

Shammah and the Field of Lentils

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[0 : 0 0] verses 11 and 12 of the chapter that we read 2 Samuel chapter 23 we read and after him was Shammah the son of Agi the Hararite and the Philistines were gathered together into a troop where was a piece of ground full of lentils and the people fled from the Philistines but he stood in the midst of the ground and defended it and slew the Philistines and the Lord wrought a great victory it's not entirely clear whether this incident which describes the heroic action of Shammah the son of Agi the Hararite whether it's part of the same battle that we have described in verses 9 and 10 and so on about Dohoh the Ahlites of the three mighty men when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle and the men of Israel were gone away in other words were melted away they had fled very similar to what we read here in verse 11 and 12 the people fled from the Philistines he arose that is Eliezer the son of Dohoh the Ahlite and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary and his hand clave unto the sword and the Lord wrought a great victory that day and the people returned after him only to spoil it in other words the people only came flooding back again once the victory was won and there was spoil to be gained from the battlefield now this description of Shammah in the middle of his parcel of ground which is full of lentils it's quite similar although obviously a wee bit different to what we read in 1 Chronicles 11 where we read it verses 12 and 14 after him was Eliezer the son of Dohoh the Ahlite who's named in the previous verses of our own chapter who was one of the three mighties he was with David at Pasdamin means a place of blood or much blood and there the Philistines were gathered together to battle where was a parcel of ground full of barley and the people fled from before the Philistines and they set themselves in the midst of that parcel and delivered it and slew the Philistines and the Lord saved them by a great deliverance so similarities but it's possible that it was you know the same battle spread over an area in a time perhaps a harvest time where you've got the lentils in the one field and barley in another section of field a different part of the hillside or whatever in the same battle or it might just be two completely separate incidents what is distinctive here about Shammah in verses 11 and 12 is that he appears to be standing alone it seems as though the Philistines in the course of battle have again regrouped and they're about to chase the rest of the Lord's people off the battlefield the people fled from the Philistines the implication is all the people fled and melted away just like in the previous verses with Elizabeth and I don't know the height the people fled they melted away in the time of the battle it looked like they were losing so they fled now sadly of course this you could see as a description of many of those who would outwardly seem to be the Lord's people when the going gets tough against them when the battle goes against them they melt away or they will not stand firm in the day but there are those who do amongst David's mighty men those who are used of the Lord to turn the tide of battle and we say used of the Lord because you'll notice that in each case whether it's Eleazar the son of Dohoh the Ahlite we read of how the Lord brought a great victory that day or else in the Chronicles it says the Lord saved them by a great deliverance it is the Lord who works the deliverance it is the Lord who makes the battle go the way that it does but he makes use of human agency and these men particularly in our verse here

Shammah the son of Agi the Haderite is distinct in the sense that he is prepared to stand if need be alone perhaps expecting to die in that field of lead because where no doubt all the crops have been trampled down by the fleeing people or the Philistines themselves but in the midst of that strategic piece of ground he stands firm the Philistines may well have hoped that everybody would just run and most people did and the devil and all those who ally themselves with the devil in this world the powers of this world always hope that they will have unanimity of surrender because if they have unanimity of surrender then it's much harder for anyone to pop their head above the parapet and to oppose the sort of steamroller force of the devil's power in this world whenever a single one stands up it highlights the fact that everything that the forces of the world are they know that this isn't actually right this isn't the way it should go if you think of you know

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego where you've got the great big pole like statue of gold in the plains of Shinar and the Nebuchadnezzar sets up and almost everybody bows down to worship but not these three men they won't do it no matter what the king threatens them with and it gets him absolutely enraged now why is it you're shrugging shoulders and saying well it's only three people all the other thousands are doing it that's okay but the fact that anybody stands up against them gets them enraged out of all proportion if you put it into the New Testament context and think how many people went into the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and made such a mess and a fuss and said this is not in the temple sports meant to be a house of prayer how could you be running this racket in God's house and disgracing this holy place and that might make people think oh yeah right enough you know we've got used to it but that's not actually how it's meant to be but one man stood against him and yes we know that it was Jesus and yes we know he was the son of God but remember that the men who put him to death for precisely standing up to them in that way did not believe he was the son of God they didn't think they were taking on the almighty they thought they were just squashing a bug that they were they were destroying the one person who stood up to them and who in standing up to them drew attention to the wrongness of what everybody else had just accepted up to that point the Philistines regrouped the Israelites fled away they hoped no doubt they'd have a nice easy battle and all they'd have to do is advance and reclaim the ground but oops there's one awkward character

Shammah the son of Agi the Haralite standing in the midst of the parcel of ground of lentils and he is not and he is not going to be moved he is not going to budge so they have to come against him and fight him what a pain they'd hope for an easy battle but nevertheless it's only one so let's just kill him and be done with it but it doesn't work out that way he stood in the midst of the ground and defended it and slew the Philistines now it doesn't mean of course he slew every single one that came against him every single soldier in the Philistine army but it means that all those who attacked them ended up dead anyone who tried to surround him or to destroy him ended up dead eventually the Philistines would lose heart and go away or retreat or else others might come to join him or whatever but for the moment he stood alone and no matter what they did they could not overcome him now we know of course it is the Lord is the reason why he couldn't overcome and the Lord verse 12 wrought a great victory this is what the Lord does time and time again these are David's mighty men

David began his military career if we can put it that way by saying to the giant the Philistine you know you are coming against me with a sword and a shield and a spear and armor but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts whose armies you have defiled and the battles are not won with these weapons the battle is the Lord's and this is where the truth is stated again and again the battle is the Lord's the Lord wrought a great victory that day and this is something which even the heathen prophets recognized remember Balaam who was told to come and curse Israel but he found he couldn't do it there was no power of prophecy against the Lord's people in Numbers 23 read it verse 23 surely there is no enchantment against Jacob neither is there any divination against Israel according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel what hath God wrought what has God done what hath God wrought the Lord wrought a great victory now the Lord had shown himself plenty of times in the past whether it was

[9 : 18] David in the Philistines or Saul in the Philistines or you know Jehoshaphat and the Ammonites or whoever it happened to be that the Lord could work a great victory without any persons being used in it he could he could overcome say do you want me to fight in this battle stand still and see the salvation of the Lord and he makes miracles happen he sends thunder as hail on the Philistines or he causes the light to reflect off the water and look like blood when the sun rise and so they all end up being slain by each other and so on he can work miracles of deliverance without anybody he does not need us but he chooses so often to work through human means which of us would not like to be a star in a team or to rise above all the rest whether it be in our business or our profession or our sporting achievement or whatever it may be everybody would wish even for a few moments to be in the limelight and the star that rises above everybody else and to be the champion to be the hero just for a little while and this we do by doing that which nobody else was able to do and that's really what the hero does here this is what this shama does here he does what nobody else is able to do or we might turn it slightly and see he does what nobody else is prepared to do because he knows the cost is likely to be that he himself is going to die that he himself is going to die in this parcel of ground this of lentils this field of lentils here and we think well why bother why are you going to stand and die here shama you can run with everybody else and you can live to fight another day this battle is lost the philistines have won everybody's melting away you save your own skin too you can at least live and fight another day or you run just now and then you regroup the others and you come back again but no he's not doing he knows if he runs with everybody else it's just like everybody else if he stands firm some people might join him or they might not but the philistines will then have to stop and deal with this one who stands against them and standing against them of course he kept on slaying them he was given the victory the lord wrought a great victory he stood in the midst of the ground and defended it and slew the philistines and the lord wrought a great victory and the implication is he is distinguished by having done so alone when nobody else was prepared to do it this is what makes him the hero this is what makes him the star he is able to do that which nobody else could do or nobody else was prepared to do when we stand as it were in that way or when we maybe draw attention in that way it's not out of a desire to be a celebrity it's perhaps in a recognition that come what may this is what we must do even if we die for it think of

Shadrach Meshach and Abednego again as we said in Daniel you know where they said you know the lord who has delivered us a time and again is able to deliver us out of your hand but if not be it known unto you oh king we will not bow down and worship the golden image that you've set up likewise Esther of course when she was encouraged to intercede with the king Ahasuerus you know she thought but if I go into the king when I've not been called for then the law of the land is that anybody who enters into the king's inner chamber without being called for is to be struck down by the guards they're to be put to death right away Esther of Abednego returned Mordecai this answer go gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan and fast ye for me and neither eat nor drink three days night or day I also my maidens will fast likewise and so will I go unto the king which is not according to the law and if I perish I perish and we all know what happens subsequently Esther gets her request she manages to persuade the king to destroy

Haman to give her people opportunity to defend themselves and it all hinges on the willingness of this one woman this one individual to utilize the position that she's got not to seek her own safety in the short term and just hide away in the hurry but rather to stand forth as the queen and to plead for her people to have to declare who her people are which of course the king didn't know at this point and this is a people now set apart for destruction he says well if I perish I perish I have to stand in the gap I have to use the position I've got I have to take the opportunity to stand for my people and for the truth and if I die will I die if that's the worst that happens then it happens and this willingness to perish which we see in Shammah also is what the Lord uses to draw attention to his faithfulness likewise if you think going back to the book of Daniel you know where of course they tried to trap Daniel because of his faithfulness to the Lord we read when

Daniel knew that the writing was signed this is about worshipping the king before being thrown into the den of lions if he wouldn't he went into his house and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime there's those key words as he did aforetime he's not just thumbing his nose at the king's law and saying well nobody's going to tell me what to do I'm going to go and pray to Jehovah I'm going to pray to the true God stop what the king says I don't care about these pagan gods I never did it before but boy am I going to do it now no he always did pray to the Lord he made it his business to seek time with the Lord to feed that relationship with the Lord to nurture that personal relationship with the Lord and because he had done this always routinely day after day after day I would suggest to you without fear of contradiction that it is precisely that relationship and the strength of his faith nurtured in this way day by day that gave him the serenity and tranquility of spirit to be able to say well I'm going to keep doing this come on mate if I perish I perish if I die I die if I get thrown into the den of lions

I get thrown into it but I'm not going to budge and I'm not going to change the reason he is strong in his faith is because he opens his windows toward Jerusalem and prays day by day to the Lord as he did aforetime now whilst we can't we ought not to speculate what would be if maybe perhaps when as it is perhaps reasonable to deduce that if Daniel had not been a man of prayer until that day and had thought well just for this once now I'm going to go and pray to the Lord never mind what the king says and that was the first time he'd done it then he would not have had the strength he would not have had the maturity the nurture the spiritual power that had been built up and trained into him over all these years he wouldn't have had the spiritual strength to face this challenge with such tranquility of spirit with such calmness with such fearlessness he wouldn't have had the strength that the Lord would give because he hadn't built it up and worked in it all the times when nobody saw all the times when nobody cared whether he prayed to the Lord or not but the day came when the fact that he was praying to the Lord was crucial do we imagine that Shanna this heel in the midst of the field of lentils that that was the first battle he ever fought in can we imagine he had never trained with the sword he'd never put in all his hours and months and years of training that he hadn't become experienced in campaigning in battle that he didn't have wounds and scars from previous occasions all of his life would have been leading up to this moment when he distinguished himself by not running away just like everybody else by not melting away and fleeing with those whose courage had failed him by simply standing fast and had he simply died there in the field he would still have been a brave man and a hero that stood against the enemy when they came but because the Lord wrought through him and worked this great victory this great deliverance it focuses attention where did this deliverance come from where did it begin and they would have to say everybody was fleeing everybody was running away everybody was ready to surrender what was the sticking point the sticking point was here that one individual in the field of lentils he read and the

[18:36] Philistines gathered together into a troop where was a piece of ground full of lentils and the people fled from the Philistines but he stood in the midst of the ground and defended it and slew the Philistines and the Lord brought a great victory you see whether or not we're going to win or lose is really almost immaterial it's almost immaterial because we don't know what the Lord's ultimate plan is the Lord may have planned for them to lose that battle for all that Shammah knew just as the Lord planned for Saul to lose his last battle and all the brave Israelites that stood with him they all but slaughtered Jonathan the prince of Israel beloved of David beloved we must save the Lord he too died in that battle was that for his sinfulness was that because he wasn't brave was that because there was something wrong no but it was part of God's greater plan to bring the kingship to David we do not know what God's plan is going to be but that does not alter what is right and clear and true in our own immediate context just because we cannot see the far horizon does not mean that the next step is not clear and all too often

I would suggest to you we are persuaded perhaps by the devil in fact almost certainly by the devil to think well you don't have to do this there's no point you taking this stand or you being the only one to stick out like a sore thumb because it's not going to change anything you're not going to turn the tide by doing this you're not going to be the one who suddenly is going to make everything roll back it's going to happen anyway so you either stand out and get slaughtered by the Philistines in the midst of this field of lentils what a ridiculous place to die why are you going to do this why will you die along with everybody else why not flee for your life why not go with the flow what on earth is a point you're not going to change anything now and this is what the devil will say so often to us nothing you do will make any difference just give yourself a quiet life you've done all you can do just run for your life now and don't you think the devil whispered in Jesus ear nobody's going to mind if you decide to go for the worldly way if you decide to take all the cities and kingdoms of the world and they'll all bow down to you and they'll all say yes he's the Messiah as long as you acknowledge me you do it in my way instead of your father's way nobody's going to mind if you turn the stones into bread you're hungry you've been fasting 40 days and 40 nights it's only reasonable why shouldn't you come on nobody's going to know nothing's going to change but everything's going to change maybe not in the world but between us and

God because the key thing is not whether or not my witness my stand my decision is going to change the world that's what the devil wants you to judge in terms of is this going to change the world is this going to make a huge difference is this going to make the thing that turns history and it's changed no it's not you've all heard the story of a little boy walking along the beach you know picking up the crabs that were stranded or starfish I think it was and throwing them back into the water and a man met him and said what are you doing he said well I'm throwing all the starfish back into the water you know the ones that are stranded here on the beach he says you can't possibly do all there's hundreds of lions on the beach you know why on earth are you going to bother it it's not going to make any difference at all and he picked one up and said well it'll make a difference to this one and threw it back into the water it doesn't matter whether you change history rather than it matters whether or not you do what the Lord requires of you of what is right and we always we always have a fair idea if not an exact understanding of what it is that is right of what would Jesus do what would the

Lord require of us yes to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with our God what will that mean in any given situation the Lord will make it clear when a crisis comes whether or not it is just a duck and run or whether to stand fast then it's when one person stands fast that all the other persons take notice now they may take notice and hate it like the chief priest did with Jesus or they may take notice and be inspired just as Luther was the one man at the time of the reformation everybody says come on who are you to stand against all the wisdom of the doctors and the cardinals and the pope and all the councils come on be reasonable just give a little and he could not budge from what the word of God revealed and he says we'll all know famously here I stand I can do no other and because he stood firm others who have been getting the same ideas planted in their heart by the Lord they were going to think well actually yes you know he's right actually yes we should be we can have nobody ever articulated it before nobody ever put it that way before but what does he stand with it who can stand with it and ones and twos would stand up in different parts of the country and leaders and civil magistrates and others would lend their weight and their support and it became a snowball effect throughout

Europe the Lord used that one man now it's not that other one man hadn't stood before Wycliffe had translated the Bible into English and ended up dying martyrs death for them and previous Jan Hus and others and so on in Europe had stood for the gospel truth of the word of God and they had been martyred for it they didn't turn the tide but they stood for him and they stood for the truth Shammah in his field of lentils almost certainly doesn't expect to be a victor that day but it doesn't alter the fact of what he does he does it because he knows it to be right and God uses human beings who are willing to do that which they know to be right it may not change the course of the world it may not make a difference to any more than one little sadness that it gets back into the sea but it makes a difference to that and because it makes a difference to that it makes a difference to God how do we know that because

[25 : 14] God tells us that in Matthew 25 and he separates the sheep and the goats but I was in hunger and you gave me meat I was thirsty and you gave me drink I was a stranger you took me in naked and you clothed me I was sick and you visited me I was in prison and you came unto me then shall the righteous answer and say Lord when saw we thee in hunger and fed thee or thirsty and gave thee drink when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in or naked and clothed thee when saw we thee sick and in prison and came to thee and these people these individuals well not and they oh it's my lifetime day after day I'm always feeding the sick I'm always going to the prisoners I'm always clothing the naked it's my life doing these whole things Lord wouldn't it be most of their lives would have been ordinary most of their lives would be doing the ordinary things the ordinary work and duties and employments that everybody has but there would have been occasions when somebody needed clothing and they just came from it somebody was in prison and they went to them and brought themselves something perhaps somebody was poor and they helped them out somebody was hungry and they gave them something to eat and then they got on with their lives they didn't sound a trumpet like the fan says look see what I'm doing I'm helping this person what a good charitable one they just did it they did it quietly and then they got on with their rights it wasn't all they ever did day after day their constant employment but they did it as and when it was required you might think it doesn't make any difference come on these people are there because it's their own fault you know they choose to be in that they got themselves into that situation pass by and leave them alone but the

Lord says I was in this situation and you helped me and as much as you did it unto one of the the least of these my brethren you've done it unto me I noticed sir Jesus I noticed when you helped the poor the prisoner the blind the naked I noticed because I was there when we did it I was there when you threw the little starfish back into the sea I was there when you stood against the Philistine whores that were coming and maybe you expected to die but sometimes the Lord works the victory through us but whether he does or whether he doesn't doesn't alter the rightness of what Shammah does in the field of Lentus he stands firm and he doesn't run and he won't run because he knows it's his duty to fight the battles of the Lord and whether we are successful or not the Lord has given us our humanity he has made us flesh and blood and because we are flesh and blood we have need of others who are likewise flesh and blood you know when when Adam is given all the creatures in the field to name and he names them all the beasts in the field with giraffes and lions and dogs and cats and all the rest of them but that isn't company enough for him it's not until the Lord brings to him one who is like him flesh and blood and humanity he says this is not the bone of my bones and flesh in my flesh it is flesh and blood that we need the help of remember that Paul when he comes to

Rome we think oh mighty Paul he's not afraid of anything Acts 28 we read and from thence when the brethren heard of us they came to meet us we came in seven days so we went to Rome from thence when the brethren heard of us they came to meet us as far as happy hour forum and the three taverns these are several miles but 40 or mile outside of Rome they have come to meet Paul to encourage you to come with him into Rome and when those the when whom when Paul saw he thanked God and took courage in other words Paul had become discouraged after all his shipwreck and all his journey and all his betrayals and all that happened to him he'd become discouraged but then he saw these brethren these Christian brothers and sisters who come out to meet him to escort him the last 40 miles to Rome he was encouraged because he was people who were coming for him who were supporting him who were loving him and wanted to be on his side flesh and blood they didn't change the course of history they didn't change God's plan in bringing Paul to Rome just as Shammah didn't change the plan of whether the Lord intended to work a victory that day or not he could do it by sending hail stones from heaven he could do it by making the ground open and swallow up for those times he could send lightning or or thundering or whatever to destroy him he didn't need men but he chose to use them and the Lord chose to use the flesh and blood believers that came to meet Paul we don't know their names we don't know who they were how many there were but they encouraged him and likewise we read at the end of 2nd Timothy on chapter 4 verses 16 and 17 that my first answer no man stood with me Paul said to

Timothy but all men forsook me I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge not withstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me that by me the preaching might be fully known and that all the Gentiles might hear and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion and I might think oh that's okay he had the Lord the Lord delivered him and that's true we always have the Lord and we all have the Lord but the Lord is in heaven and we are upon earth and yes the Lord sends his spirit but the spirit is not flesh and blood Jesus said a spirit of not flesh and bones as he seen he had the Lord gives us flesh and blood support to strengthen one another see the difference there when he said nobody stood with me but the Lord didn't person in me at the beginning of second Timothy he writes this chapter 1 verses 15 and 16 this thou knowest that all they which have in Asia be turned away from me of whom are vigilant and homogenes the Lord give mercy unto the house of an esophores for he oft refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain but when he was in Rome he sought me out very diligently and found me the

Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus thou knowest very well that's three big chunky verses given devoted by Paul to the single individual in esophores the house of an esophores he often refreshed me what does that mean he came and visited me he brought me food and drink any extra clothing I needed he was there for me that's what it means he was there for me he refreshed my spirit he gave me the certainly things that I needed but it wasn't the things that he brought it's the fact that he took the time and troubled to seek me out now in esophores we don't know a huge amount about an ordinary Christian a believer who wasn't a mighty apostle or evangelist but the faithfulness of this brother who sought out Paul so refreshed him so supported him flesh and blood support encouragement that he is mentioned three big extensive chunky verses describing the love and support that an esophores gave he said the

[32 : 17] Lord grant unto him he might make me find mercy of the Lord in that day didn't change the course of history didn't alter the fact that Paul was still in prison didn't alter the fact that the end of the day he was martyred because of his faithfulness to the Lord that was God's plan that was what God intended but it didn't alter the fact that an esophores did the little thing that he could do he gave of himself he gave of his substance he gave of such means as he had to support and encourage God's apostle and the Lord remembered it in his sacred word Shammah is used of the Lord here to win a great victory God didn't need him to win the victory it's not going to change the world the devil is right if he whispers that in your ear it's not going to make a difference it's not going to change the world and probably it won't change the world and it won't alter the fact of what we know to be right Shammah would know if I turn and run with everybody else at the end of the day that is cowardice I may save my skin but I'll never save my reputation

I'll never save my heart and the knowledge that I have turned and run and done wrong no I have to stand with the Lord I would as I mentioned in the past I'm quite certain that one reason why the Lord did not permit or strengthen any one of his apostles to stand with him in Gethsemane but the all forsook and the flair is because I suspect with a natural idolatry in men's hearts that individual disciple would have been exalted all the one who stayed faithful this is the one we all want to be like this is the one we all want to imitate never mind the apostles you should be focused on Christ maybe that is one reason why they all without exception forsook and the flair but Shammah did not forsake his place here he stood in the place of ground full of lentils and the people fled from the Philistines but he stood in the midst of the ground and defended it and slew the Philistines he stood alone it didn't matter that they were losing it didn't matter that he thought he would lose his life probably by it didn't matter that he would have been exhausted and they never knew when his next breath would be his last it didn't matter because he stood and he did what was right even though he stood alone and the Lord brought a great victory and that would have been the work of a day a day that would have been it was a day before it there was a day after it and many years come and gone before and since the day of that day that instant is that day that instant is recorded in sacred scripture because this is what happens when men and women of God stand firm for him and if need be stand alone for him whether or not it changes the course of history or even the course of the battle

God sees God knows and God remembers that these are they who are always up in his let us know