Judah.

**9 And [Abner] made him [Ishbosheth] king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel.**

Later, we will see that David was made king over all Israel very shortly after the death of Ishbosheth. David reigned over only Judah for a period of seven and a half years (v. 11). Furthermore, it states that Ishbosheth reigned only two years over the other tribes of Israel (v. 10). Since David was made king over all Israel after the death of Ishbosheth, it is highly unlikely that "Ishy" was installed right after the death of Saul, because that would leave a gap of five years after his death before David ascends to rule over all Israel.

Instead, I think it is most likely that for five years or so after the death of Saul, General Abner pursued a series of military campaigns against the Philistines and succeeded in recapturing much of the land lost to them. That is why in verse 9 it says he made "Ishy" king over all those places. Because until Abner had retaken them, there wasn't much for Ishbosheth to be king over. The Ashurites probably refers to the territory of Asher way up in the north. Jezreel is the territories of Zebulun, Naphtali and Issachar; and then there is Ephraim. The Philistines probably did not occupy all these territories but they must have had pockets or strongholds here and there.

So after Abner had consolidated these territories, he then put his man on the throne of Saul, intending for himself to be the power behind the throne. Then he felt ready to take on his perceived rival, David.

**12 And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon.**

The phrase "went out" is often a shorthand way of saying "went out to battle." Gibeon was a city in the territory of Benjamin, not far from Saul's old headquarters in Gibeah. More significantly, Gibeon was Abner's hometown. So the stage is being set for confrontation with David's army.

**13 And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.**

As we proceed with our studies in the life of David, numerous characters enter the scene, many of whom are related. For example, Zeruiah was David's sister, more correctly, his half-sister. So Joab was David's nephew, but probably close to the same age as David, who was only 30 when he began to reign. If we allow that Abner was reconquering territory from the Philistines for five years, then at this point, David would be about 35. Joab is David's top general.

General Abner then proposed a gladiator contest to Joab, where the best men were sent to battle each other. The intent was that this would save both armies from being decimated. They were kinsmen, after all. But the goal on Abner's part was to defeat David and thus regain Judah under the suzerainty of the house of Saul. Unfortunately, the 24 elite warriors slew each other and so the entire armies of both sides got involved. The battle was very intense but David's men came out on top. Abner retreated. Joab's brother, Asahel pursued him. As the youthful Asahel caught up, the veteran Abner essentially warned him (vss. 21, 22):

"Look, son, I know you are eager to kill me and have my armor as a trophy so you can show off to your company how brave and skillful a warrior you are. But you don't realize that you are out of your league, my boy! So why don't you pursue one of the young men, one of the raw recruits of my army and try to kill him as your trophy. I am a veteran commander and very skillful. I really don't want to kill you, but if you don't desist, I am going to have to. And then your brother and commander, Joab, is going to be very angry with me. I'd like to avoid that, if at all possible, so why don't you fall back now and think about it." We have to credit Abner; he gave Asahel fair warning.

But the young fool did not listen and so the wily veteran slew him. This, of course, enraged Asahel's brothers, Joab and Abishai, who then were determined to get revenge (vss. 24-26). Abner seeks a truce, noting that continuing the fighting will only engender more bitterness. Killing only begets more killing. This is a fratricidal civil war that Abner now sees he is losing and so he suggests a truce. Joab agrees.

Abner journeys back across Jordan to Ishbosheth's capital at Mahanaim, and Joab takes his troops and marches south back to David's capital at Hebron.

So David's army, led by his nephew, Joab, had lost 20 men including Joab's brother, Asahel, because of his youthful foolishness and false feelings of invincibility. We can sympathize with both sides here. Abner clearly did not want to kill him, and Asahel's feelings of invincibility were common to most males as young men. I know I personally did a lot of stupid, dangerous and foolish things when I was young: playing chicken with knives, taking idiotic risks sometimes when passing other vehicles on the highway, and many other things of which I am too ashamed or embarrassed to put in print. By the grace of God, I am still here, but I am paying the price for many of those things now in terms of aches, pains and a lower level of health than I might be enjoying otherwise. Can any of you other middle-aged and older men relate to that?

From this chapter, we can draw this lesson. Saul is dead. David has been anointed and crowned king by the tribe of Judah. His days of being a hunted man, an outlaw in the eyes of the government, are now over. He has come to a partial measure of success. He will no longer lack food as he did in the wilderness. He will no longer freeze his tootsies off sleeping in cold caves. He will move into a comfortable house, not the splendid palace he will enjoy later, but nonetheless, a far cry from the caves of En-gedi.

He will have servants to carry out his every wish and desire. The point is: how will this great change in his circumstances affect his character? Like his predecessor Saul on ascending the throne, the first signs are good. David did not suddenly become arrogant and proud and disdain any need of guidance from a higher power. He continued to seek direction from the Creator, from the God of Israel. David had known since his days tending sheep for his daddy that God had a plan for his life. The lesson here is also applicable to each one of us. God has a plan for each of our lives as well. It has been planned from the beginning of time. We must all undergo periods of trial and testing, periods of adversity and lack, times of trouble that seem to never cease. But it is during these times that our character is molded, for good or bad.

On a national level, when the World Trade Center and Pentagon were hit on 9-11, we saw an immediate *apparent* turning to God by the nation. But

this was merely a natural necessity in time of grave danger. It was not synonymous with true godliness. As many of us foresaw, it was only born of the need of the moment and would not last, because it did not engender enduring character change in most individuals. It was not genuine repentance.

Once more on a personal level, when we arrive at a time in our life when we perhaps achieve some measure of success—as David was now beginning to experience—will the virtues which were born in us during adversity remain strong or will they wither under the new temptations which accompany success?

When we arrive in the realm of prosperity and/or fame, will we still turn to God and acknowledge that we are where we are solely and completely due to His munificent benevolence, and not to our great works? Will we still turn to Him for guidance and direction or will we think that now that we have “made it,” that we can dispense with seeking His will any further? Will those godly character qualities which were forged in the crucible of our fiery trials continue to manifest in our prosperity?

(Pause and reflect as you read each of the following individual character traits.) Will patience and longsuffering and goodness and gentleness still pervade our soul and spirit? In times of blessing, will responsibility, loyalty, compassion, forgiveness, love, discernment, wisdom, sensitivity, selflessness, deference, meekness, justice, courtesy, generosity, determination and especially humility, will all these continue to be the hallmarks of our character? Will virtue remain in success?

Let us be ever mindful that subtle temptations and spiritual sinkholes are abundant on the highways labeled “Success.” Let us also remember that these new circumstances are met by an overcomer by calling upon that spiritual strength which has been stored up during the storms of adversity and delayed hope. When faced with the blessings *and burdens* of success, will the character of an overcomer still shine forth in you? I pray that it be so.

*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.*