



FEED MY SHEEP

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The Coup D'état Begins

Last issue we took a detour from our continuing studies in the life of David to examine the issue of whether Abraham and Sarah committed incest. That question arose because David's son, Amnon, had incestuously raped his half-sister, Tamar; and Abram had stated that Sarai and he had the same father but not the same mother. We trust last issue laid to rest any qualms any believer had about that question. We now rejoin the narrative of the multiple tragedies in David's family.

We had paused at the point where David's son, Absalom—now returned from exile for murdering Amnon—has been ingratiating himself with all the people by slandering his father, the king. He has sought the approval of his father to go to Hebron to “do service” to God. However, Hebron was Absalom's birth place, and the reader is given a sneaking suspicion that Absalom's true motive is to garner support among the Hebronites for a move to oust his father from the throne. This suspicion is confirmed immediately.

KJV 2 Samuel 15:10 But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.

11 And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, *that were* called; and they went in their simplicity [innocence], and they knew not any thing.

First, note the number “200” again associated with Absalom the Pentecostal, 200 being the number of insufficiency. (See FMS #95, October 2006.) Here we have 200 men invited by Prince Absalom, who is seen as David's heir-apparent by this time. They feel hon-

ored to be invited as special guests to a sacrifice by the Prince. They travel with him down to Hebron for the big sacrifice-“shindig.”

While there were indeed sacrifices made, and undoubtedly Prince Absalom put on quite a religious show, we need to remember that in many of the sacrifices, the animal was not burned up. Rather, it was roasted and grilled and shared with friends of the one making the sacrifice. And of course there would be plenty of vintage “Hebron Cabernet Sauvignon” to go around. After all, what's a meal without some good wine, Absalom would remark.

So, if you can picture it, Absalom was throwing a Texas-size barbecue party—you know, like a political fund-raiser—only this time, Absalom would not make his typical stump speech. Instead, he would use the opportunity to incite and inflame the guests to follow him as he takes action “now, to overthrow and replace his bumbling, decrepit, conservative, senile, dinosaur father and his whole corrupt administration.”

“It's time for change,” Abbie would shout. “We need new leadership in Jerusalem! Are you with me?!” “I can't hear you; are you with me?!”

“Yeah, yeah, we're with you!,” his planted cronies in the crowd would answer. Then they would start the chant:

“David must go! David must go! Absalom, Absalom, long live the king! Absalom, Absalom, long live the king!”

The chant would continue until the mass psychology had worked its magic and everybody there was caught up in the fervor of the moment, committing themselves without benefit of quiet and sober, unemotional reflection; committing themselves to a cause of which they had just been informed, and of which they knew no details. They have been unwittingly deceived into being part of Absalom's conspiracy for a coup d'état.

But no doubt, Absalom's advance men had carefully selected these 200 men out of all Jerusalem as being likely sympathizers, and when Absalom addressed them in his rally for revolution, he surely promised them all peachy jobs in his new administration. This is all S.O.P., Standard Operating Procedure, in political coup d'états whether in ancient Israel or in banana republics in the modern era. "Viva Fidel! [with clenched fist] Viva Fidel!" And in the middle of Absalom's big barbecue, look who arrives! It's one of David's closest confidential advisors.

12 And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.

I interpret this in this manner. I believe that Ahithophel was *already* privy to the plot, but he was holding back from full commitment to Absalom, waiting to see if Absalom could really muster the support he claimed he could. Ahithophel could not afford to risk being part of a palace plot unless he felt certain it would succeed. Otherwise, he was a dead man.

So Absalom gets word to Ahithophel to leave Jerusalem. Notice the very important fact that Ahithophel was one of David's counselors. This was a very inner circle position, probably comparable to the president's chief of staff, or his national security advisor, or head of the CIA.

Ahithophel needs to proceed very carefully, so before Absalom left for Hebron, he had told Ahithophel in advance to get a couple days off from David and go home to Giloh. You see, Giloh was in southern Judah, not far from Hebron, and it would be much easier for Ahithophel to join the revolution in Hebron from there.

Then, at the peak moment during Absalom's

combination Texas barbecue *cum* "Nuremberg rally," if you will, Absalom would arrange to have Ahithophel arrive. Ahithophel would be greatly impressed with the whipped-up enthusiasm of the crowd and he would then offer his full support to the revolution...which would in turn greatly encourage the partisans with the joining of so high-ranking an official as Ahithophel to their ranks.

13 And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after [in favor of] Absalom.

14 And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not *else* escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.

David is not in denial here. He has always been a realist. With confidence in his intelligence sources, David realizes that the wisest course of action at the moment is to flee. If he remains in the city, Absalom will surely come with a large force and massacre everyone in Jerusalem. Remember, David did not have a standing army. The only way to prevent the massacre is to put out the word throughout the city that a rebellion is imminent, hostile forces are approaching the city, that the king is relocating his HQ, and everyone who desires to come with him is welcome.

15 And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.

16 And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house.

In the chart of David's family which we printed in the August 2006 (issue #93), we had included three of David's wives. Now we know that he had at least ten concubines. It does not say how many concubines he took with him. It is conceivable he could have had many more. We just don't know.

17 And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off.

That is a summary verse: they left Jerusalem and remained for a while in a place that was far off. The sacred historian who penned 2 Samuel now backtracks to describe the scene as they were just departing Jerusalem.

18 And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.

If you recall when David had to flee Saul, he began to attract to himself many men who were disaffected with Saul for one reason or another. They threw in their lot early with David. Eventually, they numbered 600. They were probably all Israelites.

Remember also that at one point, David and his men lived among the Philistines for 16 months. Then they lived in Ziklag. Probably at about that time, they began to incorporate into their group some warriors who had defected from three non-Israelite groups, the Cherethites, the Pelethites and the Gittites.

We identified them in our audio lecture long ago, but let me set forth the same for our readers. The Cherethites were either a branch of the Philistines or had been allies with them. Their territory was on the southern end of Philistia and adjacent to south Judah. These Cherethites were undoubtedly also attacked by the Amalekites at the same time the Judahites of Ziklag were robbed, routed and many kidnapped.

The identity of the Pelethites is a little more uncertain, but scholars theorize they also were Philistines of one sort or another. Thus, when the Amalekites attacked, it is conceivable that this may have been the time that some of them joined forces with David to pursue the Amalekites. But at some point, some of them definitely came aboard under David, joining David's group of 600. There is no question who the Gittites were. They were men from Gath, one of the major cities of the Philistines. It's Goliath's hometown.

I believe it is likely that as men from these non-Israelite groups joined the band of 600, that they just kept the name, like the 82nd Airborne or something. The men come and go, but the name remains. So when David became king, some of the original 600 Israelites settled down in their tribal territories. Others of them remained in "the 600." But consider that it is now decades since the founding of "the 600." Hence, a large number of the non-Israelites now partially comprise the 600. This was not unusual in the ancient world. Monarchs often had foreigners as their personal bodyguard, precisely because of the threat of palace plots usually involving relatives. However, David's intel

sources initially informed him that it appeared that Absalom had the support of a far larger number of men than David's 600. Regardless of whether my interpretation is true or not, the fact remains that there was a band of Philistines and other non-Israelites who served among David's Secret Service. Next, David offers these strangers the opportunity to avoid sacrificing themselves for him. He speaks to the chief soldier of the contingent of foreigners, a Philistine named Ittai.

19 Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, [Strong's #H5237: nokriy {nok-ree'}] and also an exile.

20 Whereas thou camest but yesterday [that doesn't mean literally yesterday, but it's figurative, meaning that Ittai the Philistine had not been with them for very long], should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth *be* with thee.

This is certainly a noble and kind offer on the part of David, is it not? But observe Ittai's response.

21 And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.

This language reminds us of Ruth, doesn't it? Except that I have no doubt that Ruth was an Israelite whereas I am equally convinced that Ittai was not an Israelite. If this man and his band *were* Israelites, it is simply inconceivable to me that David would have offered his native military men a free pass from the pending battles. But it makes perfect sense to offer non-Israelites the opportunity to stay out of internecine warfare.

22 And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that *were* with him.

23 And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.

It says the "brook Kidron," but it seldom had

water in it except after the heavy rains in winter. Most of the year it was simply a deep and dry ravine. The word for "brook" could also have been translated "valley." It formed the eastern boundary of Jerusalem separating it from the mount of Olives.

The Writ states that once the people passed over Kidron that they went towards the wilderness. That refers to the northern desert area of Judah through which the road to Jericho ran. So that once they crossed the Kidron valley, they were heading first towards the Mount of Olives and then beyond that to Jericho and finally to the Jordan River at the northern tip of the Dead Sea.

So David stood just outside the city wall of Jerusalem and oversaw the evacuation of the city of everyone who desired to leave, and then once everyone was across the Kidron ravine, David also went over. Next, two characters are re-introduced into the story, Zadok and Abiathar.

24 And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city.

We first encountered these men seven chapters ago, concerning the wars of David.

2 Samuel 8:15 And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.

16 And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder;

17 And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests; and Seraiah was the scribe;

These men will figure prominently in the stories ahead so let me present some of the background on them at this juncture. Zadok was a descendant of Aaron through Eleazar; Abiathar was a descendant of Aaron through Ithamar, down through Eli and through his son, Phinehas, the corrupted priest. Here now we are being introduced to a period in which there were actually *two* men who served as co-high priests.

Here's a thumbnail sketch of the life of Abiathar: Remember when David was fleeing Saul and he

came to the city of Nob? There David pretended to be on a secret mission for King Saul and he asked for Goliath's sword which David had previously stored in the tabernacle at Nob for safekeeping.

David also demanded of the high priest, Ahimelech, Abiathar's father, that he (Ahimelech) give David and his men the old showbread to eat. But Doeg the Edomite, who witnessed all this, went back and informed Saul. Later, Ahimelech and 84 priests of Nob and their families were all massacred by Doeg on orders of the demented Saul. Only Abiathar escaped. He had the ephod and the urim and thummim with him and he then linked up with David and his men in the wilderness. Abiathar was therefore the next legitimate high priest.

Now in 2 Samuel 8:17 (above), why does it say that Zadok and Ahimelech, the son of Abiathar, were the priests? First of all, let us understand that there are two Ahimelech's here. One is Abiathar's father; the other is his son. Nothing unusual about that; many baby boys are named after their grandfathers, even today. But why is the son Ahimelech mentioned in this instance (and others) instead of his father? For the same reason that in the eight mentions of Zadok and Abiathar together in the account of Absalom's rebellion, that we always find Zadok mentioned first. Why?

Because for some unknown reason, David had made Zadok a co-high priest and gave him precedence over Abiathar. Perhaps Abiathar displayed some defect of character which caused David to favor Zadok. Later on, we will find that Abiathar deserts David and conspires with another of David's sons, Adonijah, in an attempt to obtain the throne, just as his older brother, Absalom, had tried. When Solomon became king, he did not put Abiathar to death for the treason, but he did remove him from the priesthood, and thus fulfilled the prophecy made hundreds of years earlier to Eli the priest.

(to be continued)

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