



FEED MY SHEEP

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Issue #97

December 2006

Absalom's Machiavellian Intrigues

Our studies in the life of David have brought us recently to the troubles, foibles, and squabbles among the family members. But the foibles and squabbles are not mere petty bickering and gossip, but rather life-shattering events such as rape, incest and murder. To review the dire events briefly before continuing, David's first-born son, Amnon, had raped his half-sister, Tamar. Tamar's full-brother, Absalom, then murdered Amnon two years later at a sheep-shearing party.

Absalom was both proud and ambitious. He was obsessed with obtaining his father's throne. But he was merely the third-born son and the way Absalom saw it, taking the first-born Amnon out of the way would help clear the path for him to ascend to the throne. But what about the second-born Chileab? Outside of his birth being recorded, he is never mentioned again, so it is likely that he died in infancy or in his youth.

After murdering Amnon, Absalom fled the country and remained in exile for three years. At that point, General Joab schemed to bring him back. But when he got back to Jerusalem, David commanded that Absalom not be permitted to enter the palace. Thus, he did not see his father's face for two full years.

Recall that we had noted several occasions in the life of Absalom which clearly identified him as another Saul-type, another type of the church in the age of Pentecost. For 2,000 years, the phony side of the pentecostal church has not seen our Father's face. In other words, they have no real intimacy whatsoever with the Father.

I went on to discuss the modern Pentecostal

movement, noting that just because there is a lot of fraud and phoniness involved, it does not mean that there is not a real work of God going on. I cautioned against throwing the baby out with the bath.

At this point in the story, Absalom is feeling the sting of his father, King David, for ignoring him for two full years while Absalom is living within shouting distance of the royal palace. Spitefully, Absalom burned Joab's barley field to get his attention, and then used Joab to get *somewhat* reinstated to the position of prince again. So now we pick up the story in 2 Samuel 15.

KJV 2 Samuel 15:1 And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him.

Besides the number 200, what other number is associated with Pentecost? 50! Again, this is an indicator connecting Absalom with the realm of insufficiency, the realm of Pentecost. On the literal level, by having 50 men run before him, Absalom was arrogating to himself the protocols which belonged to kings. This again relates to what we commented last time about the common abuse, especially by leaders in the modern pentecostal/charismatic movement. They like the trappings of power and wealth; they like the glitter and the gold; they like to be elevated above the rest of the brethren; and unfortunately, as it says in Jeremiah, *the people love to have it so*.

That is one reason why I have often—perhaps not so often on tape or in print—but in many private conversations, why I have warned against putting any

minister on a pedestal, and I mean that especially about myself. *Don't you dare do that to me.* It is harmful to both of us.

I *chose* to be a Bible teacher, or you could say God *appointed* me to be a Bible teacher—depending on your view of free will—but in any case, as a teacher, and according to the Bible in James 3:1, I will *already* incur stricter judgment because I have a responsibility to teach the truth of the Word to the best of my knowledge and ability. I do not want any additional chastisement for falling prey to ego, pride and vanity. I do not want such chastisement to fall on me as will happen to many ministers—Pentecostal or otherwise—who *place themselves* on pedestals. It is always a grave temptation in this line of work, so please do not exacerbate it. Just treat me like your brother and your neighbor, not like I am any more special than you are. I am not.

Absalom, with the 50 men running before him, loves to be seen by the people, just as typical pentecostals leaders do. Incidentally, the reason a monarch would have these men running before him was because they had these baton-like sticks (“billy-clubs”) and as they went through the narrow city streets which were crowded with people, they cleared the way, shouting and announcing that the king was coming, “out of the way, out of the way,” or in this case “Prince Absalom is coming; out of the way.”

Today, when the President of the United States goes anywhere by automobile, he is in a very specially designed limousine, which has the little flags on the corners of the vehicle. The little flags display the presidential seal. He also has a certain number of motorcycle policemen riding ahead of him and certain other vehicles of the Secret Service running both ahead of him and behind him.

Now, supposing a cabinet secretary or an under-secretary in the Bush administration started having himself driven around in a limousine just like the President's, with the little flags, and with the escort motorcycles and Secret Service, just exactly like the President uses. Would that be a pretty strong clue that this underling thinks that he is either on a par with the President, or that he IS the President? Well, that is essentially what Absalom was doing here.

It reminds me of that verse in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 4 where it talks about someone sitting in the tem-

ple who doesn't belong there, who is showing himself as God. Here is Absalom showing himself as king. His inordinate pride and ambition are reaching the uncontrollable stage. It will soon manifest in an even more overt move to take the throne of his father, David.

God's Word cautioned against leaders “multiplying horses...” (Deuteronomy 17:16). David perhaps did not have or use such ostentatious processions of horse-drawn chariots when he went about. Although he was the king, he seems not to have desired these trappings of royalty which were commonly used by monarchs in other kingdoms of that era. Instead, David appeared to be content to live a more subdued lifestyle, relatively speaking. But his son, our new Saul-type, Absalom, had this obsessive desire to be seen as a great personage, indeed, as THE great one, over and above his father and king. Recall that under David, Israel had risen to become great among the nations. Israel was the USA of its day. (See *Israel's Lost Empires* by Steven Collins, \$24 ppd.) Therefore, undoubtedly, many of the people of Israel, when they witnessed Absalom parading himself with such great pomp, felt that *this was more like it...* that it was more befitting for a great nation like Israel to have its royalty travel about with appropriate glitter and magnificence. But pride goes before a fall.

2 And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate:

In those days, much of the business of government as it related to individual persons and their personal cases were handled in certain areas right at the city gates. You could say that the “gate” was the courthouse or the city hall.

2 b ... and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city *art* thou? And he [i.e., the man who came to petition the king] said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel.

In other words, the guy says: “I'm Elmer Landers and I'm from the tribe of Reuben, from the city of such-and-such.” Thus, Absalom strikes up a conversation with him. Introducing himself as the prince and heir-apparent, he asks the fellow: “Tell me, Elmer, my good man, what uh, what seems to be the problem? Go ahead and tell me how you've been wronged.” Thus Absalom speaks encouragement to

the petitioners who have come to see *King David*. So Absalom gets them to tell *him* about the reason they have come to seek judgment.

3 And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but *there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.*

“[T]hy matters are good and right”...means “your case, your lawsuit has great merit, my friend.” I totally agree with you is what Absalom is telling the litigant. Notice Absalom says this after hearing only *one* side of the case! It is obvious what Absalom is doing: he is politicking! He is out there in the area of city hall, the courthouse, the city gates, telling every man that comes for a court hearing of his case that he, Absalom, agrees with him. He is ingratiating himself into the good will of the people. And then he says in effect: “...unfortunately, the king has not provided any officials to hear your case.”

But remember, Absalom had gone to the gates early in the morning. It might have been that the king’s deputies, the judicial officers, did not ordinarily arrive until 9 a.m. or thereabouts. Meanwhile, Absalom is creating the impression that his father is lazy or incompetent, or both.

In other words, Absalom is telling the petitioners: “Gosh, I’m sorry you have to wait. I’m embarrassed that my father has been slacking off on the job. He should have someone here to hear your case now. I hope you will overlook it; but you gotta understand: Dad’s gettin’ kinda old and sometimes I think he’s slippin’ a bit, if you know what I mean...”

4 Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!

So it is clear that although David had brought his son back from exile, it has been a couple of years now and David still did not entrust Absalom with any public office. He considers him unfit to serve the public in *any* position of trust. This eats at Absalom day and night because if there is one thing he wants it is power! His ego knows no bounds. He is so proud, thinking he is *entirely* fit for public service, that to be snubbed continuously like this by his father is turning his bitterness into anger. Now he has begun to implement a plot to seize the power he lusts after.

5 And it was so, that when any man came nigh to *him* to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him.

Here again is more politicking by Absalom. The ordinary folks come up to bow down before him and instead, Absalom grabs them and gives them a bear hug and a kiss on the cheek, as was the custom of that time between equals. We can see how this would be received by the common people and how the petitioner would go home that night and be telling his whole clan or village:

“I tell you, my fellow townsmen, that Absalom is one nice and friendly fellow. He told me my case was totally just and when I went to bow down to him, he wouldn’t let me. He just grabbed me and kissed me like you and I do, just like a brother. I don’t understand why King David doesn’t give him some important responsibility like being a judge or something. I know he’d be a good one. But I guess it must be like my friend, Absalom, told me: I guess the king is just getting old and senile now and there isn’t much any of us can do about it. We’ll just have to put up with it until we get a new king.”

6 And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

The cunning and deceitful Absalom was undermining his father’s authority and his father’s good will among the people. He was scheming to subvert the good government of his father—all the while pretending that he was the righteous one, that he was the man of the people, and so forth. What a hypocrite! After having planted those seeds among the people for some period of time, Absalom now moves on to implement phase two of his treasonous plot.

7 And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron.

We need to stop here and note that virtually everyone (everyone, that is, except those who believe the King James Version is perfect and inerrant¹), but nearly all agree that this 40 years is an error in copying in the Textus Receptus, because the Syriac manuscript, and the Arabic manuscript version and Josephus all state it to be *four* years.

Think about it. David only reigned 40 years total and there is much more to come in the life of David. It could not refer to the age of Absalom because he was born in Hebron after David had ascended the throne. Conversely, the four year period would be measured from the time that Absalom came back from exile. For two years, he did not see his father's face, and for the past two years, he has been secretly and cunningly campaigning for the office of king.

Imagine that: for two years, he has stood at the gates and ingratiated himself with people from all over the 12 states of Israel, *not by doing anything for them*, but by *pretending* to sympathize with them, and telling them that if *he* were in a position to do anything, that he certainly would. Moreover, Absalom was always sure to leave the impression with the people that it is his father's fault that he—their friend Absalom—is unable to actually do anything for the petitioners.

But nothing like this happens on the political stage in our era, does it? Of course, it does. The politician running for a particular office will build himself a base of support by trying to paint the incumbent as being responsible for all the ills of society and by claiming that he is their hope for "change." Then he gets elected but nothing changes for the better, does it? The cycle seems to go on and on.

As we note from this cycle, that man's government has failed over and over again, what is the ultimate solution to this problem? It is only the application of God's government with His commandments, statutes and judgments. Only this will bring about the utopia man has always dreamed of. It is not just a fantasy. The reality of the millennial kingdom is not far off. The Word of God has promised it will be so.

Absalom has been now been granted an audience with his father, King David, and Absalom is lying through his teeth as he pretends to be so pious and so devoted to Yahweh, that he claims he has to go to Hebron to fulfill this vow.

8 For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.

The phrase "serve the LORD" simply means that

he would "do service" to God; in other words, that he would go and offer some sacrifices. We might wonder why couldn't Absalom just as easily have offered the sacrifices at Zion or somewhere right there in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem. Why did he need to go to Hebron?

David appears not to have been at all suspicious. Thus David was blinded by God to Absalom's machinations and intrigues so that further judgment would be carried out on both father and son, just as God had foretold through Nathan. Absalom had been born while David reigned from Hebron so Absalom is going back to his birth place now. He needs to get some distance from Jerusalem in order to marshal his forces before attempting to overthrow his father. Since Hebron was his birth place, Absalom felt that he could expect a warm welcome and much support there.

Not only for that reason, but since David had moved the nation's capital from Hebron to Jerusalem, there were undoubtedly a portion of the people in Hebron who resented David for that. Think of the merchants who lost a lot of business when the capital moved. David is possibly so blinded to his son's intentions that he might even have been pleased to hear that his son wanted to go do sacrifice to Yahweh.

9 And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron.

The stage is now set for another tragedy in the life of David and his family. (*to be continued*)

ENDNOTE

1. Nonetheless, in our opinion, although not perfect, the King James Version is still the best and most accurate translation, primarily because nearly all other English translations are derived from a seriously defective set of manuscripts—much more erroneous than the Received Text (Textus Receptus) which underlies the KJV and NKJV. See our 20-part lecture series, *Which Bible? Which Version?* The CD format is now at the same low price as audiotapes, \$55 ppd. The album(s) includes numerous charts and visual aids.

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