



FEED MY SHEEP

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Vengeful Joabs among the Overcomers

Previously we saw how that David had become king over Judah, while Saul's son, Ishbosheth, was on the throne of the rest of the nation of Israel. "Ishy's" handler and uncle, General Abner, betraying his nephew, had attempted to deliver the loyalty of Israel to David. However, just as he had succeeded, David's nephew and top general, Joab, killed Abner in revenge for killing Joab's brother, Asahel. David realized that all Israel and Judah would believe that *he* had ordered Joab to kill Abner. After making a public denial, David takes the highly unusual actions of forcing Joab to march in front of the funeral procession (implied in the text), while he humbled himself by following the casket. Kings simply did not do that. But this was David's method of conveying to the people Joab's guilt and his own innocence in the murder.

2 Samuel 3:32 And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept.

Do you remember some years back in the Clinton presidency when Commerce Secretary Ron Brown was killed when his plane crashed into a mountain called St. John the Baptist in former Yugoslavia? At the funeral, news cameras captured President Clinton coming out the door grinning and obviously joking with those around him. But the very second he looked up and spotted the TV camera on him, his countenance changed instantaneously to grief. He suddenly produced a tear and wiped it from his eye. The man was an incredible actor!

Personally, I don't think King David was "doing a Bill Clinton" here; his tears were genuine.

David was a man of compassion, as we have seen demonstrated numerous times already in our studies. And as he had done at the memorial service for King Saul, David composed and gave a eulogy.

33 And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth?

34 Thy hands *were* not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him.

35 And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down.

In a previous study, we saw how the men of Jabesh-gilead fasted for seven days upon hearing of the death of Saul, and we pointed out how it was actually a fast during daylight hours only. Here in verse 35 is another indicator of that. David denied himself while everyone else partook of the food after the funeral. He was fasting until sundown. These actions impressed the people and they were convinced that David had nothing to do with Abner's assassination.

36 And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.

37 For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner.

38 And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?

If you recall from David's eulogy of Saul, and we notice the same thing here in his eulogy of Abner, that David does not lie about the man's character. He seeks the good traits in the man and these he extols. Verse 38 reminded me of an article I have had in my files for many years. It is from the *VFW* magazine of February 1982 and it is a reprint of the words of Thomas Jefferson eulogizing George Washington.

Allow me to quote a few selected paragraphs. Notice the similarity between Jefferson's honesty in extolling George Washington and David's eulogies of Saul and Abner. I warn you, some of it borders on humorous today—especially in the first paragraph, simply because we would be rather shocked to imagine such honesty. (Emphases are mine.)

"I think I knew General Washington intimately and thoroughly; and were I called on to delineate his character, it should be in terms like these: His mind was great and powerful *without being of the very first order*; [In other words, he was pretty smart, but not the sharpest knife in the drawer.] his penetration strong, though not so acute as that of a Newton, Bacon or Locke; and, *as far as he saw*, no judgment was ever sounder [I. e., GW thought highly of his own judgment skills.] It [his mind?] was *slow in operation*, being little aided by imagination or invention, but sure in conclusion. Hence the common remark of his officers of the advantage he derived from councils of war, where, hearing all suggestions, he selected whatever was best; and certainly, no general planned his battles more judiciously. ...

"Perhaps the strongest feature in his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighed; refraining if he saw a doubt, but, when once decided, going through with his purpose, whether obstacles opposed. His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known, no motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship or hatred, being able to bias his decision. He was, indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good and a great man. His temper was *naturally irritable* and high-toned; but reflection and resolution had obtained a firm and habitual ascendancy over it. If ever, however, it broke its bonds, he was most tremendous in his wrath.

"On the whole, his character was, in its mass, perfect; in nothing bad, in few points indifferent; and it may truly be said that never did Nature and fortune

combine more perfectly to make a man great, and to place him in the same constellation with whatever worthies have merited from man an everlasting remembrance. For his was the singular destiny and merit of leading the armies of his country successfully through an arduous war, for the establishment of its independence; of conducting its councils through the birth of a Government new in its forms and principles, until it had settled down into a quiet and orderly train; and of scrupulously obeying the laws through the whole of his career, civil and military, of which the history of the world furnishes no other example...

"He has often declared to me that he considered our new Constitution as an experiment on the practicability of republican government, and with what dose of liberty man could be trusted for his own good; that he was determined the experiment should have a fair trial, and would lose the last drop of his blood in support of it. I do believe that General Washington had a firm confidence in the durability of our government. I felt on his death, with my countrymen, that, 'Verily a very great man hath fallen this day *in Israel*.'"

Did Thomas Jefferson know that we are the descendants of Israel? I don't know. One must admit of its possibility, though. As we continue, David is confiding to some of his close courtiers that...

39 And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: YHWH shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.

That is quite a confession, isn't it? David recognizes that although he is king, he is no match for the overpowering personalities of his nephews. They are too "hard," it says. It means cruel, stubborn, and stiff-necked. The word "weak" can mean soft, delicate, weak or tender-hearted or tender as in a young plant that is only beginning to mature. So it has the meaning of immaturity. One would think that in David's case here, that "weak" means "immature" more than anything else. Let's compare that with...

2 Chronicles 13:7 And there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial, and have strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them.

The word translated "tenderhearted" there is

the same Hebrew word translated “weak” in 2 Samuel 2:39. We would surmise that David will soon outgrow this and do what is right concerning Joab and Abishai. But just what *is* the right response to their actions?

First of all, we have to remember that according to God’s law there is the principle of the “blood avenger” who has some kind of right to seek vengeance for a slain relative. But secondly, there is the principle of the “cities of refuge” where a slayer could go for sanctuary. He was not to be touched by the blood avenger as long as he was in the city of refuge.

Look now at the case of Abner, Asahel, Joab and Abishai...not only had Abner killed Asahel in a war situation—but in fact, Abner had even tried to persuade Asahel to quit pursuing him lest Abner be forced to kill him. Thus, it was also in self defense.

Therefore, Joab did not have the right of blood avenger. Moreover, the case had not even gone to court. Add to that the fact that Joab killed Abner in Hebron which was one of the designated cities of refuge. Joab is guilty of murder, plain and simple. David knew it and yet he felt powerless to do anything about it.

It certainly appears that this is a character weakness in David. He feared Joab just as wishy-Ishy had feared Abner. David’s great faith in the providence of God to protect him seems to have deserted him at this time—at least in regard to the strongman Joab. In fact, for another 33 years as he reigned over Israel, David *never* had the courage to enforce God’s law on his nephews. It was a death penalty offense. Instead, in his deathbed instructions to his son Solomon, David told Solomon to execute him after David was dead.

1 Kings 2: 5 Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, *and* what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that *was* about his loins, and in his shoes that *were* on his feet.

6 Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.

Since David is a type of the overcomers, what

does this tell us about overcomers? First, we must remember that David was a man like everyone else and therefore, he had his imperfections. Only the Greater David, Jesus the Christ, can be our model of perfection in everything. When David’s flaws show through, we cannot point to David and justify those weaknesses in ourselves. No, we emulate only the virtues of David, not his vices, few though they be.

As for corporate types and shadows, this presents an interesting speculation. Just as David and Joab were in the wilderness before the death of Saul, so also the overcomer company today has its Joabs among them. Will the Davids be strong enough in faith in the Providence of God to stand up to stronger willed men?

We discern Joabs even now, those who fellowship with overcomer candidates, those whose apparent goal is the same as the Davids, the goal of seeing the kingdom come and King Jesus reign in fullness. But the Joabs want to take matters into their own hands. Some of them want to “help” God bring in the kingdom, believing it is not going to get done unless they do it. This is not only true among the potential overcomer Christians in Christian Israel circles, but it is certainly apparent among the Christian Zionists as well; i.e., those who do all in their power to support the Jews and the Israeli state in order to help bring about (as they see it) the second coming of Christ to old Jerusalem—which is a gross misunderstanding of Bible prophecy.

In contrast, David was patient in waiting for Providence to work through politics to open the way to rulership. To *let* the kingdom come. Joabs want to *make* the kingdom come, to *force* the kingdom to come.

Like Joab, some affiliated with the overcomers will give vent to personal vendettas, seeking revenge on those they consider to be in the Saul church—just as Abner was of the House of Saul. The Joab types retain bitterness and hatred in their hearts, not just for Philistines and Edomites and Amalekites, but for the House of Saul as well, their own brethren.

And the Joabs shall be cursed for it...not to eternal damnation, of course, but to disciplinary correction through the various means which our Father has in His own counsel. And so, let each of us ask himself: Do you find yourself spiritually flirting with

Joab? Wanting to take matters into your own hands to bring in the kingdom? Wanting to coddle and fine-tune your bitterness and resentment against someone? Those Joabite tendencies in us must be surrendered at the foot of the cross. But our tendency is to respond and whine: “But I don’t want to surrender these feelings. He hurt me” or “You don’t know what she did to me!”

Fellow overcomer candidates, these are our tests. If the offenses were not hurtful, there would be nothing to forgive, and hence, no way to become an overcomer. Praise God for His exquisitely designed trials. What you are going through is perfect for you. What I am going through is perfect for me. These are the Providentially designed means through which we enter into perfection.

In the past several issues of FMS, we had a glimpse into the Machiavellian chicanery that went on in the political affairs of ancient Israel; and observing the political landscape in 21st century America-Israel, we conclude that politics really doesn’t change much over the millennia. It has always been about the struggle of the common man to obtain and retain freedom while men of unrestrained ambition, greed and lust for power conspire and connive to be king of the hill. General Abner and General Joab were two cases in point.

Rarely comes there a man of uncommon character like David, who, though he is not without faults, is nonetheless a man whose motivation is first to serve and please God. It was the very providence of God which arranged circumstances so that this lad of 17 or thereabouts would first come to King Saul’s attention as a musician who could calm his violent temper, and then as a warrior who had the courage to take on and defeat a ten-foot-tall giant.

Providence brought this young man to King Saul’s court in order to train him by serving a cruel and selfish master—a master who eventually grew so jealous of the righteous David that he tried to murder him. For a period of about 13 years, David was given first-hand experience in the royal court and then in the latter portion of those years, he was fleeing from Saul. All the while he was learning from Saul how not to rule over God’s people.

We saw that the situation even grew so dangerous that David went and lived with Israel’s Philis-

tine enemies for over a year. Only when news of Saul’s death reached him, did David come back to be with his own people in Judah. They proclaimed him king over them. Meanwhile, Saul’s cousin and top general, Abner, used Saul’s surviving son, Ishbosheth, as his puppet by installing him as king over all the other tribes of Israel.

We saw how General Abner was murdered by David’s nephew and top general, Joab. Abner was about to betray his own puppet, Ishbosheth, by telling all the tribal leaders of Israel to abandon Ishy and announce their allegiance to David as king over them all. We have seen that Ishy was a wishy-washy kind of guy. Now that Abner is no longer alive to tell him what to do, he gets kind of panicky—as seen here...

2 Samuel 4:1 And when Saul’s son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled.

This is no surprise. We have already seen that King Ishbosheth really did not have the leadership skills necessary to be king, so with his controller, Abner, gone, Ishbosheth must have felt totally vulnerable. It was also very likely that Ishy soon learned that Abner had been in the process of stabbing him in the back politically by making an alliance with David. Ishy now felt not only betrayed, but so very alone.

But why would all the populace of Israel be troubled as well? I would suggest that it is because with their strongman, Abner, gone, the Israelites are looking over their shoulders and seeing that those nasty Philistines are over yonder hill just licking their chops.

The nation of Israel is once again in a weakened condition and they are essentially leaderless. Every man in Israel with an iota of common sense realizes that this would be the ideal time for the Philistines to invade and strike them again. The stage is now set for further “patriotic” Joabite conspiracies.

(To be continued.)

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