The Life of David

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CHAPTER ONE

David As a Youth

1 Samuel 16 and 17

The life of David marked an important epoch in the unfolding of God's purpose and plan of redemption. Here a little and there a little God made known the grand goal toward which all His dealings tended. At sundry times and in divers manners God spoke in times past. In various ways and by different means was the way prepared for the coming of Christ. The work of redemption, with respect to its chief design, is carried on from the fall of man to the end of the world by successive acts and dispensations in different ages, but all forming part of one great whole, and all leading to the one appointed and glorious climax.

"God wrought many lesser salvations and deliverances for His church and people before Christ came. Those salvations were all but so many images and forerunners of the great salvation Christ was to work out when He should come. The church during that space of time enjoyed the light of Divine revelation, or God's Word. They had in a degree the light of the Gospel. But all those revelations were only so many forerunners and earnests of the great light which He should bring who came to be 'the Light of the world.' That whole space of time was, as it were, the time of night, wherein the church of God was not indeed wholly without light: but it was like the light of the moon and stars, that we have in the night; a dim light in comparison with the light of the sun. The church all that time was a minor: see Galatians 4:1-3" (Jonathan Edwards).

We shall not here attempt to summarize the divine promises and pledges which were given during the earlier ages of human history, nor the shadows and symbols which God then employed as the prefigurations of that which was to come: to do so, would require us to review the whole of the Pentateuch. Most of our readers are more or less familiar with the early history of the Israelite nation, and of what that history typically anticipated. Yet comparatively few are aware of the marked advance that was made in the unfolding of God's counsels of grace in the days of David. A wonderful flood of light was then shed from Heaven on things which were yet to come, and many new privileges were then given unto the Old Testament Church.

In the preceding ages it had been made known that the Son of God was to become incarnate, for none but a divine person could bruise the Serpent's head (cf. Jude), and He was to do so by becoming the woman's "Seed" (Genesis 3:15). To Abraham God had made known that the Redeemer should (according to the flesh) descend from him. In the days of Moses and Aaron much had been typically intimated concerning the Redeemer's priestly office and ministry. But now it pleased God to announce that particular person in all the tribes of Israel from which Christ was to proceed, namely, David. Out of all the thousands of Abraham's descendants, a most honorable mark of distinction was placed upon the son of Jesse by anointing him to be king over his people. This was a notable step toward advancing the work of redemption. David was not only the ancestor of Christ, but in some respects the most eminent personal type of Him in all the Old Testament.

"God's beginning of the kingdom of His church in the house of David, was, as it were, a new establishing of the kingdom of Christ: the beginning of it in a state of such visibility as it thenceforward continued in. It was as it were God's planting the root, whence that branch of righteousness was afterwards to spring up, that was to be the everlasting King of His church; and therefore this everlasting King is called the *branch from the stem of Jesse:* 'And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots' (Isaiah 11: 1). 'Behold the days come, says the Lord, that I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper' (Jeremiah 23:5). So Christ, in the New Testament, is called *'the root and offspring of David'* (Rev. 22: 16)" (*Work of Redemption* by Jonathan Edwards, 1757).

It is deserving of our closest attention and calls for our deepest admiration that each advance which was made in the unfolding of the counsels of divine grace occurred at those times when human reason would have least expected them. The first announcement of the divine incarnation was given not while Adam and Eve remained in a state of innocency, but after they had rebelled against their Maker. The first open manifestation and adumbration of the everlasting covenant was made after all flesh had corrupted its way on earth, and the flood had almost decimated the human race. The first announcement of the particular people from which the Messiah would spring, was published after the general revolt of men at the tower of Babel. The wondrous revelation found in the last four books of the Pentateuch was made not in the days of Joseph, but after the whole nation of Israel had apostatized (see Ezekiel 20:5-9).

The principle to which attention has been directed in the above paragraph received further exemplification in God's call of David. One has but to read through the book of Judges to discover the terrible deterioration which succeeded the death of Joshua. For upwards of five centuries a general state of lawlessness prevailed: "In those days there was no king in Israel: *every* man did that which was right in his *own* eyes" (Judges 21:25). Following this was Israel's demand for a king, and that, that they might "be *like* all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:20); therefore did Jehovah declare, "I gave you a king in Mine* anger, and took him away in My wrath" (Hosea 13:11). He, too, was an apostate, and his history ends by his consulting a witch (1 Samuel 28), and perishing on the battlefield (1 Samuel 31).

Such is the dark background upon which the ineffable glory of. God's sovereign grace now shone forth; such is the historical setting of the life of him we are about to consider. The more carefully this be pondered, the more shall we appreciate the marvelous interposition of divine mercy at a time when the prospects of Israel seemed well-near hopeless. But man's extremity is always God's opportunity. Even at that dark hour, God had ready the instrument of deliverance, "a man after His own heart." But who he was, and where he was located, none but Jehovah knew. Even Samuel the prophet had to be given a special divine revelation in order to identify him. And this brings us to that portion of Scripture which introduces to us, David as a youth.

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill your horn with oil, and go, I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons" (1 Samuel 16:1). This is the sequel to what is recorded in 1 Samuel 16:10-12. Saul had despised Jehovah, and now he was rejected by Him (1 Samuel 15:23). True, he continued to occupy the throne for some little time. Nevertheless, Saul was no longer owned of God. An important principle is here illustrated, which only the truly Spirit-taught can appreciate: a person, an institution, a corporate company, is often rejected by God secretly, a while before this solemn fact is evidenced outwardly; Judaism was abandoned by the Lord immediately before the Cross (Matthew 23:38), yet the temple stood until A.D. 70!

God had provided Him a king among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite, and, as Micah 5:2 informs us, Bethlehem Ephratah was "little among the thousands of Judah." Ah, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are" (1 Corinthians 1:27, 28). And why? "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29). God is jealous of His own honor, and therefore is He pleased to select the most unlikely and unpromising instruments to execute His pleasure (as the unlettered fishermen of Galilee to be the first heralds of the Cross), that it may the more plainly appear the power is His alone.

The principle which we have just named received further illustration in the particular son of Jesse which was the one chosen of God. When Jesse and his sons stood before Samuel, it is said of the prophet that "He looked on Eliab and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him" (1 Samuel 16:6). But the prophet was mistaken. And what was wrong with Eliab? The next verse tells us, "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (v. 7). Ah, my reader, this is solemn and searching: it is at your *heart* the Holy One looks! What does He see in you?—a heart that has been purified by faith (Acts 15:9), a heart that loves Him supremely (Deuteronomy 6:5), or a heart that is still "desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9)?

One by one the seven sons of Jesse passed in review before the prophet's eye, but the "man after God's own heart" was not among their number. The Sons of Jesse had been called to the sacrifice (v. 5), and, apparently, the youngest was deemed too insignificant by his father to be noticed on this occasion. But "the counsel of the Lord . . . *shall* stand" (Proverbs 19:21), so inquiry and then request is made that the despised one be sent for. "And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he" (16:12). Most blessed is it to compare these words with what is said of our Lord in Song of Solomon 5:10, 16, "My Beloved is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand . . . His mouth is most sweet: yes, He is altogether lovely."

The principle of divine election is designed for the humbling of man's proud heart. Striking and solemn is it to see that, all through, God ignored that in which the flesh glories. Isaac, and not Ishmael (Abraham's firstborn), was the one selected by God. Jacob, and not Esau, was the object of His eternal love. The Israelites, and not the Egyptians, the Babylonians, or the Greeks, was the nation chosen to shadow forth this blessed truth of God's sovereign foreordination. So here the eldest sons of Jesse were all "rejected" by Jehovah, and David, the youngest, was the one of God's appointing. It should be observed, too, that David was the

eighth son, and all through Scripture that numeral is connected with a *new beginning:* suitably then (and ordained by divine providence) was it that *he* should be the one to mark a fresh and outstanding epoch in the history of the favored nation.

The elect of God are *made manifest* in time by the miracle of regeneration being wrought within them. This it is which has always *distinguished* the children of God from the children of the devil; divine calling, or the new birth, is what *identifies* the high favorites of Heaven. Thus it is written, "whom He did predestine, them He also called" (Romans 8:30)—called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). This miracle of regeneration, which is the birth-mark of God's elect, consists of a complete *change of hears,* a renewing of it, so that God becomes the supreme object of its delight, the pleasing of Him its predominant desire and purpose, and love for His people its characteristic note. God's *chosen* are transformed into the *choice* ones of the earth, for the members of Christ's mystical body are predestined to be "conformed to the image" of their glorious Head; and thus do they, in their measure, in this life, "show forth" His praises.

Beautiful it is to trace the fruits or effects of regeneration which were visible in David at an early age. At the time Samuel was sent to anoint him king, he was but a youth, but even then he evidenced, most unmistakably, the transforming power of divine grace. "And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all your children? And he said, There remains yet the youngest, and, *behold,* he *keeps the sheep"* (1 Samuel 16:11). Thus the first sight we are given of David in God's Word presents him as one who had a heart (a shepherd's care) for those who symbolized the people of God. "Just as before, when the strength of God's people was being wasted under Pharaoh, Moses, their deliverer, was hidden as a shepherd in a wilderness; so, when Israel was again found in circumstances of deeper, though less ostensible, peril, we again find the hope of Israel concealed in the unknown shepherd of an humble flock" (*David* by B. W. Newton).

An incident is recorded of the shepherd-life of David that plainly denoted his character and forecast his future. Speaking to Saul, before he went forth to meet Goliath, he said, "Your servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him" (1 Samuel 17:34,35). Observe two things. First, the loss of one poor lamb was the occasion of David's daring. How many a shepherd would have considered *that* a thing far too trifling to warrant the endangering of his own life! Ah, it was love to that lamb and faithfulness to his charge which moved him to act. Second, but how could a youth triumph over a lion and a bear? Through faith in the living God: he trusted in Jehovah, and prevailed. Genuine faith in God is ever an infallible mark of His elect (Titus 1:1).

There is at least one other passage which sheds light on the spiritual condition of David at this early stage of his life, though only they who are accustomed to weigh each word separately are likely to perceive it. "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions: How he swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at *Ephratah:* we found it in the fields of the wood" (Psalm 132: 1-6). A careful reading of the whole Psalm reveals to us the interests of the youthful David's heart. There, amid the pastures of Bethlehem Ephratah, he was deeply concerned for *Jehovah's* glory.

In closing, let us note how conspicuous was the *shepherd* character of David in his early days. Anticipating for a moment that which belongs to a later consideration, let us thoughtfully observe how that after David had rendered a useful service to King Saul, it is recorded that, "David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem" (1 Samuel 17:15). From the attractions (or distractions) of the court, he returned *to the fold*—the influences of an exalted position had not spoiled him for humble service! Is there not a word here for the pastor's heart: the evangelistic field, or the Bible-conference platform, may furnish tempting allurements, but your duty is to the "sheep" over the which the good Shepherd has placed you. Take heed to the ministry you have received of the Lord, that you fulfill it.

Fellow-servant of God, your sphere may be an humble and inconspicuous one; the flock to which God has called you to minister may be a small one; but *faithfulness* to your trust is what is required of you. There may be an Eliab ready to taunt you, and speak contemptuously of "those *few* sheep in the wilderness" (1 Samuel 17:28), as there was for David to encounter; but regard not their sneers. It is written, "His lord said unto him, Well done, you good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter you into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21).

As David was faithful to his trust in the humble sphere in which God first placed him, so he was rewarded by being called to fill a more important position, in which there too he honorably acquitted himself: "He chose David also for His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young He brought him to feed Jacob, His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he fed them according to *the integrity of his heart;* and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands" (Psalm 78:70-72).

CHAPTER TWO

His Anointing

1 Samuel 16 and 17

In our last chapter we called attention to the *time* in which David's lot was cast. The spirituality of Israel had indeed fallen to a low ebb. The law of God was no longer heeded, for "every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The terrible failure of the priesthood stands out clearly in the character of Eli's sons (1 Samuel 2:22). The nation as a whole had rejected Jehovah that He should not reign over them (1 Samuel 8:7). The one then on the throne was such a worthless reprobate that it was written, "The Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Samuel 15:36). The utter contempt which the people paid to the sacred tabernacle appears in the dreadful fact that it was suffered to languish in "the fields of the wood" (Psalm 132:6). Well, then, might our patriarch cry out, "Help Lord, for the godly man ceases" (Psalm 12:1).

But though the righteous government of God caused Israel to be sorely chastised for their sins, He did not completely abandon them. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Amid the prevailing darkness, almighty power sustained, here and there, a light unto Himself. The heart of one feeble woman laid hold of Jehovah's strength: "He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He has set the world upon them: He will keep the feet of His saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail. The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of Heaven shall He thunder upon them: The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and He *shall* give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His *Anointed"* (1 Samuel 2:8-10). That was the language of true faith, and faith is something which God never disappoints. Most probably Hannah lived not to *see* the realization of her Spirit-inspired expectations, but in "due season" they were realized.

How encouraging and comforting ought the above to be to the little remnant of God's heritage in this "cloudy and dark day"! To outward sight, there is now much, very much, to distract and dishearten. Truly "men's hearts are failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). But, blessed be His name, "the Lord has *His* way in the whirlwind" (Nahum 1:3). Faith looks beyond this scene of sin and strife, and beholds the Most High upon His throne, working "all things after the counsel of His own will" (Ephesians 1:11). Faith lays hold of the Divine promises which declare, "at evening-tide it shall be light" (Zechariah 14:7); and "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59: 19). In the meantime God's grace is sufficient for the feeblest who really trusts Him.

Samuel was given by God in response to the prayers of Hannah, and who can doubt that David also was the answer to the earnest supplications of those who sought Jehovah's glory. And the Lord's ear has not grown heavy that it can no longer hear; yet the *actions* of present-day professing Christians say they believe that it has! If the diligence which is now paid to the ransacking of daily newspapers in search for sensational items which are regarded as "signs of the times," and if the time that is now given to Bible conferences was devoted to confession of sin and crying unto God to raise up a man after His own heart, whom He would use to bring back His wayward people into the paths of righteousness, it would be spent to much greater profit. Conditions are not nearly so desperate today as they were at the close of the "dark ages," nor even as bad as they were when God raised up Whitefield. To your knees, my brethren: God's arm is not shortened that it cannot save.

Now not only was the raising up of David a signal demonstration of divine grace working in the midst of a people who deserved naught but untempered judgment, but, as pointed out before, it marked an important stage in the unfolding of God's counsels, and a further and blessed adumbration of what had been settled upon in the everlasting covenant. This has not been sufficiently emphasized by recent writers, who, in their zeal to stress the

law element of the Mosaic economy, have only too often overlooked the grace element which was exercised throughout. No "new dispensation" was inaugurated in the days of David, but a most significant advance was made in the divine foreshadowings of that kingdom over which the Messiah now rules. The Mediator is not only the arch Prophet and High Priest, but He is also the King of kings, and *this* it is which was now to be specifically typified. The *throne,* as well as the altar, belongs to Christ!

From the days of Abraham, and onwards for a thousand years, the providential dealings of God had mainly respected that people from whom the Christ was to proceed. But now attention is focused on that particular person from whence He was to spring. It pleased God at this time to single out the specific man of whom Christ was to come, namely, David. "David being the ancestor and great type of Christ, his being solemnly anointed to be king over his people, that the kingdom of His church might be continued in his family forever, may in some respects be looked on as an anointing of Christ Himself. Christ was as it were anointed in him; and therefore Christ's anointing and David's anointing are spoken of under *one* in Scripture: 'I have found David My servant; with My holy oil have I anointed him' (Psalm 89:20). And David's throne and Christ's are spoken of as one: 'And the Lord shall give Him the throne of His father David' (Luke 1:32). 'David—knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne' (Acts 2:30)" (Jonathan Edwards).

The *typical* character of David's person presents a most precious line of study. His very name signifies "the Beloved." His being an inhabitant of Bethlehem was ordained to point to that place where the Darling of God's heart was to be born. His "beautiful countenance" (1 Samuel 16:13) spoke of Him who is "fairer than the children of men." His occupation as a shepherd set forth the peculiar relation of Christ to God's elect and intimated the nature of His redemptive work. His faithful discharge of the pastoral office forecast the love and fidelity of the great Shepherd. His lowly occupation before he ascended the throne prefigured the Savior's humiliation prior to His glorious exaltation. His victory over Goliath symbolized the triumph of Christ over the great enemy of God and His people. His perfecting of Israel's worship and instituting of a new ecclesiastical establishment anticipated Christ as the Head and Law-Giver of His Church.

But it is in the *anointing* of David that we reach the most notable feature of our type. The very name or title "Christ" means "the Anointed" One, and David was the first of Israel's kings who thus foreshadowed Him. True, Saul also was anointed, but he furnished a solemn contrast, being a dark foreboding of the antichrist. At an earlier period, Aaron had been anointed unto the sacerdotal office (Leviticus 8:12); and, at a later date, we read of Elisha the prophet being anointed (1 Kings 19:16). Thus the threefold character of the Mediator's office as Prophet, Priest and Potentate, was fully typed out centuries before He was openly manifested here on earth.

It is a remarkable fact that David was anointed *three* times. First, privately at Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:13). Second, by the men of Judah (2 Samuel 2:4). Third, by the elders of Israel (2 Samuel 5:3). So also was that august One whom he foreshadowed. This will appear the more evident if we quote the following: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in (or "from") the midst of his brethren: and *the Spirit of the Lord came upon David* from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). Concerning our Lord, His humanity was miraculously conceived and sanctified by the Spirit and endowed with all graces in the Virgin's womb (Luke 1:35). Second, He was publicly "anointed with the Spirit" (Acts 10:38) at His baptism, and thus equipped for His ministry (see Isaiah 61:1). Third, at His ascension He was "anointed with the oil of gladness above His fellows" (Psalm 45:6, 7). It was to *this* that the anointing of David more especially pointed.

It is striking to observe that God anointed David *after* Saul, to reign in his room. He took away the crown from him who was higher in stature than any of his people, and gave it to one who resided in Bethlehem, which was "little among the thousands of Judah" (Micah 5:2). In this way was God pleased to prefigure the fact that He who, when on earth, was "despised and rejected of men," should take the kingdom from the great ones of the earth. At a later date, this was more expressly revealed, for in the Divine interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream Daniel declared, "In the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as you saw that the Stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it break in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter" (Daniel 2:44, 45).

It was the mediatorial reign of Christ which David foreshadowed, and of which he prophesied: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever: the scepter of Your kingdom is a right scepter" (Psalm 45:6). That "throne" is His *mediatorial* throne, and that "scepter" is the symbol of authority over His mediatorial kingdom. Those metaphors are here applied to Christ as setting forth His kingly office, together with His dignity and dominion, for the throne whereon He sits is "the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1). "You love righteousness, and hate wickedness: therefore, God, your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows" (Psalm 45:7). This is in contrast from the days when He was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." It denotes His triumph and exaltation. It was at His ascension that He was "crowned with glory and honor."

Just as the priestly office and work of Christ were foreshadowed by Melchizedek and Aaron, so the kingship and kingdom of the Mediator were typed out by both David and Solomon. It would lead us too far afield to enlarge upon this, but the interested reader will do well to ponder such scriptures as 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; 33:14-17; Acts 13:34; Revelation 3:7; 5:5. And let us not be robbed of the preciousness of these passages by the attempts of some who would have us believe they belong only to the future. In many instances their insistence upon *literalizing* many portions of Holy Writ has resulted in the *carnalizing* of them, and the missing of their true and *spiritual* import. Let the reader beware of any system of interpretation which takes away from the Christian any portion of God's Word: all Scripture is "profitable for *doctrine"* (2 Timothy 3: 16).

Between the first and the third anointings of David, or between Samuel's consecrating of him to the kingly office and his actually ascending the throne, there was a period of severe trials and testings, during which our patriarch passed through much suffering and humiliation. Here too we may discern the accuracy of our type. David's Son and Lord trod a path of unspeakable woe between the time when the Holy Spirit first came upon Him and His exaltation at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It is indeed blessed to read through the first book of Samuel and take note of the series of wonderful providences by which God preserved David's life until the death of Saul; but it is yet more precious to see in these so many adumbrations of what is recorded in such passages as Matthew 2:16; Luke 4:29; John 8:59; John 10:31, 39, etc.

Before passing on, let us seek to make practical application unto ourselves of what has just been referred to above. God promised Abraham a son, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed (Genesis 12:3), yet he performed it not for thirty years (Genesis 21:2). God anointed David king over Israel, yet before the kingdom was actually given to him, his faith was severely tested, and he was called on to endure many sore buffetings. He was hated, persecuted, outlawed and hunted like a partridge on the mountains (1 Samuel 26:20, etc.). Yet was he enabled to say, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1). So the Christian has been begotten to a glorious inheritance, but "we *must* through *much* tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). It is only "through faith and patience (we) inherit the promises" (Hebrews 6: 12).

Another thing which God did at that time toward furthering the great work of redemption was to inspire David to show forth Christ and His salvation in divine songs. David was endowed with the spirit of prophecy, and is called "a prophet" (Acts 2:29, 30) so that here too he was a type of Christ. "This was a great advancement that God made in this building; and the light of the Gospel, which had been gradually growing from the fall, was exceedingly increased by it; for whereas before there was but here and there a prophecy given of Christ in a great many ages, now here Christ is spoken of by David abundantly, in multitudes of songs, speaking of His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension into Heaven, His satisfaction, intercession; His prophetical, kingly, and priestly office; His glorious benefits in this life and that which is to come; His union with the church and the blessedness of the church in Him; the calling of the Gentiles. All these things concerning Christ and His redemption are abundantly spoken of in the book of Psalms" (Jonathan Edwards).

To quote again from this Spirit-taught man, "Now first it was that God proceeded to choose a particular city out of all the tribes of Israel to place His name there. There is several times mention made in the law of Moses of the children of Israel's bringing their oblations to the place which God should choose, as

Deuteronomy 12:5-7; but God had never proceeded to it until now. The tabernacle and ark were never pitched, but sometimes in one place, and sometimes in another; but now God proceeded to choose Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem was never thoroughly conquered or taken out of the hands of the Jebusites, until David's time. It is said in Joshua 15:63, 'As for the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the children of Judah could not drive them out.' But now David wholly subdued it, as we have an account in 2 Samuel 5. And now God proceeded to choose that city to place His name there, as appears by David's bringing up the ark thither soon after; and therefore this is mentioned afterwards as the first time God proceeded to choose a city to place His name there: 2 Chronicles 6:5,6; 12:13.

"The city of Jerusalem is therefore called the *holy city;* and it was the greatest type of the church of Christ in all the Old Testament. It was redeemed by David, the captain of the hosts of Israel, out of the hands of the Jebusites to be God's city, the holy place of His rest forever, where He would dwell; as Christ, the Captain of His people's salvation redeemed His church out of the hands of devils, to be His holy and beloved city. And therefore how often does the Scripture, when speaking of Christ's redemption of His church, call it by the names of *Zion and Jerusalem!* This was the city that God had appointed to be the place of the first gathering and erecting of the Christian Church after Christ's resurrection, of that remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God on the apostles and primitive Christians, and the place whence the Gospel was to sound forth into all the world; the place of the first Christian Church, that was to be, as it were, the mother of all other churches in the world; agreeably to that prophecy, Isaiah 2:3, 4: 'out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem'" *(Work of Redemption).*

CHAPTER THREE

Entering Saul's Service

1 Samuel 16 and 17

In our last chapter we contemplated David's anointing; in our present study an entirely different experience in his varied career is before us. The two halves of 1 Samuel 16 present a series of striking contrasts. In the former, we behold David called to occupy the throne, in the latter he is seen entering the place of service. There we see the Spirit of the Lord coming upon David (v. 13), here we behold the Spirit of the Lord departing from Saul (v. 14). In the one David is anointed with the holy oil (v. 13), in the other Saul is troubled with an evil spirit (v. 14). Samuel was "mourning" (v. 1), Saul is "refreshed" (v. 23). Samuel approached Jesse with an heifer for sacrifice (v. 2), Jesse sends David to Saul with bread, wine, and a kid for feasting (v. 20). David was acceptable in God's sight (v. 12), here he found favor in Saul's eyes (v. 22). Before he was tending the sheep (v. 11), now he is playing the harp in the palace (v. 23).

God did not set David upon the throne immediately: after his "anointing" came a season of testing. The coming of the Spirit upon him was followed by his having to face the great enemy. Thus it was with David's Son and Lord, the One whom, in so many respects, he foreshadowed. After the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Him at His baptism, Christ was tempted of the devil for forty days. So here: the next thing we read of is David's being sent to calm Saul who was terrified by an evil spirit, and shortly after that he goes forth to meet Goliath—figure of Satan. The principle which is here illustrated is one that we do well to take to heart: patience has to be tested, humility manifested, faith strengthened, before we are ready to enter into God's best for us; we must use rightly what God has given us, if we desire Him to give us more.

"But the Spirit of the Lord departed From Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him" (1 Samuel 16: 14). Exceedingly solemn is this, the more so when we consider that which precedes it. In 1 Samuel 15:1-3 the Lord, had, through Samuel, given a definite commission unto Saul to "utterly destroy Amalek, and all that they had." Instead of so doing, he compromised: "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them" (1 Samuel 15:9). When faced by God's faithful prophet, the king's excuse was "the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen to sacrifice unto the Lord" (v. 15). Then it was that Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and in sacrifices, as in *obeying* the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is *better* than sacrifice, to hearken than the fat of rams" (v. 22).

Saul had openly defied the Lord by deliberately disobeying His plain commandment. Wherefore the prophet said unto him, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king" (v. 23). And now we come to the dreadful sequel. "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." Having forsaken God, God forsook him. Rightly did Matthew Henry say upon this verse: "They that drive the good Spirit away from them, do of course become a prey to the evil spirit. If God and His grace do not rule us, sin and Satan will have possession of us."

"But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." Great care needs to be taken against our reading into these words what is really not in them, otherwise we shall make one part of Scripture contradict another. The Holy Spirit had never been given to Saul as the Spirit of regeneration and sanctification: but He had been given to him as a Spirit of prophecy (see 1 Samuel 10:10 and contrast 1 Samuel 28:6), and as a Spirit of wisdom for temporal rule, thus fitting him for the discharge of his royal duties, In like manner, when we read that "God gave him another heart" (1 Samuel 10:9), this must not be confounded with "a new heart" (Ezekiel 36:26)—the "another heart" was not in a moral and spiritual sense, but only in a way of wisdom for civil government, prudence to rule, courage to fight against his enemies, fortitude against

It is a serious mistake to suppose that because the Holy Spirit has not come as the Spirit of regeneration and sanctification unto many professors, that therefore He has not come to them at all. Many are "made partakers of the Holy Spirit" as the Spirit of "enlightenment" (Hebrews 6:4), of spiritual aspirations (Numbers 24:2; 23:10 etc.), of deliverance from the "pollutions of the world" (2 Peter 2:20), who are never brought from death unto life. There are common operations of the Spirit as well as special, and it behooves all of us to seriously and diligently examine our hearts and lives for the purpose of discovering whether or not the Holy Spirit indwells *us* as a *Sanctifier,* subduing the flesh, delivering from worldliness, and conforming to the image of Christ. "When men grieve and quench the Spirit by willful sin, He departs, and will not strive" (Matthew Henry).

The servants of Saul were uneasy over the king's condition, realizing that an evil spirit from God was tormenting him. They therefore suggested that a man who had skill in playing the harp should be sought out, saying, "And it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon you, that he shall play with his hand, and you shall be well" (1 Samuel 16:16). Such is the best counsel which poor worldlings have to offer unto those in trouble. As Matthew Henry says, "How much better friends had they been to him, if they had advised him, since the evil spirit was from the Lord, to make his peace with God by true repentance, to send for Samuel to pray with him, and intercede with God for him; then might he not only have had some present relief, but the good Spirit would have returned."

How many whose consciences have convicted them of their careless, sinful, Godless ways, and who have been startled by the presence of an eternity in Hell, have been ruined forever by following a course of drowning the concerns of the soul by regaling and delighting the senses of the body, "Eat, drink, and be merry" is the motto of the world, and every effort is made to stifle all anxiety about the near prospect of a time arriving when instead of being able to go on so doing, not even a drop of water will be available to ease their unbearable sufferings. Let younger readers seriously ponder this. "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth; and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes: but know you, that for all these things God will surely bring you into judgment" (Ecclesiastes 11:9).

The suggestion made by his servants appealed to Saul, and he gave his consent. Accordingly one of them told him, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a lovely person, and the Lord is with him" (1 Samuel 16:18). A high character is here accorded David, as one well fitted for the strange part he was to play. Not only was his person suited for the court, not only was he skilled upon the harp, but he was known for his courage and wisdom. The terming of him "a mighty valiant man" intimates that his single-handed victory over the lion and the bear (1 Samuel 17:37) had already been noised abroad. Finally, it was known that "the Lord is with him." How this illustrates and demonstrates the fact that one who has received the Spirit as the Spirit of regeneration and sanctification gives dear evidence of it to others! Where a miracle of grace has been wrought in the heart, the fruits of it will soon be unmistakably manifested to all around. Very searching is this. Can those with whom we come into daily contact *see* that "the Lord is with" the writer and the reader? O to let our light "

so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in Heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

"Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David your son, which is with the sheep" (1 Samuel 16:19). Little did Saul think that in giving this order he was inviting to his palace the very one of whom Samuel had said, "The Lord has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor of your, better than you" (1 Samuel 15:28)! How marvelously does God, working behind the scenes, bring His own purpose to pass! Truly "man's goings are of the Lord," and well may we say "how can a man then understand his own way?" (Proverbs 20:24). Yet while we are quite incapable of analyzing either the philosophy or psychology of it, let us admire and stand in awe before Him of whom it is written, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all *things:* to whom be glory forever, Amen" (Romans 11:36).

"Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David your son, which is with the sheep" (1 Samuel 16:19). What a *testing* for David was this! He who had been anointed unto an office wherein he would command and rule over others, was now called on to serve. Lovely is it to mark his response: there was no unwillingness, no delay. He promptly complied with his father's wishes. It was also a testing of his courage: Might not Saul have learned his secret, and now have designs upon his life? Might not this invitation to the palace cover a subtle plot to destroy him; Ah, "the angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them," and where God is truly feared, the fear of man disappears.

"And Jesse took an donkey laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son, unto Saul" (v. 20). What a beautiful typical picture is here presented to us. It was the dire need of poor Saul which moved Jesse to send forth his anointed son: so it was a world lying in sin unto which the Father sent His Beloved. Behold David richly laden with presents for the king: Jesse sent him forth not with weapons of warfare in his hands, but with the tokens of his good will. So the Father sent forth His Son "not to condemn the world" (John 3:17), but on an errand of grace and mercy unto it.

"And David came to Saul." Yes, at his father's bidding he freely left his home: though the anointing oil was upon him, he went forth not to be ministered unto, but to minister. How blessedly this foreshadowed Him of whom it is written, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:6-8).)O that writer and reader may be so filled with His Spirit, that not 's bidding.

"And David came to Saul." Admire again the wondrous working of God. David had been called to reign over Israel, but the time had not yet arrived for him to occupy the throne. An unsophisticated shepherd-boy needed training. Observe then how the providence of God ordered it that for a season he should dwell in the royal court, thus having full opportunity to note its ways, observe its corruptions, and discover its needs. And mark it well, this was brought about *without* any scheming or effort either on his own part or of that of his friends. An evil spirit from the Lord troubled the king: his courtiers were exercised, and proposed a plan to him: their plan met with Saul's approval: David was mentioned as the one who should be sent for: the king assented, Jesse raised no demurs, David was made willing; and thus, working secretly but surely, God's purpose was accomplished. It is only the eye of faith that looks above the ordinary happenings of daily life and sees the divine hand ordering and shaping them for the accomplishment of God's counsels and the good of His people.

An important principle is here illustrated: when God has designed that any Christian should enter *His* service, His providence concurs with His grace to prepare and qualify him for it, and often it is by means of God's providences that the discerning heart perceives the divine will. God opened the door into the palace without David having to force or even so much as knock upon it. When *we* assume the initiative, take things into our own hands, and attempt to hew a path for ourselves, we are acting in the energy of the flesh. "Commit your way unto the Lord: trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass . . . Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:5-7). Obedience to these exhortations is not easy to flesh and blood, yet they must be complied with if we are not to miss God's best. The more we appropriate and act upon such divine precepts, the more clearly will the hand of God be seen when it intervenes on our behalf: the feverish activities of natural zeal only raise a cloud of dust which conceals from us the beauties of divine providence.

"And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armor-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray you, stand before me; for he has found favor in my sight" (verses 21, 22). Here too we may perceive and admire the secret workings of God s providence. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: *He* turns it wherever He will" (Proverbs 21:1). It was the divine purpose, and For David's good, that he should spend a season at the court; therefore did the Lord incline Saul's heart toward him. How often we lose sight of this fact. How apt we are to attribute the favor and kindness of people toward us to anything rather than to the Lord! O my reader, if God has given you favor in the eyes of your congregation, or your employer, or your customers, give Him the glory and the thanks for it.

"And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him" (v. 23). Here we see the readiness of David to perform every task which God allotted him. In this he evidenced his moral fitness for the important role he was yet to fill. "You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things" (Matthew 25:21), expresses an important principle in the government of God, and one which we do well to take to heart. If I am careless in fulfilling my duties as a Sunday school teacher, I must not be surprised if God never calls me to the ministry. And if I am unfaithful in teaching and disciplining my own children, I must not be surprised if God withholds His power and blessing when I seek to teach the children of others.

The power of David's harp to quiet the spirit of Saul and to drive away temporarily the demon, ought not to be attributed either to the skill of the player or to the charm of music. Instead, it must be ascribed alone to the Lord, who was pleased to *bless* this means to these ends. The instrument, be it weak or strong, likely or unlikely, is utterly powerless in and of itself. Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but there will be no increase unless *God gives it.* In view of chapter 17:55, 56 some have concluded that what has been before us in the closing verses of chapter 16 is placed out of its chronological order. But there is no need to resort to such a supposition. Moreover, chapter 17:15 plainly refutes it. How long David remained in the palace we know not, but probably for quite some time; after which he returned again unto his humbler duties in the sheepfold.

CHAPTER FOUR

Slaying Goliath

1 Samuel 17

When Samuel denounced Saul's first great sin and announced that his kingdom should not continue, he declared, "The Lord has sought Him a man after His own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). To this, allusion was made by the apostle Paul in his address in the synagogue at Antioch, "He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfill all My will" (Acts 13:22). A truly wondrous tribute was this unto the character of David, yet one which the general course of his life bore out. The dominant characteristic of our patriarch was his sincere and unsurpassed devotion to God, His cause, and His Word. Blessedly is this illustrated in what is now to be before us. The man after God's own heart is the one who is out and out for Him, putting His honor and glory before all other considerations.

1 Samuel 17:15 supplies a precious link between what was considered in our last lesson and what we are now about to ponder. There we are told, "But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem." Knowing that he was to be the next king over Israel, natural prudence would suggest that his best policy was to remain at court, making the most of his opportunities, and seeking to gain the goodwill of the ministers of state; but instead of so doing, the son of Jesse returned to the sheepfold, leaving it with God to work out His will concerning him. No seeker after self-aggrandizement was David. The palace, as such, possessed no attractions for him. Having fulfilled his service unto the king, he now returns to his father's farm.

"Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh" (1 Samuel 17:1). Josephus (Antiq. 50:6, c. 9, sect. 1) says that this occurred not long after the things related in the preceding chapter had transpired. It seems likely that the Philistines had heard of Samuel's forsaking of Saul, and of the king's melancholy and distraction occasioned by the evil spirit, and deemed it a suitable time to avenge themselves upon Israel for their last slaughter of them (chapter 14). The enemies of God's people are ever alert to take advantage of their opportunities, and never have they a better one than when their leaders provoke God's Spirit and His prophets leave them. Nevertheless, it is blessed to see here how that God makes the "wrath of man" to praise Him (

Psalm 76:10).

"And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines" (17:2). The king had been relieved, for a season at least, of the evil spirit; but the Spirit of the Lord had not returned to him, as the sequel plainly evidences. A sorry figure did Saul and his forces now cut. "And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath of Gath . . . And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are you come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine, and you servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants; but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall you be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid" (verses 4, 8-11). Before pondering the haughty challenge which was here thrown down, let us point out (for the strengthening of faith in the inerrancy of Holy Writ) a small detail which exhibits the minute accuracy and harmony of the Word.

In Numbers 13 we read that the spies sent out by Moses to inspect the promised land, declared, "The land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eats up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the *giants,* the sons of *Anak,* which come of the giants" (verses 32, 33). Now link this up with Joshua 11:21, 22, "And at that time came Joshua, and cut off *the Anakim* from the mountains . . . there was none of the Anakim left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in *Gath,* and in Ashdod, there *remained.*" Here in our present passage it is stated, quite incidentally, that Goliath belonged to "Gath"! Thus, in the mouth of three witnesses—Moses, Joshua and Samuel—is the word established, concurring as they do in a manner quite artless, to verify a single particular. How jealous was God about His Word! What a sure foundation faith has to rest upon!

Goliath pictures to us the great enemy of God and man, the devil, seeking to terrify, and bring into captivity those who bear the name of the Lord. His prodigious size (probably over eleven feet) symbolized the great power of Satan. His accouterments (compare the word "armor" in Luke 11:22!) figured the fact that the resources of flesh and blood can not overcome Satan. His blatant challenge adumbrated the roaring of the lion, our great adversary, as he goes about "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). His declaration that the Israelites were but "servants to Saul" (v. 8) was only too true, for they were no longer in subjection to the Lord (1 Samuel 8:7). The dismay of Saul (v. 11) is in solemn contrast to his boldness in 11:5-11 and 14:47, when the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. The terror of the people (v. 11) was a sad evidence of the fact that the "fear of the Lord" (11:7) was no longer upon them. But all of this only served to provide a background upon which the courage of the man after God's own heart might the more evidently appear.

The terrible giant of Gath continued to menace the army of Israel twice a day for no less than forty days—a period which, in Scripture, is ever associated with probation and testing. Such a protracted season served to make the more manifest the impotency of a people out of communion with God. There was Saul himself, who "from his shoulders and upward was higher than any of the people" (9:2). There was Jonathan who, assisted only by his armor-bearer, had, on a former occasion, slain twenty of the Philistines (14:14). There was Abner, the captain of the host (14:50), a "valiant man" (26:15), but he too declined Goliath's challenge. Ah, my reader, the best, the bravest of men, are no more than what God makes them. When He renews not his courage, the stoutest heart is a coward. Yet God does not act arbitrarily, rather is cowardice one of the consequences of lost communion with Him: "The righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1).

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. But He does not always, nor generally, act immediately, when we are brought low. No, he "*waits* to be gracious" (Isaiah 30:18), that our helplessness may be the more fully realized, that His delivering hand may be seen the more clearly, and that His merciful interposition may be the more appreciated. But even at this time, when all seemed lost to Israel, when there was none in her army that dared to pick up the gauntlet which Goliath had thrown down, God had His man in reserve, and in due time he appeared on the scene and vindicated the glorious name of Jehovah. The instrument chosen seemed, to natural wisdom and military prudence, a weak and foolish one, utterly unfitted for the work before him. Ah, it is just such that God uses, and why? That the honor may be His, that "no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:29). Before considering the grand victory which the Lord wrought through David, let us carefully ponder the training which he had received in the school of God. This is deeply important for our hearts.

It was away from the crowds, in the quietude of pastoral life, that David was taught the wondrous resources which there are in God available to faith, There, in the fields of Bethlehem, he had, by divine enablement, slain the lion and the bear (v. 34, 35). This is ever God's way: He teaches in secret that soul which He has elected shall serve Him in public. Ah, my reader, is it not just at this point that we may discover the explanation of our failures?—it is because we have not sufficiently cultivated the "secret place of the most High" (Psalm 91:1). *That* is our primary need. But do we really esteem communion with God our highest privilege? Do we realize that walking with God is the source of our strength?

There had been direct dealings between David's soul and God out there in the solitude of the fields, and it is only thus that any of *us* are taught how to get the victory. Have you yet learned, my brother or sister, that the closet is the great battlefield of faith! It is the genuine denying of self, the daily taking up of the cross, the knowing how to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and the bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Let the foe be met and conquered in private, and we shall not have to mourn defeat when we meet him in public. O may the Holy Spirit impress deeply upon each of our hearts the vital importance of coming forth from the presence of God as we enter upon any service unto Him: *this* it is which regulates the difference between success and failure. Note how the blessed Redeemer acted on this principle: Luke 6:12, 13, etc.!

"And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for your brethren an ephah of this parched corn, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to your brethren; and carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how your brethren fare, and take their pledge" (v. 17, 18). Another beautiful type is this of our Savior going about His Father's business, seeking the good of his *brethren:* a similar one is found in Genesis 37:13, 14. But without staying to develop this thought, let us observe how God was directing all things to the accomplishment of His purpose. Jesse had eight sons (16:10, 11), and only three of them had joined Saul's army (17:13), so that five of them were at home; yet David, the youngest, was the one sent—though Jesse knew it not, God had work for *him* to do. Nothing happens by chance in this world: *all* is controlled and directed from on High (John 19:11).

"And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle" (v. 20). How this evidenced the readiness and eagerness of David to obey his father's orders! Again we may look from the type to the Antitype, and hear Him say, "Lo, I come, to do Your will, O God" (Hebrews 10: 7). Blessed it is to mark that David was as mindful of his father's sheep as he was of his commands: his leaving them "with a keeper," evidenced his care and fidelity in the discharge of his office. His faithfulness in a few things fitted him to be ruler over many things. He who is best qualified to command, is the one who had, previously, learned to obey.

"God's providence brought him to the camp very seasonably, when both sides had set the battle in array, and as it should seem were more likely to come to an engagement than they had yet been all the forty days (v. 21). Both sides were now preparing to fight. Jesse little thought of sending his son to the army just in that critical juncture; but the wise God orders the time, and all the circumstances, of actions and affairs, so as to serve His design of securing the interests of Israel, and advancing the man after His own heart" (Matthew Henry).

Though he had only just completed a long journey, we are told that David "ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren" (v. 22). This reminds of Proverbs 22:29, "See you a man diligent in business? he shall stand before kings." As David talked with his brethren, Goliath came forth again and repeated his challenge. The whole army was "sore afraid" (v. 24), and though reminding one another of the promised reward awaiting the one who slew the giant, none dared to venture his life. Such inducements as Saul offered, sink into utter insignificance when *death* confronts a man. David mildly expostulated with those who stood near him, pointing out that Goliath was defying "the armies of the living God" (v. 26).

"And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why came you down hither? and with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride, and the naughtiness of your heart; for you are come down that you might see the battle" (v. 28). How this reminds us of what is said of David's Son and Lord in

John 1:11, etc. There is a lesson here which every true minister of Christ does well to take to heart, for by so doing he will be forearmed against many a disappointment and discouragement. Sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master: if the incarnate Son was not appreciated, his agents should not expect to be—"For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). Not only will men in general be displeased, but even the people of God, when in a low state, will neither understand nor value the actings of *faith.* The man of God must be prepared to be misinterpreted and to stand alone.

Blessed it is to mark David's reply to the cruel taunt of his brother: it was a real testing of his meekness, but when he was reviled, he reviled not again. Nor did he attempt any self-vindication, or explanation of his conduct—such had been quite wasted upon one with such a spirit. First, he simply asked "What have I done?": what Fault have I committed to be thus chided; reminding us of our Lord's meek reply under a much stronger provocation—"Why smite you Me?" (John 18:23). Second, he said, "Is there not a cause?" This he left with him: there *was* a cause for his coming to the camp: his father had sent him: the honor of Israel—sullied by Goliath—required it; the glory of God necessitated it. Third, he "turned from him toward another" (v. 30).

David's speaking to one and another soon reached the ears of Saul, who accordingly sent for him (v. 31). To the king, he at once said, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (v. 32); only to be met with this reply, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him," Ah, "These that undertake great and public services must not think it strange if they be discountenanced and opposed by those from whom they have reason to expect support and assistance. But must humbly go on with their work, in the face not only of their enemies' threats, but of their friends' sleights and suspicions" (Matthew Henry). The language used by him in the presence of the king was not the bravado of a boaster, but the God-honoring testimony of a man of faith. Saul and his people were in despair as the consequence of their being occupied with the things of sight: the man of faith had a contemptuous disdain for Goliath because he viewed him from God's viewpoint—as His enemy, as "uncircumcised." Note how he attributed his previous successes to the Lord, and how he improved them to count upon Him for further victory: see verse 37.

The response made by Saul unto David's pleading was solemnly ludicrous. First, he said, "Go, and the Lord be with you," which were idle words on such lips. Next we read that "Saul armed David with his own armor" (that is, with some that he kept in his armory), in which he had far more confidence than in God. But David quickly perceived that such was unsuited to him: the one who has much to do with God in secret cannot employ worldly means and methods in public; the man of faith has no use for carnal weapons. Such things as ecclesiastical titles, dress, ritualistic ceremonies, which are imposing to the eye of the natural man, are but bubbles and baubles to the spiritual. "And David put them off him" (v. 39), and advanced to meet the haughty Philistine with only a sling and five smooth stones. Should it be asked, But are we not justified in using *means?* The answer is, Yes, the means which *God* supplies (the "smooth stones"), but not that which man offers—his "armor."

"When the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him" (v. 42). First, Eliab had taunted, then Saul had sought to discourage, and now Goliath scorns him. Ah, the one who (by grace) is walking by faith must not expect to be popular with men, for they have no capacity to appreciate that which actuates him. But true faith is neither chilled by a cold reception nor cooled by outward difficulties: it looks away from both, unto Him with whom it has to do. If God be "for us" (Romans 8:3 1), it matters not who be against us. Nevertheless, faith has to be *tested*—to prove its genuineness, to strengthen its fiber, to give occasion for its exercise. Well may writer and reader pray, "Lord, increase our faith."

The Philistine blustered, "cursed David by his gods" (v. 43), and vowed he would give his flesh unto the birds and beasts. But it is written, "the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong" (Ecclesiastes 9:11); and again, "God resists the proud" (James 4:6). The response made by David at once revealed the secret of his confidence, the source of his strength, and the certainty of his victory: "I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied" (v. 45). Ah, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runs into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10).

The reader is so familiar with the blessed sequel that little comment on it is required. Faith having brought God into the scene could announce the victory in advance (v.46). One stone in its hand was worth more than all the Philistine's armor on the giant of unbelief. And why? Because that stone, though flung by David's sling, was directed and made efficacious by the hand of God. It is pitiable to find how some of the best commentators missed the real point here. Verse 6 begins the description of Goliath's armor by saying "he had a helmet of brass upon his head": some have suggested this fell off when he lifted up his hand to curse David by his gods (v. 43); others supposed he left the visor open that he might see the better. But David's stone did not enter his eye, but his "forehead"—divine power sent it through the helmet of brass! In David's cutting off his head (v. 51) we have a foreshadowment of what is recorded in Hebrews 2:14.

CHAPTER FIVE

His Early Experiences

1 Samuel 18

Had we sought a topical title for this chapter, "The Price of Popularity" might well have been selected. The seventeenth chapter of 1 Samuel closes by recounting the memorable victory of David over Goliath the Philistine giant; the eighteenth chapter informs us of a number of things which formed the sequel to that notable achievement. There is much which those who are ambitious and covetous of earthly honor do well to take to heart. An accurate portrayal is given of different phases and features of human nature that is full of instruction for those who will duly ponder the same. Much is condensed into a small compass, but little imagination is required in order to obtain a vivid conception of what is there presented. One scene after another is passed in rapid review, but amid them all, the man after God's own heart acquitted himself admirably. May the Lord enable each of us to profit from what is here recorded for our learning.

"And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1 and cf. verses 3, 4). Let us admire here the tender grace of God, and behold an illustration of a blessed principle in His dealings with us. Jonathan was the son of Saul, and, therefore (ordinarily), "heir apparent to the throne." But, as we have seen, David had been anointed unto that position. There was, therefore, occasion for Jonathan to look upon David as his rival, and to be filled with jealousy and hatred against him. Instead, his heart is united unto him with a tender affection. This should not be attributed to the amiability of his character,

What we have just called attention to above, is not sufficiently recognized and pondered in these evil days, no, not even by the people of God. There is nothing recorded of Jonathan which really shows that he was a saved man, but not a little to the contrary—particularly in the closing scenes of his life. When, then, the heart of a man of the world is drawn out to a saint, when he shows kindness unto him, we should always discern the secret workings of God's power, graciously exercised for us. He who employed ravens to feed His servant Elijah (1 Kings 17), often moves the hearts and minds of unregenerate people to be kind toward His children. It was the Lord who gave Joseph "favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21), the Israelites "favor in the sight of the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:21) at the time of their exodus, Esther in the sight of king Ahasuerus (Esther 5:2). It is so still; and we only honor God when we perceive and own this, and praise Him for it.

David's finding favor in the eyes of Jonathan was the more noteworthy, in that the envy and enmity of Saul was soon stirred against him. What a mercy from God was it, then, for David to have a true friend in his enemy's household! The value of it will come before us later. It was by this means that our hero received warning and his safety was promoted. In like manner, there are few of God's children unto whom He does not, in critical seasons, raise up those who are kindly disposed toward them, and who in various ways help and support them. Thus it has been in the life of the writer, and we doubt not, with many of our readers also. Let us admire the Lord's goodness and adore His faithfulness in thus giving us the sympathy and assistance of unsaved friends in a hostile world.

"And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house" (v. 2). The purpose of God concerning David was beginning to ripen. First, He had so overruled things, that Saul had sent for him to attend the king occasionally in his fits of melancholia. But now David was made a permanent member of the court. This was but fitting in view of the promise which had been made to him by the king before he encountered Goliath: that if victorious, Saul's daughter should be given to him to wife (17:25). Thus was David being fitted for his royal duties. It is blessed when we are able to realize that each providential change in our lives is another step toward the accomplishing of the divine counsels concerning us.

"And David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely; and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants" (v. 5). Beautiful it is to behold here the humility and fidelity of the one upon whom the anointing oil already rested: diligently had he fulfilled his trust in the sheepfold at Bethlehem, dutifully did he now carry out the orders of the king. Let this be duly laid to heart by any who are tempted to chafe under the situation which they now occupy. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (Eccl, 9:10), defines the duty of each one of us. The teaching of the New Testament is, of course, the same: "Not slothful in business; Fervent in spirit" (Rom, 12:11). Whatever position you occupy, dear reader, no matter how humble or distasteful, "whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Colossians 3:23).

"And behaved himself wisely." How very few do so! How many have, through injudicious conduct, not only hindered their spiritual progress, but ruined their earthly prospects. Such a word as the one now before us needs to be turned into prayer—believing, fervent, persevering. Especially is that counsel timely unto the young. We need to ask God to enable us to carry ourselves wisely in every situation in which He has placed us: that we may redeem the time, be on our guard against temptations, and perform each duty to the very best of our ability. "Be you wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16), does not mean, be compromisers and temporizers, tricky and deceitful; but, take into consideration the fickleness of human nature and trust none but God. In David's behaving himself "wisely" he points again unto Him of whom God said, "Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently" (Isaiah 52:13).

Saul now set David "over the men of war": though not made commander-in-chief, some high military office was given him, possibly over the king's bodyguard. This was a further step toward the equipping of David for his life's work: there was much fighting ahead of him, powerful enemies of Israel which had to be conquered; thus was God making all things "work together" for his good. What a change from the obscurity and peace of pastoral life, to becoming a courtier and soldier. "And he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants." God gave their future ruler favor in the eyes both of the common people and of the court. How this reminds us of what is recorded of the Antitype: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

"And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered as they played, and said, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (verses 6, 7). How this incident served to make manifest the low spiritual state into which the nation of Israel had now sunk. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34): the language we employ, is a sure index to the condition of our souls, "They are *of* the world, therefore *speak* they of the world" (1 John 4:5). It is indeed distressing, yet ought not to be surprising, that so few professing Christians in their general conversation with each other, "minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29)—not surprising, because the great majority of them are strangers to the power of godliness.

The language used by the women of Israel when celebrating the .death of Goliath and the defeating of the Philistines, gave plain indication that their hearts and minds were occupied only with the human victors. "*God* was not in all their thoughts" (Psalm 10:4). Alas that this is so often the case today: we are living in an age of hero worship, and Christendom itself is infected by this evil spirit. Man is eulogized and magnified on every hand, not only out in the world, but even in the so-called churches, Bible conferences, and religious periodicals—seen in the advertising of the speakers, the printing of their photos, and the toadying to them. O how little hiding behind the Cross, how little self-effacement there is today. "Cease you from *man*" (Isaiah 2:22), needs to be placed in large letters over the platforms of all the big religious gatherings in this man-deifying age. No wonder the Holy Spirit is "grieved" and "quenched," yet where are the voices being raised in faithful protest?

"And the women answered as they played, and said, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." What a sad contrast was this from what we find recorded in Exodus 15! A far greater overthrow of the enemy was witnessed by Israel at the Red Sea, than what had just taken place in the valley of Elah (1 Samuel 17:19). Yet we do not find the mothers of these women of Israel magnifying Moses and singing *his* praises. Instead, we hear Miriam saying to her sisters, "Sing you to the Lord, for *He* has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea" (v. 21). Jehovah was there given His true place, the victory being ascribed to Him and not to the human instruments. See to it, dear reader, that—no matter what the common and evil custom be to the contrary—you give *all* the glory to Him unto whom alone it rightfully belongs.

"And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?" (v. 8). The song of the women was not only dishonoring to God, but was impolitic as well. As we saw in verse 15, David "behaved himself *wisely*"; but the conduct of Israel's daughters was in sharp contrast therefrom. The honoring of David above Saul, was more than the king's proud heart could endure: the activity of the "flesh" in the women acted upon the "flesh" in him. Unable to rejoice in what God had wrought through another, Saul was envious when he heard the superior praises of David being sung; he could not tolerate the thought of being second.

Perhaps someone may be inclined to raise the question, Why did not God restrain those women from exalting David in song above Saul (as He could easily have done), and thus prevented the rising of the king's jealousy? Several answers may be returned to this query: it subserved God's purpose, arid promoted the spiritual good of David. God often withholds His curbing hand in order that it may the better appear what is in fallen and unregenerate man. Were He not to do so, the distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil would not be so evident. Moreover, David was being flattered, and flattery is ever a dangerous thing; therefore does God often wisely and mercifully check our proud hearts from being unduly elated thereby, by causing some to think and speak evil of us.

"For every great and good work a man must expect to be envied by his neighbor: no distinction or pre-eminence can be so unexceptionably obtained, but it will expose the possessor to slander and malice, and perhaps to the most fatal consequences. But such trials are very *useful* to those who love God, they serve as a counterpoise to the honor put upon them, and check the growth of pride and attachment to the world; they exercise them to faith, patience, meekness, and communion with God; they give them a fair opportunity of exemplifying the amiable nature and tendency of true godliness, by acting with wisdom and propriety in the most difficult circumstances; they make way for increasing experience of the Lord's faithfulness, in restraining their enemies, raising them up friends, and affording them His gracious protection; and they both prepare them for those stations in which they are to be employed, and open their way to them: for in due time modest merit will shine forth with double luster" (T. Scott).

Before passing on, let it be remembered that each detail of this chapter, and everything in the Old Testament Scriptures, is "written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). Especially does it need to be emphasized for the benefit of the young, that lavish commendations from those who admire and love us, in such a world as this, often prove a real injury; and in all cases everything should be avoided which can excite envy and opposition—except the performance of our duty to God and man. "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you" (Luke 6:26). During the twelve years He was in the pastorate, the writer deemed it expedient to retire into the vestry as soon as the service was over: the "flesh" loves to hear the eulogies of the people, but they are not conducive to humility. "Seek you great things for yourself? seek *them not*" (Jeremiah 45:5).

"And Saul eyed David from that day and forward" (v. 9). Perceiving that David was looked upon favorably by the people (v. 5), jealous of the praise which was accorded him (v. 7), fearful that he might soon lose the kingdom (v. 8), Saul now regarded the slayer of Goliath with a malignant eye. Instead of looking upon David with esteem and gratitude, as he should have done because of his gallant behavior, he jealousy observed his ways and actions, biding his time to do him injury. What a solemn example does this provide of the inconstancy of poor human nature! Only a little before Saul had "loved him greatly" (16:21), and now he hated him. Beware, my reader, of the fickleness of the human heart. There is only One who can truthfully say "I change not" (Malachi 3:6).

If David was counting upon the stability of Saul's affection for him, if he concluded that his military prowess had established him in the king's favor, he was now to meet with a rude awakening. Instead of gratitude, there was cruel envy; instead of kindly treatment, his very life was sought. And this too is recorded for our instruction. The Holy Scriptures not only unveil to us the attributes of God, but they also reveal to us the character of man. Fallen human nature is faithfully depicted as it actually is. The more attentively God's Word be pondered and its teachings and principles absorbed, the better will we be fortified against many a bitter disappointment. There is no excuse for any of us being deceived by people: if we took to heart the solemn warnings which the Bible furnishes, we should be far more upon our guard, and would heed such exhortations as are found in

Psalm 146:3; Proverbs 17:18; Jeremiah 9:4; 17:5; Micah 7:5.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house. And David played with his hand, as at other times; and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall. And David avoided out of his presence twice" (verses 10, 11). How swiftly troubles follow on the heels of triumphs! What a contrast between hearing the acclaiming songs of the women, and dodging a murderous weapon! And yet how true to life! Well, then, does each of us need to seek grace that we may learn to hold everything down here with a light hand. Rightly did one of the Puritans counsel, "Build not your nest in any earthly tree, for the whole forest is doomed to destruction." It is only as the heart is set upon things

"The evil spirit came from God upon Saul." Yes, the wicked as well as the righteous, evil spirits as well as holy angels, are under the absolute and immediate control of God, cf. Judges 9:23. But let us not miss the solemn *connection* between what is recorded in verse 9 and in verse 10: when we indulge jealousy and hatred, we give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:26, 27). "And he prophesied:" all prophesyings are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, that is why we need to heed I John 4:1. Observe the enemy's subtlety: no doubt Saul's prophesying was designed to take David off his guard—he would least expect an attempt on his life at such a time. Blessed is it to note that after avoiding the deadly weapon cast at him, David did not pick it up and hurl it at Saul: instead, he quietly withdrew from his presence. May like grace be granted unto both writer and reader when tempted to retaliate upon those who wrong us.

CHAPTER SIX

His Early Experiences

(Continued)

1 Samuel 18

Human nature is quite apt to turn eyes of envy upon those who occupy exalted positions. It is commonly supposed that they who are stationed in seats of eminence and honor enjoy many advantages and benefits which are denied those beneath them; but this is far more imaginary than real, and where true is offset by the added responsibilities incurred and the more numerous temptations which are there encountered. What was before us in our last chapter ought to correct the popular delusion. David on the plains of Bethlehem was far better off than David in the king's household: tending the sheep was less exacting than waiting upon Saul. Amid the green pastures he was free from jealous courtiers, the artificial etiquette of the palace, and the javelin of a mad monarch. The practical lesson to be learned by us is, to be contented with the lowly position which the providence of God has assigned us. And why should those who are joint-heirs with Christ be concerned about the trifles and toys of this world?

Resuming now at the point where we broke off, we next read, "And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul" (1 Samuel 18: 12). The word for "afraid" here is a milder one than that employed in verse 15, and might be rendered "apprehensive." The king was becoming increasingly uneasy about the future. Consequent upon his disobedience, the prophet of God had plainly told Saul, "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king," and then he added, "The Lord has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor of your, that is better than you" (15: 23, 28). While he was probably ignorant of David's anointing (16:13), it is plain that Saul was now growing more fearful that the man who had vanquished Goliath was he whom Jehovah had selected to succeed him.

First, it was evident to all that the Lord had given the young shepherd the victory over Goliath, for none had dared, in his own courage, to engage the mighty giant. *Second,* David's behaving himself so wisely in every position assigned him, and his being "accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants" (18:5), indicated that he would be popular with the masses were he to ascend the throne. *Third,* the song of the women caused the jealous king to draw his own conclusion: "they have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what can he have more but *the kingdom?*" (v. 8). And now that his personal attack upon David's life had been frustrated (v. 11), Saul was apprehensive, for he saw that the Lord was with David, while he knew that He had forsaken

"And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him" (v. 12). The proofs that the special favor of God rested upon David were too plain and numerous for Saul to deny. Jehovah was protecting and preserving, prospering and succeeding David, giving him victory over his enemies and acceptance in the sight of the people. Ah, my reader, when the smile of the Lord is resting upon any of His saints, even the wicked are obliged to take note of and acknowledge the same. The chief captain of Abimelech's host admitted to Abraham, "God is *with you* in all that you do" (Genesis 21:22)—what a testimony was that from a heathen! When Joseph was in the house of Potiphar, we are told, "And his master *saw* that the Lord was with him" (Genesis 39:3). Can those among whom our lot is cast perceive that the special blessing of Heaven is resting upon us? If not, our hearts ought to be deeply exercised before God.

"And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul." An additional cause of Saul's alarm was the knowledge that the Lord had departed from him, and therefore was he destitute of strength of mind and courage, wisdom and prudence, and had become mean and abject, and exposed to the contempt of his subjects. The reference is to chapter 16:14. A solemn warning is this for us. It was because of his rebellion against the Lord, that Saul was now deserted of God. How often God withdraws His sensible and comforting presence from His people, through their following of a course of self-will. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me: and he who loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest* Myself to him" (John 14:21).

"Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people" (v. 13). Solemn indeed is it to behold how Saul acted here. Instead of humbling himself before God, he sought to rid himself of the man whose presence condemned him. Instead of judging himself unsparingly for the sin which had caused the Spirit of God to leave him, the wretched king was loath to look any more at the one upon whom Jehovah's favor manifestly rested. Flow differently did sinning David act at a later date! Behold him as he cried, "For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight . . . . Cast me not away from Your presence; and take not Your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:3, 4, 11). Ah, here is the great difference between the unregenerate and the regenerate: the one harden themselves in their sin, the other are broken before God on account of it.

"Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people." But let us admire again the hand of God overruling, yes, directing, the reprobate monarch's actions to the carrying out of His own designs. Though it was hatred of his person that caused the king to remove David from the court, and perhaps partly to please his subjects and partly because he hoped he might be slain in battle, that our hero was now made captain over a regiment; yet this only served the more to ingratiate him with the people, by affording him the opportunity of leading them to victory over their enemies. Abundant opportunity was thus afforded to all Israel to become acquainted with David and all his ways.

Let us also take note of another line in the typical picture here. Though anointed king of Israel (16:13), David was, nevertheless, called upon to endure the hatred of the ruling power. Thus it was with David's Son and Lord. The One who lay in Bethlehem's manger was none other than "*Christ* ('the Anointed') the Lord" (Luke 2: 11), and "born King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2); yet the king of Judea sought His life (Matthew 2:16)—though fruitlessly, as in our type. So too at a later date, when His public ministry had begun, we read that, "the Pharisees went out and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him" (Matthew 12:14). Blessed is it to see how that, instead of attempting to take things into his own hands, David was content to quietly wait the time which God had appointed for his coronation. In like manner, our blessed Lord willingly endured the "sufferings" before He entered into His "glory." May Divine grace grant unto us all needed patience.

"And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him" (v. 14). Observe that little word "all," and turn it into prayer and practice. Whether on the farm, in the court, or on the battlefield, the man after God's own heart conducted himself prudently. Here too he foreshadowed Him of whom it was declared "He has done all things *well*" (Mark 7:37). Let this ever be our desire and aim. "And the Lord was with him," protecting and prospering. That word in 2 Chronicles 15:2 still holds good, "The Lord is with you, while you be with Him: and if you seek Him, He will be found of you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you." If we diligently seek to cultivate a daily walk with God, all will be well with us.

"Wherefore when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them" (verses 15, 16). When the God-forsaken king perceived that he had gained no advantage against David, but that instead he succeeded in all his undertakings, and was more and more in favor with the people, Saul was greatly alarmed, lest the hour was drawing near when the kingdom should be rent from him and given to his rival. When the wicked discern that the awe and blessing of God is upon the righteous, they are "afraid" of them: thus we read that "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy " (

Mark 6:20). When it is known that God is in the assemblies of His saints, even the great ones of the earth are convicted and rendered uneasy: see Psalm 48:2-6.

"And Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give you to wife: only be you valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him" (v. 17). This was said not in friendship and good-will to David, but as designed to lay a snare for him. Thoroughly obsessed with envy, the king was unable to rest. If it could be accomplished without incurring direct guilt, he was determined to encompass David's destruction. Formerly he had made a personal attack upon his life (18:11), but now he feared the people, with whom David was so popular (v. 16); so Saul deemed it wiser to devise this vile plot. He would have David work out his own doom. Remarkable is it to note that this was the very way in which Saul's own career was ended—he was slain by the Philistines: see 1 Samuel 31:1-5.

"Only be you valiant for me and light the Lord's battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him." Was this incident before David when he wrote, "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords" (Psalm 55:21)! How unspeakably dreadful was this: here was a man with murder in his heart, deliberately plotting the death of a fellow-creature; yet, at that very moment, talking about "fighting *the Lords* battles"! O how often is the vilest hypocrisy cloaked with spiritual language! How easy it is to be deceived by fair *words!* How apt would be the bystanders who heard this pious language of Saul, to conclude that the king was a godly man! Ah, my reader, learn well this truth: it is *actions* which speak louder than words.

"And David said unto Saul, Who am I? and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" (v. 18). Some of the commentators have supposed that Saul promised David his daughter to wife at the time when he went forth to engage Goliath; but there is nothing in Scripture which directly supports this. What is recorded in chapter 17:25 was the words of Israel, and not of the king—they *supposed* he would do this and more. When Saul's proposal was made known to him, the modesty and humility of David was at once manifested. Some think that the reference made by David to his "family," had in view his descent from Ruth the Moabitess.

It is blessed to behold the lowly spirit which was displayed by David on this occasion. No self-seeking time-server was he. His heart was occupied in faithfully performing each duty assigned to him, and he aspired not after earthly honors and fleshly advantages. "Who am I?" at once evidenced the mean estimate which he entertained of himself. Ah, *that* is the man whom the Lord uses and promotes: "God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). "And what is my life?" breathes the same sentiment: the pitting of *my* life against the Philistine is no equivalent to receiving the *king's* daughter in marriage. Here again we see the subject of these articles adumbrating the perfections of his Lord: "learn of Me, for I am meek and *lowly in heart*" (Matthew 11:29) gives us what the modesty of David but imperfectly represented. Let writer and reader earnestly seek grace to heed that word "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly" (Romans 12:3).

"But it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife" (v. 19). What was the word of such a man worth? Be very slow, dear reader, in resting upon the promises of a fallen creature. No doubt the perfidy of the king is so grossly affronting David was designed to anger him. Such shameful treatment was calculated to stir up to mutiny one who had the right to claim the fulfillment of Saul's agreement; and thus the king thought he could gain an advantage against him. It is striking and solemn to discover that the curse of God rested upon that marriage; for the five sons born by Merab to the Meholathite (brought up by Michal) were delivered into the hands of the Gibeonites, and "hanged" (2 Samuel 21:8,9)!

"And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him" (verses 20, 21). A new opportunity now presented itself unto the wicked king's purpose. Michal, another of his daughters, fell in love with David: he therefore proposed to give her to him for a wife instead of Merab, hoping that he would now have opportunity of bringing about his death. But let us look beyond the devil-possessed monarch, and behold and admire the wondrous ways of Him who makes "all things work together for good" to them that love Him. Just as of old the Lord turned the heart of the daughter of Pharaoh unto Moses and thus foiled the evil designs of her father to destroy all the male children of the Hebrews, so He now drew out the affections of Michal unto David, and used her to thwart the murderous intentions of Saul: see chapter 19: 11-17. What a proof that *all* hearts are in God's hands!

Conscious that his own word would have no weight with him, the king slyly employed his servants to gain David's confidence. They were commanded to commune with him "secretly," and to assure him "the king has *delight* in you, and all his servants love you: now therefore be the king's son-in-law" (v. 22). When the secret restraints of God are withdrawn from them "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). They will scruple at nothing, but employ any and every means to hand for accomplishing their evil designs: they will flatter and praise or criticize and condemn, advance or abase, the object of their spleen, as best serves their purpose.

When David was informed of the king's intention, his reply again evidenced the lowliness of his heart: "Seems it to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?"—by the king (v. 23). From what follows, it seems evident that David was here pointing out his inability to bring to the king's daughter the dowry that might be expected: compare Genesis 29:18; 34:12; Exodus 22:16, 17. Beautifully has Matthew Henry, in his comments on this verse, pointed out: "If David thus magnified the honor of being son-in-law to the king, how highly then should we think of it to be the sons (not in law, but in Gospel) to the King of kings! 'Behold what manner of love the Father bath bestowed upon us!' (1 John 3:1). Who are we that we should be thus dignified?" Utterly unable as we were to bring any "dowry" to recommend us unto God.

When his servants made known unto Saul David's reply, the real design of the king became apparent. "The condition of the marriage must be that he kill a hundred Philistine; and, as proof that those he had slain were uncircumcised, he must bring in their foreskins cut off. This would be a great reproach upon the Philistines, who hated circumcision, as it was an ordinance of God; and perhaps David's doing this would the more exasperate them against him; and make them seek to be revenged on him, which was the thing Saul desired and designed" (Matthew Henry). Even to such a stipulation David did not demur: knowing that God was with him, jealous of His glory to slay His enemies, he went forth and killed double the number required. Truly, God makes the wrath of man to praise Himself (Psalm 76:10).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fleeing From Saul

1 Samuel 19

At the close of 1 Samuel 18 there is a striking word recorded which supplies a most blessed line in the typical picture that was furnished by the man after God's own heart. There we read, "David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by"—the marginal reading is still more suggestive: "so that his name was *precious*." What a lovely foreshadowing was this of Him whose "Name" is "as ointment pouted forth" (Song of Solomon 1:3)! Yes, both to His Father and to His people the name of Christ is "much set by." He has "obtained a more excellent name" than angels bear (Hebrews 1:4); yes, He has been given "a name which is above every name" (Phil, 2:9). "Precious" beyond description is that Name unto His own: they plead it in prayer (John 14: 13); they make it their "strong tower" (Proverbs 18:10).

"And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David" (1 Samuel 19:1). How vivid and how solemn is the contrast presented between the last sentence of the preceding chapter and the opening one of this! And yet perhaps the spiritually minded would hardly expect anything else. When the "name" of the "Beloved" (for that is what 'David" signifies) is "much set by," we are prepared to see the immediate raging of the enemy—personified here by Saul. Yes, the picture here presented to our view is true to life. Nothing is more calculated to call into action the enmity of the Serpent against the woman's Seed than the extolling of His "name," with all that that scripturally includes. It was thus in the days of the apostles. When they announced that "There is none other Name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), the Jewish leaders "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (v. 18); and because they heeded not, the apostle's were "beaten" and again commanded "not to speak in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5:40).

The previous plot of Saul upon David's life had failed. Instead of his being slain by the Philistines, they fell under the hand of David, and the consequence was that the son of Jesse became more esteemed than ever by the people. His name was held in high honor among them. Thus it was too with his Antitype: the more the chief priests and Pharisees persecuted the Lord Jesus, the more the people sought after Him: "From that day forth, they took counsel together for to put Him to death . . . and the Jews' Passover was near at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus" (

John 11:53, 55, 56). So it was after His ascension: the more His witnesses were persecuted, the more the Gospel prospered. There seems little room for doubt that the death of Stephen was one of the things used by God to convict him who afterwards became the mighty apostle to the Gentiles. When the early church was assailed, we are told, "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word" (Acts 8:4). Thus does God make the wrath of man to praise Him.

Saul was growing desperate, and now hesitated not to make known unto his own son his fierce hatred of David. Yet here again we may behold and admire the directing hand of Providence, in the king's not concealing his murderous designs from Jonathan. The son shared not his father's enmity, accordingly we read, "But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeks to kill you: now therefore, I pray you, take heed to yourself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide yourself: and I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will commune with my father of you; and what I see, that I will tell you" (9:2, 3). It is blessed to see such true and unselfish friendship, for it should not be forgotten that Jonathan was the natural heir to the throne. Here we see him faithfully acquainting David of his danger, and counseling him to take precautionary measures against it.

Not only did Jonathan warn his beloved friend of the evil intentions of his father, but he also entreated the king on his behalf. Beautiful it is to see him interceding before Saul (verses 4, 5), at the imminent risk of bringing down his anger upon his own head. Jonathan reminded Saul that David had never wronged him; so far from it, he had delivered Israel from the Philistines, and had thus saved the king's throne; why then should he be so set upon shedding "innocent blood"? Jonathan must not here be regarded as a type of Christ, rather is he a vivid contrast. Jonathan's plea was based upon David's personal merits. It is the very opposite in the case of the Christian's Intercessor. Our great High Priest appears before the King of the universe on behalf of His people not on the ground of any good *they* have done, but solely on the ground of that perfect satisfaction or obedience which *He* offered to divine justice on their behalf; no merits of theirs can He plead, but His own perfect sacrifice prevails for them.

Jonathan's intercession was successful: "And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan" (v. 6). He not only gave his son a fair hearing, but was duly impressed by the arguments used, and was convicted for the present that he was wrong in seeking the life of David. Yet here again the intercession of Jonathan and that of the Lord Jesus for His people are in striking contrast: the former had naught but a temporary and transient effect upon his father, whereas that of our Advocate is eternally efficacious—forever be His name praised. "And Saul swore, As the Lord lives, he shall not be slain" (v. 6). Once more we see how easy it is for wicked men to make use of pious expressions, and appear to superficial observers godly men. The sequel shows of what little value is the solemn oath of a king, and warns us to place no confidence in the engagements of earthly rulers. They who are acquainted with the Scriptures are not surprised when even national and international treaties become only worthless "scraps of paper."

Reassured by Jonathan, David returned to Saul's household (v. 7). But not for long: a fresh war (probably local, and on a small scale) broke out with the Philistines. This called for David to resume his military activities, which he did with great success (v. 8), killing many of the enemy and putting the remainder to flight. A blessed example does the man after God's own heart here set us. Though serving a master that little appreciated his faithful efforts, nay, who had vilely mistreated him, our hero did not refuse to perform his present duty. "David continues his good services to his king and country. Though Saul had requited him evil for good, and even his usefulness was the very thing for which Saul envied him, yet he did not therefore retire in sullenness, and decline public service. Those that are ill paid for doing good, yet must not be weary of well-doing, remembering what a bountiful benefactor our heavenly Father is" (Matthew Henry).

"And the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand" (v. 9). The opening word of this verse seems to intimate that the fresh victory of David over the Philistines stirred up the spiteful jealousy of the king, and thus by "giving place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26, 27) became susceptible again to the evil spirit. "And David played with his hand," no doubt upon the harp. One who had been so successful upon the battlefield, and was held in such honor by the people, might have deemed such a service as beneath his dignity; but a gracious man considers no ministry too humble by which he may do good to another. Or, he might have objected on the basis of the danger he incurred the last time he performed this office for Saul (18:10), but he counted upon God to preserve him in the path of duty.

"And Saul sought to smite David even to the wall with the javelin" (v. 10). In view of his so recently acceding to his son's intercession and swearing that David should not be slain, our present verse furnishes an illustration of a solemn and searching principle. How often unsaved people, after sudden conviction have *resolved* to break from their evil doings, and serve the Lord, but only after a short season to return to their course of sin, like a washed sow to her wallowing in the mire (2 Peter 2:22), Where there has been no miracle of mercy wrought within the heart, no change of disposition, and where there is no dependence upon divine grace for needed strength, resolutions, however sincere and earnest, seldom produce any lasting effect. Unmortified lusts quickly break through the most solemn vows; where the fear of God does not possess the heart, fresh temptations soon arouse the dormant corruptions, and this gives Satan good opportunity to regain complete mastery over his victim.

But he slipped away out of Saul's presence, and he smote the javelin into the wall; and David fled, and escaped that night" (v. 10). How wonderful is the care of God for His own! Though invisible, how real are His protecting arms! "Not a shaft of hate can hit, until the God of love sees fit." What peace and stability it brings to the heart when faith realizes that "The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them" (Psalm 34:7). Men may be filled with malice against us, Satan may rage and seek our destruction, but none can touch a hair of our heads without God's permission. The Lord Almighty is the "Shield and Buckler," the "Rock and Fortress" of all those who put their trust in Him. Yet note that David was not foolhardy and reckless. Faith is not presumptuous: though we are to trust Him, we are forbidden to *tempt* the Lord; therefore it is our duty to retire when men seek our hurt (cf. Matthew 10:23).

Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If you save not your life tonight, tomorrow shall you be slain" (v. 11). Saul was thoroughly aroused: chagrined by his personal failure to kill David, he now sent his guards to assassinate him. These were to surround his house and wait until daylight, rather than enter and run the risk of killing someone else, or allowing him to make his escape during the confusion and darkness. But man proposes, and God disposes. The Lord had other services for David to perform, and the servant of God is immortal until the work allotted him has been done. This time the king's own daughter, who had married David, was the one to befriend him. In some way she had learned of her father's plan, so at once took measures to thwart it. First, she acquainted her husband of his imminent danger.

Next we are told, "so Michal let David down through a window; and he went, and fled, and escaped" (v. 12). In like manner, Rahab had let down the spies from her house in Jericho, when the king's messengers were in quest of him; and as the disciples let down the apostle Paul at Damascus, to preserve him from the evil designs of the Jews. Though the doors were securely guarded, David thus escaped through a window, and fled swiftly and safely away. It is of deep interest at this point to turn to the fifty-ninth Psalm, the heading of which (inspired, we believe) tells us it was written "when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him." In this critical situation, David betook himself to prayer: "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord" (Psalm 59:1-3). Blessed is it to see that before he completed the Psalm, full assurance of deliverance was his: "But I will sing of Your power, yes, I will sing aloud of Your mercy *in the morning*"(v. 16).

"And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth, and when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick" (verses 13, 14). Water will not rise above its own level. We cannot expect the children of this world to act according to heavenly principles. Alienated as they are from the life of God (Ephesians 4:18), utter strangers to Him in experience (Ephesians 2:12), they have no trust in Him. In an emergency they have no better recourse than to turn unto fleshly schemings and devisings. From a natural viewpoint Michal's fidelity to her husband was commendable, but from a spiritual standpoint her deceit and falsehood was reprehensible. The one who commits his cause and case unto the Lord,

trusting also in Him to bring to pass His own wise purpose and that which shall be for his own highest good (Psalm 37:5), has no need to resort unto tricks and deceits. Does not David's having yoked himself to an unbeliever supply the key to his painful experiences in Saul's household!

"And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him" (v. 15). Bent on David's destruction, the king gave orders that, sick or no, he should be carried into his presence, and this for the specific purpose of slaying him by his own hand. Base and barbarous was it to thus triumph over one whom he thought was sick, and to vow the death of one that, for all he knew, was dying by the hand of nature. Spurred on by him who is "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44), the savage cruelty of Saul makes evident the extreme danger to which David was exposed: which, in turn, intensifies the blessedness of God's protection of him. How precious it is for the saint to know that the Lord places Himself as the Shield between him and his malicious foe! "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever" (Psalm 125:2).

When the servants returned to and entered Michal's house, her plot was exposed and the flight of David discovered (v. 16). Whereupon the king asked his daughter, "Why have you deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped?" (v. 17). How thoroughly blurred is the vision of one who is filled with envy, anger and hatred! He who had befriended Saul again and again, was now regarded as an "enemy." There is a solemn lesson for us in this: if pride, prejudice, or self-seeking rule our hearts, we shall regard those who are our wisest counselors and well-wishers as foes. Only when our eye be single is our whole body full of light. Solemn is it to note Michal's answer to Saul: "He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill you?" (v. 17), thereby representing David as a desperate man who would have slain her had she sought to block his escape. Still more solemn is it to find the man after God's own heart married to such a woman!

"So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth" (v. 19). It was by Samuel he had been anointed, and through him he had first received the promise of the kingdom. Probably David now sought God's prophet for the strengthening of his faith, for counsel as to what he should do, for comfort under his present troubles, for fellowship and prayer: it was through Samuel he was now most likely to learn the mind of the Lord. And too, he probably regarded asylum with Samuel as the most secure place in which he could lodge. Naioth was close to Ramah, and there was a school of the prophets: if the Philistines gave no disturbance to the "hill of God" and the prophets in it (10:5), it might be reasonably concluded that Saul would not.

"And it was told Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah." And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied" (verses 19, 20). Notwithstanding the sacredness of the place David was in, Saul sent servants to arrest him. But again the Lord interposed, by causing His Spirit to fall upon Saul's messengers, who were so much taken up with the religious exercises, they neglected the errand on which they had been sent. How this reminds us of the Pharisees and chief priests sending officers to apprehend Christ, but who instead of executing their commission, returned to their masters, saying, "Never man spoke like this Man" (John 7:32,45,46)! Saul sent others of his servants, a second and a third time, to seize David, but before he reached the place where David was, the Spirit of God came upon him and threw him into a kind of trance, in which he continued all day and night; giving David plenty of rime to escape. Such strange methods does Jehovah sometimes employ in bringing to naught the efforts of His enemies against His servants.

CHAPTER EIGHT

His Wanderings

1 Samuel 20

The picture which the Holy Spirit has given in Scripture of David's character and life is a composite one. It is somewhat like a painting in which the dominant colors are white, black and gold. In many details David has left an example which we do well to follow. In other respects he presents a solemn warning which we do well to heed. In other features he was a blessed type of Christ. Thus, the meeting together of these three distinct things in David may well be likened unto a composite picture. Nor do we exercise a wrong spirit (providing our motive be right), or sully the grace of God by dwelling upon the sad defects in the character of the Psalmist or the failures in his life; rather will the Spirit's design be realized and our souls be the gainers if we duly take to heart and turn them into earnest prayer, that we may be delivered from the snares into which he fell.

At the close of our last chapter we saw how that, to escape the murderous hatred of Saul, David took refuge with Samuel at Naioth. Thither did his relentless enemy follow him. But wondrously did God interpose. Three times the messengers which the king had sent to arrest David were restrained and awed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Not only so, but when Saul himself came in person, the Spirit of God subdued and threw him into a kind of ecstatic trance. One would have thought that this signal intervention of God for David had quieted all his fears, and filled his soul with praise and thanksgiving unto Him who had shown Himself strong on his behalf. Was it not plain that God did not intend Saul to harm the one whom His prophet had anointed? Ah, but David too was a man of like passions with us, and unless divine grace wrought effectually *within* him, no outward providences would avail to spiritualize him. The moment the Lord leaves us to ourselves (to try us, to show what we are), a fall is certain.

Instead of continuing at Naioth, quietly waiting the next token of God's goodness, David became alarmed, and took matters into his own hands. Instead of being occupied with the divine perfections, David now saw only a powerful, inveterate, bloodthirsty enemy. Accordingly, the next thing we read is, "And David fled from Naioth in Ramah" (20:1): true he "fled" from Saul, but he also turned his back upon Samuel. "And came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" It is solemn to see David preferring a conference with Jonathan rather than with the prophet of God. As usual, the key is hung upon the door; the opening verse of this chapter explains to us what is found in the later ones. It was "natural" that David should turn for help to a "friend," but was it *spiritual?*

Do not the questions David put to Jonathan reveal to us the state of his heart? The "I," "mine," "my," "my," show plainly enough the condition of his mind. God was not now in all his thoughts, yes, *He* was not mentioned at all. The repeated attempts of Saul upon his life had thoroughly unnerved him, and his "there is but a step between me and death" (1 Samuel 20:3), intimates plainly that unbelieving fears now possessed him. Ah, David needed to turn unto an abler physician than Jonathan if his feverish anxiety was to be allayed: only One was sufficient for laying a calming and cooling hand upon him. O how much the saint loses when he fails to acknowledge the Lord in all his ways (Proverbs 3:6). But worse: when communion is broken, when the soul is out of touch with God, temptation is yielded unto and grievous sin is committed. It was so here. Afraid that Saul's anger would return when his absence from the table was noted, but fearful to take his place there, David bids Jonathan utter a deliberate lie on his behalf (20:5, 6). May this speak loudly to each of our hearts, warning of the fearful fruits which issue from severed fellowship with the Lord.

The first false step David had taken was in marrying the daughter of Saul, for it is evident from the sacred narrative that she was no suited partner for the man after God's own heart. His second mistake was his fleeing from Naioth, and thus turning his back upon the prophet of God. His third failure was to seek aid of Jonathan. The true character of his "friend" was exhibited on this occasion: seeing David so perturbed, he had not the moral courage to acknowledge the truth, but sought to pacify him with a prevarication (20:2). Surely Jonathan could not be ignorant of Saul's having thrown the javelin at David, of the instructions given to the servants to slay him (19:11), of the messengers sent to arrest him (19:20), and of his going after David in person (19:22). But all doubt is removed by "Saul spoke to *Jonathan* his son, and to all his servants, that they should *kill* David" (19:1). Jonathan deliberately equivocated in 20:2, and "evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33): thus it was here—David lied too (20:5,6).

We do not propose to go over this twentieth chapter verse by verse, for we are not now writing a commentary upon 1 Samuel. A plan was agreed upon by Jonathan whereby he should ascertain the latest attitude of his father and acquaint David with the same. A solemn covenant was entered into between them: Jonathan here, and David much later (2 Samuel 9), faithfully carried out its terms. The words "David hid himself in the held" (v. 24 and cf. 35, 41), at once expose his lie in verse 6, though the commentators have glossed it over. When David was missed from the king's table and inquiry was made, Jonathan repeated the lie which David had suggested to him. Thereupon the king reviled his son, and declared that David "shall surely die" (v. 31). When Jonathan sought to expostulate, and ask why David should be slain, Saul threw his javelin at him. The meeting between Jonathan and David in the field, and their affectionate leave-taking is touchingly described (verses 41, 42).

"Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest" (21:1). When a real saint is out of touch with God, when he is in a backslidden state, his conduct presents a strange enigma and his inconsistent ways are such as no psychologist can explain. But much that is inexplicable to many (even to ill-informed believers) is solved for us by Galatians 5: 17: "for the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would." Here we have set forth the conflict of the two "natures" in the Christian, the irreconcilable opposition between the two mainsprings of conduct, the "flesh" and the "spirit." According as one or the other of these two principles is actuating and dominating the saint, such will be his course of action. The final clause of this verse has a double force: the presence of the "flesh" hinders the "spirit" from completely realizing its desires in this life (Romans 7:15-25); the presence of the "spirit," prevents the "flesh" from fully having its way.

Galatians 5: 17 supplies the key to many a mysterious experience in the life of a Christian, and sheds much light on the checkered histories of Old Testament saints. We might add many paragraphs at this point by illustrating the last sentence from the lives of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, etc., but instead, we will confine our attention to the leading subject of these chapters. In his meeting the attacks of the wild animals (17:34-36), in his devotion for the tabernacle (Psalm 132:1-7), in his engagement with Goliath, the "spirit" was uppermost in David, and therefore was the Lord before his heart. There had been severe testings of courage and faith, but his trust in the Lord wavered not. Then followed a season in the king's household, where it was much harder to preserve this spirituality. Then Saul turned against him, and again and again sought his life. Deprived of the outward means of grace, David's faith flagged, and as it flagged fears replaced it, and instead of being occupied with the Lord, his powerful foe filled his vision.

In his flight from Saul, David first sought unto Samuel, which shows that the "flesh" in him was not completely regnant, as it never is in a truly regenerate soul: "Sin shall not have *dominion* over you" (Romans 6: 14)—it shall not render you its absolute slave. But in his flight from Samuel and his turning to Jonathan for help, we see the "flesh" more and more regulating his actions—still more plainly manifested in the falsehood which he put into his friend's mouth. And now in his flight unto Ahimelech and the manner in which he conducted himself, the anointed eye may discern the conflict which was at work within him. It now seemed clear unto David that no change for the better was to be expected in Saul: as long as the king was alive, he was in danger. An outcast from the court, he now became a lonely wanderer, but before he journeyed farther afield, his heart was first drawn to Nob, where the tabernacle had been removed.

Various motives and considerations seem to have moved David in his repairing to Nob. Foreseeing that he must now be an exile, he wished to take leave of the tabernacle, not knowing when he should see it again, it is plain from many of his Psalms that the sorest grief of David during the time of his banishment was his isolation from the house of God and his restraint from public ordinances: "How amiable are your Tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord . . . . For a day in your courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psalm 84:1, 2, 10 and cf. 42:3, 4, etc.) Second, it seems clear from 1 Samuel 22:10 that David's purpose was to inquire of the Lord through the high priest, to obtain directions from Him as to his path. Third, from what follows here, it appears that food was also his quest.

"And Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David" (21:1). Evidently the high priest had heard of David's having fallen under the displeasure of Saul, and so concluded that he was a fugitive. Knowing the type of man the king was, Ahimelech was fearful of endangering his own life by entertaining David. "And said unto him, Why are you alone, and no man with you?" That there were some "young men" with him is clear from verse 4 and also Matthew 12:3, yet having won such renown both in camp and court, it might well be expected that David should be accompanied by a suitable equipage. The disdain which the high priest showed for David the outcast, illustrates the merciless attitude of the world toward a fallen and impoverished hero.

"And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king has commanded me a business, and has said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send you, and what I have commanded you: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place" (21:2). Here again we see David guilty of a gross untruth. How solemn to find the Psalmist of Israel telling a deliberate lie at the threshold of the house of God, where he had come to inquire the mind of the Lord. Truly, each one of us has real need to pray "Remove from me the way of lying" (Psalm 119:29). David's heart quailed under the embarrassing question of the priest, and he who had dared to meet single-handed the Philistine giant was now afraid to speak the truth. Ah, there cannot be the calm and courage of faith, where faith itself is inoperative. Elijah shrank not from meeting the four hundred prophets of Baal, yet later he fled in terror from Jezebel. Peter dared to step out of the ship onto the sea, yet trembled before a maid. "Wherefore let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall."

It is easier to trust God in days of sunshine than in times of gloom and darkness. "David had often, indeed, before known difficulty and danger: from the day of his conflict with Goliath he had known little else: but then, there was this difference—in former difficulties he had been enabled to triumph. Some ray of brightness had gilded every cloud; some honor awaited him out of each affliction. But now, God seemed no longer to interfere on his behalf. The full enmity of Saul was allowed to take its course; and God interfered not, either to subdue or to chasten. He appeared no longer to intend raising David above circumstances, but to allow him to be overcome by them. David's heart seemed unable to bear this. To trust God while overcoming is one thing; to trust Him when being overcome is another" (B. W. Newton).

David now asked Ahimelech for five loaves of bread (21:3): bear in mind that he stood at the door of the tabernacle, and not before the priest's personal residence. All that was to hand were the twelve loaves which had rested for a week on the golden table in the sanctuary, and which, being replaced at once by twelve more, became the property of the priests and their families. Assuring Ahimelech that he and his men met the requirements of Exodus 19:15, David pressed for the bread being given to him. To what a low estate had the son of Jesse fallen: now that Saul's rooted malice was generally known the people would be afraid and unwilling to befriend him. In Matthew 12 we find the Lord Jesus vindicating this action, which shows us that the ordinances of religion may be dispensed with where the preservation of life calls for it: ritual observances must give way to moral duties, and in the case of urgent providential necessity that is permissible which ordinarily may not be done.

"Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen that belonged to Saul" (21:7). And yet in *his* hearing David had preferred his urgent request. Surely natural common sense would have prompted him to act with more prudence. Ah, my reader, when the saint is in a backslidden state of soul, he often acts more foolishly than does the man of the world. This is a righteous judgment of God upon him. He has given us His Word to walk by, and that Word is one of *wisdom,* containing beneficial counsel. We turn from it at our peril and irreparable loss. To lean unto our own understanding is to court certain disaster. Yet, when communion with God is broken, this is exactly what we do. Then it is that we are suffered to reap the bitter fruits of our evil ways and made to feel the consequences of our folly.

Next, David asked Ahimelech for a weapon, and was told that the only one available was "the sword of Goliath," which had been preserved in the tabernacle as a monument of the Lord's goodness to Israel. When told of this, David exclaimed, "There is none like that, give it to me." Alas, alas, how had the mighty fallen. "Surely it augured ill for David, that *his* hand—that hand which had placed the sword of Goliath in the sanctuary of the God of Israel—that hand which had once taken the pebble and the sling as the symbol of its strength, because it trusted in the Lord of hosts—it augured ill that his hand should be the first to withdraw the giant weapon from its resting-place in order that he might transfer to *it* a measure, at least of that confidence which he was withdrawing from God. How different the condition of David now, and on the day of Goliath's fall! Then, trusting in the God of Israel, and associated with Israel, he had gone out in owned weakness; but now, forsaking Israel and the land of Israel, he went forth armed with the sword of Goliath, to seek friendship and alliance with the Philistines, the enemies of Israel, and the enemies of God" (B. W. Newton).

Thus David now set forth, provisioned (temporarily, at least) and armed. But at what a cost? The unsuspecting priest had believed David's lies, and assured by him that Saul had commissioned him, feared not the presence of Doeg the king's servant (v. 7). But he paid dearly for listening, against his better judgment, to David's falsehoods. That treacherous Edomite informed Saul (22:9, 10), and later he was ordered by the enraged king to reek a fearful vengeance: "And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and donkeys, and sheep" (

1 Samuel 22: 18, 19). Such were some of the fearful results of David's lies, as he afterwards acknowledged to the one remaining child of Ahimelech: "I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house" (1 Samuel 22:22). May it please the Holy Spirit to powerfully move both writer and reader to lay to heart the whole of this solemn incident, that we may pray daily with increasing earnestness, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

CHAPTER NINE

His Flight to Ziklag

1 Samuel 21

There are times when God's tender love for His people *seems* to be contradicted by the sore testings which He sends upon them, times when His providences appear to clash with His promises; then it is that faith is tested, and so often fails; then it is also that the superabounding grace of God is evidenced by delivering the one who has given way to unbelief. These principles are illustrated again and again on the pages of Holy Writ, especially in the Old Testament, and one of their chief values is for us to lay them to heart, turn them into earnest prayer, and seek to profit from them. God forbid that we should "wrest" them to our destruction (2 Peter 3:16). God forbid that we should deliberately sin in order that grace may abound (Romans 6:1, 2). And God forbid that we should take the failures of those who preceded us as excuses for our own grievous falls, thus endeavoring to shelter behind the faults of others. Rather let us seek grace to regard them as danger-signals, set up to deter us from slipping into the snares which tripped them.

To Abraham God promised a numerous seed (Genesis 12:2), but His providences seemed to run counter to the fulfillment. Sarah was barren! But the sterility of her womb presented no difficulty to Omnipotence. Nor was there any need for Abraham to attempt a fleshly compromise, by seeking a son through Hagar (Genesis 16). True, for a while, his plan appeared to succeed? but the sequel not only demonstrated the needlessness for such a device, but in Ishmael a bitter harvest was reaped. And this is recorded as a warning for us. To Jacob God said, "Return unto the land of your fathers, and to your kindred, and I will be with you" (Genesis 31:3). During the course of his journey, messengers informed him that Esau was approaching with four hundred men, and we read that "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed" (Genesis 32:7). How human! True, and how sad, how dishonoring to God! What cause for fear was there when Jehovah was with him? O for grace to "trust in Him at all times" (Psalm 62:8).

Learn, dear brethren and sisters, that faith must be tested—to prove its genuineness. Yet only He who gives faith, can maintain it; and for this we must constantly seek unto Him. What has just been before us receives further illustration in the subject of these chapters. David was the king elect, yet another wore the crown. The son of Jesse had been anointed unto the throne, yet Saul was now bitterly persecuting him. Had God forgotten to be gracious? No, indeed. Had He changed His purpose? That could not be (Malachi 3:6). Why, then, should the slayer of Goliath now be a fugitive? He had been appointed to be master of vast treasures, yet he was now reduced to begging bread (21:3). Faith *must* be tested, and we *must* learn by painful experience the bitter consequences of *not trusting* in the Lord with all our hearts, and the evil fruits which are borne whenever we lean unto our own understandings, take matters into our own hands, and seek to extricate ourselves from trouble.

Concerning Hezekiah we read that "God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:31). None of us knows how weak he is until God withdraws His upholding grace (as He did with Peter) and we are left to ourselves. True, the Lord has plainly told us that "without Me you can do nothing." We think we believe that word, and in a way we do; yet there is a vast difference between not calling into question a verse of Scripture, an assenting to its verity, and an inward acquaintance with the same in our own personal history. It is one thing to believe that I am without strength or wisdom, it is another to *know* it through actual experience. Nor is this, as a rule, obtained through a single episode, any more than a nail is generally driven in securely by one blow of the hammer. No, we have to learn, and re-learn, so stupid are we. The Truth of God has to be burned into us in the fiery furnace of affliction. Yet this ought not to be so, and would not be so if we paid more heed to these Old Testament warnings, furnished in the biographies of the saints of yore.

In our last chapter we saw that, following the murderous attack of Saul upon him, David fled to Naioth, But thither did his relentless enemy follow him. Wondrously did God interpose on His servant's behalf. Yet, being a man of like passions with ourselves, and the supernatural grace of God not supporting him at the time, instead of David's fears being thoroughly removed, and instead of waiting quietly with Samuel to receive a word of Divine guidance, he was occupied with his immediate danger from Saul, and after vainly conferring with Jonathan, took things into his own hands and fled to Nob. There he lied to the priest, by means of which he obtained bread, but at the fearful cost of Saul reeking vengeance through Doeg in slaying eighty-five of those who wore the linen ephod. Disastrous indeed are the consequences when we seek to have our own way and hew out a path for ourselves. How differently had things turned out if David trusted the Lord, and left Him to undertake for him!

God is all-sufficient in Himself to supply all our need (Philippians 4:19) and to do for us far more exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). This He can do either in an immediate way, or mediately if He sees fit to make use of creatures as instruments to fulfill His pleasure and communicate what He desires to impart to us. God is never at a loss: all things, all events, all creatures, are at His sovereign disposal. This foundational truth of God's all-sufficiency should be duly improved by us, taking heed that we do not by our thoughts or actions reflect upon or deny this divine perfection. And this we certainly do when we use *unlawful* means to escape imminent dangers. Such was the case with Abram (Genesis 20) and Isaac (Genesis 26) when they denied their wives, concluding that that was a necessary expedient to save their lives—as though God were not able to save them in a better and more honorable way. Such we shall see was the case with David at Ziklag.

We also made brief reference in our last chapter to the fact that when the saint is out of touch with God, when he is in a backslidden state, his behavior is so different from his former conduct, so inconsistent with his profession, that his actions now present a strange enigma. And yet that enigma is capable of simple solution. It is only in God's light that any of us "see light" (Psalm 36:9). As the Lord Jesus declares, "he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12). Yes, but it is only as we are really "following" Him, our hearts engaged with the example which He has left us, that we shall see, know, and take that path which is pleasing and honoring to Him. There is only one other alternative, and that is seeking to please either our fellows or ourselves, and where this is the case, only confusion and trouble can ensue.

When communion with God (who is "light") is severed, nothing but spiritual darkness is left. The world is a "dark place" (2 Peter 1:19), and if we are not ordering our steps by the Word (Psalm 119:105), then we shall flounder and stumble. "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his *own* ways" (Proverbs 14:14), not with the "ways" of God (Psalm 103:7). Where fellowship with the Lord is broken, the mind is no longer illuminated from Heaven, the judgment is clouded, and a lack of wisdom, yes, folly itself, will then characterize all our actions. Here is the key to much in our lives, the explanation of those "unwise doings," those "foolish mistakes" for which we have had to pay so dearly—we were not controlled by the Holy Spirit, we acted in the energy of the flesh, we sought the counsel of the ungodly, or followed the dictates of common sense.

Nor is there any determining to what lengths the backslider may go, or how foolishly and madly he may not act. Solemnly is this illustrated in the case now before us. As we saw in the preceding paper, David was worried at being unarmed, and asked the high priest if there were no weapon to hand. On being informed that the only one available was "the sword of Goliath," which had been preserved in the tabernacle as a memorial of the Lord's goodness to His people, David exclaimed, "There is none like it, give it me" (1 Samuel 21:9). Alas, "how had the fine gold become dim"! He who when walking in the fear of the Lord had not hesitated to advance against Goliath with nothing in his hand save a sling, now that the fear of man possessed him, placed his confidence in a giant's sword. Perhaps both writer and reader are inclined to marvel at this, but have we not more reason to *mourn* as we see in this incident an accurate portrayal of many of our past failures?

"And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath" (1 Samuel 21:10). Fearing that Saul would pursue him were he to make for any other part of the land of Israel, and not being disposed to organize a company against him, David took refuge in Gath of the Philistines. But what business had he in the territory of God's enemies? None whatever, for he had not gone there in *His* interests. Truly, "oppression makes a wise man mad" (Ecclesiastes 7:7). Few indeed conduct themselves in extreme difficulties without taking some manifestly false step: we should therefore "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation" (Matthew 26:41), earnestly seeking from God the strength which will alone enable us to successfully resist the Devil.

"And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath." It is evident from what follows that David hoped he would not be recognized. Thus it is with the backslidden Christian as he fraternizes with the world: he attempts to conceal his colors, hoping that he will not be recognized as a follower of the Lord Jesus. Yet behold the consummate folly of David: he journeyed to Gath with "the sword of Goliath" in his hands! Wisdom had indeed deserted him. As another has said, "Common prudence might have taught him, that, if he sought the friendship of the Philistines, the sword of Goliath was not the most likely instrument to conciliate their favor." But where a saint has grieved the Holy

"And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?" (v. 11). God will not allow His people to remain incognito in this world. He has appointed that they should "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without blame in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom" they are to "shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2: 15), and any efforts of theirs to annul this, He will thwart. Abraham's deception was discovered. Peter's attempt to conceal his discipleship failed—his very speech betrayed him. So here: David was quickly recognized. And thus it will be with us. And mercifully is this the case, for God will not have His own to settle down among and enjoy the friendship of His enemies.

"And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath" (v. 12). What right had David to be at Gath? None whatever, and God soon caused circumstances to arise which showed him that he was out of his place, though in wondrous mercy He withheld any chastisement. How sad to hear of him who had so courageously advanced against Goliath now being "sore afraid"! "The righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1); yes, the "righteous," that is, they who are right with God, walking with Him, and so sustained by His grace. Sadder still is it to see how David now acted: instead of casting himself on God's mercy, confessing his sin, and seeking His intervention, he had recourse to deceit and played the fool.

"And he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard" (v. 13). Afraid to rely upon the man whose protection he had sought, the anointed of God now feigned himself to be crazy. It was then that he learned experimentally, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes" (Psalm 118:9). The king elect "feigned himself mad": "such was the condition into which David had sunk. Saul himself could scarcely have wished for a deeper degradation" (B. W. Newton). Learn from this, dear reader, what still indwells the true saint, and which is capable of any and every wickedness but for the restraining hand of God. Surely we have need to pray daily "Hold You me up, and I shall be safe" (Psalm 119:117).

"Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, you see the man is mad: wherefore then have you brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that you have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" (verses 14, 15). How evident is it to the anointed eye, from the whole of this incident, that the Holy Spirit's object here was not to glorify David, but to magnify the longsuffering grace of God, and to furnish beneficial instruction and solemn warning for us! Throughout the Scriptures the character of man is accurately painted in the colors of reality and truth.

Many are the lessons to be learned from this sad incident. Though ingenious falsehoods may seem to promote present security, yet they insure future disgrace. They did for Abraham, for Isaac, for Jacob, for Peter, for Ananias. Leaning unto his own understanding conducted David to Gath, but he soon learned from the shame of his folly that he had not walked in wisdom. Not only was David deeply humiliated by this pitiful episode, but Jehovah was grievously dishonored thereby. Marvelous indeed was it that he escaped with his life: this can only be attributed to the secret but invincible workings of His power, moving upon the king of the Philistines, for as the title of Psalm 34 informs us, "Achish drove him away, and he departed." Such was the means which an infinitely merciful God used to screen His child from imminent danger.

From Gath David fled to the cave of Adullam. Blessed is it to learn of the repentant and chastened spirit in which the servant of God entered it. The thirty-fourth Psalm was written by him then (as its superscription informs us), and in it the Holy Spirit has given us to see the exercises of David's heart at that time. There we find him blessing the Lord, his soul making his boast in Him (verses 1-3). There we hear him saying, "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (v. 4). There he declares, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them" (verses 6, 7).

But it was more than praise and gratitude which filled the restored backslider. David had learned some valuable lessons experimentally. Therefore we hear him saying, "Come, you children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (verses 11-14). "He had proved the evil of lying lips and a deceitful tongue, and now was able to warn others of the pitfall into which he had fallen" (B. W. Newton). But it is blessed to mark that the warned, not as one who was left to reap the harvest of his doings, but as one who could say, "The Lord redeems the soul of His servants, and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate" (v. 22).

CHAPTER TEN

In the Cave of Adullam

1 Samuel 22

At the close of the preceding chapter, we saw the backslider restored to communion with God. As David then wrote, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous"—most of them brought upon themselves through sinful folly—"but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19). Yet, in His own good time. The hour had not yet arrived for our patriarch to ascend the throne. It would have been a simple matter for God to have put forth His power, destroyed Saul, and given His servant rest from all his foes. And this, no doubt, is what the energetic nature of David had much preferred. But there were other counsels of God to be unfolded before He was ready for the son of Jesse to wield the scepter. Though *we* are impulsive and impetuous, God is never in a hurry; the sooner we learn this lesson, the better for our own peace of mind, and the sooner shall we "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:7).

"God had designs other than the mere exaltation of David. He intended to allow the evil of Saul and of Israel to exhibit itself. He intended to give to David some apprehension of the character of his own heart, and to cause him to learn subjection to a greater wisdom than his own. He intended also to prove the hearts of His own people Israel; and to try how many among them would discern that the Cave of Adullam was the only true place of excellency and honor in Israel" (B. W. Newton). Further discipline was needed by David, if he was to learn deeper lessons of dependency upon God. Learn from this, dear reader, that though God's *delays* are trying to flesh and blood, nevertheless they are ordered by perfect wisdom and infinite love. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come" (Habakkuk 2:3).

"David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam" (1 Samuel 22:1). Still a fugitive, David left the land of the Philistines, and now took refuge in a large underground cavern, situated, most probably, not far from Bethlehem. To conceal himself from Saul and his blood-thirsty underlings, our hero betook himself to a cave—it is probable that the Holy Spirit made reference to this in Hebrews 11:38. The high favorites of Heaven are sometimes to be located in queer and unexpected places. Joseph in prison, the descendants of Abraham laboring in the brick-kilns of Egypt, Daniel in the lions' den, Jonah in the great fish's belly, Paul clinging to a spar in the sea, forcibly illustrate this principle. Then let us not murmur because we do not now live in as fine a house as do some of the ungodly; *our* "mansions" are in Heaven!

"David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam." It is blessed to learn how David employed himself at this time; yet close searching has to be done before this can be ascertained. The Bible is no lazy man's book: much of its treasure, like the valuable minerals stored in the affections of the earth, only yield up themselves to the diligent seeker. Compare Proverbs 2: 1-5. By noting the superscriptions to the Psalms (which, with many others, we are satisfied are Divinely inspired), we discover that two of them were composed by "the sweet singer of Israel" at this time. Just as the 34th casts its welcome light upon the close of 1 Samuel 21, so Psalm 57 and 142 illuminate the opening verses of 1 Samuel 22.

The underground asylum of David made an admirable closet for prayer, its very solitude being helpful for the exercise of devotion. Well did C. H. Spurgeon say, "Had David prayed as much in his palace as he did in his cave, he might never have fallen into the act which brought such misery upon his latter days." We trust the spiritual reader will, at this point, turn to and ponder Psalms 57 and 142. In them he will perceive something of the exercises of David's heart. From them he may derive valuable instruction as to how to pray acceptably unto God in seasons of peculiar trial. A careful reading of the fifty-seventh Psalm will enable us to follow one who began it amid the gloomy shadows of the cavern, but from which he gradually emerged into the open daylight. So it often is in the experiences of the believer's soul.

Perhaps the Psalm 142 was composed by David before the Psalm 57: certainly it brings before us one who was in deeper anguish of soul. Blessed indeed is it to mark the striking contrast from what is here presented to us and what was before us as we passed through 1 Samuel 20 and 21. There we saw the worried fugitive turning to Jonathan, lying to Ahimelech, playing the madman at Gath. But vain was the hope of man. Yet how often we have to pass through these painful experiences and bitter disappointments before we thoroughly learn this lesson! Here we behold the son of Jesse turning to the only One who could do him any real good. "I cried unto the Lord with my voice I poured out my complaint before Him. I showed before Him my trouble" (verses 1, 2). This is what *we* should do: thoroughly unburden our hearts unto Him with whom we have to do. Note how, at the close of this Psalm, *after* he had so freely poured out his woes, David exclaimed, "You *shall* deal bountifully with me"!

"And Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . all Israel and Judah loved David" (1 Samuel 18:1, 16). Now their love was tested, now an opportunity was furnished them to manifest their affections for him. This was the hour of David's unpopularity: he was outlawed from the court; a fugitive from Saul, he was dwelling in a cave. Now was the time for devotion to David to be clearly exhibited. But only those who truly loved him could be expected to throw in their lot with an hated outcast. Strikingly is this illustrated in the very next words.

"And when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him" (1 Samuel 22:1). Ah, true love is unaffected by the outward circumstances of its object. Where the heart is genuinely knit to another, a change in his fortunes will not produce a change in its affections. David might be, in the eyes of the world, in disgrace; but that made no difference to those who *loved* him. He might be languishing in a cavern, but that was all the more reason why they should show their kindness and demonstrate their unswerving loyalty. Among other things, this painful trial enabled David to discover who were, and who were not, his real friends.

If we look beneath the surface here, the anointed eye should have no difficulty in discerning another striking and blessed type of David's Son and Lord. First, a type of him when He tabernacled among men, in "the days of his flesh." How fared it then with the Anointed of God? By title the throne of Israel was His, for He was born "the King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). That God was with him was unmistakably evident. He too "behaved Himself wisely in all His ways." He too performed exploits: healing the sick, freeing the demon possessed, feeding the hungry multitude, raising the dead. But just as Saul hated and persecuted David, so the heads of the Jews—the chief priests and Pharisees—were envious of and hounded Christ. Just as Saul thirsted for the blood of Jesse's son, the leaders of Israel (at a later date) thirsted for the blood of God's Son.

The analogy mentioned above might be drawn out at considerable length, but at only one other point will we here glance, namely, the fact of the solemn foreshadowment furnished by David as first the friend and benefactor of his nation, now the poor outcast. Accurately did he prefigure that blessed One, who when here was "the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Trace His path as the Holy Spirit has described it in the New Testament. Behold Him as the unwanted One in this world of wickedness. Hear His plaintive declaration, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). Read too, "And every man went unto his own house; Jesus went unto the mount of Olives" (John 7:53; 8:1); and it is evident that David's Lord was the Homeless Outcast in this scene.

But were there none who appreciated Him, none who loved Him, none who were willing to be identified with and cast in their lot with Him who was "despised and rejected of men"? Yes, there were some, and these, we believe, are typically brought before us in the next verse of the scripture we are now pondering: "And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him" (1 Samuel 22:2). What a strange company to seek unto God's anointed! No mention is made of the captains of the army, the men of state, the princes of the realm, coming unto David. No, they, with all like them, preferred the court and the palace to the cave of Adullam.

Is not the picture an accurate one, dear reader? Is it not plain again that these Old Testament records furnished something more than historical accounts, that there is a typical and spiritual significance to them as well? If David be a type of Christ, then those who sought him out during the season of his humiliation, must represent those who sought unto David's Son when He sojourned on this earth. And clearly they did so. Read the four Gospels, and it will be found that, for the most part, those who sought unto the Lord Jesus, were the poor and needy; it was the lepers, the blind, the maimed and the halt, who came unto Him for help and healing. The rich and influential, the learned and the mighty, the leaders of the Nation, had no heart for Him.

But what is before us in the opening of 1 Samuel 22 not only typed out that which occurred during the earthly ministry of Christ, but it also shadowed forth that which has come to pass all through this Christian era, and that which is taking place today. As the Holy Spirit declared through Paul, "For you see your calling brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing the things which are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

The second verse of 1 Samuel 22 sets before us a striking gospel picture. Note, first, that those who came to David were *few in number:* "about four hundred." What a paltry retinue! What a handful compared with the hosts of Israel! But did Christ fare any better in the days of His flesh? How many friends stood around the Cross, wept at His sepulcher, or greeted Him as He burst the bars of death? How many followed Him to Bethany, gazed at His ascending form, or gathered in the upper room to await the promised Spirit? And how is it today? Of the countless millions of earth's inhabitants what percentage of them have even heard the gospel? Out of those who bear His name, how many evidence that they are denying self, taking up their cross daily, and following the example which He has left, and thus proving themselves by the only badge of discipleship which He will recognize? A discouraging situation, you say. Not at all, rather is it just what faith expects. The Lord Jesus declared that His flock is a "little one" (Luke 12:32), that only "few" tread that narrow way which leads unto life (Matthew 7:14).

Second, observe again the particular *type of people* who sought out David: they were "in distress, in debt, and discontented." What terms could more suitably describe the condition they are in when the redeemed first seek help from Christ! "In debt": in all things we had come short of the glory of God. In thought, word, and deed, we had failed to please Him, and there was marked up against us a multitude of transgressions. "In distress"; who can tell out that anguish of soul which is experienced by the truly convicted of the Holy Spirit? Only the one who has actually experienced the same, knows of that unspeakable horror and sorrow when the heart first perceives the frightful enormity of having defied the infinite Majesty of Heaven, trifled with His longsuffering, slighted His mercy again and again.

"Discontented." Yes, this line in the picture is just as accurate as the others. The one who has been brought to realize he is a spiritual pauper, and who is now full of grief for his sins, is discontented with the very things which until recently pleased him. Those pleasures which fascinated, now pall. That mirthful society which once attracted, now repels. O the emptiness of the world to a soul which God has smitten with a sense of sin! The stricken one turns away with disgust from that which he had formerly sought after so eagerly. There is now an aching void within, which nothing without can fill. So wretched is the convicted sinner, he wishes he were dead, yet he is terrified at the very thought of death. Reader, do you know anything of such an experience, or is all this the language of an unknown tongue to you?

Third, these people who were in debt, in distress, and discontented, *sought out* David. They were the only ones who did so; it was a *deep sense of need* which drove them to him, and a hope that he could relieve them. So it is spiritually. None but those who truly feel that they are paupers before God, with no good thing to their credit, absolutely destitute of any merits of their own, will appreciate the glad tidings that Christ Jesus came into this world to pay the debt of such. Only those who are smitten in their conscience, broken in heart, and sick of sin, will really respond to that blessed word of His, "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Only those who have lost all heart for this poor world, will truly turn unto the Lord of glory.

Fourth, the spiritual picture we are now contemplating is not only a type of the first coming to Christ of His people, but also of their subsequent *going forth* "unto Him without the camp" (Hebrews 13:13). Those who sought David in the Cave of Adullam turned their backs upon both the court of Saul and the religion of Judaism. There was none to pity them there. Who cared for penniless paupers? Who had a heart for those in distress? So it is in many churches today. Those who are "poor in spirit" have nothing in common with the self-satisfied Laodiceans. And how "distressed" in soul are they over the worldliness that has come in like a flood, over the crowds of unregenerate members, over the utter absence of any scriptural discipline? And what is to be the attitude and actions of God's grieved children toward those having nothing more than a form of godliness? This "from such turn away" (

2 Timothy 3:5). Identify yourself with Christ on the outside; walk alone with Him.

Fifth, "And he became a *captain over them*" (1 Samuel 22:2). Important and striking line in the picture is this. Christ is to be received as "Lord" (Colossians 2:6) if He is to be known as Savior. Love to Christ is to be evidenced by "keeping His commandments" (John 14:15). It mattered not what that strange company had been who sought unto David, they were now his servants and soldiers. They had turned away from the evil influence of Saul, to be subject unto the authority of David. This is what Christ requires from all who identify themselves with Him. "Take My *yoke* upon you" is His demand (Matthew 11:29). Nor need we shrink from it, for He declares "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

His Return to Judea

1 Samuel 22 and 23

In our last chapter we left David in the Cave of Adullam. An incident is recorded in 2 Samuel 23 which throws an interesting light on the spiritual life of our hero at this time. "And three of the thirty chief went down and came to David in the harvest-time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. And David longed, and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! And the three mighty men brake through the hosts of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord. And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? Therefore he would not drink of it" (verses 13-17).

No doubt the trials of his present lot had called to David's mind his happy life at home. The weather being hot, he expressed a longing for a drink from the family well of Bethlehem, though with no thought that any of his men would risk their lives to procure it for him. Yet this is precisely what happened: out of deep devotion to their outlawed captain, three of them fought their way through a company of the Philistines who were encamped there, and returned to David with the desired draught. Touched by their loyalty, stirred by their self-sacrifice, David felt that water obtained at such risk was too valuable for him to drink, and was fit only to be "poured out unto the Lord" as a "drink-offering." Beautifully has Matthew Henry made application of this, thus: "Did David look upon that water as very precious, which was got but with the hazard of these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits for the purchasing of which our blessed Savior shed His blood"?

We quote from another who has commented upon this incident. "There is something peculiarly touching and beautiful in the above scene, whether we contemplate the act of the three mighty men in procuring the water for David, or David's act in pouring it out to the Lord. It is evident that David discerned, in an act of such uncommon devotedness, a sacrifice which none but the Lord Himself could duly appreciate. The odor of such a sacrifice was far too fragrant for him to interrupt it in its ascent to the throne of the God of Israel. Wherefore he, very properly and very graciously, allows it to pass him by, in order that it might go up to the One who alone was worthy to receive it, or able to appreciate it. All this reminds us, forcibly, of that beautiful compendium of Christian devotedness set forth in Philippians 2:17, 18: 'Yes, and if I be poured out upon the sacrifice, and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all; for this cause you also joy and rejoice with me.' In this passage, the apostle represents the Philippian saints in their character as priests, presenting a sacrifice and performing a priestly ministration to God; and such was the intensity of his self-forgetting devotedness, that he could rejoice in his being poured out as a drink-offering upon their sacrifice, so that all might ascend, in fragrant odor to God" (C. H. M.).

Some commentators have denied that the above touching episode occurred during that section of David's history which we are now considering, placing it at a much later date. These men failed to see that 1 Chronicles 11:15 and 2 Samuel 23 recount things out of their chronological order. If the reader turn back to 1 Samuel 17:1, 19:8, etc., he will see that the Philistines were quite active in making raids upon Israel at this time, and that David, not Saul, was the principal one to withstand them. But now he was no longer in the position to engage them. Saul, as we shall see in a moment, had dropped all other concerns and was confining his whole attention to the capture of David: thus the door was then wide open for the Philistines to continue their depredations. Finally, be it said, all that is recorded after David came to the throne, makes it altogether unlikely that the Philistines were then encamped around Bethlehem, still less that the king should seek refuge in the cave of Adullam.

"And David went thence to Mizpah of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray you, come forth, and be with you, until I know what God will do for me. And he brought them before the king of Moab: and they dwelt with him all the while that David was in the hold" (1 Samuel 22:3, 4). We are convinced that what has been before us in the above paragraphs supplies the key to that which is here recorded. In 1 Samuel 22:1 we learn that "all his family" had come to David in the Cave. From 16:1 we learn that their home was in Bethlehem: but the Philistines were now encamped there (2 Samuel 23:14), so they could not return thither. David did not wish his parents to share the hardships involved by his wanderings, and so now he thoughtfully seeks an asylum for them. Blessed is it to see him, in the midst of his sore trials, "honoring his father and his mother." Beautifully did this foreshadow what is recorded in John

While Saul was so bitterly opposed to David, there was no safety for his parents anywhere in the land of Israel. The deep exercises and anguish of David's heart at this time are vividly expressed in Psalm 142, the Title of which reads, "A Prayer when he was in the Cave." "I cried unto the Lord with my voice, with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before Him: I showed before Him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto You, O Lord: I said, You are my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name: the righteous shall compass me about; for You shall deal bountifully with me." Blessed is it to mark the note of confidence in God in the closing

"And David went thence to Mizpah of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, let my father and my mother, I pray you, come forth, and be with you." What was it induced David to trust his parents unto the protection of the Moabites? We quote, in part, from the answer given by J. J. Blunt in his very striking book, *Undesigned Coincidences in the Old and New Testament,* "Saul, it is true, had been at war with them, whatever he might then be—but so had he been with every people round about; with the Ammonites, with the Edomites, with the kings of Zobah. Neither did it follow that the enemies of Saul, as a matter of course, would be the friends of David. On the contrary, he was only regarded by the ancient inhabitants of the land, to which ever of the local nations they belonged, as the champion of Israel; and with such suspicion was he received among them, notwithstanding Saul's known enmity towards him, that before Achish king of Gath, he was constrained to feign himself mad, and so effect his escape . . .

"Now what principle of preference may be imagined to have governed David when he committed his family to the dangerous keeping of the Moabites? Was it a mere matter of chance? It might seem so, as far as appears to the contrary in David's history, given in the books of Samuel; and if the book of Ruth had never come down to us, to accident it probably would have been ascribed. But this short and beautiful historical document shows us a *propriety* in the selection of Moab above any other for a place of refuge to the father and mother of David; since it is there seen that the grandmother of Jesse, David's father, was actually a *Moabitess;* Ruth being the mother of Obed, and Obed the father of Jesse. And, moreover, that Orpah, the other Moabitess, who married Mahlon at the time when Ruth married Chilion his brother, remained behind in Moab after the departure of Naomi and Ruth, and remained behind with a strong feeling of affection, nevertheless, for the family and kindred of her deceased husband, taking leave of them with tears (Ruth 1:14). She herself then, or at all events, her descendants and friends might still be alive. Some regard for the posterity of Ruth, David would persuade himself, might still survive among them . . .

"Thus do we detect, not without some pains, a certain fitness, in the conduct of David in this transaction which makes it to be a real one. A forger of a story could not have fallen upon the happy device of sheltering Jesse in Moab simply on the recollecting of his Moabitish extraction two generations earlier; or, having fallen upon it, it is probable he would have taken care to draw the attention of his readers towards his device by some means or other, lest the evidence it was intended to afford of the truth of the history might be thrown away upon them. As it is, the circumstance itself is asserted without the smallest attempt to explain or account for it. Nay, recourse must be had to another book of Scripture, in order that the coincidence may be seen."

Unto the king of Moab David said, "Let my father and my mother, I pray you, come forth and be with you, until I know what God will do for me." Slowly but surely our patriarch was learning to acquiesce in the appointments of God. Practical subjection unto the Lord is only learned in the school of experience: the theory of it may be gathered from books, but the actuality has to be hammered out on the anvil of our hearts. Of our glorious Head it is declared, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). This word of David's also indicates that he was beginning to feel the need of waiting upon God for directions: how much sorrow and suffering would be avoided did *we* always do so. His "what God will do *for* me," rather than "with me," indicated a hope in the Lord.

"And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get you into the land of Judea. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth" (v. 5). In the light of this verse, and together with 22:23, we may see that "the excellent" of the earth (Psalm 16:3) were more and more gathering to him who was a type of Christ in His rejection. Here we see the prophet of God with him, and shortly afterwards he was joined by the high priest—solemn it is to contrast the apostate Saul, who was now deserted by both. David had been humbled before God, and He now speaks again to him, not directly, but mediately. Two reasons may be suggested for this: David was not yet fully restored to Divine communion, and God was honoring His own —the prophetic office: cf. 1 Samuel 23:9-11.

"And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get you into the land of Judah." It is quite clear from the language of this verse that at the time God now spoke to His servant through the prophet, he had not returned to the Cave of Adullam, but had sought temporary refuge in some stronghold of Moab. Now he received a call which presented a real test to his faith. To appear more openly in his own country would evidence the innocency of his cause, as well as display his confidence in the Lord. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Psalm 37:23), yet the path He appoints is not the one which is smoothest to the flesh. But

"When Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men that were with him, (now Saul abode in Gibeah under a tree in Ramah, having his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing about him); then Saul said unto his servants . . . " Here the Spirit takes up again another leading thread around which the history of 1 Samuel is woven. Having traced the movements of David since the leaving of his home (19: 11, 12) up to the Cave of Adullam and his now receiving orders to return to the land of Judea, He follows again the evil history of Saul. The king had apparently set aside everything else, and was devoting himself entirely to the capture of David. He had taken up his headquarters at Gibeah: the "spear in his hand" showed plainly his blood-thirsty intentions.

The news of David's return to Judea, soon reached the ears of Saul, and the fact that he was accompanied by a considerable number of men, probably alarmed him not a little, fearful that the people would turn to his rival and that he would lose his throne. His character was revealed again by the words which he now addressed to his servants (v. 7), who were, for the most part, selected from his own tribe. He appealed not to the honor and glory of Jehovah, but to their cupidity. David belonged to Judah, and if he became king then those who belonged to the tribe of Benjamin must not expect to receive favors at his hands—neither rewards of land, nor positions of prominence in the army.

"All of you have conspired against me, and there is none that shows me that my son has made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or shows unto me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day" (v. 8). Here Saul charges his followers with having failed to reveal to him that which he supposed they knew, and of showing no concern for the circumstance in which he was then placed; this he construed as a conspiracy against him. His was the language of ungovernable rage and jealousy. His son is charged as being ringleader of the conspirators, merely because he would not assist in the murder of an excellent man whom he loved! True, there was a covenant of friendship between Jonathan and David, but no plot to destroy Saul, as he wildly imagined. But it is the nature of an evil person to regard as enemies those who are not prepared to toady to him or her in everything.

It was in response to Saul's bitter words to his men, that Doeg the Edomite made known David's secret visit to Ahimelech, and his obtaining victuals and the sword of Goliath (verses 9, 10). Nothing was mentioned of the high priest being imposed upon, but the impression was left that he joined with David in a conspiracy against Saul. Let us learn from this that we may "bear false witness against our neighbor" as really and disastrously by maliciously *withholding* part of the truth, as by deliberately inventing a lie. When called upon to express our opinion of another (which should, generally, be declined, unless some good purpose is to be served thereby), honesty requires that we impartially recount what is in his favor, as well as what makes against him. Note how in His addresses to the seven churches in Asia, the Lord commended the good, as well as rebuked that which was evil.

The terrible sequel is recorded in verses 11-19. Ahimelech and all his subordinate priests were promptly summoned into the king's presence. Though he was by rank the second person in Israel, Saul contemptuously called the high priest "the son of Ahitub" (v. 12). Quietly ignoring the insult, Ahimelech addressed the king as "my lord," thus giving honor to whom honor was due—the occupant of any office which God has appointed is to be honored, no matter how unworthy of respect the man may be personally. Next, the king charged the high priest with rebellion and treason (v. 13). Ahimelech gave a faithful and ungarnished account of his transaction with David (verses 14, 15). But nothing could satisfy the incensed king but death, and orders were given for the whole priestly family to be butchered.

One of the sons of Ahimelech, named Abithai, escaped. Probably he had been left by his father to take care of the tabernacle and its holy things, while he and the rest of the priests went to appear before Saul. Having heard of their bloody execution, and before the murderers arrived at Nob to complete their vile work of destroying the wives, children and flocks of the priests, he fled, taking with him the ephod and the urim and thummim, and joined David (v. 21). It was then that David wrote the fifty-second Psalm. Three things may be observed in connection with the above tragedy. First, the solemn sentence which God had pronounced against the house of Eli was now executed (2:31-36; 3:12-14)—thus the iniquities of the fathers were visited upon the children. Second, Saul was manifestly forsaken of God, given up to Satan and his own malignant passions, and was fast ripening for judgment. Third, by this cruel carnage David obtained the presence of the high priest, who afterwards proved a great comfort and blessing to him (23:6, 9-13; 30:7-10)—thus did God make the wrath of man to praise Him and work together for good unto His own.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Delivering Keilah

1 Samuel 23

The first section of 1 Samuel 23 (which we are now to look at) presents some striking contrasts. In it are recorded incidents exceedingly blessed, others fearfully sad. David is seen at his best, Saul at his worst. David humbly waits on the Lord, Saul presumes upon and seeks to pervert His providences. Saul is indifferent to the well-being of his own subjects, David delivers them from their enemies. David at imminent risk rescues the town of Keilah from the marauding Philistines; yet so lacking are they in gratitude, that they were ready to hand him over unto the man who sought his life. Though the priests of the Lord, with their entire families, had been brutally slain by Saul's orders, yet the awful malice of the king was not thereby appeased: he is now seen again seeking the life of David, and that at the very time when he had so unselfishly wrought good for the nation.

It is instructive and helpful to keep in mind the *order* of what has been before us in previous chapters, so that we may perceive one of the important spiritual lessons in what is now to be before us. David had failed, jailed sadly. We all do; but David had done what many are painfully slow in doing: he had humbled himself before the Lord, he had repented of and confessed his sins, in our last chapter, we saw how that David had been restored, in considerable measure at least, to communion with the Lord. God had spoken to him through His prophet. Light was now granted again on his path. The word was given him to return to the land of Judah (22:5). That word he had heeded, and now we are to see how the Lord *used* him again. Strikingly does this illustrate 1 Peter 5:6: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

"Then they told David, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshing-floors" (1 Samuel 23:1). Here we may see another reason (more than those suggested at the close of our last chapter) why God had called David to return to the land of Judah: He had further work for him to do there. Keilah was within the borders of that tribe (Joshua 15:21, 44). It was a fortified town (v. 7), and the Philistines had laid siege to it. The "threshing-floors" (which were usually situated outside the cities: Judges 6:11, Ruth 3:2, 15) were already being pilfered by them. Who it was that acquainted David with these tidings we know not.

"Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines?" (v. 2). Very blessed is this, and further evidence does it supply of David's spiritual recovery. Saul was neglecting the public safety, but the one whom he was hounding was concerned for it. Though he had been ill treated, David was not sulking over his wrongs, but instead was ready to return good for evil, by coming to the assistance of one of the king's besieged towns. What a noble spirit did he here manifest! Though his hands were full in seeking to hide from Saul, and provide for the needs of his six hundred men

"Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines?" This is very beautiful. Having been anointed unto the throne, David considered himself the protector of Israel, and was ready to employ his men for the public weal. He had an intense love for his country, and was desirous of freeing it from its enemies, yet he would not act without first seeking counsel of the Lord: he desired that *God* should appoint his service. The more particularly we seek direction from God in fervent prayer, and the more carefully we consult the sacred Scriptures for the knowledge of His will, the more He is honored, and the more we are benefitted.

"And the Lord said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah" (v. 2). Where God is truly sought—that is, sought sincerely, humbly, trustfully, with the desire to learn and do that which is pleasing to Him—the soul will not be left in ignorance. God does not mock His needy children. His Word declares, "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He *shall* direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6). So it was here. The Lord responded to David's inquiry—possibly through the prophet Gad—and not only revealed His will, but gave promise that he should be successful.

"And David's men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" (v. 3). This presented a real test to David's confidence in the Lord, for if his men were unwilling to accompany him, how could he expect to relieve the besieged town? His men were obviously "afraid" of being caught between two fires. Were they to advance upon the Philistines and Saul's army should follow them up in the rear, then where would they be? Ah, their eyes were not upon the living God, but upon their difficult "circumstances," and to be occupied with these is always discouraging to the heart. But how often has a man of God, when facing a trying situation, found the unbelief of his professed friends and followers a real hindrance. Yet he should regard this as a test, and not as an obstacle. Instead of paralyzing action, it ought to drive him to seek support from Him who never fails those who truly count upon His aid.

"Then David inquired of the Lord yet again" (v. 4). This is precious. David did not allow the unbelieving fears of his men to drive him to despair. He could hardly expect them to walk by *his* faith. But he knew that when God works, He works at both ends of the line. He who had given him orders to go to the relief of Keilah, could easily quiet the hearts of his followers, remove their fears, and make them willing to follow his lead. Yes, with God "all things are possible." But He requires to be "inquired of" (Ezekiel 36:37). He delights to be "proved" (Malachi 3:10). Oft He permits just such a trial as now faced David in order to teach us more fully His sufficiency for every emergency.

"Then David inquired of the Lord yet again." Yes, this is blessed indeed. David did not storm at his men, and denounce them as cowards. That would do no good. Nor did he argue and attempt to reason with them. Disdaining his own wisdom, feeling his utter dependency upon God, and more especially for their benefit—to set before them a godly example—he turned once more unto Jehovah. Let us learn from this incident that, the most effectual way of answering the unbelieving objections of faint-hearted followers and of securing their cooperation, is to refer them unto the promises and precepts of God, and set before them an example of complete dependency upon Him and of implicit

"And the Lord answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah: for I will deliver the Philistines into your hand" (v. 4). How sure is the fulfillment of that promise, "Them that honor Me, I will honor" (1 Samuel 2:30)! We always lose by acting independently of God, but we never lose by seeking counsel, guidance and grace from Him. God did not ignore David's inquiry. He was not displeased by his asking a second time. How gracious and patient He is! He not only responded to David's petition, but He gave an answer more explicit than at the first, for He now assured His servant of entire victory. May this encourage many a reader to come unto God with every difficulty, cast every care upon Him, and count upon His support every hour.

"So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah" (v. 5). Animated by a commission and promise from God, David and his men moved forward and attacked the Philistines. Not only did they completely rout the enemy, but they captured their cattle, which supplied food for David's men, food which the men greatly needed. How this furnishes an illustration of "Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly *above* all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Ephesians 3:20)! God not only overthrew the Philistines and delivered Keilah, but as well, bountifully provided David's army with a supply of victuals.

"And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand" (v. 6). This was a further reward from the Lord unto David for obeying His word. As we shall see later, the presence of the high priest and his ephod with him, stood David in good stead in the future. We may also see here a striking example of the absolute control of God over all His creatures; it was David's visit to Ahimelech that had resulted in the slaying of all his family; well then might the only son left, feel that the son of Jesse was the last man whose fortunes he desired to share.

"And it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah. And Saul said, God has delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that has gates and bars" (v. 7). Surely David's signal victory over the common enemy should have reconciled Saul to him. Was it not abundantly clear that God was with him, and if *He* were with him, who could be against him? But one who is abandoned by the Lord can neither discern spiritual things nor judge righteously, and therefore his conduct will be all wrong too. Accordingly we find that instead of thinking how he might most suitably reward David for his courageous and unselfish generosity, Saul desired only to do him mischief. Well might our patriarch write, "They regarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul" (Psalm 35:12).

"And Saul said, God has delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that has gates and bars." How easy it is for a jaundiced mind to view things in a false light. When the heart is wrong, the providences of God are certain to be misinterpreted. Terrible is it to behold the apostate king here concluding that God Himself had now sold David into his hands! That man has sunk to a fearful depth who blatantly assumes that the Almighty is working to further his wicked plans. While David was at large, hiding in caves and sheltering in the woods, he was hard to find; but here in a walled town, Saul supposed he would be completely trapped when his army surrounded it.

"And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men" (v. 8). if we omit the last clause and read on through the next verse, it will be seen that the unscrupulous Saul resorted to a dishonest ruse. To make war against the Philistines was the ostensible object which the king set before his men; to capture David was his real design. The last clause of verse 8 states Saul's secret motive. While pretending to oppose the common enemy, he was intending to destroy his best friend. Truly, the devil was his father, and the lusts of his father he would do.

"And David knew that Saul secretly practiced mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar, the priest, Bring hither the ephod" (v. 9). Yes, "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Psalm 25:14). Ah, but *only* with them that truly "fear" Him. "If any man walk in the day, he stumbles not" (John 11:9). "He who follows Me," said Christ, "shall not walk in darkness" (John 8:12). O what a blessed thing it is, dear reader, to have light upon our path, to *see* the enemy's snares and pitfalls. But in order to this, there must be a walking with Him who is "the Light." If we are out of communion with the Lord, if we have for the moment turned aside from the path of His commandments, then we can no longer perceive the dangers which menace us.

"And David knew that Saul secretly practiced mischief against him." This is very blessed, and recorded for our instruction. We ought not to be ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11), nor shall we be if our hearts are right with God. Observe carefully that this 9th verse opens with the word "And," which announces the fact that it is connected with and gives the sequel to what has gone before. And what *had* preceded in this case? First, David had sought counsel of the Lord (v. 2). Second, he had refused to be turned aside from the path of duty by the unbelieving fears of his followers (v. 3). Third, he had maintained an attitude of complete dependency upon the Lord (v. 4). Fourth, he had definitely obeyed the Lord (v. 5). And now God rewarded him by acquainting him with the enemy's designs upon him. Meet the conditions, my brother or sister, and you too shall know when the devil is about to attack you.

David was not deceived by Saul's deceit. He knew that though he had given out to his men one thing, yet in his heart he purposed quite another. "Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake" (v. 10). This too is very blessed; once more David thus turns to the living God, and casts all his care upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). Observe well his words: he does not say "Saul purposes to slay *me,* but he seeks to destroy *the city* for my sake," on my account. Is it not lovely to see him more solicitous about the welfare of others, than the preserving of his own life!

"Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hands? will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech You, tell Your servant. And the Lord said, He will come down" (v. 11). It is to be noted that the two questions here asked by David were not orderly put, showing the perturbed state of mind he was then in. We should also observe the manner in which David addressed God, as "Lord God of Israel" (so too in verse 10), which was His *covenant* title. It is blessed when we are able to realize the covenant-relationship of God to us (Hebrews 13:20, 21), for it is ever an effectual plea to present before the Throne of Grace. The Lord graciously responded to David's supplication and granted the desired information, reversing the order of his questions. God's saying "he (Saul) will come down" (that is his purpose), here manifested His omniscience, for He knows all contingencies (possibilities and likelihoods), as well as actualities.

"Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?" (v.12). Wise David, He had good cause to conclude that after so nobly befriending Keilah and delivering it from the Philistines, that its citizens would now further his interests, and in such case, he and his own men could defend the town against Saul's attack. But he prudently refrained from placing any confidence in their loyalty. He probably reasoned that the recent cruel massacre of Nob would fill them with dread of Saul, so that he must not count upon their assistance. Thus did he seek counsel from the Lord. And so ought we: we should never confide in help from others, no, not even from those we have befriended, and from whom we might reasonably expect a return of kindness. No ties of honor, gratitude, or affection, can secure the heart under powerful temptation. Nay, we know not how *we* would act if assailed by the terrors of a cruel death, and left without the immediate support of divine grace. We are to depend *only* upon the Lord for guidance and protection.

"And the Lord said, They will deliver you up" (v. 12). This must have been saddening to David's heart, for base ingratitude wounds deeply. Yet let us not forget that the kindness of other friends whom the Lord often unexpectedly raises up, counterbalances the ingratitude and fickleness of those we have served. God answered David here according to His knowledge of the human heart. *Had* David remained in Keilah, its inhabitants would have delivered him up upon Saul's demand. But he remained not, and escaped. Be it carefully noted that this incident furnishes a clear illustration of human responsibility, and is a strong case in point against bald fatalism—taking the passive attitude that what is to be, must be.

"Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went wherever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah, and he forbear to go forth. And David abode in the wilderness in strongholds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand" (verses 13, 14). This too is blessed: David was willing to expose himself and his men to further hardships, rather than endanger the lives of Keilah! Having no particular place in view, they went forth wherever they thought best. The last half of verse 14 shows God's protecting hand was still upon them, and is Jehovah's reply to Saul's vain and presumptuous confidence in verse 7.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

His Sojourn at Ziph

1 Samuel 23

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19): some internal, others external; some from friends, others from foes; some more directly at the hand of God, others more remotely by the instrumentality of the devil. Nor should this be thought strange. Such has been the lot of all God's children in greater or lesser degree. Nor ought we to expect much comfort in a world which so basely crucified the Lord of glory. The sooner the Christian makes it his daily study to pass through this world as a stranger and pilgrim, anxious to depart and be with Christ, the better for his peace of mind. But it is natural to cling tenaciously to this life and to love the things of time and sense, and therefore most of the Lord's people have to encounter many buffetings and have many disappointments before they are brought to hold temporal things with a light hand and before their silly hearts are weaned from that which satisfies not.

There is scarcely any affliction which besets the suffering people of God that the subject of these chapters did not experience. David, in the different periods of his varied life, was placed in almost every situation in which a believer, be he rich or poor in this world's goods, can be placed. This is one feature which makes the study of his life of such practical interest unto us today. And this also it was which experimentally fitted him to write so many Psalms, which the saints of all ages have found so perfectly suited to express unto God the varied feelings of their souls. No matter whether the heart be cast down by the bitterest grief, or whether it be exultant with overflowing joy, nowhere can we find language more appropriate to use in our approaches unto the Majesty on High, than in the recorded sobs and songs of him who tasted the bitters of cruel treatment and base betrayals, and the sweetness of human success and spiritual communion with the Lord, as few have done.

Oftentimes the providences of God seem profoundly mysterious to our dull perceptions, and strange unto us do appear the schoolings through which He passes His servants; nevertheless Faith is assured that Omniscience makes no mistakes, and He who is Love causes none of His children a needless tear. Beautifully did C. H. Spurgeon introduce his exposition of Psalm 59 by saying, "Strange that the painful events in David's life should end in enriching the repertoire of the national minstrelsy. Out of a sour, ungenerous soil spring up the honey-bearing flowers of psalmody. Had he never been cruelly hunted by Saul, Israel and the church of God in after ages would have missed this song. The music of the sanctuary is in no small degree indebted to the trials of the saints. Affliction is the tuner of the harps of sanctified songsters." Let every troubled reader seek to lay this truth to heart and take courage.

"And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day but God delivered him not into his hand" (1 Samuel 23:14). It is blessed to behold David's self-restraint under sore provocation. Though perfectly innocent, so far as his conduct toward Saul was concerned, that wicked king continued to hound him without any rest. David had conducted himself honorably in every public station he filled, and now he has to suffer disgrace in the eyes of the people as a hunted outlaw. Great must have been the temptation to put an end to Saul's persecution by the use of force. He was a skilled leader, had six hundred men under him (v. 13), and he might easily have employed strategy, lured his enemy into a trap, fallen upon and slain him. Instead, he possessed his soul in patience, walked in God's ways, and waited God's time. And the Lord honored this as the sequel shows.

Ah, dear reader, it is written, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). O for more godly self-control; for this we should pray earnestly and oft. Are you, like David was, sorely oppressed? Are you receiving evil at the hands of those from whom you might well expect good? Is there some Saul mercilessly persecuting you? Then no doubt you too are tempted to take things into your own hands, perhaps have recourse to the law of the land. But O tried one, suffer us to gently remind you that it is written, "Avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath . . . vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink" (Romans 12:19,20). Remember too the example left us by the Lord Jesus, "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

"And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood" (v. 15). How this illustrates what we are told in Galatians 4:29, "But as then he who was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now"! And let us not miss the deeper spiritual meaning of this: the opposition which Isaac encountered from Ishmael adumbrated the lustings of the "flesh" against "the spirit." There is a continual warfare within every real Christian between the principle of sin and the principle of grace, commonly termed "the two natures." There is a spiritual Saul who is constantly seeking the life of a spiritual David: it is the "old man" with his affections and appetites, seeking to slay the new man. Against his relentless attacks we need ever to be on our

"And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood." "Ziph" derived its name from a city in the tribe of Judah: Joshua 15:25. It is surely significant that "Ziph" signifies "a refining-place": possibly the "mountain" there (v. 14) was rich in minerals, and at Ziph there was a smelter and refinery. Be this as it may, the spiritual lesson is here written too plainly for us to miss. The hard knocks which the saint receives from a hostile world, the persecutions he endures at the hands of those who hate God, the trials through which he passes in this scene of sin, may, and should be, improved to the good of his soul. O may many of the Lord's people prove that these "hard times" through which they are passing are a "refining place" for their faith and other spiritual

"And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you; and you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto you; and that also Saul my father knows. And they two made a covenant before the Lord: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house" (verses 16-18). These verses record the final meeting on earth between David and the weak, vacillating Jonathan. Attached to David as he was by a strong natural affection, yet he lacked grace to throw in his lot with the hunted fugitive. He refused to join with his father in persecuting David, yet the pull of the palace and the court was too strong to be resisted. He stands as a solemn example of the spiritual compromiser, of the man who is naturally attracted to Christ, but lacks a supernatural knowledge of Him which leads to full surrender to him. That he "strengthened David's hand in God" no more evidenced him to be a regenerate man, than do the words of Saul in verse 21. Instead of his words in verse 17 coming true, he fell by the sword of the Philistines on Gilboa.

"Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Does not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O King, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand" (verses 19, 20). Alas, what is man, and how little to be depended upon! Here was David seeking shelter from his murderous foe, and that among the people of his own tribe, and there were they, in order to curry favor with Saul, anxious to betray him into the king's hands. It was a gross breach of hospitality, and there was no excuse for it, for Saul had not sought unto nor threatened them. It mattered not to them though innocent blood were shed, so long as they procured the smile of the apostate monarch. That Day alone will show how many have fallen victims before those who cared for nothing better than the favor of those in authority.

"And Saul said, Blessed be you of the Lord; for you have compassion on me" (v. 21). Thankfully did Saul receive the offer of these treacherous miscreants. Observe well how he used the language of piety while bent on committing the foulest crime! Oh my reader, for your own good we beg you to take heed unto this. Require something more than fair words, or even religious phrases, before you form a judgment of another, and still more so before you place yourself in his power. *Promises* are *easily made, and easily broken by most people.* The name of God is glibly taken upon the lips of multitudes who have no fear of God in their hearts. Note too how the wretched Saul represented himself to be the aggrieved one, and construes the perfidy of the Ziphites as their loyalty to the king.

"Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who has seen him there: for it is told me that he deals very subtly. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides himself, and come you again to me with the certainty and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah" (verses 22, 23). Before he journeyed to Ziph, Saul desired more specific information as to exactly where David was now located. He knew that the man he was after had a much better acquaintance than his own of that section of the country. He knew that David was a clever strategist; perhaps he had fortified some place, and the king wished for details, so that he might know how large a force would be needed to surround and capture David and his men. Apparently Saul felt so sure of his prey, he considered there was no need for hurried action.

Then news that the Ziphites had proved unfaithful reached the ears of David, and though the king's delay gave him time to retreat to the wilderness of Maon (v. 24), yet he was now in a sore plight. His situation was desperate, and none but an Almighty hand could deliver him. Blessed is it to see him turning at this time unto the living God and spreading his urgent case before Him. It was then that he prayed the prayer which is recorded in Psalm 54, the superscription of which reads "A Psalm of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Does not David hide himself with us?" In it we are given to hear him pouring out his heart unto the Lord; and unto it we now turn to consider a few of its details.

"Save me, O God, by Your name, and judge me by Your strength" (Psalm 54:1). David was in a position where he was beyond the reach of human assistance: only a miracle could now save him, therefore did he supplicate the miracle-working God. Without any preamble, David went straight to the point and cried, "Save me, O God." Keilah would not shelter him, the Ziphites had basely betrayed him, Saul and his men thirsted for his blood. Other refuge there was none; God alone could help him. His appeal was to His glorious "Name," which stands for the sum of all His blessed attributes; and to His righteousness—"judge me by Your strength." This signifies, Secure justice for me, for none else will give it me. This manifested the innocency of his cause. Only when our case is pure can we call upon the power of divine justice to vindicate us.

"Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth" (Psalm 54:2). How *we* need to remember and turn unto the Lord when enduring the contradiction of sinners against ourselves: to look above and draw strength from God, so that we be not weary and faint in our minds. Well did C. H. Spurgeon write, "As long as God has an open ear we cannot be shut up in trouble. All other weapons may be useless, but all-prayer is evermore available. No enemy can spike this gun." "For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah" (Psalm 54:3). Those who had no acquaintance with David, and so could have no cause for ill-will against him, were his persecutors; strangers were they to God. In such a circumstance it is well for us to plead before God that we are being hated for *His* sake.

We must not here expound the remainder of this Psalm. But let us note three other things in it. First, the marked change in the last four verses, following the "Selah" at the end of verse 3. On that word "Selah" Spurgeon wrote, "As if he said, 'Enough of this, let us pause.' He is out of breath with indignation. A sense of wrong bids him suspend the music awhile. It may also be observed, that more pauses would, as a rule, improve our devotions: we are usually too much in a hurry." Second, his firm confidence in God and the assurance that his request would be granted: this appears in verses 4-6, particularly in the "He *shall* reward evil unto mine enemies"—the "cut them off" was not spoken in hot revenge, but as an Amen to the sure sentence of the just Judge. Third, his absolute confidence that his prayer was answered: the "has delivered me" of verse 7 is very striking, and with it should be carefully compared and pondered, Mark 11:24.

It now remains for us to observe *how* God answered David's prayer. "And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain of the south of Jeshimon" (v. 24). The term "wilderness" is rather misleading to English ears: it is not synonymous with desert, but is in contrast from cultivated farmlands and orchards, often signifying a wild forest. "And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them" (verses 25, 26). How often is such the case with us: some sore trial presses, and we cry unto God for relief, but before His answer comes, matters appear to get worse. Ah, that is in order that His hand may be the more evident.

David's plight was now a serious one, for Saul and his men had practically enveloped them, and only a "mountain," or more accurately, a steep cliff, separated them. Escape seemed quite cut off: out-numbered, surrounded, further flight was out of the question. At last Saul's evil object appeared to be on the very point of attainment. But man's extremity is God's opportunity. Beautifully did Matthew Henry comment, "This mountain (or cliff) was an emblem of the Divine Providence coming between David and the destroyer, like the pillar of cloud between the Israelites and the Egyptians." Yet, a few hours at most, and Saul and his army would either climb or go around that crag. Now for the striking and blessed sequel.

"But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste you, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore, they called that place The rock of divisions. And David went up from thence and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi" (verses 27-29). How marvelously and how graciously God times things! He who orders all events and controls all creatures, moved the Philistines to invade a portion of Saul's territory, and tidings of this reached the king's ear just at the moment David seemed on the brink of destruction. Saul at once turned his attention to the invaders, and thus he was robbed of his prey and God glorified as his (David's) Protector. Thus, without striking a blow, David was delivered. O how blessed to know that the same God is *for* His people today, and without them doing a thing He can turn away those who are harassing. God *does* hear and answer the prayer of faith! David and his little force now had their opportunity to escape, and fled to the strong holds of Engedi, on the shore of the Dead Sea.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Sparing Saul

1 Samuel 24

We began our last chapter by quoting "many are the afflictions of the righteous," the remainder of the verse reading "but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19). This does not mean that God always rescues the afflicted one from the physical danger which menaces him. No indeed, and we must be constantly on Our guard against carnally interpreting the Holy Scriptures. It is quite true that there are numerous cases recorded in the Word where the Lord was pleased graciously to put forth His power and extricate His people from situations where death immediately threatened them: the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, Elijah from the murderous intentions of Ahab and Jezebel, Daniel from the lions' den, being striking illustrations in point. Yet the slaying of Abel by Cain, the martyrdom of Zechariah (Matthew 23:35), the stoning of Stephen, are examples to the contrary. Then did the promise of Psalm 34:19 fail in these latter instances? No indeed, they received a yet more glorious fulfillment, for they were finally delivered out of this world of sin and suffering.

David was the one whose hand was moved by the Holy Spirit to first pen Psalm 34:19, and signally was it fulfilled in his history in a physical sense. Few men's lives have been more frequently placed in jeopardy than was his, and few men have experienced the Lord's delivering hand as he did. But there was a special reason for that, and it is this to which we would now call attention. David was one of the progenitors of Israel's Messiah, and it is indeed striking and blessed to note the wonderful works of God of old in His miraculously preserving the chosen seed from which Christ, after the flesh, was to spring. Indeed it is this more particularly, which supplies the key to many a divine interposition on behalf of the patriarchs and others, who were in the immediate line from which Jesus of Nazareth issued.

Strikingly does this appear in the history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who for so many years dwelt in the midst of the Canaanites. The inhabitants of that land were heathen, and most wicked, as Genesis 15:16 intimates. Abraham and his descendants were exposed to them as sojourners in the land, and men are most apt to be irritated by the peculiar customs of strangers. It was, then, a most remarkable dispensation of Providence which preserved the patriarchs in the midst of such a people: see Psalm 105:42, "Thus was this handful, this little root that had the blessing of the Redeemer in it, preserved in the midst of enemies and dangers which was not unlike to the preserving of the ark in the midst of the tempestuous deluge" (Jonathan Edwards). Wondrously too did God preserve the infant nation of Israel in Egypt, in the wilderness, and on their first entering the promised land.

Still more arresting is the illustration which this principle receives in the divine preserving of the life of him who was more immediately and illustriously the sire of Christ. How often was there but a step between David and death! His encountering of the lion and bear in the days of his shepherd life, which, without divine intervention, could have rent him in pieces as easily as they caught a lamb from his flock; his facing Goliath, who was powerful enough to break him across his knee, and give his flesh to the beasts of the field as he threatened; the exposing of his life to the Philistines, when Saul required one hundred of their foreskins as a dowry for his daughter; the repeated assaults of the king by throwing his javelin at him; the later attempts made to capture and slay him—yet from all these was David delivered. "Thus was the precious seed that virtually contained the Redeemer and all the blessings of redemption, wondrously preserved, when all earth and Hell were conspired against it to destroy it" (Jonathan Edwards).

But we must now turn to our present lesson, a lesson which records one of the most striking events in the eventful life of David. Well did Matthew Henry point out, "We have hitherto had Saul seeking an opportunity to destroy David, and, to his shame, he could never find it; in this chapter David had a fair opportunity to destroy Saul, and, to his honor, he did not make use of it; and his sparing Saul's life was as great an instance of God's *grace in* him, as the preserving of his own life was of God's *providence over* him." Most maliciously had Saul sought David's life, most generously did David spare Saul's life. It was a glorious triumph of the spirit over the flesh, of grace over sin.

"And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi" (1 Samuel 24:1). From these words we gather that Saul had been successful in turning back the invading Philistines. This illustrates a solemn principle which is often lost sight of: human success is no proof of divine approbation. The mere fact that a man is prospering outwardly, does not, of itself, demonstrate that his life is pleasing unto the Lord. No one but an infidel would deny that it was *God* who enabled Saul to clear his land of the Philistines, yet we err seriously if we conclude from this that He delighted in him. As oxen are fattened for the slaughter, so God often ripens the wicked for judgment and damnation by an abundance of His temporal mercies. The immediate sequel shows clearly what Saul still was.

"And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." This may be regarded as a testing of Saul, for everything that happens in each of our lives tests us at some point or other. Miserably did Saul fail under it. Nothing in the outward dispensations of God change the heart of man: His chastisements do not break the stubborn will, nor His mercies melt the hard heart. Nothing short of the regenerating work of the Spirit can make any man a new creature in Christ Jesus. The success with which God had just favored Saul's military enterprise against the Philistines, made no impression upon the reprobate soul of the apostate king. Pause for a moment, dear reader, and face this question, Has the goodness of God brought *you* to repentance?

"Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats" (v. 2). What a terribly solemn illustration does this verse supply of what is said in Ecclesiastes 8:11, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is *fully* set in them to do evil." Wicked men are often interrupted in their evil courses, yet they return unto them when the restraint is removed, as if deliverance from trouble were only given that they should add iniquity unto iniquity. It was thus with Pharaoh: time after time God sent a plague which stayed that vile monarch's hand, yet as soon as respite was granted, he hardened his heart again. So Saul had been providentially blocked while pursuing David, by the invading Philistines; but now, as soon as this hindrance was removed, he redoubled his evil efforts. O, unsaved reader, has it not been thus with you? Your course of self-pleasing was suddenly checked by an illness, your round of pleasure-seeking was stopped by a sick-bed. Opportunity was given you to consider the interests of your immortal soul, to humble yourself beneath the mighty hand of God. Perhaps you did so in a superficial way, but what has been the sequel? Health and strength have been mercifully restored by God, but are they being used for His glory, or are you now vainly pursuing the phantoms of this world harder than ever?

Ought not the very invasion of the Philistines to have changed Saul's attitude toward the one whom he was so causelessly and relentlessly pursuing? Ought he not to have realized now more forcibly than ever, that he needed David at the head of his army to repulse the common enemy? And O unbelieving reader, is not the case very much the same with you? The faithful servant of God, who has your best interests at heart, you despise; that Christian friend who begs you to consider the claims of Christ, the solemnities of an unending eternity, the certain and terrible doom of those who live only for this life, you regard as a "kill-joy." Saul is now in the torments of Hell, and in a short time at most *you* will be there too, unless you change your course and beg God to change your heart.

Let us turn our thoughts once more unto David. As we saw at the close of our last chapter, in answer to believing prayer, God granted him a striking deliverance from the hand of his enemy. Yet that deliverance was but a brief one. Saul now advanced against him with a stronger force than before. Does not every real Christian know something of this in his own spiritual experience? It is written that "we must through *much* tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Troubles come, and then a respite is granted, and then new troubles follow on the heels of the old ones. Our spiritual enemies will not long leave us in peace; nevertheless, they are a blessing in disguise if they drive us to our knees. Very few souls thrive as well in times of prosperity as they do in seasons of adversity. Winters' frosts may necessitate warmer clothes, but they also kill the flies and garden pests.

David had now betaken himself unto "The rocks of the wild goats." Thither Saul and his large army follow him. Once more God undertook for him, and that in a striking way. "And he came to the sheep-cotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave" (v. 3). In that section of Palestine there are large caves, partly so by nature, partly so by human labor, for the sheltering of sheep from the heat of the sun; hence we read in the Song of Solomon 1:7 of "where you make your flock to rest at noon." In one of these spacious caverns, David, and some of his men at least, had taken refuge. Thither did Saul, separated apparently from his men, now turn, in order to seek repose. Thus, by a strange carelessness (viewed from the human standpoint), Saul placed himself completely at David's mercy.

"And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto you, Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it shall seem good unto you" (v. 4). David's men at once saw the hand of the Lord in this unexpected turn of events. So far, so good. None but an infidel believes in things happening by chance, though there are many infidels now wearing the name of "Christian." There are no accidents in a world which is governed by the living God, for "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:36). Therefore does faith perceive the hand of God in everything which enters our lives, be it great or small. And it is only as we recognize His hand molding all our circumstances, that God is honored, and our hearts are kept in peace. O for grace to say at all times, "It "(1 Samuel 3:18).

"And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto you, Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it shall seem good unto you." It is not difficult to trace the line of thought which was in their minds. They felt that here was an opportunity too good to be missed, an opportunity which Providence itself had obviously placed in David's way. One stroke of the sword would rid him of the only man that stood between him and the throne. Not only so, but the slaying of this apostate Saul would probably mean the bringing back of the whole nation unto the Lord. How many there are in Christendom today who believe that the end justifies the means: to get "results" is the all-important thing with them—*how* this is done matters little or nothing. Had such men been present to counsel David they had argued, "Be not scrupulous about slaying Saul, see how much good it will issue in!"

"What a critical moment it was in David's history! Had he listened to the specious counselors who urged upon him to do what Providence, seemingly, had put in his way, his life of faith would have come to an abrupt end. One stroke of his sword, and he steps into a throne! Farewell poverty! Farewell the life of a hunted goat. Reproaches, sneers, defeat, would cease; adulations, triumphs, riches would be his. But his at the sacrifice of faith; at the sacrifice of a humbled will, ever waiting on God's time; at the sacrifice of a thousand precious experiences of God's care, God's provision, God's guidance, God's tenderness. No, even a throne at that price is too dear. Faith will wait" (C. H. Bright).

But there is a deeper lesson taught here, which every Christian does well to take thoroughly to heart. It is this: we need to be exceedingly cautious *how we interpret* the events of Providence and what conclusions we draw from them, lest we mistake the opportunity of following out our own inclinations for God's approbation of our conduct. God had promised David the throne, had His time now come for removing the one obstacle which stood in his way? It looked much like it. Saul had shown no mercy, and there was not the least likelihood that he would do so; then was it God's will that David should be His instrument for taking vengeance upon him? It seemed so, or why should He have delivered him into his hand! David had cried to God for deliverance and had appealed unto divine justice for vindication (Psalm 54:1), had the hour now arrived for his supplication to be answered? The unexpected sight of Saul asleep at his feet, made this more than likely. How easy, how very easy then, for David to have made an erroneous deduction from the event of Providence on this occasion!

God was, in reality, *testing* David's faith, testing his patience, testing his piety. The testing of his faith lay in submission to the Word, which plainly says, "you shall not kill," and God had given him no exceptional command to the contrary. The testing of his patience lay in his quietly waiting God's time to ascend the throne of Israel: the temptation before him was to take things into his own hands and rush matters. The testing of his piety lay in the mortifying of his natural desires to avenge himself, to act in grace, and show kindness to one who had sorely mistreated him. It was indeed a very real testing, and blessed is it to see how the spirit triumphed over the flesh.

The application of this incident to the daily life of the Christian is of great practical importance. Frequently God tests *us* in similar ways. He so orders His providences as to try our hearts and make manifest what is in them. How often we are exercised about some important matter, some critical step in life, some change in our affairs involving momentous issues. We distrust our own wisdom, we want to be sure of God's will in the matter, we spread our case before the Throne of Grace, and ask for light and guidance. So far, so good. Then, usually, comes the testing: events transpire which seem to show that it *is* God's will for us to take a certain step, things appear to point plainly in that direction. Ah, my friend, that may only be God trying your heart. If, notwithstanding your praying over it, your *desires* are really set upon that object or course, then it will be a simple thing for you to misinterpret the events of Providence and jump to a wrong conclusion.

An accurate knowledge of God's Word, a holy state of heart (wherein self is judged, and its natural longings mortified), a broken will, are absolutely essential in order to clearly discern the path of duty in important cases and crises. The safest plan is to *deny* all suggestions of revenge, covetousness, ambition and impatience. A heart that is established in true godliness will rather interpret the dispensations of Providence as trials of faith and patience, as occasions to practice self-denial, than as opportunities for self-indulgence. In any case, "he that believes shall not make haste" (Isaiah 28:16). "Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass . . . Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:5, 7). O for grace to do so; but such grace has to be definitely, diligently and daily sought for.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

His Address to Saul

1 Samuel 24

In our last chapter we left the apostate king of Israel asleep in the cave of Engedi, the very place which had been made a refuge by David and his followers. There Saul lay completely at the mercy of the man whose life he sought. David's men were quick to perceive their advantage, and said to their master "Behold the day of which the Lord said unto you, Behold I will deliver your enemy into Wine hand, that you may do to him as it shall seem good unto you" (1 Samuel 24:4). A real temptation presented itself to the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and though he was not completely overcome by it, yet he did not emerge from the conflict without a wound and a stain. "Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily." How true it is that "evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33)! Did this incident come back to his mind when, (probably) at a later date, the Spirit of God moved him to write, "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Psalm 1:1)? Possibly so; at any rate, we find here a solemn warning which each of us does well to take to heart.

"And it came to pass afterward that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt" (1 Samuel 24:5): which means, his conscience accused him, and he repented of what he had done. Good is it when our hearts condemn us for what the world regards as trifles. Though David had done no harm to the king's person, and though he had given proof it was in his power to slay him, nevertheless his action was a serious affront against the royal dignity. No matter what be the personal character of the ruler, because of his office, God commands us to "honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17). This is a word concerning which all of us need reminding, for we are living in times when an increasing number "despise dominion, and *speak evil* of dignities" (Jude 8). God takes note of this!

"David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt." With this should be compared 2 Samuel 24:10, "And David's heart smote him after that he numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech You, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant; for I have done very foolishly." From these passages it is evident that David was blessed with a tender conscience, which is ever a mark of true spirituality. In solemn contrast therefrom, we read of those "having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2), and of some "being past feeling" (Ephesians 4:19), which is a sure index of those who have been abandoned by God. David soon regretted his rash action and realized he had sinned. May God graciously grant unto reader and writer a sensitive conscience.

"And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch Forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord" (v. 6). How honest of David! He not only repented before God of his rash conduct, but he also confessed his wrong-doing unto those who had witnessed the same. It requires much grace and courage to do this, yet nothing short of it is required of us. Moreover, we know not to whom God may be pleased to bless a faithful and humble acknowledgment of our sins. David now let his men know plainly that he was filled with abhorrence for having so insulted his sovereign Lord. Observe how that it was his looking at things from the *divine* viewpoint which convicted him: he now regarded Saul not as a personal enemy, but as one whom *God* had appointed to reign as long as he lived.

"So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul" (v. 7). "Stayed" here signifies, pacified or quieted them, hindering them from laying rough hands upon the king. The first word of this verse is deeply significant: "So,' in this manner, by what he had just said—how evident that God clothed his words with power! Few things have greater weight with men than their beholding of

reality in those who bear the name of the Lord. David had honored God by calling the attention of his men to the fact that Saul was His "anointed," and now He honored David by causing his honest confession to strike home to the hearts of his men. Thus, by restraining his followers David returned good for evil to him from whom he had received evil for good.

"But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way" (v. 7). Utterly unconscious of the danger which had threatened him, the king awoke, arose, and went forth out of the cave. How often there was but a step between us and death, and we knew it not. Awake or asleep, our times are in God's hands, and with the Psalmist faith realizes "*You* hold my soul in life" (Psalm 66:9). None can die a moment before the time his Maker has appointed. Blessed is it when the heart is enabled to rest in God. Each night it is our privilege to say, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for You, Lord, only make me dwell in safety" (Psalm 4:8). But how unspeakably solemn is the contrast between the cases of the godly and the wicked: the one is preserved for eternal glory, the other is reserved unto everlasting fire. Such was the difference between David and Saul.

"David also arose afterward and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king" (v. 8). "Though he would not take the opportunity to slay him, yet he wisely took the opportunity, if possible, to slay his enmity, by convincing him that he was not such a man as he took him for" (Matthew Henry). In thus revealing himself to Saul, David intimated that he still entertained an honorable opinion of his sovereign: this was further evidenced by the respectful language which he employed. "And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself." How surprised the blood-thirsty monarch must have been in hearing himself addressed by the one whose life he sought! The posture of David was not that of a cringing criminal, but of a loyal subject. In what follows we have one of the most respectful, pathetic and forcible addresses ever made to one of earth's rulers.

"And David said to Saul, Wherefore hear you men's words, saying, Behold, David seeks your hurt?" (v. 9). It is beautiful to see how David commenced his speech to the king, wherein he endeavors to show how much he was wronged in being so relentlessly persecuted, and how much he desired Saul to be reconciled to him. Most graciously did David throw the blame upon Saul's courtiers, rather than upon the king himself. In the question here asked Saul, it was suggested that his prejudice against David had been provoked by slanderous reports from others. Herein important instruction is furnished us as to what method to follow when seeking to subdue the malice of those who hate us: proceeding on the assumption that it is not the individual's own enmity against us, but that it has been unjustly stirred up by others. Particularly does this apply to those in authority: respect is due unto them, and where they err, due allowance should be made for their having been ill-informed by others.

It is the practical application of the teaching of Scripture to the details of our own lives which is so much needed today. Of what real value is a knowledge of its history or an understanding of its prophecies, if they exert no vital influence upon our conduct? God has given us His Word not only for our information, but as a law to walk by, and every chapter in it contains important rules for us to appropriate and put into practice. What is before us above supplies a timely case in point. How often differences arise between men, breaches between friends, and misunderstandings between fellow-Christians; and how rarely do we see the spirit displayed by David unto Saul, exercised now in efforts to effect a reconciliation! Let us earnestly seek grace to profit from the lovely and lowly example here set before us.

"Behold, this day, your eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered you today into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill you: but mine eyes spared you; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed" (v. 10). First, David had refrained from reproaching or sharply expostulating Saul, now he shows that there was no ill-will in his own heart against him. He appealed to the most decisive proof that he had no intention of injuring him. The king had been completely at his mercy, and his men had urged him to dispatch his enemy, but pity for the helpless monarch had restrained him. Moreover, the fear of God governed him, and he dared not to lay violent hands upon His "anointed." By such mild measures did David seek to conciliate his foe. Let us take a leaf out of his copybook, and seek by acts of kindness to prove unto those that harbor false thoughts against us that Satan has misled them.

"Moreover, my father, see, yes, see the skirt of your robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of your robe, and killed you not, know you and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against you; yet you hunt my soul to take it" (v. 11). "He produces undeniable evidence to prove the falseness of the suggestion upon which Saul's malice against him was grounded. David was charged with seeking Saul's hurt: 'see,' says he, 'yes, see the skirt of your robe:' let this be a witness for me, and an unexceptional witness it is; had that been true which I am accused of, I had now had your head in my hand, and not the skirt of your robe; for 1 could as easily have cut off that as this" (Matthew Henry). Well for us is it when we can go to one filled with unjust suspicions against us, and confirm our words with convincing proofs of our good-will.

It is touching to see David here reminding Saul that there was a more intimate relation between them than that of king and subject; he had been united in marriage to his daughter, and therefore does he now address him as "my father" (v. 11). Here was an appeal not only to his honor, but to his affection: from a monarch one may expect justice, but from a parent we may surely look for affection. David might have addressed Saul by a hard name, but he sought to "overcome evil with good." Blessedly did he here prefigure his Lord, who, at the time of his arrest in the garden, addressed the treacherous Judas not as "Betrayer" or "Traitor," but "Friend." Nothing is gained by employing harsh terms, and sometimes "A soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

"The Lord judge between me and you, and the Lord avenge me of you: but mine hand shall not be upon you" (v. 12). David now appealed unto a higher court. First, he desires that Jehovah Himself shall make it appear who was in the right and who in the wrong. Second, he counts upon the retribution of Heaven if Saul should continue to persecute him. Third, he affirms his steadfast resolution that no matter what he might suffer, nor what opportunities might be his to avenge himself, he would not do him hurt, but leave it with God to requite the evil. This was indeed a mild method of reasoning with Saul, and the least offensive way of pointing out to him the injustice of his conduct. If men would deal thus one with another how much strife could be avoided, and how many quarrels be satisfactorily ended!

"As says the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceeds from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon you" (v, 13), This intimates that it is permissible for us to make a right use of the wise sayings of others, particularly of the ancients, even though they are not directly inspired of God. Such aphorisms as "Look before you leap," "Too many cooks spoil the broth," "All is not gold that glitters," are likely to stand us in good stead if they are stored in the memory and duly pondered. In days gone by, such proverbs were frequently spoken in the hearing of children (we are thankful that they were in ours), and the general absence of them today is only another evidence of the decadence of

"As says the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceeds from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon you." The use which David here made of this proverb is obvious: he reminds Saul that a man is revealed by his actions. As a tree is known by its fruits, so our conduct makes manifest the dispositions of our hearts. It was as though David said, "Had I been the evil wretch which you have been made to believe, I would have had no conscience of taking away your life when it was in my power. But I could not: my heart would not let me." Though the dog barks at the sheep, the

"After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom do you pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea" (v. 14). Here David descends and reasons with Saul on the lowest grounds: in your own judgment I am a worthless fellow, then why go to so much trouble over me! Is it not altogether beneath the dignity of a monarch to take so much pains in hunting after one who is not worthy of his notice? In likening himself to a "flea," David, by this simile, depicts not only his own weakness, but the circumstances he was in: obliged to move swiftly from place to place, and therefore not easily taken; and if captured, of no value to the king. Why then be so anxious to give chase to one so inconspicuous? "To conquer him would not be his honor, to attempt it only his disparagement. If Saul would consult his own reputation he would slight such an enemy (supposing he were really his enemy), and would think himself in no danger from him." If Saul had a spark of generosity in him, the humble carriage of David here would surely abate his enmity.

"The Lord therefore be Judge, and judge between me and you, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of your hand" (v. 15). Having pleaded his case so forcibly, David now solemnly warned his enemy that Jehovah would judge righteously between them, deliver him out of his hand, and avenge his cause upon him. When we are innocent of the suspicions entertained against and preferred upon us, we need not fear to leave the issue with God. This is what our Lord Himself did: "When he suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). Assured that God would, in due time, vindicate him, David acted faith upon Him and rested in His faithfulness. The justice of God should ever be the refuge and comfort of those who are wrongfully oppressed: the day is coming when the Judge of all the earth shall recompense every evil-doer, and reward all the righteous.

A brief analysis of what we may term David's "defense" teaches us what methods we should follow when seeking to show a person that we have given no cause for his malice against us. First, David asked Saul if he had not been unjust in listening to slanders against him (v. 9)? Second, he pointed out that because the fear of God was upon him, he dared not sin presumptuously (v. 10). Third, he appealed to his own actions in proof thereof (v. 11). Fourth, he affirmed he had no intention to retaliate and return evil for evil (v. 12). Fifth, he argued that the known character of a person should prevent others from believing evil reports about him (v. 13). Sixth, he took a lowly place, shaming pride by humility (v. 14). Seventh, he committed his case unto the justice of God (v. 15).

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

His Victory Over Saul

1 Samuel 24

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). A man who is "slow to anger" is esteemed by the Lord, respected by men, is happy in himself, and is to be preferred above the strongest giant that is not master of self. Alexander the Great conquered the world, yet in his uncontrollable wrath, slew his best friends. Being "slow to anger" is to take time and consider before we suffer our passions to break forth, that they may not transgress due bounds; and he who can thus control himself is to be esteemed above the mightiest warrior. A rational conquest is more honorable to a rational creature than triumph by brute force.

The most desirable authority is self-government. The conquest of ourselves and our own unruly passions, requires more regular and persevering management than does the obtaining of a victory over the physical forces of an enemy. The conquering of our own spirit is a more important achievement than the taking of a foe's fortress. He who can command his temper is superior to him that can successfully storm a fortified town. Natural courage, skill and patience, may do the one; but it requires the grace of God and the assistance of the Holy Spirit to do the other. Blessedly was all this exemplified by David in that incident which has occupied our attention in the last two chapters. He had been sorely provoked by Saul, yet when the life of his enemy was in his hand, he graciously spared him, and returned good for evil.

"A soft answer turns away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). Strikingly was this illustrated in what is now to be before us. A child of God is not to rest satisfied because *he* has not originated strife, but if others begin it, he must not only not continue it, but endeavor to end it by mollifying the matter. Better far to pour oil on the troubled waters, than to add fuel to the fire. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). We are to disarm resentment by every reasonable concession. Mild words and gentle expressions, delivered with kindness and humility, will weaken bitterness and scatter the storm of wrath. Note how the Ephraimites were pacified by Gideon's mild answer (Judges 8:1-13). The noblest courage is shown when we withstand our own corruptions, and overcome enemies by kindness.

"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us" (Luke 11:4). Wherein does this forgiving of others consist? First, in withholding ourselves from revenge. "Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any" (Colossians 3:13): "forbearing and forgiving" are inseparably connected. Some men will say, We will do to him as he has done to us; but God bids us, "*Say not* I will do so to him as he has done unto me, I will render to the man according to his work" (Proverbs 24:29). Corrupt nature thirsts for retaliation, and has a strong inclination that way; but grace should check it. Men think it a base thing to put up with wrongs and injuries; but this it is which gives a man a victory over himself, and the truest victory over his enemy, when he forbears to revenge.

By nature there is a spirit in us which is turbulent, revengeful, and desirous of returning evil for evil; but when we are able to deny it, we are ruling our own spirit. Failure so to do, being overcome by passion, is moral weakness, for our enemy has thoroughly overcome us when his injuring of us prevails to our breaking of God's laws in order to retaliate. Therefore we are bidden "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21): then is grace victorious, and then do we manifest a noble, brave and strong spirit. And wondrously will God bless our exemplifications of His grace, for it is often His way to shame the party that did the wrong, by overcoming him with the meekness and generosity of the one he has injured. It was thus in the case of David and Saul, as we shall now see.

"And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, is this your voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept" (1 Samuel 24:16). Though his mind was so hostile to David, and he had cruelly chased him up and down, yet when he now saw that the one he was pursuing had forborne revenge when it was in his power, he was moved to tears. In like manner, when the captains of the Syrians, whom the prophet had temporarily blinded, were led to Samaria, fully expecting to be slain there, we are told that the king "prepared great provisions for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away." And what was the sequel to such kindness unto their enemies? This; it so wrought upon their hearts, their bands "came no more into the land of Israel" (2

"And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, is this your voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept." Let us pause and adore the restraining power of God. Filled with wrath and fury, so eager to take David's life, Saul, instead of attempting to kill him, had stood still and heard David's speech without an interruption. He who commands the winds and the waves, can, when He pleases, still the most violent storm within a human breast. But more; Saul was not only awed and subdued, but melted by David's kindness. Observe the noticeable change in his language: before, it was only "the son of Jesse," now he says, "my son, David." So deeply was the king affected, that he was moved to tears; yet, like those of Esau, they were not

"And he said to David, You are more righteous than I: for you have rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded you evil" (v. 17). Saul was constrained to acknowledge David's integrity and his own iniquity, just as Pharaoh said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you" (Exodus 10:16); and as many today will own their wrong-doing when shamed by Christians returning to them good for evil, or when impressed by some startling providence of God. But such admissions are of little value if there is no change for the better in the lives of those who make them. Nevertheless, this acknowledgment of Saul's made good that word of God's upon which He had caused His servant to hope: "He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday" (Psalm 37:6). They who are careful to maintain "a conscience void of offense toward God and man" (Acts 24: 16), may safely leave it unto Him to secure the credit of it.

"This fair confession was sufficient to prove David innocent, even his enemy himself being judge; but not enough to prove Saul himself a true penitent. He should have said, 'You are righteous, and I am wicked,' but the utmost he will own is this, 'You are more righteous than I.' Bad men will commonly go no farther than this in their confessions: they will own they are not so good as some others are; there are that are better than they, more righteous" (Matthew Henry). Ah, it takes the supernatural workings of Divine grace in the heart to strip us of all our imagined goodness, and bring us into the dust as sell-condemned sinners, it requires too the continual renewings of the Holy Spirit *to keep us in the dust,* so that we truthfully exclaim, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory, for Your mercy and for Your truth's sake" (Psalm 115:1).

"And you have showed this day how that you have dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into your hand, you kill me not" (v. 18). This is striking: even the most desperate sinners are sometimes amenable to acts of kindness. Saul could not but own that David had dealt far more mercifully with him, than he would have done with David if their position had been reversed. He acknowledged that he had been laboring under a misapprehension concerning his son, for clear proof had been given that David was of a far different stamp than what he had supposed. "We are too apt to suspect others to be worse affected towards us than they really are, and than perhaps they are proved to be; and when afterwards our mistake is discovered, we should be forward to recall our suspicions as Saul does "(Matthew Henry).

"And you have showed this day how that you have dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into your hand, you kill me not." In view of the later sequel, this is also exceedingly solemn. Saul not only recognizes the magnanimity of David, but he perceives too the providence of God: he owns that it was none other than the hand of Jehovah which had placed him at the mercy of the man whose life he had been seeking. Thus it was plain that God was *for* David, and who could hope to succeed *against* him! How this ought to have deterred him from seeking his hurt afterwards; yet it did not: his "goodness was as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goes away" (Hosea 6:4). Alas, there are many who mourn for their sins, but do not truly repent of them; weep bitterly for their transgressions, and yet continue in love and league with them; discern and own the providences of God, yet do not yield themselves to Him.

"For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away?" (v. 19). No, this is not the customary way among men. "Revenge is sweet" to poor fallen human nature, and few indeed refuse to drink from this tempting cup when it is presented to them. And if there be more lenity shown unto fallen enemies today than there was in past ages, it is not to be ascribed unto any improvement in man, but to the beneficent effects of the spread of Christianity. That this is the case may be clearly seen in the vivid contrasts presented among nations where the Gospel is preached, and where it is unknown: the "dark places" of the earth are still "full of "(Psalm 74:20).

"For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the Lord reward you good for that you have done unto me this day" (v. 19). Strange language this for a would-be murderer! Yes, even the reprobate have spurts and flashes of seeming piety at times, and many superficial people who "believes every word" (Proverbs 14:15) are deceived thereby. "Seemingly pious" we say, for after all, those fair words of Saul were empty ones. Had he really meant what he said, would he not personally and promptly have rewarded David himself? Of course he would. He was king; he had power to; it was his duty to reinstate David in the bosom of his family, and bestow upon him marks of the highest honor and esteem. But he did nothing of the sort. Ah, dear reader: do not measure people by what they say; it is *actions* which speak louder than words.

"And now, behold, I know well that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand" (v. 20). The realization that God had appointed David to succeed him on the throne, was now forced upon Saul. The providence of God in so remarkably preserving and prospering him, his princely spirit and behavior, his calling to mind of what Samuel had declared, namely; that the kingdom should be given to a neighbor of his, better than he (15:18)—and such David was by his own confession (v. 17); and the portion cut off his own robe—which must have been a vivid reminder of Samuel rending his mantle, when he made the solemn prediction; all combined to convince the unhappy king of this. Thus did God encourage the heart of His oppressed servant, and support his faith and hope. Sometimes He deigns to employ strange instruments in giving us a message of cheer.

"Swore now therefore unto me by the Lord, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house" (v. 21). Under the conviction that God was going to place David upon the throne of Israel, Saul desired from him the guaranty of an oath, that he would not, when king, extirpate his posterity. What a tribute this was unto *the reality* of David's profession! Ah, the integrity, honesty, veracity of a genuine child of God, is recognized by those with whom he comes into contact. They who have dealings with him know that *his* word is his bond. Treacherous and unscrupulous as Saul was, if David promised in the name of the Lord to spare his children, he was assured that it would be fulfilled to the letter. Reader, is *your* character thus known and respected by those among whom you move?

"Swore now therefore unto me by the Lord, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house." How tragically this reveals the state of his heart. Poor Saul was more concerned about the credit and interests of his Family in this world, than he was of securing the forgiveness of his sins before he entered the world to come. Alas, there are many who have their seasons of remorse, are affected by their dangerous situations, and almost persuaded to renounce their sins; they are convinced of the excellency of true saints, as acting from superior principles to those which regulate their own conduct, and cannot withhold from them a good word; yet are they not thereby humbled or changed, and sin

"And David swore unto Saul. And Saul went home: but David and his men got them unto the hold" (v. 22). David was willing to bind himself to the promise which Saul asked of him, and accordingly swore to it on oath. Thus he has left us an example to "be subject unto the higher powers" (Romans 13:1). His later history evidences how he respected his oath to Saul, by sparing Mephibosheth, and in punishing the murderers of Ishbosheth. It is to be noted that David did not ask Saul to swore unto him that he would no more seek his life. David knew him too well to trust in a transient appearance of friendliness, and having no confidence in his word. Nor should we deliberately place a temptation in the way of those lacking in honor, by seeking to extract from them a definite promise.

"And Saul went home; but David and his men got them up unto the hold." David did not trust Saul, whose inconstancy, perfidy and cruel hatred, he full well knew. He did not think it safe to return unto his own house, nor to dwell in the open country, but remained in the wilderness, among the rocks and the caves. The grace of God will teach us to forgive and be kind unto our enemies, but not to trust those who have repeatedly deceived us; for malice often seems dead, when it is only dormant, and will ever long revive with double force. "They that, like David, are innocent as doves, must thus, like David, be wise as serpents" (Matthew Henry). Note how verse 22 pathetically foreshadowed John 7:53 and 8:1.

Here then is the blessed victory that David gained over Saul, not by treacherous stealth, or by brute force but a moral triumph. How complete his victory was that day, is seen in the extent to which that haughty monarch humbled himself before David, entreating him to be kind unto his offspring, when he should be king. But the great truth for us to lay hold of, the central lesson here recorded for our learning is that David first gained the victory over himself, before he triumphed Over Saul. May writer and reader be more diligent and earnest in seeking grace from God that we may not be overcome by evil, but that we may "overcome evil with good."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

His Affront From Nabal

1 Samuel 25

The incident which is now to engage our attention may seem, at first sight, to contain in it little of practical importance for our hearts. If so, we may be sure that our vision is dim. There is nothing trivial in Holy Writ. Everything which the Spirit has recorded therein has a voice for us, if only we will seek the hearing ear. Whenever we read a portion of God's Word, and find therein little suited to our own case and need, we ought to be humbled: the fault is in us. This should at once be acknowledged unto God, and a spiritual quickening of soul sought from Him. There should be a definite asking Him to graciously anoint our eyes (Rev. 3:18), not only that we may be enabled to behold wondrous things in His Law, but also that He will make us of quick discernment to perceive *how* the passage before us *applies to ourselves*—what are the particular lessons we need to learn from it. The more we cultivate this habit, the more likely that God will be pleased to open His Word unto us.

It is the *practical* lessons to be learned from each section that all of us so much need, and this is uppermost in our mind in the composing of this present series. What, then, is there here for us to take to heart? David, in his continued wanderings, applies to a well-to-do farmer for some rations for his men. The appeal was suitably timed, courteously worded, and based upon a weighty consideration. The request was presented not to a heathen, but to an Israelite, to a member of his own tribe, to a descendant of Caleb; in short, to one from whom he might reasonably expect a favorable response. Instead, David met with a rude rebuff and a provoking insult. Obviously, there is a *warning* here for us in the despicable baseness of Nabal, which must be turned into prayer for divine grace to preserve us from being inhospitable and unkind to God's servants.

But it is with David that we are chiefly concerned. In our last three chapters we have seen him conducting himself with becoming mildness and magnanimity, showing mercy unto the chief of his enemies. There we saw him resisting a sore temptation to take matters into his own hands, and make an end of his troubles by slaying the chief of his persecutors, when he was thoroughly in his power. But here our hero is seen in a different light. He meets with another trial, a trial of a much milder nature, yet instead of overcoming evil with good, he was in imminent danger of being overcome with evil. Instead of exercising grace, he is moved with a spirit of revenge; instead of conducting himself so that the praises of God are "*shown* forth" (1 Peter 2:9), only the works of the flesh are seen. Alas, how quickly had the fine gold become dim! How are we to account for this? And what are the lessons to be learned from it?

Is the reader surprised as he turns from the blessed picture presented in the second half of 1 Samuel 24 and ponders the almost sordid actions of David in the very next chapter? Is he puzzled to account for the marked lapse in the conduct of him who had acted so splendidly toward Saul? Is he at a loss to explain David's spiteful attitude toward Nabal? If so, he must be woefully ignorant of *his own heart,* and has yet to learn a most important lesson: that no man stands a moment longer than divine grace upholds him. The strongest are weak as water immediately the power of the Spirit is withdrawn; the most mature and experienced Christian acts foolishly the moment he be left to himself; none of us has any reserve strength or wisdom in himself to draw from: our source of sufficiency is all treasured up for us in Christ, and as soon as communion with Him be broken, as soon as we cease looking alone to Him for help, we are helpless.

What has just been stated above is acknowledged as true by God's people in general, yet many of their thoughts and conclusions are glaringly inconsistent therewith—or why be so surprised when they hear of some eminent saint experiencing a sad fall! The "eminent saint" is not the one who has learned to walk alone, but he who most feels his need of leaning harder upon the "everlasting arms." The "eminent saint" is not the one who is no longer tempted by the lusts of the flesh and harassed by the assaults of Satan, but he who knows that in the flesh there dwells no good thing, and that only

from Christ can his "fruit" be found (Hosea 14:8). Looked at in themselves, the "fathers" in Christ are just as frail and feeble as the "babes" in Christ. Left to themselves, the wisest Christians have no better judgment than has the new convert. Whether God is pleased to leave us upon earth another year or another hundred years, all will constantly need to observe that word, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41).

And God has many ways of teaching us the "weakness" of the flesh. One of these receives striking illustration in the incident to be before us, and which has no doubt been painfully realized in the experience of each Christian reader: that in some great crisis we have been enabled to stand our ground, strong in faith, whereas before some petty trial we have broken down and acted as a man of the world would act. It is thus that God stains our pride, subdues our self-sufficiency, and brings us to the place of more real and constant dependence upon Himself. It is the "little foxes" (Song of Solomon 2:15) that spoil the vines, and it is our reaction unto the lesser irritations of everyday life which most reveal us to ourselves—humbling us through our failures, and fitting us to bear with more patience the infirmities of our brethren and sisters in Christ.

Who would have thought that he who had taken so meekly the attacks of the king upon his life, should have waxed so furious when a farmer refused a little food for his men! Rightly did Thomas Scott point out, "David had been on his guard against anger and revenge when most badly used by Saul, but he did not expect such reproachful language and insolent treatment from Nabal: he was therefore wholly put off his guard; and in great indignation he determined to avenge himself." Lay this well to heart, dear reader: a small temptation is likely to prevail after a greater has been resisted. Why so? Because we are less conscious of our need of God's delivering grace. Peter was bold before the soldiers in the Garden, but became fearful in the presence of a maid. But it is time for us to consider some of the details of our passage.

"And Samuel died; and all the Israelites were gathered *to*gether and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah" (1 Samuel 25:1). How often will people sorrow outwardly for one when dead to whom they did not care to listen when living. There had been a time when Samuel was appreciated by Israel, particularly when they were feeling the pressure of the Philistine yoke; but more recently he has been despised (1 Samuel 8). They had preferred a king to the prophet, but now Saul was proving such a disappointment, and the breach between the king and David showed no signs of being healed, they lamented the removal of Samuel.

"And David arose, and went down to the wilderness of Paran" (25:1). David too was despised by the greater part of the nation. Once he had been the hero of their songs, hut now he was homeless and outlawed. Few cared to own him. Learning of Samuel's death, he probably thought that his danger was greater than ever, for the prophet was more than friendly disposed toward him. He no doubt concluded that Saul's malice would be now more unrestrained than ever. Taking advantage of "all the Israelites" being gathered together, to mourn the death of Samuel, he left Engedi to sojourn for a while in other parts. But let us note well the ominous hint given in the words "and *went down* to the wilderness of Paran."

We have next presented to our notice the one to whom David made his appeal (1 Samuel 25:2, 3). From the character given to him by the Holy Spirit, not much good might be expected from him. His name was "Nabal" which signifies "a fool," and none is a greater fool than he who thinks only of number one. He was a descendant of Caleb, which is mentioned here as an aggravation of his wickedness: that he should be the degenerate plant of so noble a vine. We are told that this man was "very great": not in piety, but in material possessions, for he had very large flocks of sheep and goats. His wife was of a beautiful countenance "and of good understanding," but her father could not have been so, or he would not *have* sacrificed her to a man who had nothing better to recommend him than earthly wealth. Poor woman! She was tied to one who was "churlish and evil in his doings": greedy and grasping, sour and cross-tempered.

"And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep. And David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name" (verses 4, 5). The season for shearing the sheep was a notable one, for wool was a leading commodity in Canaan. With such a very large flock, a considerable number of extra hands would have to be hired by Nabal, and a plentiful supply of provisions prepared. From 2 Samuel 13:23 it appears that it was the custom in those days to combine feasting and merriment with the shearing: compare also Genesis 38:13. It was a time when men were generally disposed to be hospitable and kind. As to how far David was justified in appealing to man, rather than spreading his need before God alone, we undertake not to decide—it is certainly not safe to draw any inference from the sequel.

"And thus shall you say to him that lives, Peace be both to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be unto all that you have. And now I have heard that you have shearers: now your shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will show you. Wherefore let the young men find favor in your eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray you, whatever comes to your hand unto your servants, and to your son David" (verses 6-8). The request to be presented before Nabal was one which the world would call respectful and tactful. The salutation of peace bespoke David's friendly spirit. Reminder was given that, in the past, David had not only restrained his men from molesting Nabal's flocks, but had also protected them from the depredations of invaders—compare verses 14-17. He might then have asked for a reward for his services, but instead he only supplicates a favor. Surely Nabal would not refuse his men a few victuals, for it was "a good day," a time when there was plenty to hand. Finally David takes the place of a "son," hoping to receive some fatherly kindness From him.

But as we examine this address more closely, we note the low ground which was taken: there was nothing spiritual in it! Moreover, we fully agree with Matthew Henry's comments on the opening words of verse 6, "Thus shall you say to him that lives" . . . "as if those lived indeed that lived as Nabal did, with abundance of the wealth of this world about them; whereas, in truth, those that live in pleasure are dead while they live (1 Timothy 5:6). This was, methinks, too high a compliment to pass upon Nabal, to call him the man that lives: David knew better things—that 'in God's favor is life,' not in the world's smiles; and, by the rough answer, he was well enough served for this too smooth address to such a muckworm."

"And when David's young men came, they spoke to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David and ceased" (v. 9). This verse serves to illustrate another important principle: not only are God's children more or less *revealed* by their reaction to and conduct under the varied experiences they encounter, but the presence of God's servants *tests* the character of those with whom they come into contact. It was so here. A golden opportunity was afforded Nabal of showing kindness to the Lord's "anointed," but he seized it not. Alas, how many there are who know not the day of their visitation. Nabal had no heart for David, and clearly was this now made manifest. So too the selfishness and carnality of professors frequently becomes apparent by their failure to befriend the servants of God, when chances to do so are brought right to their door. It is a grand and holy privilege when the Lord sends one of His prophets into your neighborhood, yet it may issue in a fearfully solemn sequel.

"And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?" (verses 10, 11). What an insulting answer to return unto so mild a request! To justify a refusal he stooped to heaping insults on the head of David. It was not a total stranger who had applied to him, for Nabal's calling him "the son of Jesse" showed he knew well who he was; but, absorbed with schemes of selfish acquisition he cared not for him. Let it be duly noted that in acting in such a heartless manner Nabal clearly disobeyed—Deuteronomy 15:7-11. Nabal's repeated use of the word "my" in verse 11 reminds us of the other rich "fool" in Luke 12:18-20.

"So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings" (v. 12). Highly commendable was their conduct. "Young men" are often hot-blooded and hot-headed, and act impetuously and rashly; but they admirably restrained themselves. The language of Nabal had been highly offensive, but instead of returning railing for railing, they treated him with silent contempt and turned their backs upon him: such churls are not entitled to any reply. It is blessed to see they did not use force, and attempt to take what ought to have been freely given to them. Never are the children of God justified in so doing: we must ever seek grace to maintain a good conscience, "in all things willing to live honestly" (Hebrews 13:18). Often the best way for overcoming a temptation to make a wrathful reply, is to quietly turn away from those who have angered us.

"And came and told him all those sayings." Here we are shown how the servants of Christ are to act when abused. Instead of indulging the spirit of revenge, they are to go and spread their case before their Master (Luke 14:21). It was thus the perfect Servant acted: of Him it is written, "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed His cause to Him that judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). Often God brings us into trying situations to reveal unto us whether we are "acknowledging Him in all our ways" (Proverbs 3:6), or whether there is still a measure of self-sufficiency at work in our hearts—our response to the trial makes manifest which be the case.

And what was David's response? How did *he* now react unto the disappointing tidings brought back by his men? Did he, as the *servant* of God, meekly bear Nabal's taunts and cutting reproach? Did he cast his burden on the Lord, looking to Him for sustaining grace (Psalm 55:22)? Alas, he acted in the energy of the flesh. "And David said unto his men, Gird you on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; And David also girded on his sword" (v. 13). David neither betook himself to prayer nor reflected upon the matter, but hurriedly prepared to avenge the insult he had received.

True, the ingratitude which Nabal had shown, and the provoking language he had used, were hard to endure —too hard for mere flesh and blood, for human nature ever wants to vindicate itself. His only recourse lay in God: to see *His* hand in the trial, and to seek grace to bear it. But momentarily David forgot that he had committed his cause unto the Lord, and took matters into his own hands. And why did God permit this breakdown? That no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:29). "This must be the reason why such-like episodes are found in the lives of all the Lord's servants. They serve to demonstrate that these servants were not any better flesh than other men, and that it was not more richly endowed brains that gave them faith of devotedness, but simply the *supernatural* power of the Holy Spirit" (C. H. Bright).

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

His Check From Abigail

1 Samuel 25

In our last chapter we saw how that God submitted David unto a testing of quite another character and from a different quarter than those he had previously been tried by. Hitherto, the thorn in his side had been none other than the king of Israel, to which we may add the callous indifference toward him of the nation at large. But now he was unexpectedly rebuffed by an individual farmer, from whom he had sought some victuals for his men. "His churlish soul, adding insult to injury, dismissed the messenger of David with contumely and scorn. It is a hard thing to endure. David had endured, and was enduring much. He was suffering from the active enmity of Saul, and from the dull apathy of Israel. But both were great, and so to speak, dignified enemies. Saul was Israel's king; and Israel were God's people. It seemed comparatively honorable to be persecuted by *them:* but it was a far different thing to endure the reproach of one so despicable as Nabal. 'Surely in vain,' said David, 'have I kept all that this fellow has in the wilderness'" (B. W. Newton).

What made the trial more poignant to David's soul, was the fact that he himself had acted honorably and kindly toward Nabal. When, on a previous occasion, he had sojourned in those parts, he had not only restrained his own men from preying upon Nabal's flocks, but had been a defense to them from the wandering bands of the Philistines. It was, then, the least that this wealthy sheep owner could do, to now show his appreciation and make present of a little food to David's men. Instead, he mocked them. Ingratitude is always trying to flesh and blood, but more so when it is coupled with gross injustice. Yet often God is pleased to try His people in this way, calling upon them to receive treatment which they feel is quite "uncalled for," yes, positively "unjust." And why does God permit this? For various reasons: among others, to furnish us opportunities to act *out what we profess!*

The reaction of David unto this trial is recorded for our learning: for us to lay to heart, and turn into earnest prayer. "And David said unto his men, Gird you on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword" (1 Samuel 25:13). Well may we ask, Had he been so long in the school of affliction and not yet learned patience? "He forgot that all suffering, all reproach, that is *for God's sake,* is equally honorable, whether it come from a monarch, or from a churl. His proud spirit was roused, and he who had refused to lift up his hand against Saul, and had never unsheathed his sword against Israel: he who was called to fight, not for his *own sake,* against his *own* enemies, but for *the Lord's sake* against the Lord's enemies, he—David, forgot his calling, and swore that Nabal should expiate his offence in blood" (B. W. Newton).

And how are we to account for his lapse? Wherein, particularly, was it that David failed? In being unduly occupied with the second cause, the human instrument; his eyes were upon man, rather than upon God. When his men returned with their disappointing tidings he ought to have said with Job, "Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2: 10). Ah, it is easy for us to say what David *ought* to have said, but do we act any better when we are similarly tested? Alas, has not both writer and reader full reason to bow his head in shame! Far be it from us, who thoroughly deserve them ourselves, to throw stones at the beloved Psalmist. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit has faithfully recorded his failures, and the best way for us to profit from them is to trace them back to their source, and seek grace to avoid repeating them.

Above we asked the question, Had David been so long in the school of affliction and not yet learned patience? This leads us to inquire, *What is patience?* Negatively, it is meekly receiving *as from God* whatever enters our lives, a saying from the heart, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). Positively, it is a persevering continuance in the path of duty, not being overcome by the difficulties of the way. Now to accept as from God whatever enters our lives requires us to cultivate the habit of seeing His hand in everything: just so long as we are unduly occupied with secondary causes and subordinate agents, do we destroy our peace. There is only one real haven for the heart, and that is to "rest in the Lord," to recognize and realize that "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things" (Romans 11:36): ever seeking to learn His lesson in each separate incident.

It is blessed to know that "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord," and that "though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholds his hand" (Psalm 37:23, 24). Yes, and often though we trip, He keeps us from falling. Where it is the genuine desire of the heart to please the Lord in all things, He will not let us go far wrong; where the will is sincerely bent Godwards, He will not suffer Satan to prevail. Thus it was here with David. To answer the fool [Nabal] according to his folly (Proverbs 26:4) was just what the devil desired, and momentarily he had gained an advantage over him. But the eyes of the Lord were upon His tempted servant, and graciously did He now move one to deter him from accomplishing his vindictive purpose. Let us admire His providential workings.

First, we are told that, "But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, neither missed we anything, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields: They were a wall unto us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what you will do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him" (verses 14-17). One of Nabal's servants acquainted his mistress with what had transpired, confirming, be it noted, what was said, by David's men in verse 7. He probably drew the logical inference that David would avenge his insult, and anxious for his own safety, as well as for the other members of the household, and yet not daring to voice his fears unto Nabal, he informed Abigail.

How wondrously God makes all things "work together" for the good of His own. How perfect are His ways: fulfilling His own secret and invincible designs, yet leaving quite free the instruments, who unconsciously, fulfill them. The providential machinery to restrain the impetuous David was now set in motion. A servant of Nabal's, moved by nothing higher than the instinct of self-preservation (so far as *his* consciousness went), warns his mistress of their impending danger. Now mark, secondly, her response: she did not laugh at the servant, and tell him his fears were groundless; nor was she suddenly paralyzed by feminine fright at the alarming tidings. No, a hidden Hand calmed her heart and directed her mind. Accepting the warning, she acted promptly, setting out at once with an elaborate present to placate the angry David; a present that would meet the immediate needs of his hungry men: see verses 18, 19.

There are some who have criticized this action of Abigail's, dwelling upon the last clause of verse 19: "But she told not her husband Nabal." Such a criticism is a very superficial conclusion. What Abigail did was necessary for the protection of the family. Perceiving that Nabal's stubbornness would ruin them all, the exigencies of the situation fully justified her conduct. It is true she owed allegiance to her husband, but her first and great duty was to take measures to protect their lives: inferior interests must always be sacrificed to secure the greater—our property to preserve our lives, our very lives to preserve our souls. As we shall see, verse 24, 28 make it clear that she acted from no disloyalty to Nabal. Nevertheless, it is an extraordinary case which is here before us, and so

not to be used as an example.

And what of David at this time? Was he recovered from his outburst of anger? No, indeed, or there had been no need for Abigail's mission of conciliation. The words of Nabal were still rankling within his heart. Hear him as he petulantly declares, "Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him: and he has requited me evil for good" (v. 21). He repented of the kindness shown Nabal, feeling now that it had been wasted upon him, that he was devoid of gratitude and incapable of appreciating the good turn shown him. But God is "kind to the unthankful and to the evil," and bids us "Be you therefore merciful" (Luke 6:35, 36). Ah, to cultivate that attitude we must seek grace to *mortify* the spirit of pride which desires recognition, and that bitterness which rises when we are slighted.

Not only was David chafing under the ingratitude and taunts of Nabal, but he was still bent on revenge: as verse 23 shows, he had determined to slay every male in Nabal's household. This was unjust and cruel in the extreme, and if God had suffered him to carry out such a design, would have greatly sullied his character and given his enemies an immense advantage against him. So determined was he, that he confirmed his intention with an oath, which was rash and savored of profanity. See here, dear reader, what even the child of God is capable of when grace is not active within him. The realization of this ought to make us walk softly, and work out our salvation with "fear and trembling." It is for this reason that God so often withdraws from us the power of His Spirit: that we may know what is yet in our hearts (2 Chronicles 32:3 1), and be humbled before Him.

How blessedly God *times* His mercies. Here was David premeditating evil, yes, on the point of carrying out his wicked purpose. But there was one, sent by the Lord, already on the way to deliver him from himself. Ah, dear reader, have not you and I often been the recipient of similar favors from Heaven? Were there not times, be they recalled to our deep shame, when *we* had determined upon a course dishonoring to our Lord; when, all praise unto Him, someone crossed our path, and we were delayed, hindered, deterred? That someone may not have spoken to us as definitely as Abigail did unto David: rather perhaps *their* errand was of quite another nature, which at the time we may have resented as a nuisance for interrupting us; but now, as we look back, do we not see the kind hand of God withholding us from carrying out an evil purpose!

Apparently David was already on his way to execute his evil intention when Abigail met him (v. 20). Blessed it is to see the place which she now took: "When Abigail saw David, she hastened, and lighted off the donkey, and fell before David on her face and bowed herself to the ground; and fell at his feet" (verses 23, 24). This was not mere adulation, and it was something more than an oriental salutation: it was *faith's acknowledgment* of the "anointed of the Lord." Nabal had insulted him as a runaway slave, but his wife owns him as a superior, as her king in the purpose of God. Her address to him on this occasion (verses 24-31) is deserving of close study, but we can only offer a few brief remarks upon it.

It is to be carefully noted that Abigail did not upbraid David for cherishing the spirit of revenge and tell him that it ill became his character and calling: that had not been seemly for *her* to do; rather did she leave it for his conscience to accuse him. She did not excuse her husband's conduct, nor did the present case allow her to hide his infirmity, but she sought to turn his well-known character for rashness and insolence (v. 25) into an argument with David, why he should lay aside his resentment. 'She intimated that Nabal (whose name means 'folly'), intended no peculiar affront to him, but only spoke in his usual way of treating those who applied to him; and it was beneath a person of David's reputation and eminence to notice the rudeness of such a man" (Thomas Scott).

Abigail's piety comes out clearly in verse 26. Possibly she perceived a change in David's countenance, or more probably she felt in her spirit that the object before her was now gained; but instead of attributing this unto her pleading, or the present she had brought, she ascribed it solely unto the restraining grace of God: "the Lord has withheld you from coming to shed blood, and from avenging yourself with your own hand." Thus alone is God honored and given His proper place, when we freely impute unto *His* working all that is good in and from our fellow-creatures. Beautiful too is it to behold how she shields her churlish husband: "upon me, my lord, upon me, let this iniquity be" (v. 24), "I pray you, forgive the trespass of your hand maid" (v. 28). She took upon herself the blame for the ill-treatment of his men, and says, If you will be angry, be angry against *me,* rather than with my poor husband.

Next, we behold her strong faith: "the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house" (v. 28). She makes reference unto the future to draw his heart from the present. As another has said, "To the heir of a kingdom, a few sheep could have but little attraction; and one who knew that he had the anointing oil of the Lord upon his head, might easily bear to be called a runaway servant." Ah, it is ever the office of faith to look beyond present circumstances and difficulties, on to the time of deliverance; only thus do we begin to judge things from *God's* viewpoint. Then she pointed out that David was fighting "the battles of the Lord" (v. 28), and therefore it was not for him to think of avenging an insult to himself.

Her closing words in verses 29-31 are very beautiful. First, she makes reference to the relentless persecution of Saul, but in becoming loyalty to the throne speaks of him as "a man" rather than "the king," and assures David in most striking language that his life should be preserved (v. 29). Second, looking away from his abject condition, she confidently contemplated the time when the Lord would make him "ruler over Israel": how heartening was this unto the tried servant of God! Thus too does God often send us a word of comfort when we are most sorely tried. Third, she pleaded with David that he would let his coming glory regulate his present actions, so that in that day, his conscience would not reproach him for previous follies. If we kept more before us the judgment-seat of Christ, surely our conduct would be more regulated thereby. Finally, she besought David to remember her, his "handmaid," when he should ascend the throne.

"As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear' (Proverbs 25:12). Abigail was a wise reprover of David's passion, and he gave an obedient ear to the reproof according to his own principle: 'Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness' (Psalm 141:5): never was such an admonition either better given or better taken" (Matthew Henry). Herein are the children of God made manifest; they are tractable, open to conviction, willing to be shown their faults; but the children of the devil ("sons of Belial") are like Nabal—churlish, stubborn, proud, unbending. Ah, my reader, lay this to heart: if we will listen to faithful counselors now, we shall be delivered from much folly and spared bitter regrets in the future.

God blessed this word of Abigail's to David, so that he was now able to view the whole transaction and his own bitter spirit and purpose, in a true light. First, he praises God for sending him this check in a sinful course (v. 32): it is a true mark of spirituality when we discern and own the Lord's hand in such deliverances. Second, he thanked Abigail for so kindly interposing between him and the sin he was about to commit (v. 33): ah, we must not only receive a reproof patiently, but *thank* the faithful giver of it. Note that instead of speaking lightly of the evil he premeditated, David emphasized its enormity. Third, he dismissed her with a message of peace, and accepted her offering. The whole shows us wise men are open to sound advice, even though it comes from their inferiors; and that oaths must not bind us to do that which is evil.

Finally, let us point out for the benefit of preachers, that we have in the above incident a blessed picture of an elect soul being drawn to Christ. 1. Abigail was yoked to Nabal: so by nature we are wedded to the law as a covenant of works, and it is "against us" (Colossians 2: 14). 2. She was barren to Nabal (see Romans 7:1-4). 3. It was tidings of impending doom which caused her to seek David (v. 17). 4. She took her place in the dust before him (v, 23). 5. She came to him confessing "iniquity" (v. 24). 6. She sought "forgiveness" (v. 28). 7. She was persuaded of David's goodness (v. 28). 8. She owned his exaltation (v. 30). 9. She, like the dying thief, begs to be "remembered" (v. 31). David granted her request, accepted her person, and said, "Go in peace" (v. 35)!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

His Marriage to Abigail

1 Samuel 25

"Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner" (Proverbs 11:31). This is a most appropriate verse with which to introduce the passage that is to engage our attention, for each of its clauses receives striking illustration in what is now to be before us. The closing verses of 1 Samuel 25 supply both a blessed and a solemn sequel to what is found earlier in the chapter. There we *saw* the wicked triumphing, and the righteous being oppressed. There we saw the godly wife of the churl, Nabal, graciously and faithfully befriending the outcast David. Here we behold the hand of God's judgment falling heavily upon the wicked, and the hand of His grace rewarding the righteous.

"Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." Of all the hundreds of Solomon's inspired proverbs this is the only one which is prefaced by the word "Behold." This at once intimates that a subject of great importance is here in view, bidding us fix the eyes of our mind upon the same with close and admiring attention. That subject is the

providential dealings of God in human affairs, a subject which has fallen sadly into disfavor during the last two or three generations, and one concerning which much ignorance and error now widely prevails. Three things are clearly signified by Proverbs 11:31: first, that God disposes the affairs of all His creatures; second, that He pleads the cause of the innocent and vindicates His oppressed people; third, that He plagues and overthrows evildoers.

Practically all professing Christians believe that there is a *future* day of retribution, when God shall reward the righteous and punish the wicked; but comparatively few believe God *now* does so. Yet the verse with which we have opened expressly declares that "The righteous shall be recompensed *in the earth.*" It is impossible to read the Scriptures with an unprejudiced mind and not see this truth exhibited in the history of individuals, families and nations. Cain murdered Abel: a mark was set upon him by God, and he cried, "my punishment is greater than I can bear." Noah was a just man and walked with God: he and his family were preserved from the flood. Pharaoh persecuted the Hebrews, and was drowned at the Red Sea. Saul thirsted for David's life, and was slain in battle. Of the Lord we must say, "Truly, He is a God that judges in the earth" (Psalm 58:11).

And now comes one with this objection: All that you have said above obtained during the Old Testament dispensation, but in this Christian era it is not so; we are shut up to faith. How ridiculous. Has God vacated His throne? Is He no longer shaping human affairs? Is His governmental justice no longer operative? Why, the most signal example in all history of God's "recompensing" the wicked and the sinner in the earth, has transpired in this *Christian* dispensation! It was in A.D. 70 that God publicly executed judgment upon Jerusalem for the Jews' rejection and crucifixion of their Messiah, and the condition of that people throughout the earth ever since, has been a perpetual exemplification of this solemn truth. The same principle has been repeatedly manifested in the establishment of Christianity upon the ruins of its oppressors. As to Christians being "shut up to faith," so were the Old Testament saints just as much as we are: Habakkuk 2:1-4.

But let us notice a more formidable objection. Have there not been many righteous souls who were falsely accused, fiercely persecuted, and who were not vindicated on earth by God? Have there not been many of the wicked who have prospered temporally, and received no retribution in this life? First, let it be pointed out that God does not always respond immediately. The writer has lived long enough to see more than one or two who traded on the Sabbath, oppressed widows, and despised all religion, brought to want. Second, there is a happy medium between denying (on the one hand) that God is not now acting at all in the capacity of Judge, and insisting (on the other hand) that *every* man fully reaps in this life what he has sown.

Here, as everywhere, the *truth* lies between two extremes. If God were to visibly reward every righteous act and punish every evil-doer in this life, much of the work pertaining to the great Day of Judgment would be forestalled. But if God never honors in this world those who honor Him, or punishes those who openly defy Him, then we should be without any pre-intimations of that Great Assize, other than what is revealed in those Scriptures of Truth which very few so much as read. Therefore, in His providential government of the world, God wisely gives sufficiently clear manifestations of His love and righteousness and hatred of unrighteousness, as to leave all without excuse concerning what may be expected when we stand before Him to be fully and finally judged. While there are sufficient cases of godliness apparently passing unrewarded and examples of evil-doers prospering, as to leave full room for the exercise of faith that the righteousness of God shall yet be completely vindicated; nevertheless, there are also a sufficient number of clear demonstrations before our eyes of God's vengeance upon the wicked to awe us that *we* sin not.

"And Abigail came to Nabal; and behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more until the morning light" (v. 36). Recall the circumstances. Only a little while previously Nabal had offered a gross insult to one who was in dire need, and who had several hundred men under his command. Measured by the standards of the world that insult called for retaliation, and so felt the one who had received it. David had sworn to revenge himself by slaying Nabal and every male member of his household, and verse 23 makes it plain that he was on his way to execute that purpose. But for the timely intervention of his wife, Nabal had been engaged in a hopeless fight to preserve his life; and here we see him feasting and drunken!

As Abigail furnishes a typical illustration of a needy sinner coming to Christ and being saved by Him (see close of last chapter), so Nabal affords us a solemn portrayal of one who despised Christ and perished in his sins. Let preachers develop the leading points which we here note down in passing. See the false security of sinners when in dire danger: Ecclesiastes 8:11. Observe how one who grudges to give to God for the relief of His poor, will lavishly spend money to satisfy his lusts or make a fair show in the flesh: Luke 16:19-21. O how many there are more concerned about having what they call "a good time," than they are in making their peace with God: Isaiah 55:2. So sottish are some in the indulging of their appetites that they sink lower than the beasts of the field: Isaiah 1:3. It is adding insult to injury when the sinner not only breaks God's laws but abuses His mercies: Luke 14:18-20. Remember people are intoxicated with other things besides "wine"—worldly fame, worldly riches, worldly pleasures.

Yes, the fool Nabal vividly portrays the case of multitudes all around us. The curse of God's broken law hanging over them, yet "feasting" as though all is well with their souls for eternity. The sword of divine justice already drawn to smite them down, yet their hearts "merry" with "the pleasures of sin for a season." The Water of Life neglected, but "drunken" with the intoxicating things of this perishing world. A grave awaiting them in a few days' time, but flirting with death during the brief and precious interval. In such a benumbed and giddy state, that it would be the casting of pearls before swine for the godly to speak seriously unto them. O how securely the devil holds his victims! O the beguiling and paralyzing effects of sin! O the utterly hopeless condition of the unbelieving, unless a sovereign God intervenes, works a miracle of grace, and snatches him as a brand from the burning!

"But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone" (v. 37). The day of danger had been spent in reveling, the night in intoxicated stupefaction, and now he is called, as it were, to account. The sacred narrative records no reproaches that Abigail made: they were not necessary—the guilty conscience of Nabal would perform its own office. Instead, she merely told her husband of what had transpired. Her words at once dispelled his dreams, shattered his peace, and sank his spirits. Most probably, he was overcome with fright, that notwithstanding his wife's kindly overtures, David would swiftly take vengeance upon him. Filled with bitter remorse, now it was too late to repent, giving way to abject despair, Nabal's heart "became as stone." See here a picture of the poor worldling when facing death, and the terrors of the Almighty overwhelming him. See here the deceitfulness of carnal pleasures: overnight his heart merry with wine, now paralyzed with horror and terror. Yes, the "*end* of that mirth is heaviness" (Proverbs 14: 13); how different the joys which God gives!

"And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died" (v. 38). What a fearfully solemn termination to a wasted life! Nabal's course was one of folly, his end was that of "the fool." Here was a man "very great" (v. 2), who had boastfully spoken of "*my* bread, *my* flesh, *my* shearers" (v. 11); who had scorned David, and spent his time in excessive self-gratification now arrived at the close of his earthly journey, with nothing before him but "the blackness of darkness forever." He seems to have lain in a senseless stupor for ten days, induced either by the effects of his intoxication, or from the horror and anguish of his mind, and this was completed by the immediate stroke of the power and wrath of God, cutting him off out of the land of the living. Such is, my reader, the doom of every one who despises and rejects Christ as Lord and Savior.

"And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died." Not only is the case of Nabal a solemn example of a careless, giddy, reckless sinner, suddenly cut off by God while giving himself up to the indulgence of the flesh, when the sword of divine judgment was suspended over his head; but we also see in his death an exhibition of the faithfulness of God, an illustration of Romans 12:19: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord." Not only is it sinful for the saint to avenge himself when unjustly insulted and ill treated, but it is quite unnecessary. In due time Another will do it far more effectually

"And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the Lord, that has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the land of Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil: for the Lord has returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head" (v. 39). It is not that David was guilty of unholy glee over the wretched end of one who had wronged him, but that he rejoiced in the display of

God's glory, of the exercise of divine justice, and the triumphing of piety over iniquity. Therein lies the real key to a number of passages which many of our moderns suppose breathe only a vengeful spirit: as though God erected a lower standard of holiness in Old Testament times than is now given to us. Such was not the case: the law, equally with the Gospel, required *love* for the neighbor.

As this subject has been so sadly wrested by "Dispensationalists," let us add a few words here. Take for example Psalm 58:10, "The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked." Superficial people say, "But *that* is altogether contrary to the spirit of *this* dispensation!" But read on: "So that a man shall say. Truly there is a reward for the righteous: truly He is a God that judges in the earth" (v. 11). It was not the exercise of a spirit of malice, which took delight in seeing the destruction of *their* foes: no indeed: for in the Old Testament the divine command was, *"Rejoice not* when *your* enemy falls" (Proverbs 24:17). Instead, it was the heart bowing in worship before the governmental dealings of God, adoring that Justice which gave unto the wicked their due. And where the heart is not completely under the dominion of maudlin sentimentality, there will be rejoicing *today* when some notoriously wicked character is manifestly cut down by the holy hand of God: so it will be at the end of this era: see Revelation 18:20; 19:1, 2.

Before passing on to the next verses, let us take notice of David's thankful acknowledgment of God's restraining grace: "Blessed be the Lord, that has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has *kept* His servant from evil" (v. 39). If we carefully reviewed the details of each day, we should frequently find occasion to admire the sin-preventing providences of God. We may well adopt the language of the Psalmist at the close of a beautiful illustration of the divine mercies: "Whoever is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord" (Psalm 107:43). Let us never miss an opportunity of praising God when He graciously keeps us from committing any evil we had premeditated.

"And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife. And when the servants of David were come to Abigail to Carmel, they spoke unto her, saying, David sent us unto you, to take you to him to wife" (verses 39, 40). The stroke of God's judgment had freed Abigail from a painful situation, and now the workings of His providence rewarded her righteousness. God gave her favor in the eyes of His anointed. David was charmed not only with the beauty of her person and the prudence of her character, but also with her evident piety—the most valuable quality of all in a wife. Abigail being now a widow, and David's own wife living in adultery, be sent messengers with a proposal of marriage to her. This line in the type is strikingly accurate: the Lord Jesus does not court His wife immediately, but employs the ministers of the Gospel, endued with the Holy Spirit, to woo and win sinners unto Himself.

"And she arose, and bowed herself on her face to the earth and said, Behold, let your handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord" (v. 41). Very beautiful is it to see the great modesty and humility with which such a wealthy woman received the advances of David, deeming herself unworthy of such an honor, yes, having such respect for him that she would gladly be one of the meanest servants of his household. She accepted his proposal, and thereby added still another line to this typical picture of conversion: note how in the margin of 2 Chronicles 30:8 faith is represented as to "give the *hand* unto the Lord"!

"And Abigail hastened, and arose, and rode upon an donkey, with five damsels of hers that went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife" (v. 42). Most blessed is this. At the time, David was an homeless wanderer, outlawed; yet Abigail was willing not only to forsake her own house and comfortable position, but to share his trials and endure hardships for his sake. Nevertheless, she knew it would be only for a brief season: she married *in faith,* assured of the fulfillment of God's promises (v. 30) and confident that in due course she would "reign with him"! And this is what true conversion is: a turning of our back upon the old life, willing to suffer the loss of all things for Christ, with faith looking forward to the future.

"David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they were also both of them his wives. But (or "for") Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim" (verses 43, 44). Polygamy, though not in accord with either the law of nature or the law of God, was a custom which prevailed in those degenerate days, which some good men gave in to, though they are not to be commended for it. In taking Ahinoam of Jezreel to wife (and later several others: 2 Samuel 3), David followed the corruption of the times, but from the beginning it was not so, nor is it permissible now since Christ has ushered in "the times of reformation" (Matthew 19:4-6).

CHAPTER TWENTY

His Chastening

1 Samuel 26

Some of our readers may wonder why we have given to the present chapter such a title, and what bearing it has upon the contents of 1 Samuel 26; if so, we would ask them to thoughtfully ponder the closing verses of the preceding chapter. Much is lost by many readers of the Bible through failing to observe the connection between the ending of one chapter and the beginning of another; even when incidents which are totally distinct and different follow each other, a spiritual eye may often discern an intimate moral relation between them, and therein many valuable lessons may be learned. Such is the case here. At first glance there appears to be no logical link uniting the further uncalled-for attack of Saul upon David, and his having taken unto himself a wife a little before; but the two things *are* related as is effect to cause, and here is to be found the key which opens to us the Divine significance of what is now to be before us.

"The way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15). No doubt the primary reference in these words is to the wicked, yet the principle of them unquestionably holds good in the case of the redeemed. In the keeping of God's commandments there is "great reward" (Psalm 19:11), in this life (1 Timothy 4;8) as well as in that which is to come; but in the breaking of God's commandments bitter chastening is sure to follow. Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace (Proverbs 3:17), but he who departs from Wisdom's ways and follows a course of self-will, must expect to smart for it. So it was now in the experience of David. It is true that in case of marital infidelity the Mosaic law permitted the innocent one to obtain a divorce and marry again; but it made no provision for a plurality of wives, and *that* was what David was now guilty of; and for his sin he was sorely chastised.

Ah, my reader, let this truth sink deep into your heart: God is exercising a moral government over the believer as well as the unbeliever, and He will no more wink at the sins of the one than He will of the other. David was saved by grace through faith apart from any good works as the meritorious cause, as truly as we are; but he was also called to be holy in all manner of conversation or behavior, as we are. Grace does not set aside the requirements of Divine holiness, instead, it reigns "through righteousness" (Romans 5:21). And when one who has been saved by grace fails to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts" (Titus 2: 12), then the chastening rod of God falls upon him, that he may be a "partaker of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10). And this, be it noted, is not only a part of the Father's dealings with His *children,* but it is also a part of his ways with His *subjects* as the Moral Ruler of this world.

As we suggested in the seventh chapter of this hook, it was David's being united in marriage to the unbelieving Michal which accounts for the painful experiences he passed through while a member of Saul's household. Trials do not come upon us haphazardly; no, they come from the hand of God. Nor does He act capriciously, but according to the righteous principles of His government. In an earlier chapter we saw how that God graciously protected David when the devil-driven king sought his life, and how that He moved him to return home. Why, then, should His restraining hand be removed, and Saul allowed to go forth again on a blood-thirsty mission? Why should the brief respite David had enjoyed now be so rudely broken? The answer is that God was again using his enemy to chasten David for his recent sin, that he might, by painful experience, learn anew that the way of transgressors *is* hard.

"O that you had hearkened to My commandments! then had your peace been as a river, and your righteousness as the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18). What a difference it makes whether the ways of a Christian please or displease the Ruler of this world: it is the difference of having God *for,* or having Him *against* us—not in the absolute sense, not in the eternal sense, but in His *governmental* dealings with us. When the heart be right with God, then He shows Himself strong on our behalf (2 Chronicles 16:9). When our ways please Him, then He makes even our enemies to be at peace with us (Proverbs 16:7). Then how diligently should we guard our hearts and ponder the path of our feet (Proverbs 4:23, 26). Carelessness invites disaster; disobedience ensures chastening; sinning will withhold good things from us (Jeremiah 5:25).

It is very important to see that while the penal and eternal consequences of the Christian's sins have been remitted by God, because atoned for by Christ, yet the disciplinary and temporal effects thereof are not cancelled—otherwise the saints would never be sick or die. It is not God in His absolute character, acting according to His ineffably holy nature, but God in His official character, acting according to the principles of His righteous government, which deals with the present conduct of His people, rewarding them for their obedience and chastening for disobedience. Hence, when God makes use of the devil and his agents to scourge His people, it is not unto their ultimate destruction, but unto their present plaguing and disciplining. And this is exactly what we see in our present lesson: Saul was allowed to disturb David's rest, but not to take his life. In like manner, the devil is often permitted to whip us, but never to devour us.

"And the Ziphites came unto Saul to Gibeah, saying, Does not David hide himself in the hills of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?" (1 Samuel 26:1). The reader may remember that the Ziphites had shown themselves unfriendly towards David on a former occasion. Was it not then a hazardous thing for him to return unto those parts! How are we to account for his acting so injudiciously, and thus courting danger? Ah, let us recall what was pointed out under 21: 1 in Chapter 8 of this book. When the soul is out of touch with God, when fellowship with Him has been broken by giving way to the lusts of the flesh, the judgment is dulled, and imprudent conduct is sure to be the effect. It is not without reason that godliness is so often designated "wisdom" (that is Psalm 90:12), and that a course of evil doing is "folly."

David had acted imprudently in marrying Abigail; he had committed a grave sin in taking unto wife Ahinoam. We say he had acted "imprudently" in marrying Abigail. The *time* was not propitious for that. He was then a homeless wanderer, and in no condition to give unto a wife the care and devotion to which she is entitled. Holy Scripture declares, "to everything there is a season" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). While on this point, let it be said that, in the judgment of the writer, young men who are out of work and have no good prospects of soon obtaining any, are acting imprudently, yes, rashly, in getting married. Let them possess their souls in patience (Luke 21:19) and wait a more favorable season, and not tempt God.

"And the Ziphites came unto Saul of Gibeah, saying, Does not David hide himself in the hills of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?" If we venture upon the enemy's territory we must expect to be harassed by him. It is probable these Ziphites were fearful that should David succeed Saul on the throne, then he would avenge himself upon them for their previous perfidy: if so, they were now the more anxious that he should be captured and slain. Afraid to tackle him themselves, they sent word to the king of David's present whereabouts. Their message presented a temptation for Saul to return again unto that evil course which he had abandoned, temporarily at least: thus does one evil-doer

"Then Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph" (v. 2). Poor Saul, his goodness was as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it vanished away. "How soon do unsanctified hearts lose the good impressions which their convictions have made upon them, and return with the dog to their vomit" (Matthew Henry). O what need has even the Christian to pray earnestly unto God, that since he still has so much of the tinder of corruption left within, the sparks of temptation may be kept far from him, lest when they come together they are "set on fire of Hell" (James 3:6). The providential restraint of God in causing Saul to leave off pursuing David because the Philistines were invading his territory, had wrought no change *within* him: his evil disposition towards God's anointed was the same as ever; and now that the favorable opportunity to seize David presented itself, he gladly made the most of it.

The action of Saul here provides a solemn illustration of a well known principle: if sin be not dethroned and mortified, it will soon recover its strength, and when a suitable temptation is presented, break out again with renewed force. How often do the servants of God witness souls under deep conviction, followed by a marked reformation, which leads them to believe that a genuine work of grace has taken place within them; only to see them, a little later, return to their sins and become worse than ever. So here: upon receiving word from the Ziphites, Saul's enmity and malice revived, and, like Pharaoh of old, he again hardened his heart, and determined to make another effort to remove his rival. And thus it is with many a one who has been sobered and awed by the Word: after a brief season, Satan and his agents suggest such thoughts as tend to rekindle the smothered flame, and then the lusts of the flesh are again allowed free play. O my reader, beg God to *deepen* your convictions and write His law on your heart.

"And Saul pitched in the hill Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, by the way. But David abode in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul was come in very deed" (verses 3,4). "David neither fled, nor went out to meet Saul, when he was fully certified that he was actually come forth to destroy him! Had a much greater army of uncircumcised Philistines marched against him, he would doubtless have forced them with his small company, and trusted in God for the event; but he would not fight against the 'Lord's anointed'" (Thomas Scott).

"David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul was come in very deed." From the previous verse it would seem David had perceived that some large force was advancing into that part of the country where he and his men were now quartered. Though not certain as to who was at the head of the approaching army, he probably suspected that it was none other than Saul, and therefore did he now send out spies to make sure. He would not fully believe that the king had again dealt so basely with him, until he had the clearest proof of it: thereby does he set us an example not to believe the worst of our enemies until we are really forced to do so by incontestable evidence.

"And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched; and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Net, the captain of his hosts; and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him" (v. 5). Most likely it was in the dusk of the evening that David now went forward to reconnoiter, surveying from close range the order of Saul's camp and the strength of its entrenchments. Though he knew the Lord was his Protector, yet he deemed it necessary to be upon his guard and make use of means for his safety. Well for us when we act as wisely as serpents, but as harmless as doves. It is to be noted that David did not entrust this critical task unto any of his underlings, but performed it in person. The leader ought always to take the lead in the most difficult and dangerous tasks.

"Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with you" (v. 6). David now addressed himself unto two of those who were, most likely, his closest attendants, asking who was bold enough to volunteer in accompanying him on an exceedingly dangerous enterprise—that of two men entering a camp of three thousand soldiers. There is little room for doubt that David was prompted by the Spirit to act thus, from whom he probably received assurance of divine protection: thereby he would be afforded another opportunity of demonstrating to Saul and Israel his innocency. Ahimelech was probably a proselyted Hittite, and not having that faith in the God of Israel which such a severe testing called for, held back, but Abishai, who was David's own nephew (1 Chronicles 2: 15, 16), readily agreed to accompany David.

"So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay around about him" (v. 7). What an extraordinary situation now presented itself before the eyes of David and his lone companion? Where was the guard? Had the watchmen failed at their point of duty? There was none to sound an alarm: the entire camp was wrapped in slumber so profound that, though the two uninvited visitors walked and talked in their midst, none was aroused. Ah, how easily can *God* render impotent an entire host of enemies! All the forces of nature are under His immediate control: He can awaken from the sleep of death, and He can put the living into such a heavy sleep that none can awaken them. There was Saul and all his forces as helpless as though they were in fetters of iron.

"Then said Abishai to David, God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray you, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time" (v. 8). In view of what had transpired in the cave (24:4-6), no doubt Abishai thought that though David scrupled to kill Saul with his own hand, yet he would allow one of his officers to slay him: thus would an end be put to the difficulties and dangers unto himself and his adherents, by cutting off at one blow their inveterate persecutor; the more so, since Providence had again placed Saul in their power, apparently for this very purpose. This illustrates the fact that often it requires as much godly resolution to restrain the excesses of zealous but unspiritual friends, as it does to stand firm against the rage of incensed enemies.

A powerful temptation was here set before David. Had their positions been reversed, would Saul hesitate to slay him? Why, then, should David allow sentiment to prevail? Moreover, did it not look as though God had arranged things to this very end? The previous opportunity was not nearly so strongly marked as this one: Saul had, as it were, accidentally wandered into the cave, but here was something extraordinary—the entire camp was wrapped in a supernatural slumber. Furthermore, his attendant urges upon him that it *was* the will of God to now take things into his own hand. But David was not to be moved from his loyalty to the throne. First, he told Abishai that it would be *sinful* to lay violent hands upon one whose person was sacred (v. 10), for Saul had been appointed by God and anointed for his office. Second, he declared it was *unnecessary:* God would, sooner or later, cut him off (verses 10, 11). Remembering how the Lord had just before smitten Nabal, he left it to Him to avenge his cause.

"So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they got them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked; for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them" (v. 12). Here we see David as a type of Christ in His wonderful forbearance toward His enemies, and in His faith in God: 1 Peter 2:23. David's procedure was an effective method of convincing Saul that he *could* have slain him. And what a proof to the king that the Lord had departed from him, and was protecting David! "Thus do we lose our strength and comfort when we are careless and secure, and off our watch" (Matthew Henry), gives the practical lesson for us in Saul's losing his spear and cruse of water.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

His Final Words With Saul

1 Samuel 26

"There are few periods in the life of David in Which his patient endurance was displayed more conspicuously than in his last interview with Saul. Saul had once more fallen into his power; but David again refused to avail himself of the advantage. He would not deliver himself by means that God did not sanction, nor stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed. Recognition of the excellency of David, and confession of his own sin, was extorted, even from the lips of Saul" (B. W. Newton).

In the preceding chapter we followed David and his lone attendant as they entered the camp of Saul, and secured the king's spear and the cruse of water which lay at his head. Having accomplished his purpose, David now retired from his sleeping enemies. Carrying with him clear evidence that he had been in their very midst, he determined to let them know what had transpired, for he was far from being ashamed of his conduct—when our actions are innocent, we care not who knows of them. David now stations himself within hailing distance, yet sufficiently removed that they could not come at him quickly or easily. "Then David went over to the other side and stood on the top of an hill afar off; a great space being between them" (1 Samuel 26:13). This was evidently on some high point facing the "hill of Hachilah" (v. 3), a wide valley lying between.

"And David cried to the people, and to Abner the son of Her, saying, Answer you not, Abner?" (v. 14) David now hailed the sleeping camp with a loud voice, addressing himself particularly unto Abner, who was the general of the army. Apparently he had to call more than once before Abner was fully aroused. "Then Abner answered and said, Who are you that cry to the king?" Probably those were words both of anger and contempt: annoyance at being so rudely disturbed from his rest, and scorn as he recognized the voice of the speaker. Abner had so lightly esteemed David and his men, that he had not considered it necessary to keep awake personally, nor even to appoint sentinels to watch the camp. The force of his question was, Whom do you think you are, that you should address the monarch of Israel! Let not the servants of God deem it a strange thing that those occupying high offices in the world consider them quite beneath their notice.

"And David said to Abner, are not you a valiant man? and who is like to you in Israel? wherefore then have you not kept your lord the king? for there came one of the people in to destroy the king your lord" (v. 15). David was not to be brow-beaten. "The wicked flee when no man pursues: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). Where the fear of God rules the heart, man cannot intimidate. Paul before Agrippa, Luther before the Diet of Worms, John Knox before the bloody Queen Mary, are cases in point. My reader, if you tremble before worms of the dust, it is because you do not tremble before God. David boldly charged Abner with his criminal neglect. First, he reminded him that he was a valiant "man," that is a man in office, and therefore duty bound to guard the person of the king. Second, he bantered him in view of the high position he held. Third, he informed him of how the king's life had been in danger that night as the result of his culpable carelessness. It was tantamount to telling him he was disgraced forever.

"This thing is not good that you have done. As the Lord lives you are worthy to die, because you have not kept your master, the Lord's anointed" (v. 16). By martial law Abner and his officers had forfeited their lives. It should be duly noted that David was not here speaking as a private person to Saul's general, but as the servant and mouthpiece of God, as is evident from "as the Lord lives." "And now, see where the kings spear is, and the cruse of water that was at his bolster." David continued to banter him: the force of his word was, Who is *really* the king's friend—you who neglected him and left him exposed, or I that spared him when he was at my mercy! You are stirring up Saul against me, and pursuing me as one who is unfit to live; but *who,* now, is worthy to die? it was plainly a case of the biter being bit.

"And Saul knew David's voice, and said, Is this your voice, my son David?" (v. 17) The king at once recognized the voice of him that was denouncing Abner, and addressed him in terms of cordial friendship. See here another illustration of the instability and fickleness of poor fallen man: one day thirsting after David's blood, and the next day speaking to him in terms of affection! What reliance can be placed in such a creature? How it should make us the more revere and adore the One who declares, "I am the Lord, I change not" (Malachi 3:6). "And David said, it is my voice, my lord, O king" (v. 17). Very beautiful is this. Though David could not admire the variableness and treachery of Saul's character, yet he respected his office, and is here shown paying due deference to the throne: he not only owned Saul's crown, but acknowledged that he was his sovereign. Tacitly, it was a plain denial that David was the rebellious insurrectionist Saul had supposed.

"And he said, Wherefore does my lord thus pursue after his servant? for what have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?" (v. 18). Once more (cf. 1 Samuel 24:11, etc.) David calmly remonstrated with the king: what ground was there for his being engaged in such a blood-thirsty mission? First, David was not an enemy, but ready to act as his "servant' and further the court's interests; thus he suggested it was against Saul's own good to persecute one who was ready to do his bidding and advance his kingdom. Equally unreasonable and foolish have been other rulers who hounded the servants of God: none are more loyal to the powers that be, none do as much to really strengthen their hands, as the true ministers of Christ; and therefore, they who oppose them are but forsaking their own mercies.

Second, by pursuing David, Saul was driving him from his master and lawful business, and compelling to flee the one who wished to follow him with respect. Oh, the exceeding sinfulness of sin: it is not only unreasonable and unjust (and therefore denominated "iniquity"), but cruel, both in its nature and in its effects. Third, he asked, "What have I done? or what evil is in mine hand?" Questions which a clear conscience (and that only) is never afraid of asking. It was the height of wickedness for Saul to persecute him as a criminal, when he was unable to charge him with any crime. But let us observe how that by these honest questions David was a type of Him who challenged His enemies with "which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46), and again, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smite you Me?" (John 18:23).

"Now therefore, I pray you, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If the Lord have stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering" (v. 19). It is likely that David had paused and waited for Saul to make reply to his searching queries. Receiving no answer, he continued his address. David himself now suggested two possible explanations for the king's heartless course, First, it might be that the Lord Himself was using him thus to righteously chastise His servant for some fault. It was *the divine side* of things which first engaged David's mind: "If the Lord has stirred you up against me." This is a likelihood which should always exercise the conscience of a saint, for the Lord "does not afflict willingly" (Lam. 3:33), but usually because *we* give Him occasion to use the rod upon us. Much of this would be spared, if we kept shorter accounts with God and more unsparingly judged ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:31). It is always a timely thing to say with Job, "Show me wherefore You contend with me" (10:2).

Should the Lord convict him of any offense, then "let him accept an offering": David would then make his peace with God and present the required sin offering. For the Christian, this means that, having humbled himself before God, penitently confessed his sins, he now pleads afresh the merits of Christ's blood, for the remission of their governmental consequences. But secondly, if God was not using Saul to chastise David (as indeed He was), then if evil men had incited Saul to use such violent measures, the divine vengeance would assuredly overtake them—they were accursed before God. It is blessed to note the mildness of David on this occasion: so far from reviling the king, and attributing his wickedness unto the evil of his own heart, every possible excuse was made for his conduct.

"But if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods" (v. 19). This was what pained David the most: not the being deprived of an honorable position as servant to Saul, not the being driven from home, but being exiled from Canaan and cut off from the public means of grace. No longer could he worship in the tabernacle, but forced out into the deserts and mountains, he would soon be obliged to leave the Holy Land. By their actions, his enemies were saying in effect, "Go, serve other gods": driving him into a foreign country, where he would be surrounded by temptations. It is blessed to see that it was the having to live among

idolaters, and not merely among *strangers,* which worried him the more.

Ah, nothing but the sufficiency of divine grace working in David's heart could, under such circumstances, have kept him from becoming utterly disgusted with the religion which Saul, Abner, and his fellows professed. But for *that,* David had said, "If these be 'Israelites,' then let me become and die a Philistine!" Yes, and probably more than one or two readers of this chapter have, like the writer, passed through a similar situation. We expect unkind, unjust, treacherous, merciless, treatment at the hands of the world; but when they came from those whom we have regarded as true brethren and sisters in Christ, we were shaken to the very foundation, and but for the mighty power of the Spirit working within, would have said, "If *that* is Christianity, I will have no more to do with it!" But, blessed be His name, God's grace *is* sufficient.

"Now therefore let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one does hunt a partridge in the mountains" (v. 20). In these words David completed his address to Saul. First, he gave solemn warning that if he shed his blood, it would fall before the face of the Lord, and He would not hold him guiltless. Second, he argued that it was far beneath the dignity of the monarch of Israel to be chasing the son of Jesse, whom he here likens unto "a flea"—an insignificant and worthless thing. Third, he appeals again to the king's conscience by resembling his case to men hunting a "partridge"—an innocent and harmless bird, which when attacked by men offers no resistance, but flies away; such had been David's attitude. Now we are to see what effect all this had upon the king.

"Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David; for I will no more do you harm, because my soul was precious in your eyes this day; behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly" (v. 21). This is more than the wretched king had acknowledged on a former occasion, and yet it is greatly to be feared that he had no true sense of his wickedness or genuine repentance for it. Rather was it very similar to the remorseful cry of Judas, when he said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood" (Matthew 27: 4). These words of Saul's were the bitter lament of one who, too late, realized he had made shipwreck of his life. He owned that he had sinned—broken God's law—by so relentlessly persecuting David. He besought his son to return, assuring him that he would do him no more injury; but he must have realized that his promises could not be relied upon. He intimated that David's magnanimity had thoroughly melted his heart, which shows that even the worst characters are capable of recognizing the good deeds of God's people.

"Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." O what a fool he had been: in opposing the man after God's own heart, in alienating his own son, in so sorely troubling Israel, and in bringing madness and sorrow upon himself! And how exceedingly had he "erred": by driving away from his court the one who would have been his best friend, by refusing to learn his lesson on the former occasion (1 Samuel 24), by vainly attempting to fight against the Most High! Unbelieving reader, suffer us to point out that these words, "I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly," are the wail of the lost in Hell. Now it is too late they realize what fools they were in despising the day of their opportunity, in neglecting their souls' eternal interests, in living and dying in sin. They realize they "erred exceedingly" in ignoring the claims of God, desecrating His holy Sabbaths, shunning His Word, and despising His Son. Will this yet be *your* cry?

"And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it" (v. 22). This at once shows the estimate which David placed on the words of the king: he did not dare to trust him and return the spear in person, still less accompany him home. Good impressions quickly pass from such characters. No good words or fair professions entitle those to our confidence who have long sinned against the light. Such people resemble those spoken of in James 1:23, 24, who hear the word and do it not, and are like unto a man "beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholds himself, goes his way, *and immediately forgets* what manner of man he was." Thus it was with Saul; he now said that he had sinned, played the fool and erred exceedingly, yet this deterred him not from seeking unto the witch of Endor!

"The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the Lord delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed" (v. 23). This was very solemn, David now appealed to God to be the Judge of the controversy between himself and Saul, as One who was inflexibly just to render unto every man according to his works. David's conscience is quite dear in the matter, so he need not hesitate to ask the righteous One to decide the issue: good for us is it when we too are able to do likewise. In its final analysis, this verse was really a prayer: David asked for divine protection on the ground of the mercy which he had shown to Saul.

"And, behold, as your life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation" (v. 24). It is to be noted that David made no direct reply to what Saul had said, but his language shows plainly that he placed no reliance on the king's promises. He does not say, "As your life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in *your* eyes," but rather, "in the eyes of the Lord." His confidence was in God alone, and though further trials awaited him, he counted upon His power and goodness to bring him safely through them.

"Then Saul said to David, Blessed be you, my son David: you shall both do great things, and also shall still prevail" (v. 25). Such were the final words of Saul unto David: patient faith had so far prevailed as to extort a blessing even from its adversary. Saul owned there was a glorious future before David, for he who humbles himself shall be exalted. There was a clear conviction in the king's mind that David was favored by God, yet that conviction in nowise checked him in his own downward course: convictions which lead to no amendment only increase condemnation. "So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place" (v. 25). Thus they parted, to meet no more in this world. Saul went forward to his awful doom; David waited God's time to ascend the throne.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

His Unbelief

1 Samuel 27

After Saul's departure (1 Samuel 26:25), David took stock of his situation, but unfortunately he left God out of his calculations. During tedious and trying delays, and especially when outward things seem to be all going against us, there is grave danger of giving way to unbelief. Then it is we are very apt to forget former mercies, and fear the worst. And when faith staggers, obedience wavers, and self-expedients are frequently employed, which later, involve us in great difficulties. So it was now with the one whose varied life we are seeking to trace. As David considered the situation he was still in, remembered the inconstancy and treachery of Saul, things appeared very gloomy to him. Knowing full well the king's jealousy, and perhaps reasoning that he would now regard him with a still more evil eye, since God so favored him, David feared the worst.

"The moment in which faith attains any triumph, is often one of peculiar danger. Self-confidence may be engendered by success, and pride may spring out of honor that humility has won; or else, if faithfulness, after having achieved its victory, still finds itself left in the midst of danger and sorrow, the hour of triumph may be succeeded by one of undue depression and sorrowful disappointment. And thus it was with David. He had obtained this great moral victory; but his circumstances were still unchanged. Saul yet continued to be king of Israel: himself remained a persecuted outcast. As the period, when he had before spared the life of Saul, had been followed by days of lengthened sorrow, so he probably anticipated an indefinite prolongation of similar sufferings, and his heart quailed at the prospect" (B. W. Newton).

Solemn is it to mark the contrast between what is found at the close of 1 Samuel 26 and that which is recorded in the opening verses of the next chapter. To question the faithfulness and goodness of God is fearful wickedness, though there are some who regard it as a very trivial offense; in fact, there are those who well-near exalt the doubts and fears of Christians into fruits and graces, and evidences of great advancement in spiritual experience. It is sad indeed to find a certain class of men petting and pampering people in unbelief and distrust of God, and being in this matter unfaithful both to their Master and to the souls of His saints. Not that we are an advocate for smiting the feeble of the flock, but their *sins* we must denounce. Any teaching which causes Christians to pity themselves for their failings and falls, is evil, and to deny that doubting the loving kindness of God is a very heinous offense, is highly reprehensible.

"And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 27:1). "And yet the hour of Saul's fall and of his own deliverance was close at hand. The Lord was about to interfere, and to extricate His faithful servant from his long and sore afflictions. Almost the very last hour of his trial under Saul had come, yet at that last moment he failed: so hard is it for 'patience to have her *perfect* work.' David had just said, 'Let *the Lord* deliver me out of all tribulation.' It was a strong, and no doubt a sincere expression of confidence in God; but the feeling of the heart, as well as the expression of the lips, may often exceed the reality of our spiritual strength, and therefore, not unfrequently, when strong expressions have been used, they who have used them are tested by some peculiar trial; that so, if there be weakness, it may be detected, and no flesh glory in the presence of God" (B. W. Newton).

"And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." Such a conclusion was positively erroneous. There was *no evidence in proof* thereof: he had been placed in perilous positions before, but God had never deserted him. His trials had been many and varied, but God had always made for him "a way to escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13). It was therefore *contrary to* the evidence. Once he had said, "your servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them" (1 Samuel 17:36). Why not reason like that now? and say "Your servant slew Goliath, was delivered from the javelin of a madman, escaped the evil devices of Doeg, and so he shall continue to escape out of the hand of Saul!" Moreover, David's rash conclusion was *contrary to promise:* Samuel had poured upon his head the anointing oil as God's earnest that he should be king—how then could he be slain by Saul?

How is David's unbelief to be accounted for? "First, because he was a man. The best of men are men at the best, and man at his best is such a creature that well might David himself say, 'Lord, what is man?' . . . If faith never gave place to unbelief, we might be tempted to lift up the believer into a demigod, and think him something more than mortal. That we might see that a man full of faith is still a man, that we might glory in infirmities, since by them the power of God is the more clearly proved, therefore God was pleased to let the feebleness of man grievously show itself. Ah, it was not David who achieved those former victories, but *God's grace* in David; and now, when that is removed for a moment, see what Israel's champion becomes!

"Second, David had been exposed to a very long trial; not for one week, but for month after month, he had been hunted like a partridge, upon the mountains. Now a man could bear one trial, but a perpetuity of tribulations is very hard to bear. Such was David's trial: always safe, but always harassed; always secure through God, but always hunted about by his foe. No place could give him any ease. If he went unto Keilah, then the citizens would deliver him up; if he went into the woods of Ziph, then the Ziphites betrayed him; if he went even to the priest of God, there was that dog of a Doeg to go to Saul, and accuse the priest; even in Engedi or in Adullam he was not secure; secure, I grant you, in God, but always persecuted by his foe. Now, this was enough to make the wise man mad, and to make the faithful man doubt. Do not judge too harshly of David; at least judge just as hardly of yourselves.

"Third, David had passed through some strong excitements of mind. Just a day or so before he had gone forth with Abishai in the moonlight to the field where Saul and his hosts lay sleeping. They passed the outer circle where the common soldiers lay, and quietly and stealthily the two heroes passed without awakening any. They came at last to the spot where the captains of the hundreds slept, and they trod over their slumbering bodies without arousing them. They reached the spot where Saul lay, and David had to hold back Abishai's hand from slaying him; so he escaped from this temptation, as he had aforetime. Now, brethren, a man may do these great things helped by God, but do you know it is a sort of natural law with us, that after a strong excitement *there is a reaction!* It was thus with Elijah after his victory over the prophets of Baal: later, he ran from Jezebel, and cried 'Let me die.'

"But there was another reason, for we are not to exculpate David. He sinned, and that not merely through infirmity, but through evil of heart. It seems to us that David had *restrained prayer.* In every other action of David you find some hint that he asked counsel of the Lord . . . But this time what did he talk with? Why, with the most deceitful thing that he could have found—with his own heart . . . Having restrained prayer, he did the fool's act: he forgot his God, he looked only at his enemy, and it was no wonder that when he saw the strength of the cruel monarch, and the pertinacity of his persecution, he said 'I shall one day fall before him.' Brothers and sisters, would you wish to hatch the egg of unbelief until it turns into a scorpion? Restrain prayer! Would you see evils magnified and mercies diminish? Would you find your tribulations increased sevenfold and your faith diminished in proportion? Restrain prayer!" (Condensed from C. H. Spurgeon).

"I shall now perish one day." Ah, has not this been the cry of many a Satan-harassed saint! He looks within and sees what God has done for him: that he has desires and aspirations which he never had before conversion, so that the things he once hated he now loves. He realizes there has been a radical change, such as mere nature could not possibly affect, and his spirit rejoices in the hope set before him. *But* he also sees so very much corruption within him, and finds so much weakness that aids and abets that corruption; he sees temptations and sore trials awaiting him, and cold despondency falls upon his heart, and doubts and questions vex his mind. He is tripped up and has a bad fall, and then Satan roars in his ear, "Now God has forsaken you," and he is almost ready to sink into despair.

"And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maoch king of Gath" (v. 2). Under the pressure of trials, *relief* is what the flesh most desires, and unless the mind be stayed upon God, there is grave danger of seeking to take things into our own hands. Such was the case with David: having leaned unto his own understanding, being occupied entirely with the things of sight and sense, he now sought relief in his own way, and followed a course which was the very opposite to that which the Lord had enjoined him (1 Samuel 22:5). There God had told him to depart from the land of Moab and go into the land of Judah, and there He had marvelously preserved him. How this shows us what poor weak creatures the best of us are, and how low our graces sink when the Spirit does not renew them!

In what is here before us (v. 2), we are shown the ill effects of David's unbelief. "First, it made him do a foolish thing; the same foolish thing which he had rued once before. Now we say a burnt child always dreads the flame; but David had been burnt, and yet, in his unbelief, he puts his hand into the same fire again. He went once to Achish, king of Gath, and the Philistines identified him, and being greatly afraid, David feigned himself mad in their hands, and they drove him away. Now he goes to the same Achish again! Yes, and mark it, my brethren, although you and I know the bitterness of sin, yet if we are left to our own unbelief, we shall fall into the same sin again. I know we have said, 'No; never, never; I know so much by experience what an awful thing this is.' Your experience is not worth a rush to you apart from the continual restraints of grace. If your faith fail, everything else goes down with it; and you hoary-headed professor, will be as a big fool as a very boy, if God lets you alone.

"Second, he went over to the Lord's enemies. Would you have believed it: he who killed Goliath, sought a refuge in Goliath's land; he who smote the Philistines trusts in the Philistines; nay, more, he who was Israel's champion, becomes the chamberlain to Achish, for Achish said, 'Therefore will I make you keeper of my head forever,' and David became thus the captain of the body-guard of the king of Philistia, and helped preserve the life of one who was the enemy of God's Israel. Ah, if we doubt God, we shall soon be numbered among God's foes. Inconsistency will win us over into the ranks of His enemies, and they will be saying, 'What do these Hebrews here?' 'The just shall live by faith, but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him'—the two sentences are put together as if the failure of our faith would surely lead to a turning back to sin.

"Third, he was on the verge of still worse sin—of overt acts of warfare against the Lord's people. David's having become the friend of Achish, when Achish went to battle against Israel, he said to him, 'Know you assuredly, that you shall go with me to battle, you and your men'; and David professed his willingness to go. We believe it was only a feigned willingness; but then, you see, we convict him again of falsehood. It is true that God interposed and prevented him fighting against Israel, but this was no credit to David, for you know, brethren, we are guilty of a sin, even if we do not commit it, if we are willing to commit it. The last effect of David's sin was this: it brought him into great trial" (C. H. Spurgeon).

O my readers, what a solemn warning is all of this for our hearts! How it shows us the wickedness of unbelief and the fearful fruits which that evil root produces. It is true that David had no reason to trust Saul, but he had every reason to continue trusting God. But alas, unbelief is the sin of all others which does so easily beset us. It is inherent in our very nature, and it is more impossible to root it out by any exertions of ours, than it is to change the features of our countenances. What need is there for us to cry daily, "Lord, I believe, help *You* mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Let me see in David myself, my very nothingness. O to fully realize that in our best moments, we can never trust ourselves too little, nor God too much.

"And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him unto Achish, the son of Maoch, king of Gath" (v. 2). Here we see David not only forsaking the path of duty, but joining interests with the enemies of God: this we must never do; no, not even for self-preservation, or out of care for our family. As another has said, "It is in one sense, a very easy matter to get out of the place of trial; but then we get out of the place of blessing also." Such is generally, if not always the case, with the children of God. No matter how sore the trial, how pressing our circumstances, or how acute our need, to "rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him" (

Psalm 37:7), is not only the course which most honors Him, but which, in the long run, spares us much great confusion and trouble which results when *we* seek to extricate ourselves.

"And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household" (v. 3). David's circumstances upon entering into Gath this time were decidedly different from what they had been on a previous occasion (1 Samuel 21:10-15): then he entered secretly, now openly; then as a person unknown, now as the recognized enemy of Israel's king; then alone, now with six hundred men; then he was driven hence, now he probably had been invited thither. Apparently he met with a kindly reception—probably because the king of Gath now hoped to use him in his own service: either that he could employ David against Israel, or secure an advantageous alliance with him, if ever he came to the throne. Thus the plan of David appeared to meet with success: at least he found a quiet dwelling-place. Providence seemed to be smiling

"And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives: Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's wife" (v. 3). Ah, has not the Holy Spirit supplied the key (in the second half of this verse) which explains to us David's sad lapse? It was his "two wives" which had displeased the Lord! We entitled the last chapter but one David's "chastening" and sought to point out the connection between what is found at the end of 1 Samuel 25 and that which is recorded in 1 Samuel 26, namely, the renewed attack of Saul upon him. That divine "chastening" was now continued, and may be discerned by the

In this chapter we have sought to show the awfulness of unbelief, and the evil character of the fruits that issue from it; and how that the graces of the strongest Christian soon became feeble unless they are renewed by the Spirit. But let it be now pointed out that God does not act capriciously in this: if our graces be not renewed, the fault lies in ourselves. It is by working backward from effect to cause, that we may here learn the most important lesson of all. (1) David sinned grievously in seeking refuge among the enemies of the Lord. (2) He went to them without having sought divine guidance. (3) He leaned unto his own understanding, and reasoned that it was best for him to go to Gath. (4) He acted thus because he had given way to unbelief. (5) He gave way to unbelief because his faith was not divinely renewed and prayer in him had been choked. (6) His faith was not renewed because the Holy Spirit was grieved over his sin! Re-read these six points in their inverse order.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

His Stay at Ziklag

1 Samuel 27

One of the chief differences between the Holy Spirit's description of Biblical characters and the delineations in human biographies is, that the former has faithfully presented their failures and falls, showing us that they were indeed men of "like passions with us"; whereas the latter (with very rare exceptions) record little else than the fair and favorable side of their subjects, leaving the impression they were more angelic than human. Biographies need to be read sparingly, especially modern ones, and then with due caution (remembering that there is much "between the lines" not related), lest a false estimate of the life of a Christian be formed, and the *honest* reader be driven to despair. But God has painted the features of Biblical characters in the colors of reality and truth, and thus we find that "as in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man" (Proverbs 27:19).

The *practical* importance (and it is *that* which should ever be our first and chief quest as we read and ponder the Scriptures) of what has just been pointed out should preserve both preacher and hearer from a one-sided idea of Christian experience. A saint on earth is not a sinless being; nor, on the other hand, does sin have complete dominion over him. In consequence of both the "flesh" and the "spirit" still indwelling him, in *"many* things" he offends (James 3:2), and in many things he pleases God. The "old man" is not only still alive (though the Christian is to "reckon" it as being *judicially* dead before God: Romans 6:11), but is constantly active; and though divine grace restrain it from breaking forth into much outward evil, yet it defiles all our inner being, and pollutes our best endeavors both Godward and manward (Romans 7:14-25). Nevertheless, the "new man" is also active, producing that which is glorifying to God.

It is because of this *dual* experience of the Christian that we are ever in danger of concentrating too much on the one aspect, to the ignoring of the other. Those with a pessimistic turn of mind, need to watch against dwelling too much on the gloomy side of the Christian life, and spending too much time in Job and the Lamentations, to the neglect of the later Psalms and the epistle to the Philippians. In the past, a certain class of writers occupied themselves almost exclusively with the contemplation of human depravity and its fearful workings in the saint, conveying the idea that a constant mourning over indwelling sin and groaning over its activities was the only mark of high spiritual experience. Such people are only happy when they are miserable. We counsel those who have been strongly influenced by such teaching, to turn frequently to John's Gospel, chapters 14 to 17, and turn each verse into prayer *and praise.*

On the other side, those with a buoyant temperament and optimistic turn of mind need to watch against the tendency to appropriate and meditate upon the promises to the almost total ignoring of the precepts of Scripture; to strive against lightness and superficiality, and to be careful they do not mistake exuberance of natural spirits for the steadier and deeper flow of spiritual joy. To be all the time dwelling upon the Christian's standing, his privileges and blessings, to the neglect of his state, obligations and failures, will beget pride and self-righteousness. Such people need to prayerfully ponder Romans 7, the first half of Hebrews 12, and much in 1 Peter. Sinful self and all its wretched failures should be sufficiently noticed so as to keep us in the dust before God. Christ and His great salvation should be contemplated so as to lift us above self and fill the soul with thanksgiving.

The above meditations have been suggested by that portion of David s life which is now to engage our attention. The more it be carefully pondered, the more should we be delivered from entertaining an erroneous conception of the experience and history of a saint. Not that we are to seize upon these sad blemishes in David to *excuse* our own faults—no indeed, that would be wickedness of the worst kind; but we are to be *humbled* by the realization that the same evil nature indwells *us,* and produces works in you and me equally vile. Those who are *surprised* that the Psalmist should act as he here did, must be woefully ignorant of the "plague" of their own hearts, and blind unto sins in their own lives which are just as abominable in the sight of the Holy One as were those of David's.

In our last chapter we saw that unbelief and fear so gained the upper hand over David, that he exclaimed, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 27:1). And yet, probably only a short while before, this same David had declared, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident" (Psalm 27:3). Yes, and has not the reader, when in close communion with the Lord, and when the sails of faith were fully spread and filled with the breeze of the Spirit, said or felt the same? And, alas that it should be so, has not this confidence waned, and then disappeared before some fresh trial! How these sad lapses should show us *ourselves,* and produce real humility and self abasement. How often expressions from our own lips in the past condemn us in the present!

Then we pointed out that, "under the pressure of trial, *relief* is what the flesh most desires." Perhaps the reader may ask, "but is not that natural?" Yes indeed, but is it *spiritual?* Our first desire in trial, as in everything else, should be that *God* may be honored, and for this, we should earnestly seek grace to so conduct ourselves that we may "glorify the Lord in the fires" (Isaiah 24:15). Our next concern should be that our *soul* may profit from the painful experience, and for this we should beg the Lord to graciously *sanctify it* unto our lasting good. But alas, when unbelief dominates us, *God* is forgotten, and deliverance, our own case, obsess the mind; and hence it is that—unless divine grace interpose—we seek relief in the wrong quarter and by unspiritual means. Thus it was here with David: he and his men passed over unto Achish, the king of Gath.

"And David dwelt with Achish, he and his men, every man with his household" (v. 3). From these words it seems that Achish, the Philistine, made no demur against David and his men entering his territory; rather does it look as though he met with a friendly and kindly reception. Thus, from present appearances—the obtaining, at last, a quiet dwelling-place—it seemed that the fleshly plan of David was meeting with real success, that Providence was smiling upon him. Yes, it is often this way at *first* when a Christian takes things into his own hands: to carnal reason the sequel shows he did the right thing. Ah, but later on, he discovers otherwise. One false step is followed by another, just as the telling of a lie is usually succeeded by other lies to cover it. So it was now with David: he went from bad to worse.

"And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him" (v. 4). This too would seem to confirm the thought that David had acted wisely, and that God was blessing his worldly scheme, for his family and people now rested safely from the approaches of their dreaded foe. But when everything is going smoothly with the Christian, and the enemy ceases to harass him, then is the time, generally speaking, when he needs to suspect that something is wrong with his testimony, and beg God to show him what it is. Nor was Saul's cessation of hostility due to any improvement of character, but because he dared not to come where David now was. "Thus many seem to leave their sins, but really their sins leave them; they would persist in them if they could" (Matthew Henry).

"And David said unto Achish, If I have now found grace in your eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" (v. 5). David knew from experience how jealous were kings and their favorites, so to prevent the envy of Achish's courtiers he deemed it well not to remain too near and receive too many favors at his hands. Probably the idolatry and corruption which abounded in the royal city made David desirous of getting his family and people removed therefrom. But in the light of the sequel, it seems that the principle motive which prompted him to make this request was, that he might have a better opportunity to fall upon some of the enemies of Israel without the king of Gath being aware of it. The practical lesson for us is, that when we forsake the path of God's appointment a spirit of restlessness and discontent is sure to possess us.

David presented his request to Achish very modestly: "give me a place in *some* town in the country that I may dwell there, where they could enjoy greater privacy and more freedom from the idolatry of the land. Six hundred men and their families would crowd the royal city, and might prove quite a burden; while there was always the danger of the subjects of Achish regarding David as a *rival* in state and dignity. But to what a low level had God's anointed descended when he speaks of himself as the "servant" of Achish! How far from communion with the Lord was he, when one of the uncircumcised is to choose his dwelling-place for him! A child of God is "the Lord's *free* man" (1 Corinthians 7:22): yes, but to maintain this in a practical way, he must walk in faith and obedience to Him; otherwise he will be brought in bondage to the creature, as David was.

"Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day:" (v. 6). Originally this city had been given to the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:31), then to Simeon (John 19:5), though it seems that neither of them possessed it, but that it came into the hands of the Philistines. "Wherefore Ziklag pertained unto the kings of Judah unto this day." Being given unto David, who shortly after became king, this section was annexed to the crown-lands, and ever after it was part of the portion of the kings of Judah: so that it was given to David not as a temporary possession, but, under God, as a permanent one for his descendants. Truly, the ways of the Lord are past finding out.

"And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months" (v. 7). "But rest reached by self-will or disobedience is anything rather than peace to the heart that fears God, and loves His service. David could not forget that Israel, whom he had forsaken, were God's people; nor that the Philistines, whom he had joined, were God's enemies. He could not but remember his own peculiar relation to God and to His people—for Samuel had anointed him, and even Saul had blessed him as the destined king of Israel. His conscience therefore, must have been ill at ease; and the stillness and rest of Ziklag would only cause him to be more sensible of its disquietude" (B. W. Newton).

"And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: for those nations were of old the inhabitants of the land" (v. 8). "When the consciences of God's servants tells them that their position is wrong, one of their devices not unfrequently is, to give themselves, with fresh energy, to the attainment of some right end; as if rightly directed, or successful energy, could atone for committed evil, and satisfy the misgivings of a disquieted heart. Accordingly, David, still retaining the self-gained rest of Ziklag, resolved that it should not be the rest of inactivity, but that he would thence put forth fresh energies against the enemies of God and of His people. The Amalekites were near. The Amalekites were they of whom the Lord had sworn that He would have war with Amalek from generation to generation. David therefore went up against them, and triumphed" (B. W. Newton).

Those which David and his men invaded were some of the original tribes which inhabited Canaan, and were such as had escaped the sword of Saul, and had fled to more distant parts. His attack upon them was not an act of cruelty, for those people had long before been divinely sentenced to destruction. Yet though they were the enemies of the Lord and His people, David's attack upon them was ill timed, and more likely than not the chief motive which prompted him was the obtaining of food and plunder for his forces. "Nothing could be more complete than his success: 'He smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive; and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the donkeys, and the camels, and the apparel.' Ziklag was enriched with spoil, and that the spoil of the enemies of the Lord. What prosperity then could be greater—what apparently more immediately from God?" (B. W. Newton)

A solemn warning, which we do well to take to heart, is pointed for us in verses 8, 9, namely, not to measure the right or wrong of a course of conduct by the *success* which appears to attend it. This principle is now being flagrantly disregarded, the scripturalness or unscripturalness of an action concerns few professing Christians today: so long as it seems to produce good results, this is all that matters. Worldly devices are brought into the "church," fleshly and high-pressure methods are adopted by "evangelists," and so long as crowds are drawn, the young people "held," and "converts" made, it is argued that the end justifies the means. If "souls are being saved," the great majority are prepared to wink at almost anything today, supposing that the "blessing of God" (?) is a sure proof that nothing serious is wrong. So the children of Israel might have reasoned when the waters flowed from the rock which Moses disobediently smote in his anger. So David might have concluded when such success attended his attack upon the Amalekites! To judge by visible results is walking by sight; to measure everything by Holy Writ and reject all that is out of harmony therewith, is walking by faith.

"And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the donkeys, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish" (v. 9). Mark well the closing words of this verse: one had thought that Achish was the last man whom David would wish to see at this time. It had been far more prudent had he returned quietly to Ziklag, but as we pointed out in a previous chapter, when a saint is out of communion with God, and controlled by unbelief, he no longer acts according to the dictates of common sense. A striking and solemn illustration of that fact is here before us. O that writer and reader may lay this well to heart: *faith and wisdom* are inseparably linked together. Nothing but folly can issue from an unbelieving heart, that is, from a heart which has not been won by divine grace.

"And Achish said, Where have you made a road today?" (v. 10). No doubt the king of Gath was surprised, as he had reason to be, when he saw David and his men so heavily laden with their booty, and therefore does he inquire where they had been. Sad indeed is it to hear the reply given: "And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites." Though not a downright lie, yet it was an equivocation, made with the design of deceiving, and therefore cannot be defended, nor is to be imitated by us. David was not willing that Achish should know the truth. He did not now play the part of a madman, as he had on a former occasion, but fearful of losing his self-chosen place of protection, he dissembled unto the king. The Amalekites were fellow-Canaanites with the Philistines, and if not in league with them, Achish and his people would probably be apprehensive of danger by harboring such a powerful foe in their midst, and would want to expel them. To avoid this, David resorted to deception. O what need has writer and reader to pray daily, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

His Sore Dilemma

1 Samuel 28

Following his local incursion upon and victory over the Amalekites, David, instead of quietly making for Ziklag, most imprudently "came to Achish" (1 Samuel 27:9). Seeing him so heavily laden with the spoils which had been taken, the king inquired where he had been. David feared to tell Achish that he had been destroying Israel's enemies and the Philistines' friends, and therefore returned a misleading answer. David had taken precaution to cover his tracks, for we are told that he "saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring tidings to Gath, saying, Lest they should tell on us, saying, So did David, and so will be his manner all the while he dwells in the country of the Philistines" (27: 11). Forgetful of God and the many tokens he had already received of His protecting care, David dissembled. Achish was thoroughly deceived, for we read, "Achish believed David, saying, He has made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant forever" (27: 12).

Probably it was his persuading Jonathan to tell his father that he had gone about his business, telling Ahimelech an untruth, his prevarications before Achish, and some other instances, which caused David, when later he penitently reflected upon them, to pray "Remove from me the way of lying" (Psalm 119:29). This seems to have been David's "besetting sin," or the particular inclination of his corrupt nature. Now when we are foiled by any sin, we should take careful pains lest we settle into a "way" or course of sinning; for as a brand which has once been in the flame is now more susceptible to fire, so the committing of any sin renders us more liable to form a habit of that evil.

Humiliating as may be the acknowledgment of it, the fact remains that every one of us needs to cry fervently unto God "Remove from me the way of lying." Because we are descended from parents who, at the beginning, preferred the devil's lie to God's truth, we are strongly inclined unto lying; yes, it is so much a part of our fallen nature that none but God can remove it from us. How many indulge in exaggeration, which is a form of lying. How many deceive by gestures and actions, which is another form of it. How many make promises (in their letters, for example, vowing they will soon write again) which they never fulfill. Worse still, how many lie unto God by false appearances: going through the form of prayer, feigning to be very pious outwardly, when their hearts and minds are upon the things of the world. Of old God said, "Ephraim compasses Me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit" (

Hosea 11:12): God sees through all vain shows, and will not be mocked.

The consequences of David's lie soon became apparent. "And it came to pass in those days, that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. And Achish said unto David, Know you assuredly, that you shall go out with me to battle, you and your men" (1 Samuel 28:1). Probably this was about the last thing he expected. Poor David! He was indeed in a tight place now, so tight that it seemed impossible for him to turn either way. On the one hand, to refuse the king's request would not only be to run the danger of angering him, with what that would most likely entail, but would appear the height of ingratitude in return for the kindness and protection which had been given to him and his people. On the other hand, to accept Achish's proposal meant being a traitor to Israel.

This sore dilemma in which David found himself, is recorded for *our* learning. It is a solemn warning of what we may expect if we forsake the path of God's precepts. If we enter upon a wrong position, then, trying and unpleasant situations are sure to arise—situations which our consciences will sharply condemn, but from which we can see no way of escape. When we deviate from the path of duty, in the slightest degree, each circumstance that follows will tend to draw us farther aside. Once a rock starts downhill, it gains momentum with every bound that it takes. Then how watchful we need to be against the first false step; yes, how earnestly should we pray, "Hold you me up, and I shall be safe" (Psalm 119:117)! Satan rests not satisfied for the Christian to yield one "little" point, and knows full well our doing so greatly lessens our resistance to his next temptations.

For the sake of younger readers, let us enlarge a little more upon this point. To go anywhere we ought not, will bring us into temptations that it will be almost impossible to resist. To seek the society of non-Christians is to play with fire, and to accept favors from them will almost certainly result in our getting burned. To compromise one point, will be followed by letting down the bars at others. For a young lady to accept the attentions of an undesirable young man, makes it far harder to reject his later advances. Once you accept a favor—even if it be but a "joy-ride" in an auto—you place yourself under an obligation, and though you be asked to pay a high price in return, yet if you demur, "ingratitude" is what you are likely to be charged with. Then go slow, we beg you, in accepting favors from any, especially from those who are likely to take an unfair advantage of you.

David had done wrong in seeking protection from Saul in the land of the Philistines, and now the king of Gath required service from him in return. War being determined against Israel, Achish asks the assistance of David and his men. Yes, when the Christian turns unto the world for help, he must expect to be asked to pay the world's price for the same. Needless intimacies with the avowed enemies of godliness, and the receiving of favors from them, quickly causes us to be unfaithful to God or ungrateful to our benefactors. To what a strait had the false position of David reduced him: if he promised to fight against Israel, and then broke his word, he would be guilty of treachery; if he fought against Israel, he would alienate the affections of his own people, and expose himself to the reproach of having slain Saul. It seemed impossible that he should extricate himself from this dilemma with a good conscience and clear reputation.

"And David said to Achish, Surely you shall know what your servant can do" (28:2). Probably David was quite undecided how to act, and cherished a secret hope that the Lord would help him out of his great difficulty; yet this by no means excused him for returning an insincere and evasive answer. "And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make you keeper of mine head forever." The king of Gath understood his reply as a promise of effectual assistance, and so determined to make him the captain of his bodyguard. At the time David was too much swayed by the fear of man to refuse attendance upon flesh.

"Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city" (v. 3). This seems to be brought in for the purpose of intimating why the Philistines should make an attack upon Israel at this time: the knowledge of the prophet's death had probably emboldened them. When death has removed ministers of God, or persecution has banished them (as it had David), a land is deprived of its best defense. "And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land" (v. 3). This is mentioned as an introduction to what follows unto the end of the chapter: it serves to emphasize the inconstancy of Saul: it illustrates the worthlessness of the temporary reformation of professors, who ultimately return to their wallowing in the mire.

"And the Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem: and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa. And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled" (verses 4, 5), Had he been in communion with God, there would be no need for such a fear, but he had provoked the Holy One to forsake him. Saul's excessive terror arose chiefly from a guilty conscience: his contempt of Samuel, his murdering the priests and their families, his malicious persecution of David. Probably he had a premonition that this attack of the Philistines foreboded his approaching doom.

"And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not" (v. 6). Unspeakably solemn is this: the case of one abandoned by God. It was under urgent terror, and not as a preparation for repentance, that Saul now sought unto the Lord. He did not "inquire" of Him until his doom was sealed, until it was too late, for God will not be mocked. O unbelieving reader, heed that call, "seek you the Lord *while He may be found,* call you upon Him *while He is near*" (Isaiah 55:6); otherwise, God may yet say of you, as of those of old, "These men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all *by them?*" (Ezekiel 14:3).

"And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not" (v. 6). Some see a contradiction between this statement and what is said in 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14, "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking of a familiar spirit, to inquire; and inquired not of the Lord." The "literalists" of the day, those who are incapable of seeing beneath the bare letter of the Word, may well be tripped up by a comparison of the two passages; but he who is taught the *spiritual* meaning of the Scriptures perceives no difficulty. There is much that passes for "prayer" among men (when they are in great physical distress) which unto God is no more than the "howling" of beasts: see Hosea 7: 14. Saul "inquired" in a hypocritical manner, which the Lord would not regard at all. The ear of the Lord is open unto none save those of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

"Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that has a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that has a familiar spirit at Endor" (v. 7). Here we behold the fearful wickedness of one who was righteously abandoned by God. Fearful presumption was it for Saul to deliberately and definitely resort unto one who practiced diabolical arts. Only a little before, he had banished from the land those who had "familiar spirits" (v. 3), known today as "mediums." It illustrates the fact that apostates frequently commit those very sins which they once were most earnest in opposing. We shall not follow Saul through the remainder of this chapter, but pass on to the twenty-ninth, where the Holy Spirit continues the narrative about the Philistines and David.

"Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek; and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands; but David and his men passed on in the rereward with Achish" (29: 1, 2). "If David had told the truth, Achish would never have dreamed of enrolling him among the hosts of the Philistines. It was his own contrivance that had brought him there. He, who so well knew how to discriminate between the Philistines and the armies of the living God; and who, on the ground of that distinction, had so often sought and obtained the assistance of the God of Israel, now found himself leagued with the enemies of God for the destruction of God's people. He who had so distinctly refused to stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, was now enrolled with those very hosts who were about to shed the blood of Saul, and of Jonathan too, upon the mountains of Gilboa. Such were the terrible circumstances in which David suddenly found himself. He seems to have looked upon them as hopeless, nor do we read of his attempting any remedy.

"But David had not ceased to be the subject of care to the great Shepherd of Israel. He had wandered, and was to be brought back. The secret providence of God again interfered, and separated him from the camp of the Philistines" (B. W. Newton). Yes, man's extremities are (so to speak) God's opportunities, and from the dilemma out of which David could see no way of escape, He graciously extricated him; without his having to move a finger, a door was opened for his deliverance. The means which the Lord employed upon this occasion should cause us to bow in adoration before the High Sovereign over all, and deepen our trust in Him.

"Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which has been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?" (v. 3) God has various ways of delivering His people from their difficulties. While the ungodly pursue their own purposes and follow out their own plans, God secretly influences them to such determinations as subserve the good of His saints.

The esteem and affection of the wicked often becomes snares mediate court of Achish, but lords of other principalities, who were confederates with him. These now opposed the design of Achish to use David and his men in the forthcoming

"And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him: and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which you have appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for with which should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" (29:4, 5). "Though God might justly have left David in his difficulty, to chasten him for his folly, yet because his heart was upright with Him. He would not suffer him to be tempted above what he was able, but with the temptation made a way for his escape (1 Corinthians 10:13). A door was opened for his deliverance out of this strait. God inclined the hearts of the Philistine princes to oppose his being employed in this battle, and to insist upon him being dishonored; and thus their enmity befriended him, when no friend he had was capable of doing him such a kindness" (Matthew Henry).

The esteem and affection of the wicked often become snares to us; but reproaches, contempt, injurious suspicions, prove beneficial, and the ill-usage of the ungodly by which we are driven from them, is much better for us than their friendship which knits us to them. "When worldly people have no evil to say to us, but will bear testimony to our uprightness, we need no more from them; and this we should aim to acquire by prudence, meekness, and a blameless life. But their *flattering* commendations are almost always purchased by improper compliances, or some measure of deception, and commonly cover us with confusion. It is seldom prudent to place great confidence in one who has changed sides, except as the fear of God influences a real convert to conscientious fidelity" (Thomas Scott). It is striking to note the particular thing which God made use of to influence those Philistine lords against David: it was the song which the women of Israel had sung in David's honor, and which now for the third time brought him into dishonor—so little are the flatteries of people worth! They stir up jealousy and hatred in others; yet in the hand of God it became the instrument of David's deliverance.

Achish now summoned David into his presence and said, Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that you displease not the lords of the Philistines" (v. 7). No doubt David secretly rejoiced at this deliverance from his sore dilemma, yet he was unwilling that the king of Gath should know it; he prevaricated again, making an appearance of concern for being so summarily dismissed. "And David said unto Achish, But what have I done? and what have you found in your servant so long as I have been with you unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king" (v. 8). Sad it is to see the anointed of God dissembling and speaking in such a manner of His people. But Achish was not to be moved, and said, "Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with your master's servants that are come with you; and as soon as you be up early in the morning and have light, depart" (v. 10). Marvelous deliverance was this from his ensnaring service, yet without the slightest credit to David: it was nothing but the sovereign grace of God which freed him from the snare of the fowler.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

His Sorrow At Ziklag

1 Samuel 29 and 30

"*Preserve me,* O God: for in You do I put my trust" (Psalm 16:1). This is a prayer which, in substance at least, every child of God frequently puts up to his heavenly Father. He feels his own insufficiency, and calls upon One who is all-sufficient. He realizes how incompetent he is to defend and protect himself, and seeks the aid of Him whose arms are all-mighty. If he is in his right mind, before starting out on a journey, when any particular danger threatens him, and before settling down For the night's repose, he commits himself into the custody and care of Him who never slumbers or sleeps. Blessed privilege! Wise precaution! Happy duty! The Lord graciously keep us in a spirit of complete dependence upon Himself.

"The Lord *preserves* all them that love Him" (Psalm 145:20). Most Christians are readier to perceive the fulfillment of this precious promise when they have been delivered from some physical danger, than when they were preserved from some moral evil; which shows how much more we are governed by the natural than the spiritual. We are quick to own the preserving hand of God when a disease epidemic avoids our home, when a heavy falling object just clears our path, or when a swiftly-moving auto just misses the car we are in; but we ought to be just as alert in discerning the miraculous hand of God when a powerful temptation is suddenly removed from us, or we are delivered from it.

"But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). The Lord's people are surrounded with a variety of evils within and without. They have sin in them, and it is the cause and fountain of all the evil and misery which they at any time feel and experience. There is the evil one without, who endeavors at times to bring great evil upon them. But the Lord "keeps His people from evil," not that they are exempted wholly and altogether from evil. Yet they are kept from being overcome by and engulfed in it. Though they fall, they shall not he utterly cast down, for the Lord upholds them with His debt hand.

Wondrous are the ways in which God *preserves* His saints. Many a one has been withheld from that success in business on which he had fondly set his heart: it was God delivering him from those material riches which would have ruined his soul! Many a one was disappointed in a love affair: it was God delivering from an ungodly partner for life, who would have been a constant hindrance to your spiritual progress! Many a one was cruelly treated by trusted and cherished friends: it was God breaking what would have proved an unequal yoke! Many a parent was plunged into grief by the death of a dearly loved child: it was God, in His mercy, taking away what would have proved an idol. Now we see these things through a glass darkly, but the Day will come, dear reader, when we shall perceive clearly that it was the *preserving* hand of our gracious God thus dealing with us at those very times when all seemed to be working against us.

The above meditations have been suggested by what is recorded in 1 Samuel 29. At the close of our last chapter we saw how mercifully God interposed to deliver His servant from the snare of the fowler. Through his unbelief and self-will, David found himself in a sore dilemma. Seeking help from the ungodly, he had placed himself under obligation to the king of Gath. Pretending to be the friend of the Philistines and the enemy of his own people, David was called upon by Achish to employ his men upon the attack which was planned against Israel. Then it was that the Lord interposed and *preserved* the object of His love from falling into much graver evil. He now graciously made "a way to escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13), lest His poor erring child should be tempted above that which he was able.

And *how* was that "way to escape" opened for him? Ah, *this* is the point to which we wish to particularly direct our attention. It was not by means of any visible or outward work, but through the inward and secret operations of His power. The Lord turned against David the hearts of the other "lords of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 29:3-5); and in consequence, Achish was obliged to part with his services. Ah, my reader, how often was the Lord secretly working *for* you, when He turned the heart of some worldling *against* you! If we were more spiritual, this would be perceived more clearly and frequently by us, and we should then render unto our gracious Deliverer the praise which is His due. David's discharge from the service of Achish was just as much a miracle as was his deliverance from the enmity of Saul; it was as truly the working of God's *preserving* power to rouse the jealousy and enmity of the Philistine lords against David, as it was to shield him from the javelin which the demon possessed king hurled at him (1 Samuel 18:11).

"So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel" (1 Samuel 29:11). Commanded by the king of Gath so to do (v. 10). there was no other prudent alternative. Thus the snare was broken, and David was now free to return unto his own city, not knowing (as yet) how urgently his presence was needed there. Stealing away amid the shadows of the dawn, the flight of David and his men was scarcely any less ignominious than was the banishment of backslidden Abraham from Egypt (Genesis 12:20). Though God often extricates His people from the dangerous situations which their unbelief brings them into, nevertheless, He makes them at least taste the bitterness of their folly. But, as we shall see, the shame which the Philistine lords put upon David, turned to his advantage in various ways. Thus does God. sometimes,

"So David and his men rose un early to depart in the morning to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel." Delivered from a sore dilemma, a heavy burden removed from his shoulders, we may well suppose it was with a light heart that David now led his men out of the camp of Achish. Blithely unconscious of the grievous disappointment awaiting them, David and his men retraced their steps to Ziklag, for it was there he had deposited all that was chiefly dear to him on earth: his wives and his children were there, it was there he had formed a rest for himself—but, apart from God! Ah, how little do any of us know what a day may bring forth: how often is a happy morning followed by a night of sadness: much cause have "rejoice with trembling" (

Psalm 2:11).

Though David had now been delivered from his false position as an ally of Achish against Israel, not yet had he been brought back to God. Deep exercises of heart were required for this, and He who preserves His people from fatal backsliding saw to it that His erring servant should not escape. Though He is the God of all grace, yet His grace ever reigns "through righteousness," and never at the expense of it. Though His mercy delivers His saints from the sad pitfalls into which their folly leads them, usually, He so orders His providences, that they are made to smart for their wrong-doing; and the Holy Spirit uses this to convict them of their sins, and they, in turn, *condemn themselves* for the same. The means employed by God on this occasion were drastic, yet surely not more so than the case called for.

"And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire" (30:1). After a three days' march from the camp of Achish, hoping to find rest in their homes and joy in the bosom of their families, here was the scene upon which the eyes of David and his men now fell! What a bitter moment must this have been for our hero! His little all had vanished: he returns to the place where his family and possessions were, only to find the city a mass of smoking ruins, and those whom he loved no longer there to welcome him. When we leave our families (though it be for only a few hours) we cannot foresee what may befall them, or ourselves, before we return; we ought therefore to commit each other to the protection of God, and to render unto Him sincere thanks when we meet again in peace and safety.

"And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way" (30:2). Let us learn from this that it is the part of wisdom, on *all* occasions, to moderate our expectation of earthly comforts, lest we should by being over-sanguine, meet with the more distressing disappointment. Behold here the restraining power of the Lord, in preventing the Amalekites from slaying the women and children. "Whether they spared them to lead them in triumph, or to sell them, or to use them for slaves, God's hand must be acknowledged, who designed to make use of the Amalekites for the correction, but not for the destruction, of the house of David" (Matthew Henry). Blessed is it to know that even in wrath God remembers "mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2).

"And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way." From this we may also see how sorely David was now being chastened for being so forward to go with the Philistines against the people of God. Hereby the Lord showed him he had far better have stayed at home and minded his own business. "When we go abroad, in the way of our duty, we may comfortably hope that God will take care of our families, in our absence, inst *not otherwise"* (Matthew Henry). No, to count upon the Lord's protection, either for ourselves or for our loved ones, when we enter forbidden territory, is wicked presumption and not faith. It was thus the devil sought to tempt Christ: Cast Yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple, and the angels shall safeguard You.

"So David and his men came to the city, and behold it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep" (verses 3, 4). Ah, now he was tasting the bitterness of being without the full protection of God. As a homeless wanderer, hunted like a partridge upon the mountains, despised by the Nabals who dwelt at ease in the land, yet never before had he known the like of this. But now, under the protection of the king of Gath, and with a city of his own, he learns that without *God's shelter,* he is exposed indeed. Learn from this, dear reader, how much we lose when we enter the path of self-will. In the first shock of disappointment, David could only weep and wail; all appeared to be irrevocably lost.

"It was indeed no wonder that David's heart was stricken. He had never before known what it was to be smitten like this by the chastening hand of God. Of late he had seemed even more than ordinarily to be the subject of His care: but now the relation of God seemed suddenly changed into one of severity and wrath. During the year that David had watched his father's flock, during his residence in the courts of Saul, during the time of his sorrowful sojourn in the wilderness, during his late eventful history in Ziklag, he had never experienced anything but kindness and preservation from the hand of God. He had become so long accustomed to receive sure protection from God's faithful care, that he seems to have calculated on its uninterrupted continuance. He had lately said. 'The Lord render unto every man his righteousness. . . and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation.' But now the Lord Himself seemed turned into an enemy, and to fight against him. Nor could the conscience of David have failed to discern the reason. It must have owned the justice of the blow. Thus, however, the bitterness of his agony would be aggravated, not lessened" (B. W. Newton).

"And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite" (v. 5). Why did the historian, after specifically stating in verse 2 that the Amalekites had "taken the women captives," enter into this detail? Ah, is the answer far to seek? Is it not the Holy Spirit making known to us the prime cause of the Lord's displeasure against David? His "*two* wives" was the occasion of the severing of his communion with the Lord, which, as we have seen, was at once followed by Saul's renewed attack (see 25:43, 44 and 26:1, 2), his unbelieving fear (27:1), and his seeking help from the ungodly (27:2, 3). We mention this because it supplies *the key to* all that follows from 25:44, and so far as we know no other writer has pointed it out.

"And David was greatly distressed: for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved (bitter), every man for his sons and for his daughters" (v. 6). Poor David! one trouble was added to another. Heartbroken over the loss of his family, and the burning of his city, additional distress was occasioned by the murmuring and mutiny of his men. They considered the entire blame rested upon their leader, for having journeyed to Achish and left the city of Ziklag defenseless, and because he had provoked the Amalekites and their allies (27:8, 9) by his inroad upon them, who had now availed themselves of the opportunity to avenge the wrong. "Thus apt are we, when in trouble, to fly into a rage against those who are in any way the occasion of our troubles, when we overlook the Divine providence and have no due regard to *God's hand* in it" (Matthew Henry).

"On all past occasions he had ever found some to sympathize with, and to console him in his afflictions. In the house of Saul, he had had the affection of Jonathan, and the favor of many beside: even in the wilderness, six hundred out of Israel had joined him, and had faithfully struggled with him through many a day of difficulty and danger: but now, they too abandon him. Enraged at the sudden calamity (for they also were bereaved of everything)—stung to the quick by a sense of its bitter consequences—imputing all to David (for it was he who had guided them to Ziklag)—even they who shrunk not from the sorrows of the cave of Adullam, and who had braved all the dangers of the wilderness, forsook him now. They all turned fiercely upon him as the author of their woe, and spoke of stoning him. Thus stricken of God, execrated by his friends, bereaved of all that he loved, David drank of a cup which he never tasted before. He had earned it for himself. It was the fruit of his self-chosen Ziklag" (B. W. Newton).

And what was the Lord's purpose in these sore trials which now came upon David? It was not to crush him and sink him into despair. No, rather was it with the design of moving him to "humble himself beneath His mighty hand" (1 Peter 5:6), confess his wrong-doing, and be restored to happy fellowship. God's heaviest chastenings of "His own" are sent in love and for the benefit of their subjects. But to enter into the good of them, to afterward enjoy "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" therefrom, the recipient of those chastenings *must be* "exercised thereby" (Heb, 12:11): he must bow beneath the rod, yes, "hear" and "kiss" it, before he will be the spiritual gainer. Thus it was with the subject of these chapters, as will appear in the immediate sequel.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

His Recourse in Sorrow

1 Samuel 30

In our last we directed attention to the gracious manner in which the Lord put forth His interposing hand to deliver David from that snare of the fowler into Which his unbelief and folly had brought him. Before passing on to the immediate sequel, let us pause and admire the blessed way in which God *timed* His intervention. "To everything there is a season . . . He has made everything beautiful in *His time*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11): equally so in the spiritual realm as in the natural. Probably every Christian can look back to certain experiences in life when his circumstances were suddenly and unexpectedly changed. At the time, he understood not the meaning of it, but later was able to perceive the wisdom and goodness of Him who shaped his affairs. There have been occasions when our situation was swiftly altered, by factors over which we had no control, which called for us to move on: but the sequel showed it was God opening our way to go to the help of others who sorely needed us. So it was now with David.

"My times are in Your hand" (Psalm 31: 15). Yes, my "times" of tarrying and my "times" of journeying; my "times" of prosperity and my "times" of adversity; my "times" of fellowship with the saints and my "times" of isolation and loneliness; each and all are ordered by God. It is blessed to know this, and more blessed still when the heart is permitted to rest thereon. Nothing is more quieting and stabilizing to the soul than the realization that everything was ordained by omniscience and is now ordered by infinite love: that He who eternally decreed the hour of my birth has fixed the day of my departure from this world; that my "times" of youth and health and my "times" of infirmity and sickness are equally in

God's hands. He knows *when* it is best to bring me out of a distressing situation, and His mercy opens the way when it is His time for me to make a move.

While David and his men were in the camp of Achish, the Amalekites took advantage of their absence, fell upon the unprotected Ziklag, burned it, and carried away captive all the women and children. Their husbands and fathers knew nothing of this: no, *but God did,* and He had designs of mercy toward them. Their sad case seemed a hopeless one indeed, but appearances are deceptive. Though they were unaware of the fact, God had already set moving the means for their deliverance. Unlike us, God is never too early, and He is never too late. Had David and his men been discharged by Achish a week sooner, they had been on hand to defend Ziklag, and a needed chastisement and a great blessing from it had been missed! Had they returned home a week later, they had probably been too late to recover their loved ones. Admire, then, the *timeliness of* God's freeing David from the yoke of the Philistines.

"So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep" (1 Samuel 30:3,4), Observe, there was no turning unto God, or seeking to cast their care upon Him! They were completely overwhelmed by shock and grief. Perhaps the reader knows something of such a state from painful experience. A heavy financial reverse which plunged the soul into dark gloom; or a sudden bereavement came, and in the bitterness of grief all seemed to be against you and even the voice of prayer was silenced. Ah, David and his men are not the only ones who have been overwhelmed by trouble and anguish.

"And David was greatly distressed; for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons, and every man for his daughters" (v. 6). The turning against him of his faithful followers was the final ingredient in the bitter cup which David was now called on to drink. But even this was of God: if one stroke of His chastening rod avails not, it must be followed by another; and if necessary, yet others, for our holy Father will not suffer His wayward children to remain impenitent indefinitely. So it was here: the sight of Ziklag in ruins and the loss of his family did not bring David to his knees; so yet other measures are employed. The anger of his men aroused him from his lethargy, the menacing of his own life by intimate friends was the way God took to bring him back

"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (v. 6). Here is where light broke into this dark scene, yet care needs to be taken lest we make a wrong use of the same. No one sentence in God's Word is to be interpreted as an isolated unit, but scripture must be compared with scripture. Much is included in the words now before us, far more than any human writer is capable of fully revealing. Attention needs to be directed unto three things: first, what is pre-supposed in David's "encouraging himself in the Lord"; second, what is signified thereby; third, what followed the same. If we take into consideration the *real* character of David as "the man after God's own heart," if we bear in mind the whole context recounting his sad lapses, and, above all, if we view our present verse in the light of the Analogy of faith, little difficulty should be experienced in "reading between the lines."

"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Ah, much is implied here. David could not *truly* "encourage himself in the Lord" until there had been *previous* exercises of heart: conviction, contrition, confession, necessarily preceded comfort and consolation. "He who covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28: 13): that enunciates an unchanging principle in God's governmental dealings, with unconverted and converted alike. Had there been no repentance on David's part, no unsparing condemnation of himself, no broken-hearted acknowledgment unto God of his failures, he would have been "encouraging himself" in *sin* and that would be "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness." Not only has Christ died to save His people from the penalty of their sins, but He has also procured the Holy Spirit to work in them a hatred for the vileness of their sins! And as there is no forgiveness and cleansing for the saint without confession (1 John 1:9), so there is no acceptable "confession" save that which issues from a contrite heart.

There is great need today for the above principles to be explained unto and impressed upon professing Christians. Neither God's glory will be maintained nor the good of His people promoted, if we conceal and are silent about the requirements of His righteousness. God's mercy is exercised in a way of holiness: where there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness; where there is no turning away from sin, there is no blotting out of sins. Something more is required than simply asking God to be gracious unto us for Christ's sake. There are many who quote "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7), but there are few indeed who faithfully point out that that precious promise is specifically qualified with, "IF *we walk in the light* as He is in the light." If we avoid the searching light of God's holiness, if we hide, excuse, repent not of and refuse to make daily confession of our sins, then the blood of Christ certainly *does not* "cleanse" us from all sin. To insist on the contrary is grossly dishonoring to the Blood, and is to make Christ the Condoner of evil!

Weigh well the following: "If they pray toward this place, and confess Your name, *and turn from their sin,* when You afflict them: *then* hear You in Heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants . . . If Your people go out to battle against their enemy, wherever You shall send them, and shall pray unto the Lord toward the city which You have chosen, and toward the house that I have built for Your name: Then hear You in Heaven their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause. If they sin against You (for there is no man that sins not), and You be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near; Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land where they were carried captives, *and repent,* and make supplication unto You in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and so *return* unto You *with all their heart,* and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto You . . . *Then hear You their prayer* and their supplication in Heaven Your dwelling-place, and maintain their cause, *and forgive* Your people that have sinned against You" (1 Kings 8:35, 36, 44-50). And God is still the same. No change of "dispensation" effects any alteration in His character, or in any ways modifies His holy requirements: with Him there is "no variableness neither shadow of turning" (James 1:27).

"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Having sought to indicate what is *pre-supposed* by those words, let us now briefly consider what is *signified* by them. The same *Holy* Spirit who convicts the backslidden saint of his sins, works in him a sincere repentance, and moves him to frankly and freely confess them to God, *also* gives him a renewed sense of the abounding mercy of God, strengthens faith in His blessed promises, and reminds him of His unchanging faithfulness (1 John 1:9): and thus the contrite heart is enabled to rest in the infinite grace of God; and being now restored to communion with Him, the soul "encourages" itself in His perfections. Thus, just as the Holy Spirit delivers the saint from heeding Satan's counsel to hide his sins, so also does He rescue him from Satan's attempts to sink him in despair after he is convicted of his sins.

"But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." This means that he reviewed afresh the everlasting covenant which God had made with him in Christ, that covenant "ordered in all things and sure." It means that he recalled God's past goodness and mercy towards him, which reassured his heart for the present and the future. It means that he contemplated the omnipotency of the Lord, and realized that nothing is too hard for Him, no situation is hopeless unto His mighty power, for *He* is able to overrule evil unto good, and bring a clean thing out of an unclean. It means that he remembered God's promises to bring him safely to the throne, and though he knew not how his immediate trouble would disappear, without doubting, *he hoped in God,* and confidently counted upon His undertaking for him. O Christian reader, when we are at our wit's end, we should not be at faith's end. See to it that all is right between your soul and God, and then trust in His sufficiency.

When all things were against him, David's faith was stirred into exercise: he turned unto the One who had never failed him, and from whom he had so sadly departed. Ah, blessed is the trial, no matter how heavy; precious is the disappointment, no matter how bitter, that issues thus. To penitently return unto God means to be back again in the place of blessing. Better, far better, to be in the midst of the black ruins of Ziklag, surrounded by a threatening mob, than to be in the ranks of the Philistines fighting against His people. Have we, in any way, known what bitter disappointment means? And have we in the midst of it turned unto Him who has smitten us, and "encouraged" ourselves in Him? If so, then like David, we may say, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept Your Word" (Psalm 119:67).

O that it may please the Lord to bless this chapter to some sorely distressed soul, who is no longer enjoying the light of His countenance, but who is beneath His chastening frowns. You may be borne down by sorrow and despondency, but no trouble is too great for you to find relief in God: in the One who has, in righteousness, sent this sorrow upon you. Humble yourself beneath His mighty hand, acknowledge to Him your sins, count upon the multitude of His mercies, and seek grace to rest upon His comforting promises. When faith springs up amidst the ruins of blighted hopes, it is a blessed thing. What has just been before us marked a turning-point in David's life; may it be so in yours. "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain you" (

Psalm 55:22).

O my reader, be you a believer, or an unbeliever, none but God can do you good, relieve your distress, remove the load From your heart, and bring blessing into your life. If you refuse to humble yourself before Him, lament the course of self-will which you followed, and turn from the same, you are your own worst enemy and are forsaking your own mercies. But if you will, take your place before Him in the dust, repent of your wickedness, and seek grace to live henceforth in subjection to His will, then pardon, peace, joy, awaits you. No matter how sadly you have failed in the past, nor what light and favors you sinned against, if you will own it all in brokenness of heart unto the Lord, He is ready to forgive.

"And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray you, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David inquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them?" (verses 7,8). Here we see the first *result* which followed David's turning back unto God. It is blessed to observe that the Holy Spirit has thrown a veil of silence over what took place in secret between David and the Lord, as He has over Christ's private interview with Peter (1 Corinthians 15: 5). But after telling us of David's encouraging himself in the Lord, He now reveals the reformation which took place in his conduct. Nothing was said of David's seeking counsel from God when he journeyed to Achish (27:2), but now that he is restored to happy fellowship, he will not think of taking a step without asking for divine guidance.

Very blessed indeed is what is recorded in verses 7 and 8. Moses had laid it down as a law that the leader of Israel should "stand before" (Eleazar) the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in" (Numbers 27:21), and in compliance therewith, David turned to the priest, and bade him seek the mind of the Lord as to how he should now act in this dire emergency. Learn from this that *obedience* to the revealed will of God is the best evidence of having been restored to communion with Him. Of course it is, for it is the very nature of love to seek *to please* its object. Let us test, then, *our* practical relation to God, not by our feelings nor by our words, but by the extent to which we are in actual subjection to Him, and walking in a spirit of dependency upon Him.

Notice here how indwelling grace triumphed over the promptings of the flesh. Mere nature would urge that David's only possible course was to rush after the Amalekites and seek to rescue any of the women and children who might yet be alive. But David was now delivered from his impetuous self-confidence; his soul was again "like a weaned child." God was now to order all the details of his life. Alas, most of us have to receive many hard knocks in the by-paths of folly, before we are brought to this place. It is indeed much to be thankful for when the feverish restlessness of the flesh is subdued, and the soul truly desires God to *lead us* step by step: progress may not *seem* so swift, but it certainly will be more sure. The Lord graciously lay His quieting hand upon each of us, and cause us to look unto and rest in Himself alone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

His Pursuit of the Amalekites

1 Samuel 30

We are now to be engaged with *the blessed sequel* to David's putting matters right between his soul and God, and his encouraging himself in the Lord. At the close of the preceding chapter we saw that the first result of his returning to God was that he summoned the high priest with his ephod, and "inquired of the Lord" whether or not he should pursue after those who had burned Ziklag and carried away his wives captive. This exemplifies a principle which is ever operative when there has been a true reformation of heart: our own wisdom and strength are disowned, and divine help and guidance are earnestly sought. Herein are we able to check up the state of our souls and discover whether or not we are really walking with the Lord. Backsliding and a spirit of independency ever go together; contrariwise, communion with God and dependence upon Him are never separated.

As we pointed out in our last, the Mosaic law required that Israel's ruler should stand before the priest, who would ask counsel for him as to whether he should go out or no (Numbers 27:31). In like manner, the saint today is bidden to "Commit your way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5). No step in life should be taken, be it great or small, without first waiting upon God for direction: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). To seek not wisdom from above, is to act in self-sufficiency and self-will; to honestly and earnestly apply for that wisdom, betokens a heart in subjection to God, desirous of doing that which is pleasing to Him.

"In all your ways acknowledge Him": if this be faithfully done, then we may be fully assured that "and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6). The serious trouble into which David fell when he sought refuge in the land of Gath, had arisen immediately from failure *to inquire of the* Lord; but now he consulted Him through the high priest: "Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them?" (1 Samuel 30:8). Blessed indeed is this. Would that we might learn to imitate him, for our fleshly efforts to undo the consequences of our unbelief and folly only cause us to continue going on in the same path which brought God's chastening upon us; and this is certain to end in further disappointment. "Be still, and know that I am God" is the word we need to heed at such a time: to unsparingly judge ourselves, and suffer the hand that has smitten to now lead in *His* path, is the only way to recovery. Only then do we give evidence that disappointment and sorrow have been *blessed* to our souls.

Unspeakably precious is it to note the Lord's response to David's inquiry: "And He answered him, Pursue: for you shall surely overtake them, and without fail recover all" (v. 8). "See the goodness and perfectness of the grace of God. There was no delay in this answer—no reserve—no ambiguity; more even was told than David had asked. He was told not only that he might pursue, but that he should surely recover all. In a moment the black cloud of sorrow that had hung so darkly over David's soul was gone: agony gave place to joy: and he whom his companions had been dooming to death, stood suddenly before them as the honored servant of the Lord his God, commissioned to pursue and to conquer. He did pursue, and all was as God had said" (B. W. Newton).

"So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him" (1 Samuel 30:9). The force of this can only be perceived and appreciated by recalling what was before us in verse 6: "David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him"! What a change we behold now! The enmity of his men has been stilled, and they are again ready to follow their leader. Herein we see the third consequence of David's spiritual return and encouraging himself in the Lord. First, he had submitted to the divine order, and sought guidance from God. Second, he had promptly received a gracious response, the Lord granting the assurance he so much desired. And now the power of God fell upon the hearts of his men, entirely subduing their mutiny, and making them willing, weary and worn as they were, to follow David in a hurried march after the Amalekites. O how much do we lose, dear reader, when we fail

"So David went, he and six hundred men that were with him." Here is David's response to the word he had received from God through the high priest. Without taking rest or refreshment, he at once set out in pursuit of the ravagers. Tired and weak as he well might be, David was now nerved to fresh endeavors. Ah, is it not written, "They that wait upon the Lord shall *renew their strength;* they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary: they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31)? So it ever is. If we truly desire spiritual guidance of the Lord, and humbly and trustfully seek it from Him, our inner man will be renewed, and we shall be empowered to follow the path of His ordering.

"And came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed" (v. 9). This teaches us that when we *are* in the current of the revealed will of God, all will not, necessarily, be plain sailing. We must be prepared to meet with difficulties and obstacles even in the path of obedience. It was *by faith* in the word that he had received from Jehovah that David turned from the ruins of Ziklag, and faith must be *tested.* A severe trial now confronted David: fatigued from their former journey and their spirits further depressed by the sad scene they had gazed upon, many of his men, though willing, were unable to proceed farther; and he left no less than two hundred behind at the brook of Besor.

"But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor" (v. 10). Considerate of the state of his men, David would not drive or force those who were faint to accompany him. Further proof was this that our hero was now again in communion with God, for *"He* knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:14)—alas, how often do those who profess His name seem to forget this. But though his company was now reduced by one third, and, as verse 17 plainly intimates, was far inferior to the Forces of the Amalekites, yet David relied implicitly on the Word of the Lord, and continued to push forward.

"And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water. And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins; and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights. And David said unto him, To whom do you belong? and whence are you? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick. We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which belongs to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire. And David said to him, Can you bring me down to this company? And he said, Swore unto me by God, that you will neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this company" (verses 11-15). We shall consider these verses from two angles: as they add to what has been before us above; as they contain a lovely gospel picture.

In the verses just quoted we may perceive the seventh consequence which followed David's righting things with God. First, he encouraged himself in the Lord: verse 6. Second, he submitted to the divine order and sought guidance from God: verse 7 and 8. Third, he obtained light for his path and assurance of God's help: verse 8. Fourth, the power of God fell upon the hearts of his men, subduing their mutiny: verse 6 and making them willing to follow him on a difficult and daring enterprise: verse 9. Fifth, the renewing of David's strength, so that he was able to start out on a forced and swift march: verse 9. Sixth, grace granted him to overcome a sore trial of faith: verse 10. And now we are to observe how the Lord showed Himself strong on their behalf by ordering His providences to work in David's favor. Such are some of the divine mercies which we may confidently expect when the channel of blessing between our souls and God is no longer choked by unjudged and unconfessed sins.

A most remarkable intervention of divine providence is here before us. David was pursuing the Amalekites, and from this incident we gather that he knew not in which direction they had gone, nor how far ahead they were. God did not work a miracle for them, but by natural means provided him with a needed guide. The men of David came across one, who was sick and famished, in a field. He turned out to be an Egyptian slave, whom his master had barbarously abandoned. Upon being brought to David, he furnished full particulars, and after receiving assurance that his life should be spared, agreed to conduct David and his men to the place where the Amalekites were encamped. Let us admire the various details in this wondrous secret provision which God now made for David, and the combined factors which entered into it.

First, stand in awe of the high sovereignty of God which suffered this Egyptian slave to fall sick: verse 13. Second, in permitting his master to act so inhumanly, by leaving him to perish by the wayside: verse 13. Third, in moving David's men to spare his life: verse 11, when they had every reason to believe he had taken part in the burning of Ziklag. Fourth, in the fact that he was himself an Egyptian and not an Amalekite: verse 11— had he been the latter, they were bound to kill him (Deuteronomy 25:19). Fifth, in moving David to show him kindness: verse 11. Sixth, in causing the food given to so quickly revive him: verse 12. Seventh, in inclining him to freely answer David's inquiries and be willing to lead him to the camp of the Amalekites. Each of these seven factors had to combine, or the result had never been reached: God made "all things *work together"* for David's good. So He does for us: His providences, day by day, work just as wondrously on our behalf.

Approaching these verses (11-15) now from another angle, let us see portrayed in them a beautiful type of a lost sinner being saved by Christ. There are so many distinct lines in this lovely gospel picture that we can here do little more than point out each one separately.

1. *His citizenship:* "And they found an Egyptian in the field" (v. 11). In Scripture Egypt is a symbol of the world: the moral world to which the unregenerate belong and in which they seek their satisfaction. As another has said, "It had its beginning in Cain's day, when he 'went out from the presence of the Lord,' and he and his descendants built cities, sought out witty inventions of brass and iron, manufactured musical instruments, and went in for a good time generally, in forgetfulness of God. And that continues to this day. The land of Egypt figures this. There Pharaoh, type of Satan, ruled and tyrannized."

2. *His woeful condition:* "I fell sick" (v. 13). Such is the state of every descendant of fallen Adam. An awful disease is at work in the unregenerate: that disease is *sin,* and "sin, when it is finished, brings forth death" (James 1:15). It is sin which has robbed the soul of its original beauty: darkening the understanding, corrupting the heart, perverting the will, and paralyzing all our faculties so far as their exercise Godward is concerned. But not only was this Egyptian desperately sick, he was *starving:* he had had nothing to eat or drink for three days. Well might he cry, "I perish with hunger" (Luke 15:17).

3. *His sad plight:* "my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick" (v; 13). He was a slave, and now that his master thought he would be of no further use to him, he heartlessly abandoned him and left him to perish. "And that is the way the devil treats his servants. he uses them as his tools as long as he can. Then, when he cannot use them any more, he leaves them to their folly. Thus he treated Judas, and hosts of others before and since" (C. Knapp).

4. *His deliverance:* "And brought him to David" (v. 11). No doubt he was too weak and ill to come of himself; and even had he the ability, he had never used it thus, for David was an utter stranger to him! Thus it is with the unregenerate sinner and that blessed One whom David foreshadowed. Therefore did Christ say, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which has sent Me draw him" (John 6:44). Each of God's elect is "brought" to Christ by the Holy Spirit.

5. *His deliverer:* No doubt this half-dead Egyptian presented a woe-begone spectacle, as he was led or carried into the presence of the man after God's own heart. But his very ruin and wretchedness drew out the compassion of David toward him. Thus it is with the Savior: no matter what ravages sin has wrought, nor how morally repulsive it has made its victim, Christ never refuses to receive and befriend one whom the Father draws to Him.

6. *His entertainment:* "And gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water. And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins" (verses 11, 12). Precious line in our picture is this of the divine grace which is stored up in Christ. None brought to Him by the Spirit are ever sent empty away. How this reminds us of the royal welcome which the prodigal received and the rich fare that was set before him.

7. His *confession:* When David asked him to whom he belonged and whence he came, he gave an honest and straightforward reply: "He said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite" (v. 13). Strikingly did this adumbrate the fact that when an elect sinner has been brought to Christ, and been given the bread and water of life, he takes his proper place, and candidly acknowledges what he was and is by nature. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us" (1 John 1:9).

8. *His obligation:* "And David said, Can you bring me down to this company?" (v. 15). In this we may see how David pressed his claims upon the one whom he had befriended, though it is blessed to mark that it was more in the form of an appeal than a direct command. In like manner, the word to the believer is, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1).

9. *His desire for assurance:* "And he said, Swore unto me by God, that you will neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring you down to this company" (v. 15). There could be no joy in the service of his new master until assured that he should not be returned unto the power of his old one. Blessed is it to know that Christ delivers His people not only from the wrath to come, but also from the dominion of sin.

10. *His gratitude:* "And when he had brought him down" (v. 16). He was now devoted to the interests of David, and did as he requested. So Christians are told, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works"* (Ephesians 2:10). O for grace to serve Christ as ardently as we did sin and Satan in our unregenerate days.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

His Recovery of His Wives

1 Samuel 30

"And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines and out of the land of Judah. And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and *fled*" (1 Samuel 30:16, 17). We resume at the point where we left off in our last chapter. These verses form a solemn sequel to those previously pondered, and set before us the other side of the picture which was then considered.

The Amalekites, in all probability, knew that the Israelites and Philistines were engaged in fighting each other a considerable distance away, and supposed that David and his men were assisting the king of Gath. Deeming themselves secure, they imprudently began to riot and make merry over the abundance of spoils they had captured, without so much as placing guards to give notice of an enemy's approach. They lay not in any regular order, much less in any military formation, but were scattered in groups, here and there. Consequently, David and his little force came upon them quite unawares, and made a dreadful slaughter of them. How often when men say, "Peace and safety, sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they "(1 Thessalonians 5:3).

Just as the sick and abandoned Egyptian who was befriended by David typified one of God's elect being saved by Christ, so these flesh-indulging Amalekites portray careless sinners who will yet be destroyed by Him. Solemnly is this announced in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." And again, "Behold, the Lord comes, with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds, which they had ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (

Jude 14, 15).

Yet, such unspeakably solemn warnings as those which God has given in His Word have no restraining effect upon the unconcerned and Satan-drugged world. The vast majority of our fellows live as though there were no eternity to come, no judgment day when they must appear before God, give an account of the deeds they have done in the body, and be sentenced according to their works. They know full well how brief and uncertain this life is: at short intervals their companions are cut down by the hand of death, but no lasting serious impressions are made upon them. Instead, they continue in their pleasure-loving whirl, impervious to the divine threatenings, deaf to the voice of conscience, disregarding any entreaties or admonitions which they may receive from Christian friends or the servants of God.

O how tragically true to the present-day life of the world is the mirthful scene presented to us in the verses we are now pondering. Those care-free Amalekites were "eating and drinking and dancing." In their imagined security they were having what the young people of this degenerate age call "a good time." There was an abundance of food to hand, why then should they deny those lusts of the flesh which war against the soul? They had been successful in spoiling their neighbors, why then should they not "celebrate" and make merry? All were in high spirits, why then should they not fill the air with music and laughter? Yes, similar is the fatal reasoning of multitudes today. But mark well the fearful sequel: "And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day." Alas, what was their carnal security worth!

David was just as truly a type of Christ in his slaying of the Amalekites as he was in befriending the poor Egyptian. Ah, dear reader, he who saves those who submit to Him as their Lord and trust in Him as their Redeemer, shall as surely judge and destroy them who despise and reject Him. He will yet say, "But those Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay before Me" (Luke 19:27). How will it fare with *you* in that day? The answer to this question will be determined by whether or not you have truly received Him as Prophet to instruct you, as Priest to atone for your sins, as King to regulate and reign over your heart and life. If you have not already done so, seek grace from above to throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him and surrender yourself wholly to Him.

"The young man of Egypt was with David when he came upon the Amalekites. He once belonged to their company and was one of them. Had he not been separated from them he would have surely shared their fate. If unconverted, you are of that world of sinners 'whose judgment now for a long time lingers not.' Turn from it now before the vengeance of God destroys you with it. God has borne with it long. The sins of Christendom reach up to Heaven, and cry for vengeance. Christ is your only refuge. Come to Him now, and, like Noah in the ark and Lot in the mountain, you will be safe from the sweeping storm. Like the young man of Egypt, you will be taken out of the world and away from this scene before the stroke descends. You will appear with Christ, along with those ten thousand holy ones who accompany Him when He comes to earth to war and judge" (C. Knapp).

Let us now return to our narrative and seek its practical teaching for the Christian today. "And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah" (v. 16). How many miles it was that the befriended Egyptian led David and his men we do not know, but probably some considerable distance: that they were supernaturally strengthened for their strenuous exertions after their previous fatigue, we cannot doubt. Justly did God make use of this poor Egyptian, basely abandoned, as an instrument of death to the Amalekites.

"And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels and fled. And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil nor anything that they had taken to them: David recovered all" (verses 17-19). Here is the blessed sequel to all that has occupied us in the preceding verses of this chapter. What a proof that David's heart was now perfect toward the Lord, for most manifestly did He here show Himself strong on his behalf, by granting such signal success to his endeavors. Ah, when our sins are forsaken and forgiven, and we act by the Lord's directions, we are just as likely to recover what we lost by our previous folly.

"And David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drove before those other cattle, and said, This is David's spoil" (v. 20). The seeming ambiguity of this language is removed if we refer back to what is said in verse 16: the Amalekites had successfully raided other places before they fell upon Ziklag. The spoil they had captured was kept separate, and the cattle which they had taken in the territory of Philistia and Judah David claimed for his own portion: the noble use which he made of the same we shall see in a moment.

"And David came to the two hundred men which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that were with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them" (v. 21). The expression "whom they had *made* to abide by the brook Besor" shows plainly that those fatigued men earnestly desired to follow David further, and had to be constrained not to do so. Typically, it tells us that all Christians are not equally strong in the Lord: compare 1 John 2:13. The Hebrew word for "saluted" signifies "he asked them of peace," which means, he inquired how they did, being solicitous of their welfare. Though all Christians are not alike spiritually robust, all are equally dear unto Christ.

"Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart" (v. 22). In the most favored company there will be found selfish men, who being ungrateful to God for His kindness and favors will desire to enrich and pamper themselves, leaving their fellows to starve, for all they care. Even amid David's band, were certain sons of Belial, wicked men, of a covetous and grasping disposition. No doubt they were the ones who took the lead in suggesting that David be "stoned" (v. 6). Their real character was here made quite evident: in their evil suggestion we may see how the heart of David was tested.

"Then said David, You shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord has given us, who has preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand" (v. 23). David's reply to the selfish suggestion of some of his grasping followers was meek, pious and righteous, and it prevailed unto their silencing. Note how gently he replied even to the sons of Belial, addressing them as "my brethren"; but observe that he, at the same time, maintained his dignity as the general-in-chief, by directly denying their request. Yet it was not a mere arbitrary assertion of his authority: he followed his "You shall not do so" with powerful reasonings.

First, he reminded these selfish followers that the spoil which had been taken from the Amalekites was *not theirs* absolutely, but that "which the Lord has given us." Therein David inculcated an important principle which is to regulate us in the discharge of our Christian stewardship: freely we have received from God, and therefore freely we should give unto others. Miserliness in a child of God is a practical denial of how deeply he is indebted unto divine grace. Second, he reminded them of how mercifully the Lord had "preserved" them when they attacked a people who greatly outnumbered them, and how He had also "delivered" the Amalekites into their hands. They must not ascribe the victory unto their own prowess, and therefore they could not claim the booty as wholly belonging unto themselves. It is not a time to give way to a spirit of greed when the Lord has particularly manifested His kindness to us.

Third, he pointed out that their evil suggestion most certainly would not commend itself unto any wise, just and right-thinking people: "For who will hearken unto you in this matter?" (v. 24). When the people of God are in the majority, they will vote down the propositions of the covetous; but when the unregenerate are allowed to outnumber them in their assemblies, woe unto them. Fourth, David reminded them that those who tarried at Besor did so out of no disloyalty or unwillingness: they had fought valiantly in the past, and now they had faithfully done their part in guarding the "stuff" or baggage, and so were entitled to a share of the spoils: "But as his part is that goes down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarries by the stuff: they shall part alike" (v. 24).

The whole of the above illustrates the fact that when a backsliding believer has been restored to communion with God, he is now in a state of soul to enjoy his recovered possessions: they will no longer be a snare unto him. When God takes something from us to teach us a needed lesson, He can, after we have learned that lesson, restore it to us again. Often, though not always, He does so. Faith is now dominant again, and receives the recovered blessings from the hand of God. One who has been truly restored, like David, who knew what his own failure has been, will permit of no such selfishness as the sons of Belial advocate. Those who had stayed at home, as it were, should share in the victory. That was true

largeness of heart, which ever marks one who has learned in God's school.

But there are always some who would wish to stint those possessing less faith and energy, yet he who realizes something of his own deep indebtedness to divine grace rejoices to give out to others what he has gained. When the Lord is pleased to open up some part of His precious Word unto one of His servants he, with enlarged heart, welcomes every opportunity to pass on the same to others. But how often are those who seek to pour cold water on his zeal, urging that it is not "wise" or "timely," yes, that such teaching may prove "dangerous." While it is not fitting that we should take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs, on the other hand it is sinful to withhold any portion of the Bread of Life from hungry souls. If God has restored to us any portion of His truth, we owe it to the whole Household of Faith to impart it unto as many as will receive it.

"And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, even to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the Lord" (v. 26). "David not only distributed of the spoil to all who had followed him in the wilderness, and shared his dangers there—he also remembered that there were some, who, though they had refused to quit their position in Israel, and had shrunk (as well they might) from the cave of Adullam, did nevertheless love and favor him. Yet though they had drawn back from following him, and had declined to partake of his cup of sorrow, David, in the hour of his triumph, refused not to them participation in his joy. Such is the liberality of a heart that has sought and found its portion in *grace*" (B. W. Newton).

Very blessed is what we find recorded in these closing verses of 1 Samuel 30. Those who view God as the Giver of their abundance will dispense of it with equity and liberality: they will seek to restrain injustice in others (v. 23), establish useful precedents (v. 25), and share with friends (verses 26-31). The Amalekites had spoiled some of those parts of Judah mentioned in verses 26-31 (see verses 14, 16), and therefore did David now send relief to those sufferers: it was the part of justice to restore what had been taken from them. Moreover, he had a grateful remembrance of those friends who secretly favored him during the time of Saul's persecution, and who had sheltered and relieved his men in the time of this distress (v. 31). Instead of selfishly enriching himself, he generously befriended others, and gave them proof that the Lord was with him.

Fearfully divergent may be the effects produced on different persons who pass under the same trials and blessings. The "sons of Belial" companied with David during the night of his sorrow (as Judas did with Christ), and were also made the recipients of his mercies; yet they now evidenced a state of soul which marked them in God's sight as "wicked men" (v. 22). What more abhorrent to God than that which would narrow the expansiveness of grace: what more hateful in His sight than a selfishness which sought to extract out of His free favors an excuse for enriching itself by despising others—cf. John 12:4-6. But how different with David: from the ruins of Ziklag he rose, step by step, to a higher faith: manifesting dependency upon God, seeking His guidance, obtaining energy to pursue the enemy, and exercising largeness of heart in sharing the spoils with all. Thereby did he furnish an eminent foreshadowing of Him who 'took the prey from the mighty" (Isaiah 49:24), "led captivity captive, and *gave gifts unto men*" (Ephesians 4:8).

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

His Lamentations for Saul

1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1

The final chapter of 1 Samuel presents to us an unspeakably solemn and terrible scene, being concerned not with David, but with the termination of Saul's earthly life. In these chapters we have said little about him, but here one or two paragraphs concerning his tragic career and its terrible close seem in place. A solemn summary of this, from the *divine* side, is found in Hosea 13:11, when at a later date, God reminded rebellious Israel, "I gave them a king in Mine anger, *and took him away in My wrath*": the reference being to Saul.

The history of Saul properly begins at the eighth chapter. There we behold the revolted heart of Israel, which had departed further and further from Jehovah, desiring a human king in His stead. Though Samuel the prophet faithfully remonstrated, and space was given them to repent of their rash decision, it was in vain: they were determined to have their own way. "Nevertheless the people . . . said, Nay, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (8:19, 20). Accordingly, God, "in His anger," delivered them up to their own hearts' lusts and suffered them to be plagued by one who proved a disappointment and curse to them, until, by his godless incompetency, he brought the kingdom of Israel to the very verge of destruction.

From the *human* side of things, Saul was a man splendidly endowed, given a wonderful opportunity, and had a most promising prospect. Concerning his physique we are told, "Saul was a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (9:2). Regarding his acceptability unto his subjects, we read that when Samuel set him before them, that "all the people shouted, and said, God save the king" (10:24): more, "there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched" (10:26), giving the young king favor in their eyes. Not only so, but "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul" (11:6), equipping him for his office, and giving proof that God was ready to act if he would submit to His yoke.

Yet notwithstanding these high privileges, Saul, in his spiritual madness, played fast and loose with them, mined his life, and by disobeying and defying God, lost his soul. In the thirteenth chapter of 1 Samuel we find Saul tried and found wanting. The prophet left him for a little while, bidding him go to Gilgal and wait for him there, until he should come and offer the sacrifices. Accordingly we are told "he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed." And then we read, "but Samuel came not to Gilgal, and the people were scattered from him"—having lost their confidence in the king to lead them against the Philistines to victory. Petulant at the delay, Saul presumptuously invaded the prophet's prerogative and said, "Bring hither a burnt offering to *me,* and peace offerings, And *he* offered the burnt offering" (13:9). Thus did he forsake the word of the Lord and break the first command he received from Him.

In the 15th chapter we see him tested again by a command from the Lord: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not: but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (verses 2, 3). But again he disobeyed: "But Saul and the people *spared* Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and *would not* utterly destroy them" (v. 9). Then it was that the prophet announced, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king" (verses 22,23). From that point Saul rapidly went from bad to worse: turning against David and relentlessly seeking his life, shedding the blood of God's priests (22:18, 19), until at last he scrupled not to seek the aid of the devil himself (28:7,8).

And now the day of recompense had come, when he who had advanced steadily from one degree of impiety to another, should miserably perish by his own hand. The divine account of this is given in 1 Samuel 31. The Philistines had joined themselves against Israel in battle. First, Saul's own army was defeated (v. 1); next, his sons, the hopes of his family, were slain before his eyes (v. 2); and then the king himself was sorely wounded by the archers (v. 3). Fearful indeed is what follows: no longer able to resist his enemies, nor yet flee from them, the God-abandoned Saul expressed no concern for his soul, but desired only that his life might be dispatched speedily, so that the Philistines might not gloat over him and torture his body.

First, he called upon his armor-bearer to put an end to his wretched life, but though his servant neither feared God nor death, he had too much respect for the person of his sovereign to lift up his hand against him (v. 4). Whereupon Saul became his own murderer: Saul took a sword and fell upon it"; and his armor-bearer, in a mad expression of fealty to his royal master, imitated his fearful example. Saul was therefore the occasion of his servant being guilty of fearful wickedness, and "perished not alone in his iniquity." As he had lived, so he died: proud and jealous, a terror to himself and all about him, having neither the fear of God nor hope in God. What a solemn warning for each of us! What need is there for both writer and reader to heed that exhortation, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living of God" (Hebrews 3:13).

The cases of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), Zimri (1 Kings 16:18) and Judas the traitor (Matthew 27:5) are the only other instances recorded in Scripture of those who murdered themselves. The awful sin of suicide seems to have occurred very rarely in Israel, and not one of the above cases is extenuated by ascribing the deed unto insanity! When the character of those men be examined, we may perceive not only the enormity of the crime by which they put an end to their wretched lives, but the unspeakably fearful consequences which must follow the fatal deed. How can it be otherwise, when men either madly presume on the mercy of God or despair of it. in order to escape temporal suffering or disgrace, despise His gift of life, and rush headlong, uncalled, unto His tribunal? By an act of direct rebellion against God's authority (

Exodus 20:13), and in daring defiance of His justice, suicides fling themselves on the bosses of Jehovah's buckler, with the guilt of unrepented sin on their hands.

"And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armor, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. And they put his armor in the house of Ashtareth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan" (31 :8-10). Though Saul had escaped torture at their hands, his body was signally abused—adumbrating, we doubt not, the awful suffering which his soul was now enduring, and would continue to endure forever. Saul's self-inflicted death points a most solemn warning for us to earnestly watch and pray that we may be preserved from both presumption and despair, and divinely enabled to bear up under the trials of life, and quietly to hope for the salvation of the Lord (Lam. 3:26), that Satan may not tempt us to the horrible sin of self-murder for which the Scriptures hold out *no* hope of forgiveness.

"Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag" (2 Samuel 1:1). David had returned to Ziklag, where he was engaged with dividing the spoil he had captured and in sending presents to his friends (1 Samuel 30:26-31). "It was strange he did not leave some spies about the camps to bring him early notice of the issue of the engagement (between the Philistines and the army of Saul): a sign he desired not Saul's woeful day, nor was impatient to come to the throne, but willing to wait until those tidings were brought to him, which many a one would have sent more than half way to meet. He who believes does not make haste, takes good news when it comes, and is not weary while it is in the coming" (Matthew Henry).

"It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance. And David said unto him, From whence come you? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray you, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also" (2 Samuel 1:2-4). This Amalekite presented himself as a mourner for the dead king, and as a loyal subject to the one who should succeed Saul. No doubt he prided himself that he was the first to pay homage to the sovereign-elect, expecting to be rewarded for bringing such good news (4: 10); whereas he was the first to receive sentence of death from David's hands.

"And David said unto the young man that told him, How know you that Saul and Jonathan be dead? And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who are you? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. And he said unto me again, Stand, I pray you, upon me, and slay me, for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord" (verses 5-10). This is one of the passages seized by atheists and infidels to show that "the Bible is full of contradictions," for the account here given of Saul's death by no means tallies with what is recorded in the previous chapter. But the seeming difficulty is easily solved: 1 Samuel 31 contains God's description of Saul's death; 2 Samuel 1 gives man's fabrication. Holy Writ records the lies of God's enemies (Genesis 3:4) as well as the true

From 1 Samuel 31:4 it is definitely established that Saul murdered himself, and *was dead* before his armor-bearer committed suicide. That is the unerring record of the Holy Spirit Himself, and must not be questioned for a moment. In view of this, it is quite evident that the Amalekite who now communicated to David the tidings of Saul's death, lied in a number of details. Finding Saul's body with the insignia of royalty upon it—which evidenced both the conceit and rashness of the infatuated king: going into battle with the crown upon his head, and thus making himself a mark for the Philistine archers—he seized them (v. 10), and then formed his story in such a way as he hoped to ingratiate himself with David. Thus did this miserable creature seek to turn the death of Saul to his own personal advantage, and scrupled not to depart from the truth in so doing; concluding, from the wickedness of his own heart, that David would be delighted with the news he communicated.

By the death of Saul and Jonathan the way was now opened for David to the throne. "If a large proportion of Israel stood up for the rights of Ishbosheth, who was a very insignificant person (2 Samuel 2-4), doubtless far more would have been strenuous for Jonathan. And though *he* would readily have given place, yet his brethren and the people in general would no doubt have made much more opposition to David's accession to the kingdom" (Thomas Scott). Yet so far was David from falling into a transport of joy, as the poor Amalekite expected, that he mourned and wept; and so strong was his passion that all about him were similarly affected: "Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: And they mourned and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword" (verses 11, 12).

"Rejoice not when your enemy falls; and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles" (Proverbs 24:17). There are many who secretly wish for the death of those who have injured them, or who keep them from honors and estates, and who inwardly rejoice even when they pretend to mourn outwardly. But the grace of God subdues this base disposition, and forms the mind to a more liberal temper. Nor will the spiritual soul exult in the prospect of worldly advancement, for he realizes that such will increase his responsibilities, that he will be surrounded by greater temptations and called to additional duties and cares. David mourned for Saul out of good will, without constraint: out of compassion, without malice; because of the melancholy circumstances attending his death and the terrible consequences which must follow, as well as for Israel's being triumphed over by the enemies of God.

"And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence are you? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. And David said unto him, How were you not afraid to stretch forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. And David said unto him, Your blood be upon your head; for your mouth has testified against you, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed" (verses 13-16). As an Amalekite, he was devoted to destruction (Deuteronomy 25: 17-19), and as the elect-king, David was now required

The last nine verses of our chapter record the "lamentation" or elegy which David made over Saul and Jonathan. Not only did David rend his clothes, weep, and fast over the decease of his arch-enemy, but he also composed a poem in his honor: 2 Samuel 1: 17-27. Nor was it mere sentiment which prompted him: it was also because he looked upon Saul as Israel's "king," the "anointed" of God (v. 16). This elegy was a noble tribute of respect unto Saul and of tender affection for Jonathan. First, he expressed sorrow over the fall of the mighty (v. 19). Second, he deprecated the exultations of the enemies of God in the cities of the Philistines (v. 20). Third, he celebrated Saul's valor and military renown (verses 21,22). Fourth, he touchingly mentioned the fatal devotion of Jonathan to his father (v. 23). Fifth, he called upon the daughters of Israel, who had once sung Saul's praises, to now weep over their fallen leader (v. 24). Sixth, his faults are charitably veiled! Seventh, nothing could truthfully be said of Saul's piety, so David would not utter lies—how this puts to shame the untruthful adulations found in many a funeral oration! Eighth, he ended by memorializing the fervent love of Jonathan for himself.

CHAPTER THIRTY

His Sojourn at Hebron

2 Samuel 2

The news of Saul's death had been received by the exiled David in characteristic fashion. He first flamed out in fierce anger against the lying Amalekite, who had hurried with the tidings, hoping to curry favor with him by pretending that he had killed Saul on the field of battle. A short shrift and a bloody end were his, and then the wrath gave place to mourning. Forgetting the mad hatred and relentless persecution of his late enemy, thinking only of the friendship of his earlier days and his official status as the anointed of the Lord, our hero cast over the mangled corpses of Saul and Jonathan the mantle of his noble elegy, in which he sings the praise of the one and celebrates the love of the other. Not until those offices of justice and affection had been performed, did he think of himself and the change which had been affected in his own fortunes.

It seems clear that David had never regarded Saul as standing between himself and the kingdom. The first reaction from his death was not, as it would have been with a less devout and less generous heart, a flush of gladness at the thought of the empty throne; but instead, a sharp pang of grief from the sense of an empty heart. And even when he began to contemplate his immediate future and changed fortunes he carried himself with commendable self-restraint. At the time David was still a fugitive in the midst of the ruins of Ziklag, but instead of rushing ahead, "making the most of his opportunity," and seizing the empty throne, he sought directions from the Lord. Ah, we not only need to turn unto God in times of deep distress, but equally so when His outward providences appear to be working decidedly in our favor.

David would do nothing in this important crisis of his life—when all which had for so long appeared a distant hope, now seemed to be rapidly becoming a present fact—until his Shepherd should lead him. Impatient and impetuous as he was by nature, schooled to swift decisions, followed by still swifter actions, knowing that a blow struck speedily while all was chaos and despair in the kingdom, might at once set him on the throne; nevertheless, he held the flesh, carnal policy, and the impatience of his followers in check, to hear what God would say. To a man of David's experience it must have appeared that now was the opportune moment to subdue the remaining adherents of the fallen Saul, rally around himself his loyal friends, grasp the crown and the scepter, vanquish the gloating Philistines, and secure unto himself the kingdom of Israel. Instead, he refused to take a single step until Jehovah had signified *His will* in the matter.

The manner in which David conducted himself on this occasion presents an example which we do well to take to heart and punctually emulate. The important principle of action which was here exemplified has been well expressed by another: "If we would possess temporal things with a blessing, we must not eagerly seize upon them, nor be determined by favorable events or carnal counsel: but we must observe the rules of God's Word, and pray for His direction; using those means, and those only, which He has appointed or allowed, and avoid all evil, or 'appearance of evil,' in our pursuit of them: and then whatever else we fail in, we shall be directed in the way to the kingdom of Heaven" (Thomas Scott). "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and *He shall direct your paths*" (Proverbs 3:5,6).

To "acknowledge" the Lord in all our ways means that instead of acting in self-sufficiency and self-will, we seek wisdom from *above* in every undertaking of our earthly affairs, beg God to grant us light from His Word on our path, and seek His honor and glory in all that we attempt. Thus it was now with David: "And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" (2 Samuel 2:1). This is very blessed, and should be linked with all that was before us in 1 Samuel 30:6-31. What is here recorded of David supplies further proof of his having been restored from backsliding. Previously he had *left* the cities of Judah "inquiring" of his own heart (1 Samuel 27:1), but now he would only think of *returning* thither as God might conduct him. Alas, that most of us have to pass through many painful and humiliating experiences before we learn this lesson.

"David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" Though the Lord had promised him the kingdom, though he had already been anointed by Samuel unto the same, and though Saul was now dead, David was not hasty to take matters into his own hands, but desired to submit himself unto God's directions and act only according to His revealed will. This evidenced the fact that he really trusted in Him who had promised him the kingdom, to give it to him in His own due time and manner; and thus he would possess it with a clear conscience, and at the same time avoid all those appearances of evil with which he might know the remaining adherents of Saul would be ready to charge him. So fully did he fulfill the word of his early Psalm: "my Strength! upon You will I wait" (59:9). We never lose anything by believing and patiently waiting upon God; but we are always made to suffer when we take things into our own hands and rush blindly ahead.

"Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" David was prepared to go where the Lord bade him. His particular inquiry about "the cities of *Judah*" was because that was his own tribe and the one to which most of his friends belonged. "And the Lord said, Go up": that is, from Ziklag into the territory of Judah, though He did not specify any particular city. This is usually the Lord's method: to first give us a *general* intimation of His will for us, and later more specific details little by little. He does not make known to us the whole path at once, but keeps us dependent upon Himself for light and strength, step by step. This is for our good, for our training, though it be a trying of our patience. Patience is a grace of great price in the sight of God, and it is only developed by discipline. May grace be diligently sought and divinely bestowed so that we shall heed that exhortation, "let patience have her perfect work" (James 1:4).

"And the Lord said unto him, Go up": the absence of anything more definite was a *testing* of David. Had the flesh been dominant in him at this time, he would have eagerly jumped to the conclusion that he was fully justified in leaving Ziklag immediately and taking prompt measures to obtain the kingdom. Blessed is it to see how he responded to the test: instead of rushing ahead, he continued to wait on the Lord for more explicit instructions, and asked, *"Where* shall I go up?" (v. 1)—to which part of Judah, Jerusalem or where? He had paid dearly in the past for taking journeys which the Lord had not ordered, and for residing in places which He had not named for him; and now he desired to move only as God should appoint. Reader, have you yet reached this point in your spiritual experience: have you truly surrendered unto the lordship of Christ, so that you have turned over to Him the entire government and disposing of your life? If not, you know not how much peace, joy and blessing you are missing.

"And He said, Unto Hebron" (v. 1). This is recorded for our encouragement. The Lord is never wearied by our asking! Nay, the more childlike we are, the better for us; the more we cast *all* our care upon Him (1 Peter 5:7), the more we seek counsel of Him, the more He is honored and pleased. Has He not told us, "in *everything* by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6)? That means just what it says, and we are greatly the losers, and God is dishonored, just in proportion to our disregard of that privilege and duty. The old hymn is true when it says, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry, Everything to God in prayer." The readiness of Jehovah to respond unto David's inquiry, is a sure intimation of His willingness to hear us; for He is "the same, yesterday, and today, and forever."

"And He said, Unto Hebron." There is a spiritual beauty in this word which can only be perceived as we compare scripture with scripture. In the Old Testament "Hebron" stands typically, for *communion.* This may be seen from the first mention of the word: "Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there *an altar* unto the Lord" (Genesis 13:15). Again, "So he (Jacob) sent him (Joseph, on an errand of mercy to his brethren) out of the valley of Hebron" (Genesis 37:14)—figure of the Father sending the Son on a mission of grace unto His elect. "And they gave Hebron unto Caleb" (Judges 1:20): the place of fellowship became the portion of the man who followed the Lord "Fully" (Numbers 14:24). How fitting, then, that the restored David should be sent back to "Hebron"—it is ever back unto *communion* the Lord calls His wandering child. O how thankful we should be when the Holy Spirit restores us to communion with God, even though it be at the cost of disappointment and sorrow (Ziklag) to the flesh.

"So David went up to Hebron" (2 Samuel 2:2). God had graciously granted him the needed word of guidance, and he hollowed out the same. O that all his actions had been controlled by the same rule: how much trouble and grief he had then escaped. But they were not; and this makes the more solemn the contrast presented in the next statement: "And his two wives also, Abinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail, Nabal's wife the Carmelite" (v. 2). Here was the one blot on the otherwise fair picture: the lusts of the flesh obtruded themselves; yes, immediately after his having sought guidance from God!—what a warning for us: we are never safe a single moment unless upheld by the arm of Omnipotence. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Divine chastisement was the sequel to what we read of in 1 Samuel 25:44, so now we may be assured that his retention of "two wives" omened ill for the future.

"And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron" (v. 3). Those who had been David's companions in tribulation were not forgotten now that he was moving forward toward the kingdom. Blessed foreshadowment was this of "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2: 12).

"And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah" (v. 4). David had been *privately* anointed as Saul's successor (1 Samuel 16:12,13), now the principal princes in the tribe of Judah *publicly* owned him as their king. They did not take it upon themselves to make him king over all Israel, but left the other tribes to act for themselves. No doubt in this they acted according to the mind of David, who had no desire to force himself on the whole nation at once, preferring to obtain government over them by degrees, as Providence should open his way. "See how David rose gradually: he was first appointed king in reversion, then in possession of one tribe only, and at last over all the tribes. Thus the kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, is set up by degrees: He is Lord of all by divine designation, but 'we see not yet all things put under Him': Hebrews 2:8" (Matthew Henry).

"And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-Gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be you of the Lord, that you have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him" (v. 5). David expressed his appreciation of what the men of Jabesh had done in rescuing the bodies of Saul and his sons from the Philistines, and for the kindly care they had taken of them. He pronounced the blessing of the Lord upon them, which probably means that he asked Him to reward them. By thus honoring the memory of his predecessor he gave evidence that he was not aiming at the crown from any principles of carnal ambition, or from any enmity to Saul, but only because he was called of God to it.

"And now the Lord show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because you have done this thing" (v. 6). David not only prayed God's blessing upon those who honored the remains of Saul, but he promised to remember them himself when opportunity afforded. Finally, he bade them fear not the Philistines, who might resent their action and seek revenge—especially as they no longer had a head over them; but *he,* as king of Judah, would take their part and assist them: "Therefore now let your hands be strengthened and be you valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them" (v. 7). Thus did he continue to show his regard for the late king. By sending a deputation to Jabesh, David instituted a conciliatory measure toward the remaining adherents of Saul.

"But Abner the son of Her, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim" (v. 8). This is a solemn "But," traceable, we believe, to the "two wives" of verse 2! David was not to come to the throne of all Israel without further opposition. Abner was general of the army, and no doubt desired to keep his position. He took Ishbosheth, apparently the only son of Saul now left, to Mahanaim, a city on the other side of the Jordan, in the territory of Gath (Joshua 13:24-26): partly to keep the men of Jabesh-Gilead in awe and prevent their joining with David, and partly that he might be at some distance both from the Philistines and from David, where he might mature his plans. "Ishbosheth" signifies "a man of shame": he was not considered fit to accompany his father to battle, yet was now deemed qualified to occupy the throne to the exclusion of David.

"And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel" (v. 9). The nation in general had rejected the "Judges" whom God had raised up for them, and had demanded a king; and now in the same rebellious spirit, they refused the prince which the Lord had selected for them. In type it was Israel preferring Barabbas to Jesus Christ. Abner prevailed until he got all the tribes of Israel, save Judah, to own Ishbosheth as their king. All this time David was quiet, offering no resistance: thus keeping his oath in 1 Samuel 24:21 and 22!

"The believer's progress must be gradual: his faith and his graces must be proved, and his pride subdued, before he can properly endure any kind of prosperity: and for these purposes the Lord often employs the perverseness of his brethren, without their knowledge or contrary to their intention. In the professing Church few honor those whom the Lord will honor: before Jesus came, and in each succeeding generation, the very builders have rejected such as Heaven intended for eminent situations; and His servants must be conformed to Him. Ambition, jealousy, envy, and other evil passions, cause men to rebel against the Word of God, but they generally attempt to conceal their real motives under plausible pretenses. The believer's wisdom, however, consists in waiting quietly and silently under injuries, and in leaving God to plead his cause, except it be evidently his duty to be active" (Thomas Scott).

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

His Testing

2 Samuel 2

It is a wonderful thing when a wayward believer is brought back to his place of fellowship with God, as David had been, though it necessarily involves added obligations. It is *sin* which causes us to leave that place, and though at first sin be a sweet morsel unto the flesh, yet it soon turns bitter, and ultimately becomes as wormwood and gall unto him who has yielded to it. "The way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:14): the wicked prove the full truth of that fact in the next world, where they discover that "the wages of sin is death"—a death agonizing in its nature and eternal in its duration. But even in this life the transgressor is usually made to feel the hardness of that way which his own mad self-will has chosen, and especially is this the case with the believer, for the harvest of *his* ill sowings is reaped—mainly, at least—in this world. The Christian, equally with the non-Christian, is a subject under the government of God, and *doubly* is *he* made to realize that God cannot be mocked with impunity.

Strikingly and solemnly was this fact exemplified in the history of Israel during Old Testament times, *this* principle supplies the key to all God's governmental dealings with them. The history of no nation has been nearly so checkered as *theirs:* no people was ever so sorely and so frequently afflicted as the favored descendants of Jacob. From the death of Joshua unto the days of Malachi we find one judgment after another sent from God upon them. Famines, pestilence, earthquakes, internal dissensions and external assaults from the surrounding nations, followed each other in rapid succession, and were *repeated* again and again. There were brief respites, short seasons of peace and prosperity, but for the most part it was one sore trouble after another. God did not deal *thus* with any other nation during the Mosaic economy. It is true that heathen empires suffered, and ultimately collapsed under the weight of their lasciviousness, but in the main God "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16), and "the times of this ignorance God winked at" (Acts 17:30).

Far otherwise was it with His own covenant people. This has surprised many; yet it should not. Unto Israel God said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." Yes, and that has been commonly recognized by readers of the Old Testament, but what immediately follows has very largely been lost sight of—"*therefore* I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Ah, it was *not* "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, *therefore* will I *wink at* your sins, excuse *your* faults, and pass over your transgressions." No, no; far from it. It was unto Israel that God had revealed Himself, it was "in Judah He was known," and therefore would He manifest before their hearts and eyes His ineffable holiness and inflexible justice. Where they were loose and lax, despising God's authority, and recklessly and brazenly breaking His laws, He would *vindicate His* honor by making it appear how much He hated sin, and hates it most of all in those who are *nearest* to Him! See Ezekiel 9:6!

That is why another of Israel's prophets announced unto those who had, under a temporal covenant, been taken into a bridal relation to Jehovah, "she has received of the Lord's hand *double* for all *her* sins" (Isaiah 40:2). Does that strike the reader as strange? But why should it? Are not the sins of the professing people of God *doubly heinous* to those committed by them who make no profession at all? What comparison was there between the sins of the nation of Israel and the sins of the heathen who were without the knowledge of the true God? The sins of the former were sins *against light,* against an open and written revelation from Heaven, against the abounding goodness and amazing grace of God toward them; and therefore must He, in His holiness and righteousness, make the severest example *of them.* Make no mistake upon that point: God will either be sanctified *by* or *upon* those who have been taken into a place of (even outward) nearness to Himself: see Leviticus 10:3.

Thus, Amos 3:3 becomes a *prophecy* of God's dealings with Christendom. The great difference which existed between the nations of Israel and the Gentiles, finds its parallel in this era between Christendom (the sphere where Christianity is professedly acknowledged) and the heathen world. But with this additional most solemn consideration: increased privileges necessarily entail increased responsibilities. Under this Christian era a far higher and grander revelation of God has been made in and through and by the Lord Jesus Christ, than ever the *nation* of Israel had in Old Testament times. If then Israel's *despising* of God in His inferior revelation was followed by such awful consequences to the temporal welfare of their people under the old covenant, what *must be* the consequences of the *despising* of God in His highest revelation under the new covenant? "See that you refuse not Him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused Him that spoke on earth, *much more* shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaks from Heaven" (Hebrews 12:25).

But what has all the above to do with the life of David? Much every way. God dealt with individual saints, who had been taken into spiritual nearness to Himself on the same principles, governmentally (that is, in the ordering of their temporal affairs), as He treated with the nation as a whole, which enjoyed only outward nearness to Himself. Hence, *as* David sowed in his conduct so he reaped in his circumstances. As *we* have seen in the last few chapters, God had acted in marvelous grace with the son of Jesse, and following his repentance and putting things right with the Lord, had unmistakably shown Himself strong on his behalf, ending by bringing him to "Hebron" which speaks of *fellowship.* Thus, David had now reached the point, where God said to him, as it were, "sin no more, *lest a worse thing came upon you"* (John 5:14).

Should it be asked, "But what has all of this to do with us? *We* are living in the 'Dispensation of Grace,' and God deals with people now—both nations collectively, and saints individually—very differently from what He did in Old Testament times." That is a great mistake: a glaring and a horrible one. Glaring it certainly is, for Romans 15:4 expressly states, "Whatever things were written *aforetime* were written for our learning": but what *could* we "learn" from the ways of God with His people of old if He is now acting from entirely different principles? Nothing whatever; in fact, in that case, the less we read the Old Testament, the less we are likely to be confused. Ah, my reader, in the New Testament also we read that "judgment must begin at

the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). *Christians* are also warned, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Horrible too is such teaching, for it represents the immutable God *changing* the principles of His government.

What has been pointed out in the above paragraphs is something more than an interesting and instructive item of historical information, explaining much that is to be met with in the Old Testament Scriptures, throwing light upon God's dealings with the nation of Israel collectively and with its prominent men individually; it is also of vital moment *for Christians today.* "Righteousness and judgment are the habitation" of God's "throne" (Psalm 97:2), and *our* temporal affairs are regulated and determined according to the same principles of God's moral government as were those of His people in by gone ages. If the distinguishing favors of God do not restrain from sin, they most certainly will not exempt us from divine chastisement. Nay, the greater the divine privileges enjoyed by us, the nearer we are brought unto God in a way of profession and favor, the more quickly will He notice our inconsistencies and the more severely will He deal with our sins.

"He who despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much *sorer punishment,* suppose you, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and has done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:28,29). Here is a statement of the broad principle which we have been seeking to explicate and illustrate. True, in this particular passage the application of it is made unto apostates, but the fact is plainly enough revealed that the greater the privileges enjoyed the greater the obligations entailed, and the greater the guilt incurred when those obligations are ignored. The same principle applies (though the consequences are different) in the contrast between the sins of the Christian and the non-Christian. The sins of the former are more heinous than those of the latter. How so? Because God is far more dishonored by the sins of those who bear His name than by those who make no profession at all.

The same principle, as it applies to gradation by contrast, holds good of the individual Christian in different stages of his own life. The more light God gives him, the more practical godliness He requires from him; the more favors he receives and privileges he enjoys, the more responsible is he to bear increased fruit. So too a sin committed by him may receive comparatively light chastisement; but let it be repeated and he may expect the rod to fall more heavily upon him. In like manner, God may bear long with one of his backslidden children, and though the path of recovery be a thorny one, yet will he exclaim "I richly deserved far severer treatment." But when the backslider has been restored and brought back into communion with God, another departure from Him is likely to be attended with far worse consequences than the former one was.

"But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be *feared*" (Psalm 130:4). Yes, "feared," not trifled with, not that we may the more confidently give free rein to our lusts. A true apprehension of the divine mercy will not embolden unto sin, but will deepen our hatred of it, and make us more earnest in striving to abstain from it. A spiritual apprehension of God's abounding grace toward us, so far from begetting carelessness, produces increased carefulness, lest we displease One so kind and good. It is just because the Christian has been sealed by the Spirit unto the day of redemption, that he is exhorted to watchfulness lest he "grieve" Him. The more the heart truly appreciates the infinitude of God's wondrous love unto us, the more will its language be, "How can I do this great wickedness against Him!"

"But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." Not a slavish and servile fear, but the fear of the Lord which is "the beginning of wisdom": that fear which reverences, loves, worships, serves and obeys Him. Genuine gratitude for God's pardoning grace will move the soul unto suitable filial conduct: it works a fear of being carried away from the heavens of His conscious presence by the insidious current of worldliness. It is jealous lest anything be allowed that would mar our communion with the Lover of our souls. Where the pardoning mercy of God is thankfully esteemed by the soul, it calls to mind the fearful price which was paid by Christ so that God could righteously forgive His erring people. and *that* consideration melts the heart and moves to loving obedience.

"But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." Yes, once more we say "feared," and not "trifled with." The word unto backsliders, who have been pardoned and graciously restored to fellowship with God, is "Let them not *turn again* to folly" (Psalm 85:8): that is, let them beware of any cooling of their affections, and slipping back into their old ways; let them pray earnestly and strive resolutely against a sinful trading with God's mercy and a turning of His grace into lasciviousness. We serve a jealous God, and must needs therefore be incessantly vigilant against sin. If we are not, if we do "return again to folly," then most surely will His rod fall more heavily upon us; and not only will our inward peace be disturbed, but our outward circumstances will he made to sorely trouble us.

That principle was plainly enunciated in the threatening which the Lord made unto Israel of old: "And if you will not be reformed by Me by *these* things, but will walk contrary unto Me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you *yet seven times* for your sins" (Leviticus 26:23,24). If the first sensible tokens of God's displeasure do not attain their end in the humbling of ourselves beneath His mighty hand and the reforming of our ways, if His lesser judgments do not lead to this, then He will surely send sorer judgments upon us. Ezra recognized this principle when, after the remnant had come out of Babylon, he said, "After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserved, and have given us such deliverance as this; should we *again* break Your commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? would not You be angry with us until You have consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?" (Ezra 9: 13, 14). Then let *us* beware of trifling with God, particularly so after He has recovered us from a season of backsliding.

Instead of taking up the details of 2 Samuel 2:9-32 (the passage which immediately follows the verses considered in the preceding chapter), we felt this topical one would prove much more helpful in paving the way for those which are to follow. Those verses record an encounter between the rival factions, The gauntlet was thrown down by Abner, the general of the followers of Ishbosheth (Saul's son), and the challenge was accepted by Joab, who headed the military forces of David. Neither side brought their full army into the field, and the slaughter was but small (v. 30). The men of Abner, the aggressor, were routed, and at the close of the day their captain begged for peace (v. 26). Knowing the pacific intentions of David, and his-loathness to make war upon the house of Saul, Joab generously called a halt (v. 28); and each side made their way homeward (verses 29-32).

And now a word upon the title we have given to this chapter, and we must close. David was now located at Hebron, which signifies communion or fellowship. The men of Judah had made him their king (2 Samuel 2:4), which though a step toward it, was by no means the complete fulfillment of the promise that he should be king "over *Israel*" (1 Samuel 16:1, 13). David made kindly overtures unto "the men of Jabesh-Gilead," the followers of the late Saul (v. 5), expressing the hope they would now show fealty to him (v. 7). Would the Lord continue showing Himself strong on his behalf, by turning the hearts of the rival faction toward him? The need for this was evident (verses 7-10), yet it was easy for God to heal that breach and give David favor in the eyes of all. Would He do so? How far will the present conduct of David warrant this? for God will not place a premium on sin. David is now *put to the test:* how he acquitted himself we must leave for the next chapter.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

His Failure

2 Samuel 3 and 4

In our last chapter (so far as the application of the principles enunciated therein related to him who is the principal subject of this book) we endeavored to show that very much hinged on the manner in which David now conducted himself. A most important crisis had been reached in his life. The time which he spent at Hebron constituted the dividing line in his career. On the one side of it was what we may designate as the period of his rejection, when the great majority of the people cleave unto Saul, who hounded him from pillar to post; on the other side of it, was the period of his exaltation when he reigned over the nation. When pondering the different events which happened in the first stage of his career, we sought to point out the moral connection between them, seeking to trace the relation between the personal conduct of David and the various circumstances which the governmental dealings of God brought about as the sequel. We propose, by divine aid, to follow a similar procedure in taking up the details under the second stage of his career.

In chapter twenty we saw how David displeased the Lord by his taking unto himself two wives (1 Samuel 25:43, 44), and in chapter twenty-two we noticed how one sin led to another; while in chapter twenty-four we observed the divine chastisement which followed. In chapter twenty-six we dwelt upon David's putting things right with God and encouraging himself in the Lord, following which we traced out the blessed results which ensued (chapters 27, 28), terminating in his being restored to full fellowship with the Lord, as was typified by God's directing him to "Hebron." There he received a "token for good" (

Psalm 86: 17) in the reception which he met with from the men of his own tribe, who came and "anointed David over the house of Judah" (2 Samuel 2:4): that was indeed a promising intimation that if his ways continued to please the Lord, He would make "even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7). On the other hand, that "token for good" only becomes the more solemn in the light of all that follows.

How much there is in the later chapters of 2 Samuel which makes such pathetic and tragic reading. Few men have experienced such sore social and domestic trials as David did. Not only was he caused much trouble by political traitors in his kingdom, but, what was far more painful, the members of his own family brought down heavy grief upon him. His favorite wife turned against him (6:20-22), his daughter Tamar was raped by her half brother (13:14), his son Ammon was murdered (13:28, 29). His favorite son Absalom sought to wrest the kingdom from him, and then he was murdered (18:14). Before his death, another of his sons, Adonijah, sought to obtain the throne (1 Kings 1:5), and he too was murdered (1 Kings 2:24,25). Inasmuch as the Lord never afflicts willingly (Lam. 3:33), but only as our sins occasion it, how are these most painful family afflictions to be accounted for?

If the Holy Spirit has been pleased to furnish us with any explanation of the sore trials which David encountered in his later life, or if He has supplied us with materials that serve to throw light upon what is recorded in the second half of 2 Samuel, then that explanation must be sought for or that illuminating material must be inquired after, in the *early* chapters of that book. This is a principle of great importance in order to a right understanding of the Scriptures. As a general rule, God hangs the key for us right on the door itself: in other words, the opening chapters (often the first verses) contain a clear intimation or forecast of what follows. True, in some cases, this is more apparent than in others, yet concerning each one of the sixty-six books of the Bible, it will be found that the closer be the attention given unto its introduction, the easier will it be to follow the development of its theme. Such is obviously the case here in 2 Samuel.

"Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker" (2 Samuel 3: 1). The battle referred to at the end of the previous chapter, though it went so greatly in favor of David, did not put an end to the warfare between him and Ishbosheth. Though Saul himself was no more, yet his son and subjects refused to submit quietly to David's scepter. For another five years they continued to manifest their defiance, and many were the skirmishes which took place between his men and the loyal subjects of David. The latter was loath to employ harsh measures against them, and probably his magnanimity and mildness were mistaken for weakness or fear, and encouraged his opponents to renew their efforts for his overthrow. But little by little they were weakened, until Ishbosheth was willing to make a league with

"Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." The contents of this verse may well be taken as a type of the conflict which is experienced in the heart of the Christian. David, exalted to be king over Judah, may be regarded as a figure of one of God's elect when he has been lifted out of the miry clay (into which the fall of Adam plunged him) and his feet set upon the Rock of ages. As 1 Samuel 2:8 declares, "He raises up the poor out of the dust, and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." But is all now henceforth peace and joy? Far from it. Inward corruption is there, and is ever assailing the principle of grace which was imparted at regeneration: "the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). What is the outcome? Is the flesh victorious? No, it may annoy, it may win minor skirmishes, but little by little the flesh is weakened and the spirit strengthened, until at the

"Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." Thus the kingdom of Israel was rent asunder by civil war. That it should last so long, when David was clearly in the right, has presented quite a problem to the commentators. Personally, we regard the contents of this verse as a plain intimation *that David was missing* God's *best.* This is an expression we use rather frequently in these pages, so perhaps a definition of it here will not be amiss. Let it be pointed out here that it is by no means equivalent to affirming that God's counsels may be thwarted by us. No indeed, puny man can no more defeat the eternal purpose of the Almighty than he can cause the sun to cease from shining or the ocean from rolling. "But our God is in the heavens: He has done *whatever* He has pleased" (Psalm 115:3).

There is a vast difference between the *promises* of God and His eternal *decrees:* many of the former are conditional, whereas the latter are immutable, dependent upon nothing for their fulfillment save the omnipotence of God. In saying that many of the divine promises recorded in Holy Writ are "conditional" we do not mean they are uncertain and unreliable, no; we mean that they are infallible declarations of what God will do or give *providing* we follow a certain course of conduct: just as the divine threatenings recorded in Scripture are a declaration of what God will do or inflict *if* a certain course be pursued. For example, God has declared "Them that honor Me, I will honor" (1 Samuel 2:30). But suppose we *fail* to "honor" God, suppose we do not obtain that enabling grace which He is ever ready to give unto those who earnestly seek it in a right way—what then? The same verse tells us: "And they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

Take for instance the declaration made in Joshua 1:8, "This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; but you shall meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein: for *then* you shall make your way prosperous, and *then* you shall have good success." First, let it be pointed out that that verse has nothing whatever to do with the eternal destiny of the soul; instead, it relates only to the present life of the saint. In it God tells us that *if* we give His Holy Word the first place in our thoughts and affections, and regulate both our inner and outer life by its teaching, *then* He will make our way "prosperous" and we shall have "good success." This does not mean that we shall become millionaires, but that by heeding the rules of His Word, we shall escape those rocks upon which the vast majority of our fellows make shipwreck, and that the *blessing of God* will rest upon our lives in all their varied aspects and relations; an all-wise and sovereign God determining both the kind and measure of the "success" which will be most for His glory and our highest good.

Nor are the principles enunciated in Joshua 1: 8 to be restricted in their application to those who lived under the old covenant: inasmuch as the governmental ways of God remain the same in all ages, those principles hold good in all dispensations. From the beginning of human history it has always been true, and to the end of history it will continue so to be, that "no good thing will He withhold from *them that walk uprightly*" (Psalm 84:11). On the other hand, it is equally a fact that those who are not subject to God's Word, who follow instead the devices of their own hearts and give way to the lusts of the flesh, suffer adversity and come under the rod of divine chastisement; of them it has to be said, "Your sins have withheld good things from you" (Jeremiah 5:25). In other words, they have missed God's best: not that they have failed to obtain any blessing which He had eternally decreed should be theirs, but they have not entered into the good of what God's Word promises should be the *present* portion of those who walk in obedience thereto.

"O that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto Him: but their time should have endured forever. He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat; and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied you" (Psalm 81:13-16). What could be plainer than that! This passage is not treating of the eternal counsels of God, but of His governmental dealings with men in this life.

The key to the above verses is found in their immediate context: "But My people would not hearken to My voice; and Israel would none of Me. So I gave them unto their own hearts' lust; and they walked in their own counsels" (Psalm 81:11, 12). The children of Israel walked contrary—not to the eternal purpose of Jehovah, but—to His revealed will. They would not submit to the rules laid down in God's Word, but in their self-will and self-pleading determined to have their own way; in consequence, *they missed God's best for them in this life,* instead of His subduing their enemies, He allowed those enemies to subdue them; instead of providing abundant harvests, He sent them famines; instead of giving them pastors after His own heart, He suffered false prophets to deceive.

Many more are the passages which might be quoted from the Old and New Testaments alike, which set forth the same great fact, warning us that if we walk contrary to the Scriptures we shall certainly suffer for it, both in soul and body, both in our estate and circumstances, in this life failing to enter into those blessings—spiritual and temporal—which the Word promises to those who are in subjection to it. That is as true today as it was under the old economy, and it supplies the key to many a problem, and explains much in God's governmental dealings with us. It certainly supplies the key to David's life, and explains why the chastening rod of God fell so heavily upon himself and his family. Bear in mind carefully what has been said above, read the passage which now follows, and then there is no reason why we should be surprised at all that is found unto the end of 2 Samuel.

"And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his first born was Ammon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess. And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom, the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital. And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron" (2 Samuel 3:2-5). In the light of all that has been said in the preceding chapter and in this, there is little need for us to attempt any lengthy comments upon these unpleasant verses. Here we see David giving way to the lusts of the flesh, and practicing polygamy; and as he sowed to the flesh in his family life, so in the flesh he reaped corruption in his family. Three of the above-mentioned sons were murdered!

The subject of polygamy as a whole is too large a one for us to deal with here, nor can we discuss it at length as it bore upon the lives of the different patriarchs. God's original creation of only one man and one woman indicates from the beginning that monogamy was the Divine order for man to heed (Matthew 19:4, 5). The first of whom we read in Scripture that had more wives than one, was Lamech (Genesis 4:19), who was of the evil line of Cain. And while Moses, because of the hardness of Israel's heart (Matthew 19:8) introduced the statute of divorce, yet nowhere did the Mosaic law sanction a plurality of wives. The limitation of one wife only is plainly suggested by such scriptures as Proverbs 5:18 and 18:22.

You shall in any wise set him king over you, whom the Lord your God shall choose; one from among your brethren shall you set king over you: you may not set a stranger over you, which is not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself . . . *neither shall he multiply wives of himself,* that his heart turn not away" (Deuteronomy 17:15-17). Here was a definite and express law which the *kings* of Israel were required to obey, and thereby set before their subjects an example of sobriety and marital fidelity. And this was the commandment which David so flagrantly disobeyed, for no sooner was he anointed "king over the house of Judah" (2 Samuel 2:4), than he began to *multiply* "wives" unto himself (3:2-5). Not only so, but when Abner sought to make a league with him, David laid it down as a condition that his first wife, Michal, who had been given to another man (1 Samuel 25:44) must be restored to him (2 Samuel 3:13), which was an open violation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

A little later on we read, "And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron" (2 Samuel 5:13). Here, then, was David's besetting sin, to which he yielded so freely—little wonder that his son Solomon followed in his footsteps! And a Holy God will not tolerate evil, least of all in those whom He has made leaders over His people. Though in the main David's life was pleasing to God, and spiritual excellencies were found in him, yet there was this one sad weakness. His giving way to it brought down long and sever chastenings, and the record of it as a whole—the sowing and the consequent reaping — is for our learning and warning. Learn, then, dear reader, that even when restored from backsliding and brought back to fellowship with God, your only safety lies in earnestly crying to Him daily "Hold You me up, and I shall be safe" (Psalm 119-117).

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

His Coronation

2 Samuel 5

Inasmuch as it is not our design to write a verse-by-verse commentary on the books of Samuel, but rather to study the life of David, we pass over what is found in the remainder of 2 Samuel 3 and 4 and come to the opening verses of chapter five. In the interval between what was before us in our last chapter and the incident we are now to contemplate, the providence of God has been working on David's behalf. His principal opponents had met with a summary and tragic end, and the way was now cleared for the purpose of God concerning our hero, to receive its accomplishment. Viewing him typically, it is indeed striking to observe how that David's path to the throne was marked by *blood shedding.* From the human side, Saul, Jonathan, and later, Ishbosheth, stood in the way, and none of them died a natural death; by the hand of violence was each one removed!

We cannot regard as accidental, or as a trivial detail, what has just been pointed out above. There is nothing trivial in the imperishable Word of God: everything recorded therein has a profound significance, if only we have eyes to see it. Here, the deeper meaning of these details is not hard to discern: David, in all the essential features of his history (his failures excepted), foreshadowed the Lord Jesus, and, as we know, *His* path to the throne was along one of blood shedding. True, the Lord Jesus was "born King of the Jews," as David also had been born into the royal tribe of Judah. True, Christ had been "anointed" (Matthew 3; Acts 10:38), prophet, priest, and king, years before His coronation; as David also had been "anointed" to the royal office (1 Samuel 16: 13). Yet, it was not until after His precious blood was shed at Calvary, that God exalted Christ to be a "Prince" unto the *spiritual* "Israel" (Acts 2:36; 5:31): as it was not until after the blood-shedding of Saul, Jonathan and Ishbosheth, that David became king.

Upon the death of Abner and Ishbosheth the tribes of Israel were left without a leader. Having had more than sufficient of the rule of Saul and Ishbosheth over them, they had no inclination to make a further experiment by setting another of Saul's family on the throne, and having observed the prosperous state of Judah under the wise and benign government of David, they began to entertain higher and more honorable thoughts of the "man after God's own heart." That illustrates an important principle in God's dealings with those whom He has marked out for salvation. There has to be a turning from Satan unto God, from the service of sin unto subjection to Christ. That is what true conversion is: it is a change of masters: it is a saying from the heart, "O Lord our God, other lords besides You have had dominion over us; but by *You only* will we make mention of Your name" (Isaiah 26:13).

But conversion is preceded by conviction. There is wrought in the soul a dissatisfaction with the old master, before there is begotten desires towards the new Master. Sin is made to be realized as a bitter thing, before there is an hungering and thirsting after righteousness. The cruel bonds of Satan must be felt, before there is any longing to be made free by Christ. The prodigal son was made to feel the wretchedness of the far country, before he had any thought of journeying toward the Father's house. Clearly is this principle exemplified and illustrated in the case of these men who now sought unto David, desiring that he should be king over them. They had had more than enough of what the prophet Samuel had faithfully warned them (1 Samuel 8:11-18)! They had no desire for any other of the house of Saul to reign over them, but were now desirous of submitting themselves to *David's* scepter.

Unspeakably blessed, then, is the typical picture here presented to our view. In the voluntary coming unto David of those men of the different tribes, following their unhappy lot under the reigns of Saul and Ishbosheth, we have adumbrated the outcome of the Holy Spirit's operations in the hearts of God's elect when He draws them to Christ. He first makes them discontented with their present lot. He gives them to realize there is no real and lasting satisfaction to be found in the service of sin and in continuing to follow a course of opposition to God and His Christ. He creates within the soul an aching void, before He reveals the One who alone can fill it. In short, He makes us thoroughly discontented with our present portion before He moves us to seek the true riches. The Hebrews must be made to groan under their merciless taskmasters in Egypt, before they were ready to start out for the promised land.

"Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spoke, saying, Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were he who led out and brought in Israel: and the Lord said to you, You shall feed My people Israel, and you shall be a captain over Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king over Israel" (2 Samuel 5: 1-3). Ah, note well the opening word, "Then": after a period of no less than seven and a half years since the death of Saul (v. 5).

After the death of the apostate king, and following David's recognition by the royal tribe, "It might have been expected that all Israel would have been ready to welcome him. Had it not long ago been declared by the lips of Samuel, that God had forsaken the house of Saul? Had not this been acknowledged by Saul himself? Had not God by the destruction on Gilboa, finally set His seal to the truth of His denunciations? And was it not evident, that the strength and blessing that had departed from Saul, had accompanied the dishonored sojourn of David in the wilderness? The might of Israel was there. There were they who were able to break through the host of the Philistines, and to draw from the well of Bethlehem, when Bethlehem and its waters were in the grasp of the enemy. There too, was the Psalmody of Israel. And yet, despite every indication that God had given—careless alike of the tokens of His favor toward David, and of His displeasure toward themselves—the tribes of Israel continued to reject the chosen servant of God; and Judah only welcomed him.

"The son of Saul, though feeble and unknown, was preferred to David; and David left the wilderness, only to be engaged in a long and destructive struggle with those who should have welcomed him as the gift of God for their blessing. So slowly does the hand of God effectuate its purposes—so resolute are men in refusing to recognize anything save that which gratifies the tendencies of their nature, or approves itself to the calculation of their self-interest. For seven years and six months, Abner and all the tribes of Israel fiercely assailed David: and yet afterwards, they were not ashamed to confess, that they knew that David was he whom God had destined to be the deliverer of Israel. They knew this, and yet for seven years they sought to destroy him; and no doubt, all the while, spoke of themselves, and were spoken of by others, as conscientious men fulfilling an apprehended duty in adhering to the house of Saul. So easy is it to speak well of evil, and to encourage iniquity by smooth words of falsehood.

"At last, however, God accomplished the long cherished desire of His servant's heart—the desire that He had Himself implanted—and David became the head and governor of Israel" (B. W. Newton). Yes, at last the hearts of these rebels were subdued; at last they were willing to submit themselves unto David's scepter. Ah, note well *the particular character* in which David was owned by them: "you shall be a *captain over Israel.*" As we have pointed out in the introductory paragraphs, the surrender of the men of the eleven tribes unto David, was a type of the sinner's *conversion.* This presents to us a vital and fundamental aspect of salvation which has well-nigh disappeared from modern "evangelism." What is conversion? True and saving conversion, we mean. It is far, far more than a believing that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, and that He made an atonement for our sins. Thousands believe that who are yet dead in trespasses and sins!

Conversion consists not in believing certain facts or truths made known in Holy Writ, but lies in the complete surrender of the heart and life to a divine Person. It consists in a throwing down of the weapons of our rebellion against Him. It is the total disowning of allegiance to the old master—Satan, sin, self, and a declaring "we *will* have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). It is owning the claims of Christ and bowing to His rights of absolute dominion over us. It is taking His yoke upon us, submitting unto His scepter, yielding to His blessed will. In a word, it is "receiving Christ Jesus *the Lord*" (Col 2:6), giving Him the throne of our hearts, turning over to Him the control and regulation of our lives. And, my reader, nothing short of this is a Scriptural *conversion:* anything else is make-believe, a lying substitute, a fatal deception.

In the passage now before us, these Israelites, who had for so long resisted the claims of David, serving under the banner of his adversary instead, now desired the king of Judah to be *their* king. It is evident that a great change had been *wrought in them*—wrought in them by God, though He was pleased to use circumstances to incline toward or prepare for that change: we purposely qualify our terms, for it should be quite obvious that no mere "circumstances" could have wrought *such* a change in their attitude toward the ruler of God's appointment, unless He had *so* "used" or influenced them by the same. So it is in connection with conversion: the distressing "circumstances" of a sinner may be used of the Spirit to convict him of the vanity of everything beneath the sun, and to teach him that no real heart satisfaction is to be found in mere *things*—even though those "things" may be an earthly mansion, with everything in it that the flesh craves; but He must perform a miracle of grace within the soul before any descendant of Adam is willing to pay full allegiance to Christ as *King!*

"Behold, we are your bone and your flesh" (v. 1). What a precious line in our typical picture is this! After conviction and conversion follows spiritual illumination. The Holy Spirit is given to glorify Christ: to take of the things concerning Him and reveal them to those whom He draws to the Savior (John 14:16). After a soul has been brought from death unto life by His mighty and sovereign operations, the Spirit of God *instructs* him; shows him the marvelous relation which divine grace has given him to the Redeemer. He discovers to him the glorious fact of his *spiritual union* with Christ, for "he who is *joined* to *the Lord* is one spirit" (1 Corinthians 6: 17). He reveals to the quickened children of God's family the amazing truth that they are members of that mystical Body of which Christ is the Head, and thus we are "members of His body, of His flesh, and *of His bones*" (Ephesians 5:30).

It is precious to see that these words of all the tribes of Israel, "we are your bone and your flesh," were used by them *as a plea.* They had long ignored his rights and resisted his claims. They had been in open revolt against him, and deserved nothing but judgment at his hands. But now they humbled themselves before him, and pleaded their near relation to him as a reason why he should forgive their ill-usage of him. They were his brethren, and on that ground they sought his clemency. And *this* is the very ground on which the Spirit-instructed believer sues for mercy from God in Christ. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same . . . Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:14, 17). What confidence does the apprehension of this impart to the penitent heart of the Satan-harassed and sin-distressed saint!

O dear Christian reader, beg God to make this transcendent and precious fact more real and moving to your heart. The Savior is not one who, like the cherubim and seraphim, is far removed from you in the scale of being. True, He *is* very God of very God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the King of kings and Lord of lords, but He is *also* one who was "born of a woman," who became Man, who is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, and therefore "He is not ashamed to call us *brethren*" (Hebrews 2: 11). And for the same reason He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15), and "in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to support them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Then hesitate not to approach Him with the utmost freedom and pour out your heart unreservedly before Him. He will not reprove you any more than David did his erring brethren. Take full encouragement from this endearing relation: we are the *brethren* of Christ; He is our *kinsman* Redeemed!

"Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were he who led out and brought in Israel; and the Lord said to you, You shall feed My people Israel, and you shall be a captain over Israel" (v. 2). This too is very blessed when we look through the type to the antitype. These humbled revolters now praised David for his *former* services, which before they had overlooked; and now acknowledged the Lord's appointment of him, which before they had resisted. So it is in the experience of the converted. While in the service of Saul (Satan) we have no appreciation of the work Christ has done and no apprehension of the position of honor to which God has elevated Him: the depths of humiliation into which the Beloved of the Father entered and the unspeakable suffering which He endured on behalf of His people, melted not our hearts; nor did the scepter which He now wields bring us into loving subjection to Him. But conversion alters all this!

But more: "the Lord said to you, You shall feed My people Israel, and you shall be a captain over Israel." They not only praised David for his former services, but recognizing him as the divinely appointed *shepherd* of Israel they determined to put themselves under his protection, desiring that he would rule over them in tenderness and righteousness, for their safety and comfort, and that he would lead them forth to victory over his enemies. This too finds its counterpart in the history of those who are truly converted: they realize they have many foes, both within and without, which are far too powerful for them to conquer, and therefore do they "commit the keeping of their souls *to Him*" (1 Peter 4: 19), assured that "He is able to keep . . . against that Day" (2 Timothy 1:12). Yes, He who is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh is "*mighty* to save," "able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him" (Hebrews 7:25).

1 Chronicles 12:23-40 supplies fuller light upon the opening verses of 2 Samuel 5. There we are shown not only the numbers which came unto David from each tribe, and with what zeal and sincerity they came, but also *the gracious reception they met with.* The one whom they had so grievously wronged did not refuse to accept them, but instead gave them a hearty and royal welcome: "And there they were with David three days (typically, now on *resurrection* ground), eating and drinking" (v. 39)—at perfect ease in his presence; "for there was *joy* in Israel" (v. 40). Blessed be God, the Savior of sinners has declared, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). Hallelujah!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

His Coronation

(Continued)

2 Samuel 5

The long-hunted exile has now been elevated to the throne: his principal enemies are in their graves, and David is exalted over the kingdom of Israel. There is not a little in the opening chapters of 2 Samuel which we have passed over, as being outside the scope of this series; yet they record several details that present some lovely traits in the character of our hero. As we have previously pointed out, the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan was received by David with no carnal joy, but instead with magnanimous grief (2 Samuel 1: 17). He had never regarded the apostate king and his favorite son as standing between him and the kingdom, and his first feeling on their fall was not—as it had been in a less generous heart—a flush of gladness at the thought of the empty throne, but instead a sharp pang of pain that the anointed of God had been grievously dishonored and degraded by the enemies of Israel (2 Samuel 1:20).

Even when he began to contemplate his new prospects, there was no hurried taking of matters into his own hands, but instead, a calm and reverent inquiring of the Lord (2 Samuel 2:1). He would do nothing in this crisis of his fortunes, when all which had been so long a hope seemed to be nearing its realization, until his Shepherd should lead him. Curbing his naturally impetuous disposition, refusing to take swift action and subdue his remaining opponents, holding in check the impatient ambitions of his own loyal followers, he waited to hear what *God* had to say. Few men have exercised such admirable self-restraint as David did under the circumstances which confronted him when his long-persecuting oppressor was no longer there to contest the field with him. Blessedly did he fulfill the vow of earlier years: "my Strength! upon You will I wait" (

Psalm 59:9).

Even before the death of Saul, the strength of David's forces had been rapidly increased by a constant stream of fugitives from the confusion and misery into which the kingdom had fallen. Even Benjamin, Saul's own tribe, sent him some of its famous archers—a sure token of the king's waning fortunes. The hardy men of Manasseh and Gad, "whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as roes upon the mountains" (1 Chronicles 12:8) sought his standard; while from his own tribe recruits "day by day came to David to help him, until it was a great host like the host of God" (1 Chronicles 12:22). With such forces, it is evident that he could easily and quickly have subdued any scattered troops of the former dynasty. But he made no such attempt, and took no measures whatever to advance any claims to the crown. He preferred God to work out things *for* him, instead of *by* him!

When he was settled at Hebron he followed the same trustful and patient policy, not merely for a few days or weeks, but for a period of upwards of seven years. The language of the history seems to denote a disbanding of his army, or at least to their settling down to domestic life in the villages around Hebron, without any thought of winning the kingdom by force of arms. His elevation to the partial monarchy which he at first possessed was not from his own initiative, but was from the spontaneous act of "the men of Judah" who came to him and anointed him "king over the house of Judah" (1 Samuel 2:4). Then followed a feeble hut lingering opposition to David, headed by Saul's cousin Abner, rallying around the late king's incompetent son Ishbosheth, whose name significantly means man of shame.

The brief narrative which we have of the seven years spent by the still youthful David at Hebron, presents him in a very lovable light. The same gracious temper which had marked his first acts after Saul's death is strikingly brought out in 2 Samuel 2:2-4. "He seems to have left the conducting of the (defensive) war altogether to Joab, as though he shrank from striking any personal blow for his own advancement. When he did interfere, it was on the side of peace, to curb and chastise ferocious vengeance and dastardly assassination. The incidents recorded all go to make up a picture of tare generosity, of patiently waiting for God to fulfill His purposes, of longing that the miserable strife between the tribes of God's inheritance should end. He sends grateful messages to Jabesh-Gilead; he will not begin the conflict with the insurgents. The only actual fight recorded is provoked by Abner, and managed with unwonted mildness by Joab.

"The generosity of his nature shines out again in his indignation at Joab's murder of Abner, though he was too meek to avenge it. There is no more beautiful picture in his life than that of his following the bier where lay the bloody corpse of the man who had been his enemy ever since he had known him, and sealing the reconciliation which Death even makes in noble souls, by the pathetic dirge he chanted over Abner's grave (3:31). We have a glimpse of his people's unbounded confidence in him, given incidentally when we are told that his sorrow pleased them, 'as whatever the king did pleased all the people' (3:36). We have a glimpse of the feebleness of his new monarchy as against the fierce soldier who had done so much to make it, in his acknowledgment that he was yet weak (3:39)" (Alexander Maclaren).

The final incident of David's reign over Judah in Hebron was his execution of summary justice upon the murderers of the poor puppet-king Ishbosheth (4:12), upon whose death the whole resistance to David's power collapsed. Immediately after, the elders of all the tribes came up to Hebron, with the tender of the crown (5:1-3). They offered it upon the triple grounds of kingship, of his military service in Saul's reign, and of the divine promise of the throne. A solemn pact was made, and David was "anointed" in Hebron "king over Israel": a king not only by divine right, but also a constitutional monarch, chosen by popular election, and limited in his powers. The *evangelical* significance of this event we considered in the preceding chapter; other points of interest connected therewith are now to engage our attention.

This crowning of David king over all Israel was, first, the fulfillment of one of the great prophecies of Scripture. "Judah, you are he whom your brethren shall praise: your hand shall be in the neck of your enemies; your father's children shall bow down before you" (Genesis 49:8). Let it be carefully noted that the clause "your hand shall be in the neck of your enemies" is placed *between* "your brethren shall praise you" and "your father's children shall bow down before you"; and that immediately following this, Judah's victories over the enemies of God's people is again pointed out: "Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, you are gone up" (v. 9).

The above prophecy intimated the exalted position which Judah, when compared with the other tribes, was to occupy: Judah was to be the fore-champion in Israel's warfare against their enemies, God having empowered him with conquering power over the foes of his kingdom. The commencement of this in the life of David is plainly intimated in 2 Samuel 5:1-3. David's hand had been "in the neck of Israel's enemies": seen in his memorable victory over Goliath, the Philistine giant; following which we observe the begun-fulfillment of "your brethren shall praise you" in the song of the women, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18:6). So also here in 2 Samuel 5 the elders of the eleven tribes "bowed down before him" when they nominated him their king, and that, specifically, in view of the fact that he had triumphantly led out and brought in Israel's army in times past (v. 2)!

This leads us, in the second place, to contemplate the coronation of David as a blessed foreshadowment of the exaltation of his greater Son and Lord. This is so obvious that there is little need for us to amplify it at much length —though the interested reader would find it profitable to prayerfully trace out for himself other details in it. The life and activities of David are plainly divided into two main parts, though the second part was of much longer duration than the first: thus it is also in the mediatorial work of Him to whom he pointed. In the first section of his career, he who was born at Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16: 1) and "anointed" of God (16:13), wrought some mighty works (1 Samuel 17:34-36,49) which clearly demonstrated that the Lord was with him (for the antitype see Luke 2:11; Acts 10:38). The fame of David was sung by many, which stirred up the jealousy and enmity of the ruling power (1 Samuel 18:7, 8): for the antitype see Matthew 21:15!

The enmity of Saul against David was exceeding bitter, so that he thirsted for his blood (1 Samuel 18:29): compare Matthew 12:14. From that time forth David became a homeless wanderer (1 Samuel 22:1): compare Matthew 8:20. A little company of devoted souls gathered around him (1 Samuel 22:2), but the nation as a whole despised and rejected him: compare John 1:11, 12. This was the period of his *humiliation,* when the anointed of God suffered privation and persecution at the hands of his enemies. True, he could (as we have seen above) have taken matters into his own hands, and grasped the kingdom by force of arms; but he steadily refused to do so, preferring to meekly and patiently wait *God's* time for him to ascend the throne: compare Matthew 26:52. In these and many other respects, our hero blessedly foreshadowed the character and career of his suffering but greater Son and Lord.

But the time had now arrived when the season of David's humiliation was over, and when he entered into that position of *honor and glory* which God had long before ordained for him: "they anointed David king over Israel" (2 Samuel 5:3). In his coronation we have a precious adumbration of the ascension of Christ, and His exaltation unto "the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3), when He "took upon Him the form of a servant" and "made Himself of no reputation" was "highly exalted" and given "a Name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:7-10). As we are told in Acts 5:31, "Him has God exalted with His right hand to be a *Prince* and a Savior, for to give repentance to (the spiritual) Israel." The recorded deeds of David after he came to the throne, which will come before us in the chapters to follow, also strikingly prefigured the work and triumphs of our exalted and glorified Redeemer.

And now, in the third place, let us inquire, How did the fugitive bear this sudden change of fortune? What were the thoughts of David, what the exercises of his heart, now that this great dignity, which he never sought, became his? The answer to our question is supplied by Psalm 18 which (see the superscription) he "spoke in the day that the Lord delivered him from all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul," that is, when the Lord brought to an end the opposition of Saul's house and followers. In this Psalm the Holy Spirit has recorded the breathings of David's spirit and graciously permits us to learn of the first freshness of thankfulness and praise which filled the soul of the young king upon his accession to the throne. Here we are shown the bright spiritual beginnings of the new monarchy, and are given to see how faithfully the king remembered the vows which as an exile had been mingled with his tears.

"It is one long outpouring of rapturous thankfulness and triumphant adoration, which streams from a full heart in buoyant waves of song. Nowhere else, even in the Psalms—and if not there, certainly nowhere else—is there such a continuous tide of unmingled praise, such magnificence of imagery, such passion of love to the delivering God, such joyous energy of conquering trust. It throbs throughout with the life-blood of devotion. All the terror, and pains, and dangers of the weary years—the black fuel for the ruddy glow—melt into warmth too great for smoke, too equable to blaze. The plaintive notes that had so often wailed from his heart, sad as if the night wind had been wandering among its chords, have all led up to this rushing burst of full-toned gladness. The very blessedness of Heaven is anticipated, when sorrows gone by are understood and seen in their connection with the joy to which they have led, and are felt to be the theme for deepest thankfulness" (Alexander Maclaren).

It is blessed to note that this eighteenth Psalm is entitled, "A Psalm of David, the *servant* of the Lord," upon which C. H. Spurgeon remarked, "David, although at this time a king, calls himself 'the servant of the Lord,' but makes no mention of his royalty: hence we gather that he counted it a higher honor to be the Lord's servant than to be Judah's king. Right wisely did he judge. Being possessed of poetical genius, he *served* the Lord by composing this Psalm for the use of the Lord's house." We cannot here attempt a full analysis of its contents, but must glance at one or two of its more prominent features.

The first clause strikes the keynote: "I will love You, O Lord, my strength." "That personal attachment to God, which is so characteristic of David's religion, can no longer be pent up in silence, but gushes forth like some imprisoned stream, broad and full even from its well-head" (Alexander Maclaren). Scholars have pointed out that the intensity of David's adoration on this occasion moved him to employ a word which is never used elsewhere to express man's emotions toward God, a word so strong that its force is but freely expressed if we render it "*from my heart* do I love You." The same exalted spiritual fervor is seen again in the loving accumulation of divine names which follow—no less than eight are used in verse 21—as if he would heap together in a great pile all the rich experiences of that *God* (which all names utterly fail to express) which he had garnered up in his distresses and deliverances.

In verses 3 and 4 David recalls pathetically the past experiences when, like an animal caught in the nets, those who hunted him so relentlessly were ready to close in upon and seize their prey. "In his distress," he says, "I called upon the Lord and cried unto my God" (v. 4). Though it was but the call of one weak solitary voice, unheard on earth, it reached Heaven, and the answer shook all creation: "He heard my voice out of His temple . . . Then the earth shook and trembled" (verses 6, 7, etc.). One saint in his extremity put in motion the mighty powers of Omnipotence: overwhelming is the contrast between cause and effect. Wonderful as the greatness, equally marvelous is the swiftness of the answer: "*Then* the earth shook."

It is blessed to note how David ascribes all to the power and grace of the Lord. "For *by You* I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall . . . It is *God* that girds me with strength, and makes my way perfect . . . You Inst also given me the shield of Your salvation: and Your right hand has held me up, and Your gentleness has made me great . . . It is *God* that avenges me, and subdues the people under me . . . Therefore will I give thanks unto You, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto Your name. Great deliverance gives He to His king; and shows mercy to His anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore" (verses 29, 32, 35, 47, 49, 50).

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Capturing Zion

2 Samuel 5

In 2 Samuel 5:6-9 a brief record is given of David wresting the stronghold of Zion out of the hands of the Canaanites, and of his making it the capital of his kingdom. This, it is to be noted, is the first thing recorded of our hero after all the tribes of Israel had made him their king. By noting that order we pointed out that the coronation of David, after the season which is now to be considered by us. In the previous chapter, we pointed out that the coronation of David, after the season of his humiliation, was a beautiful foreshadowing of the exaltation of His Son and Lord, the enthronement on High of that blessed One who had been, in the main, despised and rejected by men on earth. It therefore follows that the noble exploits of David after he came to the throne, strikingly prefigured the work and triumphs of our ascended and glorified Redeemer. It is thus, by looking beneath the mere historical upon the pages of the Old Testament that we discover "in the volume of the Book" it is written of *Christ.*

The long-cherished desire of David's heart—implanted there by God Himself—had been accomplished, and he was now the head and governor of Israel. His real work had only just commenced, his most glorious achievements were still to be accomplished. His being crowned king over all Israel was but preparatory unto the royal conquests he was to make. His previous exploits only served to manifest his qualifications for the honored position and the important work which God had appointed him. So it was with the Antitype. The enthronement of the Mediator at the right hand of the Majesty on high was but the introduction to the stupendous undertaking which God had assigned Him, for "He must reign until He bath put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25)—a very plain intimation that His "reign" has already commenced. The life-work, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, simply laid the foundation upon which His royal conquests are now being achieved.

It is a great and serious mistake made by many to suppose that the Lord Jesus is now *inactive,* and to regard His being "seated" as denoting a state of inertia—such Scriptures as Acts 7:55 and Revelation 2:1 ought at once to correct such an idea. The word "sat" in Scripture marks an *end and a beginning:* the process of preparation is ended, and established order is begun (cf. Genesis 2:2; Acts 2:3). We say again that the real work of Christ (His atonement but laying the foundation thereof) began only after He was invested with "all power (that is 'authority') in Heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). This was plainly announced in the Messianic Psalms: after God has set His king upon His holy hill of Zion, He was to ask of Him and the heathen would be given Him for His inheritance, and He would reign over them with a "rod of iron" (Psalm 2). "*Rule* You in the midst of Your enemies," was the Father's word to Him (Psalm 110).

To His chosen servants the Lord Jesus declared "Lo, I am with you always, unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). On the day of Pentecost Peter declared, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, *He* (Jesus) has shed forth this, which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). Later, we are told, "they went forth, and preached everywhere, *the Lord working with them,* and confirming the Word with signs following" (Mark 16:20). There is much in the book of Revelation which makes known to us the various activities in which the ascended Savior is engaged, into which we cannot enter. But sufficient has here been produced to show that the King of saints is now wielding His mighty scepter to good effect.

Most blessedly was that which has been before us above typed out by the crowned David. Upon his ascension to the throne he was far from indulging in ease or self-luxuriation. It was now that his best achievements were accomplished. In that section of 2 Samuel which we are entering we behold David capturing the stronghold of Zion, vanquishing the Philistines, providing a resting-place for the holy ark, and being concerned in building a temple for the worship of Jehovah. So blessed is each of these incidents, so rich is their typical and spiritual import, that we purpose, the Lord enabling, to devote a chapter unto the separate consideration of each of them. May the Spirit of Truth graciously undertake for both writer and reader, giving us eyes to see and hearts to appreciate the "wondrous things" hidden away in this portion of God's Holy Word.

"And the king and his men went to Jerusalem, unto the Jebusites" (v. 6,). "If Salem, the place which Melchizedek was king of, was Jerusalem (as seems probable from Psalm 76:2), it was famous in Abraham's time; Joshua in his times found it the chief city of the south part of Canaan: Joshua 10:1, 3. it fell to Benjamin's lot (Joshua 18:28), but joined close to Judah's (Joshua 15:8). The children of Judah had taken it (Judges 1:8), but the children of Benjamin suffered the Jebusites to dwell among them (Judges 1:21); and they grew so upon them that it became a city of Jebusites (Judges 19:21). Now the very first exploit David did after he was anointed king over all Israel, was to gain Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jebusites; which, because it belonged to Benjamin, he could not well attempt until that tribe, which long adhered to Saul's house, submitted to him" (Matthew Henry).

"And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spoke unto David, saying, Except you take away the blind and the lame, you shall not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither" (v. 6). The wording of the second half of this verse appears rather ambiguous, and we believe the translation given in the "Companion Bible" is to be preferred, "you shall not come in hither, for the blind and the lame shall drive you away." It was the language of utter contempt. The Jebusites were so assured of the impregnability of their stronghold that they considered the feeblest of their men would be quite sufficient to defend it against any attack of David and his army.

The "Jebusites" were Canaanites who inhabited the country surrounding Jerusalem, and who occupied the fortress of Zion. The tribe of Judah had once failed to drive them out (Joshua 15:63), and later the children of Benjamin met with no more success (Judges 1:21). So secure did they now deem themselves that when David purposed its capture, they met him with insulting ridicule. In this we have an illustration of the fact that the enemies of God are often most confident of their strength when the day of their fall is most imminent. Thus also it frequently appears in the history of the salvation of God's elect: their case seems to be the most hopeless immediately before the hand of divine mercy snatches them as brands from the burning. Thus it was with the dying thief, delivered at the eleventh hour; with Saul of Tarsus, as he was persecuting the church; with the Philippian jailor, as he was on the point of committing suicide. Man's extremity is Gods opportunity.

"Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David" (v. 7). The literal or material "Zion" was a steep hill which lay just outside Jerusalem, to the south west, on which had been built a fortress to protect the city. It had two heads or peaks: Moriah, on which the temple was afterwards erected, and the other on which was built the future residence of the kings of Israel. So steep and inaccessible was Zion that, like a smaller Gibraltar, it had remained in the hands of Israel's foes. But undeterred by the natural difficulties and unmoved by the contemptuous confidence of the Jebusites, David succeeded in wresting it from the enemy, and became the founder of that Jerusalem which existed from that time onwards.

"Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David." Previously, he had reigned for seven years over Judah "in Hebron" (v. 5), but now that he had been anointed king over all Israel he cast his eyes toward Jerusalem, as a preferable metropolis, and a more suitable seat of his extending empire. But as long as the hill of Zion was occupied by the military Jebusites, they would retain theft command of the lower city. His first step, therefore, was, by the help of God, to dispossess the enemy of their stronghold. There David henceforth dwelt, as a conqueror, as in a castle (1 Chronicles 11:7); there he fixed his royal abode, and there he swayed his scepter over the whole land of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba.

"So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward" (v. 9), Millo seems to have been the town hall, or statehouse, a place of public convention (compare 2 Kings 12:20, 1 Chronicles 32:5). Around Millo David erected such buildings as became his capital or seat of government, for the reception of the court which he kept. "And David went on and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him" (v. 10). The tide of fortune had turned, and the once despised fugitive now waxed great in power and reputation, in wealth and honor, subduing his enemies, and enlarging his dominion. But all his success and prosperity was entirely owing to Jehovah showing Himself strong on his behalf: without His enablement, none of us can accomplish anything good (John 15:5).

Now there would be little or no difficulty in our perceiving the typical significance of the above were it not that so many of our minds have been blinded by the errors of modern "dispensationalism." A careful study of the connections in which "Zion" is found in the Psalms and Prophets, makes it clear that "Zion" was the name by which the Old Testament Church was usually called. "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation. This is My rest forever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine Anointed" (Psalm 132:13-17). Let the dubious (and also the interested) reader ponder such verses as Psalms 74:2; 87:5; 102:13; 128:5; 133:3; Isaiah 51:16.

The Old Testament Church was designated "Zion" after the mount on which the Temple was built, where the tribes of Israel went up to worship Jehovah, who dwelt between the cherubim. This name was duly transferred to the New Testament Church, which is grafted into the Old, as the teaching upon the "olive" tree in Romans 11 shows, and as the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 2:19-22 and 3:6 expressly states. Such passages as Romans 11:26 (note carefully it is "*out* of Zion" and *not* "unto Zion"); Hebrews 12:22; 1 Peter 2:6; Revelation 14:1, make it plain that the New Testament Church is denominated "Zion," for the Church is now God's abode upon earth, His "temple" (2 Corinthians 6:16), His "city" (Ephesians 2:19), His "Jerusalem" (Galatians 4:26—"which is above" is not to be understood astronomically, but means "which *excels*"). Thus, all that is spoken of "Zion," of "the city of God," of "Jerusalem" in the Old Testament in a *spiritual* way belongs unto Christians now, and is for their faith to appropriate and enjoy.

The history of Jerusalem and Zion (for they are inseparably connected) accurately foreshadowed what is found spiritually in the antitype. The first reference to the same in Scripture presents that city as being under the benign scepter of Melchizedek (Genesis 14: 18): so, originally, the Church was blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). But, next, we see this city no longer in subjection to the servant of God, but fallen into the hands of the heathen: so the Church apostatized in Adam, God's elect sinking to the natural level of the non-elect. Zion now became inhabited by a race who were under the curse of God (Genesis 9:25): so, in consequence of the Fall, God's elect were by nature "the children of wrath even as others" (Ephesians 2:3). For centuries Zion refused to be subject unto die people of God (Joshua 15:63, Judges 1:21); so the Gentiles were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" etc. (Ephesians 2:11, 12).

But, eventually, Zion was subdued and captured by David, and made his royal residence, the Temple also being erected upon one of its mounts. Thus the stronghold of the enemy was converted into a habitation of God, and became the throne of His government upon earth. Wondrous figure was this of Christ's conquest of the *Gentile Church* (Acts 15:14) unto Himself, wresting it out of the hand of the enemy, bringing it into subjection unto Himself, and setting up His throne in the hearts of its individual members. Announcement to this effect was made by the Savior when He declared, in view of His immediate death (v. 32), "Now shall the Prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). Satan was to be dethroned and driven from his dominion, so that Christ would "draw" unto Himself many of those over whom the devil had reigned (Ephesians 2:2). It is to. be noted that the tense of the verb there denotes that the "casting out" of Satan would be as *gradual* as the "drawing" (Alford).

At the Cross the Lord Jesus "spoiled principalities and powers," and at His ascension He "made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15 and cf. Ephesians 4:8). At Calvary Satan's hold over the world was broken: "the Prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). Then it was that the "strong man" (the devil) was "overcome" by One stronger than himself, his armor being taken from him, and his "spoils" (captives) divided (Luke 11:21, 22). And a *manifestation* of this fact is made every time an elect soul is "delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). Christ's frequent casting out of demons. from the bodies of men during the days of His flesh presaged His delivering the souls of His redeemed from the dominion of Satan during this Gospel era.

That which our present type sets forth is not the Lord Jesus paying the ransom-price for the purchase of His people (particularly, those among the *Gentiles*), but His actual redeeming or delivering them from the power of the enemy. As David's capture of Zion *followed* his coronation, so that work his conquest prefigured pointed to the victorious activities of Christ *after* His ascension. It is that which was foretold in Psalm 110: 1-3. First, "Sit You at My right hand." Second, "The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength (the Gospel in the power of the Spirit) out of Zion." Third, "Your people shall be willing in the day of Your power." One by one those whom the Father gave to Christ are subdued by His grace, made willing to throw down the weapons of their warfare against His Son, and His throne is set up in their hearts (2 Corinthians 10:5).

It is beautiful to note that the meaning of the word Zion is "sunny" or "shone upon," as facing the south, basking in the rays of the warm sun. So the spiritual Zion, delivered by Christ (through His post-ascension activities) from the dominion of Satan, has been brought into the unclouded favor of God. The type is completed by what we read of in 2 Samuel 5:11, "And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David a house." In the sending of those messengers to David by *Hiram,* offering to build him a house, we have the foreshadowment of Christ's being acknowledged by the *Gentiles* (cf. Isaiah 60:3), and their being built into His spiritual house (Ephesians 2:22; 1 Peter 2:5).

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

His Victory Over The Philistines

2 Samuel 5

"But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David" (2 Samuel 5:17). The civil war in Israel, which had continued for several years, having been brought to an end, and the whole nation being now united under the government of David, he had thereby become much more powerful. Probably hearing, too, of David's capture of Jerusalem (v. 7) and of the friendship shown him by Hiram, king of Tyre (v. 11), the Philistines now thought it was high time to bestir themselves and put an end to his prowess. Accordingly they assembled a great

The typical significance of the above (by which we mean its prophetic and dispensational foreshadowings) points to much that is recorded in the book of Acts, which, in turn, presages that which was to obtain more or less throughout the whole of this Christian era. As soon as the kingdom of Christ had been set up in the world, it was vigorously attacked by the powers of darkness, which, by the combined forces of Jews and Gentiles, sought to overthrow it. Definite proof of this is found in Acts 4, where we read of the arrest of Peter and John, their being summoned before the Sanhedrin, being threatened by them, and subsequently released. On returning to their own company and reporting their experiences, they all "with one accord" quoted from the second Psalm, which some—probably with good reason—conclude was written by David just after his victory over the Philistines.

That part quoted from the second Psalm was, "Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ" (Acts 4:25, 26). This is a clear intimation from the Spirit Himself that the substance of these verses is by no means to be restricted unto the opposition made by the powers of evil (through their human emissaries) against Christ personally during the days of his flesh, but include also Christ mystical, His Church, and is a prophetic intimation of the continuous enmity of the Serpent against the woman's Seed, that is, Christ and His people. But as the remainder of the second Psalm shows, all such opposition will prove futile, for "He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25).

In this chapter, however, we do not propose to develop at length the prophetic application of David's victories over the Philistines, but rather shall we endeavor to concentrate upon the spiritual and practical bearings of the same. Surely *this* is what our poor hearts stand most in need of in this "cloudy and dark day"—that which, under God's blessing, will better equip us to fight the good fight of faith; that which will instruct and encourage for running the race that is set before *us.* There is a "time" and "season" for everything. While it is our happy privilege to admire and study the handiwork of God in creation, yet neither the pleasure of beholding the beautiful flowers nor investigating the mystery of the planets would be in order if an enemy were at our doors, and we were called upon to defend our lives. The same principle applies to concentrating upon one or more of the many different departments of Scripture study.

It was to carry forward the conquest of Canaan—begun by Joshua, but long interrupted (see Judges 1:21-36) that God had raised up David. "And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, You sought for David in times past to be king over you: now then do it; for the Lord has spoken of David, saying, By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies" (2 Samuel 3:17, 18). Chief among Israel's enemies were the Philistines. They had long been a serious menace to God's people, and eventually succeeded in slaying Saul and his sons (1 Samuel 31:1-6). But now the time had come for God to stain their pride, fight against them, and overthrow their forces. "The triumphing of the wicked is short" (Job. 20:5); so discovered Pharaoh, Haman, Rabshakeh, Nero; and so shall it be with those who now oppose the Lord and His people.

"But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David" (2 Samuel 5:17). First of all, let us behold and admire here the providential dealings of God: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things" (Romans 11:36). Nothing happens by chance in this world, and the actions of the wicked are just as truly controlled, yes, and directed, by the Governor of this world, as are those of the righteous. It was of the Lord that these Philistines threatened Israel at this time, and therein we may perceive His grace toward His servant. They were the enemies of Jehovah, and belonged to the people He had commanded Israel to destroy. But to take the initiative against them, David might feel was the height of ingratitude, for on two occasions the Philistines had given him protection when sorely persecuted by Saul (1 Samuel 27:1-3; 28:1,2). By God's moving the Philistines to take the initiative, 's scruples were subdued.

Though David had ascended the throne of Israel, this did not deter his former enemies; rather did it excite their jealousy and stirred them up to come against him. Therein we may find an illustration of Satan's ways against the saints. Whenever an advance step is taken for God, or whenever honor is put upon the true King and Christ is given His proper place in our arrangements, the enemy is on hand to oppose. Let Abraham return unto "the place of the altar" and at once there is strife between his herdsmen and those of Lot (Genesis 13:4-7). Let Joseph receive a divine revelation in a dream, and immediately the cruel envy of his brethren is stirred against him (Genesis 37). Let Elijah triumph over the false prophets upon Carmel, and Jezebel threatens his life. Many such cases are also found in the book of Acts. These are recorded for our instruction. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Let, then, the attack of the Philistines upon David right after his coronation *warn* us against finding security in any spiritual prosperity with which we may have been blessed. High altitudes are apt to make the head dizzy. No sooner had David made Zion his own city, and that to the glory of the Lord, than the Philistines came up against him. The very next words after the boastful "Lord, by Your favor You have made *my* mountain to stand *strong,"* are, "You did hide Your face, and I was troubled" (Psalm 30:7). Our "strength" is to maintain a conscious *weakness* (2 Corinthians 12:10). Every spiritual advance needs to be accompanied by watchfulness and prayer. "Let not him that girds on his armor boast himself as he who puts it off" (1 Kings 20:11)!

"The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim" (v. 18). The valley of Rephaim was but a short distance from Jerusalem: no doubt the Philistines expected to make themselves masters of that strategic city before David had time to complete the fortification of it. In the words "spread themselves" indication is given that their force was a large one: "*all* the Philistines" (v. 17) probably denotes that their five principalities (1 Samuel 6:16,18) were here combined together. Little did they realize that they were rushing onward to their destruction, for they knew not the might of David's scepter nor the power of Jehovah who had exalted him. The Philistines were unaware of the fact that the living God was *for* David, as He had not been for Saul.

Let us now consider David's response unto the threatening presence of the Philistine hosts. "And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? Will You deliver them into mine hand?" (v. 19). This is very blessed, accentuated by the final clause in verse 17, which is in marked contrast to what is recorded in verse 18: in the one we read "and David heard of it, and *went down* to the hold"; in the other we are told that the Philistines "came and spread *themselves* in the valley of Rephaim." In sharp antithesis from the self-confident Pharisees, David took a lowly place and evidenced his dependence upon God. Instead of accepting their challenge and immediately engaging them in battle, David turned to the Lord and inquired *His* will for him. O that writer and reader may cultivate this spirit more and more: it is written "In all your ways *acknowledge Him,"* and the promise is, "and he shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:6).

"And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? will You deliver them into mine hand"? Not as the mighty man of valor did he impetuously rush ahead, but as the man submissive to his God did the king here act: most probably it was through Abiathar, by means of the urim and thummim in his ephod, that the Lord's mind was sought. His inquiry was twofold: concerning his duty and concerning his success: "his conscience asked the former, his prudence the latter" (Matthew Henry). His first concern was to make sure he had a divine commission against the Philistines. In view of 2 Samuel 3: 18 his duty seemed clear, but the question was, Is it *God's* time for me to act *now!* His second concern was whether the Lord would prosper his efforts, for he realized that victory was entirely dependent upon God—unless He delivered the Philistines into his hand, all would be in vain.

"And the Lord said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand" (v. 19). He who has said, "Seek you My face" will not mock that soul who sincerely and trustfully responds with, "my *heart* said unto You, Your face, Lord, will I seek" (Psalm 27:8). Gods of wood and stone, the idols of earthly fame and material wealth, will fail their devotees in the hour of need, but the living God will not disappoint those who are subject unto Him and seek His aid in the time of emergency. The Lord is ever "a very *present* help in trouble" (Psalm 46: 1), and the sure promise is "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). The divine ordering of our ways, the directing of our steps, is urgently needed by all of us, nor will it be withheld if sought after the appointed order.

"And the Lord said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand." This also is recorded for *our* instruction and comfort; then let us earnestly seek faith to appropriate the same and make it *our own.* Those words were graciously spoken by the Lord to encourage and nerve David for the battle. We too are called upon to *fight*—"fight the good fight of faith." Yes, and it is only as *faith* is in exercise, only as the divine promises are actually *laid hold of* (expectantly *pleaded* before God), that we shall fight with good success. Has not God said *to us* He will "bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20): how *that* ought to animate us for the conflict! If we lay hold of that promise we shall be able to exclaim, "I therefore so run, *not* as *uncertainly;* so fight I, not as one that beats the air" (1 Corinthians 9:26).

"And David came to Baalperazim, and David smote them there, and said, The Lord has broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters" (v. 20). Here, too, David has left a noble example for us to follow, and the more closely we do so, the more will God be honored, and the more will further successes be assured for us. Having obtained mercy to be dependent, David found grace to be humble, and ascribed the victory unto its true Author: "

The Lord has broken forth upon mine enemies before me"—as when a swollen river bursts its banks and carries all before it. In every forward step, in every resistance to temptation, in every success in service, learn to acknowledge "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). May writer and reader be delivered from the self-praising, boastful, Laodicean spirit of this evil age, saying, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory" (Psalm 115:1).

"And there they left their images, and David and his men burned them" (v. 21). No doubt the Philistines had expected both protection and help from their idols, but they failed them in the hour of need: equally vain and impotent will prove any visible or material thing in which we put our trust. Now they were unwilling to preserve such gods as were unable to preserve them: "God can make men sick of those things that they have been most fond of, and compel them to desert what they doted upon, and cast even the idols of silver and gold to the moles and bats (Isaiah 2:20)" (Matthew Henry). In *burning* the idols of the Philistines, David not only made clean work of his victory, but *obeyed* God's order in Deuteronomy 7:5: "you shall . . . burn their graven images with fire."

"And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim" (v. 22). Yes, even though we have the promise "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7), there is no assurance given that he will not return. He departed from the Savior only "for a season" (Luke 4:13), and thus it is with His followers. Yet let not his return to the attack discourage us: it is but a summons to renewed waiting upon God, seeking *fresh* strength from Him daily, hourly. "And when David inquired of the Lord, He said" (v. 23). On this second occasion also David sought Divine guidance: even though he had been successful in the first battle, he realized that further victory depended entirely upon the Lord, and for that he must be completely subject to Him.

"You shall not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then you shall bestir yourself: for then shall the Lord go out before you, to smite the host of the Philistines" (verses 23, 24). This is striking: here was the same enemies to be met, in the same place, and under the same Lord of hosts, and yet God's answer now is the very opposite of the previous one: then it was, "Go up"; now it is "Go not up," but make for their rear—circumstances may seem identical to human sight, yet on each occasion God is to be sought unto, trusted and obeyed, or victory cannot be insured. A real test of obedience was this for David, but he did not argue or decline to respond; instead, he meekly bowed to the Lord's will. *Here* is the man "after God's own heart"—who waited upon the Lord, and acted by His answer when it was given. Nor did he lose by it: "The Lord shall go before you to smite the hosts of the Philistines": God is ready to do still greater things when we own what He has already done for us!

"And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until you come to Gazer" (v. 25). "David observed his orders, waited God's motions, and stirred then, and not until then" (Matthew Henry). Complete success was granted him: God performed His promise and routed all the enemy's forces. How that should encourage us! "When the kingdom of the Messiah was to be set up, the apostles, who were to beat down the devil's kingdom, must not attempt anything until they receive the promise of the Spirit, who 'came with a sound from Heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind' (Acts 2:2), which was typified by this 'sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees'; and when they heard that, they must bestir themselves, and did so: they went forth conquering and to conquer" (Matthew Henry).

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Bringing Up The Ark

2 Samuel 5 and 6

For lack of space we were obliged to omit from the preceding chapter a number of important points upon the closing verses of 2 Samuel 5; so we will use them here as the introduction for this one. We saw how that when the Philistines came up against David (2 Samuel 5: 18), he "inquired of the Lord" what he should do (v. 19), and God responded with the gracious assurance that the enemy should be delivered into his hands; which was accordingly accomplished. Then we saw that other Philistines came up against him again (v. 22). Taking nothing for granted, David once more sought unto the Lord for divine instructions. Therein we are taught the duty of acknowledging God in *all* our ways (Proverbs 3:6), and His gracious readiness to grant needed light for our path, for "whatever things were written aforetime, were written for *our* learning" (Romans 15:4). The whole of that blessed incident reveals some valuable and precious lessons on the intensely practical subject of *divine guidance.*

David did not act mechanically when the Philistines came against him the second time, and do according as God had instructed him on the first occasion; instead, he definitely inquired of Him *again!* Circumstances may *seem identical* to our dim vision, nevertheless, it is our duty and wisdom to wait upon the Lord on *all* occasions, trustfully seeking His instructions, implicitly obeying when His will is made clear to us through His Word. In no other way can victory over the lusts of the flesh and the subtle wiles of the devil, be insured. As we saw in our last, the Lord *did not* give David the same answer on the second occasion as He had given him in the first. His response was quite different: the first time He said, "Go up" (v. 21); the second time He said, "you shall not go up, but fetch a compass behind them," etc. It is at *that* point, particularly, that there is important instruction for us.

On the first occasion the Lord said unto David, "Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand" (v. 19). But on the second, He said, You shall not go up, but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then you shall bestir yourself: for then shall the Lord go out before you, to smite the host of the Philistines" (verses 23, 24). That made a *greater demand* upon David's faith, patience and submission, than the former order did. It was humbling to the pride of the flesh not to make an open and frontal attack. It called for quite a march to circle around and get to their rear. And when he got there, he must *wait* until he heard a movement in the boughs of the mulberry trees; and waiting is much harder than rushing ahead. The lesson here is, that as we grow in grace and progress in practical godliness, the Lord requires fuller and fuller submission to Himself.

"And let it be, when you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees." This was the equivalent of the word that was given to Israel at the Red Sea, as they saw the Egyptians bearing down upon them: "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." The mulberry trees could not move of themselves: David was to tarry until a breath from the Lord stirred them: he was to wait until he heard the wind (emblem of the Spirit) stirring their leaves. He was not to go to sleep, but to remain alert for the Lord's signal. The lesson here is, that while we are waiting for the Lord, we must diligently observe the providential motions of God: "Continue in prayer, *and watch* in the same" (Colossians 4:2).

"When you hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that *then* you shall bestir yourself": that is, David was to *respond* to the intimation which God had graciously given him. The practical lesson for us is obvious; when the Lord has made known His will, prompt action is required. There is a time to stand still, and a time to move. "Go forward" was the second word to Israel at the Red Sea. Strange as it may seem, there are many who fail at this very point. They arrive at some crisis in life: they seek unto the Lord for directions: His providential "pillar of cloud" goes before them, but they do not "bestir" themselves and follow it. It is only mocking God to ask Him for light when we respond not to what He *has* given. Listen attentively for *His* "sound of a going" and when you have heard it, act.

Observe the blessed and assuring promise which accompanied the directions to David at that time, "For then shall the Lord go out before you, to smite the host of the Philistines" (v. 24). if we carefully compare that with what is said in verse 20, it will be seen that the Lord wrought *more manifestly* on this second occasion than He did on we first. There we are simply told "and *David* smote them," though he promptly ascribed his victory unto God. But here the Lord promised that *He* would smite the Philistines. The comforting lesson for us is, that if we duly wait upon God, implicitly obey His instructions—no matter how "unreasonable" they seem, nor how distasteful; if we diligently watch every movement of His providence, and "bestir" ourselves when His will is clear, then we may assuredly count upon Him showing Himself strong on our behalf.

There is a blessed sequel to the above incident recorded in 1 Chronicles 14: 16, 17, which is not mentioned in 2 Samuel, "David therefore did as God commanded him; and they smote the host of the Philistines from Gibeon even to Gezer. And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations." God will be no man's debtor: He always rewards those who keep His commandments. He not only enabled David to vanquish the Philistines, but He also honored the one who had honored Him, by causing his fame to go abroad, so that all nations were afraid to attack him. And is it not equally the case now, that where there is a soul who is fully subject to Himself, He causes even Satan to feel he is but wasting his time to assail such an one! Compare

Proverbs 16:7.

The next thing we are told of David after his triumph over the Philistines, is the godly concern he now evidenced for the ark. This is exceedingly beautiful, manifesting as it does the deep spirituality of our hero, and showing again the propriety of his being designated "the man after Gods own heart." David's first thought after he was firmly seated as king over all Israel, was the enthronement in Jerusalem of the long-forgotten ark, that sacred coffer which held supreme place among the holy vessels of the tabernacle; that ark concerning which the Lord had said to Moses, "You shall put the mercy seat above upon the ark; and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. And *there* I will commune with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the testimony" (Exodus 25:21, 22).

That ancient symbol of the presence of the true King, had passed through many vicissitudes since the days when it had been carried around the walls of Jericho. In the degenerate times of the Judges, it had been superstitiously carried into battle, as though it were merely a magical mascot, and righteously did God mock their impious expectations: "the ark of God" fell into the hands of the uncircumcised. The Philistines carried it in triumph through their cities, and then housed it in the temple of Dagon. But again Jehovah vindicated His honor, and the ark was sent back to Israel in dismay. it had been joyfully welcomed by the inhabitants of Bethshemesh: then, alas, unholy curiosity moved them to look within the sacred chest, and the Lord smote them "with a great slaughter" (1 Samuel 6:19).

The ark was then removed to the forest seclusion of Kerjathjearim (the city or village of the woods) and placed in the house of Abinadab, where it lay neglected and forgotten for over fifty years. During the days of Saul, they "inquired not at it" (1 Chronicles 13:3). But from his days as a youth, David was deeply exercised over the dishonor done to the Lord's throne: "Lord, remember David, and all his afflictions: How he swore unto the Lord, and vowed unto the mighty God of Jacob; surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, a *habitation for* the mighty God of Jacob. Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood" (Psalm 132:1-6). He had resolved to establish a place where Jehovah's worship could be celebrated, a house where the symbol of His presence should be fixed and communion with His people established.

Now that he was established over the kingdom of Israel, David did not forget his early vows, but forthwith proceeded to put them into execution. "Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwells between the cherubim" (2 Samuel 6:1, 2). No doubt it was with a full heart that David now acted, with deep longings after God, with fervent rejoicings in Him (see verse 5). No doubt he painted a bright picture, as he anticipated the blessings which would follow the ark being rightfully honored. Alas, how his hopes were dashed to the ground! Sad indeed was the immediate sequel.

"And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was in Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on comets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God. And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place the breach of Uzzah to this day" (verses 3-8). Some exceedingly solemn lessons are pointed in this passage, and they are recorded for *our* warning; alas that they are so widely disregarded in Christendom today.

"To bring back therefore the Ark from the place of its dishonor; to bring it again into the bosom of Israel; to make it once more that which Israel should seek unto and inquire at: and above all establish it in the citadel of Zion, the place of sovereign supremacy and strength, these were the immediate objects of David's desires. Herein he was fulfilling his office of king, in giving supremacy to God and to His truth. But the servants of God have not unfrequently to learn, that the pursuit of a right end, does not necessarily imply the employment of right means" (B. W. Newton). This is the first thing here to take to heart.

"And they set the ark of God upon a new cart." By so doing they were guilty of a serious error. In the fervency of his zeal, David ignored the precepts of God. The Lord had given very definite instructions as to the order which must be followed when the ark was to be moved. Through Moses Jehovah had said, "When the camp sets forward, Aaron shall come, and his sons, and they shall take down the covering veil, and *cover the ark of* testimony with it: and shall put thereon the covering of the badgers' skins, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall *put in the staves thereof*" (Numbers 4:5, 6). The sacred ark was to be duly hidden from the gaze of the curious, but it does not appear that this detail was attended to by David! Nor was that all: "And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward: after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it" (Numbers 4:15); "they should bear *upon their shoulders*" (Numbers 7:9).

The will of God was plainly revealed: the ark was to be covered, staves were to be inserted in the rings in its ends, and it was to be carried on the shoulders of the Kohathites. Nothing had been said about placing it on "a new cart": *that* was a human invention, and *contrary to* the instructions of the Lard. David's desire was holy, his motive was pure, but *he went about things in a wrong way,* and dire were the consequences. Now there are two ways of doing the work of the Lord, two ways of acquitting ourselves when engaged in His service: strictly following what is prescribed for us in the written Word of God, or following *our own* ideas and inclinations—or following the example of other men, which amounts to the same thing. Alas, how much the latter is now in evidence; how often are right things being done in a wrong way!

The due order for the removing of the ark had been plainly made known by God in His written Word. Jehovah had given express command that the ark should be covered with the sacred curtains, committed to the charge of a divinely selected set of men, and it *must* be carried on their "shoulders," and in no other way. That was *God's* way: to move it on a cart drawn by cattle was *man's* way. Some might think the latter was to be preferred. Some might consider it was such a "little" matter as to be of no consequence. Some might conclude that as their object was right and their motive pure, that even though they ignored *the prescribed mode* of performing the duty, they might surely count upon the divine blessing. *What the Lord thought* of their procedure is evidenced in the tragic sequel.

But how are we to account for David's serious failure to heed the commands of God? What is the explanation of the "confusion" which here attended his well-meant and praiseworthy effort? Let us go back again to the beginning of 2 Samuel 6, and read carefully its first three verses. Notice, dear reader, a very significant *omission;* observe closely the solemn contrast between his conduct in 2 Samuel 5:19 and 5:23, and what is said of him here. Each time the Philistines came up against him, David "inquired of the Lord," but nothing is said of *that* now he purposed to conduct the ark unto a suitable habitation for it! Need we wonder, then, at what follows? If, *God's* blessing be not definitely sought, how can it be rightfully expected? If *prayer* does not precede and accompany our very best actions, what are they likely to amount to! If in *any* of our ways God be not "acknowledged," be not surprised if they lead to disaster.

"And David *consulted with the captains* of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good *unto you,* and that it be of the Lard our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us. And let us bring again the ark of our God to us" (1 Chronicles 13:1-3) Instead of "inquiring of the Lord," David had conferred with his officers. There was *no need whatever* for him to "consult" with any human being, for the *will of the Lord* was already upon record! And what was the policy suggested by the "leaders"? Why, to imitate the ways of the religious world around them! The Philistine "priests" had counseled that the ark be returned to Israel upon "a new cart" (1 Samuel 5:2-11), and now David—under the advice of his officers—"set the ark of God upon a *new cart*" (2 Samuel 6:3)!

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Bring Up the Ark

(Continued)

2 Samuel 6

Our principal design in this series of chapters is to emphasize the fact that the Old Testament is far, far more than a historical record of events which happened thousands of years ago, and to make it manifest that every part of God's Word is full of important truth which is urgently needed by us today. The business of a Bible teacher is twofold: to give an accurate

interpretation of the meaning of Holy Writ, and to make *application* of its contents to the hearts and lives of his hearers or readers. By "making application," we mean the pointing out and the pressing upon ourselves of the practical lessons which each passage contains, seeking to heed its warnings, appropriate its encouragements, obey its precepts, and put in a claim to its promises. Only thus does it become a living and profitable Word *to us.*

The first verses of 2 Samuel 6 record an incident which needs to be prayerfully laid to heart by every one whom God has separated unto His service. It chronicles a most blessed action on the part of David, who had in view naught but the honor and glory of the Lord. But alas, that action was sadly marred by permitting the fervency of his zeal to ignore the precepts of God. He was anxious that the long-neglected and dishonored Ark should be suitably housed in Zion. His desire was good and his motive was pure, but his execution of the same met with the open displeasure of the Lord. It is not sufficient to have a worthy purpose and a proper spirit: God's work must be performed *in the right way:* that is, according to the rules of His prescribing; anything other than that is but a species of self-will.

There seem to be a great many in Christendom today who are desirous of doing good, but they are exceedingly lax and careless in the mode and manner in which their desires are carried out. They act as though the means used and the methods employed mattered little or nothing, so long as their aim and end is right. They are creatures of impulse, following the dictates of mere whim and sentiment, or imitating the example of others. They seem to have no concern for *God's standards* study not His Word diligently to discover what laws and rules the Lord has given for the regulation of our conduct in His "service." Consequently, they are governed by the flesh, rather than the Spirit, so that it frequently happens that they do good things *in a wrong way;* yes, in a manner directly opposed to *God's* way as revealed in His Word.

There are many who are anxious to see the pews occupied and their treasury well filled, and so, "socials," "ice-cream suppers," and other worldly attractions are employed to draw the crowd. There are many preachers who are anxious to hold the young people, and so "athletic clubs," social entertainments, are introduced to secure that end. There are many evangelists who are anxious to "make a good show," secure "results," and be able to herald so many hundreds of "converts" at the close of their "campaigns," and so fleshly means are used, high pressure methods are employed to bring this about: "decision cards," the "sawdust trail," the "penitent form" are called in to their aid. There are many Sunday school teachers who are anxious to hold the interest of their class, and so "prizes" are given, "picnics" are arranged, and other devices are resorted to.

Apparently it does not occur to these "leaders" to *challenge* their own actions, to weigh them in "the balances of the sanctuary," to inquire how near or how far they measure up to the divine standard: so long as such means and methods seem right *to them,* or are in general vogue in other "churches," and so long as they appear to "succeed," nothing else matters. But in a coming day, God is going to ask of them "who has required *this* at your hand?" (Isaiah 1:12)! None of the devices mentioned by us above have one particle of scriptural authority to warrant their use; and it is *by the Scriptures* that each of us will yet be *judged! All* things must be done "according to the pattern" (Hebrews 8:5; Exodus 25:40) which God has furnished us; and woe will it yet be unto us if we have disregarded *His* "pattern" and substituted another of our own.

The terrible confusion which now prevails so extensively in Christendom is no excuse whatever for us falling into line with it: "*You shall not* follow a multitude to do evil" (Exodus 23:1). No matter how "peculiar" he may be thought, no matter how "unpopular" he may be because of it, *faithfulness* is what God requires from each of His servants (1 Corinthians 4:2). And "faithfulness" means doing the work which God has appointed *in the way which He has prescribed.* Expediency may have grasped the helm; compromise may be the order of the day; principles may he valued because of their "practicability" rather than because of their *scripturalness;* but that alters not one whit the strict discharge of duty which the Lord requires from each of His servants. Unless that fact be clearly realized, we read in vain the solemn incident recorded in 2 Samuel 6.

The laxity which now obtains in so many professedly "Christian" circles is indeed appalling. Unconverted men are allowed to occupy positions which none but Christ's true servants have any title to stand in. Human convenience is consulted when the Lord's death is to be remembered, and His "supper" is changed into the *morning* "breaking of bread." Leavened bread, rather than "*this* bread" (1 Corinthians 11:26), is used to set forth the immaculate person of the Redeemer. And if one dares to raise a voice in protest against these innovations—no matter how gently and lovingly—he is called "legalistic" and a "troubler in Israel," But even that must not move the one who covets his *Master's* "Well done."

"And they set the ark of God upon a new cart" (2 Samuel 6:3). In so doing, David and his counselors (1 Chronicles 13:1) committed a serious fault: they ignored the divinely appointed order and substituted their own arrangements. The Lord had given express commands in Numbers 4:5, 6, 15; 7:9 as to *how* the sacred ark was to be carried when it should be moved from one place to another; and He requires unquestioning obedience to all His regulations. It is true that David was moved on this occasion with a deep concern for Jehovah's honor and glory. It is true that it was the urgings of *love for Him* which prompted his noble action; but He has said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15)—love must flow in the *appointed* channels; it must be *directed by* the divine precepts, if it is to please its Object.

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24): among other things that means, God must be worshiped according to *the pattern* He has given us in His Word. There are many Protestants who can see clearly the human inventions, superstitious innovations and unscriptural practices of the Romanists, in their "elevation of the mass," the vestments of their "priests," the burning of incense, the worship of images, and the adoration of the mother of our Savior. The unwarrantable introduction of such devices are patent to multitudes of Protestants, yet they are blind *to their own* unscriptural and anti-scriptural ways! Listen, my reader: anything we introduce into "the service of the sanctuary," into the worship of God, for which we have no "thus says the Lord," is nothing but a species of "*will* worship" (Colossians 2:23) and must be abandoned by us.

As we pointed out in our last chapter, the counsel given to David by the "leaders" in Israel was patterned after the invention of the heathen. The "priests" of the Philistines had sent back the ark on "a new cart" drawn by oxen (1 Samuel 6). And history has repeated itself. If many of the means and methods which are now used in much so-called "divine worship" and "Christian work" were challenged, if a *reason* were demanded for their employment, the best that could be given would be, "*Others* are using them." But no Scriptural authority could be cited, The "leaders" in Israel might have argued that the device used by the Philistines "succeeded" and that God "blessed" their arrangements. Ah, but the Philistines had not God's Word in their hands; but Israel had! In like manner, many now argue "God blesses" many things for which we have no "thus says the Lord." But, as we shall see, God *cursed* Israel's flagrant violation of His commands!

The outstanding fact which concerns us as we seek to ponder and *profit from* this solemn incident in David's life is, that *he acted without divine orders:* he introduced something into the divine worship for which he had *no* "thus says the Lord." And the lesson to be learned therefrom is to scrutinize rigidly our own actions—the things we do, *the way in which* we do them, the means we employ—and ask, Are these *appointed by God?* There is much apparent reverence and devotion among the Papists, but is it acceptable to the Lord? Ah, my readers, if very much to the "Christian service" of earnest, zealous, enthusiastic Protestants was weighed in the balances of Holy Writ, it would be "found wanting": nor am I guiltless if found in association and fellowship with the same—no, no matter how much I protest against it all. Individual loyalty to Christ, personal obedience to His commands, is what is demanded of each one of us.

It may be thought that David was ignorant of what was recorded in Numbers 4 and 7, and so was not so seriously to blame; but the validity of such a conclusion is more than doubtful as we shall show in the next chapter. Again; it may be supposed that David considered the regulations given in the days of Moses pertained only to Israel while they were on the march in the wilderness, and did not apply to his own case; but this defense of David also breaks down before a passage we hope to consider in our next chapter. Even were the case as just supposed, his bounden duty would have been to first "ask counsel of the Lord," and inquire "*Whereon* shall the ark be placed?" Instead he conferred with flesh and blood (1 Chronicles 13:1) and followed their advice.

David's efforts proved a failure. And sooner or later all effort on the part of the "church," or of the individual Christian, which is not strictly according to the Word of the Lord will prove a failure: it will be but "wood, hay, stubble" (1 Corinthians 3: 12) in the day of divine testing and reward. God has magnified His Word above all His name (

Psalm 138:2), and He demands that His servants shall do all things according to the plan and manner which He has prescribed. When he commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, He bade him do so according to the "pattern" which He showed him in the mount (Ex, 25:40): there was no room for human opinion or preference. And if we would serve Him *acceptably,* then we must go according to *His* way, not ours. The right attitude for us was expressed by Peter when he said, "Nevertheless, at Your word, I will let down the net" (Luke 5:5): he acted according to Christ's instruction, and was blessed!

"And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it" (2 Samuel 6:6). Yes, as the marginal rendering tells us, "the oxen *stumbled.*" And do you suppose that was an accident? No indeed, there are *no* "accidents" in a world which is presided over by the living God. Not even a hair can Fall from our head until the moment He *decreed* for it to happen. But not only is everything directed by God, but there is also a significance, a meaning, a message, in the smallest occurrences, had we but eyes to see and hearts to understand. "The oxen stumbled": of course they did; what else could be expected! There can be naught but "confusion" when the divine order is departed from. In the stumbling of those oxen the Lord was *making manifest* David's disorder.

"Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it." He feared it would be overthrown, and so he wished to avert such a disaster. Like David's design in seeking a honorable habitation for the ark, Uzzah's purpose was good, and his motive pure; but like David, he also *disregarded God's written law.* See here one sin leading to another! See how David's conferring with flesh and blood, Following the counsel of the "leaders," and emulating the way of the heathen, was now succeeded by the priest's son committing an act of sacrilege. Alas, alas, how much will the present-day "leaders" in Christendom yet have to answer for, because of their setting such an evil example before others, and thus encouraging the "young people" to lightly esteem the holy and authoritative precepts of God.

"And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (v. 7), The Lord God will not be mocked. Plainly had He declared that, even the Kohathites, who were appointed to carry the ark by staves on their shoulders, "shall *not touch* any holy thing, *lest they die*" (Numbers 4:15). God not only keeps His promises, but He also *fulfills His threats!* So Uzzah found, and so will every other disregarder of His commandments yet discover.

"He, whose name is *Jealous,* was greatly offended. The sincere, the well-meaning man, having no command, nor any example for what he did, fell under Jehovah's anger, and lost his life, as the reward of his officiousness. And as the Holy Spirit has recorded the fact so circumstantially, we have reason to consider it *as a warning to all,* of the danger there is in tampering with positive ordinances; and as a standing evidence that God will have His cause supported, and His appointments administered, *in His own way.* The case of Saul, and the language of Samuel to that disobedient monarch, inculcate the same thing: 'the people,' said Saul to the venerable prophet, 'took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord your God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as *in obeying the voice* of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams': 1 Samuel 15:21-23" (A. Booth, 1813).

It is solemn to recall that no divine judgment fell upon the Philistines when *they* placed the holy ark upon a cart and sent it back to Israel: but "the anger of the Lord *was* kindled against Uzzah"! How plainly this shows us that God will suffer from the world what *He will not tolerate* in His professing people, who bear His Holy name. That is why it will be "more tolerable" for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than it will be for divinely-enlightened, highly-favored, and loud-boasting Capernaum. The same principle will obtain when Christendom comes to be judged. Better to have lived and died in the ignorance of darkest Africa, than to have had God's Word in our hands and set at naught its laws!

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Bringing Up The Ark

(Continued)

2 Samuel 6

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, after his coming to the throne of Israel and his victories over the Philistines, David evidenced a godly concern for the holy ark, which had been so grievously and so long neglected. Zealous of the divine glory, he had resolved to establish a place where Jehovah's worship should be celebrated and where the symbol of His presence should be securely housed. Accordingly, he gathered all the leaders of Israel together to bring the sacred coffer to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:1). But, alas, instead of heeding the divinely given instructions for such an occasion and placing the ark upon the shoulders of the Levites, he followed the evil example of the heathen and placed it upon a new cart. In so doing he ignored the plainly revealed will of God, and substituted a human device. The work which David undertook was indeed a good one, his motive was pure, and his design was praiseworthy, but it was executed in a wrong way. He introduced into the divine worship that for which he had no "Thus says the Lord."

David did not inquire whether *God* had any will in the matter and ask, Whereon shall the holy ark be placed? Rather did he confer with flesh and blood. It was at *that* point he made his fatal mistake, and it is this which we need to take carefully to heart. Instead of consulting the Holy Scriptures, he sought counsel of men. It is true that he "consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds and with every leader" (1 Chronicles 13:1), but as Job 32:9 tells us "great men are not always wise," and so it proved on this occasion. Instead of reminding David of the instructions which the Lord had given through Moses (Numbers 4:5, 6; 15:7, 9), they apparently advised him to follow the way of the uncircumcised (1 Samuel 6:7, 8). By so doing, David spoiled his fair enterprise, and incurred the displeasure of God. A good beginning had a bad ending because of departure from the divinely prescribed rules of procedure.

The above incident has been recorded for our learning, especially for those of us who are engaged in the Lord's service. It points a solemn warning. It shows the imperative need for zeal to be rightly directed, for there is "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2); this is a zeal to further the cause of God and bring glory unto His name, which is not regulated by that knowledge which His Word supplies. In our fervency to extend the kingdom of Christ, to spread His Gospel, to point souls unto Him, we are apt to forget His precepts, and do *His* work in *our* way. The danger is very real, and in this restless age of great activity not a few are being ensnared by this very evil. Many are so eager about the quantity of their service, they pay too little attention to the quality of it: they are anxious to be active in the Master's vineyard, but they do not sufficiently consult His guide-book as to *how* their activities must be conducted.

David's well-meant effort turned out a failure. The Lord manifested His displeasure. David, accompanied by a large number of musicians, went before the ark, playing "on all manner of instruments" (2 Samuel 6:5). But when Nachon's threshing floor was reached, the oxen drawing the cart on which the sacred chest reposed, stumbled, and Uzzah put forth his hand to steady it. "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (v. 7). A tragic check was this unto the joyous procession—one which should have produced deep heart-searchings and penitential confession of failure. Has not God said, "Provoke Me not, and I will do you no harm" (Jeremiah 25:6)? Therefore, when He *does* afflict, ought we not to inquire as to wherein we have "provoked" Him!

Though the displeasure of God was plainly manifested, yet it did not at first produce the proper effect. "And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah" (v. 8). Apparently a measure of self-complacency was at work in David's heart over the important service he was engaged in—for honoring the ark which had been neglected for so long. Now that things had gone contrary to *his* expectations, he was disconcerted, peeved, "displeased," or as the Hebrew word really signifies, "angry." His anger was not a righteous indignation against Uzzah for his affronting God, but because his own plans had gone awry. His own pride was wounded: the drastic cutting off of Uzzah by divine judgment would not advance *him* in the eyes of his subjects; rather was he now humiliated before them. But the fault was his own, and he ought to have manfully shouldered the blame, and not acted like a peeved child.

"And David was displeased (angry) because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah" (v. 8). When the rod of God descends upon us, we are but adding sin to sin if we become enraged thereby: this is "despising" the chastening of the Lord, which is expressly forbidden (Hebrews 12:5). "And he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day" (v. 8), which, as the margin tells us, signifies "the *breach* of Uzzah." Thus did David memorialize the stroke of God as a warning for posterity to beware of rashness and irreverence. A solemn contrast may be seen here from what is recorded in 2 Samuel 5:20, where David changed the name of "the valley of Rephaim" unto "Baalperazim"—"the place of *breaches"*—because "the Lord has broken forth upon mine enemies." In the one he was celebrating God's goodness, in the other he was solemnizing God's judgment.

The conduct of David on this occasion was deplorable, for it is highly reprehensible to be angered by any of the Lord's dealings. But in the light of such warnings, *our* petulancy is far worse. David ought to have humbled himself beneath the mighty hand of God (1 Peter 5:6), confessed his failure and corrected his fault (Proverbs 28: 13), and owned God's righteousness in thus taking vengeance on his inventions (Psalm 99:8). By so doing he would have put the blame where it belonged, have set a good example before others, and vindicated the Lord. Instead, his pride was hurt, his temper was inflamed, and blessing was missed. Alas, how often has writer and reader failed in a similar manner. How rarely have we heeded that injunction, "Wherefore glorify you the Lord in the fires" (Isaiah 24:15): one way of doing which is to judge ourselves unsparingly and own the need of the flames to purge away our dross.

"And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" (v. 9). The transition is very easy from sudden zeal and joy to fretfulness and dejection. We are, naturally, creatures of extremes, and the pendulum quickly swings from earnestness to indolence, from jubilation to commiseration. He who dares one day to face singlehanded the four hundred prophets of Baal, next day flees from the threat of Jezebel. He who feared not to draw his sword in the presence of armed soldiers, trembled before a maid. They who sang so heartily at the Red Sea, murmured a little later when their food supplies gave out. Few maintain an even keel amid the varying tides of life. A measure of servile fear now possessed David, and he would not venture to bring the ark any nearer his own immediate residence, lest he too should be destroyed. That holy vessel of the tabernacle which had been

With the death of Uzzah a fear came upon David. This exemplifies an important principle: fear always follows where faith is not in exercise. Said the prophet, "I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2). When the timorous disciples awoke the Savior because of their storm-tossed ship, He said, "Why are you fearful? O you of *little faith*" (Matthew 8:26). When a spirit of trembling seizes the heart it is a sure sign that faith is at a low ebb. The promise is, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, *because he trusts* in You" (Isaiah 26:3). Thus, the fear of David on this occasion is easily accounted for: his faith was eclipsed. Learn this valuable lesson, dear reader: as soon as you are conscious of sinking of heart, uneasiness, or alarm, cry unto the Lord for a strengthening of your faith. Say with the Psalmist, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in You" (Psalm 56:3).

There is another important principle exemplified by David's attitude on this occasion: his faith was inoperative because his *walk* was not according to the revealed will of the Lord. It is true that faith is the gift of God, and that, unaided, we cannot call it into operation after it is received. Every exercise of faith, every increase thereof, is to be ascribed unto the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit. But let it not be forgotten that *He* is the *Holy* Spirit, and will not put a premium upon wrong-doing. When our ways are contrary to the Rule which we are to walk by, the Spirit is grieved. When we act in self-will, and then refuse to judge ourselves under the mark of God's displeasure, His blessed operations are withheld. Fearfulness is a sign that faith is inactive, and inactive faith is an evidence that the Spirit is grieved; and that, in turn, denotes that our walk is displeasing to God. Learn, then, dear reader, to "Consider your ways" (Hag. 1:5) when conscious that faith is at a low ebb: clean out the choked channel and the waters will flow freely again.

"And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" Does it not seem strange that David should ask such a question when the Lord had given dear and definite instructions as to *how* the ark should be conducted from place to place? Stranger still, sadder far, that he would not make right the wrong which he had committed. But alas, it is not easy to condemn ourselves when we have departed from God's ways: even though the providential smile of the Lord be changed into a frown, we are loath to humble ourselves before Him. How this reveals the "desperate wickedness" which still remains in our hearts, and how the realization of this ought to remove pride far from us, cause us to marvel increasingly at God's longsuffering with us, and make us more patient toward our erring brethren.

"So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him, into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed Edom, the Gittite" (v. 10). Instead of correcting his fault, we now see David forsaking his own mercy (Jonah 2:8). The ark was the symbol of the Lord's manifest presence, and *that* should be the one thing above all others desired and cherished by the saint. Moses was deeply conscious of this when he said, "If Your presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exodus 33:15). Ah, but to enjoy the manifest presence of God we must be in the path of obedience: "he who has My commandments, and *keeps* them, he it is that loves Me, and he who loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest* Myself to him" (John 14:21). Was it not because he felt he was out of the way of subjection to God's revealed will that caused David to now abandon his purpose of bringing up the ark to Jerusalem? It was a guilty conscience which made him "afraid of the Lord."

There is a fear of God which is becoming, spiritual, excellent; but there is also a fear of God which is hurtful, carnal, worthless: the one is servile, the other filial. There is a slavish fear which springs from hard thoughts of God, and there is a holy and laudable fear which issues from lofty thoughts of His majesty. The one is a terror produced in the mind by apprehensions of evil, the other is a reverential awe of God which proceeds from right views of His infinite perfections. The one is the fear of wrath, such as Adam had in Eden, when he was afraid and hid himself; and such as the demons have, who "believe and tremble" (James 2: 19). The other is a fear of displeasing One who is gracious, like children have to dear parents. The one is our treasure, the other our torment; the one drives from God, the other draws to God; the one leads to despair, the other to godly activities (Hebrews 11:7). The one is the product of a guilty conscience, the other is the fruit of an enlightened understanding.

There is a natural fear and there is a spiritual fear of God. The one hates Him, like a slave his cruel master; the other loves God, as a child respects and reveres his father. The one dreads God because of His power and wrath; the other venerates God because of His holiness and sovereignty. The one engenders to bondage; the other conduces to worship. Perfect love casts out the former (1 John 4: 18); appropriating God's promises leads to the furtherance of the latter (2 Corinthians 7:1). When we are walking with God in the light of His Word, a filial fear directs our ways; but when we depart from His statutes and a guilty conscience torments us, then a servile fear possesses our hearts. Hard thoughts are entertained of God. and we dread His anger. The soul is no longer at ease in His presence, and instead of viewing Him as our loving Father, we shrink from Him and regard Him as a hard Master. Such was the condition of David at this time. Alarmed by the divine judgment upon Uzzah, he was afraid to have anything more to do with the ark.

"But David carried it aside into the house of Obed Edom the Gittite." That was David's loss; but, as we shall see, it was Obed Edom's gain. The ark was both the symbol of God's manifested presence in the midst of Israel, and a notable type of the person of the Lord Jesus. In the placing of the ark in the house of Obed Edom, following the unbelief of David, there was a prophetic hint given of the Gentiles receiving what Israel failed to appreciate—so marvelously does God overrule even the failures of His people. Obed Edom was a Gittite, and the "Gittites" were *Philistines* (Joshua 13:3), the inhabitants of Gath (1 Chronicles 20:5), yet many of them were devoted to the person and interests of David (2 Samuel 5:18-21). Thus it was dispensationally: "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you (Jews): but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

"And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed Edom the Gittite three months" (v. 11). After the awful death of Uzzah, and the fear of David to have anything further to do with the ark, it had scarcely been surprising had this Gittite refused to shelter the sacred coffer. As a Philistine, it is likely that he was acquainted with the trouble it had caused in the temple of Dagon (1 Samuel 5:2-4) and of the plague it brought upon the Ashdodites (1 Samuel 5:6). Anxious enough were they to get rid of the ark (1 Samuel 6), yet now we find one of their countrymen providing a home for it in his own house. Doubtless he had been truly converted unto the Lord, and therefore esteemed whatever pertained to His worship. It is beautifully significant that his name "Obed" means *servant,* and here we find him rendering a true service unto God.

"And the Lord blessed Obed Edom, and all his household" (v. 11). Need we be surprised at this? God will be no man's debtor: as He declared, "Them that honor Me, I will honor" (1 Samuel 2:30). It is ever so. After Laban had received the fugitive Jacob into his family, he acknowledged, "I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake" (Genesis 30:27). When His servant was befriended by Potiphar, we read, "The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" (

Genesis 39:5). Through giving shelter unto God's prophet the widow of Zarephath was rewarded by having her son restored to life (1 Kings 17:23). How much more may we be sure of receiving God's rich blessing when His dear Son—to —is given the throne of our hearts.

"And the Lord blessed Obed Edom, and all his household." By the indwelling Spirit the Lord has promised to manifest Himself to the believer. The presence of the Lord in our lives and in our homes is the limitless source, if we will, of divine blessing. The blessing will depend upon our *servant* attitude to that Presence or Spirit. If we take the place of a true "Obed," surrendering ourselves to His sway, the Lord will make our way prosperous. If in all things we give Christ the pre-eminence, so far from being the losers thereby, we shall be immeasurably the gainers, both now and hereafter. O may He who moved Obed to take in the ark, open our hearts to receive Christ in all His fullness.

CHAPTER FORTY

Bringing Up the Ark

(Continued)

2 Samuel 6

"And it was told king David, saying, The Lord has blessed the house of Obed Edom, and all that pertains unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed Edom into the city of David with gladness (2 Samuel 6:12). There are five things to be observed here. First, the Lord's blessing of a man is a very real and evident thing. Second, it is so patent that others take notice thereof. Third, they perceive *why* it is that the blessing of God is bestowed. Fourth; so impressed are they therewith, they mention it to others. Fifth, the effect which the evident blessing of the Lord of Obed Edom had upon David. Let us briefly ponder each of these points, and pray that their distinct messages may find lodgment in our hearts.

First, the Lord's blessing of a man is a very real and evident thing. "All these blessings shall come on you, and overtake you, if you shall hearken unto the voice of the Lord your God . . . Blessed shall be your basket, and your store; blessing of God is bestowed. Fourth, so impressed are they you be when you go out" etc. (Deuteronomy 28:2, 5, 6). *God's governmental ways* are the same in all dispensations. "The blessing of the Lord, it makes rich, and He added no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22): for the meaning of the word "rich" see verse 4—in the former the means is in view, in the latter the Source; in neither verse does spiritual "riches" exclude material ones. "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).

Second, God's blessing of a person is so obvious that others are obliged to take notice thereof. So much so was this the case with Isaac, that Abimelech and two of his chief men went to him and said, "We certainly saw that the Lord was with you" (Genesis 26:28)—what a testimony was that! Of the one who purchased Joseph it is recorded, "And his master *saw* that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Genesis 39:3)—do people now see this is the case *with us?* "And Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David" (1 Samuel 18:28). The wicked may not read God's Word, but they do read the lives of His people, and are quick to perceive when His blessing is upon them; and the recognition of *that* has far more weight than anything they say!

Third, nor are men ignorant of *the reason why* the Lord prospers those with whom He is pleased. This is evident from the case now before us: "And it was told king David, saying, The Lord has blessed the house of Obed Edom and all that pertains unto him, *because of* the ark of God." This is very striking: they traced the effect back to the cause: they recognized that God had honored the one who had honored Him. The same principle is illustrated again in Acts 4:13, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and *they took knowledge* of them that they had been with Jesus." The men who drew this deduction were not regenerate, but the most notorious enemies of Christ; nevertheless they were right in attributing the spiritual graces of the apostles unto their fellowship with the Savior.

Fourth, the recognition of God's evident blessing upon those whose ways are pleasing in His sight is voiced by men unto their fellows. It was so in the incident now before us. When it was so apparent that Obed Edom was being blessed in all his affairs, some went and informed the king thereof. Ah, my readers, we little know what impression is being made upon our neighbors by God's governmental dealings with us, nor how they speak one to another when it is manifest that His smile is upon us. How we should plead this before God in prayer, that He would enable us so to walk that we may not miss His best, and this that *His* name may be glorified through those around us taking note of the fact that "godliness with contentment (Greek "a sufficiency") *is great gain*" (1 Timothy 6:6).

Fifth, the effect which this news had upon David. As he had perceived God's frown in His stroke upon Uzzah, so now he discerned God's smile in Obed Edom's prosperity. It was clear to him that the ark was not a burdensome object, For so far from being the loser, he who had provided a home for it had been noticeably blessed of the Lord. This encouraged David to resume his original design of bringing the sacred coffer to Jerusalem: his fears were now stilled, his zeal was rekindled. "The experience which others have of the gains of godliness, should encourage us to be religious. Is the ark a blessing to other's homes? let us bid it welcome to ours" (Matthew Henry). Do we perceive that those who are most yielded to the Lord make the best progress spiritually? Then let that be an incentive to fuller consecration on our part.

"He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake" (Psalm 23:4). In restoring the souls of His erring people, God does not act uniformly: according to His loving-kindness, unerring wisdom, and sovereign pleasure, He is pleased to use and bless a variety of means. Sometimes it is by a process of disappointment, withering the gourd under which we luxuriated, blowing upon that in which we had promised ourselves satisfaction. Sometimes it is by the application of a verse of Scripture, searching our conscience or melting our heart. Sometimes it is by a sore calamity, like the death of a loved one, which casts us back more closely upon the Lord for strength and comfort. In the case now before us it was the words of friends, who reported to David the blessing which the presence of the ark had brought to the family of Obed Edom.

The effect of David's restoration of soul is seen very blessedly in 1 Chronicles 15:2, 3, 12, 13. "Then David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites; for them has the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto Him forever. And David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the Lord unto his place, which he had prepared for it. And said unto them, You are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because you did it not at the first the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order." There are several things in these verses which we do well to note.

First, David now gave the Lord His proper place in his plans and submitted to the regulations which He had given. He learned from painful experience that God's work must be done in God's prescribed way, if His approval and blessing was to rest upon the same. None but those whom God had specifically appointed must carry the sacred ark: this was one of the duties assigned the Levites. who had been definitely set apart unto the Lord's service. The application of this to our own day is obvious. The ark was a type of Christ: the carrying of the ark from place to place prefigured the making known of Christ through the preaching of the Gospel. Only those are to preach the Gospel whom God has specially called, separated and qualified for His holy service. For others to invade this sacred office is but to introduce confusion and incur God's displeasure.

Second, David now realized that suitable preparation must precede holy activities: "Sanctify yourselves, both you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it": let the reader compare Exodus 19:10-15 and 2 Chronicles 29:5. Those whose carried the ark must cleanse themselves from all ceremonial pollution and compose themselves for the solemn service of the Lord: only thus would they strike reverence upon the people. The same principle holds good in this Christian dispensation: "The Lord has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations . . . *be you clean,* that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isaiah 52: 10, 11). Those whom God has separated unto the sacred ministry of the Gospel must be "an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12 and cf. 2 Timothy 2:21, 22)—God's servants today are to "sanctify" themselves for the discharge of their honorable duties by repentance, confession, faith, prayer and meditation, availing themselves constantly of that precious Fountain which has been opened for sin and impurity.

Third, David owned his previous failures: "The Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order." In like manner. Daniel acknowledged, "O Lord, righteousness belongs unto You, but unto us confusion of faces as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are afar off, through all the countries where You have driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against You" (9:7). "The life of faith is little more than a series of falls and restorations, errors and corrections displaying, on the one hand, the sad weakness of man, and on the other, the grace and power of God" (C. H. M.).

"So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 15: 14, 15). All was now carried out "after the due order." God requires obedience in small things as well as great. And due notice is taken and record made by Him of all our actions. Blessed is it to behold these Levites now being governed, in every detail, by the revealed will of the Lord. "*Then* we make a good use of the judgments of God on ourselves and others, when we are awakened by them to reform and amend whatever has been amiss" (Matthew Henry). O that each of us may have more and more occasion for saying "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now have I *kept* Your law" (Psalm 119:67).

"So David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obed Edom *with joy*" (1 Chronicles 15:25). That is no small part of the present reward which God bestows upon His obedient people. Satan would feign seek to persuade us that a strict compliance with all the statutes of Holy Writ would be irksome. One of his favorite dogmas is, Law-keeping brings one into bondage. That is one of his lies. The Psalmist was better instructed: said he, "And I will walk at *liberty,* for I seek Your precepts" (Psalm 119:45): the more we practice the precepts of Scripture, the more are we delivered from the dominion of sin. God fills the heart of the obedient with gladness; hence, the reason why there is so much gloom and unhappiness among Christians today is that their obedience is so half-hearted and spasmodic.

"And it came to pass when God *helped* the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams" (1 Chronicles 15:26). God is honored when we acknowledge His assistance—for without Him we can do nothing—even in those things which fall within the compass of our natural powers. But more especially should we own His aid in all our spiritual exercises: "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing" (Acts 26:22). These Levites were in need of special help, for remembering the fate of Uzzah, they were likely to tremble when they took up the ark: but God calmed their fears and strengthened their faith. God enabled them to discharge their duty decently and in order,

"And it came to pass when God *helped* the Levites that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams." This is wonderful. Everything was changed now: there was no stumbling, no thrusting forth of presumptuous hands to steady a shaking ark, no judgment from God; instead, His evident smile was upon them. It is ever thus: when God's work is done in God's way, we may confidently count upon His help. Go against the Word of God, and He is against us, as we shall discover sooner or later; but go according to the Word and God will bless us. "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord *working with them,* and confirming the Word with signs following" (Mark 16:20).

"And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings" (2 Samuel 6: 13). Probably David offered this sacrifice unto God with a twofold design: to make an atonement for his former errors, and as a thank-offering for present mercies. Great must have been his gratitude and joy when he perceived that all was now well. "*Then* we are likely to speed (prosper) in our enterprises when we begin with God, and give diligence to make our peace with Him. When we attend upon God in holy ordinances, our eye must be to the great Sacrifice, to which we owe it that we are taken into covenant and communion with God" (Matthew Henry).

"And David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod" (2 Samuel 6: 14). The ordinances of God are to be performed with joy as well as reverence. In seeking to preserve a becoming decorum and sobriety, we need to be on our guard against lapsing into a cold and stilted perfunctoriness. No doubt there are certain occasions when higher expressions of joy are more suited than at others. It was so here. After his previous disappointment David was now transported with delight. His exultation of mind was manifested in his leaping for gladness, which he did "with all his might." "We ought to serve the Lord with our whole body and soul, and with every endowment or capacity we possess; our religious affections cannot be too intense, if properly directed; nor our expressions of them too strong, provided 'all be done decently and in order,' according to the spirit of the dispensation under which we live" (Thomas Scott).

"And David was girded with a linen ephod." On this auspicious occasion, David laid aside his royal robes, and as taking the lead in the worship of God he wore a linen ephod. This was the ordinary garb of the priests when officiating, yet it was also used in religious exercises by those who were not priests, as the case of Samuel shows: 1 Samuel 2: 18. The Spirit of God has here duly noted the fact that, though king over all Israel, David deemed it no disparagement to appear in the clothing of a minister of the ark; yet let it not be supposed that he was making any attempt to encroach upon the priestly office. The practical lesson for us in this detail is, that instead of decking ourselves out in worldly finery, we should be garbed plainly when we attend the public worship of God.

In conclusion it should be pointed out that the best expositors, ancient and modern, have regarded Psalm twenty-four as a sacred song composed by David on the glad occasion of the ark being brought to Jerusalem. The joy and triumph, the awe and the memories of victory which clustered around the dread symbol of the presence of the Lord, are wonderfully expressed in that choral piece. It is divided into two parts. The first replies to the question, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?"—an evident echo of the terror-stricken exclamation of the Bethshemites (1 Samuel 6:20). The answer is given in a description of the men who dwell with God. The second half deals with the correlative inquiry "Who is the King of glory?" And the answer is, The God who comes to dwell with men.

Inexpressibly blessed is verse 7. As the procession reached the walls of Jerusalem, and before the ark—type of Christ—entered, the cry was made "Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be you lift up, you everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." It was as though their towering portals were too low. How clearly David recognized his own derived power, and the real Monarch of whom he was but the shadowy representative! The newly conquered city was summoned to admit its true Conqueror, whose throne was the ark, which was expressly named "the glory" (1 Samuel 4:21), and in whose train the earthly king followed as a subject and a worshiper.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

His Condemnation by Michal

2 Samuel 6

In the closing verses of 2 Samuel 6 there is to be seen a mingling of the lights and shadows; the blessed fruits of the Spirit appear, but the evil works of Satan are also evident. As it often is in the natural world, we find it in the moral realm conflicting Forces clash with each other: sunshine and rain, calm and storm, summer and winter, constantly alternate. That which is spread before our senses in nature, is but an external adumbration of what exists in the invisible: two mighty beings, diametrically opposed to each other, the Lord God and the devil, are ever at work. Such too is the life of the individual Christian, for he is a miniature replica of the world: in him "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would" (Galatians 5:17), and consequently in his experience there is ever a mingling of the lights and shadows.

Before it ended, the joyful day of David's bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem was overcast by a domestic cloud. There was one in his own household who was incapable of entering into the fervor of his heart toward God, who was irritated by his devotion, and who bitterly condemned his zeal: one who was near and dear to him railed upon the king for his earnestness in Jehovah's cause and service. The enmity of the Serpent was stirred by the honor accorded the holy ark, the procession of the Levites, the jubilation of Israel's ruler, and the offerings which had been presented before the Lord. The anointed eye has no difficulty in discerning behind Michal him who is the inveterate enemy of God and His people, and in her biting denunciation of David, the Christian of today may learn what to expect from those who are not one with him in the Lord.

Our last chapter closed at the verse "So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet" (2 Samuel 6: 16). Our present lesson opens with "and as the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart" (v. 16), and, as we shall see from the sequel, that secret hatred of David was shortly after vented in open opposition. Let not those who are engaged in the happy service of the Lord be surprised when they encounter antagonism; when, so far from their efforts being appreciated by all, there will be some who decry and denounce them. It was so with the prophets; it was so with Christ's fore-runner; it was so with the Lord of glory Himself; it was so with His apostles; and it will continue to be so with all His faithful servants unto the end of time. It cannot be otherwise while Satan is out of the Pit.

"And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart" (2 Samuel 6: 16). Saul himself had grievously neglected the public worship of Jehovah, and his daughter appears to have had no sense of the importance and value of heavenly things. It could hardly be expected that a woman who had idols, "teraphim," in her house (1 Samuel 19: 13), cared anything for the holy ark, and hence she regarded her husband with scorn as she beheld his gratitude and joy.

Yes, not only is the natural man (the unregenerate) unable to apprehend the things of the Spirit, but that of which He is the Author appears as "foolishness" unto him. When the Lord Jesus was so occupied in ministering unto the needy multitude that He and His disciples "could not so much as eat bread," we are told that His kinsmen "went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is *beside Himself*" (Mark 3:21). When the apostles began to "speak with other tongues," the wondrous works of God, some mocked and said, "These men are full of new wine" (Acts 2). When Paul reasoned so earnestly with Agrippa, he answered "you are beside yourself; much learning does make you mad" (Acts 26:24). And, my reader, there is something seriously lacking in you and me if similar charges are not made against us today!

The world will tolerate religion so long as its carnal repose is not disturbed; yes, while it provides a garb to hide its shame, the world approves. But let the high claims of God be pressed, let it be insisted on that *He* demands the first place in our affections, thoughts, and lives, and such a message is at once distasteful. The professing Christian who attends the church on Sunday and the theater during the week, who contributes occasionally to missionary societies but underpays his servants and overcharges his customers, is commended for his broad-mindedness and shrewdness. But the real Christian who lives in the fear of the Lord all the day long, and who conducts himself as a stranger and pilgrim in this scene, is condemned as a bigot and puritan. Let the saint weep over the dishonoring of his Lord by many that bear His name, or leap for joy in his service as David did, and like David he will be dubbed a fanatic and his whole-heartedness will be similarly censured.

"And they brought in the ark of the Lord, and set it in his place in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord" (v. 17). The word "tabernacle" does not signify a building made of wood or stone, but rather a tent. Joshua had erected such an one centuries before, but doubtless that had decayed and perished long ago. It is to be noted that David did not bring the ark into his own residence, but into a separate curtained canopy, which he had provided for it. in the days of Solomon a more stately temple was built to house the sacred coffer. As the ark was so manifestly a figure of Christ, its abiding first in a lowly tent and then in a magnificent edifice, no doubt foreshadowed the twofold state of the Savior: first in humiliation, and then in glory.

"And David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord." Now that his noble design had been completely effected, David presented suitable sacrifices unto the Lord. His object in so doing was probably twofold: to express his deep gratitude unto God for the success of his undertaking, and to supplicate a continuance of His favors. An important lesson for us is therein inculcated: praises are to mingle with our prayers: God is to be recognized and owned amid our joys, as well as sought unto under our sorrows. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13): the first is easily remembered, but the latter is often forgotten. God has appointed "feasts" as well as "fasts," for He is to be given the first place by us at all times.

"And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. of Hosts" (v. 18). This seems to have been an official act, consonant with the position to which God had instated him. The expression occurs first in Genesis 14: 19, where we find that Melchizedek, priest of the Most High, "blessed" Abraham. At a later date, Moses (Exodus 39:43), Joshua (Joshua 22:6), and Solomon (1 Kings 8:14) "blessed the people": in each case it was their leaders who did so. The added words that David "blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts" signifies that he, formally and authoritatively, pronounced His blessing upon those who had been committed to his care.

As a prophet of God, and as king over the people, it was both David's privilege and duty to do so, "without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better" (Hebrews 7:7). In this act we may see David prefiguring his greater Son and Lord. Of Him it is recorded, "And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and *blessed* them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven" (Luke 24:50, 51). There we behold Christ as the Prophet unto and the King over the Church, officially blessing its ministers: that was His final act before He left this earth and took His place on high, to administer all the blessings which He had purchased for His people; and unto the end of the age the efficacy of His blessing abides. If by grace the writer and reader be among those whom *He* has blessed, then are we blessed indeed.

"And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house" (v. 19). Those who accompanied David on his joyous undertaking were now bounteously feasted: having presented his thank offerings unto the Lord, presents were now made to the people. "When the heart is engaged in cheerfulness, that should open the hand in liberality: as they to whom God is merciful, ought to exercise bounty in giving" (Matthew Henry). Compare Esther 9:22: the feast of Purim, celebrating the Jews' deliverance from the plot of Haman, was observed with "sending portions one to another, and gifts to the people." By this act David confirmed his interest in the people, and would endear himself to them, so that they would be encouraged to attend him again should he have occasion to call them. The typical significance is obvious.

"Then David returned to bless his household" (v. 20). In attending to his official duties, David did not overlook his domestic responsibilities. "Ministers must not think that their public performances will excuse them from their family worship: but when they have, with their instructions and prayers, blessed the solemn assemblies, they must return in the same manner to bless their households, for with them they are in a particular manner charged" (Matthew Henry). Nor must they be deterred from the discharge of this obligation and privilege should there be those under their roof whose hearts do not accompany them in such holy exercises: God must be honored by the head of the house and the family altar maintained, no matter how much Satan may oppose the same.

"And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" (v. 20). Being a total stranger to the zeal for God which filled David, incapable of appreciating his elevation of heart over the bringing home of the ark, she regarded his joyous dancing as unfitting a king, and imagined he was demeaning himself in the eyes of his subjects. Having no heart herself for God, she despised the exuberance of one who had. Being obsessed with thoughts of temporal dignity and glory, she looked upon David's transports of religious fervor in the midst of his people, as degrading to his high office. "David *the brave captain,* leading forth the people to battle and returning with them in triumph, she admired; but David *the saint,* leading the people in the ordinances of God, and setting before them the example of fervency of spirit in His service, she despised" (Thomas Scott).

Base ingratitude was this for Michal to thus revile the very one who had been so devoted to her that he had declined to accept a crown unless she was restored to him (2 Samuel 3:13). Fearful sin was this to insult and denounce her lord, whom God required her to reverence. Having secretly scorned him in her heart, she now openly chides with her lips, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." She was highly displeased with his deep veneration for the holy ark, and basely misrepresented his conduct by charging him with indecent dancing before it. There can be no doubt that her charge was a false one, for it is a common thing for those who have no piety themselves to paint others in false colors and hold them up as the most odious characters.

But the wicked conduct of Michal is not difficult to account for: at heart she was a partisan of the fallen house of Saul, and a despiser of Jehovah and His worship. As she grew older, her character had hardened in its lines and became more and more like her father's in its insatiable pride, and in its half dread and half hatred of David. Now she poured forth her venom in these mocking jibes. Because David had laid aside his royal robes, and had girded himself in a plain "linen ephod" (v. 14), she vilely charged him with immodesty. O how empty professors hate the true pilgrim spirit! Nothing riles them more than to see the children of God refusing to conform to the extravagant and flesh-pleasing fashions of the world, and instead, dress and act as becomes the followers of Him, who, when here, "had not where to lay His head."

"And David said unto Michal, It was before the Lord, which chose me before your father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel; therefore will I play before the Lord" (v. 21). David now vindicated himself. He had no reason to be ashamed of his conduct, for what he had done was only for the glory of God. No matter through what distorted lens the evil eyes of Michal might view it, his conscience was clear. If our own hearts condemn us not, we need not be troubled over the censures of the ungodly. Moreover, had not God recently elevated him to the throne? Then it was but fitting that he should show his jubilant gratitude.

"And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight; and of the maidservants which you have spoken of, of them shall I be had in honor" (v. 22). David replies to Michal's evil charge in the language of irony, which was suitably "answering a fool according to her folly" (Proverbs 26:5). The force of his words is, If because of my setting aside the showy robes of imperial majesty and clothing myself in plain linen, and dancing before the Ark of God's glory, I am regarded by you as mean, then I, who am but "dust and ashes" in the sight of the Almighty, will humble myself yet more before Him; and so far from the common people despising me for the same, they will esteem one who takes a lowly place before the Lord. The more we be condemned for well-doing, the more resolute should we be in it.

"Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death" (v. 23). Thus did God punish David's wife for her sin. "She unjustly reproached David for his devotion, and therefore God justly put her under the perpetual reproach of barrenness. They that honor God, He will honor; but those that despise Him, and His servants and service, shall be lightly esteemed" (Matthew Henry). There is a searching application of this verse which holds good today. We often hear quoted the first half of 1 Samuel 2:30, but the second half is not so frequently cited. It is just as true that they who "despise" the Lord shall be "lightly esteemed" by Him as those who "honor" Him shall be "honored" by Him. A solemn example of this is found here: in mocking David, Michal insulted his Master! Beware how you slight or speak evil against God's servants, lest spiritual "barrenness" be your portion!

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

His concern for God's House

2 Samuel 7

How often has "success" been the ruination of those who have experienced it! How often has worldly advancement been followed by the deterioration of spirituality! It is good to see that such was far from being the case with David. In the thirty-fifth chapter of this book we called attention to the blessed manner in which David conducted himself after coining to the throne. So far from indulging in ease and self-luxuriation, it was now that his best achievements were accomplished. First, he captured the stronghold of Zion; next he vanquished the Philistines; then he provided a resting place for the holy ark; and now he evidenced his deep concern to build a temple for the worship of Jehovah. So blessed is each of these incidents, so rich are they in their spiritual and typical import, we proposed to devote a chapter unto the separate consideration of each of them. By the Lord's gracious enabling we have accomplished our purpose concerning the first three, and now we turn to the fourth.

"And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies" (2 Samuel 7:1). This brings before us a restful interlude in the strenuous and eventful life of our hero. As we have seen in earlier chapters, David had been called upon to gird on the sword again and again; and as we shall see in what follows, considerable fighting yet lay before him. Moreover, little opportunity had been given him in previous years for quietness and repose: during Saul's life and also under the reign of Ishbosheth, David was much harried, and forced to move from place to place; so too in the future, disquieting and distressing experiences lay before him. But here in 2 Samuel 7 a very different picture

What has been pointed out above finds its counterpart, more or less, in the lives of all Christians. For the most part, their experience both outward and inward closely resembles that of David's. Christians are called upon to wage a warfare against the flesh, the world, and the devil, to "Fight the good fight of faith." Those inveterate enemies of the new man give him little rest, and often when he has been enabled by divine grace to achieve a notable victory, he quickly discovers that fresh conflicts await him. Yet, amid his outward troubles and inward strifes, he is occasionally granted a little breathing-spell, and as he sits in his house it can be said of him, "The Lord has given him rest round about from all his enemies."

As it is in nature, so it is in grace: after the storm comes a peaceful calm. The Lord is merciful and tender in His dealings with His own. Amid many disheartenings, He grants encouragements along the way. "There has no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). After the toil of trying service, He says, "Come you yourselves apart into a desert place, and *rest awhile*" (Mark 6:31). After a long stretch of the dreary sands of the wilderness, He brings us to some Elim "where are twelve wells of water, and three score and ten palm trees" (Exodus 15:27). After some unusually fierce conflict with Satan, the Lord grants a season of peace, and then, as in David's case, we have rest from all our enemies.

And with what was David's mind employed during the hour of repose? Not upon worldly trifles or fleshly indulgences, but with the honor of God: "That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See, now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains" (7:2). This is very blessed and furnishes a true insight to the character of him whom the Lord Himself declared to be "a man after His own heart." There are few things which afford a surer index to our spirituality—Or the lack of it—than how we are engaged in our hours of *leisure.* When the conflict is over, and the sword is laid down, we are very apt to relax and become careless about spiritual concerns. And then it is, while off our guard, that Satan so often succeeds in gaining an advantage over us. Far different was it with him whose history we are here pondering.

"The king said unto Nathan the prophet, See, now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains." Observe, first, that in this season of rest David's companion was "the prophet." Let that speak loudly to us! A godly companion is an invaluable aid to the preserving of spirituality when we are enjoying a little rest. Hours of recreation would prove hours of *re-creation* indeed, if they were spent in godly converse with someone who lives near to the Lord. David here supplied proof of his own assertion, "I am a companion of all that fear You, and of them that keep Your precepts" (Psalm 119:63). A person is not only *known* by the company he or she keeps, but is *molded* thereby: "He who walks with wise men, shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Proverbs 13:20). Seek as your friends, dear reader, those who are most Christ-like in their character and conversation.

Next, observe what it was which occupied David's heart while he sat in his palace in the company of Nathan the prophet: "See, now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains." How this, too, reveals the beatings of David's heart! One cannot but contrast what we have here with the haughty words of Nebuchadnezzar: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, for the honor of *my* majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). Instead of being occupied with his achievements and self-satisfied with the position which he now occupied, David was concerned about the lowly abode of God's ark. Very beautiful indeed is it to see the recently crowned monarch solicitous, not for the honor of his own majesty, but, for the glory of Him whom he served.

It is not often that those in high places manifest such interest in spiritual things: would that more of the Lord's people who are entrusted with a considerable amount of this world's goods were more exercised in heart over the prospering of His cause. There are not many who make conscience over spending far more upon themselves than they do for furthering the service of God. In this generation, when the pilgrim character of the saints is well-near obliterated, when separation from the world is so largely a thing of the past, when self-indulgence and the gratification of every whim is the order of the day, few find their rest disturbed in the conviction that the worship is languishing. Thousands of professing Christians think more about the welfare of their pet dogs than they do in seeing that the needs of God's servants and impoverished believers are met, and spend more on the upkeep of their motorcars than they do in the support of missionaries. Little wonder that the Holy Spirit is quenched in so many places.

"And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you" (v. 3). A certain class of writers who delight in criticizing almost everyone and everything, and who pretend unto a deeper insight of spiritual things than all who went before them, condemn both David and Nathan on this occasion, which seems to us close akin to the complaint of Judas when Mary lavished her costly ointment upon the Savior. Nothing is said in the record here that David actually purposed to build Jehovah a temple, but only that he was troubled because one was not yet erected. Whatever conclusion Nathan may have drawn therefrom, he was careful to say nothing to modify David's godly concern, but rather sought to encourage his spiritual aspirations. Alas, how many today are ready to snub earnestness, quench zeal, and hinder those who have more love for perishing souls than they have.

Nathan was better taught in divine things than some of those who have traduced him. He was quick to perceive that such unselfishness and godly concern as the king manifested was good evidence that the Lord was with him, for such spiritual exercises of heart proceed not from mere nature. Had David been actuated by a "legalistic" spirit as one of his foolish detractors supposed—deploring it with an "alas, alas!"—God's faithful servant had promptly rebuked, or at least corrected him. But instead of so doing, he says? "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you." O that more of this so-called "legality" were in evidence today—a heart melted by the Lord's abounding mercies, anxious to express its gratitude by furthering His cause and service. But it is hardly to be expected that those who so strenuously oppose the Law's being a rule of life for the Christian, should have any clear ideas on either grace or what constitutes "legality."

"And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan" (v. 4). In the brief notes on this verse found in "The Companion Bible" it is there stated that, "After these words ('that night') all the MSS. (manuscripts) have a hiatus, marking a solemn pause." The design of the ancient Hebrews may have been to connect this passage with Genesis 15:12-17, which is another *night* scene. In both a wondrous revelation was made by the Lord: in both His great purpose concerning the Messiah and Mediator received an unfolding: in both a remarkable adumbration was made respecting the contents of the Everlasting Covenant.

"Go and tell my servant David, Thus says the Lord, Shall you build Me an house for Me to dwell in?" (v. 5), or, as it is said in 1 Chronicles 17:4, "You shall not build Me an house to dwell in." Some may suppose that these words make it quite clear that David *had* definitely determined to erect a temple unto Jehovah. But we rather regard these statements as the gracious construction which God placed upon the holy concern of His servant, just as the Savior sweetly interpreted the loving devotion of Mary's anointing as "against the day of My burying has she kept this" (John 12:7); and, as in a coming day He will yet say unto those on His right hand, "I was an hungered, and you gave *Me* meat: I was thirsty, and you gave *Me* drink: I was a stranger, and you took *Me* in" (Matthew 25:35, etc.).

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man bath, not according to that he bath not" (2 Corinthians 8:12). It is the disposition and desire of the heart which God regards, and sincere intentions to do good are approved by Him, even though His providences do not permit the execution of them. Thus it was in David's case. He was concerned that the sacred ark should be under curtains, while he dwelt in a ceiled house. That holy concern was tantamount unto a willingness on his part to honor the Lord's worship by a stately temple, and *this* is the construction which God graciously placed upon it, accepting the will for the deed. Though David had not formally planned to build the temple, God so *interpreted* the exercises of his mind; just as when a man looks lustfully upon a woman, Christ *interprets* this as "adultery" itself (Matthew 5:28).

We have dwelt the longer upon this point because the commentators have quite missed the force of it. Not only so, but some teachers, who are looked upon in certain circles as well near infallible in their expositions, have falsely charged David with "legality." Now that the Lord had elevated him from the sheepcote to the throne, and had given him rest from all his enemies, David's concern for the dwelling place of the ark is twisted into his desire to do something *for* the Lord as payment of all He had done for him. Such men err "not knowing the scriptures." One verse of the Word is sufficient to refute their childish misconceptions, and establish what we have said above: "And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in your heart to build an house unto My name, you *did well* [not "you was moved by a legalistic spirit"] that it was in your heart" (1 Kings 8:18).

We do not propose to comment in detail upon the remainder of the Lord's message through Nathan, but rather will we generalize our remarks upon the same. First, the Lord made touching mention of His own infinite condescension in graciously accommodating Himself unto the stranger and pilgrim character of His people (v. 6). The great Jehovah had deigned to "*walk with* the children of Israel." What an amazing and heart-melting word is that in Leviticus 25:23 "The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners *with* Me." David himself had laid hold of that word, as his statement in Psalm 39: 12 clearly shows, "Hold not Your peace at my tears: for I am a stranger *with You,* and a sojourner as all my fathers were." Until Israel were settled in their inheritance an humble tent had sewed the Lord's requirements. In this He has left *us* an example to follow: pomp and parade, extravagance and luxury, ill become those who have here "no continuing city."

Second, as yet the Lord had given no definite instruction for the erection of an imposing edifice for His worship (v. 7), and until He did, a *tent* of His appointing, was better than a *temple* of man's devising. Our desires, even of usefulness, must be governed by His precepts. Whatever be our spiritual aspirations, they must be regulated by the revealed will of God. He assigns unto every one his own work, and each of us should thankfully and faithfully attend to our own proper business. O to be satisfied with the place which God has allotted *us,* to discharge earnestly the duty which He has appointed us, and leave to other whom He has chosen, the more honorable work. The temple was to bear the name of Solomon, and not that of David.

Third, David was reminded of the wondrous things which God had already wrought for him, so that while he was not called unto the building of the temple, nevertheless, he was one of the favorites of Heaven (v. 8). Moreover, God had made him signally victorious over all his foes, and had advanced him unto high honor among the nations (v. 9). Let us be thankful for the mercies which God *has* bestowed, and not repine for any which He sees fit to withhold. Fourth, the happy future of his people was assured him (v. 10), from which he might well conclude that, when *they* were more securely established, then would be the time for the erection of a permanent house of worship. Finally, God announces rich blessings as being entailed upon David's family, for from *his* seed should issue, according to the flesh, the promised Messiah and Mediator (verses 11-16). Thus, instead of David's building for the Lord a material and temporal house, the Lord would build for *him* a spiritual house which would abide "forever." Thus we see that a "willing mind" (2 Corinthians 8: 12) is not only accepted, but richly *rewarded.* "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, unto Him be glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20, 21).

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

His Deep Humility

2 Samuel 7

In the preceding chapter we looked upon David while he was permitted to enjoy a brief season of repose, following the trying experiences through which he had passed before he came to the throne. He might well have found in the many trials and vicissitudes of his past life an excuse for luxurious repose now. But devout souls will consecrate their leisure as well as their toil to God, and will serve with thank-offerings in peace, Him whom they invoked with earnest supplication in battle. As another has said, "Prosperity is harmless only when it is accepted as an opportunity for fresh forms of devotion, and not as an occasion for idle self-indulgence." Thus it was with our hero. He was not spoiled by success; his head was not made giddy by the height he now occupied; the Lord was not forgotten when prosperity smiled upon him. Instead, he was deeply concerned about the honor of God, especially at there being no suitable place for His public worship.

As David sat alone in his palace, meditating, there can be little doubt that one so conversant with the Scriptures as he was would turn in thought to the ancient promise, "When He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there" (Deuteronomy 12:10, 11). It was *that* word, we believe, which caused our hero to say unto Nathan, "See, now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells within curtains" (2 Samuel 7:2). Israel's king felt more or less rebuked by his own ease and comfort, and regarded his tranquility not as a season for selfish indolence, but rather as a call to serious reflection upon the interests of God's cause or kingdom. He could not bear the thought of lavishing more upon self than upon the service of Him to whom he owed everything.

The response made by the Lord unto the spiritual exercises of His servant was indeed blessed. Through the prophet He gave David a much fuller revelation of what was in *His* heart toward him: "I will set up your seed after you . . . I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever . . . your house and your kingdom shall be established forever" (verses 10-12). God made known His purpose to confer upon the posterity of David a special favor, which He had not granted even to Abraham, Moses, or Joshua, namely, establish them upon the throne of Israel. Moreover, it was declared of his seed who should be set up after him, "He shall build an house for My name" (v. 13). This will be considered in more detail under "The Divine Covenants" (when we reach the "Davidic"): suffice it now to say, the ultimate reference was a *spiritual* one in the person and kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While there was much in the revelation now granted to David which was well calculated to evoke gratitude and praise, yet there was one omission from it that presented a real test of his submission, humility and patience. While there was abundant cause for thanksgiving, that *his* posterity should continue to occupy the throne, and his own son build an house for Jehovah's name (and fame), yet that *he* was denied this honor, had been resented by one who was proud and filled with a sense of his own importance. David's longings were not to be realized during his own lifetime, and though he should be permitted to gather together much of the material for the future temple, yet *he* would not be permitted to see the finished product itself. Here, then, was a real trying of his character, and it is blessed to see how he endured and met the same.

How often it falls out that one sows and another reaps: one set of men labor, and another generation is permitted to enter into the benefits of their toil. Nor should we complain at this, seeing that our sovereign and all-wise God has so ordered it. David did not complain, nor did he manifest any petulant disappointment at the crowning of his hopes being deferred to a future time. Instead, as we shall see, he sweetly bowed to God's pleasure and adored Him for the same. Ah, my readers, our prayers may yet move God to send a gracious revival, yet that happy event may not come during our lifetime. The faithful labors of God's servants today may not immediately transform the present "wilderness" state of Zion into a fruitful garden, yet if they be the means of plowing and harrowing the ground as a necessary preliminary thereto, ought we not to gladly acquiesce?

In the passage which is now to be before us, we behold the effects which God's wondrous revelation through Nathan had upon the soul of David. "Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord; and he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that You have brought me hitherto?" (2 Samuel 7:18). Inexpressibly blessed is this. Such tidings as had just fallen on his ears would have puffed up many a man, filled him with a sense of his own importance, and caused him to act arrogantly toward his fellows. Far otherwise was it with "the man after God's own heart." Filled with joyful amazement at Jehovah's infinite condescension, David at once left the royal palace and betook himself to the humble tent which housed that sacred ark, there to pour out his heart in adoration and praise. There is nothing like a keeling sense of God's sovereign, free and rich *grace,* to melt the soul, humble the heart, and stir unto true and acceptable worship.

"Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord" (2 Samuel 7:18). This is in designed contrast from verse 1: there the king "sat in his house"; here he is seen in the tabernacle, before Jehovah. The word "*sat* before the Lord," probably refers to his *continuance* in the tabernacle, rather than to the posture in which he prayed. "And he said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that You have brought me hitherto?" (v. 18). How few kings there are who have such a realization of their lowliness as this! All sense of personal greatness vanished when David came into the presence of the great Jehovah. Ah, my reader, when *the Lord* is truly before us, "I" sinks into utter insignificance! But it is only as we are absorbed with His perfections—His infinitude, His majesty, His omnipotency—that self will be lost sight of.

"Who am I? O Lord God? and what is my house?" How these words bring before us the deep humility of David! Truthfully could he say, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty" (Psalm 131:1). A number of illustrations of this lovely grace may be cited from the record of David's life. His being content to follow his mean vocation as a shepherd, until God called him to a higher office. He never affected the royal diadem, neither would it have been any grief of heart to him had God passed him by, and made another king. His words to Abishai concerning Saul, "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" (1 Samuel 26:9), show plainly that he was not coveting the crown, and was quite content for the son of Kish to continue occupying the throne of Israel.

It is beautiful to see how often this spirit of lowliness and self-abnegation appears in "the man after God's own heart." When he went forth to engage Goliath, it was not in the confidence of his own skill, but with the holy assurance "This day will *the Lord* deliver you into mine hand" (1 Samuel 17:46). When Saul lay helpless before him, he took no credit unto himself, but said to the king, "*the Lord* had delivered you today into mine hand" (1 Samuel 24:10). When Abigail was used to quiet his passionate spirit, he exclaimed, "blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent you this day to meet me" (1 Samuel 25:32); and when Nabal was dead, "Blessed be the Lord, that bath pleaded the cause of my reproach . . . and has kept His servant from evil" (v. 39). Alter his notable victory over the Amalekites he said, "You shall not do so, my brethren, with that which *the Lord* has given us, who bath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand" (1 Samuel 30:23). humility is that grace which gives the Lord His proper place.

Distrusting his own wisdom, we find David "inquiring of the Lord" again and again (1 Samuel 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19; etc.). This is another sure mark of genuine humility: that spirit which is afraid to trust in our own knowledge, experience and powers, and seeks counsel and direction from above. When for his prowess Saul called him to court and promised to give him Michal to wife, he answered, "Seems it to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?" (1 Samuel 18:23). Note the love he bore to those who admonished him for his sins: "Let the righteous smite me: it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head" (Psalm 141:5): far meaner people do not take it so kindly! In all his heroical acts he sought not his own honor, but God's: "Not unto "(Psalm 115:1).

Mark his submission to God under chastisement: "And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and His habitation: But if He thus say, I have no delight in you; behold, here am I, let Him *do to me as seems good unto Him*" (2 Samuel 15:25, 26). In all his dealings with God, he dared not trust in his own righteousness, but wholly took refuge in the covenant of grace: "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3). "Enter not into judgment with Your servant: for in Your sight shall no man living be justified" (Psalm 143:2). When a man can find all this in himself, he may honestly say, "Lord, *my* heart is not haughty" (Psalm 131:1). Yet, David was not perfect, and the remains of pride still indwelt him, as they do each of us—until we get rid of the flesh, we shall never be completely rid of pride. Psalm 30:6 and 2 Samuel 24:2 show his vainglory creeping out.

We have dwelt the more largely upon David's *humility,* because in this day of Laodicean conceit and boasting, it needs to be emphasized that, as a general rule, those whom God has used most mightily have not been men who were distinguished for abnormal natural powers or gifts, but instead *by deep humility.* See this admirable trait in Abraham: "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27); in Moses, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3: 11); in Christ's forerunner, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30); in Paul, "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9). O that Divine grace may make us "little in our own eyes."

But again we would notice it was while David was "before the Lord" that he said, "Who am I?" So too it was while he was in the immediate presence of the Lord that Abraham confessed himself to be "but dust and ashes." In like manner, it was when the great I Am revealed Himself at the burning bush that Moses asked, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh?"! It was when Job could say, "Now mine eye sees Thee"—in all Your awful sovereignty (see context)—that he cried, "wherefore I abhor myself" (Job 45:5).

"And what is my house, that You have brought me hitherto?" David continued in the same lowly strain. His "house" pertained to the royal tribe; he was the immediate descendant of the prince of Judah, so that he was connected with the most honorable family in Israel; yet such fleshly distinctions were held lightly by him. The "You have brought me hitherto"—to the throne, to rest from all his enemies—gave to God the rightful glory. "It intimates that he could not have reached this himself by his own management, if God had not brought him to it. All our attainments must be looked upon as God's vouchsafements" (Matthew Henry).

"And this was yet a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God; but You have spoken also of Your servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?" (v. 19). Having owned the goodness of the Lord upon him "hitherto," David now turns to comment upon the glorious things which God had promised for the future. The latter so immeasurably outweighed the former, that he sums up his own establishment over the kingdom as "this was yet a small thing in Your sight, O Lord God." We believe this throws light upon the word "sat" in the previous verse, which has presented a difficulty unto the commentators—who point out that this is the only place in Scripture where a saint is represented as being seated while engaged in prayer. But are we not rather to regard the term as denoting that David was in an attitude of most carefully surveying the wonderful riches of divine grace toward him, instead of defining his posture while engaged in his devotions?

The whole of 2 Samuel 7 is to be viewed as the blessed and instructive sequel to what is presented to us in the opening verse. God had tenderly given His servant a season of rest that lie might receive a fuller revelation of what was in *His* heart toward him. And now he is in the sacred tabernacle, pondering over what he had heard through Nathan. As he meditated, divine light and understanding broke in upon him, so that he was enabled, in measure at least, to penetrate the mysterious depths of that wonderful prophecy. The golden future was now opened to him, shining with more than earthly glory and bliss. "He beheld in spirit another Son than Solomon, another Temple than that built of stones and cedar, another Kingdom than the earthly one on whose throne he sat. He beholds a scepter and a crown, of which his own on Mount Zion were only feeble types—dim and shadowy images" (Krummacher's *David and the God man*).

Beautifully does this come out in his next words: "And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what can David say more unto You? for You, Lord God, know Your servant. For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, have You done all these great things, to make Your servant know them" (verses 19-2 1)—in the light of which knowledge, he no doubt penned the fortieth, forty-fifth and one hundred tenth Psalms. The last clause of verse 19 should be translated, more literally, "This is the law of *the* Man, the Lord God," namely, "The Man" of Psalm 8;5, 6 and of Psalm 80:17! David was now given to realize that the blessed promises which had been given to him through the prophet would be made good in the person of the Messiah, who should yet issue from his own loins, who would be "The Man," yet none other than "the Lord God" incarnate. Yes, God reveals His secrets to the lowly, but hides them from those who are wise and prudent in their own esteem.

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

His Exemplary Prayer

2 Samuel 7

The latter part of 2 Samuel 7 contains the prayer made by David in the tabernacle, following the gracious revelation which he had received from the Lord through Nathan (verses 5-16). This prayer is among the "whatever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). it contains valuable instruction which we do well to take to heart. It makes known that which is a valuable preliminary aid unto stimulating the spirit of prayer. It shows us the attitude of soul which most becomes the creature when desirous of drawing near unto the great Creator. It reveals some of the elements which are found in those supplications that gain the ear of God and which "avails much." If the Christian of today paid more attention unto the prayers *of Scripture,* both of the Old and New Testaments alike, and sought to pattern his invocations after theirs, there is little doubt they would be more acceptable and effectual.

We pointed out in our last that David's *sitting* before the Lord denoted his earnest attention unto the message he had received from Him, his careful pondering of it, his devout surveying of the riches of Divine grace which were then spread before his mind's eye. This preceded his prayer, and supplies a valuable hint for us to heed. Meditation upon the discoveries which God has made to us of His goodness, of His bounty, of the glorious things contained in His covenant, is a wondrous stimulant to the spirit of devotion and a suitable preparative for an approach unto the Mercy-seat. To review God's past dealings with us, and to mix faith with His promises for the future, kindle the fires of gratitude and love. As we attend upon what God has spoken to us, when our consciences are pricked or our affections stirred, then is the best time to retire to our closets and pour out our hearts before Him.

Generally it is but an idle excuse—if not something worse—when the Christian complains that his heart is cold and the spirit of prayer is quite inactive within him. Where this be the case, it must be shamefacedly confessed to God, accompanied by the request that He may be pleased to heal our malady and bring us back again into communion with Himself. But better still, the *cause* of the complaint should be corrected: nine times out of ten it is because the Word has been neglected—if read at all, mechanically, without holy reflection and personal appropriation. The soul is likely to be in a sickly state if it be not regularly fed and nourished by the Bread of life. There is nothing like *meditating* upon Gods promises for warming the heart: "While I *was musing* the fire burned: then spoke I with my tongue" (Psalm 39:3).

We commented in our last upon the deep humility manifested by David on this occasion. This too is recorded for our learning. If we are becomingly to approach the Most High, there must be the taking of a lowly place before Him. This is the chief design of prayer, the prime reason why God has appointed this holy ordinance: for the *humbling* of the soul—to take our proper place in the dust, to kneel before the Lord as beggars, dependent upon His bounty; to stretch forth empty hands, that He may fill them. Alas that so often man, in his pride and perverseness, turns the footstool of mercy into the bench of presumption, and instead of supplicating becomes guilty of dictating unto the Almighty. Ah, my readers, take careful note that He who prayed, "Not as I will, but as You will," was *on His face* before the Father (Matthew 26:39).

Now in seeking to ponder David's pattern prayer—having duly noted above what preceded it, let us seek to profit from the various features found in it. First, observe that *all is ascribed to free grace.* "And what can David say more unto You? for You, Lord God, know Your servant. For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, have You done all these great things, to make Your servant know them" (verses 20, 21). David's heart was deeply moved by a sense of God's sovereign benignity; that such blessings should be bestowed upon him and his posterity was more than he could understand. He was lost in wonderment: words utterly failed him, as his "what can David say more unto You?" evidences. And is it not thus, at times, with every true believer? As he contemplates the abounding of God's mercies, the richness of His gifts, the supernal future promised him, is he not moved to exclaim, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12).

Realizing his own nothingness and unworthiness (v. 18), viewing the future glories assured him (v. 19), knowing there was nothing in himself which merited any such blessings, David traces them to their true causes: "For Your Word's sake, and according to Your own heart, have You done all these great things" (v. 21). It is the *personal* "Word" which he had in mind, Him of whom it is declared, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). It was an acknowledgment—"for *Christ's* sake" You have so honored me! "And according to Your own heart" signifies, according to His gracious counsels, out of His own mere good pleasure. Yes, those, and those alone, are the springs of all God's dealings with us: He blesses His people for the sake of His beloved Son, "according to the riches of His grace" and "according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself" (Ephesians 1:7, 9).

Second, *the greatness of God is apprehended and extolled.* "Wherefore You are great, O Lord God: for there is none like You, neither is there any God beside You, according to all that we have heard with our ears" (v. 22). It is blessed to observe that David's sense of God's goodness in nowise abated his awesome veneration of the divine majesty. There is ever a danger at this point: we may be so occupied with God's love as to forget His holiness, so appreciative of His tenderness as to ignore His omnipotency. It is most needful that we should hold the balance here, as everywhere else; hence did the Savior instruct us to say, "Our Father, who are in Heaven"—the latter words reminding us of the exalted dignity of the One who has deigned to adopt us into His family. Apprehensions of God's amazing grace toward us must not crowd out the realization of His infinite exaltation above us.

God's greatness should be duly acknowledged by us when we seek an audience with the Majesty on high: it is but ascribing to Him the glory which is His due. Prayer is reduced to a low level if it is to be confined unto the presenting of requests. The soul needs to be so absorbed with the divine perfections that the worshiper will exclaim, "Who is like unto You, O Lord, among the gods? who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). God's supreme excellency is to be reverently and freely owned by us. It was owned by Solomon, "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like You, in Heaven above, or on earth beneath" (1 Kings 8:23). It was owned by Jehoshaphat, "O Lord God of our fathers, are not You God in Heaven? and rule not You over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand You?" (2 Chronicles 20:6). It was by Jeremiah, "Forasmuch as there is none like unto You, O Lord; You are great, and Your name is great in might. Who would not fear You, O King of nations?" (Jeremiah 10:6, 7). What examples are these for us to take to heart. The more we heartily acknowledge God's greatness, the more likely is He to answer our requests.

Third, *The special goodness of God to His people is owned.* "And what one nation in the earth is like Your people, like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to Himself, and to make Him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible?" (v. 23). As none of the "gods" of the heathen could be compared to Jehovah, so none among the people's of the earth have been so highly favored and so richly blessed as His privileged "Nation" (Matthew 21:43, 1 Peter 2:9). O what praise is due unto God for His distinguishing mercy and discriminating grace unto His elect. "We are bound to give thanks

always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). The special blessings of God call for special acknowledgment: the "redemption" which we have in and by Christ Jesus demands our loudest hosannas. There is far too little praise in our prayers today: its absence denotes a low state of spirituality—occupation with self, instead of with the Lord. It is written "whoever offers praise, glorifies Me" (Psalm 50:23).

Fourth, *the Covenant of Grace is celebrated.* "For You have confirmed to Yourself Your people Israel to be a people unto You forever; and You, Lord are become their God" (v. 24). In the light of the whole context, it is evident that the *spiritual* "Israel" is here in view, contemplated as being taken into covenant relationship with the triune Jehovah. For, whenever a people is said to be *God's* people, and He avows Himself as their God, it is the covenant relationship which is in view. Thus it was in the promise to Abraham: "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you in their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God* unto you, and to your seed after you" (Genesis 17:7). Thus it is under the new covenant, "I will be to them *a God,* and they shall be to Me *a people*" (Hebrews 8:10). It greatly encourages and emboldens the praying soul to bear this in mind.

Fifth, *a believing pleading of the promises.* "And now, O Lord God, the word that You have spoken concerning Your servant, and concerning his house, establish it forever, and *do as You have said*" (v.25). This is blessed, and most important for us to emulate. In these words the faith of David was expressed in two ways: in *believing* God's word, in *pleading* its accomplishment. That should be the very heart of our petitionary prayers: laying hold of the divine promise, and pleading for its fulfillment. God is not only a Speaker, but a Doer as well: "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: has He said, *and shall He not do it?* or has He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" (Numbers 23: 19). Ah, but it is one thing to assent mentally to such a declaration, but it is quite another for the heart to be really influenced thereby, and for the praying soul to appropriate that fact.

True faith looks to a *promising* God, and expects Him to be a *performing* God too: "Faithful is He who calls you, who *also will do it*" (1 Thessalonians 5:4). The business of faith in prayer is to appropriate God's Word to our own case and beg for it to be made good unto us. Jacob did this: "*And You said,* I will surely do you good, and make your seed as the sand of the sea" (Genesis 32: 10). David is another notable example: "Remember the word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope" (Ps, 119:49)—"hope" in Scripture signifies *far* more than a vague and uncertain longing: it denotes a confident expectation. That confident expectation was his because his faith rested upon the sure promise of Jehovah, that promise of which he here reverently reminds God. Glance through this Psalm, dear reader, and observe how frequently David requested God to act "according to Your Word"—119:25, 28, 41, 58, etc.

"Do as You have said." Faith has no other foundation to rest upon but the Word of God. One of God's chief ends in giving us His Word was that His people might appropriate the same unto themselves (John 20:31, 1 John 5:13). Nothing honors Him more than for us to count upon His making it good to us (Romans 4:20). Now whatever may be our case, there is something in the Word exactly suited thereto, and it is our privilege to lay hold of the same *and plead it* before God. Are we groaning under sin's defilement? then plead Isaiah 1:18. Are we bowed down with a sense of our backslidings? then plead Jeremiah 3:22. Do we feel so weak as to have no strength for the performance of duty? then plead Isaiah 40:29-31. Are we perplexed as to our path and in urgent need of divine guidance? then plead Proverbs 3:6 or James 1:5. Are you sorely harassed with temptation? then plead 1 Corinthians 10:13. Are you destitute and fearful of starving to death? then plead Philippians 4:19. Reverently urge that promise and plead "Do as You have said."

Sixth, *the supreme desire: that God might be glorified.* "And let Your name be magnified forever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed to Your servant, saying, I will build you an house: therefore have Your servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto You" (verses 26, 27). This must be the supreme desire and the chief end in all our praying: "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). The prayer which Christ has given for our pattern begins with "Hallowed be Your name," and ends with "Your is the glory." The Lord Jesus ever practiced what He preached: "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? . . . Father, *glorify* Your name" (John 12:27); so too at the beginning of His high priestly prayer, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You" (John 17:1). O that more of His spirit may possess us: that the honor of God may be our great concern, His glory our constant aim.

Seventh, *a final pleading* for *God to make good His Word.* "And now, O Lord God, You are that God, and Your words be true, and You have promised this goodness unto Your servant: therefore now let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You: for You, O Lord God, have spoken it; and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever" (verses 28, 29). David built his hopes upon the fidelity of God: "I entreated Your favor with my whole heart: be merciful unto me *according to* Your Word" (Psalm 119:58)—I desire no more, I expect no less. We may be bold to ask for all God has engaged to give. As Matthew Henry said, "It is by turning God's promises into petitions that they are turned into performances." Flow necessary it is then that we should diligently acquaint ourselves with the Scriptures, so that we ask not "amiss" (James 4:3). How necessary that the Word dwell in us richly, that we may act in faith, nothing doubting.

Our space is exhausted. Ponder carefully, dear reader, these seven features or elements in David's God-honoring prayer, and seek the help of the holy Spirit to pattern your supplications after his.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

His Conquests

2 Samuel 8

2 Samuel 8 opens with, "And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them: and David took Methegammah out of the hand of the Philistines. And he smote Moab . . . David smote also Hadadezer" (verses 1-3). The thoughtful reader may well ask, What is there here for me? Why are such matters as these recorded in God's Word, to be read by His people in all generations? Are they merely a bare account of incidents which happened thousands of years ago? If so, they can hardly hold for me anything more than what is of historical interest. But such a conclusion will be far from satisfactory to a devout inquirer, who is assured there is something of profit for his soul in *every* portion of his Father's Word. But how to ascertain the spiritual value and practical lessons of such verses is that which sorely puzzles not a few: may it please the Lord now to enable us to render them some help at this point.

While it be true that none but the One who inspired the Holy Scriptures can open to any of us their hidden depths and rich treasures, yet it is also true that He places no premium upon sloth. It is the prayerful and meditative reader who is rewarded by the Holy Spirit's illumination of the mind, giving him to behold wondrous things out of God's Law. "The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing: but the soul of the *diligent* shall be made fat" (Proverbs 13:4). If, then, any verse of Scripture is really to speak to our hearts, there has to be not only a crying unto God for the hearing ear, but there must be a girding up the loins of our minds and a careful pondering of each word in the verse.

"And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines and subdued them: and David took Methegammah out of the hand of the Philistines. And he smote Moab David smote also Hadadezer." As he carefully weighs these statements, the spiritually-minded can hardly fail to discern One more eminent than David, even his greater Son and Lord. Here we may clearly behold in type the Lion of the tribe of Judah (to which tribe the son of Jesse belonged!), springing upon and overcoming His enemies. In figure, it is the Lord as "a man of war" (Exodus 15:3), going forth "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2), of whom it is written "For He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25). Yet, precious as this is, it fails to direct us to the practical application of the passage unto our

The question, then, returns upon us, What direct message is there in these verses for the Christian today? Not simply what curious signification may be found to amuse him during a few minutes' recreation, but what practical lessons are here inculcated which can be turned to useful account in his struggle to live the Christian life? Nothing short of *that* should be before the Satan-harassed, sin-afflicted, temptation-tried soul, when he turns to the Word of God for help, instruction, strength and comfort. Nor will God fail him if he seeks in the right spirit—confessing his deep need, pleading the all-prevailing Name of Christ, asking God to grant him for the Redeemer's sake that wisdom, understanding and faith he sorely craves. Yet, let us add, prayer is not designed to encourage laziness, for it is not a substitute for diligent effort: the Scriptures must be "searched" (John 5:39) and "studied" if they are to yield food to the soul.

But *how* is the devout and anxious reader to get at the spiritual meaning and practical value of the verses quoted above? Well, the first thing to observe is that the central thing in them is, *David overcoming his enemies.* Put in *that* form, the application to ourselves is obvious. David is here to be viewed as a type of the Christian who is menaced by powerful foes both within and without. These are not to be suffered to lord it over the believer, but are to be engaged in mortal combat. Second, we note that David is not said to have exterminated or annihilated those enemies, but to have "subdued" them (v. 11), which is true to the type, and supplies a key to its practical interpretation. Third, we must pay due attention unto the time-mark which is given in the opening verse—"And *after this* it came to pass that David smote the Philistines"—for this is another key which unlocks for us its meaning. It is by attending carefully unto such details that we are enabled to burrow beneath the surface of a verse.

"And *after this* it came to pass that David smote the Philistines." These words look back to what was before us in 7:1, "And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies." May we not apply these words to the first coming of a sinner to Christ, heavily laden with a conscious load of guilt, sorely pressed by the malicious foes of his soul, now finding *spiritual* rest in the only One in whom and from whom it is to be obtained. Hitherto David had been assailed again and again by the surrounding heathen, but now the Lord granted him a season of repose. That season had been spent in sweet communion with God, in the Word (2 Samuel 7:4-17) and prayer (2 Samuel 7: 18-29). Blessed indeed is that, but let it be duly noted that communion with God is intended to animate us for the discharge of duty. It is not upon flowery beds of ease that the believer is conducted to Heaven. Being led beside the still waters and being made to lie down in green pastures is a blissful experience, yet let it not be forgotten that it is a means to an end—to supply strength for the carrying out of our obligations.

"And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines and subdued them." We may observe a very noticeable change here: previously the Philistines had been the aggressors. In 2 Samuel 5 we read, "But when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David . . . the Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim . . . And the Philistines came up yet again" (verses 17, 18, 22). "From their assaults God had graciously given His servant rest" (2 Samuel 7:1). But now he evidently received a commission from the Lord to make war upon them. Thus it is in the initial experience of the Christian. It is a sense of sin—its vileness, its filthiness, its guilt, its condemnation—which drives him to Christ, and coming to Christ, he finds "rest." But having obtained forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience, he now learns that be must "strive against sin" (Hebrews 12:4) and fight the good fight of faith. Now that the young believer has been delivered from the wrath to come, he discovers that he must "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3),

"And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them." While these words may be legitimately applied to the *initial* experience of the believer, they are by no means to be restricted thereunto. They contain a principle which pertains to the Christian life as a whole, and to every stage thereof. That principle is that before we are fitted to engage our spiritual enemies we must first spend a season in communion with God: only thus and only then can strength be obtained for the conflict which lies before us. Renewed efforts to subdue our persistent foes can only be made (with any degree of success) as we are renewed by the Spirit in the inner man, and that is only to be obtained by feeding on the Word (2 Samuel 7:4-17) and by prayer (2 Samuel 7:18-29)—the two chief means of communion with God.

"And David took Methegammah out of the hand of the Philistines." Here our passage passes from the general to the particular, and a most important practical truth is here inculcated. This is another case when Scripture has to be compared with Scripture in order to understand its terms. 1 Chronicles 18 is parallel with 2 Samuel 8, and by comparing the language of the opening verse of the former we are enabled to arrive at the meaning of our text: "Now after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them, and took *Gath and her towns* out of the hand of the Philistines." Thus "Methegammah" has reference to "Gath and her towns." Now Gath (with its suburbs) was the metropolis of Philistia, being a fortified city on a high hill (2 Samuel 2:24). In our text it is called "Methegammah" which means "the bridle of the mother city." It had long acted as a "bridle" or curb upon Israel, serving as a barrier to their further occupation of Canaan. So much, then, for the etymological and historical meaning: now for the typical.

What was denoted spiritually by "Gath and her towns"? In seeking the answer to this question let us carefully bear in mind the three details mentioned above: Gath occupied a powerful eminence, it was the metropolis or mother-city, it had served as a "bridle" upon Israel. Surely the practical application of this to ourselves is not difficult: is it not some *master* lust in our souls or *dominant* sin in our lives which is here represented?

It is not the eyelashes which require trimming, but the "eye" itself which must be plucked out; it is not the fingernails which need paring, but the "right hand" which must be cut off (Matthew 5:29, 30), if the Christian would make any headway in overcoming his inward corruptions. It is to his special "besetting sin" he must direct his attention. No truce is to be made with *it,* no excuses offered for it. No matter how firmly entrenched it may be, nor how long it has held sway, grace must be diligently and persistently sought to conquer it. That darling sin which has so long been cherished by an evil heart must be slain: if it be "spared," as Saul spared Agag, it will slay us. The work of mortification is to begin at the place where sin has its strongest hold upon us.

The subduing of the Philistines, and particularly the capture of Gath, was vitally essential if Israel was to gain their rights, for as yet they were not in full possession of the land to which, by the divine promise, they were entitled. Canaan had been given to them by God as their heritage, but valiant effort, hard fighting, was called for, in order to bring about their occupation of the same. This is a point which has sorely puzzled many. It is clear from Scripture that the land of Canaan was a figure of Heaven, but there is no *fighting* in Heaven! True, but the believer is not yet in Heaven; nevertheless, Heaven ought to be in him, by which we mean that even now the believer should be walking in the daily enjoyment of that wondrous portion which is now his by having been made a joint heir with Christ. Alas, how little is this fact appreciated by the majority of God's dear people today, and how little are they experimentally *possessing* "their possessions" (Obadiah 17).

It is greatly to be regretted that so many of the saints relegate to *the future* the time of their victory, joy and bliss; and seem content to live in the present as though they were spiritual paupers. For example, how generally are the words "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11) regarded as referring to the time of the believer's glorification. But there is nothing whatever in the context to warrant such a view, nothing required in it to understand that "abundant entrance" as belonging to a day to come, nothing to justify us postponing it at all in our thoughts. Instead, there is much against it. In the preceding verses the apostle is exhorting the believer to make his calling and election "sure," and this by adding to his faith "virtue" etc. (verses 5-7), assuring him that by so doing he shall "never fall," and adding "for *so* an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly."

Legally, the believer has already been "delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of Gods dear Son" (Colossians 1:13), but experimentally an "abundant entrance" thereunto is dependent upon his spiritual growth and the cultivation of his graces. The believer has already been begotten unto "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in Heaven" for him (1 Peter 1:4), but his practical *enjoyment* thereof turns upon the exercise of faith. "Abraham," said Christ, "rejoiced to see My day" (John 8:56): and *how* did the patriarch "see" it? Why, *by faith,* for there was no other way in which he could see it: by the exercise of faith in the sure promises of God. And what was the effect upon Abraham of this entrancing vision which faith brought to him? This, "And he saw it and *was glad."* In like manner, the believer now is to use the long distance lens of faith and view his promised inheritance, and *rejoice* therein; then will "the joy of the Lord" be his "strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

Israel had a valid title to the land of Canaan: it was theirs by the gift of God. But enemies sought to prevent their occupation of it: and enemies seek to hinder the Christian from faith's appropriation and enjoyment of *his* "inheritance." And what are those enemies? Chiefly, the lusts of the flesh, sinful habits, evil ways. *Faith cannot be in healthy exercise while we yield to the lusts of the flesh.* How many a saint is sighing because his faith is so feeble, so spasmodic, so fruitless. Here is the cause: allowed sin! Faith and sin are opposites, opponents, and the one cannot flourish until the other be subdued. It is vain to pray for more faith until we start in earnest to mortify our lusts, crucify our Christ-dishonoring corruptions, and wrestle with and overcome our besetting sins; and that can only be accomplished by fervently and untiringly seeking enabling grace from on High.

"David *smote* the Philistines, and *subdued* them." In figure that represents the believer waging unsparing warfare upon all within him that is opposed to God, "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" in order mat he may "live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12). It represents the believer doing what the apostle speaks of in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "But I *keep under* my body, and bring it into subjection:" his "body" there referring not so much to the physical, as to the "old man" within, the "body of sin" (Romans 6:6), "this body of death" (Romans 7:24 margin); or as it is spoken of elsewhere as "the body of the sins of the flesh" (Colossians 2:11), Indwelling sin is spoken of in these passages as a "body" because it has, as it were, a complete set of members or faculties of its own; and these must be *subdued* by the Christian: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5),

"And David took Methegammah out of the land of the Philistines," Typically this turns, as we have previously said, from the general unto the particular—from the work of mortification as a whole to the crucifying of a special sin which prevails against the saint. In figure it represents the believer concentrating his attention upon and conquering his master lust or chief besetting sin, that "mother" evil which is the prolific source of so many iniquities, that "bridle" which has for so long hindered his entering into God's best for him. But our space is exhausted: as the subject is of such vital moment we will continue it in our next chapter.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

His Conquests

(Continued)

2 Samuel 8

In the preceding chapter we pointed out that the central thing in 2 Samuel 8 is David overcoming his enemies, and this, in order that Israel might enter their rightful portion—occupy and enjoy the inheritance which God has given them. In order to do this, hard fighting was entailed. We also called attention to the fact that 2 Samuel 8 opens with the word "And," which requires us to observe what immediately goes before. In 2 Samuel 7 we find God giving David "rest round about from all his enemies" (v. 1), and that he spent this season of repose in communion with the Lord—over His Word (verses 4-17) and in prayer (verses 18-29). Following which he evidently received a commission from on high to attack and conquer his most formidable foes, for we are next told "And after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them" (v. 1).

The spiritual, application unto the believer of the above is striking and blessed. The "rest" given to David from those who had assailed him typifies, first, the initial coming to Christ of a convicted and sin-weary soul, and finding rest in Him; and second, it typifies the restraining hand of God laid upon the sinful lusts of the Christian, granting him a little respite from their assaults. This is necessary if there is to be sweet and profitable communion with the thrice holy God, for the soul is in no condition to rejoice in His perfections while sin is raging within him; therefore does the Lord, in His mercy, frequently lay His powerful hand upon us, subduing our iniquities (Micah 7: 19). Then it is we should improve the opportunity by feeding upon the Word of promise and by pouring out our hearts before God in thanksgiving, praise and adoring worship. "Thus David used his "rest," and so should We; for by so doing new strength will be obtained for further conflicts.

David's smiting of the Philistines and subduing them is a figure of the work of mortification to which God calls the Christian: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, impurity, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness" (Colossians 3:5). The clear call of God to His people is, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof" (Romans 6: 12). The Christian must not suffer his fleshly lusts to lord it over, him, but is to engage them in mortal combat, refusing to spare anything in him which is opposed to God. David's taking of "Methegammah" (which means "the bridle of the mother") out of the hands of the Philistines, speaks of the believer devoting his special attention unto his master lust or besetting sin, for until *that* be (by grace) conquered there can be no real experimental progress in spiritual things; "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth to his neighbor Let him that stole, steal no more . . . Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth" (Ephesians 4:25, 28, 29).

Now David's subduing of the Philistines and his capture of Methegammah, their chief stronghold, was imperatively necessary if Israel was to gain possession and occupy their inheritance, and it is *this* fact which we desire to press most upon the reader. The Christian has been begotten unto a blessed and eternal inheritance in Heaven: from his eventual entrance into it Satan cannot keep him, but from his present possession and enjoyment thereof he seeks by might and main to rob him; and unless the believer be duly instructed and steadfastly resists him, then the enemy will prove only too successful. Alas that so few of the Lord's people realize *what* their present privileges are; alas that so many of them relegate unto the future what is theirs *now* in title; alas that they are so ignorant of Satan's devices and so dilatory in seeking to resist the great robber of their souls.

The believer has, *even now,* a rich and wondrous portion in Christ; a portion which is available and accessible unto *faith:* "For all things *are* yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; *all* are yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). But O how little are we impressed by such glorious declarations as these; how little do we enter into them in a practical way; how little do we *appropriate* them. We are much like the man who died in poverty, knowing not that a valuable estate had been left to him. Instead of setting our affections upon things above, we act as though there was nothing there for us until we pass through the portals of the grave. "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16: 11)—*now* as well as in the future!

O what a tremendous difference it makes whether or not the Christian be living in the present enjoyment of his eternal inheritance. What power could the attractions of this world have for one whose heart is on high? None at all. Instead, they would appear to him in their true light, as worthless baubles. How little would he be affected by the loss of a few temporal things: not making them his "treasure" or chief good, the loss of them could neither destroy his peace nor kill his joy—"And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing *in yourselves* that you have in Heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Hebrews 10:64). How little would tribulation and suffering move us from a steady pressing forward along the path of duty: "who for the joy *that was set before Him* (by faith) endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

But for the present enjoyment of our eternal inheritance *faith* must be in exercise, for "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is that which gives visibility and tangibility to that which is invisible to sight. Faith is that which gives *reality* to the things which hope is set upon. Faith brings near what is far off. Faith lifts the heart above the things of time and sense:

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: *for he had respect unto* the recompense of the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26). Ah, the "recompense of the reward" was a living reality unto Moses, and under the elevating power thereof the flesh-inviting offer of Egypt's princess was powerless to drag him down. And, my reader, if "our citizenship is in Heaven" (Phil 3:20) *in a practical way,* so far from the baits of Satan tempting us, they will repel.

But, as we pointed out in the preceding chapter, faith cannot be in healthy operation while the work of mortification be neglected. If we yield to the solicitations of our fleshly and worldly lusts, if we fail to crucify our besetting sins, if any evil be "allowed" by us, then faith will be suffocated and rendered inactive. Just as both the Canaanites and the Israelites could not possess the promised land at one and the same time—one being compelled to yield occupancy to the other—so neither can faith and sin rule the heart at one and the same time. The idolatrous Canaanites already had possession of the promised land when God gave it to them, and *only by hard fighting* could the Israelites secure it for themselves. in like manner sinful lusts originally possess the heart of the Christian, and it is only by hard fighting that they can be dispossessed and the heart be filled with Heaven.

As the Canaanites were vanquished, the Israelites occupied their places. Thus it must be spiritually. The mortification of sin is in order to the vivification of spirituality. The garden plot must first be clear of weeds and rubbish before it is ready for the vegetables and flowers to be planted therein. Hence the oft-repeated word is, "Cease to do evil, Learn to do well" (Isaiah 1:16,17), "depart from evil and do good" (Psalm 34:14), "hate the evil and love the good" (Amos 5: 15)—the second cannot be attended to until the first be accomplished. "Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts . . . Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (

Ephesians 4:22, 24). That is God's unchanging order throughout: we must "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit," if we would know "perfect holiness in His fear."

How instructive and how striking is the order in Obadiah 17, "But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions." First, there is deliverance upon "mount Zion," which is where *Christ* is, for in Psalm 2:6 God declares, "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion." Only by Christ can the sin-harassed believer obtain "deliverance" from those enemies which are ever threatening to destroy his peace, joy and usefulness. Second, following the "deliverance" is the promise of "holiness," which is a positive thing, a moral quality of purity, with the added signification of devotedness unto God. But note this cannot be before the "deliverance"! Third, there is then the assurance that God's people shall "*possess* their possessions," that is, actually enjoy them, live in the power thereof.

"And he smote Moab" (v. 2). In order to get at the practical application of this unto ourselves it will be necessary to go back to earlier scriptures. From Genesis 19:36, 37 we learn that Moab was the incestuous son of backslidden Lot. Their territory was adjacent to the land of Canaan, the Jordan dividing them (Numbers 22:1; 31:12). It was Balak the king of the Moabites who hired Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22:4, 5). Her daughters were a snare to the sons of Israel (Numbers 25:1). Her land also proved to be a snare unto Naomi and her family (Ruth 1:1). God used the Moabites as one of His scourges upon His wayward people in the days of the Judges (3:12-14). No Moabite was suffered to enter into the congregation of the Lord unto the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:3). It was foretold that Christ would "smite" them (Numbers 24:17). In the last reference to them in Scripture we read, "Surely Moab shall be as Sodom" (Zephaniah 2:9).

From the above facts it is clear that the Moabites were a menace unto Israel, and that there should be no fellowship between them. But the particular point which we need to define is, exactly what do the Moabites symbolize? The answer to this question is not difficult to discover: they figured the world away from God, but more particularly, the world bordering on the domain of faith. It is not the world-bordering church, but the church-bordering *world,* ever inviting the people of God to leave their own heritage and come down to their level. The Moabites were *near* to Israel both by birth and locality. There was a long and a strong border-line between them, namely, the Jordan, the river of death, and that had to be crossed before the people of God could enter their domain. Moab, then, typifies the world *near* the church; in other words, Moab stands for a mere *worldly profession* of the things of God.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14). The Cross of Christ is the antitype of the Jordan. It is by the Cross the Christian is separated from the world. While the principle of the Cross—the principle of self-sacrifice, death to sin—rules the Christian, he is preserved from the blandishments of the world. But as soon as the principle of the Cross—mortification, the denying of self—ceases to dominate, we fall victims to the fair "daughters of Moab," and commit spiritual adultery with them (Numbers 25:1); in other words, our testimony degenerates into a mere profession; we cease to be heavenly pilgrims, and vital godliness becomes a thing of the past. "Every fair attractive worldly delight that makes us forget our true Home is a 'daughter of Moab'" (F. C. Jennings).

"And he smote Moab." The spiritual application of this to us today is, we must be uncompromising in our separation from an apostate Christendom, and unsparingly mortify every desire within us to flirt with worldly churches and an empty profession. For a child of God to come under the power of "Moab" is to have his usefulness, power and joy, replaced with wretchedness, impotency and dishonor. Hence our urgent need of *obeying* that emphatic command, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: *from such turn away*" (2 Timothy 3:5). It is not that we are called upon to *fight against* the modern "Moabites" (as Israel did under the Old Testament dispensation) but to mortify that within us which lusts after their attractions. In sparing one third of the Moabites and in receiving "gifts" from them, David temporized—the sad sequel is found in 2 Kings 3:4, 5 and what follows.

We do not have sufficient light and discernment to follow out all the details of 2 Samuel 8 and give the spiritual application of them unto ourselves, but several other obvious points in the chapter claim our attention. "David smote also Hadadezer" (v. 3); "David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men" (v. 5). How *numerous* are the (spiritual) enemies which the people of God are called upon to engage! It is to be carefully noted that David did not quit when he had subdued the Philistines and the Moabites, but continued to assail other foes! So the Christian must not become weary in well doing: no furloughs are granted to the soldiers of Jesus Christ: they are called on to be "steadfast, unmovable, *always* abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58), that is the work or task which the Lord has assigned them, which, as the immediate context shows, is to gain the victory over *sin.*

Let us now anticipate a criticism which some of the Lord's people may feel ready to make against what we have said in this and the previous chapter: Have you not been arguing in favor of self-sufficiency and creature-ability? No, indeed; yet, on the other hand, we are no advocate for Christian impotency, for there is a vital difference between the regenerate and unregenerate as to spiritual helplessness. The way to get more faith and more strength is to *use* what we already have. But we are far from affirming that the Christian is able to overcome his spiritual foes in his own might. So with David. Considering the vast numbers which composed the ranks of his numerous enemies, David and his small force could never have won such great victories had not *the* Lord undertaken for him.

"And the Lord preserved David wherever he went" (v. 6): note the exact repetition of these words in verse 14. Here is the explanation of David's success: he fought not in his own strength. So the Christian, fighting the good fight of faith, though weak in himself, is energized by divine grace. David's onslaught upon the Philistines and the Moabites was in line with the promises of God in Genesis 15:18 and Numbers 24:17, and most probably they nerved him for the battle. Thus it should be with the Christian. It is his privilege and duty to remind God of His promises and *plead* them before Him: such promises as "I will subdue all your enemies" (1 Chronicles 17:10), and "sin shall not have dominion over you" (Romans 6:14), O to be able to say "You have girded me with strength unto the battle: You have subdued under me those that rose up against me" (Psalm 18:39).

We have space to consider only one point: "Which also king David did dedicate unto the Lord, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued" (v. 11). While David destroyed the idols, he dedicated to God all the vessels of silver and gold which he took from his enemies. So while the Christian strives to mortify every lust, he must consecrate unto the Lord all his natural and spiritual endowments. Whatever stands in opposition to God must be crucified, but that which may glorify Him must be dedicated to I us service. This point is a blessed one: David entirely *changed the destination* of this silver and gold: what had previously adorned the idolaters, was afterwards used in the building of the temple. The spiritual application of this is found in "as you have yielded your members servants to impurity and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Romans 6: 19). May the Lord graciously add His blessing unto all that has been before us.

CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

His Kindness to Mephibosheth

2 Samuel 9

2 Samuel 9 presents to us one of the loveliest scenes in the life of David. To appreciate it properly we need to recall his earlier experiences, particularly the unkind treatment he received from the hands of Saul. We will only refer briefly now to the jealousy which was awakened in that king's heart when he heard the women celebrating in song the victory of Jesse's youthful son over Goliath. How that later he sought to kill David again and again by throwing a javelin at him. Finally, how that David had to flee for his life and how relentlessly the king pursued him, determining to kill him. But things had been completely altered. Saul and his sons were slain in battle, and David had ascended the throne of Israel. A most admirable spirit did our hero now display: instead of using his royal power tyrannically or maliciously, he put it to a most noble use: to return good For evil, to extend pity to the descendant of his foe, to befriend one who might well have feared death at his hands, was David's next act.

"And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Samuel 9:1). First of all let us observe the pathos of such a question. 1 Chronicles 8:33 furnishes a list of Saul's sons, but now his family had been so reduced by the judgments of God that inquiry has to be made "is there yet *any* that is left of the house of Saul?" How true it is that "the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children"—O that more parents would take this to heart. But, second, let us note the benevolent designed of David: he sought any possible survivor of Saul's family, not that he might imprison or slay, but that he might show him "kindness." It was no passing whim which had actuated him. "Jonathan" was before his heart, and for

his "sake" he was determined to show clemency and display his magnanimity. At length they brought to David an old retainer of Saul's family, who knew well the sad state into which it was fallen; and to him also David said, "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" (v. 3).

But beautiful as was David's conduct on this occasion, something yet more blessed was shadowed forth by it, and upon that we would particularly concentrate our attention. As other writers on this sweet incident have pointed out, David as monarch over Israel suggests to us God upon His throne in Heaven: David showing kindness to the family of his archenemy, foreshadowed God's dealing in grace with sinners. The name of the one whom David befriended, the place he had hitherto occupied, the condition he was then in, the wondrous portion he received, all typified the case of those upon whom God bestows saving mercy. The picture here presented is perfect in its accuracy in every detail, and the more closely it be examined, the more clearly will its evangelical character appear. O that our hearts may be melted by its exquisite light and shade.

"And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Let us first observe that *David* was the one who here took *the initiative.* No overtures were made unto him by the one remaining descendant of Saul; the king himself was the one to make the advance. So it is in the antitype: it is not the sinner, but God, who makes the first move. Through the Gospel He makes overtures of mercy, and in each instance of salvation He is found of them that seek Him not. "All we *like sheep* have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6), and it is the nature of a lost sheep to wander farther and farther afield. The shepherd must do the seeking, for sheep astray never go after the shepherd—true alike both naturally and spiritually. It was God who sought out Abraham in Ur, Jacob at Bethel, Moses in Midian, Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, and not they who sought unto Him.

Next, we may notice *the object* of David's quest. It was not one who had befriended him during the days of his own dire need. Nor was it one whom men of the world would call "a deserving case." Nor was it one from whom David could expect anything again in return. Instead, it was one immediately descended from his most merciless and implacable foe; it was one who was hiding away from him; it was one who had nothing of his own, having lost his heritage. How accurate the picture The Gospel of God's grace is not seeking those who have something of their own to commend them unto the Lord, nor does it offer salvation in return for service to be rendered afterwards. Its inestimable riches are for worthless wretches, spiritual paupers, lost and undone sinners; and those riches are freely offered "without money and without price."

But let us pay attention to *the motive which actuated David.* Very beautiful is this line in our typical picture. "And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness *for Jonathan's sake.*" Here was what moved the king to make overtures of mercy toward the house of his sworn enemy. Though there was nothing whatever in Saul's survivor to commend him unto the royal favor, David found a reason *outside* of him, in that bond of love and friendship which existed between his own heart and Jonathan. And thus it is too in the antitype: "For we ourselves also *were* sometime Foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But after that *the kindness* and pity of God our Savior toward man appeared, *not by works of righteousness which we have done,* but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which He shed on us abundantly *through Jesus Christ our Savior*" (Titus 3:3-6). It is because of Another that God is gracious to His people: "God *for Christ's* sake has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

One more item completes this point, and a very striking one it is. When Zeba, Saul's servant, had been found and brought to David, the king asked, "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show *the kindness of God* unto him?" (v. 3). This language goes further than his words in the first verse. It takes us back to 1 Samuel 20. There we find Jonathan acted the part of *a mediator* between Saul and David (verses 27-34). There too we read of a solemn "covenant" (verses 16, 17, 42) between Jonathan and David, in which the latter swore to show kindness unto the house of the former forever: "Jonathan caused David to swore again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul" (v. 17). It was to *that* incident the words of David "that I may show the kindness *of God* unto him" looked back: it was that kindness of which God Himself had been the witness; it was *covenant* "kindness" which he had promised to exercise.

Thus, the one who here obtained kindness at the hands of the king, received favor not because of anything *he* had done, nor because of any personal worthiness he possessed, but wholly on account of a covenant promise which had been made *before he was born.* So it is with those toward whom God now acts in free and sovereign grace. It is not because of any personal claims they have upon Him, but because of the love He bears toward the Mediator, that He shows "kindness." Nor is that all: long, long before they first saw the light, God entered into a covenant with Christ, promising to extend mercy unto all who belonged to His "house": "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it *by an oath:* that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6: 17, 18). It is "through the blood of *the everlasting covenant*" that God makes His people "perfect in every good work to do His will" (Hebrews 13:20, 21).

Next, let us look more closely at this one to whom David showed "the kindness of God"—covenant-kindness. First, his name, for no detail here is meaningless. The son of Jonathan was called "Mephibosheth" (v. 6), which signifies "a *shameful thing.*" How accurately does that appellation describe the natural man! "We are all as an unclean thing" (Isaiah 64:6) says God's Word—polluted by sin. We are by birth and practice thoroughly depraved and corrupt. Our understanding is darkened so that we cannot apprehend spiritual things, our will are opposed to God's, our hearts are desperately wicked, our consciences are seared, our strength spent in the service of Satan; and in the sight of the Holy One our very righteousnesses are "as filthy rags." "A shameful thing," then, we truly are: "from the sole of the foot even unto the crown of the head there is no soundness" in us by nature, but instead "wounds and bruises and putrefying sores" (Isaiah 1:6). O what cause have we to cry with the leper "Unclean! unclean!" and say with Job "I am vile."

Second, Mephibosheth was a *fugitive from David.* When news reached the survivors of his family that Saul and his sons had been slain in battle, and David had ascended the throne, Mephibosheth and his nurse fled in terror: "he was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, *and fled*" (2 Samuel 4:4). They were anxious to keep out of David's way. So it is with the sinner, he is afraid of God, and seeks to banish Him from his thoughts. The knowledge of God's holiness, power and omniscience fills him with dismay, and he seeks to have nothing to do with Him. "The wicked flee when no man pursues."

Third, Mephibosheth was a *cripple.* He was "lame of his feet" (2 Samuel 4:4): as the closing words of our chapter states, he "was lame on *both* his feet" (v. l3). How accurately that portrays the condition of those who are out of Christ! The natural man is *unable* to run m the path of God's commandments, or tread the narrow way which leads unto Life. He is a spiritual cripple; "without strength" (Romans 5:6). The utter inability of the unregenerate to meet God's requirements and walk acceptably before him, is a truth written plain across the Scriptures, though it is given little place indeed in much modern preaching. The greatness of man, the freedom of his will, his ability to accept Christ any time, is now the sweet opiate which is chloroforming millions. "No man *can come to Me except* the Father which has sent Me draw him" (John 6:44): how those words of Christ's attest the solemn fact that the sinner is "lame of *bath* his feet"!

Fourth, Mephibosheth became a cripple *through a fall:* "and his nurse took him up and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee that he fell, and *became* lame" (2 Samuel 4:4). What a truly marvelous book the Bible is! Yet how it needs eyes anointed by the Divine Inspirer to perceive its wonders and beauties! How obvious it is to those favored with spiritual discernment that we have here far more than an historical account pertaining to a single individual: that it is rather a *typical* picture having a *universal* application. Man was not originally created in the condition he is now in. Man was far from being "lame on both his feet" when his Maker proclaimed him "very good." The faculties of mans soul have become spiritually crippled as the result of *the fall*—our fall in Adam. In consequence of that fall, "they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God" (Romans 8:8).

Fifth, *the place where Mephibosheth resided.* It was not at Jerusalem, no, indeed; none out of Christ live there. Jerusalem signifies "the foundation of peace" and as Holy Writ truly declares, "There is no peace, says the Lord, unto the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22): how can there be while they despise Him in whom alone peace is to be found? "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (

Isaiah 57:20)—discontented, dissatisfied. No, it was not at Jerusalem that poor Mephibosheth resided. Instead, he dwelt at "Lodebar" (2 Samuel 9:4), which means, "the place *of no pasture.*" What a significant line in our picture is this, so obviously drawn by more than a human artist. How aptly does it portray the world in which we live, the world which is away from God, which lies in the wicked one. It is a world which provides no food for the soul: it is a great "howling wilderness" so far as spiritual provisions are concerned. Yet how little is that fact realized by those who are in it and of it.

"Lodebar" is written across all the varied fields of this world, though the great masses of people realize it not. Multitudes are seeking to find something to fill that void in the heart which God should occupy. They seek satisfaction in sport, in novel reading, in an endless round of pleasure, in making money, in fame; but soul satisfaction is not to be found in such *things*—things which perish with the using of them. Despising Him who is "the true Bread," the "Bread of life," no food is to be found here but "the *husks* that the swine" feed upon. The prodigal son discovered that when he left his patrimony and went into the far country: "I perish with hunger" was his plaintive cry. Life, peace, joy, satisfaction, are to be found only in the Lord.

One other point and we must conclude this chapter: *the provision* David made for Mephibosheth. There was this poor creature, belonging to a family that was in rebellion against David, lame in both feet, and dwelling in the place of no pasture. And here was the king upon his throne, with purpose of heart to show him kindness for the sake of another. What, then, was the next move? Did David send a message of welcome, inviting him to come to Jerusalem? Did he notify Mephibosheth that if he "did his part" mercy should be accorded him? Did he forward the cripple a pair of crutches, bid him make use of them, and hobble to Jerusalem as best he could? No, indeed; had anything like *that* been David's policy, our typical picture had failed completely to exhibit "the kindness *of God*" unto those on whom He bestows His so great salvation. God does much more than provide "means of grace."

"Then king David sent and *fetched* him" (v. 5). This blessed item shadows forth the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit in those whom God brings unto Himself. Had He done nothing more than give His Son to die for sinners, and then sent forth His servants with the gospel invitation, *none* had ever been saved. This is clear from the parable of the Great Supper: men were bade to come and assured that "all things were now ready." And what was their response? This, "they all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luke 14:18). But God was not to be foiled, and said to the servant (the Spirit), "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, *and bring in* hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." Thank God for *bringing* grace; that He does all, both for and in His people.

'Twas the same grace that spread the feast,
That gently forced me in;
Else I had still refused to taste,
And perished in my sin!

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

His Kindness to Mephibosheth

(Continued)

2 Samuel 9

Behind the noble magnanimity exercised by David toward the last descendant of his archenemy Saul, we may perceive the shining forth of the glory of God's grace unto His fallen and sinful people. Alas, how feeble are our apprehensions of this wonderful attribute of God, how altogether inadequate our best efforts to set forth its excellency! Those who are the most indebted to the divine favor, are most conscious of the poverty of their language to express the gratitude and praise, the admiration and adoration which is due from them. When the poor outcast and crippled son of Jonathan was brought from Lodebar to Jerusalem, and was received not only with kindness, but accorded a place in the king's family and given a seat at David's own table, he must have found words to utterly fail him. And when a slave of sin and captive of Satan is not only set free by Christ but made a joint heir with Him, he is lost in wonderment. Eternity will be required to render unto God that worship to which He is entitled.

Grace is the opposite of justice. Justice gives to each his exact due: it shows no favor and knows no mercy. It gives impartially to all precisely by the wages which your have earned. But grace is free favor, unwarranted and unmerited by the recipients of it. Grace is the very last thing to which rebellious sinners are entitled; to talk of *deserving* "grace" is a contradiction in terms. Grace is purely a matter of charity, exercised sovereignly and spontaneously, attracted by nothing praiseworthy in its object. Divine grace is the free favor of God in the bestowment of mercies and blessings upon those who have no good *in* them, and concerning whom no compensation is demanded *from* them. Nay more: divine grace is not only shown to those who have no merit, but who are full of positive demerit; it is not only bestowed upon the ill-deserving, but the hell-deserving.

How completely grace sets aside *every* thought of personal desert, may be seen from a single quotation of Scripture: "Being justified freely by His grace" (Romans 3:24). The word "freely" gives intensity to the term "grace," though the Greek does not convey the thought of abundance, but rather emphasizes its gratuitousness. The same word is rendered "without a cause" in John 15:25. There was nothing whatever in the Lord Jesus to deserve such vile treatment from the hands of His enemies, nothing whatever that He had done warranting such awful enmity on their part. In like manner, there is nothing whatever in any sinner to call forth the favorable regard of a holy God, nothing done by him to win His love; instead, everything to the contrary. Grace, then, is gratis, a free gift.

The very expression "the grace of God" implies and denotes that the sinner's condition is desperate to the last degree, and that God may justly leave him to perish; yes, it is a wonder of wonders that he is not already in Hell. Grace is a divine provision for those who are so depraved they cannot change their own nature, so averse from God they will not turn to Him, so blind they can neither see their malady nor the remedy, so dead spiritually that God must bring them out of their graves on to resurrection ground if ever they are to walk in newness of life. Grace is the sinner's last and only hope; if he is not saved by grace, he will never be saved at all. Grace levels all distinctions, and regards the most zealous religionist on the same plane as the most profligate, the chaste virgin as the foul prostitute. Therefore God is perfectly free to save the chief of sinners and bestow His mercy on the vilest of the vile.

In our last, we got as far as Mephibosheth being actually brought into the presence of David. What a meeting was that! For the first time in his life this man now sees the one whom his grandfather had so mercilessly and unrighteously persecuted. "Now when Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence" (v. 6). Fitting position was this to take for one whose very life hung upon the mere mercy of the king. What could he expect but to hear from his lips the sentence of death! There he lies, aptly portraying a trembling sinner, who, in his understanding and conscience, is brought, for the first time, face to face with the thrice holy God, with the One whom he has so long slighted, so wickedly ignored, so grievously offended. It was thus with Saul of Tarsus when the Lord first appeared to him: "he fell to the earth" (Acts 9:4). Reader, have you ever taken your place before Him in the dust?

Most probably David had never before seen Mephibosheth, yet he now addressed him in the most intimate terms: "And David said, Mephibosheth" (v. 6). It is blessed to see that the king was the first one to break the silence, showing us in type how God *takes the initiative* at every point in connection with the saving of His people. This recalls to us that word of the apostle to the Galatians, "But now, after that you have known God, *or rather* are known of God" (4:9). A single word was all that David yet uttered—"Mephibosheth"— yet how much was expressed by it! How it reminds us of that precious declaration from the lips of the good Shepherd, "He calls His own sheep *by name*" (John 10:3). When, at the burning bush, the Lord first revealed Himself to Israel's deliverer from Egypt, He said, "Moses, Moses" (Exodus 3:4). The first word of the Savior to the one in the sycamore tree was "Zaccheus" (Luke 19:5). When He made known Himself unto the tear-blinded seeker at His sepulcher, it was by the single word, "Mary" (John 20: 16). His first word to the persecutor of His church was "Saul" (Acts 9:4). Thus it was in our present incident. "And Mephibosheth answered, Behold your servant."

But the next word of David's was yet more blessed: "Fear not" (v. 7) he said to the cripple prostrate before him. There was no rebuke for his having so long kept away from him, no reproaching him because he was of the house of Saul; but instead, a word to assure him, to put him at his ease. O how this should comfort every contrite soul: we have nothing whatever to fear, once we take our place in the dust before the Lord. "God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). Was it not thus with the Father, when the penitent prodigal cast himself on His mercy! No word of censure left His lips: instead He quickly assured him of His love. How this "fear not" of David to Mephibosheth reminds us of the same language found so often on the lips of the Redeemer when addressing His own! Wondrous is it to observe that, when the glorified Savior appeared unto John in Patmos, when that apostle fell at His feet as dead, it was the same old familiar "Fear not" (Rev. 1: 17) which reassured him.

Not only did David address Mephibosheth by name, and quiet his heart with a "Fear not," but he also added, "For I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore you all the land of Saul your father; and you shall eat bread at My table continually" (2 Samuel 9:7). This was grace pure and simple, wondrous grace, the "exceeding riches of grace." There was no contingency here, no bargain made, no conditions stipulated; but instead "I will *surely* show you kindness." David did not say "If you do this or that" or "if you will keep your part of the contract, I will adhere to mine." No, no; it was free favor, gratuitous mercy, unmerited bounty; everything for nothing. David acted royally, like a king, for it becomes not a monarch to barter. How much more is this the case with the King of kings: He is "the God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10), and eternal life is a *gift* (Romans 6:23) wherever He is pleased to bestow it. To preach salvation by works is not only to mock impotent sinners, but is to grossly insult the ineffable Jehovah.

And what effect did this astonishing kindness have upon Mephibosheth? Did it puff him up with self-importance, and cause him to act as though he was other than a poor cripple? No, indeed; such is never the effect of divine grace applied to the heart, though often it is the ease where airy notions of it sink no deeper than the head. "And he bowed himself, and said, What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I am?" (v. 8). Is not that truly beautiful? The exceeding kindness of David did not work in him self-elation and sell-exaltation, but self-abasement: it wrought in him a deeper consciousness of his utter unworthiness before such un-thought-of favors. He was amazed that the king should even notice, much less favorably regard, such a worthless creature as he felt himself to be. Did he not now conduct himself in suitable accord with *his name,* when he called himself "a dead dog," for "Mephibosheth" signifies "a shameful thing." And what is the name which Scripture gives to me?—sinner!: do I, by my attitude, own the truthfulness of it?

This line in our picture calls for particular notice in such a day as we are living in, wherein there is so much self-esteem, creature boasting, Laodicean complacency and Pharisaic self-righteousness. O what a stench in the nostrils of the Almighty must be the reeking pride of modern Christendom. How little practical exemplification of that principle, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). How few feel, like Paul did, that they are "the chief of sinners." And why is this? Because the hearts of so very few are *really* touched and affected by the grace of God. Grace ever humbles. The goodness of God leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Where the kindness of God is truly felt in the soul we are "little in our own eyes." Just as the royal magnanimity of David bowed Mephibosheth before him, causing him to own that he was but "a dead dog," so when the love of God melts our hard hearts, we realize and own what unworthy wretches, vile creatures, and corrupt worms we are.

We must now consider the wondrous *portion* which was bestowed upon Mephibosheth as the result of the great kindness which David showed him, for this was a striking figure of the "riches" which divine grace imparts to those who are blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ. First, there was *life* for him, for the king refused to slay him when he was in his power. That his life was spared him was a notable act of clemency on the part of the monarch. Blessedly did this illustrate the abounding mercy of God unto those who have flouted His authority, broken His laws, and deserved naught but unsparing judgment at His hands: though the wages of sin is death, yet the gift of God is "eternal life" through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Second, there was *peace* for him: David's "Fear not" was designed to allay his terror, quiet his heart, and set him at perfect ease in the presence of the king. So it is with the believer: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Romans 5:1).

Third, there was *an inheritance* for him. "Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto your master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house" (v. 9). What a truly wonderful line in our typical picture is that!—one, we are again constrained to say, which no merely human artist could have drawn. How it portrays to us the bounty of our God in bestowing upon poor bankrupt paupers the riches of His grace. Though we come to Him empty-handed, He does not suffer us to remain so. But there is something there yet more definite: Mephibosheth had restored to him the *forfeited* inheritance. The heritage which had originally belonged to Saul had been lost to his family. In like manner, through our first father's apostasy, we lost our primitive heritage, even the life, image, and blessing of God. Nor could *we* possibly do anything to regain it. But as David "for Jonathan's sake" restored unto Mephibosheth the estate of his father, so God for Christ's sake gives back to His people all that they lost in Adam.

Fourth, there was a *wondrous portion* granted him. Said David to Mephibosheth, "You shall eat bread at my table continually" (v. 7). What a tremendous contrast was that from being an outcast at Lodebar—"the place of no pasture": now to feast at the king's own table, and that, not merely for once, but "continually"! Truly it *was* the "kindness of God" which David showed unto him. How forcibly this reminds us of what we find at the close of the parable of the prodigal son, when he who, having been "in want" in the far country, after his return in penitence, is feasted by his Father with the "fatted calf." Nothing short of giving us His best will satisfy the great heart of "the God of all grace": and what is His "best" but *fellowship with Himself,* of which eating at His table is the symbol.

Fifth, there was *an honored position* for him: "As for Mephibosheth said the king, he shall eat at my table, *as one of the king's sons*" (v. 11). He eats not as an alien or stranger, but as a member of the royal family. Not only was he sumptuously fed, but highly honored: a place in the king's own palace was now his, and that, not as a servant, but as a son. How this makes us think of "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that *we* should be called *the sons of God*" (1 John 3:1)! O what a marvelous place does divine grace give unto those that are the objects of it: all believers stand accepted as the children of God, the subjects of His everlasting favor. That is something which Saul never enjoyed, but for Jonathan's sake Mephibosheth now gained more than he had previously lost. So through Christ the believer obtains far, far more than he lost in Adam. Where sin abounds, grace does *much more* abound. "That as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21). Under the king's table the crippled feet of Mephibosheth were *lost to sight:* in Christ all our deformities are hid!

There is a sequel, both pathetic and blessed, recorded in the later chapters of 2 Samuel which we will here briefly notice, for it provides a lovely completeness to all which has been before us. First, in 2 Samuel 16:1-4 we learn that when David fled from Absalom, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, met the king with a liberal provision of food for his men. When David inquired where Mephibosheth was, Ziba answered him, "Behold, he abides at Jerusalem: for he said, Today shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father." This is one of many warnings given to the saints in Scripture that they must be prepared for calumny and unkind treatment: often—as was the case here—by those from whom it should be the least expected.

Second, after Absalom's death, there went forth a company to do honor to the returned king. Among them was Mephibosheth, of whom it is said, that he "had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace" (2 Samuel 19:24). What a lovely picture does that present to us of a loyal soul, whose heart had remained true to the (temporarily) rejected king! How clearly Mephibosheth's condition evidenced *where his affections* had been during David's absence! David now repeated the tale which Ziba had told him, and is informed it was utterly false. Mephibosheth then cast himself on the spiritual discernment and sovereign pleasure of his royal master (verses 27, 28). The king then put his heart to the test, suggesting that the land be divided between Mephibosheth and his servant—the same in principle as Solomon's proposal that the living child be divided between the two women who claimed it as hers.

Had Mephibosheth been the false-hearted wretch which Ziba has painted him, he had acquiesced promptly to David's suggestion, glad to escape so easily: "a wise settlement" he would have exclaimed. Instead, he nobly replied, "Yes, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house" (2 Samuel 19:30). How that gave the lie to Ziba's accusation: how it demonstrated he was clear of any carnal covetousness. It was not *land* which he wanted: now that his beloved master had returned, he was quite satisfied. O how this should speak to and search us: are *our* affections set upon the Person of the absent King? Is it *His* presence that *we* long for above everything else?

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

His Servants Insulted

2 Samuel 10

The next incident recorded in the life of David needs to be pondered from more than one viewpoint. This is intimated to us by the fact that in 2 Samuel 10 it is given immediately after the account of the grace which he showed unto Mephibosheth, whereas in 1 Chronicles 19

it is placed right after a parallel account of what is mentioned to 2 Samuel 8. Yet though the context of 2 Samuel 10 and 1 Chronicles 19 is so different, each of them opens with *the same* words: "And ('Now') it came to pass after this." Thereby it is suggested that inasmuch as this incident is described at length in almost identical language in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles, it, possesses a *twofold* significance; and because it is given different settings that it requires to be considered *separately* in its relation to each one. We shall endeavor, then, to follow up this clue, viewing the subject first as it comes immediately after what was before us in the preceding chapter.

The king of the Ammonites having died, David purposed to express a neighborly and friendly sympathy for his son. Accordingly, he sent some of his servants "to comfort him." But instead of this kindly overture meeting with appreciation, it was regarded with distrustful suspicion. The princes of the Ammonites imagined that David had evil designs against their city, and that the men who had ostensibly come to console their bereaved master, were but spies, seeking information with a view to their overthrow. Whereupon Hanun the king grievously insulted his visitors and put them to an open shame. His action was a declaration of war against David, and so the king of Israel regarded it. The remainder of the chapter records the fighting to which their insult gave rise. But it is the typical and spiritual meaning of it with which we are desirous of being occupied. Nor should this be difficult to ascertain.

The link of connection between 2 Samuel 9 and 10 is obvious on the surface: the former opens with "and David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may *show him kindness* For Jonathan's sake?" the latter opens with, "And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, *I will show kindness* unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me." But with the exception of the words we have just italicized everything else is in sharp and solemn contrast. In 2 Samuel 9 David shows kindness to an Israelite; in 2 Samuel 10 he shows kindness to an Ammonite. In the Former, it was to the descendant of his archenemy; in the latter, it was to the son of one who had befriended him. In the one, his gracious overtures were deeply appreciated; in the other, they were maliciously resented.

Now as we showed at length in our two chapters upon 2 Samuel 9, that chapter gives us a most lovely typical picture of the free and sovereign grace of God unto His elect. What, then, is it which is distinctively prefigured here in 2 Samuel 10? In seeking the answer to this question, as we attend closely to each word used in the first five verses of it, we notice a further contrast: throughout 2 Samuel 9 it is David himself who is prominent; whereas in 2 Samuel 10 it is his ambassadors who occupy the center of the stage. In verses 2-4 the *servants* of David are referred to no less than Four times; whereas his servants are not mentioned once in the preceding chapter. Here, then, is the key to our incident; typically, it is the ambassadors of the Son of David who are in view.

"But after that the kindness and pity (margin) of God our Savior toward *man* appeared" (Titus 3:4). And wherein is that "kindness and pity of God our Savior" revealed? In the Gospel. And to whom is His Gospel to be preached? To "every creature" (Mark 16:15). There are some of our readers—preachers—who need reminding of this. Christ has commissioned. His servants to preach the Gospel, to make known His "kindness and pity," not only to those who give evidence of having been awakened by the Holy Spirit, but also to the unregenerate. There is something seriously wrong with any creed or theological system which cramps and fetters the preacher in his free proclamation of the Gospel. They who imagine that the Gospel is only for the "elect," err grievously. On the other hand in order to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Timothy 4:5) one does not have to believe either in a general redemption or in the free will of fallen man.

In the parable of the Sower, Christ makes it clear that *He* sowed the seed upon *all* parts of the field, and not on the "good ground" only. In the closing parable of Matthew 13, He represents the Gospel "net" as gathering in fish of all kinds, "bad" as well as "good." In the parable of the Great Supper, the servant is sent forth to say, "Come, for all things are now ready," and this, even unto those who "all with one consent began to make excuse" (Luke 14:17,18). In the closing section of the parable of the two sons, Christ declared concerning the *elder* brother (the self-righteous, hard-hearted Pharisee) "therefore came his Father out and *entreated* him" (Luke 15:28). O my dear brethren in the ministry, seek grace and wisdom to make *your* ministry square with that of Christ's! He did not allow the eternal decrees of God to tie His hands or muzzle His mouth.

It was the same with those that immediately succeeded Christ, It was to a *promiscuous* audience (Acts 3:9), to those who were unbelievers (v. 17), that Peter said, "Repent you, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3: 19)! "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them" (Acts 8:5): we are not told that it was to a small and picked company, who had been quickened by the Spirit, but to "the *city of* Samaria" in general. And what was the theme of his preaching? Christ!—as an all-sufficient Savior for the very chief of sinners. The apostle Paul was not cramped in his message: "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21): the impenitent he called upon *to* repent and the unbelieving, he bade believe on the Savior. Are not these very things recorded For *our* learning, as a precedent for us to follow!

That which we have sought to emphasize in the last three paragraphs receives striking illustration and confirmation in the incident we are here considering. If 2 Samuel 9 supplies a blessed representation of the kindness of God shown toward one of His elect, our present chapter gives an equally clear type of the overtures of the Lord's kindness extended unto the non-elect. Here is the reason why the two incidents are placed side by side: the one *supplements* the other. If in the last chapter we beheld the "kindness" of David manifested unto one with whom he was in covenant relationship, in the chapter now before us we see his "kindness" being shown to one who was outside the commonwealth of Israel, to one who was a heathen. And it is in *that* particular fact lies the typical beauty of our passage, and the great evangelical lesson which we need to learn from it.

"And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. *Then* said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash" (2 Samuel 10:1,2). It is only as we attend closely unto each detail here that we can appreciate the accuracy of our typical picture. *Death* provided the dark background for it. It was the decease of Nahash which supplied the opportunity for David to manifest the kindness of his heart! Once our minds are definitely focused on this item, what anointed eye can fail to perceive its spiritual signification? No "comfort" was needed by man in his unfallen state; the Gospel had been entirely unsuited to Adam during the brief season that he remained in unclouded communion with his Maker, But the entrance of sin entirely altered the case.

Adam's transgression cast a pall of blackness over the fair scene of Eden; nor was its darkness in any ways relieved until the light of the Gospel (Genesis 3: 15) broke in on it. It is *sin* which exhibited the need for a Savior; it was that spiritual *death* into which the fall plunged the whole family, which makes evident the glad tidings of life in Christ. The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. And it was where sin abounded, that grace did much more abound. The sin of then brought out the marvelous grace that was in the heart of God. The Lord had by no means acted unjustly, had He eternally doomed the whole human race when their father and federal head apostatized from Him. But He did not do so: in wrath He "remembered mercy."

Here, then, is the first line in our typical picture: *death* provides for it a suitable background. The more the awfulness be felt of that spiritual death which it adumbrated, the more will we appreciate the blessedness of that wondrous "comfort" which divine mercy has provided. The terrible fall which brought in spiritual death was of such an aggravated nature that it left all whom Adam represented without excuse. The nature of our spiritual death is described in Ephesians 4; 18, "Having the understanding darkened, being *alienated from the life of God* through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." it has wrought in us a carnal mind which "is enmity" against God (Romans 8:7). Why, then, should the Lord have any regard for us? Why should He concern Himself about those who prefer darkness to light, evil to good, death to life? Had He totally abandoned us to our ruin and wretchedness, that had been all we deserved.

"Then said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun" (v. 2). Here is the second line in our typical picture, pointing us unto the One who is the Author of all that is good, gentle, sympathetic and unselfish in His creatures; and is Himself "of great kindness" (Jonah 4:2). O what kindness did the Lord show when He left Heaven's glory and came down to this sin curst earth! What kindness for the Lord to take upon Himself the form of a servant, and minister unto others rather than be ministered unto. What compassion He exhibited when in the presence of want, suffering and misery; what kindness when He "healed all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (

Matthew 4:23). Thus did the kindness of David shadow forth the infinitely greater kindness of his Son and Lord.

"And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants" (v. 2). This gives the third line in our typical picture. During the days of His flesh, Christ announced, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised (Luke 4:18), Since His ascension, He has continued this gracious ministry through His ambassadors and servants: 2 Corinthians 5:20, Mark 16:20. O what a message of "comfort" have Christ's ministers for every poor sinner that will give ear to them: a message which makes known a way of escape from the wrath to come, that tells of how the forgiveness of sins may be obtained; how peace, joy, everlasting life and bliss may become our portion.

The fourth line in our picture is given in the next words, "And the servants of David came into the land of the children of Ammon" (v. 2). These servants of David were not like Jonah, who demurred when called upon to preach unto the Ninevites. No, they made no objection against going *outside* the bounds of God's covenant people, and journeying to a place of idolaters. As such, they prefigured the obedient servants of the Son of David, whose commission is "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among *all* nations" (Luke 24:47).

"And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their Lord, Think you that David does honor your father, that he has sent comforters unto you? has not David rather sent his servants unto you to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" (v. 3). Is any interpreter required here? Is not this next line in our picture so clear that it speaks for itself! The common experience of the Christian evangelist is identical in substance with that which befell the servants of David. Though his intentions are of the best, they are interpreted as being evil. Though he comes with a message of true "comfort" the poor blinded dupes of Satan regard him as a "kill-joy." Though his only object be to make known the "kindness" of his royal Master, the vast majority of those to whom he comes, resent his mission. Alas, that now, in many circles of professing Christians, the true servant of Christ is not wanted, but rather looked upon with suspicion, as a "self-seeker" or "disturber of the peace."

"Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away" (v. 4). This line in our picture is also so obvious that it needs little comment from us. It foreshadowed the treatment which the Son of David's servants would receive from those whose welfare they sought. Those servants were mocked and insulted: not wanted, they were "sent away" in shame. Men today have other ways of insulting and disgracing the ministers of the Gospel beside the methods used by those Ammonites; but they are just as effective. Wrongful charges are made against them, false reports are spread, so that they are excluded from many places.

"When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return" (v. 5). Here is the sequel to the unkind treatment they had met with: the servants of David are called upon *to retire* from *the public eye.* They have to spend a season—one of some months at least—in, seclusion, cut off from fellowship. One wonders how many today are, like the writer, "tarrying at Jericho"! Not a few "teachers" are now "removed into a corner" (Isaiah 30:20), for the time has come "when they will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:3). Concerning Israel of old we read, "But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, until there was *no remedy*" (2 Chronicles 36:16)—is this soon to be repeated in the history of Christendom?

The final line in our typical picture—occupying the remainder of 2 Samuel 10—is a solemn one: *David avenged his insulted servants.* He regarded the ignominy heaped on them as a direct affront upon himself. Thus it is in the antitype. Concerning His ministers, Christ has said, "He who hears you, hears Me; and he that despises *you,* despises *Me*" (Luke 10:16). He regards the ill-usage of *them* as a declaration of war against *Himself.* He has said, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets *no* harm" (Psalm 105:15), and He will not be disobeyed with impunity. Solemn is it to look forward to the time when those who have despised, slandered, insulted and cast out His servants, will yet have to answer to the Son of David Himself.

Many and important are the lessons for the servants of Christ in this incident. Chief among them are: 1. They are to obediently carry out the orders of their royal Master, no matter how unreasonable they may appear or how distasteful they be unto themselves. 2. They must be prepared for their best intentions and kindest actions to expose them unto the basest suspicions. They must expect ingratitude, contempt and abuse; but sufficient for the servant to be as his Lord. 3. These things must not discourage them, for eventually, Christ Himself will plead their cause! 4. They must not attempt to avenge themselves, but rather follow the example left by their Master: 1 Peter 2:23. 5. if now, for a reason, they are required to "tarry at Jericho," they may take comfort from the fact that it is their Lord who has ordered that isolated seclusion.

CHAPTER FIFTY

His Kindness Repulsed

2 Samuel 10

"I have seen an end of all perfection; but Your commandment is exceeding broad" (Psalm 119:96). The Chaldee Paraphrase renders this verse, "I have seen an end of all things about which I have employed my care; but Your commandment is very large." The Syriac version reads, "I have seen an end of all regions and countries (that is, I have found the compass of the habitable world to be finite and limited), but Your commandment is of vast extent." The contrast drawn by the Psalmist is between the works of the creature and the Word of the Creator. The most perfect of worldly things are but imperfect; even man, at his best estate, is "altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5). We may quickly see "the end" or "the bound" of man's works, for the profoundest product of human wisdom is but shallow, superficial and having its limits; but it is far otherwise with the Scriptures of Truth.

"But Your commandment is exceeding broad." The Word partakes of the perfections of its divine Author: holiness, inerrancy, infinitude and eternity, are numbered among its wondrous qualities. God's Word is so deep that none can fathom it (Psalm 36:6), so high that it is established in Heaven (Psalm 119:89), so long that it will endure forever (1 Peter 1:23), so exceeding broad that none can measure it, so full that its contents will never be exhausted. It is such a rich storehouse of spiritual treasure, that no matter how many draw upon it, the wealth thereof remains undiminished. It has in it such an inconceivable vastness of wisdom, that no single verse in it has been fully fathomed by any man. No matter how many may have previously written upon a certain chapter, the Spirit can still reveal wonders and beauties in it never before perceived.

We are now to go over again the same passage which was before us in our last chapter, but this time it is to be considered from an entirely different viewpoint. Perhaps some explanatory remarks are called for at this point, that none of our readers may be confused. There are many portions of the Word that are not only capable of several legitimate applications, but which *require* to be pondered from distinct and separate angles. Oftentimes the same incident which manifests the goodness and grace of God, also exhibits the depravity and sin of man. Many parts of the life of Samson furnish most striking pre-figurations of Christ, yet at the same time we see in them the grievous failures of Samson himself. The same dual principle is exemplified in the lives of other characters prominent in the Old Testament. Instead of being confused thereby, let us rather admire the wisdom of Him who has brought together things so diverse.

Moses erred sadly when, instead of trustfully responding promptly unto the Lord's call for him to make known His request unto Pharaoh, he gave way to unbelief and voiced one objection after another (Exodus 3 and 4); nevertheless in the same we may perceive a lovely exemplification of the self-diffidence of those called upon to minister in divine things, and their personal sense of unfitness and utter unworthiness. The two things are quite distinct, though they are found in one and the same incident: the personal failure of Moses, yet his very failure supplying a blessed type of humility in the true servant of God. That which is found in 2 Samuel 10 affords a parallel: the action of David in expressing his condolence to the king of Ammonites supplies a beautiful type of Christ sending forth His servants with a message of comfort for sinners; yet, as we shall see, from a *personal* viewpoint, David's conduct was to be blamed.

The same thing is seen again in connection with Jonah. We have the Lord's own authority for regarding him as a type or "sign" of Himself (Matthew 12:39,40), and marvelously did that prophet foreshadow the Savior in many different details. But that in nowise alters or militates against the fact that, as we read the personal history of Jonah, we find some grievous sins recorded against him. Let it not seem strange, then, if our present exposition of 2 Samuel 10 differs so radically from our treatment of it in our last chapter: there is no "contradiction" between the two chapters; instead, they approach the same incident from two widely separated angles. Our justification for so doing lies in the fact that the incident is described in identical terms in 1 Chronicles 19, yet its context there is

quite different from 2 Samuel 9.

On this occasion, instead of admiring the lovely typical picture which 2 Samuel 10 sets forth, we shall examine the personal conduct of David, seeking to take to heart the lessons and warnings which the same inculcates. "And it came to pass after this, that the king of the children of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his stead. Then said David, I will show kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father" (verses 1, 2).

In seeking to get at the practical teaching of these verses, the first question which needs to be pondered is, *why* did David send his servants with a message of comfort to the king of Ammon? What was the motive which prompted him? It is no sufficient answer to reply, The kindness of his heart; for that only changes the form of our inquiry to, *Why* should he determine to show kindness unto the head of this heathen tribe? And how are we to discover the answer to our question? By noting carefully the context: this time, the context of 1 Chronicles 19 which is the same as the *remoter* context in 2 Samuel for 1 Chronicles 18 is parallel with 2 Samuel 9. And what do we find there? David engaging in warfare, subduing the Philistines (2 Samuel 8:1), the Moabites (v. 2), Hadadezer (v. 3), the Syrians (v. 5), placing garrisons in Edom, and setting in order the affairs of his kingdom (verses 15-IS).

After engaging in so much fighting, it appears that David now desired a season of rest. This is borne out by what we are told in the very first verse of the next chapter: "And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Amman, and besieged Rahbah. *But David tarried still* at Jerusalem" (2 Samuel 11:1). Thus, in the light of the immediate context, both before and after what is recorded in 2 Samuel 10 and 1 Chronicles 19, it seems clear that David's sending a message of comfort to Hanun after the death of his father was a diplomatic move on his part to secure peace between the Ammonites and Israel. In other words, reduced to first principles, it was an attempt to promote amity between the ungodly and the godly. The Lord *blew upon this move,* and caused it to come to nothing.

"You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that *the friendship* of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4). Yes, we may know it in theory, but alas, how often we disobey it in practice. God requires His people to be separated from the world, to be strangers and pilgrims therein, to have no close familiarity with its subjects, to refuse all "yokes" with them. And is not that both right and necessary? What fellowship can there be between those who love His Son and those who hate Him? between those who are subject to His scepter and those who are in league with Satan? Yet, self evident as is this principle, how slow many of us are to conform our *ways* to its requirements! How prone we are to flirt with those who are the enemies of God.

But if *we* are careless and disobedient, *God* is faithful. In His love for us, He often causes worldlings to *repulse* our friendly advances, to wrongly interpret our kindly overtures, to despise, mock and insult us. If we will not keep on *our* side of the line which God has drawn between the kingdom of His Son and the kingdom of Satan, then we must not be surprised if He employs the wicked to drive us out of *their* territory. Herein lies the key, my reader, to many a painful experience which often perplexes the Christian. Why does a righteous God suffer me to receive such unjust and cruel treatment from those I wish to be "nice to"? God permits that "enmity" which *He* has placed between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman to burst out against the latter, because they were becoming too intimate with the former.

It is not only that God rebukes us for disregarding the line which He has drawn between the world and the Church, but that it is our spiritual profit which He designs to promote. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Yes, Christian reader, and that "all things" includes the present aloofness of some unsaved people who were once friendly towards you; that "all things" includes the coldness of Christless relatives, the unkind attitude of neighbors, the unfriendliness of those who work side by side with you in the office, store, or workshop. God sees the *danger,* if you do not! Because of His love for you, He prevents your becoming drawn into alliances with those whose influence would greatly hinder your growth in grace. Then, instead of chafing against the attitude of your fellows, thank the Lord for *His* faithfulness.

Against what has been said above it may be objected, But you surely do not mean that, in his separation from the world, the Christian must be unsociable and live like a hermit; or that God requires us to be uncivil and morose toward our fellow-creatures, No, dear Reader, *that* is not our meaning. We are required to be "pitiful" and "courteous" (1 Peter 3:8), and to "do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Moreover, the Christian must be watchful against assuming an "I am holier than you" attitude toward his fellow men. Nevertheless, there is a real difference between a respectful and kindly conduct toward the unsaved, and an undue intimacy with them—making close friends of them.

It may be further objected, But in David's case, it was proper and needful for him to act as he did, for verse 2 expressly states that Hanun's father had shown kindness to him. Then would it not have been rebukable ingratitude if David had failed to make some suitable return? Exactly what was the nature of that "kindness" which Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, had shown David, Scripture does not inform us; and therefore speculation is useless. But if David had *sought* some favor from him, as he did from Achish, the son of the king of Gath (1 Samuel 27:1-7), then he was guilty of turning aside from the high calling and privileged place of one whose dependency should be on the living God alone. When such is the case, when we place our confidence in man and lean upon the creature, we must not be surprised if God rebukes and foils our carnal hopes.

There is a principle involved here which it is important for us to be clear upon, but the application of which is likely to exercise those who are of a tender conscience. How far is it permissible for the Christian to receive favors from unbelievers? Something depends upon the relation borne to him by the one who proffers them; something upon the motive likely to be actuating the offerer; something upon the nature of what is offered. Obviously, the Christian must never accept anything from one who has no right to tender it—a dishonest employee, for example. Nor must he accept anything which the Word of God condemns—such as an immodest dress, a ticket to the theater, etc. Firmly must he refuse any favor which would bring him *under obligation* to a worldling: it is at *this* point that Satan often seeks to ensnare the believer—by bringing him under the power of the ungodly through becoming indebted to them.

But though we are not informed of how and when Nahash had befriended David, the Holy Spirit *has* placed on record an incident which reveals the character of this king: "Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-Gilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel" (1 Samuel 11:1, 2). Why, then, should David now show respect unto the memory of one who had evidenced himself such a cruel enemy of the people of God! It could not be any *spiritual* principle which actuated Israel's king on this occasion. A clear word for our guidance concerning those who are the open enemies of God is given us in, "Should you help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord!" (2 Chronicles 19:2)

But not only should the evil character of Nahash have restrained David from showing respect to his memory, but *the race* to which he belonged ought to have been a separating barrier. He was an Ammonite, and as such under the interdict of the Lord, because that nation had refused to meet the children of Israel "with bread and with water in the way, when they came forth out of the land of Egypt," and they together with the Moabites (because they had hired Balaam against them) were debarred from entering into the congregation of the Lord, even to their tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:3, 4). But more: concerning both the Ammonites and the Moabites God expressly prohibited, "You shall *not* seek their peace nor their good all your days forever" (Deuteronomy 23:6). David, then, disobeyed a plain command of God on this occasion.

As to whether or not David was personally acquainted with that particular divine statute, we cannot say. Probably the only thought in his mind was diplomatically to time his effort to secure peace between the two nations. But God blew upon his political scheme, and in so doing gave warning unto His people throughout all generations that only disappointment and vexation can be expected from their attempts to court the friendship of the ungodly. "And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Think you that David does honor your father, that he has sent comforters unto you? has not David rather sent his servants unto you, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?" (2 Samuel 10:3). Treacherous minds always suspect other people of perfidy.

"Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away" (v. 4). And why did God allow those princes to wrongly interpret David's kindness, and their king to heed them and now insult David by thus disgracing his ambassadors? Because He had far different designs than His servant. These men had filled up "the measure" of their iniquity (

Genesis 15:16; Matthew 23:32): their hearts were ripe for ruin, and therefore were they hardened to their destruction (11:1). God had not forgotten what is recorded in 1 Samuel 11:1, 2, though it had taken place many years before. His mills "grind slowly," yet in the end, "they grind exceeding small."

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

His Fearful Fall

2 Samuel 11

A difficult and most unwelcome task now confronts us: to contemplate and comment upon the darkest blot of all in the fair character of David. But who are we, so full of sin in ourselves, unworthy to unloose his shoes, to take it upon us to sit in judgment upon the sweet Psalmist of Israel. Certainly we would not select this subject from personal choice, for it affords us no pleasure to gaze upon an eminent saint of God befouling himself in the mire of evil. O that we may be enabled to approach it with true humility, in tear and trembling, remembering that "as in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man." Only then may we hope to derive any profit from our perusal; the same applies to the reader. Before proceeding further, let each of us ask God to awe our hearts by the solemn scene which is to be before us.

It must be for God's glory and our profit that the Holy Spirit has placed on record this account of David's fearful fall, otherwise it would not have been given a permanent place on the imperishable pages of Holy Writ. But in order to derive any good from it for our souls, it is surely necessary that we approach this sad incident with a sober mind and in a spirit of meekness, "considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted' (Galatians 6:1). This inspired record is to be regarded as a divine beacon, warning us of the rocks upon which David's life was wrecked; as a danger signal, bidding us be on our guard, lest we, through unwatchfulness, experience a similar calamity. Viewed thus, there are valuable lessons to be learned, instruction which will stand us in good stead if it be humbly appropriated.

The fearful fall of David supplies a concrete exemplification of many solemn statements of Scripture concerning the nature and character of fallen man. Its teaching in regard to human depravity is very pointed and unpalatable, and often has it been made a subject of unholy jest by godless scoffers. Such declarations as, "the imagination of mans heart is evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21), "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9), "in my flesh dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18), are highly objectionable to human pride, yet *the truth* of them cannot be gainsaid. Fearful and forbidding as are such descriptions of fallen man, nevertheless their accuracy is illustrated and demonstrated again and again in the lives of Bible characters, as well as in the world today.

Rightly has it been said that, "One of the most astounding demonstrations of the truth of the Bible is its unhesitating revelation and denunciation of sin, in the professed follower at God. It conceals nothing; on the contrary, it pulls aside the veil and discloses all. It condones nothing; instead, it either utters the terrible wrath of God against the guilty one, or records His judgments as they fall upon the unhappy sinner, even to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 34:7).

"It exalts Noah as a preacher of righteousness in an evil and violent generation; with equal faithfulness it records his drunkenness and shame (Genesis 9:20, 21). Abraham is set before us as a man of faith. In the hour of famine, instead of waiting in quietness upon God, he goes down into Egypt. Once there, he persuades has wife to misrepresent her relationship to him, and through the acted falsehood imperils his peace and her own (Genesis 12:12, 13). Lot falls away after his deliverance from Sodom, and through love of wine is subjected to the lust of his wanton daughters. Aaron and Miriam are filled with jealousy and speak evilly against Moses, their brother. Moses speaks unadvisedly with his lips, and is shut out from the land of promise. The white light of truth flashes on every page, and the faults, the follies, the sins and inexcusable iniquities of those who call themselves the people and servants of God, are seen in all their repulsive forms" (I. M. H.).

Thus it was in the tragic case now before us. The fearful conduct of David reveals to us with terrible vividness that not only is the natural man a fallen and depraved creature, but also that the redeemed and regenerated man is liable to fall into the most heinous evil; yes, that unless God is pleased to sovereignly interpose, unwatchfulness on the part of the believer is certain to issue in consequences highly dishonoring to the Lord and fearfully injurious to himself. This it is which above all else makes our present portion so unspeakably solemn: here we behold the lusts of the flesh allowed full sway not by a man of the world, but by a member of the household of faith; here we behold a saint, eminent in holiness, in a unguarded moment, surprised, seduced and led captive by the devil. The "flesh" in the believer is no different and no better than the flesh in an unbeliever!

Yes, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, who had enjoyed such long and close communion with God, still had the "flesh" within him, and because he *failed to mortify* its lusts, he now flung away the joys of divine fellowship, defiled his conscience, ruined his soul's prosperity, brought down upon himself (for all his remaining years) a storm of calamities, and made his name and religion a target for the arrows of sarcasm and blasphemy of each succeeding generation. Every claim that God had upon him, every obligation of his high office, all the fences which divine mercy had provided, were ruthlessly trampled under foot by the fiery lust now burning in him. He who in the day of his distress cried, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:2) now lusted after a forbidden object. Alas, what is man? Truly "man at his best estate is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5).

But how are we to account for David's fearful fall? Why was it that he succumbed so readily in the presence of temptation? What was it that led up to and occasioned his heinous sin? These questions are capable of a twofold answer, according as we view them in the light of the high sovereignty of God or the responsibility of man; for the present we shall consider them from the latter viewpoint. And it is here we should derive the most practical help for our own souls; it is in tracing the *relation* between God's chastisements and what occasions them, between men's sins and what leads up to them, that we discover what is most essential for us to lay to heart. The reasons why Abraham "went *down* to Egypt" are revealed in the context. Peter's denial of Christ may be traced back to his self-confidence in following his Master "afar off." And, we shall see, the divine record enables us to trace David's fall back to the springs which occasioned it.

"And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an evening-tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her impurity: and she returned unto her house" (2 Samuel 11:1-4). We cannot do better than seek to fill in the outline of Matthew Henry on these verses: first, the occasions of this

The occasions of or what led up to David's fearful fall are plainly intimated in the above verses. We begin by noticing the rime mark here mentioned: "And it came to pass after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle" (v. 1), which signifies, at the season of spring, after the winter is over. Following the period of enforced inactivity, upon the return of favorable weather, the military activities against the Ammonites were resumed: Joab and the army went forth, "But David tarried still at Jerusalem." Ominous "But," noting the Spirit's disapproval at the king's conduct. Here is the first key which explains what follows, and we do well to weigh it attentively, for it is recorded "for *our* learning" and warning Reduced to its simplest terms, that which is here signified is *David's failure to follow the path of duty.*

It is obvious that at this time the king's place—his accustomed one hitherto (see 10:17)—was at the head of his fighting men, leading them to the overthrow of Israel's enemies. Had he been out fighting the battles of the Lord, he had not been subject to the temptation which soon confronted him. It may appear a trifling matter in our eyes that the king should tarry at Jerusalem: if so, it shows we sadly fail to view things in their proper perspective—it is never a trifling matter to forsake *the post of obligation,* be that post the most menial one. The fact is that we cannot count upon divine protection when we forsake the path of duty. *That* was the force of our Saviors reply when the devil bade Him cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple; that pinnacle lay not in the path of His duty, hence His "you shall not tempt the Lord your God."

David relaxed when he should have girded on the sword: he preferred the luxuries of the palace to the hardships of the battlefield. Ah, it is so easy to follow the line of least resistance. It requires grace (diligently sought) to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3). Alas that David had failed to profit from a previous failure along this same line: when he had sought

rest among the Philistines at an earlier date, he fell readily into sin (1 Samuel 21:13); so it was now, when he sought ease in Jerusalem. The important principle here for the Christian to lay to heart is, David had *taken off his armor,* and therefore he was without protection when the enemy assailed him. Ah, my reader, this world is no place to rest in; rather is it the arena where faith has to wage its fight, and that fight is certain to be a losing one if we disregard that exhortation "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

"And it came to pass in an evening-tide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house." Here is the second thing for us to observe: not only had David shunned the post of duty, but he was guilty of *slothfulness.* It was not the slumbers of nighttime which the Spirit here takes notice of, for it was evening-tide when he "arose"—it was the afternoon which he had wasted in self-luxuriation. David had failed to redeem the time: he was not engaged either in seeking to be of use to others, or in improving himself. Laziness gives great advantage to the tempter: it was "while men slept" that the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat" (Matthew 13:29). It is written, "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule (in measure, over his lusts): but the slothful shall be *under tribute*" (Proverbs 12:24).

What a word is this: "I went by the field of *the slothful,* and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and, *lo,* it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down" (Proverbs 24:30, 31). Does not the reader perceive the *spiritual* meaning of this: the "field" is his life, open before all; the vineyard" (private property) is his heart. And what a state they are in: through idle neglect, filled with that which is obnoxious to God and worthless to men. "Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction" (v. 32). Do *we?* Do we lay it to heart and profit therefrom when we behold so many wrecked and fruitless lives around us—ruined by spiritual *indolence.* "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; So shall your poverty come as one that travels; and your want as an armed man" (verses 33, 34)—are not those verses a solemn commentary on 2 Samuel 11:2!

"And from the roof he saw a woman washing herself, and the woman was very beautiful to look upon." Here is the third thing: a *wandering eye.* In Isaiah 33:15 and 16 we are told concerning the one that "shuts his eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on the heights, his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks." Alas, this is what David did not do: instead, he suffered his eyes to dwell upon an alluring but prohibited object. Among his prayers was this petition, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity" (Psalm 119:37), but we cannot expect God to answer us if we deliberately spy upon the privacy of others. We turn now to consider the actual steps in this fall.

"And David sent and inquired after the woman." He purposed now to satisfy his lust. He who had once boasted "I *will* behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when will You come unto me? I *will* walk within my house with a perfect heart. I *will* set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I *will not* know a wicked person" (Psalm 101:2-4), now determined to commit adultery. Note the repeated "I will" in the above passage, and learn therefrom how much the "will" of man is worth!

"And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Here was calm deliberation and premeditation on the part of David. Here too was a merciful interposition on the part of God, for one of the kings servants dared to remind his royal master that the woman he was inquiring about was the *wife* of another. How often does the Lord in his grace and faithfulness place some obstacle across our path, when we are planning something which is evil in His sight! It is this which renders our sin far worse, when we defiantly break through any hedge which the providence of God places about us. O that we may draw back with a shudder when such obstacles confront us, and not rush blindly like an ox to the slaughter.

"And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her." The order is very solemn: first "he saw" (v. 2), then he "sent and inquired" (v. 3), and now "he lay with her." Yet that does not give us the complete picture: we need to go back to verse 1 in order to take in the entire scene, and as we do so, we obtain a vivid and solemn illustration of what is declared in James 1:14, 15. First, David was "drawn away of his lust"—of fleshly ease and indolence; second, he was then "enticed"—by the sight of a beautiful woman; third, "then when lust had conceived it brought forth sin"—that of premeditated adultery; and, as the terrible sequel shows, "sin when it was finished brought forth *death*"—the murder of Uriah her husband.

The *aggravations* of his sin were marked and many. First, David was no longer a hot-blooded youth, but a man some fifty years of age. Second, he was not a single man, but one who already had several wives of his own—this is emphasized in chapter 12:8, when God sent the prophet to charge him with his wickedness. Third, he had sons who had almost reached the age of manhood: what a fearful example for a father to set before them! Fourth, he was the king of Israel, and therefore under binding obligation to set before his subjects a pattern of righteousness. Fifth, Uriah, the man whom he so grievously wronged, was even then hazarding his life in the king's service. And above all, he was a child of God, and as such, under bonds to honor and glorify His name.

CHAPTER FIFTY TWO

His Terrible Sin

2 Samuel 11

In the Psalms of David two very different characters come before us again and again. In some of those Psalms there is expressed the sorrows of one who is consciously *righteous,* suffering the reproaches of the wicked, yet assured of strength in God, and looking forward to that fullness of joy which is at His right hand. In other Psalms we hear the sobbings of a *convicted* conscience, a heart deeply exercised over personal transgression, seeking after divine mercy, and being granted a blessed sense of the infinite sufficiency of divine grace to meet his deep need. Now, those two characters in the Psalms correspond to the two principal stages in David's life as portrayed, respectively, in the first and second books of Samuel. In 1 Samuel we see him brought from obscurity unto honor and peace, upheld by God in righteousness amid the persecution of the wicked. In the latter we behold him descending from honor, through sin, into degradation and turmoil, yet there learning the amazing riches of divine grace to bear with and pardon one who fell into such deep mire.

Solemn indeed is the contrast presented of David in the two books of Samuel: in the former he is conqueror of the mighty Goliath: in the latter he is mastered by his own lusts. Now the sins of God's servants are recorded for our instruction: not for us to shelter behind and use for palliating our own offences, but for us to lay to heart and seek with all our might to avoid. The most effectual means against our repeating their sins is to keep from those things which lead up to or occasion them. In the preceding chapter we pointed out that David's fearful fall was preceded by three things: the laying aside of his armor at the very time it was his duty to gird on the sword; the indulging in slothful ease in the palace, when he should have been enduring hardness as a soldier on the battlefield; the allowing of a wandering eye to dwell upon an unlawful object, when he should have turned it away from beholding vanity.

"Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Prayer of itself is not sufficient: we have not fully discharged our duty when we have asked God to lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. We must "watch," be on the alert, noting the direction of our desires, the character of our motives, the tendency of things which may be lawful in themselves, the influence of our associations. It is our *inner man* which we most need to watch: "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Then, if we are faithful and diligent in "watching," out of a sense of our personal weakness and insufficiency, it is in order to "pray," counting on the help of our gracious God to undertake for us. To "pray" *without* "watching" is only to mock God, by seeking to shelve our responsibility.

Prayer was never designed by God as a substitute for personal effort and diligence, but rather as an adjunct thereto—to seek divine grace for enabling us to be dutiful and faithful. "Continue in prayer, *and* watch in the same with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). Not only does God require us to "watch" *before* we pray, but we are also to "watch" immediately after. And again we say, that which we most need to watch is *ourselves.* There is a traitor within our own breast, ever ready and desirous of betraying us if allowed the opportunity of so doing. Who had thought that such an one as David would ever experience such a fearful fall as he had! Ah, my reader, not even a close walk with God, or a long life of eminent piety, will eradicate or even change the sinful nature which still abides in the saint. So long as we are in this world we are never beyond the reach of temptation, and nothing but watchfulness and prayer will safeguard us from it.

Nor is it easy to say how low a real child of God may fall, nor how deeply he may sink into the mire, once he allows the lusts of the flesh their free play. Sin is insatiable: it is never satisfied. Its nature is to drag us lower and lower, getting more and more daring in its opposition to God: and but for His recovering grace it would carry us down to Hell itself. Took at Israel: unbelieving at the Red Sea, murmuring in the wilderness, setting up the idolatrous calf at Sinai. Look at the course of Christendom as outlined in Revelation 2

and 3: beginning by leaving her first love, ending by becoming so mixed up with the world that Christ threatened to spew her out of His mouth. Thus it was with David: from laying on his bed to allowing his eves to wander, from gazing on Bathsheba to committing adultery with her, from adultery to murder, and then sinking into such spiritual deadness that for a whole year he remained impenitent, until an express messenger from God was needed to arouse him from his torpor.

"And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said. I am with child" (2 Samuel 11:5). Sooner or later the man or the woman who deliberately defies God and tramples His laws underfoot finds from painful experience that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Proverbs 13:15). It is true that the final punishment of the wicked is in the next world, and it is true that for years some daring rebels appear to mock God with impunity; nevertheless, His government is such that, even in this life, they are usually made to reap as they have sown. The pleasures of sin Are but "For a season" (Hebrews 11:25), and a very brief one at that: nevertheless "at the last it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Proverbs 23:32). Make no mistake on that point, dear reader: "Be sure your sins will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). It did so with David and Bathsheba, for now the day of reckoning had to be faced.

The penalty for adultery was death: "And the man that commits adultery with another man's wife, even he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10). Bathsheba now had good cause to fear the righteous wrath of her husband, and the enforcing of the dread sentence of the law. David, too, was faced with serious trouble: the one with whom he had had illicit fellowship was pregnant, and her own husband had been away from home for some time. The hidden works of darkness must soon be forced into the light for when Uriah returned the unfaithfulness of his wife would be discovered. This would give him the right to have her stoned, and though David, by virtue of his high position as king, might escape a similar fate, yet it was likely that his guilt would be proclaimed abroad and a general revolt be stirred up against him. But sad as was the predicament in which David now found himself, still sadder was the measure he resorted to in seeking to extricate himself.

Before taking up the doleful details in the inspired narrative, let us first seek to obtain a general idea of what follows—asking the reader to go over 2 Samuel 11:6-21 before continuing with our comments. There was no thirsting for Uriah's blood on the part of David: it was only after all his carnal efforts had failed to use Uriah in covering his own sin, that the king resorted to extreme measures. Another before us has pointed out the awful parallel which here obtains between David and Pilate. The Roman governor thirsted not for the blood of the Savior, rather did he resort to one expedient after another so as to preserve His life; and only after those had failed, did he give his official sanction to the crucifying of the Lord Jesus. Alas that the sweet Psalmist of Israel should here find himself in the same class with Pilate, but the flesh in the believer is no different from the flesh in the unbeliever, and when allowed its way it issues in the same works in both.

But the analogy between David and Pilate is even closer. What was it that caused David to sacrifice Uriah in order to shield himself? It was his love of the world, his determination to preserve his place and reputation among men at all costs. Love of his Fair name in the world, resolved that under no circumstances would he be branded as an adulterer, so whatever stood in the way must be removed. He contrived various expedients to preserve his character, but these were baffled; so just as the lust of the eye led him to adultery with Bathsheba, now the pride of life goaded him to the murder of her husband. And was it not the same with Pilate? He had no murderous designs against Christ, but he put his own credit in the eyes of men before everything else: he was Caesar's friend—the world's friend—and rather than risk any breach in that friendship Jesus must die.

"And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David" (v. 6). It was not unto the Lord that David now turned: *He* seems not to have been in his thoughts at all. Nor is He when sin has gained the ascendancy over the saint. Alas that we are so slow, so reluctant, to put things right with God—by sincere repentance and humble confession—when we have displeased and dishonored Him. No, David was far more anxious to conceal his crime and escape the temporal consequences of it, than he was to seek the forgiveness of the Lord his God. This, too, is recorded for our instruction. It is written, "He who covers his sins shall not prosper" (Proverbs 28:13), and there is no exception to that rule —O that divine grace would cause each of us to lay it to heart and act *upon it.* Only God knows how many of His own people are now under His chastening rod, are lean in their souls and joyless in their hearts, because of failure at this very point.

Refusal to put things right with God and our fellows, by confessing our sins to the One and (so far as lies in our power) making restitution to the other, gives Satan a great advantage over us. A guilty conscience estranges the heart from God, so that it is no longer able to count upon His protection; the Spirit is grieved and withholds His grace, so that the understanding is unable to see things in His light. The soul is then in such a state that Satan's lies are acceptable to it, and then the whole course of conduct is more or less regulated by him. Carnal scheming takes the place of seeking wisdom from on high, stealth and trickery supplant openness and honesty, and self-interests absorb all the energies instead of seeking the glory of God and the good of others. This comes out plainly in the deplorable sequel here: all of David's actions now show that he was actuated by Satan rather than dominated by the Holy Spirit.

"And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered" (v. 7). Having been summoned back from the scene of fighting, Uriah was given an audience with David under the pretense of supplying his royal master with an accurate account of how the hostilities were proceeding. In reality, those inquiries of the king were merely a blind to cover his real desire in having sent for Bathsheba's husband. Seemingly, David wished to convey to Uriah the impression that he had more confidence in *his* word concerning the progress of the war than that of any one else in Israel. But it is quite clear from what follows that David had called Uriah home for a very different purpose. How little *we* know the motives of those who ask us questions, and how it behooves us to heed that exhortation "*put not* your confidence in princes" (Psalm 146:3).

"And David said to Uriah, Go down to your house, and wash your feet" (v. 8). This makes clearer the secret design of the king in summoning Uriah to Jerusalem. David was determined to spare himself the shame of its becoming known that he was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba, and the only way in which that could be avoided was by getting her husband back to spend a night or two at home, so that the child might be fathered on him. "And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king" (v. 8). David was anxious that the one whom he designed to act as a cloak for his own sin should feel free to enjoy to the full the brief furlough now granted him. Again we say, how ignorant we often are of the subtle designs

"But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house" (v. 9). How often the best-laid schemes of men meet with disappointment. It was so with Abraham's attempt in getting Sarah to pose as his sister; it was so with Jonah's efforts to avoid preaching to the Ninevites; it was so here. David was balked: he had failed to estimate aright the sterling qualities of the man with whom he was dealing. Uriah was not the one to give way to self-indulgence while his brethren were enduring the hardships of a military, campaign. And should not this speak loudly to our hearts? Are the days in which *we* are living such that Christians are justified in seeking ease and fleshly gratification?

"And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Came you not from your journey? Why then did you not go down into your house?" (v. 10). Instead of commending Uriah for his noble unselfishness, the king half reproved him. But David could not approve Uriah's conduct without condemning his own. Ah, my reader, they who criticize those who *live as* "strangers and pilgrims" in this scene (and they are few in number in this degenerate generation), calling them "strict," "straight-laced," "extremists," "puritanic," do but give themselves away. They who practice self-denial are thorns in the sides of those who wish to "make the most of both worlds" by pandering to their carnal desires.

"And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife?—as you live, and your soul lives, I will not do this thing" (v. 11). What a rebuke was this! The Lord and His people in the open fields, engaging the foes of Israel; David at home in his palace, enjoying his ease and indulging the desires of nature. How those noble words of Uriah should have melted David's heart! How they should have smitten his conscience for having yielded so vilely to his sinful passions and for so grievously wronging, in his absence, such a loyal subject! But alas, where the heart is no longer concerned for

God's glory, it is incapable of receiving correction or rebuke from a fellow creature. David was filled with pride of reputation and the fear of man, and was determined to make Uriah serve for him as a screen from the public eye.

"And David said to Uriah, Tarry here today also, and to morrow I will let you depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow" (v. 12). When the heart is fully set upon doing evil, it refuses to be daunted by difficulties: if one method of obtaining the coveted end fails, it will try another. Alas that the same persistent determination does not characterize us when we are seeking that which is good: how easily we are discouraged then! Patience is a virtue, but it is prostituted to a base end when used in an evil course. Thus it was now: David refused to admit defeat, and hoped that by keeping

"And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk" (v. 13). To what awful lengths can sin carry a saint once he enters upon the downward path. The plan which David now resorted to was horrible indeed, deliberately endeavoring to make the faithful Uriah break his vow in verse 11. How sad to now see David the tempter of Uriah unto drunkenness—hoping that while his blood was heated, he would go home to his wife. But again he failed: "And at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, *but went not down to his house*" (v. 13). How this baffling of his plans should have aroused David's sleeping conscience, for, manifestly, God's providences were working *against* him. Worse was yet to follow: this we must leave for our next chapter.

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

His Terrible Sin

(Continued)

2 Samuel 11

David's fearful fall into committing adultery with Bathsheba was now followed by a crime yet more odious. His unlawful child, soon to be born, he had sought to father upon Uriah; but his efforts had failed. A desperate situation now confronted him. He knew that if Uriah lived, he must discover his wife's unfaithfulness, and this the king was determined to prevent at all costs. Even though it meant adding sin to sin and sinking more deeply into the mire of evil, David must preserve his reputation before men, Here, again, we see the likeness between him and Pilate: each sought to preserve innocent blood *and* the world (a position of honor in it) for himself at the same time, and surrendered the former for the latter when they could not both be retained—the "pride of life" was so strong that to maintain it, the death of another was not scrupled against.

Once a man, even though he be a believer, disregards the claims of God, he is quite liable to ignore the claims of human friendship. It was so in the sad case here before us. David now shrank not from going to any length. First, he had tempted Uriah to break his vow (2 Samuel 11:11). Second, he had endeavored to make him drunk (11:13). And now he deliberately plotted the death of his devoted subject. He had rather that innocent blood be shed, and his whole army be threatened with defeat, than that his *own* good name should be made a scandal. See to what incredible lengths sin will urge even a child of God once he yields to its clamorings: adultery now occasioned murder! O my reader, what real need there is for begging God to enable you to "pass the time of your sojourning here *in fear*" (1 Peter 1:17)!

"When a man has so far given place to the devil as not only to commit scandalous sins, but to use disingenuous and base means of concealing them, and with sure prospect of having the whole exposed to public view; what would prevent his being pushed forward, by the same influence and from the same motives, to treachery, malice and murder, until crimes are multiplied and magnified beyond computation, and until every nobler consideration is extinguished?" (Thomas Scott). Thus it was here: no matter what happened, David was resolved to maintain *his own* reputation. Sure proof was this that, at the time, he was completely dominated by Satan, as is shown by those words "lest being lifted up with *pride,* he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:6). How we need to pray that God would mercifully *hide* pride from" us (Job 33:17)!

Further proof that David was then thoroughly in the toils of Satan, may be seen in the subtle and vile tactics to which he now resorted. Thoroughly determined to cover his awful sin of adultery by committing still greater wickedness, he resolved to have poor Uriah put out of the way. "That innocent, valiant, and gallant man, who was ready to die for his prince's honor must die by his prince's hand" (Matthew Henry). Yes, but not directly; David was too cunning for that, and too anxious to preserve his own good name before men. He would not kill Uriah by his own hand, nor even bid his servants assassinate him, for his reputation had been destroyed by such a step. He therefore resorted to a more serpentine measure, which, though it concealed his own hand, was none the less heinous. The bravery of Uriah and his zeal for this country, suggested to the king the method of dispatching him.

And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter saying, Set you Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire you from him, that he may be smitten, and die" (2 Samuel 11:14, 15). With cold-blooded deliberation David penned a note to the commander of his army, commanding him to station his faithful soldier in the place where he would be the most exposed to the assaults of the foe, and then leave him to his cruel fate. The king's letter, decreeing his death, was carried by Uriah himself, and delivered to Joab. The general did as his master had bidden, and Uriah was slain. David's abominable plan succeeded, and he whose accusations he so much feared, now lay silent in death—committed to an honorable grave, while his murderer's honor was sullied as long as this world lasts.

This terrible sin of David's was more laid to his charge by God than any other he committed: not only because of its gravity, and because it has given occasion to so many of His enemies to blaspheme, but also because it was more a deliberate and premeditated crime than an involuntary infirmity acting suddenly. How many of his failures are left on record: his lie to Ahimelech (1 Samuel 21:2), his dissimulation before the king of Gath (1 Samuel 21:12), his rash vow to destroy Nabal (1 Samuel 25:33), his unbelieving "I shall one day perish at the hand of Saul" (1 Samuel 27:1), his injustice in the matter of Mephibosheth and Ziba (2 Samuel 16:4), his indulgence of Absalom, his numbering of the people (2 Samuel 24); yet after his death God said, "David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, *save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite*" (1 Kings 15:5).

The immediate sequel is as sad and awful as is what has just been before us. When he received the tidings that his vile plot had succeeded, David callously said to the messenger, "Thus shall you say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another" (v. 25). There was no compunction that a loyal supporter had been cruelly murdered, no horror of heart at his own guilt in connection therewith, no grief that others besides Uriah had been sacrificed for his crime; instead, he pretended that it was but "the fortunes of war," and to be taken stoically. Disregarding the massacre of his soldiers, David complimented Joab on the execution of his abominable order, and bade the messenger return "and encourage you him."

"And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband" (v. 26). What a vile mockery! Only God knows how often the outward "mourning" over the departed is but a hypocritical veil to cover satisfaction of heart for being rid of their presence. Even where that be not the case, the speedy remarriage of weeping widows and widowers indicates how shallow was their grief. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (v. 27). David had pleased himself, but he had grievously displeased the Lord! "Let none therefore encourage themselves in sin by the example of David, for if they sin as he did, they will fall under the displeasure of God as he did" (Matthew Henry).

The question has been asked, can a person who has committee such atrocious crimes, and so long remains impenitent, be indeed a child of God, a member or Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and an heir of everlasting glory? Can one spark of divine like exist un-extinguished in such an ocean of evil?" Were we left to our own unaided judgment to make reply, most probably every last one of us would promptly answer, No, such a thing is unthinkable. Yet in the clear light of Holy Writ it is plain that such things *are* possible. Later, David made it manifest that he was a truly regenerated person by the sincerity and depth of his contrition and confession. Yet, let it be said that, no man while guilty of such sins, and before he *genuinely* repents of the same, can have any warrantable evidence to conclude that *he* is a believer; yes, everything points to the contrary. Though grace be not lost in such an awful case, divine consolation and assurance is suspended.

But now the question arises, *Why did God* permit David to fall so low and sin so terribly? The first answer must be, To display His high and awe-inspiring *sovereignty.* Here we approach ground which is indeed difficult for us to tread, even with unshodden feet. Nevertheless it cannot be gainsaid that there is a marvelous and sovereign display of the Lord's grace toward His people in this particular respect, both before their calling and after. Some of the elect are permitted to sin most grievously in their unconverted state, while others of them, even in their unregenerate days, are wondrously preserved. Again; some of the elect after their conversion have been divinely allowed to awfully fall into the most horrible impieties, while others of them are so preserved as never to sin willfully against their consciences from the first conviction to the very close of their lives (Condensed from S. E. Pierce on

Hosea 14:1).

This is a high mystery, which it would be most impious for us to attempt to pry into: rather must we bow our heads before it and say, "Even so, Father, for *so* it seems good in your sight." It is a solemn fact, from which there is no getting away, that some sin more before their conversion, and some (especially those saved in early life) sin worse after their conversion. It is also a plain fact that with some saints God most manifests His *restraining grace,* and with others his *pardoning* grace. Three things are to be steadily borne in mind in connection with the sins or the saints. God never regards sin as a trifle: it is *ever* that abominable thing which He hates (Jeremiah 44:4). Second, it is never to be excused or extenuated by us. Third, Gods *sovereignty* therein must be acknowledged: whatever difficulties it may raise before our minds, let us hold last the tact that God does as He pleases, and "gives no account" of His actions (Job 33:13).

A second answer to the question, Why did God permit David to fall so fearfully and sin so grievously? may be: that we might have set before our eyes the more clearly the awful fact that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Unmistakably plain as is the meaning of those words, uttered by him who cannot lie, yet how very slow we all are to *really* receive them at their face value, and acknowledge that they accurately describe the natural state of every human heart—that of the Man Christ Jesus alone excepted. But God has done more than make this bare statement: He has placed on record in His Word illustrations, exemplifications, demonstrations of its verity—notably so in allowing us to see the unspeakable wickedness that still remained in the heart of *David!*

Third, by suffering David to fall and sin as he did, God has graciously given a most solemn warning to believers in middle life—and elder Christians also. "Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory, and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against sin. David was so; his great surprisal into sin was after a long profession, manifold experiences of God, and watchful keeping himself from his iniquity. And hence, in particular, has it come to pass that the profession of many has declined in their old age or riper time: they have given over the work of mortifying sin *before* their work was at an end. There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being endless in our pursuit. The command God gives in Colossians 3:5 is *as necessary* for them to observe who are toward the end of their race, as those who are but at the beginning of it" (John Owen).

Fourth, the fearful fall of David made way for a display of the amazing grace of God in recovering His fallen people. If we are slow to receive what Scripture teaches concerning the depravity of the human heart and the exceeding sinfulness of sin, we are equally slow to *really* believe what it reveals about the covenant-faithfulness of God, the efficacy of Christ's blood to cleanse the foulest stain from those for whom it was shed, and the super-abounding grace of Him who is "the Father of mercies." Had David never sinned so grievously and sunken so low, he had never known those infinite depths of mercy which there are in the heart of God. Likewise, had his terrible sin, his subsequent broken-hearted confession, and his *pardon* by God, never been placed upon divine record, not a few of God's people throughout the centuries had sunk in abject despair.

Fifth, to furnish a fatal stumbling-block to blatant rebels. "It is certain that thousands through succeeding generations have, by this fall of 'the man after God's own heart,' been prejudiced against true religion, hardened in infidelity, or emboldened in blasphemy; while others have thence taken occasion to commit *habitual wickedness* under a religious profession, and with presumptuous confidence, to the still greater discredit of the Gospel. It should, however, be considered, that all these have been, previously, either open enemies to true religion, or hypocritical pretenders to it: and it is the righteous purpose of God, that stumbling-blocks should be thrown in the way of such men, that they may 'stumble, and fall, and be snarled, and taken, and perish.' It is His holy will thus to detect the secret malignity of their hearts, and to make way for the display of His justice in their condemnation. On the other hand, thousands, from age to age, have by this awful example been rendered more suspicious of themselves, more watchful, more afraid of temptation, more dependent on the Lord, and more fervent in prayer; and by means of David's fall, have, themselves, been preserved from falling" (Thomas Scott).

God, then, had wise and sufficient reasons, both for permitting David to sin so heinously and for placing the same upon imperishable record. Nor has any opposer or despiser of the Truth any just ground to sneeringly ask, Are *those* the fruits of grace and faith? We answer, No, they are not; instead, they are the horrible works of the flesh, the filth which issues from corrupt human nature. How strong must those inclinations be to evil, when they, at times, succeed in overcoming the oppositions of truth and grace dwelling in the heart of an eminent saint of God! And in the light of the context (2 Samuel 11:1, 2) how it behooves us to watch against the *beginnings* of negligence and sell-indulgence, and keep at the utmost distance from that precipice over which David fell; begging God that it may please Him to deliver us from all forbidden objects.

But this incident presents another difficulty to some, namely, how to harmonize it with the declaration made in 1 John 3:15: "You know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." It is really surprising that so many have experienced trouble in reconciling this with the case of David: as usual, the difficulty is self-created through ignoring the context. In 1 John 3:11 the apostle takes up the subject of the Christians' love one for another, whereby they make it manifest that they are *brethren* in Christ. The world (1) loves them not (2) hates them (3) will murder them whenever they dare—as Cain did Abel. But no real Christian has *such* a hatred in his heart against any "brother" in Christ. Nor had David. Uriah was not an Israelite, but an "*Hittite*" (2 Samuel 11:3; 1 Kings 15:5)!

In conclusion, let us point out some of the solemn lessons which we may learn from this sad incident. 1. Beware of the *beginnings* of sin: who had imagined that taking his ease when he should have been at the post of duty on the battlefield, had led to adultery and ended in murder? 2. See how refusal to put one serious wrong right, preferring concealment to confession, gives Satan a great advantage over us, to lead into yet worse evil! 3. Learn therefrom that there is no security in years, and that no *past* communion with God will safeguard us against temptations when we are careless in *the present.* 4. How fickle is poor human nature: David's heart smote him when he cut off Saul's skirt, yet later he deliberately planned the murder of Uriah. 5. Mark what fearful lengths pride will go to in order to maintain a reputation before men. 6. Behold how callous the heart will become once the strivings of conscience are disregarded. 7. Though we may succeed in escaping the wrath of our fellows, sin always meets with the displeasure of the Lord.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

His Conviction

2 Samuel 12

An interval of some months elapsed between what is recorded in 2 Samuel 11 and that which is found at the beginning of chapter 12. During this interval David was free to enjoy to the full that which he had acquired through his wrongdoing. The one obstacle which lay in the way of the free indulgence of his passion was removed; Bathsheba was now his. Apparently, the king, in his palace, was secure and immune. So far there had been no intervention of God in judgment, and throughout those months David had remained impenitent for the fearful crimes he had committed. Alas, how dull the conscience of a saint may become. But if David was pleased with the consummation of his vile plans, there was One who was displeased. The eyes of God had marked his evil conduct, and the divine righteousness would not pass it by. "These things have you done, and I kept silence," yet He adds "but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes" (Psalm 50:21).

God may suffer His people to indulge the lusts of the flesh and fall into grievous sin, but He will not allow them to remain content and happy in such a case; rather are they made to prove that "the way of transgressors is hard." In Job 20 the Holy Spirit has painted a graphic picture of the wretchedness experienced by the evil-doer. "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not; but keep it still within his mouth: yet his meat in his affections is turned, *it is the gall* of *asps within him.* He has swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again: God shall cast them out of his belly. He shall suck the poison of asps: the viper's tongue shall slay him . . . It shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle. The Heaven shall reveal his iniquity" (verses 12-16, 26, 27). Notably is this the case with backsliders, for God will not he mocked with impunity.

The coarse pleasures of sin cannot long content a child of God. It has been truly said that "Nobody buys a little passing pleasure in evil at so dear a rate, or keeps it so short a time, as a good man." The conscience of the righteous soon reasserts itself, and makes its disconcerting voice heard. He may yet be far from true repentance, but he will soon experience keen remorse. Months may pass before he again enjoys communion with God, but self-disgust will quickly fill his soul. The saint has to pay a fearfully high price for enjoying "the pleasures of sin for a season." Stolen waters may be sweet for a moment, but how quickly his "mouth is filled with gravel" (

Proverbs 20:17). Soon will the guilty one have to cry out, "He has made my chain heavy . . . He has made me desolate: He has filled me with bitterness . . . You have removed my soul far off from peace" (Lam. 3:7, 11, 15, 17).

Though the inspired historian has not described the wretchedness of David's soul following his murder of Uriah, yet we may obtain a clear view of the same from the Psalms penned by him after his conviction and deep contrition. Those Psalms tell of a sullen closing of his mouth: "when I kept silence" (32:3). Though his heart must frequently have smitten him, yet he would not speak to God about his sin; and there was nothing else he could speak of. They tell of the inward perturbation and tumult that filled him: "My bones waxed old through my *roaring* all the day long" (32:3): groans of remorse were wrung from his yet unbroken heart. "For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me" (v. 4)—a sense of the divine holiness and power oppressed him, though it did not melt him.

Even a palace can afford no relief unto one who is filled with bitter remorse. A king may command his subjects, but he cannot quiet the voice of outraged conscience. No matter whether the sun of the morning was shining or the shades of even were falling, there was no escape for David. "Day and night" God's heavy hand weighted him down: "my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (he declared in v. 4)—it was as though some heated iron was scorching him: all the dew and freshness of his life was dried up. Most probably he suffered acutely in both body and soul. "Thus he dragged through a weary year—ashamed of his guilty dalliance, wretched in his self-accusation, afraid of God, and skulking in the recesses of his palace from the sight of the people.

"David learned, what we all learn (and the holier a man is, the more speedily and sharply the lesson follows on the heels of his sin), that every transgression is a blunder, that we never get the satisfaction which we expect from any sin, or if we do, we get something with it which spoils it all. A nauseous drug is added to the exciting, intoxicating drink which temptation offers, and though its flavor is at first disguised by the pleasanter taste of sin, its bitterness is persistent though slow, and clings to the palate long after that has faded away utterly" (Alexander Maclaren). With equal clearness does this appear in Psalm 51: "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation" (v. 12) he cries, for spiritual comforts had entirely deserted him. "O Lord, open You my lips: and my mouth shall show forth Your praise" (v. 15): the dust bad settled upon the strings of his harp because the Spirit within was grieved.

How could it be otherwise? So long as David refused to humble himself beneath the mighty hand of God, seeking from Him a spirit of true repentance, and freely confessing his great wickedness, there could be no more peace for him, no more happy communion with God, no further growth in grace. O my reader, we would earnestly press upon you the great importance of *keeping short accounts with God.* Let not guilt accumulate upon your conscience: make it a point *each* night of spreading before Him the sins of the day, and seeking to be cleansed therefrom. Any great sin lying long upon the conscience, unrepented of, or not repented of as the matter requires, only furthers our indwelling corruptions: neglect causes the heart to be hardened. "My wounds stink and are corrupt *because* of *my foolishness*" (Psalm 38:5): it was his foolish neglect to make a timely application for the cure of the wounds that sin had made, which he there laments.

At the end of 2 Samuel 11 we read, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord," upon which Matthew Henry says. "One would think it should have followed that the Lord sent enemies to invade him, terrors to take hold on, and the messengers of death to arrest him. No, He sent a *prophet* to him"—"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David" (12:1). We are here to behold the exceeding riches of divine grace and mercy: *such* "riches" that legal and self-righteous hearts have murmured at, as a making light of sin—so incapable is the natural man of discerning spiritual things: they are "foolishness" unto him. David had wandered far, but he was not lost. "Though the righteous fall," yet it is written "he *shall not he* utterly cast down" (Psalm 37:24). O how tenderly God watches over His sheep! How faithfully He goes after and recovers them, when they have strayed! With what amazing goodness does He heal their backslidings, and continue to love them freely!

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David" (12:1). It is to be duly noted that it was not David who sent for the prophet, though never did he more sorely need his counsel than now. No, it was *God* who took the initiative: it is ever thus, for we never seek Him, until He seeks us. It was thus with Moses when a fugitive in Midian, with Elijah when fleeing from Jezebel, with Jonah under the juniper tree, with Peter after his denial (1 Corinthians 15:5). O the marvel of it! How it should melt our hearts. "If we believe not, yet *He* abides faithful: He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). Though He says, "I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." it is at once added, "Nevertheless My loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail" (Psalm 89:32, 33). So it was here: David still had an interest in that everlasting covenant "ordered in all things and sure" (2 Samuel 23:5).

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David." Probably about a year had elapsed from what is recorded in the beginning of the preceding chapter, for the adulterous child was already born (12:14). Rightly did Matthew Henry point out "Though God may suffer His people to fall into sin, He will not suffer His people to lie still in it." No, God will exhibit His holiness. His righteousness, and His mercy in connection therewith. His holiness, by displaying His hatred of the same, and by bringing the guilty one to penitently confess it. His righteousness. in the chastening visited upon it; His mercy, in leading the backslider to forsake it, and then bestow His pardon upon him. What a marvelous and blessed exercise of His varied attributes! "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid Me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will *heal him* (!!): I will lead him also and restore comforts unto him" (Isaiah 57:17,18).

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David." The prophet's task was far from being an enviable one: to meet the guilty king alone, face to face. As yet David had evinced no sign of repentance. God had not cast off His erring child, but He would not condone his grievous offences: all must come out into the light. The divine displeasure must be made evident: the culprit must be charged and rebuked: David must judge himself, and then discover that where sin had abounded grace did much more abound. Wondrous uniting of divine righteousness and mercy—made possible by the Cross of Christ! The righteousness of God required that David should be faithfully dealt with; the mercy of God moved Him to send Nathan for the recovery of His strayed sheep. "Mercy and truth are *met* together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).

Yes, Nathan might well have quailed before the commission which God now gave him. It was no easy matter to have to rebuke his royal master. Varied indeed are the tasks which the Lord assigns His servants. Often are they sent forth with a message which they well know will be most unpalatable to their hearers; and the temptation to tone it down, to take off its sharp edge, if not to substitute another which will be more acceptable, is both real and strong. Little do the rank and file even of God's people realize what it costs a minister of the Gospel to be *faithful* to his calling. If the apostle Paul felt his need of requesting prayer "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth *boldly*" (Ephesians 6:18, 19), how much more do God's servants today need the support of the supplications of their brethren and sisters in Christ! For on every side the cry now is "speak unto us *smooth* things!"

On a previous occasion God had sent Nathan to David with a message of promise and comfort (7:4, 5, etc.): now he is ordered to charge the king with his crimes. He did not decline the unwelcome task, but executed it faithfully. Not only was his mission an unenviable one, but it was far from easy. Few things are more difficult and trying to one with a sensitive disposition than to be called upon to reprove an erring brother. In pondering the method here followed by the prophet—his line of approach to David's slumbering conscience—there is valuable instruction for those of us who may be called upon to deal with similar cases. *Wisdom* from on High (we do not say "tact," the *world's* term, for more often that word is employed to denote the serpentine subtleties of the serpent than the honest dealings of the Holy Spirit) is sorely needed if we are to be a real help to those who have fallen by the wayside—lest we either condone their offenses, or make them despair of obtaining pardon.

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children: it did eat of his own meat, and drink of his own cup. and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that "(2 Samuel 12:1-4).

Nathan did not immediately charge David with his crimes: instead, he approached his conscience indirectly by means of a

parable—clear intimation that he was out of communion with God, for He never employed *that* method of revelation with those who were walking in fellowship with Him. The method employed by the prophet had the great advantage of presenting the facts of the case before David *without* stirring up his opposition of self-love and kindling resentment against being directly rebuked; yet causing him to pass sentence against himself without being aware of it—sure proof that Nathan had been given wisdom from above! "There scarcely ever was anything more calculated, on the one hand, to awaken emotions of sympathy, and, on the other, those of indignation, than the case here supposed; and the several circumstances by which the heart must be interested in the poor man's case, and by which the unfeeling oppression of his rich neighbor was aggravated" (Thomas Scott).

The prophet began, then, by giving an oblique representation of the vileness of David's offence, which was conveyed in such a way that the king's judgment was *obliged* to assent to the gross injustice of which he was guilty. The excuselessness, the heartlessness, and the abominable selfishness of his conduct was depicted, though Uriah's loyal service and the king's ingratitude and treachery, and the murder of him and his fellow-soldiers, was not alluded to— is there not a hint here that, when reproving an erring brother we should *gradually* lead up to the worst elements in his offense? Yet obvious as was the allusion in Nathan's parable. David perceived not its application unto himself—how this shows that when one is out of touch with God, he is devoid of spiritual discernment: it is only in God's light that we can see light!

"And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord lives, the man that has done this thing shall surely die" (v. 5). David supposed that a complaint was being preferred against one of his subjects. Forgetful of his own crimes, he was fired with indignation at the supposed offender, and with a solemn oath condemned him to death. In condemning the rich man, David unwittingly condemned himself. What a strange thing the heart of a believer is! what a medley dwells within it, often filled with righteous indignation against the sins of others, while blind to its own! Real need has each of us to solemnly and prayerfully ponder the questions of Romans 2:21-23. Self-flattery makes us quick to mark the faults of others, but blind to our own grievous sins. Just in proportion as a man is in love with his own sins, and resentful of being rebuked, will he be unduly severe in condemning those of his neighbors.

Having brought David to pronounce sentence upon a supposed offender for crimes of far less malignity than his own, the prophet now, with great courage and plainness, declared "*You* are the man" (v. 7), and speaks directly in the name of God: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel." First, David is reminded of the signal favors which had been bestowed upon him (verses 7, 8), among them the "wives" or women of Saul's court, from which he might have selected a wife. Second, God was willing to bestow yet more (v. 6): had he considered anything was lacking, he might have asked for it, and had it been for his good the Lord had freely granted it—cf. Psalm 84:11. Third, in view of God's tender mercies, faithful love, and all-sufficient gifts, he is asked "Wherefore have you *despised* the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight?" (v. 9). Ah, it is contempt of the divine authority which is the occasion of all sin—making light of the Law and its Giver, acting as though its precepts were mere trifles, and its threats meaningless.

The desired result was now accomplished. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13). Those words were not uttered lightly or mechanically, as the sequel shows; but this we must leave until our next chapter.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

His Repentance

2 Samuel 12

"The emperor Arcadius and his wife had a very bitter feeling towards Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople. One day, in a fit of anger, the emperor said to one of his courtiers, 'I would I were avenged of this bishop!' Several then proposed how this should be done. 'Banish him and exile him to the desert,' said one. 'Put him in prison', said another. 'Confiscate his property', said a third. 'Let him die,' said a fourth. Another courtier, whose vices Chrysostom had reproved, said maliciously, '*You* all make a great mistake. You will never punish him by such proposals. If banished the kingdom, he will feel God as near to him in the desert as here. If you put him in prison and load him with chains, he will still pray for the poor and praise God in the prison. If you confiscate his property, you merely take away his goods from the poor, not from him. If you condemn him to death, you open Heaven to him. Prince, do you wish to be revenged on him? Force him to commit sin. I know him; *this man* fears *nothing in the world but sin*.' O that this were the only remark which our fellows could pass on you and me, fellow-believer" (From the *Fellowship* magazine).

We recently came across the above in our reading, and thought it would form a most suitable introduction to this chapter. What cause have we *to fear* Sin!—that "abominable thing" which God hates (Jeremiah 44:4), that horrible disease which brought death into the world (Romans 5:12), that fearful thing which nailed to the Cross the Lord of glory (1 Peter 2:24), that shameful thing which fouls the believer's garments and so often brings reproach upon the sacred Name which he bears. Yes, good reason has each of us to *fear* sin, and to beg God that it may please Him to work in our hearts a greater horror and hatred of it. Is not this one reason why God permits some of the most eminent saints to lapse into outrageous evils, and place such upon record in His Word: that we should be more distrustful of ourselves, realizing that *we* are liable to the same disgracing of our profession; yes, that we certainly shall fall into such unless upheld by the mighty hand of God.

As we have seen, David sinned, and sinned grievously. What was yet worse, for a long season he refused to acknowledge unto God his wickedness. A period of months went by before he felt the heinousness of his conduct. Ah, my reader, it is the inevitable tendency of sin to deaden the conscience and harden the heart. Therein lies its most hideous feature and fatal aspect. Sin suggests innumerable excuses to its perpetrator and ever prompts to extenuation. It was thus at the beginning. When brought face to face with their Maker, neither Adam nor Eve evidenced any contrition; rather did they seek to vindicate themselves by placing the blame elsewhere. Thus it was with each of us while in a state of nature. Sin blinds and hardens, and nothing but divine grace can illumine and soften. Nothing short of the power of the Almighty can pierce the calloused conscience or break the sin-petrified heart.

Now God will not suffer any of His people to remain indefinitely in a state of spiritual insensibility: sooner or later He brings to light the hidden things of darkness, convicts them of their offenses, causes them to mourn over the same, and leads them to repentance. God employs a variety of means in accomplishing this, for in nothing does He act uniformly. He is limited to no one measure or method, and being sovereign He acts as seems good unto Himself. This may be seen by comparing some of the cases recorded in the Scriptures. It was a sense of God's awe-inspiring majesty which brought Job to repent of his self-righteousness and abhor himself (Job 42:1-6). It was a vision of the Lord's exalted glory which made Isaiah cry out, "Woe is me for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:1-5). A sight of Christ's miraculous power moved Peter to cry, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). Those on the day of Pentecost were "pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37) by hearing the apostle's sermon.

In the case of David God employed a *parable* in the mouth of His prophet to produce conviction. Nathan depicted a case where one was so vilely treated that any who heard the account of it must perforce censure him who was guilty of such an outrage. For though it is the very nature of sin to blind its perpetrator, yet it does not take away his sense of right and wrong. Even when a man is insensible to the enormity of his own transgressions, he is still capable of discerning evil in others; yes, in most instances it seems that the one who has a beam in his own eye is readier to perceive the mote in his fellow's. It was according to this principle that Nathan's parable was addressed to David: if the king was slow to confess his own wickedness, he would be quick enough to condemn like evil in another. Accordingly the case was spread before him.

In the parable (2 Samuel 12:1-4) an appeal is made to both David's affections and his conscience. The position of Uriah and his wife is touchingly portrayed under the figure of a poor man with his "one little ewe lamb," which was dear to him and "lay in his bosom." The one who wronged him is represented as a rich man with "exceeding many flocks and herds," which greatly heightened his guilt in seizing and slaying the one lone lamb of his neighbor. The occasion or the offence, the temptation to commit it, is stated as "there came a *traveler* unto the rich man": it was to minister unto *him* that the rich man seized upon the poor mans lamb. That "traveler" which came to him pictures the restless flesh, the active lusts, the wandering thoughts, the roving eyes of David in connection with Bathsheba. Ah, my reader, it is at *this* point we most need to be upon our guard. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (

Proverbs 4:23). Part of that task lies in regulating our thoughts and repelling unlawful imaginations. True it is that we cannot prevent wandering thoughts from entering our minds nor evil imaginations from surging up within us, but we *are* responsible to resist and reject them. But this is what David failed to do: he *welcomed* this "traveler," he *entertained* him, he *feasted* him, and feasted him upon that which was not *lawful*—with that which belonged to another: pictured in the parable by the lamb belonging to his neighbor. And, my reader, it is when we give place to our sinful lusts, indulge our evil imaginations, feed our wandering thoughts upon that which is unlawful, that we pave the way for a sad fall. "Travelers" *will* come to us—the mind will be active—and our responsibility is to see that they are fed with that which is lawful: ponder Philippians 4:8 in this connection.

Nathan, then, traced the trouble back to its source, and showed what it was which occasioned and led up to David's fearful fall. The details of the parable emphasized the excuselessness, the injustice, the lawlessness, the wickedness of his crime. He already had wives of his own, why, then, must he rob poor Uriah of his! The case was so clearly put, the guilt of the offender so evidently established, the king at once condemned the offender, and said, "The man that has done this thing shall surely die" (12:5). Then it was that the prophet turned and said to him, "*You* are the man." David did not flame forth in hot resentment and anger against the prophet's accusation; he made no attempt to deny his grievous transgression or offer any excuses for it. Instead, he frankly owned, "I have sinned against the Lord" (v. 13). Nor were those words uttered mechanically or lightly as the sequel so clearly shows, and as we shall now see.

David's slumbering conscience was now awakened, and he was made to realize the greatness of his guilt. The piercing arrow from God's quiver, which Nathan had driven into his diseased heart, opened to David's view the awfulness of his present case. Then it was that he gave evidence that, though woeful had been his conduct, nevertheless, he was not a reprobate soul, totally abandoned by God. "The dormant spark of divine grace in David's heart now began to rekindle, and before this plain and faithful statement of facts, in the name of God, his evasions vanished, and his guilt appeared in all its magnitude. He therefore was far from resenting the pointed rebuke of the prophet, or attempting any palliation of his conduct; but, in deep humiliation of heart, he confessed, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' The words are few; but the event proved them to have been the language of genuine repentance, which regards sin as committed against the authority and glory of the Lord, whether or not it have occasioned evil to any fellow-creature" (Thomas Scott).

In order fully to obtain the mind of God on any subject treated of in His Word, Scripture has to be diligently searched and one passage carefully compared with another—failure to observe this principle ever results in an inadequate or one-sided view. It is so here. Nothing is recorded in the historical account of Samuel about the deep exercises of heart through which David now passed; nothing is said to indicate the reality and depth of his repentance. For *that* we must turn elsewhere, notably to the penitential Psalms. There the Holy Spirit has graciously given us a record of what David was inspired to write thereon, for it is in the Psalms we find most fully delineated the varied experiences of soul through which the believer passes. There we may find an unerring description of every exercise of heart experienced by the saint in his journey through this wilderness scene; which explains why *this* book of Scripture has ever been a great favorite with God's people: therein they find *their own* inward history accurately described.

The two principal Psalms which give us a view of the heart exercises through which David now passed are the fifty-first and the thirty-second. Psalm 51 is evidently the earlier one. In it we see the fallen saint struggling up out of "the horrible pit and miry clay." In the latter we behold him standing again on firm ground with a new song in his mouth, even the blessedness of him "whose sin is covered." But both of them are evidently to be dated from the time when the sharp thrust of God's lancet in the band of Nathan pierced David's conscience, and when the healing balsam of God's assurance of forgiveness was laid by the prophet upon his heart. The passionate cries of the sorely stricken soul (Psalm 51) are really the echo of the divine promise—the efforts of David's faith to grasp and appropriate the merciful gift of pardon. It was the divine promise *of* forgiveness which was the basis and encouragement of the prayer *for* forgiveness.

It is to be noted that the title affixed to Psalm 51 is "A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." Beautifully did Spurgeon point out in his introductory remarks, "When the divine message had aroused his dormant conscience and made him see the greatness of his guilt, he wrote this Psalm. He had forgotten his psalmody while he was indulging his flesh, but he returned to his harp when his spiritual nature was awakened, and he poured out his song to the accompaniment of sighs and tears." Great as was David's sin, yet he repented, and was restored. The depths of his anguish and the reality of his repentance are evident in every verse. In it we may behold the grief and the desires of a contrite soul pouring out his heart before God, humbly and earnestly suing for His mercy. Only the Day to come will reveal how many sin-tormented souls have from this Psalm, "all blotted with the tears in which David sobbed out his repentance," found a path for backsliders in a great and howling desert.

"Although the Psalm is one long cry for pardon and restoration, one can discern an order and progress in its petitions—the order, not of an artificial reproduction of a past mood of mind, but the instinctive order in which the emotion of contrite desire will ever pour itself forth. In the Psalm all begins (v. 1), as all begins in fact, with the grounding of the cry for favor on 'Your loving-kindness,' 'the multitude of Your tender mercies'; the one plea that avails with God, whose love is its own motive and is own measure, whose past acts are the standard for all His future, whose own compassions, in their innumerable numbers, are more than the sum of our transgressions, though these be 'more than the hairs of our head.' Beginning with God's mercy, the penitent soul can learn to look next upon its own sin in all its aspects of evil" (Alexander Maclaren).

The depth and intensity of the Psalmist's loathing of self is clearly revealed by the various terms he uses to designate his crime. He speaks of his "transgressions" (verses 1, 3) and of his "iniquity" and "sin" (verses 2, 3). As another has forcibly pointed out, "Looked at in one way, he sees the separate acts of which he had been guilty—his lust, fraud, treachery, murder; looked at in another, he sees them all knotted together in one inextricable tangle of forked, hissing tongues, like the serpent-locks that coil and twist round a Gorgon head. No sin dwells alone; the separate acts have a common root, and the whole is matted together like the green growth on a stagnant pond, so that, by whatever filament it is grasped the whole mass is drawn towards you."

A profound insight into the essence and character of sin is here exhibited by the accumulated synonyms. It is "transgression," or as the Hebrew word might be rendered, "rebellion"—not merely the breach of an impersonal law, but the revolt of a subject's will against its true King; disobedience to God, as well as contravention of a standard. It is "iniquity"—perversion or distortion—acting unjustly or dealing crookedly. It is "sin" or "missing the mark," for all sin is a blunder, shooting wide of the true goal, whether regard be had for God's glory or our own well being and happiness. It is pollution and filth, from which nothing but atoning blood can cleanse. It is "evil" (v. 4), a vile thing which deserves only unsparing condemnation. It is a fretting leprosy, causing him to cry, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (v. 7).

"Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight" (v. 4). In these words David gives evidence of the sincerity of his contrition and proof that he was a regenerate man. It is only those possessing a spiritual nature that will view sin in the presence of God. The evil of all sin lies in its opposition to God, and a contrite heart is filled with a sense of the wrong done unto Him. Evangelical repentance mourns for sin because it has displeased a gracious God and dishonored a loving Father. David, then, was not content with looking upon his evil in itself, or in relation only to the people who had suffered by it. He had been guilty of crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah, and even Joab whom he made his tool, as well as against all his subjects; but dark as those crimes were, they assumed their true character only when seen as committed *against God.*

"Behold, I was shaped in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (v. 5). Many have been puzzled by this verse in the light of its setting, yet it should occasion no difficulty. Certainly it was not said by David in self-extenuation; rather was it to emphasize his own excuseless guilt. From the second half of verse 4 it is plain that he was vindicating God: *You* had nothing to do with my sin: it was all mine own—out of the proneness unto evil of my depraved nature. It was not You, but my own evil lusts, which tempted me. David was engaged in making *full* confession, and therefore did he acknowledge the defilement of his very nature. It was to humble himself, clear God, and magnify the divine grace, that David said verse 5.

In the clear light of Psalm 51 we cannot doubt the reality, the sincerity, nor the depth of David's repentance and brokenhearted contrition. We close, then, with a brief quotation from Thomas Scott: "Let not any vile hypocrite, who resembles David in nothing but his transgressions, and who adds the habit of allowed sin to all other aggravations, buoy up his confidence with *his* example; let him first imitate David's humiliation, repentance, and other eminent graces, before he thinks himself, or requires others to consider him, as a backslider."

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

His Forgiveness

2 Samuel 12

The inward experience of a believer consists largely of growing discoveries of his own vileness and of God's goodness, of his own excuseless failures and of God's infinite forbearance, with a frequent alternation between gloom and joy, confession and thanksgiving. Consequently, the more he reads and meditates upon the Word, the more he sees how exactly suited it is to his case, and how accurately his own checkered history is described therein. The two leading themes of the Scriptures are *sin and grace:* throughout the Sacred Volume each of these is traced to its original source, each is delineated in its true character, each is followed out in its consequences and ends, each is illustrated and exemplified by numerous personal examples. Strange as it first sounds, yet it is true that, upon these two, *sin and grace,* do turn all the transactions between God and the souls of men.

The force of what has just been said receives clear and striking demonstration in the case of David. Sin in all its hideousness is seen at work within him, plunging him into the mire; but grace is also discovered in all its loveliness, delivering and cleansing him. The one serves as a dark background from which the other may shine forth the more gloriously. Nowhere do we behold so unmistakably the fearful nature and horrible works of sin than in the man after God's own heart, so signally favored and so highly honored, yet failing so ignominiously and sinking so low. Yet nowhere do we behold so vividly the amazing grace of God as in working true repentance in this notorious transgressor, pardoning his iniquity, and restoring him to communion. King Saul was rejected for a far milder offense: ah, *he* was not in the covenant! O the awe-inspiring sovereignty of divine grace.

Not only has the Holy Spirit Faithfully recorded the awful details of David's sin, He has also fully described the heart-affecting repentance of the contrite kind. In addition thereto, He has shown us how he sought and obtained the divine forgiveness. Each of these is recorded for our learning, and, we may add, for our comfort. The first shows us the fearful tendency of the flesh which still indwells the believer, with its proneness to produce the vilest fruit. The second makes known to us the lamentable work which we make for ourselves when we indulge our lusts, and the bitter cup we shall then be obliged to drink. The third informs us that grievous though our case be, yet it is not hopeless, and reveals the course which God requires us to follow. Having already considered the first two at some length, we will now turn to the third.

As it is in the Psalms that the Spirit has recorded the exercises of David's broken heart, so it is therein we learn of how he obtained the divine pardon for his aggravated offences. We will begin by turning to one of the last of the "penitential" Psalms, which we believe was probably penned by David himself. "Out of the depths have I cried unto You, O Lord" (130:1). There are various "depths" into which God suffers His people, at times, to fall: "depths" of trial and trouble over financial losses, family bereavements, personal illness. There are also "depths" of sin and guilt, into which they may plunge themselves, with the consequent "depths" of conviction and anguish, of darkness and despair—through the hidings of God's face—and of Satanic opposition and despondency. It is these which are here more particularly in view.

The design of the Holy Spirit in Psalm 130 was to express and represent in the person and conduct of the Psalmist the case of a soul entangled in the meshes of Satan, overwhelmed by the conscious guilt of sin, but relieved by a discovery of the grace of God, with its deportment upon and participation of that grace. We quote the helpful paraphrase of John Owen in its opening verses: "O Lord, through my manifold sins and provocation I have brought myself into great distresses. Mine iniquities are always before me, and I am ready to be overwhelmed with them, as with a flood of waters; for they have brought me into depths, wherein I am ready to be swallowed up. But yet, although my distress be great and perplexing, I do not, I dare not, utterly despond and cast away all hopes of relief or recovery. Nor do I seek unto any other remedy, way, or means of relief, but I apply myself to You, Jehovah, to You alone. And in this my application unto You, the greatness and urgency of my troubles makes my soul urgent, earnest, and pressing in my supplication. While I have no rest, I can give You no rest; oh, therefore, attend and hearken unto the voice of my crying!"

When the soul is in such a case—in "the depths" of distress and despondency—there is no relief for it *but in God,* fully unburdening the heart to Him. The soul cannot rest in such a state, and no deliverance is to be obtained from any creature helps. "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, You are our gods: for *in You* the fatherless (the grief-stricken and helpless) finds mercy (Hos. 14:3). In God alone is help to be found. The vain things which deluded Romanists have invented—prayers "to the Virgin," penances, confession to "priests," fastings, masses, pilgrimages, works of compensation—are all "cisterns which hold no water." Equally useless are the counsels of the world to sin-distressed souls—to try a change of scenery, diversion from work, music, cheerful society, pleasure, etc. There is no peace but in the God of peace.

Now in his very lowest state the Psalmist *sought help* from the Lord, nor was his appeal in vain. And this is what we need to lay hold of when in similar circumstances; it is recorded to this very end. Dear Christian reader, however deplorable may be your condition, however dire your need, however desperate your situation, however intolerable the load on your conscience, your case *is not hopeless*. David cried, and was heard; he sought mercy, and obtained it; and the divine promise to you and me is "let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may *obtain mercy,* and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). David was not the only one who cried unto God out of "the depths." Think of the prophet Jonah: following a course of self-will, deliberately fleeing from God's commandment, then cast into the sea and swallowed by the whale: yet of him too we read, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and He heard me; out of the belly of Hell cried I, and You heard my voice" (2:2).

It was his hope in the plenitude of divine grace that moved David to seek unto the Lord. "If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul does *wait,* and in His word do I *hope*" (Psalm 130:3-5). In the third verse he owns that he could not stand before the thrice Holy One on the ground of his own righteousness, and that if God were to "mark iniquities," that is, impute them unto condemnation, then his case was indeed hopeless. In the 4th verse he humbly reminds God that there *was* forgiveness with Him, that He might be revered and adored—not trifled with and mocked, for divine pardon is not a license for future self-indulgence. In the fifth verse he hopefully waits for some "token for good" (Psalm 86:17), some "answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16) from the Lord.

But it is in Psalm 51 that we find David most definitely and most earnestly suing for God's pardon. The same intensity of feeling expressed in the use of so many words for sin, is revealed also in his reiterated synonyms for pardon. This petition comes from his lips again and again, not because he thought to be heard for his much speaking, but because of the earnestness of his longing. Such repetitions are signs of the persistence of faith, while those which last, like the prayers of Baal's priests "from morning until the time of evening sacrifice," indicate only the supplicant's doubts. The "vain repetition" against which the Lord warned, is not a matter of repeating the same form of request, but of mechanically multiplying the same—like the Romanist with his "pater noster's"—and supposing there is virtue and merit in so doing.

David prayed that his sins might be "blotted out" (v. 1), which petition conceives of them as being recorded against him. He prayed that he might be "washed" (v. 2) from them, in which they are felt to be foul stains, which require for their removal hard scrubbing and beating—for such is, according to some of the commentators, the force of the Hebrew verb. He prayed that he might be "cleansed" (v. 7), which was the technical word for the priestly cleansing of the leper, declaring him clear of the taint. There is a touching appropriateness in this last reference, for not only lepers, but those who had become defiled by contact with a dead body, were thus purified (Numbers 19); and on whom did the taint of this corruption cleave as on the murderer of Uriah? The prayer in the original is even more remarkable, For the verb is formed from the word for "sin," and if our language permitted it, would be rendered "You shall *un-sin* me."

"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). His sin had made manifest his weakness and sensuality, but his remorse and anguish evidenced that above and beyond all other desires was his abiding longing after God. The petitions of this Psalm clearly demonstrate that, despite his weakness and Satan's victory over him, yet the root of the divine matter was in David. In asking God to

create in him a clean heart, David was humbly placing himself on a level with the unregenerate: he realized too his own utter inability to quicken or renew himself—God alone can create either a new heart or a new earth. In asking for a right spirit, he was owning that God takes account of the state of our souls as well as the quality of our actions: a "*right* spirit" is a loving, trustful obedient, steadfast one, that none but God can either impart or maintain.

In the midst of his abased confessions and earnest cries for pardon, there comes with wondrous force and beauty the bold request for restoration to full communion: "Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation" (v. 12). How that request evidenced a more than ordinary confidence in the rich mercy of God, which would efface all the consequences of his sin! But note well *the* position occupied by this petition: it *followed* his request for pardon and purity—apart from *those,* "joy" would be nothing but vain presumption or insane enthusiasm. "And uphold me with Your free Spirit" (v. 12). First, he had prayed, "Take not Your Holy Spirit from me" (v. 11)—an obvious reference to the awful judgment which fell upon his predecessor, Saul; here, assured that the previous petition is granted, and conscious of his own weakness and inability to stand, he asks to be supported by that One who alone can impart and maintain holiness.

Before passing on to consider the gracious answer which David received, perhaps this is the best place to consider the question, Was he justified in asking God for forgiveness? or to put it in a form which may better satisfy the critical, Are we warranted in supplicating God for the pardon of our sins? for there are those today who insist that *we* occupy a different and superior relation to God than David did. It will no doubt surprise some of our readers that we raise such a question. One would naturally think it was so evident that we *ought* to pray for forgiveness, that none would question it; that such a prayer is so well founded upon Scripture itself, is so agreeable to our condition as erring believers, and is so honoring to God that we *should* take the place of penitent suppliants, acknowledging our offenses and seeking His pardoning mercy, that no further proof is required. But alas, so great is the confusion in Christendom today, and so much error abounds, that we feel obliged to devote one or two paragraphs unto the elucidation of this point.

There is a group, more or less influential, who argue that it is dishonoring to the blood of Christ for any Christian to ask God to pardon his sins, quoting "*Having* forgiven you *all* trespasses" (Colossians 2:13). These people confuse the impetration of the Atonement with its application, or in less technical terms, what Christ purchased for His people, with the Holy Spirit's making good the same to them in the court of their conscience. Let it be clearly pointed out that, in asking God for forgiveness, we do *not* pray as though the blood of Christ had never been shed, or as though *our* tears and prayers could make any compensation to divine justice. Nevertheless, renewed sins call for renewed repentance: true, we do not then need another Redeemer, but we *do* need a fresh exercise of divine mercy toward us (Hebrews 4:16), and a fresh application to our conscience of the cleansing blood (1 John 1:7, 9).

The saints of old prayed for pardon: "For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great" (Psalm 25:11). The Lord Jesus taught His disciples *to pray* "Forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12), and that prayer is assuredly for Christians today, for it is addressed to "Our *Father!*" In praying for forgiveness we ask God to be gracious to us for *Christ's* sake; we ask Him not to lay such sins to our charge—"enter not into judgment with Your servant" (Psalm 143:2); we ask Him for a gracious *manifestation* to us of His mercy to our conscience—"Make me *to hear* joy and gladness; that the bones which You have broken may rejoice" (Psalm 51:8); we ask Him for the comforting proofs of His forgiveness, that we may again have "the joy of His salvation."

Now it is in Psalm 32 that we learn of the answer which "The God of all grace" (1 Peter 5:10) granted unto His erring but penitent child. In his introductory remarks thereon Spurgeon said, "Probably his deep repentance over his great sin was followed by such blissful peace that he was led to pour out his spirit in the soft music of this choice song." The word "Maschil" at its head, signifies "Teaching": "The experience of one believer affords rich instruction to others, it reveals the footsteps of the flock, and so comforts and directs the weak." At the close of Psalm 51 David had prayed, "O Lord, open You my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Your praise" (v. 15): here the prayer has been heard, and this is the beginning of the fulfillment of his vow.

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputes not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1,2). In the former Psalm David had begun with the plaintive cry for mercy; here he opens with a burst of praise, celebrating the happiness of the pardoned penitent. There we heard the sobs of a man in the agonies of contrition and abasement; here we have an account of their blessed issue. There we had the multiplied synonyms for sin and for the forgiveness which was desired; here is the many-sided preciousness of forgiveness possessed, which runs over in various yet equivalent phrases. The one is a psalm of wailing; the other, to use its own words, a "song of deliverance."

The joy of conscious pardon sounds out in the opening "*blessed* is the man," and the exuberance of his spirit rings forth in the melodious variations of the one thought of forgiveness in the opening words. How gratefully he draws on the treasures of his recent experience, which he sets forth as the "taking away" of sin—the removal of an intolerable load from his heart; as the "covering" of sin—the hiding of its hideousness from the all-seeing Eye by the blood of Christ; as the "imputing not" of sin—a debt discharged. How blessed the realization that his own forgiveness would encourage other penitent souls—"*For this* shall every one that is godly pray unto You" (v. 6). Finally, how precious the deep assurance which enables the restored one to say, "You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall compass me about with songs of deliverance" (v. 7)!

Here, then, is hope for the greatest backslider, if he will but humble himself before the God of all grace. True sorrow *for* sin is followed by the pardon *of* sin: "If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "Is it possible that such a backslider from God can be recovered, and admitted afterwards to comfortable communion with Him? Doubtless it is: 'for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him there is plenteous redemption,' and He will never cast out one humble penitent believer, whatever his former crimes have been, nor suffer Satan to pluck any of His sheep out of His hand. Let then those who are fallen return to the Lord without delay, and seek forgiveness through the Redeemer's atoning blood" (Thomas Scott).

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

His Chastenings

2 Samuel 12

It may strike some readers as strange that our last chapter upon David's *forgiveness* should be immediately followed by one upon his *chastening:* surely if God had pardoned his transgressions we would not expect to hear of His rod now being laid upon him. But there will be no difficulty if we carefully distinguish between two of the principal offices which God sustains, namely, the character of moral *Ruler* of the world, and that of the *Judge* of His creatures: the one relating to His dealings with us in time, the other pertaining to His passing formal sentence upon our eternal destiny; the one concerning His governmental actions, the other His penal verdict. Unless this distinction be plainly recognized and given a constant place in our thoughts, not only will our minds be clouded with confusion, but our peace will be seriously undermined and our hearts brought into bondage; worst of all, shall entertain erroneous ideas of God and sadly misinterpret His dealings with us in providence. How we need to pray that "our love may abound yet more and more *in knowledge* and in all judgment, that we may try things *that differ*" (Philippians 1:9, 10 margin).

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Howbeit, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto you shall surely die" (2 Samuel 12:13, 14). Here are the two things to which we have just called attention, and placed moreover in immediate juxtaposition. The first exhibits to us the Lord in His character as *Judge,* declaring that David had been pardoned for his great transgression—such a word (spoken now by the Spirit in power to the conscience of a penitent believer) is *anticipatory* of God's verdict at the Great Assize. The second manifests the Lord in His character of *Ruler,* declaring that His holiness required Him to take governmental notice of David's wickedness, so that demonstration might be made that His laws cannot be broken with impunity. Let us proceed to follow out this double thought a little further.

"He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10). Here is a verse which no believer will hesitate to set to his seal that it is true, for he has abundant evidence thereof in his own personal experience, and therefore will he positively affirm, If I received my just deserts, I had been cast into Hell long ago. Rightly did Spurgeon say on this passage, "We ought to praise the Lord for what He has

not done, as well as for what He has wrought for us." O what cause has each Christian to marvel that his perverseness and sottishness have not utterly exhausted God's patience. Alas that our hearts are so little affected by the infinite forbearance of God: O that His goodness may lead us to repentance.

Have we not abundant reason to conclude, because of our base ingratitude and vile behavior, that God would withhold from us the communications of His Spirit and the blessings of His providence, cause us to find the means of grace profitless, and allow us to sink into a state of settled backsliding? Is it not a wonder that He does not so deal with us? Truly, "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." And why? Because He dealt with Another "after our sins" and exacted from Him full satisfaction to His justice. And payment God cannot *twice* demand: first at my bleeding Surety's hand, and then again at mine. God rewarded Christ according to our iniquities, and now He rewards us according to Christ's merits. Hallelujah. Heaven be praised for such a Gospel! May this old, old truth, come with new power and sweetness unto our souls.

"He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." This is true *penally* (that is God's dealings with us as Judge) and with respect to the *eternal* consequences of our sins. Yet this does *not* mean that the sins believers commit are ignored by God as the moral Ruler of this world, that He refrains from dealing with us governmentally. The whole of His dealings with His people Israel (who were in covenant relationship with Him) shows otherwise. The New Testament also forbids such a conclusion: see Galatians 6:7; 1 Corinthians 11:29, 30! Yet it must be remembered that God exercises His sovereignty in this, as in all things: the extent to which and the manner in which God makes His people smart for their "inventions" is determined by His own mere good pleasure.

Though God forgives His people their sins, yet He frequently gives them plain proof of His holy abhorrence of the same, and causes them to taste something of the bitter fruits which they bring forth. Another scripture which brings out this dual truth is, "You were a God that forgave them, though You took vengeance of their inventions" (Psalm 99:8). What could possibly be plainer than this: God pardoning His people, yet also manifesting His sore displeasure against their transgressions. A striking case in point—obviously included in Psalm 99:6-8—is recorded in Exodus 32. There we see Israel worshiping the golden calf in the lascivious manner of the heathen. In response to the intercession of Moses, they were forgiven: "The Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people" (v. 14). Nevertheless, God took vengeance of their inventions, "And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made" (v. 35).

Another example is seen in the case of the unbelief of Moses and Aaron at Meribah: though God pardoned the guilt of their anger as to eternal death, yet He took vengeance by not suffering them to conduct Israel into the promised land: see Numbers 20:12, 24. And so it is still, as many a Christian discovers from sorrowful experience when God takes him to task for his sinful "inventions" and visits upon him His governmental displeasure. Yet this in nowise clashes with the fact that "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." There is *mercy* in our chastenings, and no matter how heavily the rod may smite, we have good cause to say, "And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that You our God have punished us *less* than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra 9:13).

Before passing on, let us anticipate the objection of some tried saints, whose case may be quite extreme. There are some who are smarting so severely beneath the chastening rod of God that to them it certainly seems that He *is* dealing with them "after their sins" and rewarding them "according to their iniquities." The light of His countenance is withheld from them, His providential dealings wear only a dark frown, and it appears very much as though He has "forgotten to be gracious." Ah, dear friend, if your heart is in any measure truly exercised before God, then your case is far from being hopeless, and to you apply those words "Know therefore that God exacts of you less than your iniquity deserves" (Job 11:6). My brother, even your present *sufferings* are far, very far from being as great as your *sins.*

Now what we have sought to bring out above receives striking exemplification in the case of David. In a very real sense God did not deal with him after his sins, nor reward him according to his iniquities; yet in another sense, He did. God sent a prophet to faithfully rebuke him, He wrought conviction and repentance in David, He heard his cry, blotted out his transgressions, as Psalm 32 so blessedly shows. Yet though God pardoned David as to the guilt of eternal death, saved his soul, and spared his life, yet He "took vengeance of his inventions." There was a needs-be why sore afflictions came upon him: the divine holiness must be vindicated, His governmental righteousness must be manifested, a solemn warning must be given to wrong-doers, and David himself must learn that "the way of the transgressor is hard." O that writer and reader may lay this to heart and profit therefrom.

Through Nathan God said to David, "Wherefore have you despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? you have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house; because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them unto your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun (2 Samuel 12:9-11). What a solemn exhibition of God's governmental righteousness! David must reap as he had sown. He had caused Uriah to be slain by the sword, and now God tells him "the sword shall never depart from tine house"; he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and now he hears that his own wives shall be defiled. How true are those words "For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2)!

God has declared that to the froward He will show Himself froward" (Psalm l6:26), and frequently does He punish sin *in its* own *kind.* Upon the burning lusts of the Sodomites He rained down fire and brimstone from Heaven (Genesis 19:24). Jacob deceived his father by means of the skin of a kid (Genesis 29:16), and he in turn was thus deceived by his sons, who brought him Joseph's coat dipped in the blood of a kid (Genesis 37:31), saying he had been devoured by a wild beast. Because Pharaoh had cruelly ordered that the male infants of the Hebrews should be drowned (Exodus 1:24), the Egyptian king and all his hosts were swallowed up by the Red Sea (Exodus 14:26). Nadab and Abihu sinned grievously by offering "strange fire" unto the Lord, and accordingly they were consumed by fire from Heaven (Leviticus 10:1, 2). Adonibezek cut off the thumbs and toes of the kings he took in battle, and in like manner the Lord rewarded him (Judges 1:6, 7). Agag's sword made women childless, and so his own mother was made childless by his being torn in pieces before the Lord (1 Samuel 15:33).

What proofs are these that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). What evidences are these of the inflexible justice of God: none need fear but what the Judge of all the earth will "do right." What solemn intimations are they that in the Day to come each one shall be judged "according to his works." What warnings are these that God is not to be mocked. But let it not be forgotten that if it is written, "He who sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption": it is also added (though not nearly so frequently quoted) that "he who sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:8). The same principle of God's granting an exact quid pro quo applies to the service of His ministers: "He which sows sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which sows bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Corinthians 9:6)—the harvest shall not only be answerable to the seed and the reward to the work, but it will be greater or less according to the quantity and quality of the work.

Nor does the last-quoted passage mean that God is going to reward His ministers according to the fruit and success of their work, but rather according to the labor itself, be it little or much, better or worse: "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Corinthians 3:8). God in His sovereignty may set His servant over a blind and perverse people (as He did Ezekiel), who so far from profiting from his ministry, add iniquity to their iniquity; nevertheless his work is with God (Isaiah 49:4). So too with the rank and file of Christians the more bountifully they sow the seeds of good works, the more shall they reap; and the more sparingly they sow, the less will be the harvest: "Knowing that whatever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:8). What an incentive and stimulus should that be unto all of us: "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we *shall* reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

But to return to David. "And Nathan departed unto his house" (v. 15). The prophet had faithfully delivered his message, and now he withdrew from the court. It is striking and blessed to see how God *honored* His servant: He moved David to name one of his sons "Nathan" (1 Chronicles 3:5), and it was from

him that Christ, according to the flesh, descended (Luke 3:31). "And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick" (v. 15). The prophet's words now began to receive their tragic fulfillment. Behold here the sovereignty of God: the parents lived, the child must die. See here too God's respect for His law: David had broken it, but He executes it, by visiting the sins of the father upon the son.

"David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth" (v. 16). It is touching to see this seasoned warrior so affected by the sufferings of his little one—proof of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, for the penitent are pitiful. It is true that the prophet had said, "The child also that is born unto you shall surely die" (v. 14), yet David seems to have cherished the hope that this threat was but a *conditional* one, as in the case of Hezekiah: his words "while the child was yet alive I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" (v. 22) strongly appear to bear this out. In his fasting and lying all night upon the ground David humbled himself before the Lord, and evidenced both the sincerity of his repentance and the earnestness of his supplication. What is recorded in verse 17 illustrates the fact that the natural man is quite incapable of understanding the motives which regulate the conduct of believers.

"And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died" (v. 18). No detail of Scripture is meaningless. It was on the eighth day that the male children of the Israelites were to be circumcised (Genesis 17:12, etc.), thus in the death of his son before it could receive the sign of the covenant a further proof was given David of God's governmental displeasure! Though it was a mercy to all concerned that the infant was removed from this world, yet inasmuch as its death had been publicly announced as a rebuke for their sin (v. 14), its decease was a manifest chastening from God upon David and Bathsheba.

"Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshiped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat" (v. 20). This is beautiful, reminding us of Job's bowing beneath God's chastening rod and worshiping Him when he received tidings of the death of his children. How different was this from the disconsolate grief and rebellion against God which is so often displayed by worldlings when *their* loved ones are matched away from them. Weeping should never hinder worshiping: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray" (James 5:13). How the terms of this verse rebuke the personal untidiness of some who attend public worship!

"And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the Lord loved him" (v. 24). Having meekly bowed before God's rod, humbled himself beneath His mighty hand, and publicly owned Him in worship, David now received a token of God's favor: "Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days" (1 Chronicles 22:9). The birth and name given to Solomon was an evidence that God was *reconciled* to David, as it was also an earnest of the tranquility which would obtain in Israel during his reign. Solomon was also named "Jedidiah" which signifies "beloved of the Lord"—signal demonstration of the *sovereignty* of divine grace!

The chapter closes (verses 26-31) with a brief account of Israel's capture of Rabbah, the royal city of the Ammonites. Further proof was this of God's grace unto David: he prospered his arms notwithstanding his aggravated sins. The additional chastisements which came upon him under the governmental dealings of God will be considered by us in the chapters which follow.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

His Son Absalom

2 Samuel 13

The chastenings, which were the natural fruits of David's sins, quickly began to fall upon him. Though God had made with him a covenant "ordered in all things and sure" (2 Samuel 23:5), and though he was the man after His own heart, yet He was far from regarding his sins lightly. The honor of Jehovah's name required that such transgressions as David's should be marked by no ordinary tokens of His displeasure. He had "given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (2 Samuel 12:14), and therefore did He proclaim His disapproval more loudly by suffering David to live and pass through one tremendous sorrow after another, than had He slain him instantly after his crime against Uriah. Yet we may also behold therein the faithfulness, wisdom, and grace of God toward His servant by using those very sorrows for the renewing of him in holiness; that this *was* accomplished appears blessedly in the sequel.

David was now to prove to the full the solemn truth of "Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backslidings shall reprove you: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that you have forsaken the Lord your God, and that My fear is not in you, says the Lord God of hosts" (Jeremiah 2:19). It was through those nearest and dearest to himself that David was to experience what "an evil thing and bitter" it is to depart from the Lord. "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of *your own house*" (2 Samuel 12:11) the Lord had declared. What must have been the feelings of his poor heart with this dread threat hanging over his family! How often do *we* moralize upon the wisdom and mercy of God in withholding from us a knowledge of the future: how it would spoil our present peace and comfort if we were acquainted with the trials and sorrows lying ahead of us; the more so if it were now revealed to us the evils which would yet overtake the members of our household. But the case was otherwise with David: *he knew* that the sore judgments of God were about to fall within his family circle!

One can readily imagine with what trepidation David would now look upon his several children, wondering upon which of them the divine blow would first fall. The death of Bathsheba's infant was but the prelude of the fearful storm which was about to descend upon his loved ones. It seems quite clear from all that follows, one of the family-failings of David was that he had been too easy-going with and indulgent toward his children, allowing his natural affections to override his better judgment, instead of (as it should be) the judgment guiding the affections—it is not without reason and meaning that the head is set *above* the heart in our physical bodies! No doubt the fact that David had several wives made it much more difficult to rule his offspring as duty required—how one wrong leads to another!

As we have seen in earlier chapters, David was a man of strong natural passions, and the deep feelings he cherished for his children was in full accord therewith. The fear of his servants to tell him his infant was dead (2 Samuel 12:18); the advice of Jonadab to Amnon, who had read David's disposition aright, to feign himself sick, that "when his father came to see him" (2 Samuel 13:5) he might offer his requests; his "weeping so sore for the death of his son, and then again, his anguish having subsided, "his soul longing to go forth" to the other son who had slain him (2 Samuel 13:39); and the final instructions to his officers touching the safety of Absalom, even when he was in arms against his father—"deal gently, for my sake, with Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:5)—being far more concerned with the care of his child than the outcome of the battle; are so many illustrations of this trait.

But that which throws light upon the doting fondness of David for his children, a fondness which caused him to set aside the clamant calls of duty, comes out in his failure to punish Amnon for his crime against Tamar, and his failure to punish Absalom for his murder of Amnon. What light is thrown upon this infirmity of David's when, in connection with Adonijah's rebellion, "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why have you done so?" (1 Kings 1:6). Little wonder, then, that his own offspring were made a scourge to him. Alas, he followed far too closely the evil example of Eli, the high priest of Israel, of whom it is written, "his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Samuel 3:13). Wisely did Thomas Scott say, "Children are always uncertain comforts, but *indulged* children surely prove trials to pious parents, whose foolish fondness induces them to neglect their duty to God"—who *requires* them to duly discipline their offspring.

Yet David's children had been preserved from open wickedness in their early years: it was not until *their father* became guilty of aggravated crimes that the restraining hand of God was removed from *them!* How this should speak to the hearts of parents today: if *they* forsake the paths of righteousness, there is good reason to believe that God will chasten them by suffering *their offspring* to do likewise. Children in their youth naturally consider the evil example of their parents an excuse why they may follow in their steps; and grown up ones too are emboldened and confirmed in sin by the sinful conduct of fathers and mothers. "Let this be a warning to us to watch and pray against temptations, lest by the misconduct of one unguarded hour we should occasion such future consequences to our offspring, and such misery to ourselves throughout our future lives" (Thomas Scott).

It is both deeply instructive and unspeakably solemn to observe *the method* followed by the Lord in the execution of His awful threatenings through Nathan. It was not that David's palace was now burned by fire from Heaven or razed to the ground by a cyclone. Nor was it that one of his Sons was killed by a flash of lightning, and another swallowed up by an earthquake. No,

that is not God's customary way: not by physical miracles, but by the operation of moral laws, is the retribution meted out by His government conducted. "God denounced the most grievous afflictions against the house of David on account of his conduct toward Uriah. Those afflictions were all executed in a way of Providence . . . Every part of the divine sentence against David was executed by His providence without a miracle. Who can work like God?" (Alexander Carson). This exceedingly striking and worthy of our closest attention, for it casts much light upon God's government over the world today.

Yes, the manner in which God's awful threatenings were fulfilled is most noteworthy: it was done in a way of *natural consequence* from David's own transgressions. The curse which God pronounced upon him corresponded exactly to the character of his iniquities. He had despised the commandment of the Lord (2 Samuel 12:9, namely, "You shall not commit adultery") by taking to himself the wife of another man, and now the women of his own household should he defiled. He had become a man of blood in the butchery of Uriah, and now of blood his own family should be made to drink. He had yielded to his lusts, and by that same baneful passion in others was he to be scourged for the rest of his days. The *complexion* of his remaining years was set by his own conduct in the palace at Jerusalem! And though David himself was spared from the violent hand of the avenger, yet he was long made the spectacle of righteous suffering before the world.

In marked contrast from the opening of 2 Samuel 11, chapter 12 closes by showing us David occupying again his proper position. There he slighted the post of duty, but here he is seen at the head of his people fighting the battles of the Lord. In the previous case David was made to pay dearly for his fleshly ease, but here God prospered his efforts by delivering Rabbah into his hands. After the victory David and his army returned *to* Jerusalem, yet only for him to suffer one calamitous grief after another. The chapter which is now to be considered by us chronicles two of the most horrible crimes which ever disrupted the harmony of a family circle. One of David's sons now dishonors David's daughter, while another of his sons, after biding his time, revenged the outraged honor of his sister by murdering her seducer. Thus, lust and fratricide now desolated the king's own household.

David's children had learned the lesson which the fall of their father had taught them. Tragic indeed was the harvest the king now reaped, for a parent can have no sharper pang than the sight of his own sins reappearing in his children. "David saw the ghastly reflection of his unbridled passion in his eldest son's foul crime (and even a gleam of it in his unhappy daughter), and of his murderous craft in his second son's bloody revenge" (Alexander Maclaren). There is little need for us to dwell upon the revolting details. First, Amnon had determined to commit the fearful sin of incest against his half-sister, who was "fair" or beautiful (2 Samuel 13:1). Ah, how many a young woman has grieved because she was not pretty: alas, good looks often prove to be a fatal snare, and those endowed with them need to be doubly cautious.

The most solemn features of this first calamity may be seen in tracing the workings of God's righteous retribution in it. First, we have the Spirit's time mark in the opening words of our chapter, "and it came to pass after this." which, as we have intimated above, was when the king had returned to *Jerusalem*—where his own fearful fall had taken place! Second, Amnon was the king's oldest son (2 Samuel 3:2) and therefore the one in immediate line for the throne, and probably the one he loved the most. Third, Amnon was at a loss to think of means for the gratification of his base desires, but there was at hand a cunning counselor who promptly devised a plot whereby he succeeded, and that man was a nephew of David's (v. 3)! Fourth, the workings of Providence were such that David himself was made an unwilling accessory to his daughter's ravishment. When the king saw Amnon, who pretended to be sick, God not only withheld from him a discernment of his evil designs, but David was the one who sent for Tamar: as poor Uriah had been deceived by him, now he was deceived by his son!

After gross insult (v. 17) had been added to her grievous injury Tamar found a home with Absalom, who was her full brother. His question to her (v. 20) indicates that the character of Amnon was well known, which renders the more excuseless the king's consenting for his daughter to visit him. Yet "the counsel of the Lord, that *must* stand" (Proverbs 19:21), and though it evidenced His "severity" (Romans 11:22), nevertheless it was what even this world would designate a case of "poetic justice," so far as David was concerned. The more closely the case be examined the more will appear the righteous retribution which characterizes it. As Joab had been so far from refusing to execute David's wicked plan, but had been a willing party to the same (2 Samuel 11:15, 16), so Jonadab instead of recoiling with horror from the vile design of Amnon, helped him to secure it!

"But when king David heard of all these things, he was very wroth" (v. 21). A severe testing of his character was now presented, for it must be remembered that as king he was the chief magistrate in Israel, and therefore under the highest obligations to see that the law of God was impartially enforced. Merely to be "very wroth" by no means met the requirements of the case: as the head of the nation it was his bounden, though exceedingly painful, duty, to see that his debauched son was punished. The law was express concerning such a case (see Leviticus 20:17), yet there is no intimation that David inflicted this penalty. Was it the workings of his own guilty conscience (calling to remembrance his sin), or parental softness toward his offspring which deterred him? Whichever it was, a dangerous precedent was set, for mildness unto transgressors by magistrates only serves to encourage greater evils. But though the king failed in his public duty, later on, the Lord dealt with Amnon, and in such a way as to add greatly to David's domestic trials.

"And Absalom spoke unto his brother Amnon neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon because he had forced his sister Tamar" (v. 22). The Holy Spirit now introduces to our notice one of the most despicable, vile and God-abandoned characters whose record is chronicled in the Scriptures. The first thing that we learn about Absalom is his antecedents: he issued From a heathenish stock! His mother was a Gentile, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (2 Samuel 3:3). The Geshurites were a fierce and intractable people, and the strain of their lawlessness passed into his blood. In taking Maacah unto himself David disobeyed a plain command of the Lord: "Neither shall you make marriages with them: your daughter you shall not give unto his son, nor his daughter shall you take unto your son" (Deuteronomy 7:3). Need we wonder then that, having sown the wind, David was made to reap the whirlwind? God will not be defied with impunity.

"To Maacah were born Tamar and Absalom. Both were fair; both attractive. 'In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.' David probably was proud of the attractiveness which adorned his house, and was willing to forget the source from which it sprang. The attractiveness wrought its effects; and as might be expected from the attractiveness of nature, the resulting consequences were sin and sorrow. The beauty of Tamar was the cause of sin and destruction to Amnon, who fell beneath the revengeful hand of Absalom his brother; and the attractiveness of Absalom wrought on the hearts of the men of Israel, until they were drawn away from David and his throne. Such were the results of an attractiveness derived from sources foreign and forbidden to God's people" (B. W. Newton).

Little wonder that Mr. Newton went on to ask, "Has Christianity profited by the lesson, or has it also formed alliances with the stranger?" Alas, that these questions are so easily answered. One of the chief reasons why poor Christendom is in such a sad condition today is because she has been so largely attracted by that which makes an appeal to the flesh. Nor is this evil by any means restricted to Rome, with its ornate architecture, imposing ritual, appeal to the senses. The same thing, in varied forms, now blights the greater part of Protestantism. The plain exposition of the Scriptures is replaced by the popular topics of the day, congregational singing has been pushed into the background by professional vocalists in the choir, and all sorts of worldly devices are employed to "draw" the young people. All of this is but the present form of Israel being allured by the physical attractions of a godless Absalom.

Singularly enough the meaning of "Absalom" is "the father of peace" but his was the peace of a *deceiver.* He was the child of him that was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and he knew no other master—there is not a single intimation that God ever had any place in his thoughts. The deceitfulness and treachery of his character appears from the beginning. His words to Tamar were "hold now your peace, my sister; he (Amnon) is your brother: regard not this thing. So Tamar *remained* desolate in her brother Absalom's house" (v. 20), apparently with no suspicion of his murderous intentions. Meanwhile, "Absalom spoke unto his brother neither good nor bad: for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar." The spirit of revenge consumed him, and he only waited his time for a suitable opportunity to exercise it. Absalom was the rod appointed by the Lord for the further chastening of David; a rod, as we have seen, taken out of his own stem, his own child. "The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small!"

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

His Son Absalom

(Continued)

2 Samuel 13

Tamar, David's daughter, as we saw in our last, found an asylum in the home of Absalom, following the vile treatment which she had received from Amnon—another of David's sons, but by a different wife. Her brother, we are told, "hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar." Nor did Absalom's enmity abate at all with the passing of time, but merely waited an occasion which he deemed would be most suitable for taking his revenge. This only served to make more apparent his real character. There is an anger which is sinless, as is clear from "When He (Christ) had looked round about on them *with anger,* being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5). Yet there is so much of a combustible nature in the flesh of a Christian that he needs to turn into earnest prayer that exhortation, "Be you angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).

But the sun *had* gone down upon Absalom's wrath: a deadly fire burned in his heart which two full years had no power to quench, his crafty soul biding its time until a way opened to let out his rage on its victim. Implacable hatred burned in Absalom toward his half-brother as though it had been kindled but yesterday; and now his subtlety devised a sure passage for it. He was most manifestly a child of the devil, and the lusts of his father he was ready to willingly execute. The deceit of the "serpent" now ministered unto the fury of the "lion," for those are the two predominant characteristics in the archenemy of God and men. This is clear from the tactics he followed with our blessed Lord. First, we see his venomous deceit in the Temptation, and then his fiendish cruelty at the Cross. Similarly does he work now, and thus it ever is with those whom he dominates.

"And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheep-shearers in Baalhazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's Sons" (2 Samuel 13:23). Corresponding to the old English custom of "harvest-home," when a time of feasting and merriment followed the garnering of it, in Palestine the annual occasion of "sheep shearing" was made an event of festive celebration and of the coming together of relatives and friends. This is clear from Genesis 38:12, 13 and 1 Samuel 25:4, 36: for in the one we read, "and Judah was comforted (after the death of his daughter), and went up unto his sheep-shearers in Timnath, with his friend," while in the other we are told that "Nabal did shear his sheep . . . and behold, he held a *feast* in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken."

During quite a lengthy interval Absalom had concealed his bitter hatred against his half-brother under an appearance of indifference, for we read that he "spoke unto him neither good nor bad" (v. 22). But now Absalom deemed the time ripe for vengeance. To cover his base design he invites "all the king's sons' to his feast, which he had purposed should be the place of execution for his unsuspecting victim. Only the last great Day will reveal how often treacherous designs have been cloaked by apparent kindness—Judas betrayed his Master not with a blow, but a kiss!

But Absalom went to yet greater pains to hide his base intention. "And Absalom came to the king and said, Behold now, your servant has sheep-shearers; let the king, I beseech you, and his servants go with your servant" (v. 24). That was downright hypocrisy, for Absalom could have had no desire that David himself should be on the ground to witness the treachery against his son. Nor was the success of his cunning plot endangered by this specious move, for he had good reason to believe that his father would decline the invitation. Such indeed was the case: "And the king said to Absalom, Nay my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto you." How that evidenced one of the many noble traits of David's character: his unselfish thoughtfulness of others—his kindly consideration by refusing to put his son to unnecessary expense. "And he pressed him," yet a little later sought to turn the hearts of all Israel against him and wrest the kingdom from his hand! "Howbeit he would not go, but blessed him" (v.25), that is, pronounced a patriarchal blessing upon him.

"Then said Absalom, If not, I pray you, let my brother Amnon go with us" (v.26). Here was the real design of Absalom in pressing the king to be present himself at the forthcoming family-union and feast: having considerately declined his son's invitation, it would be doubly difficult to refuse his second request. Yet how this pretended deference unto David's parental authority exhibited the perfidy of Absalom! He was determined to get Amnon into his toils, yet veiled his bloodthirstiness under a pretense of affection and filial respect. "And the king said unto him, Why should he go with you?" (v.26). David was evidently somewhat uneasy or at least wondered what lay behind the outward show of Absalom's friendliness toward Amnon. But "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turns it wherever He will" (Proverbs 21:1); and so the sequel clearly demonstrated.

"But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him" (v. 27). Absalom prevailed against the king's better judgment. It may be that David yielded to his son's urgency from the fond hope that a full reconciliation would be effected between the two brothers, but whether or not that be the case, we must look higher and behold the over-ruling hand of God accomplishing His own counsel. The Lord had declared that "the sword shall never depart from 'your house" and "I will raise up evil against you out of your own house" (2 Samuel 12:10, 11), and from the execution of that judgment there was no escape. Divine providence so directed things that David, by giving his consent for Amnon to attend the feast, became an unwitting accessory to Amnon's murder. How much heavier did this make the blow to the poor king's heart! Yet how absolutely just were the divine dealings with him!

"Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark you now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant" (v. 28). Birds of a feather flock together: Absalom had succeeded in gathering around him unscrupulous menials who were ready to aid him in any villainy. They knew that the Lord God had commanded "you shall *not* kill," yet were they ready to damn their souls to please their wicked master. The vilest characters are rarely at a loss to find those who will aid them in the blackest of crimes. The fearful impiety of the reprobate Absalom appears in "when *I* say unto you, Smite Amnon, then kill him: fear not"—either God or man, be regardless of consequences. Such reckless abandon marks those who are given up by God.

But let us now observe how *the righteous retribution of God* appears in every detail of this incident. First, as David's murder of Uriah was not a sudden surprisal into evil, but a thing deliberately premeditated in cold blood, so Absalom's removal of Amnon callously planned beforehand, as verse 28 shows. Second, as the slaying of Uriah was a means to an end—that David might obtain Bathsheba; so the killing of Amnon was but a preliminary to Absalom's design of obtaining the kingdom—by removing his older brother who was heir to the throne. Third, as David did not slay Uriah by his own hand, but made Joab an accomplice, so Absalom involved his servants in the guilt of his crime—instead of striking the fatal blow himself. Fourth, as David made Uriah "drunk" before his death (11:13), so Amnon was struck down while "his heart was merry with wine"! Who can fail to see the superintending government of God here?

"And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded" (v. 29). How little can we foresee when tragic calamity may smite a family reunion—"you know not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). How lightly we should hold the things of earth, for the most treasured of them are likely to be rudely snatched from us at any moment. The predicted "sword" is now drawn in David's house, and the rest of his sons knew not how soon *they* might fall victims to Absalom's bloodthirstiness. Therefore do we read, "Then all the king's sons arose, and every man got him upon his mule, and fled" (v. 29). What an ending to a time of festivity! How vain are the pleasures of this poor world! How slender is the thread upon which hangs the lives even of king's sons!

"And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom has slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left" (v. 30). How often the bearers of evil tidings make bad matters worse by excuselessly exaggerating them! Things were now represented unto David as being much blacker than they really were. There is a warning for *us* here: not to credit reports of evil until they are definitely corroborated. "Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent" (v. 31). How ready we are to believe the worst! Poor David was now as sorely afflicted by the false news brought to him as though it had been authentic. But alas, how slow we are to believe the Good News; such is fallen man—ready to receive the most egregious lie, but rejecting the authority of Divine Truth.

"And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose that they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this has been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar" (v. 32). Jonadab appears to have had knowledge from the beginning that Absalom had definitely purposed to slay his brother, yet had he refrained from informing the king—so that he might use his influence to reconcile the two men, or at least take steps to prevent murder being done. Great indeed was the guilt of Jonadab. But again we perceive Providence overruling things. God sometimes permits the evil plots of men to come to light, so that their intended victims receive timely warnings (

Acts 9:23-25), while in other instances He seals the mouths of those possessing such knowledge;. and this as best subserves His own inexorable designs.

"But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur, and was there three years" (verses 37, 38). By his foul crime the land of Israel had been defiled and his own life forfeited (Numbers 35:33). He was now a debtor to that Law of which David was the guardian, for the king held his throne on the terms of reading the Law continually and obeying the same (Deuteronomy 17: 18-20). It is true that David had not executed punishment for Amnon's incest, but he could scarcely expect him to wink at barbarous fratricide. Nor could this abandoned wretch obtain protection in any of the "cities of refuge," for they afforded no shelter unto those who were guilty of willful murder. Only one alternative, then, was left him, and that was to flee unto his mother's people; and there it was that he found an asylum.

From the human side of things it seems a great pity that this fugitive from justice did not continue at Geshur, the place of his heathen origin; but the sentimental heart of his father yearned after him: "And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon" (v. 39). Time is a great healer, and after three years most of David's horror at Absalom's sin and grief over Amnon's death had worn off. "At first he could not find in his heart to do justice on him: now he can almost find in his heart to take him into his favor again. This was David's infirmity" (Matthew Henry). One can understand David's attitude, and his subsequent conduct, from a natural viewpoint; but from the spiritual side it betokened another sad lapse, for divine holiness requires us to "*Crucify* the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24): yes, dear reader, its "*affections*" as well as its "lusts." The claims of God must prevail over all natural inclinations to the contrary, and when they do not, we have to pay dearly, as David did.

We read nothing of Absalom pining for a return unto his father, for he was devoid of even natural affection. Fierce, proud, utterly unscrupulous, he lacked any of the finer qualities of human nature. But "David longed to go forth unto Absalom," yet it seemed that this son on whom he wasted his affections was irredeemably lost to him. Absalom was guilty of murder, and the unchanging law of God commands, "Whoever sheds man's blood by man shall his blood be shed" (Genesis 9:6). How, then, was it possible for David to restore his erring son without defying the divine requirements of *his* maintaining righteous government in Israel? It is to be duly noted that there is no word recorded of David seeking unto the Lord at this time. Ominous silence! The energies of nature now dominated him, and therefore there was no seeking of wisdom from above. This it is which casts light upon the dark scenes that follow.

Chapter 14 of 2 Samuel makes known to us how it came to pass that Absalom was brought back again to Jerusalem. The prime mover was Joab, who was what would be termed in present-day language an astute politician—an unprincipled man of subtle expediency. He was the leader of Israel's armies, and anxious to curry favor both with the king and his heir apparent. He knew that David doted upon Absalom and reasoned that any plausible device to bring him back would be acceptable to the king, and, at the same time, strengthen his own position in the royal favor. But the problem confronting him was, How might mercy rejoice against judgment? He knew too that while there might be a godly remnant who would oppose any open flouting of the Law, yet he counted on the fact that with the generality of Israel Absalom was their idol: see verse 25.

Joab therefore resorted to an artful subterfuge whereby David might be saved from disgracing the throne and yet at the same time regain his beloved son. He employed a woman to pose as a desolate widow and relate to the king a fictitious story, getting him to commit himself by passing judgment there on. She is termed a wise woman" (14:2), but *her* wisdom was the deceit of the Serpent. Satan has no initiative, but always imitates, and in the tale told by this tool of Joab we have but a poor parody of the parable given through Nathan. The case she pictured was well calculated to appeal to the king's susceptibilities, and bring to mind his own sorrow. With artful design she sought to show that under exceptional circumstances *it would be permissible* to dispense with the executing of a murderer, especially when the issue involved the destruction of the last heir to an inheritance.

The story she related was far from being an accurate portrayal of the real facts of the case relating to Absalom. First, Absalom had not slain Amnon during a fit of sudden anger, nor had he murdered him when they were alone together (14:6); instead, he was slain by deliberate malice, and that, in the presence of his brethren. Second, there was no cruel persecution being waged against Absalom by those who coveted his inheritance (v. 7): but the righteous Law of God demanded his death! Third, Absalom was not the only remaining son of David (12:24, 25), so that there was no immediate danger of the royal line becoming extinct, as the woman represented (14:7). These half-lies clearly indicated the *source* of this woman's "wisdom," and had David been in communion with God at the time, he had not been imposed upon or induced to deliver such an unholy judgment.

But apart from these glaring inaccuracies, the tale told by this woman made a touching appeal to the king's sentiments, and prevailed upon him. First, he hastily promised to protect her (v. 10), and then rashly confirmed the same by an oath (v. 11). Then she applied his concession to the case of Absalom and intimated that David was going against the interests of Israel (not displeasing *God,* be it noted!) in allowing his son to remain in exile (v. 13). Next she argued that since God in His sovereignty has spared David's life (notwithstanding his murder of Uriah), it could not be wrong for him to show leniency unto Absalom (v. 13). Finally, she heaped flattery upon the king (v. 17). The sequel was that David willingly concluded his oath to this woman *obliged* him to recall Absalom (v. 21), and accordingly he gave orders to Joab for him to be brought back.

His Son Absalom

(Continued)

2 Samuel 14

It was fleshly sentiment, and not a concern for God's glory, which moved David to authorize Joab to bring back Absalom. Some of our readers may regard this as a harsh verdict and say, "Possibly the writer is not a parent, if he were, perhaps he would better understand the case before him. Was not David actuated by *love* for his erring son? Surely God does not expect His people to be without natural affection." Ah, dear reader, the claims of the Lord are both high and comprehensive, and His requirements much more exacting than many like to recognize. Right eyes are to be plucked out and right hands cut off (Matthew 5:29,30)—things which are very dear to us—if they prove a hindrance to our treading the Narrow Way; and *that* is indeed a painful sacrifice, is it not?—so painful, that nothing short of the supernatural but sufficient grace of God can enable any of us thereunto.

"If any man come to Me," said the Lord Christ, "and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). No wonder that He bade intending disciples to "set down first and count the cost" (Luke 14:28). Christ will be Lord of all, or He will not be Lord at all. He requires the throne of our hearts, and all other interests and inclinations must bow before His sovereign will. Alas, how little are *His* claims emphasized today! How His holy standard has been lowered! How His Gospel has been cheapened! How maudlin sentimentality now ousts the principles of holiness in the great majority of those who bear His name! How those who endeavor, in their feeble way, to press the divine requirements are now condemned as being heartless and censorious.

"But surely a Christian is not required to become an unemotional stoic, devoid of all natural affection." No, indeed; grace in the heart does not harden, but softens. Nevertheless, holiness, and not carnal sentiment, is to dominate the Christian. Natural affections are not to be granted a lawless license, but are to be *regulated* by the precepts of Scripture. A Christian is permitted to lament the death of a fellow-believer, yet is he bidden to "sorrow not even as others which have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). We are exhorted to *mortify* "inordinate affection" (Colossians 3:5), that is, lawless and excessive fondness. And sometimes we have to choose—as David did—between honoring God by an obedience which requires us to set aside the yearnings of nature, or dishonor Him by yielding to fleshly emotions: in such a case self (the natural man) is to be *denied.*

Take it on its lowest ground. Do not those parents defeat their own ends who, from a *miscalled* "love," fail to deal sternly with the disobedience and defiance of their little ones; and who when their children are grown up, wink at their sins? How many a shiftless youth, whose every whim is gratified by his doting mother, develops into a worthless wastrel! How many a flighty daughter is allowed her own way, under the pretext of "letting her have a good time," only to end in her becoming a woman of the streets! Even the natural man is responsible to bring his affections under the control of his judgment, and not let his heart run away with his head. But the child of God is to be regulated by far higher and holier principles, and is to subordinate the yearnings of nature to the glory of God by obeying His commandments.

Now in his ordering Joab to Fetch back Absalom from Geshur, David acted according to the dictates of "natural affection," and not out of any regard to the honor of the Lord. Joab knew how to work upon his weakness, as is evident from the success of his scheme through the woman of Tekoah. She so wrought upon his sentiments that he rashly gave a verdict in favor of the criminal depicted in her story; and then she persuaded him to restore his treacherous son. Yet nothing could possibly justify him in disregarding the divine law, which cried aloud for the avenging of Amnon. God had given no commandment for his son to be restored, and therefore

His blessing did not attend it. David paid dearly for his foolish pity, as we shall see from the sequel; and that is recorded for *our* learning. God grant that some parents at least who read these lines will take this solemn lesson to heart.

"So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face" (verses 23, 24). Previously we read that "David mourned for his son every day" and "the soul of king David was consumed (margin) to go forth unto Absalom" (13:37, 39), whereas now that he is brought back to Jerusalem orders are given that he must *not* see the kings face. What a strange thing human nature is! What expedients it will resort to and compromises it will make in order to save its face. Possibly some of the more godly of David's counselors had demurred at his Routing of the Law, and maybe his own heart was uneasy over the step he had taken; and so as a sop to his conscience, and in order to quiet the censures of others, Absalom was confined to his own private dwelling.

Some writers are of the opinion that this measure of the king was designed for the humbling of his son, hoping that he would now be brought to see the heinousness of his sin and repent for it. But surely there had been sufficient time for that in his three years' sojourn in Geshur. No, we believe that what we have pointed out above is the more likely explanation. By permitting Absalom to return to his own house David exercised mercy, and by denying him entrance to the court he made a show of justice, persuading himself by this interdict he evidenced his abhorrence of Amnon's murder. Nevertheless the fact remained that, as chief magistrate in Israel, David had set aside the divine law. Therefore he must not be surprised if his wayward son now resorts to further lawlessness, for there is no escape from the outworking of the principle of sowing and reaping.

"But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him" (v. 25). How this reveals the low state of the Nation at that time! Absalom was not esteemed for his moral worth, for he was utterly lacking in piety, wisdom, or justice. His handsome physique was what appealed to the people. His abominable wickedness was ignored, but his person was admired—which only served to increase his arrogance, ending in his utter ruin. Alas, how often a corrupt mind indwells a sound body. How sad it is to observe our decadent generation valuing physical beauty and prowess more highly than moral virtues and spiritual graces. The allowing of his luxuriant hair to grow to such a length, and then afterwards weighing it (v. 26), shows the pride and effeminacy of the man. The three sons born to him (v. 27) evidently died at an early age: see 18:18.

"So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face. Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him, and when he sent again the second time, he would not come" (verses 28, 29). In the light of the immediate sequel it is clear that Absalom was chafing at his confinement (that he "sent for Joab" indicates he was virtually a prisoner in his own house) because it interfered with the development of his evil plans, and that the reason why he was anxious to be reconciled to the king was that he might obtain his liberty and thus be able to win the Nation over to himself. Probably this was the reason why Joab declined to visit him: suspecting his disloyal designs, knowing what a dangerous character he was to be at large.

"Therefore he said unto his servants, See Joab's field is near mine and he has barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire" (v. 30). He was still the same self-willed character: "who is lord over us?" being the language of all his actions. The three years he had spent at Geshur and his two years of isolation in Jerusalem had wrought no change in him: his heart was not humbled and his pride was not mortified. Instead of being thankful that his life has been spared, he deems himself sorely wronged for being secluded from the court. Instead of being grateful to Joab for bringing him back from Geshur, he now takes a mean revenge upon him because he refused his present request. Such conduct displayed a self-will that would brook no denial; a man of violence ready to go to any lengths in order to have his own way. The fear of God was not in him, nor had he any respect for his neighbor.

"Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have your servants set my field on fire?" (v. 31). At first sight it seems strange after twice refusing to see Absalom, that now, after being insulted and injured, Joab should grant his request, and mediate for him with the king; yet a little reflection will make it clear. Joab was a shrewd politician, with his finger on the public's pulse, and he knew full well that Absalom stood high in the favor of the people (v. 25): and now that he had further proof of the fury and power of the man—his servants being ready at his bidding to do violence unto the property of the general of the army!—he was afraid further to cross his will; and probably, with an eye to the future, he also wished to keep in his good books.

"And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto you, saying. Come hither, that I may send you to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come From Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me" (v. 32). What an arrogant and insolent attitude to assume toward his royal parent: one which manifested the grossest ingratitude, a contempt for the king's authority, and a deliberate challenge for him to enforce the law. Rightly did Matthew Henry point out, "His message was haughty and imperious, and very unfitting either a son or a subject. He undervalued the favor that had been shown him in recalling him from banishment, and restoring him to his own house. He denies his own crimes, though most notorious, and will not own that there was any iniquity in him, insinuating that, therefore, he had been wronged in the rebukes he had been under. He defies the king's justice, 'Let him kill me, if he can find it in his heart,' knowing he loved him too well to do it."

"So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom" (v. 33). Alas, notwithstanding his insulting rudeness Absalom prevailed upon the king to yield. His better judgment blinded by intemperate affection for his son, David invited Absalom to the palace. By prostrating himself before the king Absalom feigned submission to his authority, yet his heart was full of base designs to secure the throne for himself. David sealed his pardon with a kiss, instead of allowing the Law to take its course. As another has well said. "David's inordinate tenderness only paved the way for Absalom's open rebellion. Terrible warning! Deal tenderly with evil, and it will, assuredly, rise to a head and crush you in the end. On the other hand, meet evil with a face of flint, and victory is sure. Sport not with the serpent, but at once crush it beneath your feet."

While all this trouble was brewing around David a strange passiveness seems to have crept over him, and to have continued until his flight before Absalom. The narrative is singularly silent about him. He appears to be paralyzed by the consciousness of his past sins: he originated nothing. He dared not punish Amnon, and could only weep when he heard of Absalom's crime. He weakly craved for the return of the latter, but could not bring himself to send for him until Joab urged it. A flash of his old kingliness appeared for a moment in his refusal to see his son, but even that vanished when Joab chose to insist that Absalom should return to the court. He had no will of his own, but had become a mere tool in the hands of his fierce general—Joab having gained this hold over him by his complicity in Uriah's murder. At every step he was dogged by the consequences of his own wrong-doings, even though God had pardoned his sins.

Beautifully did Alexander Maclaren, in his little work, "The Life of David as reflected in his Psalms," throw light upon this particular stage of his career, and we feel we cannot do our readers a better service than close this chapter with a rather lengthy quotation therefrom. "It is not probable that many Psalms were made in those dreary days. But the *forty-first* and *fifty-fifth* are with reasonable probability, referred to this period by many commentators. They give a very touching picture of the old king during the four years in which Absalom's conspiracy was being hatched. It seems from the forty-first that the pain and sorrow of his heart had brought on some serious illness, which his enemies had used for their own purposes and embittered by hypocritical condolences and ill-concealed glee. The sensitive nature of the Psalmist winces under their heartless desertion of him, and pours our its plaint in this pathetic lament. He begins with a blessing on those who 'consider the afflicted'—having reference, perhaps, to the few who were faithful to him in his languishing sickness. He passes thence to his own case, and, after humble confession of his sin—almost in the words of the fifty-first Psalm—he tells how his sick bed had been surrounded by different visitors.

"His disease drew no pity, but only fierce impatience that he lingered in life so long. 'Mine enemies speak evil of me—when will he die, and his name have perished?' One of them, in especial, who must have been a man in high position to gain access to the sick chamber, has been conspicuous by his lying words of condolence. 'If he come to see me, he speaks vanity.' The sight of the sick king touched no cord of affection, but only increased the traitor's animosity—'his heart gathered evil to itself'—and then, having watched his pale face for wished-for unfavorable symptoms, the false friend hurries from the bedside to talk of his hopeless illness—'he goes abroad, he counts it.' The tidings spread, and are stealthily passed from one conspirator to another: 'all that hate me whisper together against me.' They exaggerate the gravity of his condition, and are glad because, making the wish the father to the thought, they believe him dying—'a thing of Belial' (that is a destructive disease) say they, 'is poured out upon him, and now that he lies, he shall rise up no more.

"We should be disposed to refer the thirty-ninth Psalm also to this period. It, too, is the meditation of one in sickness, which he knows to be a divine judgment for his sin. There is little trace of enemies in it; but his attitude is that of *silent submission,* while wicked men are disquieted around him—which is precisely the characteristic peculiarity of his conduct at this period. It consists of two parts (verses 1-6 and 7-13), in both of which the subjects of his meditations are the same, but the tone of them different. His own sickness and mortality, and man's fleeting, shadowy life, are his themes. The former has led him to think of the latter.

"It may be observed that this supposition of a protracted illness, which is based upon these Psalms, throws light upon the singular passiveness of David during the maturing of Absalom's conspiracy, and may naturally be supposed to have favored his schemes, an essential part of which was to ingratiate himself with suitors who came to the king for judgment, by affecting great regret that no man was deputed of the king to hear them. The accumulation of untried causes, and the apparent disorganization of the judicial machinery, are well accounted for by David's sickness."

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

His Son Absalom

(Continued)

2 Samuel 15

"And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him" (2 Samuel 15:1). The "after this" refers to what now followed upon David's receiving back into his favor the son who had murdered a brother (14:33). If a spark of gratitude had burned in his breast, Absalom would now have sought to do all in his power toward forwarding the interests of his indulgent father. But alas, so far from strengthening the hands of his royal parent, he sets to work to dethrone him. Absalom was now in the position to develop his vile plan of deposing David. The methods he followed thoroughly revealed what a godless and unscrupulous scoundrel he was. The first thing here recorded of him at once intimated his utter contempt of God and manifested his affinity with the

Jehovah requires His people to conduct themselves differently from the idolatrous nations surrounding them, and therefore He gave, among others, this law for the regulation of Israel's king: But he shall not multiply *horses* to himself" (Deuteronomy 17:16). It was in accord with this, that, when the King of kings formally presented Himself to Israel, He appeared "meek and sitting upon *an* donkey" (Matthew 21:5), so perfectly did He honor the Law in every detail. But Absalom was of a totally different type: arrogant, proud, self-willed. All the other sons of David rode upon mules (2 Samuel 13:19), but nothing less than "chariots and horses" would satisfy this wicked aspirant to the kingdom.

The "fifty men to run before him" was a symbol of *royalty:* see 1 Samuel 8:11; 1 Kings 1:5. In acting thus, Absalom took advantage of his father's fond attachment and basely traded upon his weakness. Unauthorized by the king, yet not forbidden by him, he prepared an imposing retinue, which gave him a commanding status before the nation. Finding himself unchecked by the king, he made the most of his position to seduce the hearts of the people. By means of underhand methods, Absalom now sought to turn toward himself the affection of his father's subjects. From the employment of force (2 Samuel 14:30), he resorted to craftiness. As we have said before, these two are the leading characteristics of the devil: the *violence* of the "lion" and the *deceit* of the "serpent," *and* thus it ever is with those whom he fully possesses.

"And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: 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 are you? And he said, Your servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, your matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear you. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which has any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came near to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And in this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (2 Samuel 15:2-6).

A few explanatory comments are required upon some of the terms in the above verses. First, the "way of the gate" was the place of judgment, that is, of judicial assize (see Genesis 19:1; 23:10, 18; 34:20; Ruth 4:1). "Your matters" in verse 3 signifies "your suit or cause" as in verse 4. The obvious intention of Absalom in stationing himself at this important center was to ingratiate himself with the people. His "your matters are good and right" to all and sundry alike, showed his determination to win them regardless of the requirements of justice or the claims of mercy. His "there is no one deputed of the king to hear you" was a dastardly attempt to create prejudice and lower the sovereign in their eyes. His "O that I were made judge in the land" revealed the lusting of his heart; neither pleasure nor pomp contented him—he must have *power* too. His embracing of the common people (v. 5) was a display of (pretended) humility and geniality.

"So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel," upon which Thomas Scott well said, "He did not gain their hearts by eminent services, or by a wise and virtuous conduct. But he affected to look great, as heir to the crown, and yet to be very condescending and affable to his inferiors: he pretended a great regard to their interests, and threw out artful insinuations *against David's administration;* he flattered every one who had a cause to be tried, with the assurance that he had right on his side; that, if it went against him, he might be led to accuse David and the magistrates of injustice. Though Absalom knew not how to obey, and deserves to die for his atrocious crime, yet he expressed a vehement desire to be judge over all the land, and suggested that suits should not then be so tedious, expensive, and partially decided as they were. This he confirmed by rising early and by apparent application; though it was other people's business, and not his own duty: and by such sinister arts, united with his personal attractions and address, he imposed upon multitudes all over the land to prefer so worthless a character to the wise, righteous, and pious David."

Before proceeding further let us pause and ask the question, What is there here for *our own souls?* This should ever be the principal concern of our minds as we read the Word of God. Its historical sections are full of important practical teaching: many valuable lessons may be learned therefrom if only we have hearts to receive them. Ah, *that* is the point on which so much turns. There must be a readiness and willingness on my part if I am to profit spiritually from what I peruse; and for that, there must be *humility.* Only a lowly heart will perceive that *I* am likely to be attracted by the same baits which led to the downfall of others; that *I* am liable to the same temptations they met with, and that unless I guard the particular gate at which the enemy succeeded in gaining an entrance into *their* souls, he will just as surely prevail over *me.* O for grace to heed the solemn warnings which are found in every incident we ponder.

Now look again at what is recorded here. "Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." Surely that is the sentence which should speak most loudly to us. It was not the open enemies of David that he wrought upon, but his subjects. It was not the Philistines whom he enlisted but the people of God whom he seduced. Absalom sought to sow the seeds of discontent in their minds, to alienate their affections from David, to render them disloyal to their king. Ah, is not the lesson plain? Is there not one who is ever seeking to seduce the subjects of Christ? tempting them to revolt from allegiance to His scepter, endeavoring to allure them into *his* service. Learn, then, dear friend, to look beneath the surface as you read the Holy Scriptures, to see through the historical details to the underlying principles that are therein illustrated, to observe the motives which prompted to action; and then *apply the whole* to *yourself.*

What had *you* done had you been one of those "men of Israel" whose hearts Absalom was seeking to divorce from David? The answer to that question would have turned entirely on one thing: was your heart satisfied with David? Of this tempter we read: "But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him" (2 Samuel 14:25), thus there was everything about his person to appeal to "the lust of the *flesh*." And as we have seen, "Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him," thus there was an appeal to "the lust of the *eyes*." Moreover, he promised to further the temporal interests of all who had "a controversy," that is, of all who considered they had a grievance and were being hardly dealt with: thus there was an appeal to "*the pride of life*" (1 John 2:16). Were those things more than sufficient to counterbalance the excellencies which David possessed?

Again we say, *Look beneath* the historical characters and discern those whom they typified! When Satan comes to tempt the subjects of the antitypical David he assumes his most alluring character and dangles before us that which appeals either to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life. But mark it well, dear reader, that Satan's baits *have no attraction* for those who are in communion with and finding their joy in the Lord. And he knows that full well, and therefore does he seek to stir up enmity against Him. He knows he cannot cause a regenerate soul to dislike the

person of the Lord, so he endeavors to create dissatisfaction with *His government over us.* It was so in the type: "there is no man deputed of the king to hear you." Ah, it is here we most need to be on guard: to resist every effort of Satan's to bring us to murmur at the Lord's providences. But we must turn from the spiritual application back again to the historical.

And what of David during this time? He could hardly have been totally ignorant of the perfidy of his son: some tidings must have reached him of the treacherous plot now on foot to dispose him. Yet there is no hint that he took any steps to thwart Absalom. How, then, shall we account for *his apathy?* At the close of our last chapter we dwelt upon the strange passiveness which characterized David during this stage of his checkered career, suggesting that the explanation offered by Alexander Maclaren was a most likely one and apparently confirmed by the Scriptures, namely, that during this period the king suffered from a severe and protracted sickness. That helpful writer called attention to the fact that many of the best commentators regard Psalms 41 and 55 as being composed by David at this time. Having already given his brief remarks upon the former, we will now reproduce those upon the latter; suggesting that Psalm 55 be read through at this point.

"The fifty-fifth psalm gives some very pathetic additional particulars. It is in three parts: a plaintive prayer and portraiture of the psalmist's mental distress (verses 1-8); a vehement supplication against his foes, and indignant recounting of their treachery (verses 9-16); and, finally a prophecy of the retribution that is to fall upon them (verses 17-23). In the first and second portions we have some points which help to complete our picture of the man. For instance, his heart is 'sore pained' within him, the 'terrors of death' are on him, 'fear and trembling' are come to him, and 'horror" has covered him. All this points, like subsequent verses, to his knowledge of the conspiracy before it came to a head.

"The state of the city, which is practically in the hands of Absalom and his tools, is described with bold imagery. Violence and strife in possession of it, spies prowling about the walls day and night, evil and trouble in its midst, and destruction, oppression, and deceit—a goodly company—flaunting in its open spaces. And the spirit, the brain of the whole, is the trusted friend whom he had made his own equal, who had shared his secretest thoughts in private, who had walked next him in solemn processions to the temple. Seeing all this, what does the king do, who was once so fertile in resource, so decisive in counsel, so prompt in action? Nothing. His only weapon is prayer: 'As for me, I will call upon God; and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and He shall hear my voice.

"He lets it all grow as it list, and only longs to be out of all the weary coil of troubles. 'O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest. Lo, I would flee far off, I would lodge in the wilderness. I would swiftly fly to my refuge from the raging wind, from the tempest.' The languor of his disease, love for his worthless son, consciousness of sin, and submission to the chastisement through 'one of his own house,' which Nathan had foretold, kept him quiet, though he saw the plot winding its meshes round him. And in this submission patient confidence is not wanting, though subdued and saddened, which finds expression in the last words of this psalm of the heavy laden, "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain you . . . I will trust in You.'"

Much of what Absalom said to those whose hearts he stole had, no doubt, a measure of truth in it. The disorders and sorrows of David's house had borne heavily on the king: his energy flagged, his health was broken, and the influence of his throne proportionately weakened. Absalom saw the defects of his father's government, and perceived that others saw them too, and quickly and meanly he took advantage of the situation, deprecating David and extolling himself. Yet David idolized Absalom, indeed, this was one of his chief failures, and bitterly was he now made to smart for cherishing such a viper in his bosom. He knew that Absalom was exalting himself. He knew that the calling of God was not with him, but with Solomon (2 Samuel 7:12; 12:25). He knew that Absalom was godless, that the flesh ruled him in all his ways; and yet, knowing all this, he interfered not to restrain him.

"And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray you, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron" (15:7). We are not sure from what point these forty years date, but certainly not from the time of David's coronation, for in such a case we would now have arrived at the closing year of his reign, which is obviously not the case—see 2 Samuel 21:1. Possibly it is to be dated from the time of his first anointing (1 Samuel 16:13). At any rate, that which is most germane to our present line of meditation is, Absalom considered that his wicked plot was ripe for execution, hence he now proceeded to put the finishing touches to it. Nothing less than the kingdom itself was what he determined to seize.

"For your 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. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron" (verses 8, 9). Absalom's duplicity and hypocrisy appear in all their hideousness. He cloaked his insurrection under the guise of offering sacrifice unto Jehovah (Deuteronomy 23:21-23) in performance of a vow which he pretended to have made. He had no love for his parent and no fear for his God, for he dared now to mock His worship with a deliberate lie. He cunningly imposed upon his poor father's hopes that at last his wayward son was becoming pious. No doubt David had often prayed for him, and now he supposed that his supplications were beginning to be answered. How delighted he would be to hear that Absalom desired to "serve the Lord," and therefore he readily gave his consent for him to go to Hebron.

"But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, Absalom reigns in Hebron" (v. 10). Let this be a warning to parents not to assume too readily that their children have experienced the new birth, but wait to see *the fruits of* the same. Instead of journeying to Hebron in order to worship Jehovah, Absalom's purpose was to be acclaimed monarch over Israel. "Hebron" was not only the place where he was born (2 Samuel 3:2,3) but it was also where David had commenced his reign (2 Samuel 5: 1-3). These "spies" that he sent forth were either his own trusted "servants" (14:30) or those whose hearts he had stolen from David and on whom he could now rely to further his evil scheme. Those who would hear this proclamation "Absalom reigns" might draw whatever conclusion they pleased—that David was dead, or that he had relinquished the reins of government, or that the Nation at large preferred his attractive son.

"And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called, and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything" (v. 11). No doubt these "two hundred men were persons of rank and prominence, being summoned to accompany the king's son to a sacred feast. Absalom's object was to awe the common people and give them the impression that David's cause was now being deserted at headquarters. Thus these men unwittingly countenanced Absalom's evil devices, for their presence signified that they supported his treason. This is a fair sample of the methods employed by unprincipled politicians to further their selfish ends, getting many to join their ranks or party under a complete misconception of the leader's real policy.

"And Absalom sent for Ahithophel, the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom" (v. 12). The man whose aid Absalom now sought was a renowned statesman, apparently no longer on friendly terms with David. He was a fit tool for the insurrectionist, though in the end God turned his counsel into foolishness. The sovereignty which God displays in His providences is as patent as it is awe-inspiring. As He graciously raises up those to befriend His people in the hour of their need, so He has appointed those who are ready to help the wicked in the furthering of their evil plans. As there was an Ittai loyal to David, so there was an Ahithophel to counsel Absalom.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

His Flight

2 Samuel 15

There are few incidents in the checkered life of David more pathetic than the one which is now to engage our attention, illustrating as it also does the providential ups and downs and the alternating spiritual prosperity and adversity which is the lot of God's people on this earth. All is not unclouded sunshine with them, nor is it unrelieved gloom and storm. There is a mingling of both; joys and sorrows, victories and defeats, assistance from friends and injuries from foes, smiles from the Lord's countenance and the hidings of His face. By such changes opportunities are afforded for the development and exercise of *different* graces, so that we may, in our measure, "know how to be abased and how to abound . . . both to be full and to be empty" (Phil 4:12); and above all, that we may, amid varying circumstances, prove the unchanging faithfulness of God and His sufficiency to supply our every need.

David was called to leave the lowly plains of Bethlehem to participate in the honors of Saul's palace. From tending the flock he became the conqueror of Goliath and the popular hero of Israel. But soon Saul's friendship was changed to enmity, and David had to flee for his life, and for many weary months he was hunted as a partridge on the mountains. Subsequently his fortunes were again greatly altered, and from being an outcast he was crowned king of Israel. Then he was enabled to capture Jerusalem, the stronghold of Zion, which became "the city of David" (2 Samuel 5:7). There he established his court and thither he "brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the voice of the trumpet" (

2 Samuel 6:15). But now we are to behold him fleeing from Jerusalem and being separated from the holy ark: a fugitive once more, in humiliation and deep anguish.

Ah, my reader, if you be one of God's elect, expect not a smooth and easy path down here, but be prepared for varying circumstances and drastic changes. The Christian's resting place is not in this world, for "here have we no continuing city" (Hebrews 13:14). The Christian is a "pilgrim," on a journey; he is a "soldier," called on to fight the good fight of faith. The more this be realized, the less keen will be the disappointment when our ease is disturbed and our outward peace rudely broken in upon. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," and if they come not to us in one form, they most certainly will in another. If we really "appropriate" *this* promise (!) then we shall not be so staggered when those afflictions come upon us. It is written that "we must through *much* tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22), and therefore we should make up our minds to *expect* the same, and to "think it not strange" (1 Peter 4:12) when we are called upon to pass through "the fiery trial."

Affliction, tribulation and fiery trial were now David's portion. "And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom" (2 Samuel 15:13). Visualize the sad scene: the dark clouds of a threatened revolt had been steadily gathering, and now the storm bursts on the king's head. By this time David was some sixty years of age, with health and strength greatly impaired. Ahithophel, his trusted counselor, had deserted him, and Absalom his favorite son was now risen in rebellion against him. Not only his throne, but his very life was in danger, together with the lives of his wives and their little ones—Solomon was scarcely ten years old at this time. What, then, does the king do? Nothing! There was no calling of a counsel, no effort made to provision Jerusalem for the withstanding of a siege, no determination to stand his rightful ground and resist his lawless son.

"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" (v. 14). Now that at last the blow falls, David passively acquiesces in what he evidently felt to be God's righteous chastisement upon him. When the awful news arrives that Absalom had set up the standard of revolt at Hebron, David's only thought was immediate flight. The intrepid warrior was now almost cowardly in his eagerness to escape, and was prepared to give up everything without a blow. It seemed as though only a touch was needed to overthrow his throne. He hurries on the preparations for flight with nervous haste. He forms no plans beyond those of his earlier wish to fly away and be at rest.

That David had good reason to conclude the situation which now confronted him was a *just retribution* upon his own crimes is quite evident. First, the Lord had declared, "I will raise up evil against you out of your own house" (2 Samuel 12:1), fulfilled here in the insurrection of his favorite son. Other evidences thereof will come before us later, but at this point we will consider, second, Ahithophel's joining hands with the rebel. No sooner had Absalom determined to execute his daring plan than he looked to Ahithophel. He appears, for some reason not specifically mentioned, to have confidently counted upon his cooperation; nor was he disappointed. "And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city, even from Giloh" (15:12). It is to be carefully noted that immediately after Ahithophel's coming to Absalom, we are informed, "And the conspiracy was strong, for the people *increased* continually with Absalom" (v. 12)—intimating that Ahithophel was a host in himself.

"And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom" (16:23): in view of this statement we need not be surprised that his joining heart and hand with Absalom so greatly strengthened his cause. There is no doubt that *he* was the chief instrument in this conspiracy, and the prime reason why so many in Israel turned from the king to his traitorous son. His official status and the great influence which he possessed over the people made Absalom glad to avail himself of his help, both to sink the spirits of David's party and to inspire his own with confidence, for Ahithophel was commonly regarded as a prophet. But *what was* it that made Ahithophel respond so readily to Absalom's invitation, and cause him to find still greater favor in the eves of the people, as one who had been grievously wronged and deserved to be avenged of his adversity?

To answer this question the Scriptures must be searched and passage carefully compared with passage. In the second half of 2 Samuel 23 the names are given of the thirty-seven men who formed the special body "guard' (v. 23) of David. Among them we find "Eliam the son of Ahithophel *the Gilonite"* (v.34) and "Uriah the Hittite" (v. 39). Thus Eliam and Uriah were fellow-officers and would be much thrown together. Hence, we need not be surprised to learn that Uriah married the daughter of Eliam (see 2 Samuel 11:3). Thus Bathsheba, whom David so grievously wronged, was *the grand-daughter of Ahithophel;* and Uriah, whom he so cruelly murdered, was his grandson by marriage! Does not *this* fact explain why David's "familiar friend" (Psalm 41:9) became his deadly foe, and account for his readiness to aid Absalom—thus seeking to avenge the dishonor brought upon his house.

Some years had passed since this dishonor had come upon the family of Ahithophel, and during that interval it appears that he had turned his hack upon David and the court, and had quietly retired to his birthplace (15:12). Brooding over the grievous wrongs which David had done to his family, the spirit of revenge would rankle in his heart. It seems that Absalom was well aware of this, and perceived that Ahithophel was only waiting for a suitable opportunity to give vent to his feelings and execute his meditated wrath upon the head of David. Does not this explain why Absalom approached him *with confidence,* made known to him his treason, and counted on him welcoming the news and becoming his fellow-worker? Does not this also account for so many of the people transferring their allegiance from a throne which they knew to be defiled with adultery and murder to the rebellious son?

Not only does Ahithophel's blood-relationship to Bathsheba explain his readiness to take sides with Absalom against the king, and account for the common peoples' transference of loyalty, but it also supplies the key to David's own attitude and conduct at this time. It was additional evidence to him that *God* was now dealing with him for his sins—other proofs of this will come before us later, but we must not anticipate. And most blessed is it to observe him bowing so meekly to the divine rod. David felt that to withstand Absalom would be to resist the Lord Himself; therefore, instead of strengthening his forces in Jerusalem and maintaining his ground, he flees. We cannot but admire the lovely fruit brought forth by the Spirit at this time in David's heart, for *to Him,* and not to mere nature, must be attributed that which is here presented to our view.

Long before this we had occasion to admire the beautiful spirit evidenced by David when suffering *for righteousness,* now we behold it again when he was suffering *for transgressions.* Then we saw him as *the martyr* in the days of Saul, bringing forth the fruits of meekness, patience, and confidence in God, willing to be hounded by Saul day after day, and refusing to take vengeance into his own hands and smite the Lord's anointed. But here we see David as *the penitent:* his sin has found him out, brought into remembrance before God, and he submissively bows his head and accepts the consequences of his wrongdoing. This is quite beautiful, manifesting again the workmanship of the Spirit of God in David. He alone can quiet the turbulent heart, subdue the rebellious will, and mortify that innate desire to take matters into our own hands; as He alone can bring us to humble ourselves beneath the mighty hand of God, and hold our peace when He visits our iniquity "with stripes" (Psalm 89:32).

Yes, it is, as we said in our opening paragraphs, *changing circumstances* that afford opportunity for the development and exercise of *different* graces. Some graces are of the active and aggressive kind, while others are of a passive order, requiring quite another setting for their display: some of the traits which mark the soldier on a battlefield would be altogether out of place were he languishing on a bed of sickness. Spiritual joy and godly sorrow is equally beautiful in its season. It would be most incongruous to mourn while the Bridegroom was present, but it is fitting for the children of the Bride chamber to fast when He is absent. As there are certain vegetables, fruits and flowers which cannot be grown in lands which are unvisited by nipping winds and biting frosts, so there are some fruits of the Spirit which are only produced in the soil of severe trials, troubles and tribulations.

"And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king shall appoint" (v. 15). What we have just said above is equally pertinent to this verse: the sad situation confronting David revealed plainly the state of heart of those in his immediate employ. The revolt of Absalom and his stealing the hearts of so many of the people afforded an opportunity for these servants of David to manifest *their* unswerving loyalty and deep devotion to their master. Exceedingly blessed is this, supplying as it does the sequel to what was before us in verse 6. There we saw that Absalom was a man well calculated to captivate the multitude. But let it be duly noted that he possessed no attractions for those who were nearest to David. That illustrates an important principle: while we maintain communion with Christ, the antitypical David, the baits of Satan will have no influence over us!

Let us observe too that changing circumstances are necessary in order to test the loyalty of those who are on intimate terms with us. Not only did this revolt of Absalom's provide an occasion for the manifestation of David's subjection to the will of God, but it also served to make unmistakably evident who were for and who were against him. Prosperity is often a mixed blessing, and adversity is far from being an unmixed calamity. When the sunshine of providence smiles upon a person, he is soon surrounded by those who profess great attachment to him; but when the dark clouds of providence cover his horizon, most of those fawning flatterers will quickly take their departure. Ah, my reader, it is worth something to discover who really *are* our friends, and therefore we should not murmur if it takes the shaking of our nest and the disrupting of our peace to make this plainly evident to us. Adversities are a gain when they expose to us the hypocrisy of an Ahithophel, and still more so when they prove the loyalty and love of the few who stand by us in the storm.

"And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house" (v. 16). The writer feels his heart awed as he reads the second half of this verse—a prosaic statement, yet one possessing depths which no human mind can fathom. Apparently David acted quite freely when he made this simple domestic arrangement, yet really he could not do otherwise, for he was being *directed* by the unerring and invincible hand of God, unto the outworking of His own counsels. *David's* object in leaving behind the ten concubines was "to keep the house," that is, to maintain the palace in some order and cleanliness; but *God's* design was to make good His own word.

A part of the punishment which the Lord had announced should Fall upon David for his evildoing was, "*I* will take your wives before your eyes, and give them unto your neighbor, and he shall be with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel" (2 Samuel 12:11, 12). The execution of that threat is recorded in, "So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel" (16:22). The connecting link between the two is seen here in our present passage: "And the king left ten women which were concubines, to keep the house" (v. 16). Again, we say, David's object in leaving them behind was that they should "keep the house," but *God's* purpose was that they should be publicly insulted, raped by Absalom. Unspeakably solemn is this fact: *God* directs those actions which eventuate in evil as truly as He does those which terminate in good. Not only all events, but all persons, and their every action, are under the immediate control of the Most High.

"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are, *all* things; to whom be glory forever." (Romans 11:36). Yet this neither makes God the "Author of sin" nor man an irresponsible creature: God is holy in all His ways, and man is accountable for all his actions. Whether or not we perceive the "consistency" of them, each of these basic truths must be held fast by us; nor must one be so maintained that the other is virtually negatived. Some will argue, If God has foreordained our every action, then we are no better than machines; others insist, If man is a free agent, his actions cannot be directed by God. But Holy Writ exposes the vanity of such reasonings: so far as David knew it was a voluntary act on his part when he decided to leave ten of his concubines in the house, nevertheless he was divinely "constrained" in it for the accomplishment of God's purpose.

"And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. 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" (verses 17, 18). No "fair weather friends" were these. They had enjoyed with him the calm, they would not desert him in the storm; they had shared the privileges of Jerusalem, they would not abandon him now that he had become a fugitive and outcast. It is striking to note that while Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel," *all* the Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites remained steadfast to David—a foreshadowment of Christ, for whereas the Jewish nation despised and rejected Him, yet God's elect among the Gentiles have not been ashamed to be His followers.

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

Crossing Kidron

2 Samuel 15

The second half of 2 Samuel 15 displays a striking blending of lights and shadows: in David's darkest hour we not only see the shining forth of some of his own loveliest virtues, but we also behold his friends and followers at their best. It is the way of our gracious God to temper our severest crosses by mingling comforts with them. David's favorite son and his chief counselor had both turned traitors against him, but the loyalty of part of his army, the faithfulness of the Levites, the sympathy expressed by those of the common people who witnessed his distress, afforded some real consolation to his stricken heart. In times of deep distress and seasons of sore despondency we are apt to imagine that our enemies are more numerous than is actually the case, and that we have fewer friends than is really so; but David was now to discover that a goodly number were prepared to cleave to him at all costs.

It is not so much from the natural (though even here there is much that is praiseworthy) as the spiritual viewpoint that our passage needs to be pondered. The key to it lies in the state of David's heart at this time. He is to be viewed as *the penitent soul,* as one who realized that in justice he was being afflicted. He knew that his sin had found him out, that he was being lovingly yet righteously chastised for the same. He was filled with godly sorrow and mourned before Him whose Name had been so dishonored by him. He humbly bows to God's rod and submissively receives its stroke. In this spirit he would be *alone* in his trouble, for he alone had sinned and provoked Jehovah: therefore does he counsel the Gittites to leave him. In the same lowly spirit he sends the ark—the symbol of Jehovah's manifested presence—back to Jerusalem: it was his chief joy, and that he felt he was not now entitled to taste.

But we will not generalize any further upon our passage, but consider its details. "Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite. Wherefore go you also with us? return to your place, and abide with the king (Absalom, who now usurped the throne): for you are a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas you came but yesterday, should I this day make you go up and down with us? seeing I go hither I may, return you, and take back your brethren: mercy and truth be with you" (2 Samuel 15:19, 20). What a lovely spirit did the king here evidence: in the midst of his own deep trouble, his thought and concern was for those about him, desiring them to escape the hardships and peril which now lay before him. What a gracious example for us to heed in this selfish age—that even in our sorest trials we must not impose upon those who are kind to us and load them with our troubles. "For every man shall bear his own burden" (Galatians 6:5).

It would appear that Ittai was the leader of the six hundred Gittites (v. 18). They had thrown in their lot with David while he sojourned in Gath of the Philistines, and followed him when he returned to the land of Israel: either because they believed that Philistia was doomed or, more likely, because they were attracted by David himself. They were now among the king's most faithful attendants, having accompanied him as he fled from the royal city. They would be a most useful bodyguard for him at this time, but in his noble generosity and tender compassion David desired to spare them the inconveniences and dangers which were now his portion. How this makes us think of David's Son and Lord, who, probably, at this identical place, said to those who had come to arrest Him, "If therefore you seek Me, let these go their way" (John 18:8). The *Antitype* should ever be in mind as we read the Old Testament Scriptures.

"And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord lives, and my lord the king lives, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in life or death, even there also will your servant be" (v. 21). David desired to dismiss them, but their attachment to him and his cause was much stronger than that of many of the Israelites. Most blessed and striking is this, for David had nothing to offer them now save fellowship with him in his rejection and sufferings; yet they valued his companionship so highly that they refused to leave their stricken leader. Spiritually, that love of the brethren which is the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, when it is healthy and vigorous, will not be deterred through tears of hardship or danger, but will stand by and render assistance to those in affliction. Anti-typically, this verse teaches us that we should cleave faithfully to Christ no matter how low His cause in the world may be.

"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" (v. 22). Such devotion as had been displayed by these loyal followers must have touched the king's heart, the more so as it proceeded from those who were of a heathen stock. From Ittai's words, "as the Lord lives" (v. 21), it would seem that they were influenced by David's religion as well as his person; and assuredly he would *not* have kept them so near him, or have said "mercy and truth be with you" (v. 20), unless they had definitely renounced all idolatry. There is a seeming ambiguity in his words here "go and pass over," yet this disappears in the light of the next verse: it was the Kidron they crossed—thus they were given the place of chief honor, taking the lead and heading David's present company!

"And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over" (v. 23). Though the multitude favored Absalom, yet there were many who sympathized with David. It must indeed have been a hard heart which remained unmoved by such an affecting sight: the aged king forsaking his palace, with but a small retinue, fleeing from his own son, now seeking shelter in the wilderness! They had been less than human if they grieved not for poor David. And let it be duly noted that the Spirit has *recorded* their weeping, for God is not unmindful of genuine tears, either of personal repentance or pity for others. This mention of their weeping plainly teaches that *we* should feel deeply for those parents who are abused or ruined by their children.

"The king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness" (v. 23). This manifestly foreshadowed one of the most bitter episodes in our Lord's passion. Not only is this same brook actually mentioned in John 18:1—the slight difference in spelling being due to the change from the Hebrew to Greek—but there are too many points of analogy between David's and Christ's crossing of it to miss the merging of the type into the antitype. But before tracing these striking resemblances, let us—as its solemn historical interest requires—make a few remarks upon the brook itself.

Significantly enough "Kidron," or to use the more familiar spelling of John 18:1 "Cedron," signifies "black." It was aptly named, for it was a dark rivulet which ran through the gloomy valley of Moriah, which Josephus tells us was on the east side of Jerusalem. It lay between the bases of the temple hill and the mount of Olivet. Into this brook was continually emptied the sewage of the city, as well as the filth from the temple sacrifices for sin. This was the "unclean place without the city" (Leviticus 14:40, 45), where the excrements of the offerings were deposited and carried away by the waters of this brook. In a figure it was the sins and iniquities of the people which were being washed away from before God's face—from the temple, where He dwelt in Israel's midst.

It is interesting to note there are other references to "Kidron" in the Old Testament, and what is recorded in connection therewith is in striking and solemn harmony with what we have just pointed out above. This brook not only (later) received the filth of the city and the refuse from the temple, but into its foul waters the godly kings of Judah cast the ashes of the idols they had destroyed: see 2 Chronicles 15:16; 30:14; 2 Kings 23:4, 6. Over this unclean brook our blessed Savior passed on His dolorous way to Gethsemane, where His holy soul loathed our iniquities put into His "cup," represented by this filthy and nasty Cedron. That foul brook served as a suitable reminder of the deep mire (Psalm 69:2) into which Christ was about to sink. Nothing could be more repulsive and nauseating than the soil and waters of this brook, and nothing could be more loathsome to the Holy One than to be encompassed with all the guilt and filth of sin belonging to His people.

But let us now consider the points of resemblance between the type and antitype. First, it was at this brook the humiliating flight of David began, and the crossing of the same marked the commencement of the Savior's "Passion" (Acts 1:3). Second, it was as the despised and rejected king that David now went forth, and so it was with the Redeemer as He journeyed to Gethsemane. Third, yet David was not entirely alone: a little company of devoted followers, still clung to him; thus it was with the Antitype. Fourth, Ahithophel, his familiar friend, had now joined forces with his enemies: in like manner, Judas had gone forth to betray Christ to His foes. Fifth, though the multitude favored Absalom, some of the common people sympathized with and "wept" for David; so, while the general cry against the Lord Jesus was "crucify Him," nevertheless, there were those who wept and bewailed Him (Luke 23:27).

"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" (v. 24). This spoke well for David, that even the Levites, and the high priest himself, were prepared to throw in their lot with him in the day of his rejection. Notwithstanding his sad failures, the ministers of the tabernacle knew full well the affection which the sweet Psalmist of Israel had for them and their office. The policy which Absalom had followed in order to curry favor with the people had not appealed at all to these servants of the Lord, and therefore they steadfastly adhered to the king, in spite of the drastic change in his fortunes. Alas, how often has it been otherwise, when the religious leaders turned traitors at the time the ruling monarch most needed their support and ministrations.

Ministers of God should always set an example of submission and loyalty to "the powers that be" (Romans 13:1), and more especially should they openly manifest their fealty unto those rulers who have countenanced and protected them in their pious labors, when those rulers are opposed by rebellious subjects. "Fear God: honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17) are joined together in Holy Writ, and if the ecclesiastical leaders fail to render obedience to this divine precept, how can we expect that those who are under their charge will do better? "They that are friends to the ark in their prosperity, shall find it a friend to them in their adversity. Formerly, David would not rest until he had found a resting place for the ark (Psalm 132); and now, if the priests may have their mind, the ark shall not rest until David returns to his resting place" (Matthew Henry).

"And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation" (v. 25). This too is very impressive, bringing out as it does the better side of David's character. The presence of the Levites, and particularly of the ark, would have considerably strengthened the king's cause. That ark had figured prominently in Israel's history, and the very sight of it would hardly have failed to stir the hearts of the people. Moreover, it was the recognized symbol of God's presence, esteemed by David more highly than anything else. But the king, like Eli of old, was extremely solicitous of the welfare of the sacred coffer, and therefore he refused to expose it to the possible insults of Absalom and his faction. He "preferred Jerusalem—the honor of the Lord—above his chief joy" (Psalm 137:6). Furthermore, David knew that he was under the divine rebuke, and so felt himself to be unworthy for the ark to accompany him, and therefore while he was being chastised for his sins, he refused to pretend that God was on his side.

"If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation." Clearly, David recognized that everything hinged upon *the unmerited "favor"* of the Lord. This is a point of considerable importance, for our modern dispensationalists suppose that Israel was under such a stern regime of Law that the grace of God was virtually unknown, yes that He did *not* exercise it until Christ appeared—a view based on an entirely erroneous interpretation of John 1:17. This is a great mistake, for the Old Testament Scriptures make it unmistakably clear that God's free grace is the foundation of all blessing: see Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 10:15; 1 Kings 10:9; 2 Chronicles 9:8; Acts 7:46. It is blessed to observe David's "If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back again and show me (not "my place," but) both it and His habitation:" he valued the humble tabernacle far more highly than his own throne and honor!

"But if He thus say, I have no delight in you: behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seems good unto Him" (v. 26). Precious submission was this. The Lord was rebuking him for his sins, and he knew not what would be the outcome. He humbled himself beneath the mighty hand of God, and left the issue to His sovereign pleasure. He hoped for the best, but was prepared for the worst. He realized that he deserved to suffer the continued displeasure of the Holy One, and therefore did he commit the outcome of his cause unto God's sovereign grace. Mark it carefully, dear reader, that David saw *God's* disciplinary hand in this dark hour of Absalom's revolt, and *that* preserved him, in measure at least, both from rebellion against Heaven and the fear of man. The more *we* discern the controlling hand of the Most High in all events, the better for our peace of mind.

There is much important and precious instruction for our hearts in this incident. It is a true act *of faith* when we yield ourselves to that sovereign pleasure of God wherein He is gracious to whom He will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom He will show mercy" (Exodus 33:19); yes, just as truly so as when we appropriate one of God's promises and plead it before Him. We conceive it was thus that David's faith now directed him in the sore strait that he was then in. He knew not how grievously the Lord was provoked against him, nor how things were now likely to go; so he bowed before His throne and left *Hint* to determine the case. Many a sorely-stricken soul has obtained relief here when all other springs of comfort have completely failed him, saying with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15).

A sin-entangled soul with guilt burdening his conscience, sees that, in himself, be is unquestionably lost: how the Lord will deal with him, he knows not. His signs and tokens are completely eclipsed: he can discern no evidence of God's grace in him, nor of His favor unto him. What is a guilt-bowed soul to do when he is at such a stand? To definitely turn his back upon God would be madness, for "Who has hardened himself against God and has prospered?" (

Job 9:4). Nor is there the slightest relief to be obtained for the heart except from and by *Him,* for "who can forgive sins, but God only?" The only recourse, then, is to do as David did: bring our guilty soul into God's presence, wait upon the sovereign pleasure of His grace, and gladly acquiesce in His decision.

"*If* I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation. But *if* He thus say, I have no delight in you; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seems good unto Him." Here is an anchor for a storm-tossed soul: though it may not (at once) give rest and peace, yet it secures from the rock of abject despair. To solace the heart with a "who can tell *if* God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" (Jonah 3:9), or a "Who can tell *whether* God will be gracious to me?" (2 Samuel 12:22), is far better than giving way to a spirit of hopelessness. "Who knows if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him" (Joel 2:14): there the soul must abide until more light from above break forth upon it.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

Ascending Olivet

2 Samuel 15

We resume at the point left off in our last. "The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Are not you a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me" (verses 27, 28). Though they could not be permitted to minister unto him in holy things, he does not disdain their services; they could further his interests by returning to their post of duty, and from there acquaint him with developments in Jerusalem. What implicit confidence in them was evidenced by this experienced strategist, in revealing to them his immediate plans—the place where he intended to remain for the time being! O that God's servants today so conducted themselves that those in trouble would not hesitate to confide in them and seek their counsel. "Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there" (v. 29). Blessed obedience: sinking their own wishes, complying with the will of their master.

"And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot" (v. 39). Let not the reader forget what was said in the opening paragraphs of the preceding chapter, where we pointed out that the real key to the whole of this passage is to be found in the state of David's heart. Throughout he is to be viewed as *the humble penitent.* God's rebuke was heavy upon him, and therefore did he humble himself beneath His mighty hand. Hence it is that we here see him giving outward expression to his self-abasement and grief for his sins, and for the miseries which he had brought upon himself, his family, and his people. Suitable tokens of his godly sorrow were these, for the covering of his head was a symbol of self-condemnation, while his walking barefooted betokened his mourning (cf. Isaiah 20:2, 4; Ezekiel 24:17).

"And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up. How striking is this, coming right after his crossing of the brook Kidron! In the previous chapter we pointed out five respects in which that foreshadowed our Lord's crossing that same brook on the night of His betrayal. Who can fail to see here another unmistakable analogy? After His crossing of that doleful brook, our Savior entered Gethsemane, where His soul was "exceeding sorrowful" and where His supplications were accompanied with "strong crying *and tears*" (Hebrews 5:7). Yet while observing the comparison, let us not forget the radical contrast: his own sins were the cause of David's grief, but the sins of His people occasioned Christ's tears.

"And all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up weeping as they went up" (v. 30). It is our duty to weep with those that weep, and those that were with him were deeply affected by their king's grief. Once again our minds revert to our Savior's passion, and discover another resemblance between it and David's case here, though it has been strangely overlooked by many. The disciples who accompanied Christ into the Garden failed, it is true, to "watch with Him" for one hour, yet it most certainly was not through indifference, nor because they sought fleshly ease in slumber, for as the Holy Spirit expressly informs us, Christ "found them sleeping *for sorrow*" (Luke 22:45). Thus the weeping people who Followed David up Olivet found its counterpart in the sorrowing of those disciples who had accompanied the Savior unto Gethsemane.

"And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom" (v. 31). With the exception of his own sons insurrection, this was the bitterest ingredient in the cup which David was now having to drink. It was no ordinary blow For him to bear, for Ahithophel was no ordinary man. He was one whom the king had taken into his confidence, numbered among his closest friends, and to whom he had shown much kindness. He not only enjoyed the most intimate relations with David concerning the affairs of state, but had close fellowship with him in spiritual things. This is evident from the Psalmist's own statement "We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company" (55:14). Fickle and treacherous is human nature. Our sharpest trials often come from those in whom we have reposed the most trust and to whom we have shown the greatest kindness; yet, on the other hand, the most unlikely friends are sometimes raised up among those from whom we had the least expectations—as the Gittites attached to

"And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." Troubles rarely come singly: often they crowd one on top of another, as was the case with Job. This sad news was brought to the king just when he was being the most severely tried. Absalom had revolted, and now his "prime minister" turned traitor at the most crucial moment. It was a vile requital for the king's generosity to him. Here again we may perceive these historical incidents shadowing forth events even more solemn and frightful in connection with our blessed Lord, for Ahithophel is undoubtedly a striking type of Judas, who, after being admitted to the inner circle of Christ's disciples, basely turned against Him and went over to the side of His enemies. Sufficient, then, for the disciple to be as his Master: if *His* charity was rewarded with cruel treachery, let us be prepared for similar treatment.

How keenly David felt the perfidy of Ahithophel is evident from several statements in the Psalms which obviously refer to him. In Psalm 41 he mentions one evil after another which afflicted him, and finishes with "Yes, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (v. 9)—that was the climax: anything worse could scarcely be imagined, as the opening "Yes," suggests. Ahithophel had not only forsaken David in his hour of need, but had gone over to the side of his foe. The "lifted up his heel against me" is the figure of a horse which has just been bedded by its master, and then lashing out with his feet, viciously kicks him. More plainly still is his anguish evidenced in "For it was not an enemy that reproached me: then I could have borne it; neither was it he who hated me that did magnify himself against me: then I would have hid myself from him. But it was you, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance" (55:12, 13).

There is still another reference in the Psalms where David laments, "For my love they are my adversaries; but I give myself unto prayer. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love" (109:4, 5). This sad trial of David's was illustrative of what is often the most painful experience of the Church, for her troubles usually begin at home: her open enemies can do her little or no harm until her pretended friends have delivered her into their hands. The statement that David "gave himself to prayer" at once links up with our passage, for there we read next, "And David said, O Lord, I *pray* You, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (v. 31). It is apparent that David was more afraid of Ahithophel's wisdom than he was of Absalom's daring, for he was a man of experience in statecraft, and was highly respected by the people (2 Samuel 16:23).

"And David said, O Lord, I pray You, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." Here again the type points forward to the antitype, in fact, *that* is the outstanding feature of our passage. David's crossing of the Kidron (v. 23), his complete surrender of himself to the will of God (v. 26), his tears (v. 30), and now his *praying,* present one of the most remarkable prefigurations of our Lord's sufferings to be found anywhere in the Old Testament. In asking the Lord to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, David recognized and acknowledged that all hearts are in His hands, that He can "make the judges fools" (Job 12:17). There was no suitable opportunity for David to engage in a *lengthy* season of prayer, nor was that necessary, for we are not heard for our much speaking. Apparently, a brief ejaculation was all that now issued from his heart; but it was heard on high!

What a blessed and encouraging example David has here left us! Prayer should ever be the believer's resource, for there is never a time when it is unseasonable. We too may pray for God to bring to nothing the crafty counsel of the wicked against His people. We too may come to Him when all appears to be lost, and spread our case before Him. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, for vain is all worldly wisdom and power against it. So it proved here: though David's petition was a brief one, yet it met with an unmistakable answer as 2 Samuel 17:14 shows, where we are told, "And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel; for the Lord had commanded to

defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." Let us take encouragement from this incident, then, and "*in everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6).

"And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshiped God" (v. 32). This is blessed and teaches a lovely practical lesson: "weeping must never hinder worshiping" (Matthew Henry). No, why should it? We may worship God in the minor key as truly as in the major. We may adore the Lord as genuinely in the valley of humiliation as from the heights of jubilation. Furthermore, we may worship God as acceptably from the rugged mountaintop as in the most ornate cathedral. This principle was clearly apprehended by the spiritually minded in Old Testament times, as is evident from our passage: though David was away from the tabernacle, he realized that God was still accessible in spirit. Let us, then, grasp this fact, that nothing should prevent us worshiping the Lord, even though we no longer have access to His *public* ordinances. How thankful we should be for such a merciful provision in a day like ours.

"And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, there he worshiped God." There are some who believe—we consider with good reason—that David sang Psalm 3 as a part of his worship on this occasion, for it bears the title "a Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son." It has been well said that "Among all the Psalms of David there is none which more remarkably evidences the triumph of his faith out of the depths of affliction and chastisement than this one" (B. W. Newton). There was no shutting or his eyes to the gravity of his situation, no ignoring the imminency of his danger, for he said, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which "(Psalm 3:1,2).

David described his foes as being numerous, and as boasting there would be no deliverance for him by the Lord. As we have seen (2 Samuel 15:12), the revolt had assumed considerable dimensions, and the conspirators were assured that David's sins had turned away the aid of Heaven from his cause. "But you, O Lord, *are* a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head" (Psalm 3:3): this is most blessed—he opposes their malicious utterances and confident hatred by the conviction that amidst real perils Jehovah was still his defense. With bowed and covered head he had fled from Jerusalem but "You are the lifter up of mine head" was his confidence. "Though the dangers were still present, yet in faith he speaks of them as past (Hebrew); the deliverance was yet future, yet he speaks of it as already come" (B. W. Newton).

"I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill. Selah" (Psalm 3:4). He was an exile from the tabernacle on Zion, and he had sent back the ark to its rest; but though he had to cry to God from the mountain side, He graciously answers from "His holy hill." "He and his men camped amidst dangers, but an unslumbering Helper mounted guard over the undefended slumberers" (A. Maclaren): "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me" (Psalm 3:5). Such was the calm confidence of David, even while multiplied perils were still encircling him. Refreshed by the night's repose, heartened by the divine protection granted while sheltering in caves or sleeping in the open, the Psalmist breaks forth in triumphant exclamation: "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about" (Psalm 3:6).

Betaking himself for renewed energy to the weapon of prayer, even before the battle David sees the victory, but ascribes it solely to his God. "Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God: for You *host* smitten all mine enemies upon the cheekbone; You *host* broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongs unto the Lord: Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah" (Psalm 3:7,8). "Nor was his confidence in vain. He was restored and allowed again to see Israel in peace—again to prove that God's blessing is upon His people. How precious is the individual use of such a Psalm as this, to every one who, after having backslidden or trespassed, has only turned again to the mercies and faithfulness of God. Even though the tokens of divine rebuke and chastisement be present on every side, even though every tongue may say 'there is no help for him in God,' such an one may remember David, and again say, 'You, O Lord, are a shield for me: my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.' Thus, even the sins and chastisements of God's servants are made blessings in result to His people" (B. W. Newton).

"Behold Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head" (v. 32). From 1 Chronicles 27:33 we learn that Hushai was another who had taken a prominent part in the affairs of state, for there it is recorded, Hushai the Archite was the king's companion." That Hushai was regarded as a man of wisdom is also apparent from the fact that, a little later, Absalom applied to him for advice (2 Samuel 17:5). In the light of what immediately follows, it seems to us that the coming to David of Hushai is often His way to so regulate our circumstances as to exhibit the secret workings of our hearts—that we may, subsequently, be humbled thereby, and brought to prize more highly that grace which bears so patiently with us.

"Unto whom David said, If you pass on with me, then you shall be a burden unto me; But if you return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be your servant, O king; as I have been your father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be your servant: then may you for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And have you not there with you Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing so ever, you shall hear out of the king's house, you shall tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them you shall send unto me everything that you can hear. So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem" (verses 33-37).

"As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man" (Proverbs 27:19). Alas, cannot both writer and reader see in the above incident a reflection of his own character? Have there not been times when we confidently committed our cause and case unto the Lord, and then we saw an opportunity where, by fleshly scheming, we thought that we could secure the answer to our prayers? It is far easier to commit our way unto the Lord, than it is to "rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him" (Psalm 37:5, 7). It is *there* that the real test of faith often lies: whether we *leave* things entirely in God's hands, or seek to take matters into our own. Learn, then, that the appearing of a willing Hushai at the critical moment is often permitted to put us to the proof—whether or nor our heart be still inclined to lean upon an arm of flesh.

Various attempts have been made seeking to vindicate David for sending Hushai to become a spy for him in Absalom's camp. Strategy may be permissible in warfare, but nothing could justify the king in causing Hushai to act and utter a lie. It is true that God overruled, and through Hushai defeated Ahithophel's counsel, but that no more proves He *approved* of this deception, than did the flowing of water from the smitten rock show God's approbation of Moses' anger. The best that can be said is, "Alas! where shall we find wisdom and simplicity so united in any mere man that we can perceive nothing which admits of censure and needs forgiveness?" (Thomas Scott). There has only been One on this earth in whom there was *no* spot or blemish.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

Misjudging Mephibosheth

2 Samuel 16

"It is human to err." True, yet that does not excuse it, especially here a fellow-mortal is unjustly condemned by us. Appearances are proverbially deceptive: we need to get beneath the surface in order to form a right estimate. Gossip is never to be credited, in fact should not be heeded at all. Only from the mouths of two or more reliable witnesses is an accusation against another to be given a hearing. Even then there must be a fair trial accorded, so that the one accused may know what he is charged with, and have opportunity to defend himself and refute the charge. Only arrant cowards stab in the back or under the cover of darkness. A safe rule to be guided by is never to say anything behind a person's back which you would be afraid to say and are not prepared to substantiate before his face. Alas, how commonly is that rule violated in this evil day! How ready people are to imagine and believe the worst, rather than the best of others—few have escaped this infection.

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). The setting of those words is worthy of note. The Lord Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath day, and His enemies—ever seeking some pretext to condemn Him— were angry. He had flagrantly disregarded their dicta: He had acted at complete variance with *their* ideas of how the Sabbath should be kept holy. Therefore they at once jumped to the harsh conclusion that the Redeemer had desecrated the Sabbath. Christ pointed out that their verdict was both an arbitrary and superficial one. Circumstances alter cases: as the circumcising of a child on the Sabbath, if that were the eighth day from its birth, (v. 23). It is the motive which largely determines the value of an act, and it is sinful to guess at the motives of others. Moreover, the reign of law must not be suffered to freeze the milk of human kindness in our veins, nor make us impervious to human suffering.

"Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Is not this a word which is much needed today by both writer and reader? There is a twofold danger to be guarded against. First, to form too favorable a judgment of people, particularly of those who profess to be Christians. Words are cheap, and gushiness is never a mark of reality. That a man calls himself a Christian, and sincerely thinks himself to be so, does not make him one. The fact that he is a great reader of the Bible, a regular attender of religious services, and is sound in his morals, is no proof that he has been born again. "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (

1 Timothy 5:22): look for the marks of regeneration and be satisfied you have found them, before you address any one as a Brother or Sister in Christ. It is our 's clothing.

On the other hand, there is just as real a danger of forming too harsh a judgment of people, and imputing to hypocrisy what is genuine. A man is not to be made an offender for a word, nor does he deserve to be snubbed because he fails to fawn upon and flatter you. We must not expect everyone to pronounce *our* shibboleths or see eye to eye with us in everything. A kindly heart often beats beneath a gruff exterior. A babbling brook is very shallow, but still waters run deep. Not all are endowed with five talents. Others may not have had the same opportunities and privileges you have enjoyed. Let not a single action alienate a friend: bear in mind the general tenor of his conduct towards you. Be as ready to forgive as you desire to be forgiven. Remember there is still much in you which grates upon others. When wronged *pray over* it before you pass a verdict. Many a person has afterwards bitterly regretted a hasty decision. Take *all* the circumstances into account and "judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

We have begun this chapter thus because the passage we are about to consider (2 Samuel 16:1-4) shows us David grievously misjudging one who was affectionately attached to him. David was unwarrantably influenced by "appearances." He gave ear to an unconfirmed slander against an absent one. He at once believed the worst, without affording the accused any opportunity to vindicate himself. He was one to whom David had shown much kindness in the past, and now that a servant brought to him an evil report, the king accepted the same, concluding that the master had turned traitor. It is true that human nature is lamentably fickle, and that kindness is often rewarded with the basest of ingratitude; yet all are not unthankful and treacherous. We must not allow the wickedness of some to prejudice us against all. We should deal impartially and judge righteously of everyone alike: yet only divine grace— humbly and earnestly sought—will enable us to remain just and merciful after we have been deceived and wronged a few times.

Later, David discovered that he had been deceived (2 Samuel 19:24-30) and was obliged to reverse his harsh verdict; but this did not alter the fact that he had grievously misjudged Mephibosheth and had harbored unjust prejudices against him. And this incident, like many another narrated in Holy Writ, is recorded, my reader, for *our* learning and warning. We are prone to misjudge even our friends, and because of this, are in danger of crediting false reports about them. But there is no reason why we should be deceived, either for or against another: "He that is spiritual discerns all things" (1 Corinthians 2:15 margin). Ah, *there* is the seat of our trouble: it is because we are so unspiritual that we so often judge according to the appearance, and not righteous judgment. A jaundiced eye is incapable of seeing things in their true colors. When the regenerate walk after the flesh, they are just as liable to be imposed upon as are the unregenerate. And this, as we shall see, was the cause of David's sad error.

"And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him" (2 Samuel 16:1). The topographical references connects with 15:30 and 32. On leaving Jerusalem David and his little band had crossed the Kidron, and ascended Olivet. They were making for Bahurim (v. 5), which was a low-lying village in the descent from Olivet to the Jordan. Ultimately, they pitched camp at Mahanaim, on the far side of the Jordan (17:24). Thus it will be seen that they were passing through that portion of the land which was allotted to the tribe of Benjamin (see Joshua 18:11-28), which was the territory of *Saul's* tribe, and *that* was surely dangerous ground for him to tread! This is the first point for us to carefully weigh, for it is one of the keys which opens to us the inner significance of our present incident.

There is nothing meaningless in God's Word, even the geographical details often contain deeply important instruction, pointing valuable spiritual lessons, if only we take the trouble to search them out. This is what we have to do here, for the Holy Spirit has given us no direct hint that the direction which David was now taking furnishes a clue to his subsequent conduct. In making for the territory of Saul's tribe, David was (typically) entering upon *the enemy's ground* should the reader deem this a rather far-fetched conclusion on our part, we would ask him to note that in the verse which immediately follows our present passage, we are plainly told that there came out "a man of the family of the house of *Saul* . . . and *cursed*" David! Surely that was the devil as a "roaring lion" raging against him. Now to come on to the enemy's ground, my reader, is to give him an "advantage of us" (2 Corinthians 2:11), and that is to come under his power; and when under his power our judgment is blinded, and we are quite incapable of judging righteously.

But there is another little detail here, a confirmatory one, which is necessary for us to observe, if we are to view this incident in its true perspective. Our passage opens with the word "And," and common-place and trivial as that may appear, yet it is a vital link in the chain of thought we are now endeavoring to follow out. That "And" tells us we must *connect* what is recorded at the beginning of chapter 16 with that which is narrated at the close of 15. And there, as we saw in the previous chapter, David was guilty of dishonest subterfuge, counseling the priests to feign themselves the faithful servants of Absalom, when in reality they were David's spies. Therein the king was manifestly acting in the energy of *the flesh* seeking by his own carnal efforts to "defeat the counsel of Ahithophel" (15; 34), instead of leaving it with the Lord to answer his prayer to that end (15:31).

Here, then, is vitally-important practical teaching for you and me, dear reader. If *we* are not to be misguided by superficial appearances and to judge "righteous judgment," then we must *avoid* these mistakes that David made. The two small details we have dwelt upon above, explain why he so grievously misjudged Mephibosheth. If, then, we are to have clear discernment, which will preserve us from being deceived by glib-tongued imposters and taken in by apparent acts of kindness toward us, we must walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh, and tread the paths of righteousness and not get on to the enemy's territory. "He who is spiritual discerns all things" (1 Corinthians 2:15): yes, the "spiritual," and not the carnal. As we have said above, it is our *own* fault if we form a wrong judgment of others—due to making the mistakes David did. "If therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light" (Matthew 6:22).

"And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of donkeys saddled; and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and a hundred bunches of raisins, and a hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine" (v. 1). Those who have not followed us throughout this series of chapters should turn to 1 Samuel 9, where not a little is recorded of these two men. Mephibosheth was the grandson of Saul, the archenemy of David, yet to him David showed great kindness because he was the son of Jonathan (4:4), with whom David had made a covenant that he would not cut off his kindness to his house forever (1 Samuel 20:11-17). In 2 Samuel 9 we read, "The king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto your master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. You therefore, and your sons, and your servants, shall until the land for him, and you shall bring in the fruits, that your master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth your master's son shall eat bread always at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons "(verses 9,10).

Ziba, then, was a man of some importance, for he had twenty servants, yet both they and his sons were commanded to serve Mephibosheth. This it is which explains his conduct in our present incident: Ziba was not content to be manager of the considerable estate of Mephibosheth, but coveted to be master of it; and covetousness is ever the mother of a brood of other sins. It was so there: so carried away was he by his evil lust, Ziba scorned not to resort to the basest treachery. He concluded that now was a favorable opportunity for furthering his base design. Having laid his plans with serpentine cunning, he put them into execution, and apparently with success, But "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment" (Job 20:5), and so it proved in this case.

Ziba was determined to procure from David a royal grant of his master's estate, and then, whether David or Absalom prevailed in the present conflict, his desire would be secured. To obtain that grant two things were necessary: first, Ziba himself, must obtain favor in the king's eyes; and second, Mephibosheth must be brought into decided disfavor. The opening verse shows the measure Ziba took to accomplish the first. He met the fugitive king and his band with an elaborate present: it was well timed and appropriately selected. Ziba posed as one who was not only loyal to David's cause, but as very solicitous of his welfare and comfort. But as Thomas Scott says, "Selfish men are often very generous in giving away the property of others for their own advantage." Looking at this detail from the divine side of things, we may see here the mercy of God in providing for His own, as He ever does—even though He employs the *ravens* to feed them!

"And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest you by these?" (v. 2). David was habitually cautious, and at this critical juncture he had need to be doubly so. His own spoiled son had risen up against him, securing a large following, and when such an one as Ahithophel had gone over to his side, the king knew not whom he could trust. Yet, while this sad situation warranted the utmost caution, it certainly did not justify a readiness to believe the worst of everyone—there is

a happy medium between losing all confidence in human nature, and having such a blind trust in men that any charlatan may impose upon us. David did not, then, immediately accept Ziba's present but issued this challenge: was it a subtle trap, or the liberality of a generous man kindly disposed toward him?

"And Ziba said, The donkeys be for the king's household to ride on: and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink" (v. 2). This was the means used by this wretched Ziba to ingratiate himself with David: "A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men" (Proverbs 18:16). Rightly did Matthew Henry ask, "Shall the prospect of advantage in the world, make men generous to be *rich;* and shall not the belief of an abundant recompense in the resurrection of the just, make us charitable to the *poor?*" Surely *that* is the practical lesson for us in this verse: "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (Luke 16:9).

"And the king said, And where is your master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abides at Jerusalem: for he said, Today shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father" (v. 3). Having wormed himself into the king's heart—for being so largely swayed by his emotions, David was peculiarly susceptible to kindness—Ziba now undertook to blacken the character of his master and turn David utterly against him. He represents Mephibosheth as ungrateful, treacherous and covetous. How often masters and mistresses suffer unjustly from the lies of their servants! "A wicked man takes a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment" (Proverbs 17:23). "It is true indeed that David did not *know* that Ziba was wicked. His unexpected kindness came at a time when almost every other hand was either paralyzed by terror, or else armed against him in active enmity. No doubt at such a moment, it required great self-possession to pause, and to withhold the tongue from rashly pronouncing judgment. But David was a king, and it behooved him to be wisely cautious" (B. W. Newton).

"Then said the king to Ziba, Behold your are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth" (v. 4). David credited the foul calumny and without further inquiry or consideration condemns Mephibosheth, seizes his lands as forfeited, and makes a grant of them to his servant. What a solemn warning is this for us! What pains we should take to confirm what we hear, and thus arrive at the real truth of things. As an old writer quaintly said. "God has given us *two* ears that we may hear *both* sides." But sooner or later the truth *will* come to light, as it did in this case. When at last David returned in triumph to Jerusalem, Mephibosheth met him and had opportunity to vindicate himself. How bitterly must the king have then regretted his hasty verdict and the cruel wrong he had done him by crediting such vile reports against him!

"And Ziba said, I humbly beseech you that I may find grace in your sight my lord, O king" (v. 4). Yes, words are cheap, and backbiters are generally flatterers. But note well that Ziba *did not accompany* the fugitive king! No, he thought too much of his own skin for that, and was determined to be on the safe side, no matter what should be the outcome of Absalom's rebellion. "Anxious apparently lest he should suffer if Absalom were to succeed, he seems to have retired to Shimei and the Benjamites, to secure his interests with them; for he was found, when the king returned, in the train of Shimei—that same Shimei who had cursed David" (B. W. Newton). Thus, when David arrived back again in Jerusalem, Ziba was in the ranks of the king's enemies!—whereas Mephibosheth was among his most loyal subjects.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

Cursed

2 Samuel 16

In an earlier chapter we emphasized the fact that in his flight from Jerusalem, David is to be viewed as a contrite penitent. His refusal to stand his ground when Absalom rose up in rebellion against him is to be attributed not to moral weakness, but to spiritual strength. Apparently this had been preceded by a lengthy and debilitating illness which had hindered him nipping that rebellion while it was in the bud, but the king bad recovered by the time the conspiracy had come to a head. No, in his son's rebellion David saw the righteous retribution of God upon his fearful sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, and accordingly he bumbled himself beneath His mighty hand. He recognized the ways of God in His moral government, so instead of vainly flinging himself against the bosses of Jehovah's buckler (rebelling and murmuring at His providences), he meekly bowed before His chastening rod. This was "bringing forth fruits meet for repentance"—as lovely, and as acceptable to God, as are "the fruits of righteousness" in their season.

It is, then, in the viewing of David *as an humble penitent* that we obtain the key to most of what is recorded in 2 Samuel 15 and 16. His sin had found him out and brought him to remembrance before the Holy One of Israel, and he bowed his head and meekly accepted His reproofs. It was for this reason that he bade his loyal followers go back, and leave him alone in his trouble. It was in that spirit he had ordered the priests to carry back the ark to Jerusalem—he felt utterly unworthy that *it* should accompany him on his flight. It was in that same spirit, as an humble penitent, he a crossed the Kidron and ascended Olivet barefooted and in tears. It was as *the mourner before God* that David had now turned his face toward the wilderness. All of this has been before us on a previous occasion, but we deemed it necessary to repeat the same, for it explains, as nothing else does, his amazing attitude in the incident we are about to contemplate.

As the fugitive king and his little following began to descend into the valley leading to the Jordan, a man who belonged to the family of the house of Saul came forth, and *cursed* him, charging him with a fearful crime he had never committed. Meeting with no opposition, this wretched creature cast stones at the king and his men. Now David was not the man, naturally speaking, to suffer such indignities to pass unnoticed: why, then, did he now endure them in silence? Abishai, one of the king's followers, asked permission to avenge his master of these insults by slaying the offender; but David restrained him, and suffered Shimei to continue his outrageous conduct. But what seems stranger still, David attributed this humiliating experience unto God Himself, saying, "*The Lord* has said unto him, Curse David"—language which raises a problem of the first magnitude: the relation of God to evil; for David was not guilty of speaking rashly and wickedly, but gave utterance to a most solemn and weighty truth. But to keep to our main thought:

"He saw God in every circumstance, and owned Him with a subdued and reverent spirit. To him it was not Shimei, but the Lord. Abishai saw only the man, and desired to deal with him accordingly. Like Peter afterwards, when he sought to defend his beloved Master from the band of murderers sent to arrest Him. Both Peter and Abishai were living upon the surface, and looking at secondary causes. The Lord Jesus was living in the most profound subjection to the Father: 'the cup which My Father bath given Me, shall I not drink it?' This gave Him power over everything. He looked beyond the instrument to God—beyond the cup to the hand which had filled it. It mattered not whether it were Judas, Caiaphas, or Pilate; He could say, in all, '*My Father's cup*.' Thus, too, was David, in his measure, lifted above subordinate agents. He looked right up to God, and with unshod feet and covered bead, he bowed before Him: 'The Lord has said unto him, Curse David.' This was enough.

"Now, there are, perhaps, few things in which we so much fail as in apprehending the presence of God, and His dealings with our souls, in every circumstance of daily life. We are constantly ensnared by looking at secondary causes; we do not realize God *in everything.* Hence Satan gets the victory over us. Were we more alive to the fact that there is not an event which happens to us, from morning to night, in which the voice of God may not be heard, the hand of God seen, with what a holy atmosphere would it surround us! Men and things would then be received as so many agents and instruments in our Father's hands; so many ingredients in our Father's cup. Thus would our minds be solemnized, our spirits calmed, our hearts subdued. Then we shall not say with Abishai. 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray you, and take off his head.' Nor shall we, with Peter, draw the sword in natural excitement. How far below their respective masters were both these affectionate though mistaken men! How must the sound of Peter's sword have grated on his Master's ear and offended His spirit! And how must Abishai's words have wounded the meek and submitting David! Could David defend himself while God was dealing with his soul in a manner so solemn and impressive? Surely not. He dare not take himself out of the hands of the Lord. He was His for life or death—as a king or an exile. Blessed subjection!" (C. H. M.).

"And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera, he came forth, and cursed still as he came" (2 Samuel 16:5). What a contrast is this from what was before us in the preceding verse! There we saw the hypocritical Ziba fawning upon David, pretending that he desired to "find grace" in his sight, and addressing him as my lord, O king." Here we find Shimei "cursing" the king, and denouncing him as "you man of Belial." Ziba presented David with an elaborate present, whereas Shimei threw stones and cast dust at him. Unto the flatteries of the former David reacted by grievously misjudging Mephibosheth; whereas to the revilings of the latter, he meekly bowed before God—ah, my reader, the Christian has good reason to fear the smiles of the

"And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came." The first book of Samuel furnished the background to this dark scene. Saul had been Israel's king, and upon his death a determined effort had been made to preserve the throne in *his* family: see 2 Samuel 2:8-3:2. But the attempt of Abner and the determination of Ishbosheth to reign as king over Israel, was in direct defiance of Jehovah's ordination (1 Samuel 16: 1-13; 2 Samuel 2:4). But Shimei disregarded this divine appointment, and his heart was filled with enmity against David, whom he wrongly regarded as the usurper of the throne. While David was in power, he dared not openly anathematize him—though he hated him just the same; but now that David was fleeing from Absalom, Shimei took the opportunity to vent his malice, which shows his utter baseness in taking advantage of the king's trouble at this time.

"And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right band and on his left" (v. 6). The rank hatred of Shimei's heart now burst forth in full force. With savage vehemence be curses the king, and flings stones and dust in the transports of his fury; stumbling along among the rocks high up in the glen, he keeps pace with the little band in the valley below. But before passing on, let us not overlook the fact that Bahurim has been mentioned previously in this book: see 2 Samuel 3:16 and context. Did David now recall how the husband from whom he had torn Michal had followed her to this very place, and then turned back weeping to his lonely home? We cannot be sure, but the remembrance of later and more evil deeds now subdued David's spirit, and caused him to meekly submit to these outrageous insults.

"And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, you bloody man, and you son of Belial: the Lord has returned upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead you has reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son: and, behold, you are taken in your mischief, because you are a bloody man" (verses 7, 8). The different scenes presented in these chapters require to be viewed from various angles, if their manifold signification is to be perceived. This we endeavor to bear in mind as we pass from incident to incident. Shimei is not only to be regarded as the Lord's instrument for chastening David, as a figure of the devil as "a roaring lion"—raging against David because he had come into the enemy's territory (see preceding chapter); but also as a type of those who slandered and persecuted Christ Himself. It is this many-sidedness of these historical pictures which gives to them their chief

When the parents of the infant Jesus presented Him to God in the temple, old Simeon was moved by the Spirit of prophecy to say, "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against . . . *that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*" (Luke 2:34,35). How truly the terms of this prediction concerning the Antitype were adumbrated in the type. All through his checkered career, but especially that part of it we are now considering, David's various experiences served as occasions that "the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed." Much that was bidden beneath the surface was forced out into the open. Those who were loyal to him at heart were now unmistakably manifested as his staunch supporters and faithful friends: his "mighty men" continued to cling to him despite the drastic change of his fortunes. It now became clear who really loved him for his own sake—like Mary and Martha and the apostles in the Gospels. On the other hand, hypocrites were exposed (Ahithophel, the forerunner of Judas), and bitter enemies openly reviled and condemned him—as was the lot of our Lord.

The conduct of Shimei on this occasion was base and vile to the last degree. In the first place, it was in direct defiance of the express commandment of the Lord: "You shall not revile the judge, nor curse the ruler of your people" (Exodus 22:28); "Curse not the king, no not in your thought" (Ecclesiastes 10:20). Second, it was despicable beyond words that Shimei should wait to vent his malice upon David until the time when his cup of sorrow was already full, thus adding to his grief: "For they persecute him whom You have smitten; and they talk to the grief of Your wounded" (Psalm 69:26). Third, the awful charge he now preferred was absolutely false, and against the plainest evidence: so far from David having slain Saul, he had again and again spared his life when he was at his mercy. He was many miles away at the time of Saul's death, and when the tidings of it reached him, he made lamentation for him: 2 Samuel 1:12.

"And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, you bloody man, and you son of Belial: the Lord has returned upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son: and, behold, you are taken in your mischief, because you are a bloody man" (verses 7, 8). What a solemn case is this of the holy name of the Lord being found upon the lips of the wicked!—a warning to us that all who make use of the name of Christ do *not* "depart from iniquity" (2 Timothy 2:19). Observe too how Shimei undertook to interpret the divine dispensations toward David, showing us that wicked men are ever ready to press God's judgments into their service, for they judge right and wrong by selfish interests. May divine grace preserve both writer and reader from the folly and sin of attempting to philosophize about God's dealings with others.

"Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray you, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord has said unto him, Curse David. Who then shall say, Wherefore have you done so?" (verses 9, 10). Here again the type merges into the antitype, and that in two respects. First, how this well-meant but fleshly suggestion of David's devoted follower reminds us of that request of Christ's disciples concerning those who "did not receive Him," namely, "Lord, will You that we command fire to come down from Heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?" (Luke 9:54). As Christ answered "You know not what manner of spirit you are of," so David restrained Abishai—clear proof he was *not* the "bloody man" Shimei had called him! Second, David refused to return railing for railing, reminding us of "when He (Christ) was reviled, He reviled not again" (1 Peter 2:23), in this leaving an example for us to follow. But turning from the typical, let *us* consider the practical.

Though the blood of Saul did not rest upon David, that of Uriah did; this he knew full well, and therefore towed to God's righteous chastisement, and spared Shimei—both Absalom and Shimei were instruments in the hand of God, justly afflicting him—though the guilt of their conduct belonged to them. A parallel case is found in Aaron: the remembrance of his great wickedness in making the golden calf, composed his mind under the fearful trial of the death of his sons (Leviticus 10:1-3)—knowing he deserved yet sorer judgment, he was silent.

"And the king said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord has said unto him, Curse David" (v. 10). David saw the hand of God in this experience, afflicting him for his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah. Shimei had received a commission from Heaven, to curse David, though that no more excused him or took away his guilt than the crucifers of Christ were guiltless because they did what God's hand and counsel "determined before to be done" (Acts 2:23; 4:28). God has foreordained *all* that comes to pass in this world, but this does not mean that He regards the wickedness of men with complacency, or that He condones their evil. No indeed. In their zeal to clear God of being the Author of sin, many have denied that He is the Ordainer and Orderer of it. Because the creature cannot comprehend His ways, or perceive how He is the Author of an act without being chargeable with the evil of it, they have rejected the important truth that sin is under the absolute *control* of God, and is as much subject to His moral government, as the winds and waves are directed by Him in the material sphere.

The subject is admittedly a difficult one, and if we are spared, we hope to write more at length upon it in the future. Meanwhile, we content ourselves by giving a quotation from the Westminster Confession: "God's providence extends itself to all sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and other wise *ordering and governing,* in a manifold disposition unto His own holy ends; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God" (chapter 5). The holiness of God is no more sullied by directing the activities of evil men, than the beams of the sun are defiled when they shine upon a filthy swamp. The hatred of his heart belonged to Shimei himself, but it was God's work that that hatred should settle so definitely on David, and show itself in exactly the manner and time it did.

"And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my affections, seeks my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day" (verses 11,12). Two further considerations are here presented: David calmed himself under the lesser affliction of Shimei's cursing him, by reminding himself of the greater trial of Absalom's rising up against him. And he sought comfort in the possibility that God might yet overrule this trouble for his own ultimate blessing. The

practical value of this incident is, the valuable teaching it contains on how a saint ought to conduct and console himself under severe trials. Let us summarize. First, David comforted himself with the thought that his sins deserved sorer chastisement than he was receiving. Second, he looked beyond the afflicting instrument, to the righteous hand of God. Third, lie considered the minor affliction unworthy of consideration in view of the major. Fourth, he exercised *hope* that God would yet bring "good" out of evil. May grace be granted us to do likewise.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

Befriended

2 Samuel 16

Amid much that is saddening in the next two or three chapters there occasionally shine rays of light through the darkness which overshadows them. The record is mainly concerned with the deeds of David's enemies, but here and there we find chronicled some of the kindly actions of his friends. The depravity of fallen human nature is exhibited again and again, and we behold what fearful depths of iniquity men will fall into when not immediately restrained from above. God righteously permits the devil to work freely in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2), for man at the beginning deliberately elected to become subject to Satan's scepter rather than remain in allegiance to his Maker: preferring death to life, darkness to light, bondage to freedom, he is made to suffer the consequences of the same. Nevertheless, the Almighty is over Satan and makes his ragings to subserve His own purpose: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise You: the remainder of wrath shall You restrain" (Psalm 76:10)—strikingly illustrated again and again in the various scenes which are to come before us.

The depravity of fallen human nature is not an attractive subject, yet it is a solemn fact confronting us daily, both within and without. Moreover, it explains to us, as nothing else will, the fearful wickedness which abounds on every hand. A corrupt tree can (of itself) produce nothing but corrupt fruit. That which should really surprise us is not the bountiful harvest which sin is producing in the human family, but rather that so many of its foul blossoms and buds are nipped before they can develop. Now and again God permits some monster of iniquity to run his race without hindrance, to show us what fearful evil man is capable of, and what would be a common occurrence were He to leave Adam's descendants entirely to themselves. The deeds of Ahithophel and Absalom would be duplicated all around us were it not that God puts bridles into the mouths of those who hate Him, and bounds their enmity as truly as He does those of the winds and waves.

But the restraining of man's wickedness is not the sole operation of the divine government of the human family: from the uncongenial soil of fallen human nature God is also engaged in producing that which makes this world a fit place for His people to live in, for He is doing *all* things for *their* sakes (Romans 8:28)—His glory and their good being inseparably bound up together. That the saint meets with *any* mercy, justice, or kindness at the hands of the unregenerate is due alone to the grace and power of the Lord. That the believer is at times befriended by those who have not the love of God in their hearts, is as much the product and marvel of divine power as His creating an occasional oasis in the desert. There are times when the Lord makes the leopard to "lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together" (Isaiah 11:6). There are times when He causes the ravens to feed His servants. Yet, whatever be the instruments God is pleased to use, the language of the believer should be "*You* prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies" (Psalm 23:5).

Thus, amid the hardships and sufferings which his enemies inflicted upon David, we are also to note the reliefs and kindly supplies which God moved others to furnish him and his men. It was so in the experience of his blessed Son: if on the one hand we read that He "had not where to lay His head," on the other hand we are told "And many others (of the women) which ministered unto Him of their substance" (Luke 8:3). It was so in the history of the apostle Paul: if on the one hand he sometimes experienced "hunger and thirst . . . cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:27), at others it could be recorded "The barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us everyone, because of the present rain, and because of the cold . . . who also honored us with many honors: and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary" (Acts 28:2, 10). And has it not been thus in the lives of both writer and reader? Undoubtedly; sweets and bitters, disappointments and pleasant surprises, have been intermingled: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also has *set the one over against the other*" (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

"And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there" (16:14): that is, at Bahurim (v. 5). After their long and arduous journey from Jerusalem, David and his band of loyal followers pitched camp and obtained a much-needed rest. At the same time "Absalom, and all the people of the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem and Ahithophel with him" (v. 15), David and his retinue having left the way wide open for Absalom to take possession of the royal city whenever he pleased. There were none to oppose him. Accordingly he came, and no doubt felt much elated by this initial success, promising himself that the whole country would soon be his: "God suffers wicked men to prosper a while in their wicked plots, even beyond their expectation, that their disappointment may be the more grievous and disgraceful" (Matthew Henry).

"And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king (margin). And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this your kindness to your friend? why went you not with your friend? and Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay; but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide. And again, whom should I serve? should I not serve in the presence of his son? as I have served in your father's presence, so will I be in your presence" (verses 16-19). This is the sequel to what was before us in 15:32-37: Hushai, at some risk to himself, ventured into the lion's den, in order to serve and help David. His conduct on this occasion raises a problem, one which the commentators have differed widely upon. Some have argued that, on the worldly principle of "all is fair in love and war," Hushai was fully justified in his dissimulation: others have condemned him, without qualification, as an unmitigated liar; while a few have been so puzzled they withheld a judgment. Let it be pointed out, first, that Hushai did *not* say "Let king Absalom live"; and when challenged concerning his infidelity to David, he did not reply I have done with your father, and am now devoted solely to *you* and your cause": his language was ambiguous, capable of a double construction. While that somewhat modified his offense it by no means cleared Hushai, for his language was intended to mislead, and therefore was chargeable with duplicity. That his intention was a good one, and that his efforts succeeded, by no means exonerated him. "Results" are not the criterion by which we should determine the rightness or wrongness of anything. Bear in mind it is the *human* side of things we are now considering—from the divine side, God suffered the pride of Absalom's heart to deceive him: he fondly imagined that David's best friends were so in love with himself that they gladly took the present opportunity to flock to his banner; and therefore he construed Hushai's words in favor of himself.

The above incident is recorded as a warning, and *not* for our imitation. It shows that something more than a good motive is necessary in order for a deed to be right in the sight of God. This is an important principle for us to weigh, for not a few today excuse much that is wrong by saying "Well, his intentions were good." While it be true that the motive often determines the value of an act, yet *other* principles and considerations must also regulate us. For instance, in seeking to carry out our good intensions, we must use the *right means.* It is praiseworthy for a parent to seek food for his hungry children, yet he or she must not steal the same. *This* was where Hushai failed: the desire to help David did not warrant his playing the part of a hypocrite. "For our rejoicing is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in *simplicity and godly sincerity,* not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Corinthians 1:12) is the Christian's standard. It is never right to do wrong.

The principal means which the believer should employ in every time of trouble and emergency, is *prayer:* presenting his case in humble and trustful confidence to Him with whom there are no difficulties, leaving Him to undertake for us as seems Him best. This is what David had done at first (2 Samuel 15:31); but, later, he spoiled it by resorting to a carnal policy (15:34). Before passing on let us note how Absalom's challenge to Hushai may be taken to heart by ourselves in a higher sense: "Men who admire themselves will be easily deceived by those who profess an attachment to them; yet they readily discern those faults in others, of which themselves are far more notoriously guilty, and are apt to express astonishment at them. If a zealous disciple of Christ commit evident wickedness, even profligates will exclaim 'Is this your kindness to your Friend?' But, alas, how often might the Savior Himself address each of us in these words, to our shame and confusion! And how often should we thus check ourselves, and remember our ingratitude, to our deep humiliation" (Thomas Scott). Unfaithfulness to Christ is a species of unkindness to our best Friend! What a theme that is for a practical sermon!

We have, in a former chapter, already made allusion to the revolting episode recorded in the closing verses of 2 Samuel 16, so a few brief remarks on it here will suffice. "Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do" (v. 20). First, we note that Absalom did not seek unto the custodians of the ark (which David had sent back to Jerusalem) for guidance, for he had no concern for the will of Jehovah: throughout the entire piece he acts as an infidel, a blatant rebel. Second, the obvious design of Ahithophel in so evilly advising Absalom—which, as Matthew Henry rightly says was as though he inquired "at the oracle of Satan" rather than "of God" (v. 21)—was to get his new master to so conduct and commit himself that all hope of forgiveness by David would be out of the question. Third, but behind the scenes, was the overruling hand of God, fulfilling His own word (2 Samuel 12:11) and chastising David for his wickedness—that he had these "concubines" in addition to a plurality of wives, is a sad reflection upon the Psalmist.

"Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: and I will bring back all the people unto you: the man whom you Seek is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace" (17:1-3). It may be thought that this vile suggestion was prompted by the feelings of private animosity, for, as previously pointed out, Bathsheba was the grand-daughter of Ahithophel, and therefore he would desire to personally avenge the wrong done to his family. But whether this be the case or no, as a politic man Ahithophel would be quick to recognize that delay was dangerous, and that if Absalom desired the removal of David from his path, there must be swift action, and a striking while his father and men were tired and low spirited.

Those who surrounded the wicked Absalom at this time understood clearly that nothing short of the death of David and the seizing of the throne for himself would satisfy his covetousness: the only matter to be determined was the best way in which to accomplish this base design. Consequently, when Ahithophel voiced his evil counsel, there were none that raised hands of holy horror, none who so much as objected to the *gross injustice* of such a course. Not long ago Absalom himself had fled for a crime, and David contented himself by allowing his son to remain in exile, though he deserved death; nay, he craved his return. But so utterly devoid was Absalom of natural affection, so incapable of ingratitude, that he thirsted for David's blood. See, my reader, what human nature is capable of (yours and mine not excepted) when God leaves us entirely to ourselves. How far, far astray are they who deny the solemn truth of the total depravity of fallen man!

The scheme propounded by Ahithophel had much to commend itself to a man of such a designing type as Absalom. It would not serve his purpose for there to be a wholesale massacre of his subjects—the Philistines were too near and numerous to unnecessarily weaken his forces. Let the king himself be smitten, and his followers would readily capitulate. "Smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered, and be an easy prey to the wolf" was the principle of Ahithophel's plan. It has been pointed out by others that there was a close resemblance (if not an actual foreshadowment) here to the policy suggested by Caiaphas: "Now consider that it is expedient for us that *one man* would die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50). So too the language of others of Christ's enemies was "This is the Heir: come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours" (Mark 12:7).

"And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel" (v. 4). The desperate wickedness of the cold-blooded proposal of Ahithophel to "smite"—slay—God's anointed, so far from filling Absalom with horror, met with his hearty approval. If "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18), it is equally true that evil men and seducers wax worse and worse. The falling stone gathers momentum, and the further it rolls down hill, the greater is its velocity. So it is with one who has thoroughly sold himself to the devil—he gives his wretched victims no rest, but urges them on from crime to crime, until their cup of iniquity is full. Satan is a merciless taskmaster, who ever demands an increasing tale of bricks from his slaves. How earnestly we should pray to be delivered from the evil one!

"Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he says" (v. 5). This is surely striking. In the previous instance Absalom had acted promptly on the evil counsel of Ahithophel (16:22), why, then, did he not do so now? The proposal made had "pleased him well," yet he hesitated and consulted with Hushai, the secret friend of David. It was not that Hushai took the initiative and pushed himself forward: it was Absalom himself who *sought* to know his mind. What a proof that "the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turns it wherever He will" (Proverbs 21:1). "The Lord had appointed to defeat the good (politic) counsel of Ahithophel" (v. 14), yet He accomplished this not by physical force, but by the working of natural laws. Absalom appeared to act quite freely in following out the thought that had entered his mind, nevertheless a divine hand was directing him, unknown to himself. Man is free to act only within the circumference of the divine decrees.

It was at this critical moment, when the doom of David appeared to be as good as sealed, that his faithful follower was given the opportunity of befriending him. How blessedly God *times* His interventions. He is never too early, and never too late. It is the impatience of unbelief and the fretfulness of self-will which so often makes us think the Lord is tardy. Often God "waits that He may be gracious" (Isaiah 30:18) in order to bring us to the end of ourselves, and that the deliverance may more evidently appear to be from Himself. At other times, He delays His intervention on behalf of His own for the greater chagrin and dismay of their enemies. Hushai did not fail David at this critical moment, but by clever and plausible arguments caused Absalom to change his mind, and postpone an immediate attack upon the fugitive king. This accomplished his object, for any delay on the part of Absalom afforded David an opportunity to rest his weary men, add to his forces and station them to best advantage. But more of that in our next.

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

Befriended

(Continued)

2 Samuel 16 and 17

In working out His own eternal designs, in ministering to the spiritual and temporal needs of His people, and in delivering them from their enemies, God acts as sovereign, employing subordinate agents or dispensing with them as He pleases. That He is *not* restrained by the lack of means is evident from His feeding two million Israelites in the wilderness for the space of forty years, by giving them bread from Heaven; and from other signal instances recorded in His Word. Nevertheless, generally, He is pleased to make use of means in the accomplishment of His everlasting decrees. Oftentimes those means are feeble ones, altogether inadequate in themselves for accomplishing the ends they do—to show us that their sufficiency lies in Him who deigns to make use of them. Where human agents are employed by God, their unfitness and unworthiness is often quite apparent, and this, that we may glory not in them, but in the One who condescends to place His treasure in earthen vessels. Unless his principle be clearly recognized by us, we are apt to stumble at the manifest faults in the instruments God employs.

God has never had but one perfect Servant on this earth, and His surpassing excellency is made the more conspicuous by the numerous imperfections of all others. Yet we must not take delight in looking for or dwelling upon the blemishes of those God made use of—like unclean birds see in carrion to feed upon. Who are we, so full of sin ourselves, that we should throw stones at others? On the other hand, the faults recorded in Scripture of those whom God used in various ways must not be made a shelter behind which we hide, in order to excuse our own sins. It is the bearing in mind of these obvious rules which often occasions a real difficulty to the minister of God, whether his preaching be oral or written. It is his duty to use *as warnings* the faults of Biblical characters; yet, alas, in doing so, he frequently has occasion to *condemn himself;* yet that is beneficial if it truly humbles him before God.

We are now to consider the means used by God in delivering His servant from the murderous designs of his enemies. If there had been a Jonathan in Saul's palace to plead his cause and give him intelligence of his father's plans, so now God raised up an Hushai at the headquarters of Absalom to render him aid and forward him notice of what was impending. Reliable messengers to carry these important tidings from him to David were present in the persons of the two priests, whom David had sent back to Jerusalem in order to there serve his interests; though they had been obliged to lodge outside the city at Enrogel, where a servant-girl communicated, in turn, with them. Yet one other link in the chain was required in order for the contact to be established: the two priests were seen as they started out on their mission, and were pursued by Absalom's men; but a protector was raised up for them, and they escaped. Thus, in this one instance God made use of a prominent politician, two priests, a maidservant, and a farmer and his wife.

"Then said Absalom, call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he says. And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spoke unto him, saying, Ahithophel has spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not, speak you" (

2 Samuel 17:5,6). Let it not be forgotten that "the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom" (16:23). Is it not, then, truly remarkable that Absalom did not act promptly on his advice, instead of now conferring with Hushai; the more so as the plan propounded by Ahithophel had "pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel" (v. 4). There is only one satisfactory explanation: God had decreed otherwise! This is far more, my reader, than an incident in ancient history: it furnishes an example *of how* God regulates the affairs of nations today. Have we not witnessed individuals as devoid of all natural affections, as godless, as ruthless, as unscrupulous as was Absalom, who have *forced themselves* into the high places of national and international affairs!

Yes, my reader, what the Holy Spirit has recorded here in 2 Samuel 17 is something of much greater importance than an episode which transpired thousands of years ago. The anointed eye may discern in and through it the light of Heaven being shed upon the political affairs of earth. God governs as truly in the houses of legislature and in the secret conferences of rulers and diplomats, as He does the elements and the heavenly bodies: He it is who rules their selfish schemings and overrules the counter plans of others. It was so here in Jerusalem in the long ago; it is so, just as actually now, at London, Washington, Paris, Moscow, Berlin and Rome. The very reason why the Spirit has chronicled our incident in the imperishable pages of Holy Writ is that God's people in all succeeding generations might know that "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whoever He will" (Daniel 4:17, 25, 32)— alas, that through the ignorance and unfaithfulness of the modern pulpit so many believers are now deprived of that comforting assurance.

God's Word is a *living* Word, and not an obsolete history of things which took place in the far-distant past. It is to our own irreparable loss if we fail to turn its light upon the mysteries of life and the "dark places of the earth." And surely there are no darker places than the conference chambers of politicians and international diplomats: God "sets up over the kingdom of men, *the basest* of men" (Daniel 4:17). where His claims and the interests of His people are either totally ignored or blatantly defied: yet, even *there* the Most High is supreme, and has *His* way. Only so far are they allowed to go in their evil schemings and greedy plannings. If on the one hand there is a bloodthirsty Ahithophel (a military leader) who urges the modern dictator to the shedding of innocent blood, on the other hand God raises up an Hushai (though his name may not appear in our newspapers), who restrains and checks by advising cautious delay, and *his* counsel is made (by God) to thwart or modify the more extreme measures of the former. In the Day to come we shall find that 2 Samuel 17 has often ken duplicated in the politics of this world, particularly in those of Europe.

"And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time" (v. 7). Hushai was put to rather a severe test. In the first place, Absalom had already evidenced some suspicion of his loyalty to himself, when he first appeared on the scene (16:17). In the second place, Ahithophel had just advanced a plan which met with general approval. And in the third place, to criticize the scheme of Ahithophel might well be to increase Absalom's suspicion against himself. But he stood his ground, and at some risk to himself, did what he could to befriend David. He came right out and boldly challenged the counsel of his rival, yet he prudently took the edge off the blow by his modification of "at this time." His language was skillfully chosen: he did not say "such a course would be downright madness," but only it "is not good"—it is unwise to employ harsher language than is absolutely necessary. Thus Absalom discovered that his counselors did not agree—it is by diversity of views and policies that a balance is preserved in the affairs of human government.

"For, said Hushai, you know your father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and your father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people" (v. 8). In these words Hushai artfully suggests that Ahithophel was seriously misjudging the ease of his task. He had lightly and bumptiously declared "I will smite the king only" (v. 2). But that was not such a simple task as Ahithophel supposed. David was something more than a pasteboard monarch: he was a man of great courage and much experience in the arts of warfare. Moreover, he was accompanied by valiant warriors, who were in an angry mood over the shameful necessity of their beloved master's flight from Jerusalem, and would not stand idly by while he was slaughtered. Absalom had better pause and face the terribly real difficulties of the situation, for it is often a fatal mistake to underestimate the strength of an adversary. To sit down first and count the cost (Luke 14:28) is always a prudent course to follow rash and ill-considered measures are likely to meet with failure. But much grace is needed in this feverish age to act thoughtfully and cautiously, and not rush blindly ahead.

"Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whoever hears it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follows Absalom" (v. 9). The fugitive king was not the type of man to seek his ease: he "will not lodge with the people," but rather will he, as a seasoned warrior, resort to subtle strategy, and lie in a well-chosen ambush, from which he will unexpectedly spring out, and slay at least the foremost of Ahithophel's men. And *that* would seriously prejudice Absalom's cause, for the news would quickly go forth that David was victor in the field. The practical lesson which this points for us, is that we must not commit the folly of underestimating the strength and subtlety of our spiritual enemies, and that we must carefully consider what are the best ways and means of overcoming them. Our lusts often secretly hide themselves, and then spring forth when they are least expected. Satan generally attacks us from an unlooked-for quarter. He has had far more experience than we, and we need to tread cautiously if he is not to gain a serious advantage over us.

"And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men" (v. 10). Hushai is here pressing upon Absalom what would inevitably follow if that should eventuated which he had mentioned in the previous verse. In case David succeeded in springing a trap and the advance guard of Ahithophel's proposed expedition were slain, as would most probably happen when pitted against such a wily antagonist as the conqueror of Goliath, only one course would surely follow—the entire force sent against David would be demoralized. The inexperienced men Ahithophel led, though superior in numbers, would now feel they were no match for the braves in the king's forces, and they would be utterly dismayed. That would be fatal to Absalom's cause, as a little reflection must make apparent. Human nature is fickle, and men in the mass are even more easily swayed than are individuals: it takes little to turn the tide of public opinion.

"Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto you, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that you go to battle in your own person" (v. 11). This was the only logical inference to draw from the preceding premises. The "twelve thousand men" Ahithophel asked For (17:1) were altogether inadequate for success against such a general as David and against such renowned men as he commanded. Absalom must mobilize the entire manhood of the nation, and overwhelm his father by sheer force of numbers.

In counseling Absalom to undertake a general mobilization, or the gathering together of an overwhelming force, Hushai was obviously "playing for time." The longer he could induce Absalom to delay taking military action against the one he was befriending, the better would his real object be achieved. The slower Absalom was in moving, the more time would David have for putting a greater distance between himself and Jerusalem, to increase his own Forces, and to select to best advantage the site for the coming conflict. The entire design of Hushai was to counter Ahithophel's proposed "I will arise and pursue after David *this* night" (v. 1). To further strengthen his argument Hushai suggests that Absalom should "go to battle in your own person" (v. 11)—take the place of honor, and lead your own men. Indirectly, he was intimating that Ahithophel's project had only his *own* ends (private revenge) and personal glory in view: note his "I will arise," "I will come upon him," "I will smite the king" (verses 1, 2). Hushai knew well the kind of man he was dealing with, and so appealed to the pride of his heart.

As we shall see from the sequel, it was this very detail which issued in Absalom's losing his own life. Had he followed the counsel of Ahithophel he would have remained at Jerusalem, but by accepting the advice of Hushai to go to battle in his own person, he went forth to his death. How true it is that "God takes the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (Job 5:13)! No doubt Absalom was priding himself in his prudence by obtaining the advice of both these experienced counselors, yet that was the very thing that led to his destruction. The suggestion of Hushai appealed to his personal vanity, and by yielding thereto we are shown here that "Pride goes before destruction." If God has placed you, my reader, in humble circumstances and in a lowly position, envy not those who take the lead, and aspire not to a place of worldly dignity and carnal honors.

"So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falls on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one" (v. 12). This completes the thoughts begun at the start of the preceding verse: by means of an enormous force we shall be able to fall upon David and his followers and utterly annihilate them: neither strategy nor valor will be of any avail against such overwhelming numbers. Such counsel as this was not only calculated to appeal to Absalom himself, but also to the unthinking masses: there would be little danger to themselves; in fact, such a plan seemed to guarantee success without any risk at all "There is safety in numbers" would be their comforting slogan. Note Hushai's artful use of the plural number: "So shall *we* come upon him" and "*we* will light upon him" in sharp contrast from the threefold "I" of Ahithophel.

"Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there" (v. 13). Thus Hushai sought to close the door against every possible objection. Should David and his men take refuge in some city, and fortify it, instead of hiding in a pit or wood (v. 9), *that* would prove no obstacle to such a host as we should take against him. We will not endanger our men by seeking to force a way in, but, by main force, drag the city and its people into the river—this, of course, was not to be taken seriously, but was intended to raise a laugh. It was simply designed to signify that by no conceivable means could David either defy or escape them.

"And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good (politic) counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom" (v. 14). The second half of his verse explains the first. The prudent advice of Ahithophel was rejected, and the plausible but foolish measures of Hushai were accepted—foolish because they involved so much delay. The same thing has happened scores of times in the affairs of nations, and for a similar reason. Folly often prevails over wisdom in the counsels of princes and in the houses of legislators. Why? Because *God* has appointed the rejection of sound counsel in order to bring on nations the vengeance which their crimes call down from Heaven. It is *thus* that God rules the world by His providence. See that grave senator, or that sage diplomat: he rises and proposes a course of wisdom; but if God has appointed to punish the nation, some prating fanatic will impose his sophisms on the most sagacious assembly.

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

His Stay at Mahanaim

2 Samuel 17

We have seen how God made use of Hushai, David's friend to defeat the counsel which Ahithophel had proposed to Absalom. This meant a short breathing space was afforded the fugitive king. Hushai at once took steps to acquaint his master with his success (17:15, 16). The two priests who served as messengers were obliged to take refuge in a farmer's house at Bahurim, biding in a well, which his wife covered—how many strange and unexpected places have sheltered the servants of God from their enemies only the Day to come will fully reveal. Incidentally, let us note how this episode teaches us that so far from acting rashly and presumptuously, we should always avail ourselves of any lawful means which a merciful providence supplies for us. True faith never leads to fanaticism or fatalism, but moves us to act with prudence and with good judgment.

It was well that the two messengers had taken this precaution, for they were pursued and tracked to the place where they were hiding, but through the woman's prevarication their enemies were sent on a false trail. "And it came to pass, after they (the pursuers) were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David, and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water; for thus has Ahithophel counseled against you. Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over *Jordan*" (17:21, 22). "This was a remarkable instance of God's providential care over His servant and his friends, that not one was lost, or had deserted, out of the whole company; and he was in this a type of Christ, who loses none of His true followers" (Thomas Scott). For the antitype see John 18:8, 9.

It was at this time, most probably, that David wrote Psalms 42 and 43. They were composed at a season when he was deprived of the benefit and blessing of the public means of grace. This loss he felt keenly (42:4), but hoping in God and earnestly supplicating Him, he looked forward to the time when he would be again permitted to enter His holy courts with joy and thanksgiving (43:3, 4). These Psalms bring before is in a most blessed way the exercises of soul through which David passed at this season, and the persevering efforts he made to retain his hold upon God. They show us that though a fugitive, pressed almost beyond endurance by sore trials, nevertheless he maintained his fellowship with the Lord. They reveal the grand recourse which the believer has in every time of trouble—something to which the poor worldling is a complete stranger—namely, the privilege of unburdening his heart unto One who is of tender mercy, great compassion, and who has promised to sustain (Psalm 55:22) when we east our burden upon Him.

The first two verses of Psalm 42 express the deep longing of a spiritual heart for communion with God in the house of worship: it is only when deprived of such privileges that we come to value them as we should—just as a parched throat is the one which most relishes a glass of water. In verse 3 he tells the Lord how keenly he had felt the mocking jibes of his blasphemous foes. Then he recalls the vivid contrast from previous experience, when he, though king, had gone with the multitude to the tabernacle and joined in celebrating God's praise. Challenging himself for his despondency, he seeks to raise his spirits. But soon dejection returns and he cries, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me" (v. 6). Then it was he added "therefore will I *remember You* from the land of *Jordan,* and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar." Yes, though cut off from the public means of grace, though plagued with sore trials, he will not forget his best Friend.

In the remaining verses we find the Psalmist freely unburdening himself to God. As Spurgeon said, "It is well to tell the Lord how we feel, and the more plain the confession the better: David talks like a sick child to his mother, and we should seek to imitate him." So closely is Psalm 43 connected with the one preceding, that in one or two of the older manuscripts they are coupled together as one: that it was written during the same period is evident from verse 3, 4. In it we find David begging God to undertake for him, to "plead his cause against an ungodly nation," to "deliver him from the deceitful and unjust man"—the reference to Ahithophel or Absalom, or both. He is distressed at his own despondency and unbelief, prays for a fresh manifestation of the divine presence and faithfulness (v. 3), asks for such a deliverance as would permit his return to God's house, and closes with an expression of assurance, that, in the end, all would turn out well for him.

"And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey, and arose, and got him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself and died, and was buried in the sepulcher of his father" (2 Samuel 17:23). Unspeakably solemn is this. What a contrast is here presented: in the preceding verse we see the temporal deliverance of David and all his men; here we behold his chief enemy flinging himself into eternal destruction by his own mad act. Significantly enough "Ahithophel" signifies "the brother of a fool," and none exhibit such awful folly as those who are guilty of self-murder. Ahithophel did not commit this unpardonable crime on the spur of the moment, but with full deliberation, journeying to his own home to accomplish it. Nor was he bereft of his senses, for he first duly settled his affairs and arranged for the future of his family before destroying himself.

But *why* should Ahithophel have proceeded to such desperate measures? Ah, my reader, there is something here which needs to search *our* hearts. That upon which he had *chiefly doted* was now turned to ashes, and therefore he no longer had any further interest in life: his household "gods" were, so to speak, stolen from him, his "good thing" was gone, and therefore his temple lay in ruins. Hitherto his counsel was regarded "as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God" (16:23), but the advice of Hushai was now preferred before his. The high esteem in which he had been held for his political acumen, his wisdom in the affairs of state, was everything to him, and when Absalom passed his advice by (17:14) it was more than the pride of his heart could endure. To be slighted by David's usurper meant that he was now a "back number"; to be thus treated before the people was too humiliating for one who had long been lionized by them.

Do we not behold the same Satanic egotism in Saul. When Samuel announced to him that the Lord had rejected him from being king, what was his response? Why, this: "Then he said, I have sinned: yet *honor me now,* I pray you, before the leaders of my people, and *before* Israel" (1 Samuel 15:30). At, it was the praise of man, and not the approbation of God, which meant everything to him. Thus it was with Ahithophel: an intolerable slur had been cast upon his sagacity, and his proud heart could not endure the idea of having to play second fiddle to Hushai. What point this gives to that exhortation, "Thus says the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the Lord" (

Jeremiah 9:23, 24). Observe the justice of God in suffering Ahithophel to come to such an end: he plotted the violent death of David, and now was fulfilled that word his mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate" (Psalm 7:16).

O that we may really take this to ourselves, so that we honestly examine our hearts, and ascertain upon what it is, really, chiefly set. What did anything avail Haman, while Mordecai sat at the gate? is another illustration of the same evil principle. What a solemn lesson all of this reads to us! Have we, my reader, some earthly idol—be it riches, honor, fame, or even a loved one—around which the tendrils of the soul are so entwined that if *it* be touched, our very *life* is touched; if *it* be taken away, life is for us no longer worth living? Where is our ruling passion fixed? On what is it centered? Is it some object of time and sense, or One who is eternal and immutable? What "treasure" are we laying up day by day? Is it one that the hand of man or the hand of death may soon take from us, or that which is "eternal in the heavens"? Seek to answer this question in the presence of the Lord Himself.

"Then David came to Mahanaim" (v. 24). This was one of the cities of the Levites in the tribe of Gad (Joshua 13:26). What sacred memories were associated with this place we may discover by a reference to Genesis 32. It was at this very place that Jacob had stopped on his return from sojourning so long with Laban. He was on his way toward the unwelcome meeting with Esau. But it was there that "the angels of God met him"! With faith's discernment, Jacob perceived that this was "a token for good" from the Lord: And when Jacob saw them, he said, I his is God's host, and he called the name of that place Mahanaim" or 'two hosts"—if God were for him, who could be against him! It was *this* place, then, that David now made his headquarters, where he increased his forces, and gathered together an army with which to oppose the rebels.

By this time the first force of the disaster bad spent itself, and when David had succeeded in getting his forces safely across the Jordan, on the free uplands of Bashan, his spirits rose considerably. Psalms 42 and 43 reflect the struggle which had taken place within him between despair and hope, but as we have seen, the latter eventually triumphed. Now that Mahanaim was reached, he determined to make a definite stand. No doubt the sacred memories associated with this place served to further hearten him, and when the news reached him of Ahithophel's defection from Absalom and his subsequent suicide, he had good ground to conclude that the Lord was not on the side of his enemies. As the time went on, it became increasingly evident that the leaders of the rebellion were lacking in energy, and that every day of respite from actual fighting diminished their chances of success, as the astute Ahithophel had perceived.

"And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him . . . so Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead" (verses 24, 26). At last the treacherous Absalom proceeds to carry out his vile designs. Not content with having hounded his fond parent from Jerusalem, and driven him to the utmost corner of his kingdom, nothing will satisfy him but removing David from the world itself. See to what fearful lengths Satan will lead one who is fully yielded to his sway. He was guilty of high treason. With eager mind and brutal heart he determined to deprive his father of his life. His awful conspiracy had now reached its consummation. He set his army in battle array against David. He was willing to play the part of patricide, to stain his hands with the blood of a loving father who had been too long-suffering with him.

"And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa was a mans son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother" (v. 25). Joab, the commander-in-chief of Israel's army (1 Chronicles 20:1), had remained loyal to his master, so that Absalom had perforce to appoint a new general to take charge of his forces: the wicked are not allowed to have everything their own way—divine providence generally puts a cog in their wheel. There is some difficulty in deciphering the details of this verse; as the marginal readings intimate. The one selected by Absalom as captain of his host was, originally, "Jether an *Ishmaelite,"* who had seduced the half-sister of David—suitable character for the present position! Later, he was known as "Ithra an Israelite," Matthew Henry suggesting that he had become such by "some act of state—naturalized." Such a selection on the part of Absalom was fully in accord with his own rotten character.

"And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, brought beds, and basins, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentils, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for all the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness" (verses 27-29). Here the scene changes again, and from the malice of David's foes our attention is directed to the kindness of his friends. With what vivid contrasts these chapters abound! And is it not thus in all earthly life? How can it be otherwise in a world which is ruled by Satan but overruled by God.

There is something striking and touching in connection with each of the three men mentioned here, who brought such a lavish present to David. "Shobi was the brother of him, concerning whom David had said, "I will *show kindness* to Hanun the son of Nahash" (10:2) so, with the measure he had meted out to this Gentile, it is measured to him again. Ah, has not God promised that he who waters others, shall himself be watered! "Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar" was the man who had given shelter to Mephibosheth (9:5): the king had relieved him of this trust by giving Mephibosheth a place at his own table (9:11), and now Machir shows his gratitude by providing for David's table. Concerning "Barzillai" we read that he was "a very aged man, even four score years old" (19:22), yet he was not too aged to minister now unto David's needs. He will come before us again in the sequel.

Weary from their long march, ill provisioned for what lay before them bountiful supplies are now freely given to them. As Matthew Henry pointed out, "He did not put them under contribution, did not compel them to supply him, much less plunder them. But, in token of their dutiful affection to him, their firm adherence to his government, and their sincere concern for him in his present straits, of their own good will, they brought in plenty of all that which he had occasion for. Let us learn hence to be generous and open-handed, according as our ability is, to all in distress, especially great men, to whom it is most grievous, and good men, who deserve better treatment.

How often it falls out that God moves strangers to comfort His people when they are denied it from those much nearer them. There is a law of compensation which is conspicuously exemplified in the divine government of human affairs. A balance is strikingly preserved between losses and gains, bitter disappointments and pleasant surprises. If an heartless Pharaoh determines to slay the children of the Hebrews, his own daughter is constrained to care for Moses. If Elijah has to flee from Palestine to escape the fury of Ahab and Jezebel, a widow at Zarephath is willing to share her last meal with him. If the parents of Jesus Christ were poverty stricken, wise men from the East come with a gift of "gold," which made possible their flight and sojourn in Egypt. If a man's foes be those of his own household, friends are raised up for him in the most unexpected quarters. Let us not, then, dwell unduly upon the former; and let us not fail to be grateful and return thanks for the latter.

CHAPTER SEVENTY

His Son's Death

2 Samuel 18

"The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment" (Job 20:5)—often so even when measured by human and temporal standards: how much more so in the light of eternity! Alas, that our hearts are so little affected by that unspeakably solemn consideration—a *never-ending future:* enjoyed under the blissful approbation of God, or endured beneath His frightful curse. What are the smiles and honors of men worth, if their sequel be the everlasting frown of the Almighty? The pleasures of sin are but "For a season" (Hebrews 11:25), whereas the pleasures which are at God's right hand are "for evermore" (Psalm 16: 11). Then what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Yet how many, like Esau of old, place more value upon a mess of pottage than the blessings of Heaven. How many, like Ahab, will sell themselves to do evil in order for a brief moment of pleasure or fame.

"The triumphing of the wicked is short." Yes, and so it proved with David's wretched son. Absalom had laid his plans carefully, executed them zealously, and bad carried them out without any compunction (2 Samuel 15:1, 2, 5). He had taken a mean advantage of his father's indisposition and had stolen the hearts of many of his subjects from the king. He aspired to the kingdom, and now determined to seize the throne for himself (15:10). He had assembled his forces at Jerusalem, and had the powerful Ahithophel to counsel him. He had ruthlessly determined that his father's life must be sacrificed to his ambition, and had now gone forth at the head of the army to accomplish his death (17:24). His triumph seemed to be assured, but unknown and unsuspected by himself, he was going forth to meet his own tragic but fully merited

"And David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them" (2 Samuel 18:1). As Ahithophel had foreseen, the delay of Absalom had afforded David the opportunity to greatly augment his forces. Though considerable numbers had joined the rebel, yet there must have been many scattered throughout Israel who still remained loyal to David, and as the news of the insurrection spread abroad, no doubt hundreds of them took up arms and went forth to assist their fugitive king. That his army had, by this time, been greatly strengthened, is clear from the terms of this verse. David now proceeded to muster and marshal his reinforcements so that they might be used to the best advantage. He girded on the sword with some of the animation of early days, and the light of trustful valor once more shone in his eyes.

It seems quite clear that, by this time, David had no fear of what the outcome would be of the coming conflict. He had committed his cause to God, and looked forward with confidence to the issue of the impending battle. The striking answer which God had given to his prayer that the counsel of Ahithophel might be turned to foolishness, must have greatly strengthened his faith. His language at the close of Psalms 42 and 43 (composed at this period) witness to his hope in the living God. Yet let it be duly noted that strong faith did not produce either sloth or carelessness, David acted with diligence and wisdom: marshaling his forces, putting them in good order, dividing them to best advantage, and placing them under the command of his most experienced generals. In order to insure success, our responsibility is to employ all lawful and prudent means. Declining to do so is presumption, and not faith.

"And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite" (v. 2). How true it is that there is nothing new under the sun. Military tactics were conducted along the same lines then as they are now: David disposed his forces into a central army, with right and left protecting flanks. "And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also" (v. 2). David was not lacking in courage, and was ready and willing to share any danger with his men. Yet we believe there was something more than bravery evidenced by these words: was he not anxious to be on the spot when the crisis arrived, so that he could protect his wayward son from the fury of his soldiers! Yes, we see here the father's heart, as well as the king's nobility.

"And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also." His desire was still upon Absalom, judging that his presence might help to shield him, for he was of too soft a heart to disown the feelings of a father, even toward one who had risen up in rebellion against him. Yet it seems to us that there was something of a deeper character which prompted David at this time. He would feign go forth himself because he realized that it was *his sin* which had brought all this trouble upon the land, and he was far too noble minded to let the risks of battle find any in the foreground but himself. Let not the reader forget what we pointed out several times in the preceding chapters, namely, that it is *as the humble repentant* David is to be viewed throughout this connection: this it is which supplies the key to various details in these incidents,

"But the people answered, You shall not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now you are worth ten thousand of us, therefore now it is better that you support us out of the city" (v. 3). This is indeed beautiful. David had shown his affection for his faithful followers, and now they evidence theirs for him. They would not hear of their beloved king adventuring himself into the place of danger. How highly they esteemed him! and justly so: he was not only possessed of qualities which could well command, but of those which held the hearts of those who knew him best. The deep veneration in which he was held comes out again at a later date, when he was hazarding his life in battle with the Philistines: his men swore to him saying, "*You* shall go no more out with us to battle, that you quench not the light of Israel" (21:17). He was their "light": their leader, their inspirer, their joy, the honored and loved one, in favor with God and man.

"And the king said unto them, What seems you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands" (v. 4). "He might be more serviceable to them by tarrying in the city, with a reserve of his forces there, whence he might send them recruits—that may be a position of real service, which yet is not a position of danger. The king acquiesced in their reasons, and changed his purpose. It is no piece of wisdom to be stiff in our resolutions, but to be willing to hear reason, even from our inferiors, and to be overruled by their advice, when it appears to be for our own good. Whether the people's prudence hid an eye to it or no, God's providence wisely ordered it, that David should not be in the field of battle; for then his tenderness had certainly interposed to 's life, whom God had determined to destroy (Matthew Henry).

Personally, we regard the king's acquiescence as another indication of his *chastened heart.* There is nothing that more humbles and meekens the soul than a spirit of genuine repentance, as nothing more tends to harden and swell with self-importance than the absence of it. He who is blind to his own faults and failings, is unprepared to listen to the counsels of others: an unbroken will is self-assertive and impervious to either the feelings or wishes of his fellows. But David was sorrowing over his past sins, and that made him tractable and in a condition to yield to the desire of his men. As he stood at the gate, watching his army go forth to the battle of the wood of Ephraim, victory or defeat would be much the same to him. Whatever the outcome, the cause must be traced back to his *own* wrong doing. He must have stood there with a sad remembrance of that other battle, in which a devoted servant had fallen, as one murdered by his own hand (2 Samuel 11:24).

"And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom" (v. 5). So great was David's love for his wayward son that, even now, he sought to deliver him from the stroke of death. He knew that Absalom was an excuseless rebel, who sought his life and throne, who had proven himself to be the very incarnation of iniquitous ingratitude, of unfeeling cruelty, of unadulterated wickedness, of Satanic ambition. He was guilty of treason of the vilest sort, and his life by every law of justice was entirely forfeited; yet in spite of all, the heart of David remained steadfast unto him. There is nothing recorded in Holy Writ which exhibits so vividly the depth and power of human affection, nothing which displays so touchingly *love for the utterly unworthy.* Therefore, is it not designed to turn our thoughts unto a higher and purer Love!

Yes, see this aged parent, driven from his home, humiliated before his subjects, stricken to the very depths of his heart by the murderous hatred of the son whom he had forgiven and honored, loving this worthless and devil-driven youth with an unchanged devotion, that sought to save him from his just and impending doom. Yet wonderful as this was, it provides only a faint shadow of the amazing love of Christ, which moved Him to set His heart upon "His *own,*" even while they were totally depraved, utterly corrupt, dead in trespasses and sins. God commended His love toward us by the death of His Son (Romans 5:8), and it was for the rebellious and the ungodly that He was crucified. Nor can anything ever separate us from that love: no, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). Truly, such love "passes knowledge."

"So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim" (v. 6). This statement has presented quite a problem to the commentators, some going so far as to (irreverently) say there was a slip of the historian's pen. As we have seen, both David and Absalom had crossed the Jordan and were now "in the land of Gilead" (17:22, 26), which was on the eastward side of the river; whereas *their* territory lay wholly on the west of it. How, then, ask the skeptics, could this battle be said to have taken place in "the wood of Ephraim"? Did the narrator err in his geography? Certainly not: it is the critics who display their ignorance of sacred history.

We do not have to go outside of the Scriptures in order to discover the solution to this "serious difficulty." If we turn back to Judges 12, we discover that an attack was made by "Ephraimites" upon Jephthah in the land *of Gilead,* under pretense of a wrong being done them when *they* were not invited by the latter to take part in his successful invasion of Ammon. Jephthah sought to soothe his angry assailants, but in vain. A battle was fought near "the passages of the Jordan" (Judges 12:5), and Ephraim met with fearful slaughter: in all forty-two thousand of their men being put to death. Now an event so fearful was not likely to pass away without some memorial, and what more natural than to name their grave, the Aceldama of their tribe, by this name "the wood of Ephraim" in the land of Gilead!

For a short while the battle was furious, but the issue was not long left in doubt: the rebels suffering a heavy defeat: "The people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men, For the battle was here scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured" (verses 7, 8). "Now they smarted justly for their treason against their lawful prince, their uneasiness under so good a government, and their base ingratitude to so good a governor; and found what it was to take up arms for an usurper, who with his kisses and caresses had wheedled them into their own ruin. Now where are the rewards, the preferment's, the golden days, they promise themselves from him? Now they see what it is to take counsel against the Lord and His anointed, and to think of breaking His bands asunder" (Matthew Henry).

Most evident was it on which side the Lord was. All was confusion and destruction in the ranks of the apostate. The anointed eye may discern the hand of God as manifest here as, on a former occasion, it has been at Gideon: as there the "hailstones," so here the "wood" devoured more than the sword. No details are given so it is useless to conjecture whether it was pits and bogs or the wild beasts that infested those forests: sufficient that it was God Himself who fought against them—conquering them by a much smaller force than their own, and then, their being pursued by His destructive providences when they sought to escape the sword. Nevertheless, such wholesale slaughter of Israel—in view of their surrounding enemies—was a serious calamity for David's kingdom.

And meanwhile, what of the arch-traitor himself? Ah, he is dealt with separately, and that, in a manner which still more conspicuously displayed God's hand: he was "made a show of openly." "And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the Heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away" (v. 9). Those boughs, like the hands of a giant, gripped him, holding him fast either by his neck or by his luxuriant hair (2 Samuel 14:26). His beast continued its progress, leaving him there, as though glad to be rid of such a burden. There he was suspended, between Heaven and earth, to intimate he was fit for neither. Behold the striking providence of this: "*Cursed* is every one that hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13)! There he hung as an object of shame, filled with terror, incapable of delivering himself, unable to either fight or flee. He remained in this direful situation for some considerable time, awaiting with horror his merited doom.

Full opportunity was now afforded him to meditate upon his crimes and make his peace with God. But, alas, so far as the sacred record informs us, there was no contrition on his part, nothing to intimate that he now felt unfit to either live or die. As God declared of Jezebel "I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not" (Rev. 2:21), so the life of Absalom was spared a few more hours, but no hint is given us that he confessed his fearful sins to God before being summoned into His holy presence. No, God had no place in his thoughts; as he had lived, so he died—defiant and impenitent. His father's love, tears and prayers were wasted on him. Absalom's ease presents to us one of the darkest pictures of fallen human nature to be met with in the whole of God's Word.

A more melancholy and tragic spectacle can scarcely be imagined than Absalom dangling from the boughs of that tree. Deserted by his fellows, for they had one and all left him to his fate; abandoned by God, now that the cup of his iniquity was filled; a prey to remorse, for though utterly heartless and conscienceless, his thoughts now must have been of the gloomiest nature. Quite unable to free himself, he was compelled to wait, hour after hour, until someone came and put an end to his wretched life. What an unspeakably solemn object lesson is this for the young people of our day! how clearly the fearful end of Absalom demonstrates the Lord's abhorrence of rebellion against parents! God's Word tells us that it is *the fool* who "despises his father's instruction" (Proverbs 15:5), and that "whoever curses his Father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness" (Proverbs 20:20); and again, "The eye that mocks at his father, and despises to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it" (Proverbs 30:17).

The sands of his hour glass had now almost run out. "And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Beheld, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak" (v. 10). This man had beheld Absalom's tragic plight, but had made no effort to extricate him: instead, he went and reported it to the general. "And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, you saw him, and why did you not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a belt. And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom" (verses 11, 12). And here we must stop. Amidst so much that is revolting, it is a welcome contrast to behold the obedience of this man to his royal master.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

His Son's Death

(Continued)

2 Samuel 18

In our last we left Absalom caught in an oak, suspended in the air, unable to free himself. His predicament was indeed a desperate one, for all his followers had forsaken him. What was to be the sequel? David had given express instructions to his generals, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:5). In that charge we see expressed the weakness of a doting father, rather than the uncompromising faithfulness of a monarch. It was not for the interests of his kingdom that such an insurrectionist should be spared, for none could tell how soon he would occasion further trouble. Sentiment ought never to override the requirements of righteousness, yet often it is far from easy to perform the latter when they come into conflict with the yearnings of the former. By yielding to his paternal feelings and giving such counsel to his men, David created a difficulty which should never have been raised.

"And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak" (2 Samuel 18:10). The commentators differ considerably in their estimations of what is recorded in this verse and those which immediately follow. Some criticize this man for his timidity in refusing to take matters into his own hands and rid the earth of such a wretch; others go to an opposite extreme and blame him as a sneak for revealing the situation to Joab, knowing that he would have no scruples against killing Absalom. Personally, we consider he did the right thing in taking this middle course. It was not for him, as a private person, to fly in the face of the king's charge, and act as public executioner; nor was it the thing for him to conceal from the general-in-charge the helpless position in which the archenemy of David was now placed: all of which illustrates what was said at the close of the preceding paragraph.

"And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, you saw him, and why did you not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given you ten shekels of silver, and a belt" (v. 11). Those words were evidently uttered rashly on the spur of the moment, for when Joab had listened to the man's reply, he did not further upbraid him. Joab failed to realize the quandary in which David's command had placed this man, or perhaps he was constitutionally incapable of appreciating the conscientious scruples which regulated others—which seems the more likely in the light of what follows. What a coarse and mercenary spirit his words betrayed! As though a monetary reward should have been sufficient inducement for anyone to have slain Absalom in cold blood. One cannot expect such a gross materialist to value

"And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom. Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and you yourself would have set yourself against me" (verses 12, 13). This unnamed man was not to be intimidated by the fierce Joab, but boldly stood his ground and frankly avowed the principles which had regulated his conduct. Though it was not a lawful command which the king had imposed upon his subjects, yet this one respected the authority of his royal master. Moreover, as he shrewdly pointed out, what advantage would he receive from the largest reward if the penalty for his action were the forfeiting of his own life? That was an argument which admitted no answer, acknowledged by Joab's abruptly terminating the conversation under the plea of haste.

"Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with you. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak" (v. 14). Joab will come before us again in the chapters that follow, but this seems as good a place as any to offer some remarks upon his character, it has been rightly said that "Among the followers and closest adherents of David, Joab was one. He was early found with David in the cave. While Jonathan tarried in the court of Saul, Joab was sharing the hardships and dangers of David in the wilderness. Throughout all his subsequent dangers, he stood like a lion at his side, and if extent of outward service were regarded, David perhaps had no such servant as he. Yet in order to serve David aright, it was necessary to have respect not to his office merely, but also to appreciate the character of him who bore that office; to love him for *his own* as well as for his office sake, and above all, to remember that no real service could be rendered to David, except God were reverently regarded and reverently obeyed" (B. W. Newton).

It is possible for one to serve, because of the dignity of his office, one whose excellency as an individual we have no regard for. In such an event, our service, no matter however energetic, will probably have its springs in self-interest, and its course will be marked by self-will and pride. Such indeed was the case with Joab: he was zealous in maintaining the support of David's throne, yet he was ever alive to the maintenance of his own personal interests. He deemed it best that the crown should rest on David's brow, because by so doing his own fortunes were furthered. No matter how definitely or plaintively David might express his desires, Joab never hesitated, when the opportunity arose, to outrage the king's feelings or defy his will if he could thereby gain his own ends without at the same time compromising the stability of the throne. In such a course, Joab regarded neither David nor God.

No one can read carefully the sacred narrative without perceiving that in the latter years of his reign David was little more than a *nominal* king. He seems to have come thoroughly under the power of Joab, the captain of his armies: on the one hand he was too suspicious to trust him, and on the other too weak to dismiss him. It is both interesting and instructive to trace out the *occasion and cause* whereby Joab established such a despotic control over his royal master. Nor is this by any means a complicated task: "David wrote a letter to *Joab,* and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set you Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire you from him, that he may be smitten, and die" (2 Samuel 11:14, 15). By making Joab the partner and secret agent of his guilty plot concerning Uriah, David sold himself into his hands; in that fatal letter he forfeited his liberty, surrendering it to this unscrupulous accomplice.

By temperament Joab was a daring and energetic man: a bold fighter in lawless times. The faction of Saul's house was so strong that at the beginning of his reign David could scarcely call the throne his own, or choose his servants according to his own pleasure. Joab was an able warrior, and though he sometimes avenged his own private quarrels at the expense of his sovereign's honor, thereby vexing him at heart, yet he was too strongly entrenched to be displaced. Nevertheless, at that time David was not afraid to open his mouth and rebuke him for his slaying of Abner. Nay, be openly asserted his authority by *compelling* Joab to rend his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn before this very Abner (2 Samuel 3 :28-31)—a most humiliating experience for one of his own proud heart, and which made it unmistakably manifest that David was as yet supreme in his own dominions.

Circumstances might still constrain David to employ this renowned warrior, and he had not—short as had then been his reign—yielded himself up to this imperious subject. On the contrary, as his own cause waxed stronger and stronger, and the remnant of Saul's party dispersed, he became king of Israel in fact as well as in name, so that his throne was established not only by law, but by public opinion too, for we are told that "whatever the king did, pleased all the people" (2 Samuel 3:36). Consequently, he was now in the condition to rule for himself, and this he did, for a little later we find him appointing this officer to be the commander of his army by his *own* decision, and that simply because Joab was the one who won that rank, when it was promised by David as the reward to any individual in his host who should be the first to get up to the gutter and smite Jebusites at the storming of Zion (2 Samuel 5:8).

We have only to read carefully through 2 Samuel 8 and 10, in which are narrated the bold achievements of David at this bright period of his life, his prowess abroad and his strong policy at home, the energy he instilled into the national character, and the respect he commanded for it throughout all the surrounding countries, to perceive that he reigned without restraint and without a rival. But then came his fearful fall, that evil sowing from which he reaped so bitter a harvest, From that point onwards we may discern how Joab usurped by degrees an authority which he had not before. More and more he took matters into his own hands, executing or disregarding David's orders as suited his own designs; until finally, we shall see he dared to conspire against his very throne and the rightful successor of his line.

An incident recorded in 2 Samuel 14 well illustrates what we have pointed out above. There we see the hands of David tied, his efforts to free himself from this oppressor both feeble and ineffectual, and his punishment of Absalom successfully resisted, for it was Joab, through the widow of Tekoah, who clamored for the recall of Absalom from his banishment. The suspicions of the king were aroused, for he asked, "Is not the hand of *Joab* with you in all this?" (14:19), nevertheless, he yielded to his will. It seems that this move on Joab's part was without any other design than to embarrass the king and force him to do that which could only lower him in the estimation of his subjects. Certainly he had no love for Absalom as the sequel clearly shows.

During Absalom's rebellion, Joab, as might have been expected, was loyal to the cause of David, for he had no desire to see *his* government overthrown and one of another order take its place. Joab knew full well what was in the heart of Absalom, and therefore he was prepared to resist him with all his might. He wished to have the present government of Israel continued, and that in David's own person, yet it was out of no love for David that he now fought against Absalom. This is evident from his open defiance of the express charge which the king had given his generals: "Deal gently for my sake with Absalom." But Joab heeded not, for he had lost all respect for David's commands. Nothing could he more deliberate than his infraction of this one—probably the most imperious which had ever been laid upon him. It was not in the fury of the fight that he forgot his commission of mercy, but in cold blood he deliberately went to the place where Absalom was hanging helpless and slew him.

No, if Joab had loved David and regarded him as his friend, he had never recklessly despised the anguish of David's heart and made him cry, "Would God I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Whatever may be said about his conferring a public benefit by the removal of this reprobate ringleader, the fact remains that Joab no longer cared anything for a king *whose guilty secret he shared.* He thrust Absalom through the heart with his three darts, and then made his way, with countenance unabashed, into the chamber of his royal master, where David was lamenting the death of his son. As we shall see, the sequel is a piece with what preceded: Joab imperious and heartless; David, once so regnant, abject in spirit and tame to the lash. How had the mighty fallen! Into what public humiliation as well as personal sorrows had his deed of lust and blood now sunk him down?

"And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent" (2 Samuel 18:17). What in ending is this! Hanged in a tree, abandoned by his followers, dispatched by Joab, and now his body treated with the utmost contempt. Instead of receiving the honorable burial of a king's son, he was ignominiously dealt with as a criminal: the casting of him into a great pit intimated their valuation of his carcass, while their laying upon him a great heap of stones signified that he ought to have been stoned to death as a rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18, 21).

"Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place" (v. 18). What a striking and solemn contrast do these two verses present, and what a forcible illustration do they supply of that principle "whoever exalts himself shall be abased" (Luke 14:11); so it was in the history of Haman and of Nebuchadnezzar, and such was the case here. Absalom had three Sons (2 Samuel 14:27), but they had predeceased their father, and therefore he sought to perpetuate his memory by setting up this pillar to honor his name, by the side of which he doubtless intended that his body should be interred. Alas, how vain are some men to attract the note of future generations, who are at no pains to seek the approbation of God. But even in death Absalom was thwarted: "a great heap of stones as a monument to his villainy was all that marked his resting-place.

"Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the Lord has avenged him of his enemies" (v. 19). Ahimaaz was the son of Zadok the priest (2 Samuel 15:27), who was deeply devoted to David. He was one of the two men who had endangered their lives in the king's service by bringing him tidings of Absalom's plans (17:17-21). That he was a godly soul is intimated by the language which he used on this occasion, for instead of flattering Joab, by congratulating him for his bringing the conflict to a triumphant issue, he ascribes the success to the Lord. How often God is forgotten in the flush of victory, and instead of exclaiming "*His* right hand, and *His* holy arm, has gotten Him the victory" (Psalm 98:1), proud man attributes the defeating of his enemies to his own strength, vigilance or skill. In such an hour it is for the servant of God to lift up his voice and make known the truth that the glory belongs to God alone.

"And Joab said unto him, You shall not bear tidings this day, but you shall bear tidings another day: but this day you shall bear no tidings, because the king's sons is dead" (v. 20). In the light of what follows it is not easy to determine what it was that influenced Joab to refuse the request of Ahimaaz, for immediately afterward he bids another man go and tell the king what he had seen, and when Ahimaaz renewed his request, after a slight demur Joab granted it. It is possible that Joab feared for the life of Ahimaaz and considered he was too valuable a man to he thrown away, for the name of the selected messenger ("Cushi") suggested that he was an Ethiopian—probably an African slave. Joab knew that David was an impulsive and quick-tempered man, and remembered the fate which overtook the one who bore to him the tidings of Saul's death (2 Samuel 1:15), and therefore he probably thought that a similar vengeance might be visited upon the one who should inform him 's death.

"Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab. But however, let me, I pray you, also run after Cushi. And Joab said, Wherefore will you run, my son, seeing that you have no tidings ready?" (v. 22). The marginal renderings of this verse seem to decidedly confirm what we have just said above. The words of Ahimaaz "But however" are literally "be what may": Whatever be the risk of incurring the king's fury, I am quite willing to face it. Joab's "Wherefore will you,

my son," indicates that he held Ahimaaz in some esteem, and his "you have no tidings ready" is really "no tidings *convenient,*" which intimates he sought to discourage him from being the bearer of news which would be so unwelcomed to David. And why, it may be asked, was Ahimaaz anxious to serve as messenger on this fateful occasion? We believe it was because he was so devoted to the king that he wished, so far as possible, to tactfully *lighten the blow.* This he did, for instead of bluntly blurting out that Absalom had been slain he simply said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, which has delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the King" (v. 28).

CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

His Inordinate Grief

2 Samuel 18

Man is a composite creature, possessing a soul as well as a spirit. God has bestowed upon him an emotional nature as well as a rational principle. True, in some persons the passions are much stronger, while in others the intellectual faculty is more prominent; but whichever be the case, we should seek to preserve the balance between their play and interplay. The emotions must not be allowed to run away with us, for if they do we shall be incapacitated for clear thinking and prudent acting. On the other hand, the emotions are not to be utterly crushed, or we shall degenerate into callous cynics and cold intellectual machines. There is a happy medium between epicureanism and stoicism, yet it can only be attained by constant watchfulness and self-discipline. The regular management of our unruly passions is essential if we are to obtain the mastery of them, and not be mastered by them.

Stoicism or the complete suppression of our emotions receives no countenance from the teachings of Holy Writ. How could it, seeing that the Author of Scripture is the One who has endowed us with an emotional nature! God's Word and His works do not contradict each other. Let it be remembered that it is recorded of the Perfect Man that He *wept* by the grave side of Lazarus and made lamentation over the doomed city of Jerusalem. He who created muscles in the face which are only called into action by a hearty laugh and a tear-duct for the eye, meant that each should be used in their season. They who are physically incapable of breaking out into a healthy sweat, suffer far more than those who perspire freely in hot weather; and they who weep not when a great sorrow overtakes them, incur the danger of something snapping in their brains. Laughter and tears are nature's safety valves; they ease nervous tensions, much as an electric storm relieves a heavily-charged atmosphere.

Nevertheless, it remains that our emotions are to be disciplined and regulated. "Keep your heart with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23): an essential part of the task that involves, is the government of our passions and emotions—anger is to be curbed, impatience subdued, covetousness checked, grief and joy tempered. One of the things we are bidden to mortify is "inordinate affection" (Colossians 3:5), and that includes not only unholy lustings, but also excessive desires after lawful things. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2); that does not mean it is wrong for us to have any love for earthly objects, but it does mean that such love is to be regulated and subordinated to divine and spiritual things. Responsibility attaches as much to our inner life as it does to our outward.

Rejoicing and merrymaking are seasonable at a wedding or a birth, while grief and lamentation are natural at the death of a loved one; yet even on such occasions we are required to hold our emotions within due bounds. If on the one hand we are bidden to "rejoice with trembling" (Psalm 2:11), on the other hand we are exhorted to "sorrow not, even as others who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The subject is admittedly a delicate one, yet is it one of practical importance. Intemperate grief is as unjustifiable as is intemperate joy. The hand of God is to be viewed in that which occasions the one as truly as that which occasions the other: if He is the One who gives, He is equally the One who takes away; and the more the heart recognizes this, the less likely are we to overstep the bounds of propriety by yielding to uncontrolled passion.

That God takes notice of inordinate grief may be seen from the case of Samuel mourning for Saul. Samuel is one of the brightest characters of which we have recorded in Scripture, yet he failed at this point. The thought of God's having rejected Saul from being king, so moved the affections of natural affection in the prophet that he sat up all night weeping for him (1 Samuel 15:11), yes, he continued mourning until the reproof of Heaven stopped the torrent of his tears. "And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?" (1 Samuel 16:1)—had such grief been acceptable to God, He surely had not rebuked him for the same! This incident is recorded for our learning and warning.

The hour of emergency is what usually brings to light that which is to be found within us. It is not the ordinary routine of life, but the crises which revealed character: not that the crisis changes or makes the man, but rather that it affords opportunity to display the benefits of previous discipline or the evils of the lack of the same. Therefore it is of little or no use to bid a person control himself or herself when deeply agitated over an unusual experience, for one who has never learned to govern himself day by day, cannot begin doing so under exceptional circumstances. Here, then, is the answer to the question, How am I, especially if of passionate nature, to *avoid* inordinate joy or sorrow? A person cannot change his disposition, but he can greatly modify it, if he will take pains to that end.

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty: and he who *rules his spirit* than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32): it is this ruling of our spirits which is the subject we are attempting to develop: the mind perceiving the needs and the will exerting itself to govern our emotions. Inordinate grief is the outcome of inordinate love, and therefore we need to watch closely over our affections and bring reason to bear upon them. We must discipline ourselves daily and control our emotions over little things, if we are to control ourselves in the crises of life. As the twig is bent, so the bough grows. The longer we allow bur passions to run riot, the harder will it be to gain control of them. Much can be done by parents in training the child to exercise self-control and be temperate in all things.

Does not the reader now perceive the practical importance of what has been before us? How many there are who go entirely to pieces when some grief or calamity overtakes them. And why is this? Because they have no self-control: they have never learned to govern their emotions. But *can* we rule our spirits? Certainly; yet not in a moment, nor by spasmodic efforts, but only by the practice of daily and *strict self-discipline.* From the habit, then, of keeping tab on your desires, and check them immediately you find they are going out after forbidden objects. Watch your affections, and bring reason to bear upon them: see that they do not become too deeply attached to anything down here: remember the more highly you prize an object, the more keenly will you feel the loss of it. Seek to cultivate a mild and even disposition, and when provoked, assure yourself such a trifle is unworthy of perturbation. Paul could say, "all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12)—that was *his own* determination.

The pertinency of what has been before us will appear as we resume our consideration of David. The reader will remember that we last viewed him disposing of his forces, and then commanding his generals, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom" (2 Samuel 18:1-5). Two things are to be noted. First, David was under no qualms of the issue of the conflict, no fear that the battle would go against him. As we pointed out in a previous chapter, Psalms 42 and 43 (composed at this time) show that he had overcome his despondency and doubts, and again had confidence in God. Second, we behold again the doting father: not only in referring to Absalom as "the young man" (he had had at least four children: 14:27), but in laying such an unlawful charge upon his officers he allowed sentiment to override the requirements of righteousness.

"And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone" (2 Samuel 18:24). What a pathetic picture is presented her: the aged king and tender parent anxiously waiting for news? He must have known, deep down in his heart, that the providence of God would execute that just punishment which he had been too weak to inflict upon the evil doer; yet, doubtless, he hoped against hope that the guilty one would escape. Moreover, as he sat there with plenty of time for meditation, he must have reflected upon *his own sins,* and how they were responsible for this unhappy conflict, which seriously threatened to permanently split the Nation into two opposing factions. If only we would look ahead more and anticipate the consequences of our actions, how often we should be deterred from entering upon a mad and sinful course.

"And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, "Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also brings tidings" (verses 25, 26). Within a short time at most the king's anxiety was to be relieved, and he would know the best or the worst. When the watchman upon the walls reported that a single runner was approaching, followed by another lone individual, David knew that his forces had not been defeated, for in that case, his men had fled before the enemy in confusion, and had come back in scattered groups. These persons were evidently special messengers, bringing report to the king: God had prohibited the multiplying

"And the watchman said, Me thinks the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and comes with good tidings" (v. 27). It will be remembered that Joab had first dispatched Cushi and then had yielded to the importunity of Ahimaaz to follow him, but the latter taking a short cut and being the swifter of the two, "overran Cushi" (v. 23). Upon hearing that the son of the priest was approaching, David concluded he was the bearer of favorable news. As other writers have pointed out, this illustrates an important principle: those who bear good tidings should themselves be good men. Alas, what incalculable harm has often been wrought and the Gospel brought into contempt by the inconsistent and worldly lives of many who proclaim it. How needful it is that the servants of Christ should practice what they preach, and secure the confidence of those who hear them by reputation for integrity and righteousness. "In all things showing yourself a pattern of good "(Titus 2:7).

"And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the Lord your God, which has delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king" (v. 28). Truly this was "a good man" indeed, who both feared God and honored the king (1 Peter 2:17). First, his "all is well" was to assure David that his forces had been successful; then he rendered obeisance to his royal master, and honored God by ascribing the victory to Him. This was both pious and prudent, for his words were calculated to turn David's mind from Absalom unto the Lord, who had so mercifully interposed to defeat his counsels. Herein is a most important lesson to be heeded by those who have to break the news of the death of a loved one: seek to direct the heart of the grief stricken to Him in whose hands alone the "the issues from death" (Psalm 68:20).

"And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still" (verses 29, 30). David's question showed he was more concerned about the welfare of his wicked son than he was over the well-being of his kingdom: that was natural no doubt, nevertheless it was a serious failure—those who serve the public are often called on to set aside their own private feelings and interests. Ahimaaz avoided giving a direct reply to the king: he was deeply attached to him, and no doubt wished to spare his feelings as far as possible; yet that did not excuse him if he resorted to prevarication. We are never justified in telling an untruth: no, not even to relieve the suspense of an anxious soul or to comfort a bereaved one.

"And, behold, Cushi came; and Cushi said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord has avenged you this day of all them that rose up against you. And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushi answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against you to do you hurt, be as that young man is" (verses 31, 32). The second courier now arrived and confirmed the word of Ahimaaz that the Lord had graciously undertaken For the king. His language too was pious, though not so fervent as that of the former. It was couched also in general terms, so that David had to repeat the question concerning his son. His query now received a definite reply, though the harrowing details were wisely withheld. Cushi did not mention Joab's having thrust the three darts into Absalom's heart, nor that his body had been contemptuously cast into a pit and covered with a great heap of stones. Instead, he merely intimated that Absalom was now safe in the grave, where he could work no more harm against the kingdom, where Cushi loyally desired all other traitors might be.

"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (v. 33). Gratitude that his kingdom had been delivered was completely submerged by overwhelming grief for his wayward child. Probably this was one of the most pathetic lamentations that ever issued from a stricken heart, yet its extravagance and impiety cannot rightly be defended. David's inordinate affection for Absalom now found expression in inordinate grief. His passions carried him completely away, so that he spoke unadvisedly, rashly, with his lips. No doubt his sorrow was made more poignant by the realization that Absalom's soul was lost, for there is no hint whatever that he sought to make his peace with God; yet that in nowise warranted such an inconsiderate outburst.

Matthew Henry ably analyzed and summarized this sin of David's. "He is to be blamed. 1. For showing so great a fondness for a graceless, however handsome and witty, son, that was justly abandoned both of God and of man. 2. For quarreling, not only with Divine Providence, the disposals of which he ought silently to acquiesce in, but divine justice, the judgments of which he ought to adore and subscribe to: see how Bildad argues, 'If your children have sinned against him, and he has cast them away in their transgression (you should submit) for does God pervert judgment?' (Job 8:3,4 and compare Leviticus 10:3). 3. For opposing the justice of the Nation, which, as king, he was entrusted with the administration of, and which, with other public interests, he ought to prefer before any natural affection, 4. For despising the mercy of his deliverance, and the deliverance of his family and kingdom, from Absalom's wicked designs, as if this were no mercy, nor worth giving thanks for, because it cost the life of Absalom. 5. For indulging a strong passion, and speaking unadvisedly with his lips. He now forgot his own reasoning upon the death of another child (can I bring him back again?) and his own resolution to keep 'his mouth as with bridle when his heart was hot within him'; as well as his own practice at other times, when he 'quieted himself as a child that was weaned from his mother.'"

The practical warnings from this incident are obvious. David had allowed his inordinate affection for Absalom to hinder the discharge of his public duty. First, in failing to inflict the penalty of the divine law for Absalom's murder of Ammon. Second, in allowing him to return from banishment. The claims of God must prevail over all natural inclinations: fleshly sentiment, and not a concern for Gods glory, moved David to send for his son. As chief magistrate in Israel he condoned his grievous offences. His inordinate love terminated in this inordinate grief. How we need to watch and pray against excessive affection, the indulging of wayward children, and passionate outbursts in times of stress and strain. Doubly we need to keep a strict guard upon ourselves when that is removed from us which is very dear to us: much grace is required to say with Job "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

His Inordinate Grief

(Continued)

2 Samuel 19

It will be remembered that in our last we were occupied with the effects which the advance messengers of Joab had upon David. Those special couriers informed him of the defeat and death of Absalom (2 Samuel 18), and the king at once broke down and gave way to bitter lamentations. No doubt this was natural, and to be expected, for the insurrectionist was his own son, though an utterly unworthy one; yet while an outburst of sorrow was excusable, inordinate grief was not so. In writing upon this subject care needs to be taken by us, so as to prevent the reader, as far as we can, from drawing wrong conclusions. Inordinate grief is neither the depths to which we may be shaken nor the copiousness of our tears, for that is largely a matter of personal temperament and the state of our health.

Inordinate grief is when we so far lose control of ourselves that we become guilty of hysterical outbursts which ill become a rational creature, and uttering intemperate expressions, which displease the Lord and offend those who have His fear upon them. Especially should the Christian ever seek to set before others an example of sobriety, checking everything which savors of insubordination to God. Again, we are guilty of inordinate grief when we allow a sorrow to so overwhelm us that we are rendered incapable of discharging our duty. Particularly is this the case with those who occupy a public position, upon whom others are dependent or influenced thereby. In David's case he failed at each of these points, being guilty of a violent outburst of his passions, using intemperate language, and taking issue with Gods providential will.

In due time Joab and his victorious army arrived at Mahanaim, to receive the congratulations of the king and wait upon him for further instructions. But instead of meeting them with warm gratitude for the signal service they had rendered him and his kingdom, David conducted himself in such a way as to make the army conclude the sovereign was filled with regret at their achievements, Consequently, instead of there being joyous celebrations over the victory, the spirit of the camp was greatly dampened. Instead of being thankful that his kingdom had been mercifully delivered, David was completely overwhelmed with grief over the death of his wayward son, aid all were made to suffer in consequence. The deplorable effects this produced will now be considered by us.

"And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weeps and mourns for Absalom. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. And the people got them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (

2 Samuel 19:1-4). "The excessive indulgence of any passion (grief by no means excepted), not only offends God, but betrays men into great imprudences in their temporal concerns. They who have faithfully served us expect that we should appear pleased with them, and thankful for their services; and many will do more for a smile and a kind word from their superiors, than for a more substantial recompense; and be much grieved and disheartened if they "(Thomas Scott).

This was no time for David to yield to his private sorrows: public interests urgently required him to bestir himself and grip the helm of state with a firm hand. A most serious and critical situation confronted him, which called for prompt and decisive action. Absalom's rebellion had rent the kingdom asunder, and only a prudent policy, swiftly executed, could hope to restore peace and unity again. There had been a widespread revolt, and David's throne had been shaken to its very foundations. The king himself had been forced to flee from Jerusalem and his subjects had become divided in their interests and loyalty. But God had graciously intervened: the arch-rebel was slain and his forces utterly routed. This was the hour, then, for David to assert his authority, press upon the people the honor of Jehovah's name, take charge of things, and take full advantage of the situation which had swung things so markedly into his favor.

As soon as he had received confirmation that Absalom and his forces had been defeated, David's only wise course was to return immediately to Jerusalem. To set up his court once more in the royal city, while the rebels were in confusion and before they could rally again, was but the part of common prudence—how else could the insurrectionists be cowed and the unity of the nation be restored? But now grief paralyzed him: beclouding his judgment, sapping his energy, causing him to conduct himself most injudiciously. Never was there a time when he more needed to hold the hearts of his soldiers: it was essential to his royal interests that he should secure their respect and affection; but by keeping himself in close mourning, he not only dampened the spirits of his strongest supporters, but acted as though he disapproved of what they had done.

"And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weeps and mourns for Absalom. And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son." "The people will take particular notice of what their princes say and do: the more eyes we have upon us, and the greater our influence is, the more need we have to speak and act wisely, and to govern our passions strictly" (Matthew Henry). David ought to have been ashamed of his sorrowing over such a worthless and wicked son, and done his utmost to subdue and hide it. See how the people reacted: they "got them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle." Out of respect for their sovereign they would not rejoice while he continued to mourn, yet they must have felt deeply how little their efforts on his behalf

"But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!" This was not the initial outburst of David's anguish, but the prolonged hugging to himself of his sorrow after the army had returned. The king was quite overcome, insensible to the pressing requirements of the hour and the needs of his subjects. This is what inordinate grief produces: it makes one so self-centered that the interests of others are ignored. It thoroughly unfits for the discharge of our duties. It so takes the eye off God that we are wholly occupied with distressing circumstances. It is in such an hour that we need to take hold of and act out that oft-repeated injunction, "Be strong and of a good courage." Inordinate grid will not restore the dead, but it will seriously injure the living.

David's conduct displeased the Lord, and He used an unwelcome instrument to bestir the king to a renewed sense of his responsibility, for it is from this angle that we must first view Joab's attack upon David. "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Proverbs 16:7): yes, "makes," for our enemies are as much under the immediate control of the Most High as are our best friends. True it is that every attack made upon us by our foes is not, necessarily, an indication that we have offended God, yet oftentimes it is so, and therefore it is the part of wisdom for us to always regard the attacks of our enemies as king God's rod reproving us, and for us to examine our ways and judge ourselves. Did not God make Abimelech to be at peace with Isaac (Genesis 26:26-30) and Esau with Jacob (Genesis 33)? Then He could have easily softened the heart of Joab toward David; that He did *not* do so, intimates He was displeased with him for his inordinate grief.

"And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, You have shamed this day the faces of all your servants, which this day have saved your life, and the lives of your sons and of your daughters, and the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines; In that you love your enemies, and hate your friends. For you have declared this day, that you regard neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased you well" (verses 5, 6) As we have pointed out in a previous chapter, Joab, during the later years of his life, was far from being friendly disposed toward David, and though he served at the head of his army, self-interest and not loyalty to the king was what actuated him. He was therefore quick to seize this opportunity to assert his arrogance, and not sparing David's feelings at all, he strongly berated him for his present selfishness and inertia. True, he was justified in remonstrating with David on the impropriety of his conduct, yet that by no means excused his pride and insolence. Though there was much force in what Joab said, yet he sadly failed to show that respect which was due his master.

"Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto your servants: for I swear by the Lord, if you go not forth, there will not tarry one with you this night: and that will be worse unto you than all the evil that befell you from your youth until now" (v. 7). David's duty was here plainly if roughly pointed out to him: he ought to present himself at once before those faithful troops who had endangered *their* lives for the preservation of *his*. Let the king now bestir himself and delay no longer, but go forth and publicly congratulate their success and thank them heartily for their services. The painful alternative must not be ignored: there was grave danger of a further and worse revolt. If the king persisted in selfish ingratitude, he would lose the respect of his staunchest supporters, and then he would be left without any to further his interests. Sometimes God makes use of a rough hand to arouse us from our lethargy, and we should be thankful that He cares sufficiently for us to do so.

Joab had pressed upon David the claims of his people, and the king was duly aroused. So far from being angry at and refusing the counsel which he had received, David acted promptly upon it and took his proper place. "Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king does sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent (v. 8). A wise man will seek to profit from good advice, no matter who may offer it or how unkindly it may be given—shall I refuse an important letter because I dislike the appearance or manners of the postman? "When we are convinced of a fault we must amend, though we are told it by our inferiors, and indecently, or in heat and passion" (Matthew Henry). Was David looking back to this incident when he wrote, "Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head" (Psalm 141:5)?

"And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines, and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak you not a word of bringing the king back?" (verses 9:10). These verses show clearly the timeliness of Joab's intervention and the deplorable state the kingdom of Israel was now in. A house divided against itself cannot stand: strong and swift measures were now called for. Many of the people still desired the return of their king, though they were too dilatory to do more than talk, and ask why a message was not sent urging him to come to Jerusalem. It is generally thus: those who are friendly disposed toward us lack the energy to act on our behalf.

The tribes of Israel were conscious of their predicament: they were without a competent head. David undoubtedly possessed the best claims: he had proved himself a valiant and successful leader, delivering them from their powerful foes. Yet, when his sons turned traitor and many of his subjects had joined forces with him, the king fled. But Absalom was now dead, and his army had been defeated. A "strife" ensued: probably the people blamed their elders for not taking the initiative and communicating with David, to assure him of their repentance and renewed fealty; while the elders threw the blame on the people because of their recent disloyalty. Mutual recriminations got them no where; meanwhile no definite steps were taken by them to urge David's return to the capital.

"And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. You are my brethren, you are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are you the last to bring back the king?" (verses 11, 12). When David learned of the favorable sentiment which existed, generally, throughout Israel toward him, he threw the onus on the elders of his own tribe. "We do not always find the most kindness from those whom we have the most reason to expect it" (Matthew Henry). Alas, how true that is. How often we find that those who are bound to us by the closest ties and upon whom we have the greatest claims, are the first to fail and the last to help us. Perhaps one reason why this incident is recorded is that it may warn us not to expect too much even from our spiritual brethren—the less we expect, the less will be our disappointment.

That Judah, David's own tribe, were so lacking in affection or enterprise, suggests that they too had been seriously implicated in the recent rebellion; and now they were either too slack to make suitable overtures to their king, or else they feared they had wronged him so grievously by siding with Absalom that there was no hope of regaining his favor. By employing two of the priestly family to negotiate with the elders of Judah, David evidenced both his prudence and piety. As God-fearing men, Zadok and Abiathar were trusted by the king and respected by the best of people, and therefore there would be no suspicion on either side that they were working from self-interests. It is always wise and well for us to enlist and aid of those most looked up to for their uprightness when it becomes necessary for us to use intermediaries.

"And say you to Amasa, Are you not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if you be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab" (v. 13). Though Amasa was the son of David's sister (1 Chronicles 2:17), Absalom had set him over the rebel army (2 Samuel 17:25), and therefore he was the leader of an influential party whom David desired to win. Moreover, he was determined to strip the haughty and intolerable Joab of his power, if that were at all possible; yet he was unwise in making known his purpose, for though Amasa accepted David's offer, yet on the very first military enterprise on which he was dispatched, Joab met and murdered him (2 Samuel 20:10). By singling out Amasa for special notice—owning him as his kinsman and promising to make him general of all his forces if he now stood by the king's cause—David gave clear intimation that he was ready to *pardon* those who had most grievously wronged him.

"And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return you and all your servants" (v. 14). There is some difference of opinion as to whether the "he" refers to David, Amasa, or the Lord Himself. Personally, we believe it signifies the latter. First, because "God" is directly mentioned in verse 13; second, because had the reference been to David it had said "so they sent this word unto him," etc.; third, because we have no reason to suppose that Amasa was sufficiently prominent or powerful to affect "all the men of Israel." Finally, because it is God's prerogative alone to regulate the heart (Proverbs 21:1). No doubt God, instrumentally, made use of the persuasions of the priests and of Amasa to influence them; nevertheless their spontaneity and unanimity must be ascribed unto him who sways all His creatures.

"So the king returned, and came to Jordan" (v. 15). David did not move until he was assured that the people really desired his return: he was unwilling to be king of those who welcomed him not. In this we have typically illustrated an important truth: "Our Lord Jesus will rule in those who invite Him to the throne of their hearts, and not until He *is* invited. He first *bows the heart* and makes it willing in the day of His power, and then *rules* in the midst of His enemies: Psalm 110:2, 3" (Matthew Henry).

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

His Return to Jordan

2 Samuel 19

What a bewildering maze does the path of life present to many a soul: its twistings and turnings, its ups and downs, its advances and retreats are often too puzzling for carnal wisdom to solve. True it is that the lives of some are sheltered ones, with little of adventure and still less of mystery in them; yet it is far otherwise for others, with their journeyings hither and thither. But in the light of Scripture the latter should not be surprised. One has only to read the biographies of the patriarchs to discover how often they were called upon to strike their tents, move from place to place, traverse and then re-traverse the same path. The experiences of David, then, were in this respect, far from being exceptional: nor should any child of God deem it passing strange if he too finds himself retracting his steps and returning to the same place which he left months or years ago.

Amid the strange vicissitudes of life how comforting it is for the saint to be assured that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Psalm 37:23). Ah, it was David himself, who, by the Spirit of inspiration originally penned those words. He realized that a predestinating God had first decreed and then ordered his entire journey through this world. Happy, thrice happy, the soul who by faith lays hold of this grand truth. To he fully assured that neither fickle fortune nor blind fate, but his all-wise and loving Father has mapped out his course supplies a peace and poise to a believing heart such as nothing else can give. It softens disappointment, affords comfort in sorrow, and quiets the storm within; yet it is only as faith is *in* exercise that those peaceable fruits of righteousness are produced in us. An evil heart of unbelief deprives one of such consolation, placing him on the same level as the poor worldling who has no light to disperse his gloom.

In previous chapters we spent some little time in dwelling upon the various sad incidents which marked David's journey from Jerusalem to the Jordan, and from there to Mahanaim; now we are to contemplate the brighter side of things as the king retraced his steps. The contrasts presented are indeed striking, reminding us of the welcome spring and genial summer after a long and dreary winter. The analogies which exist between the seasons of the year and the different stages and experiences of life have often been dwelt upon, yet not too often, for there are many beneficial lessons to be learned therefrom. Some dyspeptic souls seem more in their element when dwelling upon that which is sad and somber, just as there are those (because they suffer from the heat) who are glad when summer is over, Another class determine to be occupied only with that which is cheerful and mirthful, refusing (to their own loss) to face that which is serious, sober and solemn—just as some people always grumble when the weather is wet, failing to realize the rain is as needful as the sunshine.

It is much the same with those preachers who attempt to trace out the experiences of a Christian. Some who delineate the inward history of a believer, or what *they* consider it should consist of disproportionately dwell upon his assurance, peace and joy; while others overemphasize his painful conflicts and defeats, his doubts and fears. The one is as harmful as the other, for in either case only a caricature of the truth is presented. The one would rapidly skim over the distressing incidents which occasioned David's Right from Jerusalem to the Jordan, and those which attended him on the way to Mahanaim; while the other would expatiate fully thereon, but say little upon his happier lot as he returned from his exile to the capital. Let us diligently seek to avoid such lopsidedness, and preserve the balance in all things, so that as we should be equally thankful for each of the passing seasons of the year, we will endeavor to profit from the ever-varying circumstances of life through which we are called upon to pass.

If David had passed through a season of gloom and tragedy, he was now to encounter some pleasant and gratifying experiences. If he had met with ingratitude and unjust reproaches from some of his subjects, he was now to be the recipient of a hearty welcome and the appreciative homage of others. How the tide of public opinion ebbs and flows: one moment exclaiming "no doubt this man is a murderer," and the next one changing their minds and saying "that he was a God" (Acts 28:4-6). How this should warn us against placing any reliance upon the creature! How thankful we should be when God is pleased to incline any to be favorably disposed towards us. On occasions the crowd changes from friendliness to hostility, at other times the converse is the case. So it was at the stage we have now reached in our hero's history.

"So the king returned and came to Jordan" (2 Samuel 19:15). What a change had been wrought since David had last stood on the banks of this river. Then he was fleeing from Absalom, who had captured the hearts of many in Judah; now the rebel was dead, and God had so reinstated David in the affections of the royal tribe, that all men of Judah had sent word unto him "Return you, and all your servants" (v. 14). Assured that God was with him, and that he could rely upon the loyalty of his people, David left Mahanaim where his temporary camp had been set up, and betook himself as far as this famous stream. He had been slow in acting, partly because he wished to make sure of his ground, by ascertaining whether or no the people still desired him to reign over them. Not by force of arms, but by the wishes of his subjects was he determined to hold his position.

"And Judah came to Gilgal to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan," (v. 15). It will be recalled that David had sent Zadok and Abiathar to inquire into the attitude of the elders of Judah toward him: it seems a pity that there had been no joint conference with the heads of the other tribes. "It would have been better if they had conferred with their brethren, and thus acted in concert, as this would have prevented many bad consequences" (Thomas Scott). Even though it had involved further delay, joint action on the part of Israel would have been far more satisfactory. Nothing is gained by partiality: those slighted nurse their grievance, and sooner or later express their dissatisfaction and cause trouble. Thus it proved with the Nation, for less than a century later ten

"And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan." The place where the men of Judah now met David was associated with memorable events. It was there that Joshua had, by the command of the Lord, circumcised those of Israel who had been born in the wilderness, so that "the reproach of Egypt" was rolled away from them (

Joshua 5:2-9); and it was from that incident it derived its name, for Gilgal means "rolling away." How appropriate the chosen venue, for the reproach of Judah's infidelity was rolled away as they now renewed their fealty to David. Again, at a later date we read, "Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and *renew the kingdom there*" (1 Samuel 11:14)—thus was history now virtually repeating itself.

"And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hastened and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David" (v. 16). What pleasant surprises we sometimes have amid life's disappointments! This is the last man of all who might have been expected to be among those who came to welcome the king, for Shimei was the one who had reviled and cursed him on his outward journey (2 Samuel 16:5, 6). The commentators attribute Shimei's friendly advances on this occasion to nothing more than carnal prudence or an instinct of self-preservation, but this we think is quite a mistake—he seems to have been in no danger of his life, for the next verse informs us there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him. No, in the light of verse 14 we believe this is another instance of God's making his enemies to be at peace with him when a man's ways please the Lord.

"And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen Sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king" (v. 17). Well did Matthew Henry suggest, "Perhaps Jordan was never passed with so much solemnity, nor with so many remarkable occurrences, as it was now, since Israel passed it under Joshua." It was almost as surprising for the lying Ziba to present his obeisance to the king on this occasion, as it was for Shimei, for if the one had reviled him with a foul tongue, the other, by his wicked imposition (2 Samuel 16:1-4) abused him with a fair one. No doubt he was anxious to establish himself more firmly in the king's favor before Mephibosheth should undeceive him.

"And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good" (v. 18). "This is the only place in which a *boat* for passing over a river is mentioned. Bridges are not mentioned in Scripture. Rivers were generally *forded* at that time" (Thomas Scott). "And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan" (v. 18). See here a signal demonstration of the power of God: nothing is too hard for Him: He can subdue the most rebellious heart. What wonders are wrought by the Spirit even in the reprobate, for upon them too He puts forth both His restraining and constraining operations: were it not so, the elect could not live in this world at all. Yet how feebly is this realized today, even by the saints. How little is the hand of God beheld by them in the subduing of their enemies' hatred and in making others to be friendly and kind toward them. A spirit of atheism, which would exclude God from all human affairs, is more and more infecting this evil generation.

"And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do you remember that which your servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For your servant does know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king" (verses 19, 20). Let us see in this incident a typical picture of the penitent sinner casting himself upon the mercy of David's greater Son and Lord. This is exactly what takes place at a genuine conversion: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7). This is the course which Shimei now followed: he ceased his defiant conduct, threw down the weapons of his warfare against David, acknowledged his grievous offences, cast himself at the king's feet, thereby avowing his willingness to be subject to his royal scepter. Saving mercy is not to be obtained any other way. There must be a complete right-about-face: contrition and confession are as imperative as is faith in Christ.

Have *you,* my reader, really and truly surrendered yourself to the Lordship of Christ? If you have not, no matter what you believe, or how orthodox the profession you make, you are yet in your sins and on your way to eternal perdition. Make no mistake on this point, we beseech you: as you value your soul, examine thoroughly the foundations of any hope of salvation which you may cherish. If you are living a life of self-pleasing, and are not in subjection to the commandments of Christ, then are you in open revolt against Him. There must be a complete break from the old life of worldliness and carnal gratification, and the entering into a new relationship with God in Christ, namely, a submitting to His holy will and the ordering of all your conduct thereby. You are either living for self, or striving to serve and please God; and in your heart you *know* which course you are following. Being religious on the Sabbath and irreligious the other six days will avail you nothing.

"But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?" (v. 21). Abishai was brother to the arrogant Joab and possessed much of his domineering spirit. He was the one who had offered to slay Shimei at the time he had reviled David (2 Samuel 16:9): mercy was foreign to his nature, and even though Shimei now publicly acknowledge his offence and besought the king's pardon, this son of Zeruiah thirsted for his blood. May we not consider this line in our typical picture as illustrative of the principle (cf. Luke 9:42; 15:2, etc.) that there are some ready to oppose whenever a sinner takes his true place before God. If there are those who complain that the way of salvation is made too easy when the grace of God is emphasized, there are others who argue that salvation by works is being inculcated when the *righteousness* of God and the claims of Christ are duly pressed.

"And David said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death *this* day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei, You shall not die. And the king swore unto him" (verses 22, 23). It is indeed blessed to mark how David's soul loathed the evil suggestion made by Abishai. That son of Zeruiah—whose heart had never been broken before God, and therefore was devoid of His compassions—was far too blind to perceive that this was no time for the enforcing of unmingled justice. But it was far otherwise with David: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7): he had received wondrous mercy from the Lord, and now he exercised mercy unto this wretched Shimei, and in return for this he shall obtain further mercy from God. Let us not ignore that searching word, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14, 15). God communicates grace to His people in order to make them gracious—reflectors of Himself.

Feign would we dwell for a moment longer on the lovely spirit which now actuated our hero. In previous sections of 1 and 2 Samuel we have beheld the grace of God *towards* David—electing, exalting, pardoning and preserving him; so too have we seen the grace of God working *in* him. It was the general rule of his life, giving character to his dealings with others, as it had thus given character to God's dealings with him. Being called to enter into blessing, he rendered blessing. When he was reviled, he reviled not again (1 Samuel 17:28); when persecuted, he threatened not, but suffered it (1 Samuel 19:31). Never do we read of him seeking his own advancement or honor: when tidings reached him of the death of Saul, he wept instead of rejoicing; in the fall of Abner and Ishbosheth, it is only of the sorrow and fasting of David we hear. So it is, in varying measure, with all Christians: notwithstanding the detestable workings of the flesh, there are also the precious fruits of the Spirit—seen and approved of by God, if not always observable by others or cognizable to ourselves.

This was the man after God's own heart, and in every scene in which he was called to take a part—save when he was, for a while, turned aside by Satan—we behold him seeking not his own aggrandizement or even vindication, but serving in grace and kindness. A most blessed example of this was before us when pondering 2 Samuel 9. He would be an emulator or follower of God (Ephesians 5:1), as a dear child. So it was when Abishai was for exacting bare righteousness: but mercy had rejoiced over judgment towards himself in the heart of the Lord, and nothing but the same is now beheld in the heart of David. Divine grace had not only pardoned his grievous sins against Uriah, but had now delivered him from the murderous designs of Absalom; how, then, could he consent to the death of even his worst enemy! Ah, my reader, divine grace not only forgives sins, but it also transforms sinners: taming the lion, making gentle the wolf. Thereby the divine "workmanship" (Ephesians 2:10) is made manifest.

But let us look again beyond David to that blessed One of whom he was so eminent a type. In what has just been before us we are presented with a lovely picture of *the Gospel.* The grand truth of the Gospel is that Christ "receives sinners." Yes, He not only spares, but welcomes His worst enemies, and freely pardons them. Nevertheless, they must seek Him, surrender to His Lordship, take their place before Him in the dust as penitents, confessing their sins, and casting themselves on His sovereign mercy. This is what Shimei did. He determined to make his peace with David, came to him, and did obeisance before him; and we read that the king said "You shall not die." And this, dear reader, is what the King of kings will say of you, if you throw down the weapons of your warfare against Him and exercise faith in Him. May the Spirit of God graciously cause some unbelieving reader to do so.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

His Restoration

2 Samuel 19

We continue to trace out the progress of David on his way back from Mahanaim to Jordan, and thence to Jerusalem. A number of incidents occurred which intimated the change in his fortunes. Many of those who forsook the king in the time of adversity, now flocked around him in the day of his prosperity. Yet these were not all fair-weather friends; some had rendered him real service when the storm burst upon him; others, who had been hindered from so doing, had nevertheless remained loyal to him and now came to welcome him as he returned from exile. Each of these incidents possesses a charm all its own. At the close of our last we viewed the lovely magnanimity of our hero unto Shimei, the man who had cursed him; next we behold his wisdom and fidelity.

"And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace" (2 Samuel 19:24). This is wonderfully touching. Mephibosheth, it will be remembered, was the grandson of Saul, David's archenemy. For his father Jonathan's sake, Mephibosheth had received such kindness at the king's hands that he was accorded a place at his table (2 Samuel 9). Mephibosheth was practically a cripple, being lame on both his feet (2 Samuel 9:3 and cf. 4:4). In the day of David's sore need, Mephibosheth had prepared an elaborate and serviceable present, and had ordered his servant to saddle an donkey that he might ride unto the fugitive king. But instead of obeying orders, the servant, Ziba, had himself ridden to the king, offered the present as a gift from himself, and had then grievously slandered and lied about his master (2 Samuel 16:1-4). All through the time of his absence David had labored under a misapprehension of the loyalty of Mephibosheth; but now the truth was to be revealed.

What is recorded about Mephibosheth here in verse 24 clearly denoted his devotion to David in the hour of his rejection and humiliation. So real and so great had been his grief at the sorry pass to which the king had been reduced, that Mephibosheth had utterly neglected his own person. Instead of seeking to feather his own nest, he had genuinely mourned David's absence. This is beautiful, and is recorded for our learning, for everything in the Old Testament has a lesson for *us* if only we have eyes to see and a heart to receive. The practical lesson in this incident for the believer today is found in those words of Christ's, "The days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (Matthew 9:15)—it becomes us to *mourn* during the King's absence! Note how the apostle rebukes the Corinthians because they were "full," "rich," and had "reigned as kings" (1 Corinthians 4:8).

"The king said unto him, Wherefore went not you with me, Mephibosheth?" (v. 25). First, let it be noted that David did not turn away from him in anger or disgust, refusing him a hearing. Probably the king was surprised to see him at all after the false impression that Ziba had conveyed to him. But the present condition of Mephibosheth must have made quite an impression, so the king gave him opportunity to explain and vindicate himself. An important lesson this for *us* to heed. We must ever seek to be fair and impartial, and ready to hear *both* sides. It is obviously unjust to give credence to a report received behind a person's back, and then refuse to hear his explanation face to face.

Mephibosheth gladly availed himself of the opportunity now given, and proceeded to make an unvarnished statement of the facts (verses 25, 26). He employed the most respectful and affectionate language—an example we also do well to heed if placed under similar circumstances, for nothing is gained, and our case is rather weakened than strengthened, if we hotly condemn our questioner or judge for being so ready to believe evil of us. "But my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in your eyes" (v. 27). Herein Mephibosheth expressed his confidence in David's wisdom and justice. He was satisfied that once his royal master heard both parties and had time to reflect upon the merits of the case, he would not be imposed upon; and therefore he was not afraid to leave himself in David's hands.

Next, Mephibosheth owned the utter unworthiness of himself and family, and acknowledged the signal grace that had been shown him. "For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king, yet did you set your servant among them that did eat at your own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?" (v. 28). "This shows that Ziba's suggestion was improbable: for could Mephibosheth be so foolish as to aim higher, when he fared so easily, so happily, as he did?" (Matthew Henry). This was powerful reasoning. By the king's clemency Mephibosheth had already been amply provided for: why, then, should he aspire unto the kingdom? It was not as though he bad been slighted and left portionless. Having been adopted into the king's family circle, it had been utter madness to deliberately court the king's displeasure. But he would refrain from any further self-vindication.

"And the king said unto him, Why speak you any more of your matters? I have said, You and Ziba *divide* the land" (v. 29). it seems strange that the commentators completely miss the force of this, considering that David was quite unconvinced by Mephibosheth's defense, yes, themselves regarding it as weak and unsatisfactory. We feel, then, we must labor the point a little. First, the words of David on this occasion cannot possibly mean that his previous decision remained unaltered, that the verdict he had given in the past must stand. And for this simple but conclusive reason: David had given no such orders previously! If we turn back to the occasion when the servant had deceived the king, we find that he said, "Behold, your are *all* that pertained unto Mephibosheth" (16:4).

But now: since David did *not* confirm here the order he had given in 16:4, how are we to understand his words? Was he so puzzled by the conflicting statements of Ziba and Mephibosheth that he knew not which to believe, and so suggested a *division* of the land as a fair compromise? Surely not; for that had been grossly unjust to both of them. What then? This: David said what he did not in any harshness, but in order to *test* Mephibosheth's heart and draw out his affections. Obviously a false and mercenary Mephibosheth would have cried out, Yes, yes, that is a very satisfactory settlement. But not such was the language of the true devoted Mephibosheth.

Have we not a similar case in the puzzling situation presented to Solomon by the two harlots? Both of those women gave birth to a child: one overlying and smothering hers, and then stealing the remaining one. When the two women appeared before the king, each claimed to be the mother of the surviving child. What did Solomon say? This, "*Divide* the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other" (1 Kings 3:25)—the very proposal David made unto Mephibosheth! And how did the suggestion work out? Why, the imposter was quite willing to the arrangement, but the actual mother of the living child at once cried out, "O my lord, give *her* the living child, and in no wise slay it" (v. 26). And so it was here, as the sequel shows.

"And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yes, let *him* take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house" (v. 30). How clearly that evidenced the sincere and unselfish character of his love! All he wanted was David's own company. Now that the king was restored, nothing else mattered. To be in David's own presence meant far more to Mephibosheth than any houses or lands. A later incident *confirms* the fact that Mephibosheth had *not* been cast out of the king's favor, for when seven of Saul's descendants were slain as a satisfaction for his sin in the slaughter of the Gibeonites, it is expressly recorded that "The king spared Mephibosheth" (21:7)! And what of the wicked Ziba? He was allowed to go away unpunished, as Shimei had been, for David marked his appreciation of his restoration by the gracious remission of the injuries done to him.

"And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man" (verses 31, 32). This befriending of the king in the hour of his need came before us as we pondered the closing verses of chapter 17. There is no doubt that in ministering so freely to David and his men, Barzillai had done so at considerable risk to himself, for had Absalom prevailed there is little doubt that he had been made to suffer severely for his pains. It is touching to see him here, in his feebleness, taking such a journey to conduct his beloved monarch across the Jordan.

"And the king said unto Barzillai, Come you over with me, and I will feed you with me in Jerusalem" (v. 33). Deeply did the king appreciate the loyalty, generosity and welcome of his aged subject, and accordingly desired that he should participate in the feast which was to mark his restoration. But Barzillai had other thoughts. He felt, and rightly so, that one so near to death should be engaged in more serious and solemn exercise than festive jollifications. Not but there is a time to feast as well as a time to fast, yet such was hardly a suitable occupation for a man so close to the brink of eternity. The aged should be done with carnal pleasures, and set their thoughts and affections on something more enduring and satisfying than the

"But behold your servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king, and do to him what shall seem good to you" (v. 37)—apparently this was one of his sons or grandsons. Barzillai was no austere cynic who cherished a dog-in-the-manger attitude toward the rising generation. "They that are old must not begrudge young people those delights which they themselves are past the enjoyment of, nor oblige them to retire as

they do" (Matthew Henry). If on the one hand those of experience should do what they can to warn and shield their juniors from carnal follies and the snares of this world, on the other hand they must guard against that extreme which would deprive the young of those lawful pleasures which they themselves once participated in. It is easy for some dispositions to develop selfishness and crabbedness under a supposed concern of protecting those under their charge. Such, we take it, is one of the lessons here inculcated in Barzillai's response to the king's invitation.

"And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto you: and whatever you shall require of me, that will I do for you" (v. 38). David at once fell in with Barzillai's suggestion, for he was anxious to repay his kindness. It is our duty to do what we can in assisting the children of those who befriended us, when we were in need. It is beautiful to read how that when the aged David was giving instruction to Solomon, he made special mention of the descendants of Barzillai: "But show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at your table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom your brother" (1 Kings 2:7). Nor was this all that David had done, as the sequel will show.

In his remarkable little work, "Scripture Coincidences," J. J. Blunt points out how that Chimham is mentioned by the prophet Jeremiah, and in that incidental manner common to hundreds of similar allusions in the Word which so evidently bear the stamp of truth upon them. This argument for the divine inspiration of the Scriptures produces a stronger conviction than any external evidence. There is an exact coincidence observable by allusions to particular facts which demonstrates perfect consistency *without* contrivance or collusion. As we have seen, Chimham accompanied David to Jerusalem, but what the king did for him, beyond providing a place for him at his table and recommending him to the care of Solomon, does not appear. Nothing further is said about him in the historical books of the Old Testament. But in Jeremiah 41 his name again appears. An account is there given of the murder of Gedaliah, the officer whom Nebuchadnezzar had left in charge of Judea as its governor, when he carried away captive the more wealthy of its inhabitants. The Jews, fearing the consequences of their crime, and apprehending the vengeance of the Chaldeans, prepared for flight: "And they departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by *Bethlehem* to go to enter into Egypt" (Jeremiah 41:17).

"It is impossible to imagine anything more incidental than the mention of this estate near Bethlehem, which was the habitation of Chimham; yet how well does it tally with the spirit of David's speech to Barzillai some four hundred years before! What can be more probable, than that David, whose birth-place was this very Bethlehem, and whose patrimony in consequence lay there, having undertaken to provide for Chimham, should have bestowed it in whole, or in part, as the most flattering reward he could confer, a personal, as well as a royal, mark of favor, on the son of the man who had saved his life, and the lives of his followers in the hour of their distress; and that, to the very day when Jeremiah wrote, it should have remained in the possession of the family of Chimham and be called after his own name" (J. J. Blunt).

"Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel. And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen you away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him over Jordan?" (verses 40, 41). By the time that David had crossed the Jordan many of the elders and people of Israel came to bring back the king, only to discover they had been anticipated. The officers of Judah had taken the lead in this, and had failed to notify the Ten Tribes of their intentions. This omission was strongly resented, for those of Israel felt they had been slighted, yes, that a serious reflection was cast upon their loyalty to the king.

"And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be you angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or has he given us any gift? And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than you: why then did you despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel" (verses 42, 43). Alas, what is poor human nature. If these Israelites were so desirous that the king should be honored, why be peeved because others had preceded them? O what mischief issues from pride and jealousy. How quick many are to take umbrage at the least seeming slight. How we need to watch against the workings of our own pride, and endeavor to avoid giving offence to the pride of others. But let us, in closing, contemplate a deeper significance possessed by the incidents which have been before us.

"But here again some glimpses may be discerned of the glorious character and kingdom of David's Son and Lord. Being anointed by the Father to be His King upon His holy hill of Zion, He reigns over a willing people, who deem it their privilege to be His subjects. Once indeed they were rebels (and numbers of their associates perish in rebellion): but when they became sensible of their danger, they were fearful or reluctant to submit unto Him; until His ministers, by representing His tender love, and His promises of pardon and preferment, through the concurring influences of His Spirit, bowed their hearts to an humble willingness that He should reign over them; then He readily pardoned and accepted them, and upon no account will He cast out or cut off the greatest offender who cries for mercy. He will recompense those, who from love to Him, feed His servants; He will assign them a place in His holy city. Alas that it must be added, that while the king himself is so plenteous in mercy, many of His professed subjects are envious and contentious with each other, and quarrel about the most trivial concerns, which prevent much good, and does immense mischief" (Thomas Scott).

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

His Restoration

(Continued)

2 Samuel 20

There had been not a little to offset David's grief over the revolt and death of Absalom. As we have seen, his journey back to Jerusalem was marked by several incidents which must have brought satisfaction and joy to the kings heart. The radical change in the attitude of Shimei toward him, the discovery that after all the heart of Mephibosheth beat true to him, the affectionate homage of the aged Barzillai, and the welcome from the elders and men of Judah, were all calculated to cheer and encourage the returning exile. Things seemed to have taken a decided turn for the better, and the sun shone out of a clear sky. Yes, but the clouds have a habit of returning even after a heavy rain. And so it was here. A dark cloud suddenly appeared on David's horizon which must have caused him considerable uneasiness, presaging as it did the gathering of another storm.

The leaders of the Ten Tribes had met David at Gilgal, and a dispute at once ensued between them and the men of Judah. This was the fly in the ointment. A foolish quarrel broke out between the two factions over the matter of bringing back the king. "It was a point of honor which was being disputed between them, which had most interest in David. 'We are more numerous' say the elders of Israel. 'We are nearer akin to him' say the elders of Judah. Now one would think David very safe and happy when his subjects are striving which should love him best, and be most forward to show him respect; yet even that strife proved the occasion for a rebellion" (Matthew Henry). No sooner was one of David's trials over than another arises, as it were, out of the ashes of the former.

Ah, my reader, we must not expect to journey far in this world without encountering trouble in some form or other; no, not even when the providence of God appears to be smiling upon us. It will not be long before we receive some rude reminder that "this is not your rest." It was thus in the present experiences of our hero: in the very midst of his triumphs he was forced to witness a disturbance among his leading subjects, which soon threatened the overthrow of his kingdom. There is nothing stable down here, and we only court certain disappointment if we build our hopes on anything earthly or think to find satisfaction in the creature. Under the sun is but "vanity and vexation of spirit." But how slow we are to really believe that melancholy truth; yet in the end we find it is true.

We closed our last chapter with a quotation which called attention to the typical significance of the incidents recorded in 2 Samuel 19; the opening verses of chapter 20 may be contemplated as bearing out the same line of thought. Christ's visible kingdom on earth is entered by profession, hence there are tares in it as well as wheat, bad fish as well as good, foolish virgins as well as wise (Matthew 13 and 25). This will be made unmistakably manifest in the Day to come, but even in this world God sometimes so orders things that profession is tested and that which is false is exposed. Such is the dispensational significance of the episode we are now to consider. The Israelites had appeared to be loyal and devoted to David, yes, so much so that they were hurt when the men of Judah had, without consulting them, taken the lead in bringing back the king.

But how quickly the real state of their hearts was made apparent. What a little thing it took to cause their affection for David not only to cool off but to evaporate completely. No sooner did an enemy cry "to your tents, O Israel," than they promptly responded, renouncing their professed allegiance. There was no reality to their protestations of fealty, and when the choice was set before them they preferred a "man of Belial" rather than the man after God's own heart. How solemnly this reminds us of the multitudes of Israel at a later date: first crying out "Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Mart. 21:9) and a short time after, when the issue was drawn, preferring Barabbas to Christ. And how often since then, especially in times of trial and persecution, have thousands of those who made a loud profession of Christianity preferred the world or their own carnal safety.

"And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Birchri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel" (2 Samuel 20:1). Alas! how often it appears that in a happy concourse of those who come together to greet and do homage to David there is "a son of Belial" ready to sound the trumpet of contention. Satan knows full well that few things are better calculated to further his own base designs than by causing divisions among the people of God. Sad it is that we are not more upon our guard, for we are not ignorant of his devices. And to be on our guard means to be constantly mortifying pride and jealousy. *Those* were the evil roots from which this trouble issued, as is clear from the "that *our* advice should nor *first* be had in bringing back our king" (19:43).

"And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel" (19:43). This was only adding fuel to the fire. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). If the spirit of jealousy prevailed among the leaders of Israel, pride was certainly at work in the hearts of the elders of Judah, and when those two evils *clashed,* anger and strife quickly followed. It is solemn to observe that God Himself took notice of and recorded in His Word *the fierceness* of the words of the men of Judah—a plain intimation that He now registers against *us* that language which is not pleasing unto Him. How we need to pray that God would set a watch before our mouths, that the door of our lips may be kept from allowing evil to pass out.

"And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Birchri, a Benjamite; and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse." Sheba belonged to the tribe of Saul, which had bitterly begrudged the honor done to Judah, when the son of Jesse was elected king. The Benjamites never really submitted to the divine ordination. The deeper significance of this is not hard to perceive: there is a perpetual enmity in the serpent's seed against the antitypical David. How remarkably was this mysterious yet prominent feature of Christ's kingdom adumbrated in the continued opposition of the house of Saul against David: first in Saul himself, then in Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 2:8, 9; 3:1, etc.), and now Sheba. But just as surely as David prevailed over all his enemies, so shall Christ vanquish all His

"And he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel." See how ready is an evil mind to place a false construction upon things, and how easily this can be accomplished when determined so to do. The men of Judah had said "the king is near of kin to us" (19:42), but this son of Belial now perverted their words and made them to signify "We have *no* part in David" whereas they intended no such thing. Then let us not be surprised when those who secretly hate us give an entirely false meaning to what we have said or written. History abounds in incidents where the most innocent statements have been grossly wrested to become the means of strife and bloodshed. It was so with the Lord Jesus Himself: see John 2:19-21 and compare Matthew 27, 26:61, 62—sufficient then for the disciple to be as his Master. But let the Christian diligently see to it that he does not let *himself* (or herself) be used as a tool of Satan in this vile work.

"Every man to his tents, O Israel." This call put them to the proof testing their loyalty and love to David. The sequel at once evidenced how fickle and false they were. "So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Birchri" (v. 2). Hardly had they returned to their allegiance, than they forsook it. How utterly unreliable human nature is, and how foolish are they who put their trust in man. What creatures of extremes we be: now welcoming Moses as a deliverer, and next reviling him because the deliverance came not as easily and quickly as was expected; how glad to escape from the drudgery of Egypt, and a little later anxious to return thither. What grace is needed to *anchor* such unstable and unreliable creatures.

"So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Birchri" (v. 2). Nothing is told us as to whether or not David himself had taken any part in the debate between the elders of Israel and of Judah, or whether he had made any attempt to pour oil on the troubled waters. If he did, it appears that he quite failed to convince the former, for they now not only refused to attend him any further on his return to Jerusalem, but refused to own him as their king at all. Nay more, they were determined to set up a rival king of their own. Thus the very foundations of his kingdom were again threatened. Scarcely had God delivered David from the revolt of Absalom. than he was now faced with this insurrection from Sheba. And is it not thus in the experience of David's spiritual seed? No sooner do they succeed in subduing one lust or sin, than another raises its ugly head against them.

"But the men of Judah cleave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem" (v. 2). It is blessed to find there were some who remained loyal to David, refusing to forsake him even when the majority of his subjects turned away from him. Thus, though the test exposed the false, it also revealed the true. So it ever is. And *who* were the ones that remained steadfast to the king? Why, the men of his own tribe, those who were related to him *by blood.* The typical significance of this is obvious. Though in the day of testing there are multitudes who forsake the royal banner of the anti-typical David, there is always a remnant which Satan himself cannot induce to apostatize, namely, those who are Christ's brethren spiritually. How beautifully was that here illustrated.

"And David came to his house at Jerusalem: and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, hut went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood" (v. 3). Here we see one of *the gains* resulting from the severe chastening that David had undergone. As we have seen in earlier chapters, David had multiplied wives and concubines unto himself contrary to the law of God, and they had proved a grief and a shame to him (15:16; 16:21, 22). God often has to take severe measures with us before we are willing to forsake our idols. It is good to note that from this point onwards we read nothing more of concubines in connection with David. But how solemn to discover, later, that this evil example, which he had set before his family, was followed by his son Solomon—to the drawing away of his heart from the Lord. O that parents gave more heed to the divine threat that their sins shall surely be visited upon their descendants.

"Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be you here present" (v. 4). Though the men of Judah had not followed the evil example of the Ten Tribes in their revolt against the king, yet it appears from this verse that many of them were no longer in attendance upon David, having no doubt returned unto their own homes. Considering the circumstances, it seems that they put their own comfort and safety first, at a time when their master's regime was seriously threatened. "Though Forward enough to attend the king's triumphs, they were backward enough not to fight his battles. Most love a loyalty, as well as a religion, that is cheap and easy. Many boast of their being akin to Christ that yet are very loath to venture for Him" (Matthew Henry). On the other hand let it not be forgotten that it is not without reason the Lord's people are called "sheep"—one of the most *timid* of all animals.

"Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be you here present." This shows the uneasiness of David at Sheba's rebellion and his determination to take strong and prompt measures to quell it. Amasa, it may be pointed out, had been the "captain of the host for Absalom against David (17:25), yet he was near akin unto the king. He was the one whom David had intended should replace Joab as the commander of his armies (19:13), and the rebellion of Sheba now supplied the opportunity for the carrying out of this purpose. Having received a previous notification of the king's design may have been the main reason why Amasa, though an Israelite, did not join forces with the insurrectionists. He saw an opportunity to better his position and acquire greater military honor. But, as we shall see, in accepting this new commission, he only signed his own —so insecure are the honors of this world.

It is very much to be doubted whether David's choice was either a wise or a popular one. Since Amasa had filled a prominent position under Absalom, it could scarcely be expected that the man who Joab had successfully commanded would now relish being placed on subjection to the man who so recently had been the enemy of their king. It is this which, most probably, accounts for the delay, or rather Amasa's lack of success in carrying out the king's orders, for we are told "So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him" (v. 5). As Scott says, "The men of Judah seemed to have been more eager in disputing about their king, than to engage in battle under Amasa." This supplied a solemn warning for Amasa, but in the pride of his heart he heeded it not.

"And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Birchri do us more harm than did Absalom: take you your lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us" (v. 6). It had already been clearly demonstrated that Sheba was a man who possessed considerable influence over the men of Israel, and therefore David had good reason to Fear that if he were allowed to mature his plans, the most serious trouble would be sure to follow. His order to Amasa shows that he was determined to frustrate the insurrectionists by nipping their plans while they were still in the bud, by sending a powerful force against them. Chafing at the delay occasioned by Amasa's lack of success in promptly collecting an army, David now gave orders to Abishai to take command of the regular troops, for he was determined to degrade Joab.

"And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Birchri" (v. 7). This, we take it, defines "your lord's servants" of the previous verse, namely, the seasoned warriors which Joab had formerly commanded. Though he had no intention of employing Joab himself on this occasion, David gladly availed himself of his trained men Abishai was a proved and powerful officer, being in fact brother to Joab. All seemed to be now set for the carrying out of David's design, but once more it was to be shown that though man proposes it is God who disposes. Even great men, yes, kings themselves, are often thwarted in their plans, and discover they are subordinate to the will of Him who is the King of kings. How thankful we should be that this is so, that the Lord in His infinite wisdom rules over all.

"When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them" (v. 8). It seems this was the appointed meeting-place for the concentrated forces of David. Amasa now arrived on the scene at the head of the men which he had mustered, and promptly placed himself in command of the army. But brief indeed was the moment of his military glory, for no sooner did he reach the pinnacle of his ambition than he was brutally dashed therefrom, to lay weltering in his own blood. "Vain are earthly distinctions and preferments, which excite so much envy and enmity, without affording any additional security to mans uncertain life: may we then be ambitious of that honor which comes from God only" (Thomas Scott).

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

His Purpose Thwarted

2 Samuel 20

In previous chapters it has been pointed out that Joab was a man of a fierce and intractable spirit, and that be was ungodly and unscrupulous in principle. Once David had placed himself in his power (by making him his secret agent in the death of Uriah: 2 Samuel 11:14, 15), he thenceforth took matters more and more into his own hands, executing or disregarding the king's orders as best suited himself, Imperious and ruthless to the last degree, Joab would brook no interference with his own policy. Devoid of natural feeling, fearing neither God nor man, he hesitated not to slay any who stood in his way. Fearfully does his arrogance, treachery and brutality appear in the incident which is to be before us. Feign would we pass by an episode so revolting, yet it is recorded in Holy Writ, and therefore it must contain some message that is needed by us.

We have also seen how that, at length, David made a determined effort to strip Joab of his power, by removing him from the head of the army. Accordingly Amasa was selected as the one to replace him. But the king's design was thwarted, frustrated by one of the vilest deeds chronicled in the Scriptures. Under pretense of paying obeisance to the new general, Joab thrust him through with the sword. Such an atrocity staggers the thoughtful, making them to wonder why God suffers such outrages to be perpetrated. This is indeed one of the dark mysteries of divine providence—why the Lord permits such monsters of wickedness to walk the earth. Faith is assured that He must have some sufficient reason. Though often God gives "no account of His matters" (Job 33:13), yet His Word does indicate, more or less clearly, the general principles which regulate His governmental dealings.

Much help is afforded upon the mystery of Providence when it is perceived that God makes "all things *work together*" (Romans 8:28). When incidents are contemplated singly they naturally appear distorted, for they are viewed out of their proper perspective; but when we are able to examine them in relation to their antecedents and consequents, usually their significance is much more evident. The detached fragments of life are meaningless, bewildering, staggering; but put them together, and they manifest a design and purpose. Much in the present finds its explanation in that which preceded it in the past, while muck' in the present will also become intelligible by the sequel in the future—"What I do you know not now; but you shall know hereafter" (John 13:7). If these principles were more steadily borne in mind, we should be less nonplused by startling occurrences.

Our present incident is a case in point. Viewed by itself apart, the brutal murder of Amasa is indeed overwhelming, as to why God should permit him to come to such a fearful end. But viewed in relation to other things, contemplated in connection with that inexorable but righteous principle of sowing and reaping, light is cast on that dark scene. if we take the trouble to go back from effect to cause, we shall find that God had a just reason for employing Joab to thwart David's purpose, and that in meeting with such a death Amasa but received his just deserts. If this can be demonstrated, then we may perceive much more clearly why this revolting incident is recorded in Holy Writ; for since it is evident that God had a sufficient reason for suffering *this* tragedy to occur, we may rest the better assured that He has His own wise ends in things which often appear so puzzling and appalling to us in the world today.

There was a reason why God permitted Jacob to be so basely deceived about the fate of his beloved Joseph (Genesis 37:31-35): he was but reaping what he had sown in the deceiving of his father Isaac (Genesis 27). There was a reason why God permitted the Egyptians to treat the Hebrews with such cruelty and severity (Exodus 1 and 5): they were His instruments in punishing them for their idolatry and their refusal to heed the divine call to cast away the heathen abominations with which they had defiled themselves (Ezekiel 20:7, 8). There was a reason why God permitted Doeg to brutally slay no less than eighty-five of the priestly family (1 Samuel 22: 18): it was the execution of the solemn judgment which He pronounced upon the house of Eli (1 Sam, 2:31-36; 3:12-16), the sins of the fathers king visited upon the children. There is a reason why God has permitted the Jews to be more hated and persecuted throughout this Christian era than any other people: the guilt of Christ's crucifixion rests on them and their children (Matthew 27:25).

"The curse causeless shall not come" (Proverbs 26:2). While God is absolute sovereign and exercises His justice or His mercy as and when He pleases, yet He acts not arbitrarily: He neither punishes the innocent, nor does He pardon the guilty without reparation—that is through a substitute. Hence, we may rest assured that when the divine curse falls upon a person, there is due cause for the same. But let not the reader misunderstand us: we do not wish to imply that any of *us* are capable of ascertaining the reason or reasons which lie behind any calamity that may overtake either ourselves or any of our fellows. On the contrary, it lies entirely outside of our province to explain the mysteries of divine providence, and it would be the height of presumption to say *why* an affliction has been sent upon another—the book of Job warns loudly against such a procedure.

No, what we have been seeking to do is to point out that the most mysterious of divine providences, the most appalling events in history—whether involving individuals only or nations—*have* a satisfactory explanation, that God *has* sufficient reason for all that He does or permits. And in His Word He has graciously made this evident, by revealing in instance after instance, the obvious connection between sowing and reaping. True, He has by no means done so in every case, for God has not written His Word either to vindicate His own character and conduct or to satisfy our curiosity. Sufficient is said in His Word to show that God is infinitely worthy of our utmost confidence, so that we should say with him whose faith was tried in a way and to an extent that few ever have been, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

We have followed out the present train of thought because some are so overwhelmed by the shocking things which take place in the world from time to time, that their faith is shaken. They know that so far from its affording any solution to the problem, to affirm that *God* has no connection with such things, is a serious error—denying His present government over and control of the wicked. Nay, it is because they recognize that God actually permits these outrages, that they find it so difficult to harmonize this with His revealed character. We have called attention to some outstanding eases because they are to be regarded as examples of a general principle. Retributive justice is one of the divine perfections, and though we are often far too short-sighted to perceive its workings, nevertheless, we may have implicit confidence in its operations, and as it is regulated by Omniscience, we know it makes no mistakes.

Resuming now at the point where we left off in our last: "When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them" (2 Samuel 20:8). It will be remembered that in connection with David's journey back to Jerusalem, upon his crossing of the Jordan, there had occurred a sharp controversy between the elders of Judah and the elders of Israel. The old spirit of rivalry and jealousy was stirred up, and an evil man, Sheba, who belonged to the tribe of Saul, sought to capitalize the situation, and called upon those belonging to Israel to abandon the cause of David. In this he was, for the moment, successful, for we are told, "So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Birchri" (v. 2). This threatened the most serious consequences, and unless Sheba's plans were nipped in the bud, David would be faced with another rebellion.

The king recognized the danger, and at once took measures to meet it. Now was the opportunity, he felt, to put into execution the plan which he had formed for the removing of Joab from the head of his forces. Calling Amasa to him, he said, "Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be you here present." As we saw, there was some delay, so "David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Birchri do us more harm than did Absalom: take you your lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us." Then we are told, "And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba." They had some distance to go, and apparently the great stone in Gibeon was to be the gathering point of David's forces, for "when they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them." By this we understand that the men whom Amasa had gathered together came up with those led by Abishai, and that Amasa, according to David's orders, now took charge of the entire expedition.

"And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a belt with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out" (v. 8). It seems from this that Joab had accompanied the soldiers in a private capacity. He pretended to gladly submit to the new arrangement, and to be full of zeal for David's cause, prepared to do his part in preventing another general uprising. But outward appearances are often deceptive. In reality, Joab was determined to avenge the dishonor done to him and assassinate the one who had been appointed to displace him. As he advanced to greet the new commander-in-chief, his sword fell out of its sheath, and to prevent its falling to the ground he caught it in his left hand. It looked as though the sword had become unsheathed by accident, but the sequel shows it was by design, and was but a subtle device to cloak his vile purpose.

"And Joab said to Amasa, Are you in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his affections to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died" (verses 9, 10). How the real character of Joab was here displayed! Treacherous, ruthless, blatant, utterly hardened. Amasa was his own cousin, yet ties of blood meant nothing to this callous wretch. Amasa had been definitely appointed by the king to lead his forces, but the royal authority counted for naught to Joab. Moreover, it was in front of all the troops that Joab committed his awful crime, caring not what they thought nor afraid of what they might do. Thoroughly lawless and defiant, he never hesitated to take matters into his own hands and crush whoever stood in his way.

Viewed as an isolated event, here was a most appalling crime. A man in the path of duty brutally murdered without a moment's warning. And yet a holy God permitted it, for most certainly He could have prevented it had He so pleased. Why, then, did He suffer David's purpose to be so rudely thwarted? and why was Joab allowed to slay Amasa? The two questions are quite distinct, and must be considered separately. Unspeakably solemn though the subject be, yet earlier events cast their light on this dark scene. After David's murder of Uriah God had said, "the sword shall never depart from your house" (2 Samuel 12:10), and Amasa was David's *own nephew:* see 2 Samuel 17:25 and compare 1 Chronicles 2:13, 16. "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). It found David out: in the death of Bathsheba's child, in the raping of Tamar, in the murder of Amnon, in the death of Absalom, and now in the slaying of Amasa.

And what of Amasa himself? Ah, was he one who had served the king with unswerving loyalty? No indeed, far from it. And what of the stock from which he came? Were his parents pious, so that the blessing of the Lord might be expected upon their offspring? And again the answer is no. "And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab" (2 Samuel 17:25). Thus, Amasa had not only failed David at the most critical juncture, but he had taken an active and prominent part against him. And now he was slain, justly slain, by one who had fought *for* the king. 2 Samuel 17:25 also tells us, "Which Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah, Joab's mother" so that here again it was a case of the sins of the parent being visited upon the child. Thus, revolting though this episode be, we may see in it the righteous judgment of God.

"So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Birchri. And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He who favors Joab and be that is for David, let him go after Joab" (verses 10, 11). This was playing politics with a vengeance, pretending that fealty to David demanded that the army should follow the leadership of Joab—how often the people are induced to follow a course which is evil under the impression that they are furthering a righteous cause! Why, these soldiers had just seen Joab slay the very man whom the king had called to head his forces: how, then, could they be for David if they followed this murderer? But few people think for themselves, and fewer still are regulated by moral principle. The great majority are easily imposed upon, accepting what any glib-tongued or forcible leader tells them.

"And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still. When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Birchri" (verses 12, 13). Though none had raised a hand against the cold-blooded murderer, they had sufficient decency to stand their ground until the body of his victim was removed from the public highway and respectfully covered. This done, they unanimously followed Joab. He might be impetuous and imperious, still he was a valiant warrior, and in the eyes of these soldiers, *that* covered a multitude of sins. Moreover, was he not pursuing Sheba, the enemy of their king; there could not, then, be anything radically wrong with him. Such has often been the superficial logic of the multitude, as the testimony of history abundantly illustrates. Yet faith discerns One behind the scenes working all things after the counsel of His own will.

Sheba had meanwhile taken refuge in the "city," or fortified town of Abel. Thither came Joab and his forces to besiege it, battering upon the outer wall to throw it down. Whereupon a wise woman of the city expostulated with Joab, protesting against the needless destruction of the town and the slaying of its inhabitants, reminding him that by so doing he would "swallow up the heritage of the Lord" (v. 19). Joab at once made it known that all he was after was the capture of the arch-rebel against David, assuring the woman that as soon as that son of Belial was delivered up to him, he and his forces would withdraw. Accordingly, Sheba was executed and his head thrown over the wall. Thus perished one more of those who set themselves against the Lord's anointed. "Evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow him" (Psalm 140:1 1).

The readiness of Joab to heed the wise counsel of the woman of Abel is not to be taken as a redeeming feature on this occasion, still less as conflicting with what we have said above about his general character. Joab had no personal grievance against the inhabitants of that city: had *that* been the case, it had indeed gone hard with them. Moreover, to have made a wholesale slaughter of those innocent Israelites, would obviously have been against the interests of the kingdom at large, and Joab was too politic to be guilty of so grave a blunder. "And Joab returned unto Jerusalem unto the king" (v. 22). Unabashed at his crime, conscious of the guilty hold which he had over him, Joab feared not to face his royal master. Thus was David's purpose thwarted, and as though to particularly emphasize the fact, the chapter closes by saying, "Now Joab was over all the hosts of Israel," etc. (v. 23).

CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT

His Honorable Conduct

2 Samuel 21

There does not seem to be much in common between the murder of Amasa and the famine which afflicted the land of Israel, yet that the contents of 2 Samuel 20 and 21 are definitely linked together is clearly intimated by the opening "Then" of the latter. What that connection is, a little reflection should make clear: that which is now to be before us supplies a further illustration of the principal thought developed in our last. It is *the retributive justice* of God which is again seen in exercise. There it had to do with an individual; here it affected a whole nation. Valuable light is here shed upon the subject of the Divine government of this world, for we are not only given to see how that God fully controls even its physical history, but are also shown something of the moral principles which regulate His procedure. So far from that government being a capricious one, it is regulated by definite design and method. It is the noting of this which supplies the key to the philosophy of history.

"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years. year after year" (2 Samuel 21:1). When faced with droughts and famines, the scientists (so-called) and other wiseacres prate about planetary disturbances, sun-spots, the recurring of astronomical cycles, etc., but the Christian looks beyond all secondary causes and discerns the Maker of this world directing all its affairs. And thus the simplest believer has light which the most learned of this world's savants possess not. They, and all who follow them, leave God out of their thoughts, and therefore the light which is in them is darkness, and how great is that darkness. It is only the eye of faith which sees the hand of the Lord in everything, and where faith is in exercise there is secured a satisfying resting-place for the heart.

"And David inquired of the Lord" (v. 1). Wise man: he declined to lean unto his own understanding. Nor did he, like the monarchs of Egypt and Babylon before him, send for the astrologers and soothsayers. There was no need to, when he had access to the living God. The pity is that he did not consult Him earlier, instead of waiting until the situation got really desperate. By inquiring of the Lord in the time of trouble, David left us an example which we do well to follow. The Sender of trouble is the only One who can remove it; and if it be not His pleasure to remove it, He is the One who can show us how best to meet it. He did so for David; and He will for us, if we seek Him aright—that is, with an humble, penitent, yet trustful heart.

Troubles do not come by haphazard. The poor worldling may talk of his "ill fortune," but the believer ought to employ more God-honoring language. He should know that it is his

Father who orders all his circumstances and regulates every detail of his life, Therefore, when famine comes upon him—be it a spiritual or a financial one—it is both his privilege and his duty to seek unto the Lord and ask, "Show me wherefore You contend with me" (Job 10:2). When the smile of God is withdrawn from us we should at once suspect that something is wrong. True, His favor is not to be measured by His material benefits; and true also that His withholding of them does not always indicate His displeasure. No, He may be testing faith, developing patience, or preparing us for an enlarged trust. Nevertheless, it is always the part of wisdom to think the worst of ourselves, for the promise is "seek you first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these (material) things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

"And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house because he slew the Gibeonites" (21:1). The Lord did not turn a deaf ear unto David's inquiry, even though it was such a tardy one. How longsuffering He is with His own! How many of us have been like David in this! smarting under the chastening rod of God, yet allowing a lengthy interval to pass before we definitely inquired of God as to its cause. Rightly did the poet say, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer." Yes, oftentimes they are quite "needless," for if God show us what is wrong, and we put matters right, His rod will quickly be removed.

It is solemn to note that the controversy which the Lord had with Israel at this time was not over some recent thing, but one which had been committed years previously; yet was it one that had never been put right. God does not forget, if we do. Many afflictions, both upon individuals and upon nations, are expressly sent by Him for the purpose of "bringing to remembrance" the sins of the past. In the case before us Israel was now suffering because of the transgression of Saul, for it is an unchanging principle in the divine government that God deals with nations according to the conduct of their rulers or responsible heads. No truth is more clearly revealed in Scripture than this, and the same is plainly exemplified in the history of the world all through this Christian era. Nor need this fact and principle at all surprise us, for in the great majority of instances the rulers follow that policy which will best please their subjects.

The earlier history supplies no record of that which occasioned this calamity upon the nation. We mention this to correct the assertion which is often made in some quarters that Scripture always explains Scripture, by which it is meant that every verse or statement in the Word may be understood by some other statement elsewhere. As a general principle this is true, yet it is by no means without exception, and therefore it needs qualifying. The above is an example of what we mean: there is no historical account of Saul's slaying the Gibeonites. Nor is this example by any means an isolated one. Paul said "thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep" (2 Corinthians 11:25), yet we know not when and where this occurred. In connection with the giving of the law at Sinai "Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (Hebrews 12:21), but there is no record in the Old Testament of this. Hebrews 13:23 tells of Timothy being "set at liberty," yet his imprisonment is nowhere recorded in Scripture.

"Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them" (v. 2). The allusion is to what is found in Joshua 9. It will be remembered that after Joshua had overthrown Jericho and Ai the inhabitants of Gibeon were afraid, and resorted to dishonest strategy. They succeeded in deceiving Joshua. After telling a plausible tale, the Gibeonites offered to become the servants of Israel. And we are told "And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them" (Joshua 9:15). A little later, Israel learned that they had been deceived, that instead of the Gibeonites being travelers from a far country (as they had affirmed) they were really Canaanites. The sequel is quite striking and contains a lesson which governmental leaders would do well to take to heart today.

Three days later, as they continued their advance, the Israelites reached the cities of the Gibeonites, and we are told "And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel" (v. 18). The heads of the nation respected the solemn treaty into which they had entered with the Gibeonites. Then they were put to a more severe test: "And all the congregation murmured against the princes" (v. 18). The common people urged their leaders to regard that treaty as a scrap of paper—human nature was just the same then as it is now: unprincipled, blind to its own highest interests, utterly selfish, indifferent to the divine approval. But in the merciful providence of God, Israel at that time was favored with conscientious leaders, who refused to yield to the popular clamor and do that which they knew was wrong.

"But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the Lord God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them. This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swore unto them" (verses 19, 20). What mercy it is when the responsible bends of the nation are God-fearing men, whose word is their bond, who cannot be induced to forsake the paths of righteousness. And, my reader, how we need to *pray* (as we are commanded to do: 1 Timothy 2:1, 2) for all in authority over us, that God will make them honest, just, truthful, and that He will keep them steadfast in the performance of duty. Their position is no easy one: they are in need of divine grace, and prayer is the appointed channel through which supplies of grace are communicated—to the ministers of state as truly as to the ministers of the Gospel. Then instead of criticizing and condemning them, let us hold up their hands by daily supplication for them.

Joshua confirmed the stand taken by the "princes"—the heads of the tribes. Calling the Gibeonites unto him, he asked why they had beguiled him. Whereupon they confessed it was out of fear for their very lives that they had resorted to the imposture; and then cast themselves upon his mercy and fidelity. "And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, even unto this day" (verses 26, 27). From that time onwards, the Gibeonites remained in Israel's midst, acting as their servants—a peaceful and useful people, as Nehemiah 3:7 and other passages intimate.

"And Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah" (2 Samuel 21:2). In utter disregard for the solemn treaty which guaranteed their security, Saul determined to exterminate these Gibeonites; but this was done not out of zeal for the Lord, but "in his zeal to the children of Israel." How perverse human nature is! God had given Saul no commission to slay the Gibeonites, but He *had* commanded him to destroy the Philistines and Amalekites; but this he left undone. Ah, the extirpation of the Philistines was a difficult and dangerous task, for they were a well-armed and powerful people, fully prepared to resist; whereas the Gibeonites were an easy prey. And is there not much fleshly zeal being displayed in corrupt Christendom today?—thousands engaged in work to which God has never called them, while neglecting the great task He *has* assigned them. What numbers of the rank and file of professing Christians are now busy in seeking to "win souls to Christ," while neglecting the mortifying of their fleshly and worldly lusts—ah, the former is far easier than the latter.

Saul, then, broke public faith with the Gibeonites, for the solemn covenant entered into with them by Joshua assured their preservation. This is clear from verse 5, for while verse 2 says only that he "sought to slay them," here the Gibeonites referred to him as "the man that consumed us, and that devised against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel," which is an amplification of the Lord's words, "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (v. 1). This brought down heavy guilt upon the nation, which had not been expiated by the punishment of the guilty. The three years' famine which now came upon the land was proof of this. "It pleased God in this manner, and so long after, to proceed against the nation for it: to show His abhorrence against such crimes; to teach rulers to keep at a distance from similar offences themselves, and to punish them in others; and to intimate the chief punishment of sin is *after* the death of the offenders" (Thomas Scott).

The fact that God waited so many years before He publicly evidenced His displeasure against Israel for this heinous transgression, manifested His long sufferance, granting them a lengthy space for repentance. But they repented not, and now He made them to realize that He had neither overlooked nor forgotten their crime. Learn then, my reader, that the passage of time does not remove or lessen the guilt of sin. Let us also learn what a solemn thing it is for a strong nation to go back upon its pledged word when they have promised protection to a weak people.

God made known unto David the reason for his present controversy with Israel, that he might take proper measures for expiating the national guilt. As a God-fearing man, David at once recognized the binding obligation of the league Joshua had made with the Gibeonites, and the nation's guilt in violating the same. Accordingly "David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and with which shall I make the atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord" (v. 3). This was but fair: they were the ones who had been wronged, and therefore it was but just that they should be given the opportunity for deciding what form the reparation should take. Incidentally, let it be carefully noted that this is still another passage which plainly teaches that "atonement" is made for the express purpose of turning away the displeasure of the Lord—there is no thought of at-one-ment or reconciliation here, for the Gibeonites were not alienated from Him!

"And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shall you kill any man in Israel" (v. 4). Most generous and noble was their reply. It showed they were neither mercenary nor spiteful: they neither desired to turn this situation to their own material advantage, nor did they harbor a spirit of revenge. For centuries they had acted as servants, and now that Israel had broken the covenant they might well have demanded their freedom. How their selfishness puts to shame the greedy, grasping spirit of this much-vaunted twentieth century! It is not often that the poor are free from covetousness and avarice—the great majority are not poor from choice, but from necessity of circumstances. No wonder the Lord was ready to plead the cause of so meek and mild a people.

And he said, What you shall say, that will I do for you. And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel; let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose" (verses 5, 6). Here we perceive their spiritual intelligence and piety. Their asking for "seven" of the descendants of Saul showed they understood that number signified completeness. Their suggestion that these seven men should be "hanged," intimated that they knew this form of death betokened accursedness (Deuteronomy 21:23). Their words "hang them up before the Lord in Gibeah" evinced their knowledge that satisfaction must be offered unto God's justice before His wrath could be turned away from Israel. Their declaration "Saul, whom the Lord did choose" was an open acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. Their offer *we* will hang them up unto the Lord" was magnanimous—willing to spare David, and themselves bear any public criticism which was likely to be offered.

But let us now notice the nobility of David's conduct in this connection. First, in his inquiring of the Lord as to the reason why the famine had been sent on his land. You will recall how often this grace was seen in him—signal evidence of his piety. Second, in his readiness to consult with the Gibeonites. How many a man would have considered it beneath his dignity to hold conference with menials!—but humility was another grace which shone brightly in David. Third, in his fairness. An unscrupulous man would have disputed their claim, saying that the league made in the days of Joshua was long since obsolete. Fourth, in his consenting to their proposal. We know from other passages that he was sentimentally attached to the family of Saul, but with him the claims of justice superseded all personal considerations. Finally, his fidelity to the promise he had made to Jonathan: "But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the Lord's oath that was between them" (v. 7) and cf. I Samuel 15:20, 42.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE

His Honorable Conduct

(Continued)

2 Samuel 21

"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year: and David inquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (2 Samuel 21:1). In our last we sought to show that this occurrence supplies a definite illustration or example of God's governmental ways with the nations. On this occasion He was dealing with Israel for a crime which they had committed many years previously. That crime respected their violation of a treaty which had been entered into between themselves and the Gibeonites in the days of Joshua. King Saul had ruthlessly ignored that solemn obligation, and instead of protecting the weak he had brutally sought to exterminate them, thus bringing down upon his own house and upon the nation the holy wrath of the

God does not always manifest His displeasure at once, either against individuals or nations; instead, He usually gives "space for repentance" (Rev. 2:21). But alas, so perverse is fallen human nature that, instead of improving the divine mercy, it perverts the same: "Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:10). No, instead of "learning righteousness" man only adds iniquity to iniquity: "Because sentence against an evil work *is not executed speedily,* therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Men regard God's patience as indifference to their sins, thereby emboldening themselves in their wickedness: "These things have you done, and I kept silence: you thought that I was altogether such an one as yourself: but I will reprove you, and set them in order before your eyes" (Psalm 50:21). Yes, sooner or later, God will "reprove"—exhibiting His holiness, exercising His retributive justice. It was so here. Though Saul was now dead, yet his house was made to feel God's avenging hand.

When David inquired the reason why God had sent this protracted famine upon the land of Israel, God made known to him the cause thereof. The king thereupon entered into a conference with those who had been wronged, and invited them to state what reparation should be made for Saul's outrages upon their people. Their response was striking, illustrating the fact that those from whom it is to be the least expected often evince much more magnanimity than others who have enjoyed far greater privileges. The Gibeonites made it known that they sought no financial gain, being far more concerned that divine justice should be compensated: "Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them *up unto the Lord* in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose" (2 Samuel 21:6).

Let it be duly noted, first, that the Gibeonites had for many years held their peace, neither complaining to David for the unredressed wrong Saul had done them, nor disturbing the kingdom by their protests and demands. It was not until the Lord had interposed on their behalf, and until David himself had inquired what satisfaction should be made for the grievous wrong which had been done them, that they preferred the above request. It was in no blood-thirsty and vindictive spirit they now spoke. Their request was neither unjust nor unreasonable: they asked for no lives but those of Saul's own family: he had done the wrong, and therefore it was but right that *his house* should pay the price. To this day, the heirs may be lawfully sued for their parents' debts. True, in the ordinary course of things, children are not to be slain for the crimes of their father (Deuteronomy 24:16), but the case of the Gibeonites was altogether extraordinary.

Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that the Lord had definitely intervened on behalf of these injured ones, and therefore what is here before us should be considered from the *divine* viewpoint. However shocking this incident may appear to us, or however contrary to our sense of the fitness of things, let us beware of condemning or even criticizing that which the Most High inspired. "God had made Himself an immediate party to the cause, and, no doubt, put it into the hearts of the Gibeonites to make this demand . . . Let parents take heed of sin, especially the sin of cruelty and oppression, for their children's sake, who may be smarting for it by the just hand of God, when they are in their graves. Guilt and a curse are a bad entail on a family" (Matthew Henry). A most solemn warning was furnished for all future generations in this tragic incident.

Finally, let it not be overlooked that God owned what was done on this occasion: "And after that God was entreated for the land" (v. 14). God's judgments are not subject to those rules which human judgments are to be regulated by, nor does He stand in need of any apology from us. Jehovah's actions are not to be measured by our petty tape-lines. Where we cannot understand His ways, we must bow silently before Him, assured that He will yet fully vindicate Himself and at the finish close the mouth of every rebel who now quarrels with His providences. However, it should not be overlooked that, in this particular punishment which fell upon Saul's descendants, it was by no means a case of innocent and unoffending members of his house being dealt with, for God Himself speaks of them as a "bloody house" (v. 1)—they were actuated by their father's cruel spirit and walked in his steps.

"Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose" (v. 6). Notice the "whom *we* will hang up, which showed their consideration for the king: they were quite willing to bear the odium of the execution. As we have already pointed out, this was not for the gratification of personal revenge—"neither for us shall you kill any man in Israel" (v. 4). "Hang them up *unto the Lord*"—as a sacrifice unto His justice, and also as a warning unto Israel to molest them no more. "In Gibeah of Saul"—as an object lesson to those who had assisted him in his persecution and slaughter of the innocent. "And the king said, I will give them" (v. 6). Obviously David had never consented to their proposal had it been wrong in the sight of God. Inasmuch as the selection of these seven men was left to David, opportunity was afforded him to spare the son of Jonathan (v. 7).

"But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite" (v. 8). The first two were Saul's own sons, which he had by a concubine. The other five were grandsons which his daughter had borne to Adriel, but who had been brought up by their aunt: Let it be recalled that the mother of these five men had been promised to David by her father, but he treacherously gave her to Adriel, with the intention of provoking the sweet singer of Israel (

1 Samuel 18:19). Herein we may perceive more clearly the workings of divine justice. Commenting on this particular point Joseph Hall said, "It is a dangerous matter to offer injury to any of God's faithful ones: if their meekness have easily remitted it, God will not pass it over without a severe rebuke, though it may be long afterwards."

"And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites" (v. 9). We are well aware that, in this sentimental age when capital punishment is being more and more opposed, many will consider David did wrong in carrying out the wishes of the Gibeonites. Some have so perversely wrested this incident that they have not hesitated to charge David with seizing the opportunity to wreak his own spite upon an old enemy. But surely it is evident to all right-minded people that David could do no other: it was not from any private animosity which he bore to the house of Saul, but that obedience to God required his compliance with the request of the Gibeonites, while his having at heart the good of the Nation left him no other alternative. "Those executions must not be complained at as cruel which are become necessary in the public welfare. Better that seven of Saul's bloody house be hanged, than that all Israel should be famished" (Matthew Henry).

"And they hanged them in the hill before the Lord: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest" (v. 9). "As these persons were hanged by the express appointment of God for an anathema, an accursed thing, a national atonement to divine justice, they were left on the tree or gibbet until some tokens of the Lord's reconciliation were afforded by seasonable rains" (Thomas Scott). Yet here again we may perceive the absolute sovereignty of Jehovah, and His superiority to all restrictions. Though He had expressly forbidden magistrates to slay children in order to avenge the crimes of their parents (Deuteronomy 24:16), nevertheless, God Himself is bound by no such limitations. He had also given command to Israel, "If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and you hang him on a tree: his body shall *not remain* all night upon the tree, but you shall in any wise bury him that day, for he who is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:22, 23); yet here we see the Lord moving David to do exactly the contrary! Why? if not to make it plain that He Himself is *above* all law, free to do just as He pleases.

"And were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest" (v. 9). Every detail here evidenced the superintending hand of the Lord. First, the *place* appointed for this execution, namely, in Saul's own city, so that the seven victims were, practically speaking, put to death on their own doorstep. Second, the *manner* of their execution, which was by hanging before the Lord, to demonstrate they were accursed in His sight. Third, the *time* of their execution, namely, "in the days of harvest." Those days were selected to make it the more manifest that they were being sacrificed for the specific purpose of appeasing God's wrath, which had for three years withheld from them harvest mercies, and to obtain His favor for the present season. Who, then, can reasonably doubt that everything was here done according to the divine ordering?

But is there not also an important practical lesson *for us?* Surely there must be, for the natural ever adumbrates the spiritual. Nor should it be difficult to ascertain what is here figuratively set forth. While those bloody sons of Saul were spared, the mercies of God were withheld; but when they had been hanged, "God was entreated for the land" (v. 14). And is it not the same with us today individually? If we fail to deny self, and on the contrary indulge our corruptions, how can we expect the smile of the Lord to be upon us? "Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good things from you" (Jeremiah 5:25). Do we sufficiently realize, dear reader, that the One with whom we have to do is the thrice Holy God? If we play with fire we must expect to get our fingers burned, and if we trifle with sin and trample upon the divine precepts, we shall suffer severely.

We are well aware that *this* aspect of the Truth is not a palatable one. Those who lead a life of sell-pleasing wish to hear only of the grace of God. But does not the very grace of God teach us *to deny* "ungodliness and worldly lusts" and to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12) Grace is given not to countenance evil doing, but to counteract the workings of an evil nature. Grace is given to enable its recipient to pluck out right eyes and cut off right hands: in other words, it is a supernatural principle which produces supernatural effects. Is it doing so in you and me? or are we after all our profession, strangers to it? Have we diligently sought to use the grace already imparted? If not, can we really expect more grace until we penitently confess our failures and put right with God what we know to be displeasing in His sight.

We are also well aware that this aspect of the Truth is utterly ignored by the great majority of preachers and "Bible teachers" today, who instead of pressing the holy claims of God and rebuking self-indulgence, are seeking either to amuse or soothe their hearers in their sins. It is not that we are inculcating a strange doctrine, introducing that which opposes divine grace. No, those servants of God in the past who most extolled the grace of God, also maintained the requirements of His righteousness. As a sample of what we have in mind take these words of Matthew Henry's on 2 Samuel 21:19, "There is no way of appeasing God's anger but by mortifying and crucifying our lusts and corruptions. In vain do we expect mercy from God, unless we do justice upon our sins. What have we said above which is any stronger than that? If there was no other way of placating God's wrath than the slaying of Saul's sons, so now our sins must be put to death if His approbation is to be enjoyed."

"Then there was a famine in the days of David, three years, year after year." Is that nothing more than an item of ancient history? Has it no voice for us today? Does it not accurately describe the actual experience of many a backslidden Christian? Is it not pertinent to the case of some of our readers? Has there not long been a famine *in your* soul, dear friend? Ah, there *is* indeed a most important practical application of the above incident to our own lives. If you are painfully aware that such is the case with you, are you not desirous of that famine being removed? Then take to heart what has been before us above: put matters right with God—banish from your life that which withholds from you His approval. He who covers his sins shall not prosper; but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

"And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of Heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night" (v. 10). It is touching to behold this poor mother keeping so lengthy a vigil over the corpses of her two sons. True, she made no attempt to cut down the bodies, thereby evidencing her submission to the righteous judgment of God; yet was she not guilty of inordinate grief? As Matthew Henry says, "She indulged her grief, as mourners are apt to do, to no good purpose. When sorrow, in such cases, is in danger of excess, we should rather study how to divert and pacify it, rather than humor and gratify it. Why should we thus harden ourselves in sorrow?"

"And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa. And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son, and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulcher of Kish his father" (verses 12-14). This respectful interment of the bones of Saul and his descendants, by the king, is clear proof that David had not been actuated by a spirit of spite and revenge when he had delivered them up to the Gibeonites. But what, let us ask, is the spiritual lesson for *us* in this detail? If those sons of Saul may justly be taken as a figure of our sins (that which withholds God's blessings from us), and if the slaying of them adumbrates the believer's mortification of his lusts, then surely it is no far-fetched fantasy to regard the interment of their bones as indicating we are to *bury in oblivion* those disgraceful things of the past: "Never open your mouth any more because of your shame, when I am pacified toward you" (Ezekiel 16:63). Instead of holding up to the public view—under the pretense of "giving your testimony"— those things we hope are under the blood, let us draw a veil over them.

The last eight verses of our chapter give a brief summary of the events which occurred during the closing years of David's reign. That which is most prominent in them is the further battles which took place between Israel and the Philistines, and the slaying of certain antagonistic giants. Here, too, the spiritual application is not difficult to perceive. There is *no furlough* in the fight of faith! The flesh continues to lust against the spirit until the end of our earthly pilgrimage, and therefore the work of mortification is to go on until God calls us to our rest. When the seven sons of Saul have been put to death, other foes (lusts) will seek to prevail against us, and they too must be resisted, and (by grace) be overcome. Let it be duly noted that, though David grew old and feeble, he did not grow indolent (verses 15, 22)! The mention of the "giants" at

the close of the chapter, intimates that the most powerful of our enemies are reserved for the last great conflict: yet through our "David" we shall be more than conquerors.

CHAPTER EIGHTY

His Sacred Song

2 Samuel 22

2 Samuel 22 opens with the word "And," which at once suggests there is a close connection between its contents and what was has immediately preceded. The chapter which is now to be before us records David's grand psalm of thanksgiving, and, as its opening verse intimates, it was sung by him in celebration of the signal deliverances which God had granted him from his many enemies. In the previous chapter we had an account of the execution of the sons of Saul, followed by a summary of Israel's victories over the Philistines and the slaying of a number of their giants. In our last chapter we sought to point out the spiritual application of these things, as they bear upon the lives of Christians today, and the same line of thought is to be followed as we enter the present chapter. It is this looking for the *practical hearing* of the Scriptures upon ourselves which is so sorely needed, and which, alas, is now so much neglected by the present generation; only thus do we make the Bible a *living* Book, suited to our present need.

The spiritual and practical link of connection between 2 Samuel 21 and 22 is not difficult to perceive. As was shown in our last, the execution of the sons of Saul (seven in number, for the work must be done *completely*) is to be regarded as a figure of the believer's mortifying his lusts, and the conflicts which followed between Israel and the Philistines, David and the giants, symbolizes the fact that that warfare with sin which the saint is called upon to wage, continues until the end of his earthly course. Now the work of mortification is indeed a painful one, nevertheless it issues in a joyful sequel. The plucking out of right eyes and the cutting off of right hands doubtless produces many a groan, yet will they be followed by melodious thanksgiving. Death figures prominently in 2 Samuel 21, but 2 Samuel 22 opens with a "Song!" Here, then, is the obvious connection: when *death* be written upon our lusts, music will fill the heart; when that which is displeasing to God has been put away, the Spirit will tune our souls to sing Jehovah's praise.

It is a most interesting and instructive study to trace out the sacred "Songs" of Scripture, paving particular attention to their *setting.* The first one is recorded in Exodus 15. We read not of the Hebrews celebrating the Lord's praises while they were in Egypt, but only of their sighing and groaning (Exodus 2:23, 24). But when they had been delivered from the house of bondage and their foes had been drowned in the Red Sea, a song of worship ascended from their heart. Again, we read of Israel singing when the Lord supplied them with water (Numbers 21:17). Moses ended his wilderness wanderings with a song (Deuteronomy 31:22). Upon Israel's victory over the Canaanites they sang a song (Judges 5:1). Job speaks of God giving "songs in the night" (35:10)—a real, if a rare, experience, as many saints can testify. The Psalmist said. "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (119:54).

There is a most marked similarity between the Song of David in 2 Samuel 22 and Psalm 18 (observe the latter's superscription), indeed so close is the resemblance that almost all of the commentators have regarded them as being one and the same, attempting to account for their verbal variations (which though incidental are by no means few in number) on the supposition that the latter is a revised edition of the former. But such an assumption does not seem at all satisfactory—to us it appears a serious slight upon divine inspiration: surely the Holy Spirit never needs to make any emendations! We therefore greatly prefer the view of C. H. Spurgeon: "We have another form of this eighteenth Psalm with slight variations, in 2 Samuel 22, and this suggests the idea that it was sung by him on different occasions when he reviewed his own remarkable history, and observed the gracious hand of God in it all."

This particular Song of David is no exception to a general if not an invariable feature which marked all his inspired minstrelsy, in that we may see in it both a surface and a deeper allusion, both an historical and a prophetic significance. All doubt upon this point is definitely removed by the testimony of the New Testament, for there we find two of its verses quoted From as being the very words of Christ Himself, thus making it plain that a greater than David is here. In its deeper meaning it is the utterance of the Spirit of Christ in David, making special reference to His triumph over death by the mighty power of God (Ephesians 1:19). David thankfully recounts the glorious actings of God on his behalf, yet in such language as rises above himself, to his Son and Lord, against whom all the powers of darkness were concentrated.

"And David spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul" (2 Samuel 22:1). One of the outstanding features of the checkered career of David was the large number of his foes, both from the surrounding nations and among his own people, the chief of all being Saul—the most formidable, malicious and inveterate. Nor should this unduly surprise us, even though, as Matthew Henry tersely expressed it. "David was a man after *God's* heart, but not after *man's* heart: many were those who hated him." Why was this? First, God so ordered it that he might be an eminent type of Christ, who, throughout the ages has been "despised and rejected of men." Second. that thereby God might display the more conspicuously His faithfulness and power in preserving His own. Third, because this is generally the experience of the saints.

"And David spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." Therefore was he well qualified experimentally to declare, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19). The Lord's "deliverance" of David from his many foes assumed a great variety of forms: sometimes in one way, sometimes in another, for the Almighty is not limited to any particular means or method. On occasions He employs human instruments; and again, He wrought without them. Let this encourage the tried and Satan-harassed believer. Though every avenue of escape seem fast shut to your eyes, yet remember that closed doors are no barrier to the Lord (John 20:26). When the long drought completely dried up the water which sustained Elijah at

This too is written for our learning and comfort. As we have traced the life of David through the two hooks of Samuel, we have seen him in some sore straits: again and again it looked as though his foes must surely prevail against him; yes, on one occasion, he himself dolefully declared, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Samuel 27:1). Yet he did not! No, One infinitely mightier than Saul was watching over him. And this is equally the case with you and me, dear reader, if we belong to Christ: the combined forces of Hell shall never prevail against us; the united assaults of the flesh, the world and the devil cannot destroy us. Why? "Because greater is He who is in you, than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Then why should we be so fearful? let us seek grace to rest on that sure promise, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Observe well David's *response* to these divine interpositions on his behalf: deliverance calls for thanksgiving. This is the very least we can render unto the Lord in return for all His benefits. Nor should there be any tardiness in discharging this delightful obligation: gratitude must issue promptly in praise. it did so with the sweet singer in Israel, and it should also with us. Then let us take to heart this word, "And David spoke unto the Lord the words of this song in *the day* that the Lord had delivered him." We ought to present unto God a sacrifice of praise while His mercies are fresh and the heart is duly affected by them. We are not slow in crying to God when imminent danger threatens us: then let us be just as prompt in acknowledging His goodness when His delivering hand is extended to us.

Many of the commentators are of the opinion that this sacred song was composed by David at an *early* date in his life, but personally we fail to sec anything in the Scriptures which supports such a view. The very fact that the Holy Spirit has expressly told us it was uttered by David when "The Lord had delivered him out of the hand of *all* his enemies," is surely a plain intimation that it was uttered by him late in life—the added words "and out of the hand of Saul" do not modify this view when the mention of him is regarded as being intended for the purpose of *emphasis,* he being his predominant foe. The main divisions of the Song are fairly clearly defined. First, is the preface, in which David is occupied with extolling Jehovah's perfections: verses 1-4. Second, he magnifies the Lord for His delivering mercies: verses 5-20. Third, he expresses the testimony of a clear conscience: verses 21-28. Fourth, he concludes with a prophetic anticipation of the glorious triumphs of the Messiah: verses 29-45.

"And he said, The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer" (v. 2). David begins by adoring Jehovah. He does so on the ground of his personal relation to Him, for all the benefits he had received, he bases upon his relation to God. Observe that in verses 2 and 3, he uses the personal pronoun no less than nine times. It is a grand thing when we have the assurance and can feelingly say, "The Lord is *my* Rock." While our enemies are hot upon our heels wounding us sorely, threatening our very life, we sometimes do not have this blessed assurance; but when God's delivering grace is experienced afresh by us, new hope is kindled in the soul. "The Lord is my Rock and my Fortress." "Dwelling among the crags and mountain fastnesses of Judea, David had escaped the malice of Saul, and here compares his God to such a place of concealment and security. Believers are often hidden in their God from the strife of tongues and the fury of the storm" (C. H. Spurgeon).

"And he said, The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer." Let us not miss *the connection* between this and the preceding verse: they that trust God in the path of duty, will ever find Him a very present help in the greatest of dangers. And David *had* trusted God, with a faith which wrought miracles. Recall, for example, his intrepidity in Facing Goliath. All Israel were afraid of the Philistine giant, so that none—not even Saul—dared to accept his haughty challenge. Yet David, though then but a youth, hesitated not to engage him in mortal combat, going forth to meet him without any material armor, and with naught but a sling in his hand. And wherein lay his strength? What was the secret of his courage and of his success? It was at once revealed in the words with which he met the enemy's champion: "you come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel" (1 Samuel 17:45)!

And is *that,* my reader, nothing more than a striking incident of ancient history? Has it no message for our hearts? Is not God the same today: ready to respond to a faith that dares! Is it not written "if you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes" (Mark 9:23)? Do we really believe this? If so, are we earnestly begging God to increase our faith? Faith is invincible, because it lays hold of One who is omnipotent. Faith is the hand which grasps the Almighty, and is anything too hard for Him! Is it not also written "according unto your Faith be it unto you" (Matthew 9:29). Ah, does not that explain why it is we so often meet with defeat, why it is that our enemies prevail against us? O for faith in the living God, faith in the efficacy of Christ's mediation, to vanquish our lusts.

Yes, most important is it that we should heed the connection between the first two verses of our chapter: the deliverances David had from his enemies, and his implicit confidence in God. Nor was he by any means alone in this experience. It was by the miracle-working power of God that the three Hebrews were delivered from Babylon's fiery furnace. Yes, but that divine power was put forth in response to their faith: "our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king" (Daniel 3:17). So again with Daniel himself, yet how often *this* particular is overlooked. From early childhood most of us have been familiar with that divine marvel which preserved the prophet from the lions, but how many of us have noticed those words, "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, *because he believed in his God*" (6:23).

"And he said, The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer" (v. 2). When almost captured, the Lord's people are rescued from the hand of the mighty by One who is mightier still. God never fails those who really exercise faith in Him: He may indeed severely test, but He will not suffer them to be "utterly cast down." As our "Rock" God is the strength and support of His people, the One on whom they build their hopes, the One who affords shade from the burning heat of the desert. As our "Fortress" God gives His people shelter from their assailants, supplying protection and security—"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runs into it, and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). As our "Deliverer" God saves us from ourselves, redeems us from the damning power of sin, rescues us from the roaring lion, secures us against

"The God of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my Savior; You save me from violence" (v. 3). This piling up of metaphors indicates the strong assurance which David had in the Lord, the realization of His sufficiency to meet his every emergency and supply his every need. He saw in God one who was infinitely worthy of his fullest confidence: no matter how critical his circumstances, how desperate his situation, how numerous or powerful his foes, and how great his own weakness, Jehovah was all-sufficient. Such too ought to be *our* confidence in God. Yes, we have more ground to rest *our* faith upon than ever David had. God is now revealed as the (penitent) sinner's Friend, as He never was then. In Christ He is revealed as the Conqueror of sin, the Vanquisher of death, the Master of Satan. Then have we not cause to exclaim in Him will I *trust.*" O that this may become more and more of an actuality in the lives of both writer and reader.

"The God of my rock; in Him will I trust: He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my Savior; You save me from violence." These energetic figures of speech, which rise above the level of ordinary prose, reveal what God is to His believing people, for only as *faith* is lively and vigorous is He viewed thus. He is "my Shield" with which to ward off every attack: faith interposes Him between our souls and the enemy. He is "the Horn of my salvation," enabling me to push down my foes, and to triumph over them with holy exultation. He is "my high Tower": a citadel placed upon a high eminence, beyond the reach of all enemies, from which I may look down on them without alarm. He is "my Refuge" in which to shelter from every storm. He is "my Savior" from every evil to which the believer is exposed. What more do we need! what more can we ask! O for faith's realization of the same in our souls. "You save me from violence": again we would press the point that this is in response to faith—"He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, *because they trust in Him*" (Psalm 37:40).

"I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies" (v. 4). As an unknown writer has said, "The armor of a soldier does him no service except he put it on; so, no protection from God is to be expected, unless we apply ourselves to prayer." It is faith which girds on the spiritual armor; it is faith which finds all its resource in the Lord. "I will *call* on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: *so* shall I be saved from mine enemies": note carefully the words which we have placed in italics. This affords abundant confirmation of all we have said above: to "call upon the Lord" is to exercise faith in Him, such faith as praises Him *before* the victory—So shall we be saved from our enemies: by God's mighty power in response to believing prayer and sincere praise.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

His Sacred Song

(Continued)

2 Samuel 22

As pointed out in our last, the main divisions of David's sacred song in 2 Samuel 22 are more or less clearly marked. In the first (verses 1-4) he is occupied with extolling Jehovah's perfections: this section we have already considered. In the second (verses 5-20), which is now to be before us, he magnifies the Lord for His delivering mercies. The section of the song is couched in highly figurative and poetic language; which indicates how deeply stirred were the emotions of its inspired composer. Its contents may be regarded in a threefold way. First, as depicting the physical dangers to which David was exposed from his human foes. Second, the deep soul distress which he experienced from his spiritual enemies. Third, the fearful sufferings through which Christ passed while acting as the Substitute of His people, and the awe-inspiring deliverance which God wrought for His servant. We will endeavor to consider our passage from each of these viewpoints.

"When the waves (pangs) of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows (cords) of Hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented (anticipated) me" (2 Samuel 22:5, 6). Thus opens this second division: that which it so vividly portrayed is the large number and ferocity of his enemies, and the desperate danger to which David was exposed by them. First, he employed the figure of an angry sea, whose raging waves menaced him from every side, until his frail craft was in immediate prospect of being swamped by them. Next, he likened his lot to one who was marooned on some piece of low-lying ground, and the floods rapidly rising higher and higher, until his destruction seemed certain. The multitude of the wicked pressed him sorely on every side. Then he compared his plight to one who had already been taken captive and bound, so that the very cords of death seemed to be upon him. Finally, he pictures his case as a bird that had been caught in the fowler's

The above references were to the attempts made by Saul, Abner and Absalom to capture and slay David. So fierce were their attacks, so powerful the forces they employed against him, so determined and relentless were his foes, that David here acknowledged they "made me afraid." "The most sea-worthy bark is sometimes hard put to it when the storm Hood is abroad. The most courageous man, who as a rule hopes for the best, may sometimes fear the worst" (C. H. Spurgeon). Strong as his faith generally was, yet on one occasion unbelief prevailed to such an extent that David said, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Samuel 27:1). When terrors from without awaken fears within, our case is indeed a miserable one: yet so it was with Moses when he fled from Egypt, with Elijah when he ran away from Jezebel, with Peter when he denied his Lord.

But these lamentations of David are also to be construed *spiritually:* they are to be regarded as those harrowing exercises of soul through which he passed in his later years: Psalms 32 and 51 cast light upon them. "The sorrows (cords) of Hell compassed me about; the snares of death anticipated me": such was the anguish of his soul under the lashings of a guilty conscience. "The temptations of Satan and the consciousness of his sins filled him with fears of wrath and dreadful apprehensions of future consequences. He felt like a malefactor bound for execution, whose fetters prevent him from attempting an escape, for whose body the grave has certainly opened her mouth, and who is horribly alarmed lest the pit of bell should swallow up his soul" (Thomas Scott). Fearful beyond words is the suffering through which many a backslider has to pass before he is restored to fellowship with God—one who has experienced it will not deem the language of these verses any too strong.

But there is something deeper here than the trials David encountered either from without or within: in their ultimate sense these verses articulate the groanings of the Man of sorrows as He took upon Him the obligations and suffered in the stead of His people. As we pointed out in our last, two of the verses of this song are quoted in the New Testament as being the very words of Christ Himself: "In Him will I trust" (v. 3) is found in Hebrews 2:13, and "I will give thanks unto You O Lord, among the heathen (Gentiles), and I will sing praises unto Your name" (v. 50) is found in Romans 15:9. "The Messiah our Savior is evidently, over and beyond David or any other believer, the main and chief subject of this Song; and while studying it we have grown more and more sure that every line has its deeper and profounder fulfillment in Him" (C. H. Spurgeon). Let this be kept before us as we pass from section to section, and from verse to verse.

"When the waves (pangs) of death compassed Me, the floods of ungodly men made Me afraid; the sorrows (cords) of Hell compassed Me about; the snares of death prevented (anticipated) Me." Here was the Spirit of Christ speaking prophetically through the Psalmist, expressing the fierce conflict through which the Redeemer passed. Behold Him in Gethsemane, in the judgment-halls of Herod and Pilate, and then behold Him on the Cross itself, suffering horrible torments of body and anguish of soul, when He was delivered into the hands of wicked men, encountered the fierce assaults of Satan, and endured the wrath of God against Him for our sins. It was then that He was surrounded by the insulting priests and people. His "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matthew 26:38) was but an echo of these words of 's song.

"In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and He did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears" (v. 7). Here we behold God's suffering servant making earnest supplication to Heaven. The one so sorely pressed by his enemies that the eye of sense could perceive not a single avenue of escape, yes, when death itself immediately threatened him, seeks relief from above, and so it should be with us: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray" (James 5:13). Ah, it is then he is most likely to really *pray:* cold and formal petitions do not suit one who is in deep trouble—alas that so often nothing short of painful trial will force fervent supplications from us. An old writer expressed it, "Prayer is not eloquence, but earnestness; not the definition of earnestness, but the feeling of it; it is the cry of faith in the ear of mercy": yet either pangs of body or of soul are usually needed before we will cry out in reality.

"In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God: and He did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears" (v. 7). So many neglect prayer when they are quiet and at ease, but as the Lord declares, "In their affliction they *will* seek Me early" (Hosea 5:15). Yet it is well if we do seek unto God in our affliction, instead of sulking in rebellion, which is to forsake our own mercy. The Lord is a very present help in trouble, and it is our holy privilege to prove this for ourselves. The Hebrew word for "cried" here is an expressive one, signifying such a cry as issues from one in a violent tempest of emotion, in the extremity of grief and anxiety: in fact Alexander Maclaren renders it "shriek." David was all but sinking and could only give vent to an agonized call or help.

"Prayer is that postern gate which is left open even when the city is straightly besieged by the enemy: it is that way upward from the pit of despair to which the spiritual miner flies at once, when the floods from beneath break forth upon him. Observe that he 'calls,' and then '*cries*'; prayer grows in vehemence as it proceeds. Note also that he first invokes his God under the name of Jehovah, and then advances to a more familiar name, '*my* God': thus faith increases by exercise, and he whom we at first viewed as Lord is soon seen to be our God in covenant. It is never an ill time to pray: no distress should prevent us from using the divine remedy of supplication" (C. H. Spurgeon).

"In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God." The fulfillment of these prophetic words in the case of out suffering Redeemer is well known to all who are acquainted with the four Gospels. Blessed indeed is it to behold that One, who was supremely the Man after God's own heart, betaking Himself to prayer while His enemies were thirsting for His blood. The deeper His distress, the more earnestly did He call upon God, both in Gethsemane and at Calvary, and as Hebrews 5:7 tells us, "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." Let us not hesitate, then, to follow the example which He has left us, and no matter how hardly we are pressed, how desperate be

"And he did hear my voice out of His temple, and my cry did enter into His ears." This is in explanation of all that follows: the gracious interpositions of the Lord on David's behalf and the wondrous deliverances He wrought for him, were *in answer to prayer.* God's lending a willing ear to the cry of His distressed child is recorded for our encouragement. It is indeed deplorable that we are often so prayerless until pressure of circumstances force supplication out of us, yet it is blessed to be assured that God does not then (as well He might) turn a deaf ear unto our calls; nay, such calls have the greater prevalency, because of their sincerity and because they make a more powerful appeal unto the divine pity. Let the fearing and despondent believer read through Psalm 107 and mark how frequently it is recorded that the redeemed "cry unto the Lord in their trouble," and how that in each instance we are told "He delivered them" Then do *you* cry unto Him, and be of good courage.

"Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of Heaven moved and shook, because He was wroth" (v. 8). David's prayer was answered in a most effectual manner by the providential interpositions which Jehovah made on his behalf. In a most singular and extraordinary way the Lord appeared for his relief, fighting for him against his enemies. Here again David adorned his poem with lively images as he recorded God's gracious intervention. The mighty power of God was now exercised for him: such language being employed as to intimate that nothing can resist or impede Him when He acts for His own. God was now showing Himself to be strong on behalf of His oppressed but supplicating servant. See here, dear reader, the response of Heaven to the cry of faith. "Then the earth shook and trembled": let these words be pondered in the light of "And at midnight Paul and Silas *prayed* . . . and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were *shaken:* and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed" (Acts 16:25,26)!

Again we would remind the reader that a greater than David is to be kept before us as we pass from verse to verse of this Psalm. "Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of Heaven moved and shook, because He was wroth:" who can fail to be reminded of the supernatural phenomena which attended the death and resurrection of David's Son and Lord? He too had called upon Jehovah in His deep distress, "And was heard" (Hebrews 5:7). Unmistakable was Heaven's response: "from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour . . . Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the Spirit. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened" (Matthew 27:45, 50-52). Yes, the earth literally "shook and trembled"! As another has rightly said, "Tremendous was the scene! Never before and never since was such a battle fought, or such a victory gained, whether we look at the contending powers or the consequences resulting Heaven on the one side, and Hell on the other: such were the contending powers. And as to the consequences resulting, who shall recount them?"

"There went up a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under His feet" (verses 9, 10). These expressions are borrowed from the awe-inspiring phenomena which attended the appearing of Jehovah upon mount Sinai: compare Exodus 19:16-18. It was Jehovah the Avenger appearing to vindicate His servant and vanquish his enemies. David considered that in his case the Lord God manifested the same divine perfections which He had displayed of old at the giving of the Law. We cannot do better here than quote from Matthew Henry's comments on the spiritual significance of the vivid imagery which was here employed by the Psalmist.

"These lofty metaphors are used. First, to set forth the glory of God, which was manifested in his deliverance: His wisdom and power, His goodness and faithfulness, His justice and holiness, and His sovereign dominion over all the creatures and all the counsels of men, which appeared in favor of David, were as clear and bright a discovery of God's glory to an eye of faith, as those would have been to an eye of sense. Second, to set forth God's displeasure against his enemies: God so espoused his cause, that he showed Himself an Enemy to all his enemies; His anger is set forth by a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth. Who knows the power and terror of His wrath! Third, to set forth the vast confusion which his enemies were put into and the consternation that seized them; as if the earth had trembled and the foundations of the world had been discovered. Who can stand before God, when He is angry? Fourth, to show how ready God was to help him: He 'rode upon a cherub, and did fly' (v.11). God hastened to his support, and came in to him with seasonable relief."

"And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and He was seen upon the wings of the wind" (v. 11). Though the Lord "*wait* that He may be gracious" (Isaiah 30:18), and sometimes sorely tries faith and patience, yet when His appointed time comes, He acts *swiftly.* "And He made darkness pavilions round about Him, dark waters and thick clouds of the skies" (v. 12): just as that pillar of fire which gave light to Israel was "a cloud and darkness" to the Egyptians (Exodus 14:20), so were the providential dealings of the Lord unto the enemies of David. The One who is pleased to reveal Himself unto His own, conceals Himself from the wicked, and hence the fearful portion of those who shall be everlastingly banished from the presence of the Lord is represented as "the blackness of darkness forever."

"Through the brightness before Him were coals of fire kindled. The Lord thundered from Heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. And He sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils"(verses 13-16). All of this is an amplification of "because He was wroth" (v. 8). Nothing so arouses Jehovah's indignation as injuries done to His people: he who attacks them, touches the apple of His eye. True, God is not subject to those passions which govern His creatures, yet because He hates sin with a perfect hatred and sorely punishes it, He is often represented under such poetic imagery as is suited to human understanding. God is a God to be feared, as those who now trifle with Him shall yet discover. How shall puny men be able to face it out with the Almighty, when the very mountains tremble at His presence! Satan-deluded souls may now defy Him, but their false confidence will not support or shelter them in the dread day of His wrath.

"He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters; He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me" (verses 17, 18). Here is the happy issue to David's prayer and the Lord's response. Observe, first, that David gives God the glory by unreservedly ascribing his deliverance unto Him He looked far above his own skill in slinging the stone which downed Goliath and his cleverness in eluding Saul: "*He* sent . . . *He* took me, *He* drew me . . . *He* delivered me" gives all the honor unto Him to whom it was truly due. Note, second, the particular reason mentioned by David as to why the Lord had intervened on his behalf: "*for* they were too strong for me"—it was his confessed weakness and the strength of his foes that made such a powerful appeal to God's pity: compare the effectual plea of Jehoshaphat: "O our God, will You not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that comes against us" (2 Chronicles 20:12). Finally, while the "strong enemy" of verse 18 is an allusion to either Goliath or Saul, yet David's deliverance from them but prefigured Christ's victory over death and Satan, and here He ascribed that victory unto His God.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

His Sacred Song

(Continued)

2 Samuel 22

The second section of David's song glides so smoothly into the third that there is scarcely a perceptible break between them: in the one he recounts the Lord's gracious deliverances of him his numerous and relentless enemies; in the other he states the reasons why He had intervened on his behalf. A Few more words now on the closing verses of the former: "He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters; He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: For they were too strong for me" (2 Samuel 22:17,18). Here he Freely ascribes unto God the glory of his deliverances: extolling His goodness, power, faithfulness, and sufficiency. If God be for us, it matters not who be against us. Torrents of evil shall not drown the one whose God sits upon the floods to restrain their Fury. He has but to speak and the winds are calmed, the downpour ceases, and the floods subside; true alike physically and morally.

"They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the Lord was my stay" (v. 19). This is a parenthetical statement between verses 18 and 20, wherein the writer refers to the determined efforts of his foes to prevent his escape and insure his destruction. "When David had framed any plan for secreting or securing himself in the day of his calamity, his enemies employed every method of treachery and malice to prevent his success. Thus the men of Keilah were ready to deliver him to Saul (1 Samuel 23:7-12) and the Ziphites repeatedly informed of him (1 Samuel 26:1, 2): and therefore, notwithstanding his own prudence and activity, he must have been cut off if the Lord Himself had not protected him by His own immediate and extraordinary interpositions" (Thomas Scott). "But (blessed "but!") the Lord was my stay": his support, the One on whom he rested—nor was his confidence disappointed. When the enemy rages most fiercely against us, then is the time to lean most heavily upon the everlasting arms.

"He brought me forth also into a large place: He delivered me, because He delighted in me" (v. 20). It is here that the third division of this inspired song really begins, the main purpose of which is to vindicate David, by showing that he had done nothing to provoke or deserve the fierce attacks which had been made upon him; and to affirm that God had acted in righteousness in Favoring him with deliverance. But before taking up this leading thought, let us observe and admire the ways of the Lord. God does not leave His work half done, for after He has defeated the foe, He leads the captive out into liberty. After pining for years in the prison, Joseph was advanced to the palace; from the cave of Adullam, David was elevated to the throne. This illustrates and exemplifies a most important and blessed principle in the dealings of God with His people, and when laid hold of by faith and hope it

The prison ever precedes the palace in true spiritual experience, not only at our first awakening, but repeatedly throughout the Christian life. The soul is shut up in confinement, before it is brought forth "into a large place." The spirit of bondage is experienced before we receive the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). Our frail craft is made to battle long against the angry waves, before the Lord appears for our relief (Matthew 14:22-33). Bear this steadily in mind, dear reader, while you are passing through the day of calamity: "Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you, *will* complete it . . ." (Philippians 1:6). Enlargement of spirit will be the more appreciated after a season of sorrowful confinement. Remember, then, that Joseph did not die in prison, nor did David *end* his days in the cave of Adullam: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Sometimes we are granted a foretaste of that joy even in this valley of tears; but even if we are not, all weeping shall end when the night is over.

Once again we would remind ourselves that the *antitypical David* must be kept before us as we pass from verse to verse of this song, for the experiences of the members is identical with those which were endured by the Head of the mystical Body. Christ too could say, "They prevented Me in the day of My calamity: but the Lord was My stay" (v. 19). Never forget that the Redeemer Himself passed through a day of calamity: why, then, should the redeemed think it a strange thing if they too encounter the same? *He* was beset by merciless foes: *His* liberty was taken away when they arrested Him: *He* was buffeted and scourged—sufficient, then, for the disciple to be as his Master. O that we also may be able to say with Him "but the Lord was My stay." Yes, He too could say, "He brought Me forth also into a large place: He delivered Me, because He delighted in Me." Yes, He was delivered from the grave, removed from this earth, and given the position of honor and glory at God's right hand; and this, because God delighted in Him: Isaiah 42:1.

Nevertheless, it is a great mistake to confine our attention, as some have done, to the antitypical David in this passage. For example, in his comments upon this portion of David's song, C. H. M. said, "These verses (21-25) prove that in this entire song, we have a greater than David. David could not say 'The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands did He recompense me.' How different is this language from that of Psalm 51. There it is 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of Your tender mercies.' This was suitable language for a fallen sinner, as David felt himself to be. He dare not speak of his righteousness, which was as filthy rags; and as to his recompense, he felt that the Lake of Fire was all that he could in justice claim upon the ground of what he was. Hence, therefore, the language of our chapter is the language of Christ, who *alone* could use it" (*The Life and Times of David, King of Israel*).

Such confusion of thought is really inexcusable in one who posed as a teacher of preachers, and who was so fond of criticizing and condemning the expositions of servants of God which issued from pulpits in what he dubbed the "sects" and "systems" of Christendom. One might just as well affirm that "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the Faith" (2 Timothy 4:7) is "the language of Christ, who alone could use it." And then add "how different is the language of Paul in Philippians 3," "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ. and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ" (verses 7-9). The simple fact is that the apostle was speaking from two radically different viewpoints in those respective passages: in Philippians 3

he defines the ground of his *acceptance* before God, whereas in 2 Timothy 4 he refers to his *ministerial fidelity.* It was thus with David: in Psalm 51 he states the basis on which he sought God's forgiveness; in 2 Samuel 22:21-25 he relates his innocence in connection with his enemies.

We hardly expect one who belonged to the religious school that Mr. Mackintosh did, to be capable of drawing theological distinctions, but we *are* surprised to find such an able exegete as Alexander Maclaren erring on this same point. He too failed to grasp the Psalmist's scope or object in the passage which we are now considering, as is clear from his remarks thereon in his otherwise helpful work on "The Life of David as reflected in his Psalms." It was his mistaking of the purpose of these verses (20-25—repeated in substance in Psalm 18:19-24) which caused him to argue that this song (and Psalm) must have been written before his awful sin in connection with Uriah: "The marked assertion of his own purity, as well as the triumphant tone of the whole, neither of which characteristics correspond to the sad and shaded years after his fall, point in the same direction" (p. 154).

"He brought me forth also into a large place: He delivered me, because He delighted in me." The "large place" is in designed contrast from the cramped confinement of the eaves in which David had been obliged to dwell when his enemies were so hotly pursuing him: it may also refer to the vast extent of his dominions and the great riches he was blessed with. God not only preserved, but prospered him, granting him liberty and enlargement. The Lord not only displayed His power on behalf of His servant, but also manifested His particular favor toward him: this is intimated in "He delivered me, because He delighted in me," which signifies that God acted not from His general providence, but from His covenant love. Should it be asked, How would David know this? The answer is, by the communications of divine grace and comfort in his soul which accompanied the deliverances, and by the

"The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands has He recompensed me" (v. 21). It seems strange that these words have perplexed anyone with a spiritual mind, for if they be not strained beyond their original and obvious intention, there is nothing in them to occasion any difficulty. Let them be read in the light of their context, and they are plain and simple. David was alluding to God's delivering of him from Goliath and Saul, and from others of his foes: what had been his conduct toward *them?* Had he committed any serious crimes which warranted their hostility? Had he grievously wronged any of them? Had they justly or unjustly sought his life? His own brother preferred a charge against him (1 Samuel 17:28) just before he engaged Goliath, and from several of the Psalms there seems to be good ground for concluding that Saul accused him of pride, covetousness and treachery. But what real basis was there for such? Read the record of David's life, and where is there a hint that he coveted the throne or hated Saul?

No, the fact of the matter is that David was entirely innocent of any evil designs against any of those who persecuted him. Further proof of this is found in one of his prayers to God: "Let not them that are mine enemies *wrong fully* rejoice over me, neither let them wink with the eye that hate me *without* a cause (Psalm 35:19). It was because he had neither given his enemies just cause for their persecution, and because so far from retaliating, he had borne them no malice, that he enjoyed the testimony of a good conscience. David's character had been grievously maligned and many hideous things laid to his charge; but his conduct had been upright and conscientious to an uncommon degree. "In all his persecutions by Saul, he would not injure him or his party; nay, he employed every opportunity to serve the cause of Israel, though rewarded by envy, treachery and ingratitude" (Thomas Scott). When maligned and oppressed by men, it is an inestimable consolation to have the assurance of our own hearts of our innocence and integrity, and therefore we should spare no pains in exercising ourselves "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and men" (Acts 24:14).

In saying "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness" David enunciated one of the principles operative in the divine government of this world. "Albeit that the dispensations of divine grace are to the fullest degree sovereign and irrespective of human merit, yet in the dealings of Providence there is often discernible a rule of justice by which the injured are at length avenged and the righteous ultimately delivered" (C. H. Spurgeon). That statement manifests an intelligent grasp of the viewpoint from which David was writing, namely, the *governmental ways of* God in time, and not the ground upon which He saves eternally. These declarations of the Psalmist had nothing whatever to do with his justification in the high court of Heaven, but concerned the innocency and integrity of his conduct toward his enemies on earth, because of which God delivered him from them.

"For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not departed from my God" (v. 22). We regard David as continuing to refer unto how he had conducted himself during the time that his life had been in danger. Certainly his language here is not to be taken absolutely, nor even as a relative declaration upon his life as a whole. Notwithstanding the provocations he received from Saul, and later from Absalom, and notwithstanding the efforts which we doubt not Satan made at such seasons to make him question God's goodness and faithfulness, tempting him to cast off allegiance to Him, David persevered in the paths of righteousness and refused to apostatize. The Psalms written by him at these trying periods of his life make it unmistakably clear that David's piety waned not, despite the most aggravating circumstances.

"For all His judgments were before me: and as for His statutes, I did not depart from them" (v. 23). "His conscience witnessed to him that he had ever made the Word of God his rule, and had kept to it. Wherever he was, God's judgments were before him, and his guide; wherever he went, he took his religion along with him; and though he was forced to depart from his country, and sent, as it were, to serve other gods, yet, as for God's statutes, he did not depart from them, but kept the way of the Lord and walked in it" (Matthew Henry). This was sure evidence of the genuineness of his piety. It is comparatively easy to discharge the external duties of religion while we are at home, surrounded by those like-minded, but the real test of our sincerity comes when we go abroad and sojourn among a people who make no profession. David not only worshiped God while he abode at Jerusalem, but also while he tarried in the land of the Philistines.

"I was *also* upright before *Him,* and have kept myself from mine iniquity" (v. 24). This declaration manifestly clinches the interpretation we have made of the preceding verses: in them he had referred solely to his conduct unto his *enemies* which conduct has been strictly regulated by the divine statutes: particularly had he heeded "you shall not kill" when Saul was entirely at his mercy. Now he appeals to God Himself, and declares that in *His* sight too he had acted blamelessly toward his foes. "Sincerity is here claimed; sincerity, such as would be accounted genuine before the bar of God. Whatever evil men might think of him, David felt that he had the good opinion of God" (C. H. Spurgeon). Various explanations have been given of "mine iniquity"; but in the light of the context, we regard the reference as king to David's refusal to slay Saul when in his power.

"Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in His eyesight" (v. 25). They greatly err who suppose that David here gave vent to a boastful spirit: he was pleading his innocency before the bar of *human* equity. A man is not guilty of pride in knowing that he *is* truthful, honest, merciful; no, nor when he believes that God rewards him in providence because of these virtues, for such is a most evident matter of fact. Yes, so patent is this, that many of the ungodly recognize that honesty is the best policy for this life. It *would he* self-righteousness to transfer such thoughts from the realm of providential government into the spiritual and everlasting kingdom, for *there* grace reigns not only supreme, but alone, in the distribution of divine favors. A godly man with a clear conscience, who knows himself to be upright, is not required to deny his consciousness, and hypocritically make himself out to be worse than he is.

Having shown how the above verses may be understood, relatively, of David himself, let us briefly point out how they applied to Christ without any qualification. "I have kept the ways of the Lord": when tempted to forsake them, He indignantly cried, "get you hence, Satan." "And have not wickedly departed from My God": "Which of you convinces Me of sin?" (John 8:46) was His challenge to His enemies. "For all His judgments were before Me": "I have given unto them the words which You gave Me" (John 17:8) He affirmed. "I was also upright before Him": "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8:29) was His declaration. "And have kept Myself from Mine iniquity": so far from slaying those who come to arrest, He healed one of them (Luke 22:51). "Therefore the Lord has recompensed Me according to My righteousness": "You love righteousness, and hate wickedness: therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your fellows" (Psalm 45:7) is the Spirit's confirmation.

"With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful, and with the upright man You will show Yourself upright But Your eyes are upon the haughty, that You may bring them down" (verses 26-28). These verses announced a general principle in God's government of this world: we say "general," for God exercises His sovereign discretion in the actual application of it. If on the one hand we are told that some of the Old Testament heroes of faith "quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword," etc., yet we also read "others had trial of cruel mockings . . . were stoned," etc. (

Hebrews 11:36-37). The Baptist was beheaded and Stephen stoned, yet Peter and Paul were miraculously delivered from their enemies until they had served long and well.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE

His Sacred Song

(Continued)

2 Samuel 22

In this song David is celebrating the wondrous deliverances from his many enemies which he had experienced by the goodness and power of Jehovah. But unless we carefully bear in mind his particular viewpoint therein, we shall utterly fail to contemplate those experiences in their proper perspective. David was not here furnishing an outline of his entire history, but instead, confines himself to one particular phase thereof. Because they lay outside his present scope, he says nothing about his own sad failures and falls, rather does he restrict himself to what the Lord had wrought for and by him. There *are* passages, many of them, both in the historical books, and in the Psalms, wherein we hear him confessing his sins and bewailing his transgressions; but in this song he recounts his victories over and vanquishing of his foes, not by his own prowess, but by divine enablement.

In what has just been pointed out there is a most important lesson for the believer to take to heart. If there be times (as there certainly are) when the Christian may feelingly appropriate to his own use the mournful language of Psalm 38 and the abasing confessions of Psalm 51, it is equally true that there are times when he should employ the triumphant tones of Psalm 18, which is almost identical with 2 Samuel 22. In other words, if there be occasions when the saint can only sigh and groan, there are also seasons when he should sing and celebrate his triumphs, for David has left us an example of the one as truly as he has of the other. Nor should such singing be limited to the days of our "first love," the joy of our espousal. This song was composed by David in his declining years: as he reviewed his checkered career, despite his own failings and falls, he perceived how, after all, he was "more than conqueror through Him that loved him" (Romans 8:37).

If on the one hand there be a large class of Satan-deceived professors who are fond of trumpeting forth their own achievements and of advertising their imagined victories over sin, there is on the other hand a considerable proportion of the Lord's people who are so occupied with their downfalls and defeats, that they are sadly remiss in recounting the Lord's triumphs in them and by them. This ought not to be: it is robbing the Lord of that which is His due; it is a morbidity which causes them to lose all sense of proportion; it conveys to others an erroneous conception of the Christian life. It is a false humility which shuts our eyes to the workings of divine grace within us. It is the presence and exercise of a true humility that takes notice of our successes and conquests so long as it is careful to lay all the trophies of them at the Lord's feet, and ascribe to Him alone the honor and glory of the same.

Let those who are engaged in fighting the good fight of faith remember that this is not the work of a day, but the task of a lifetime. Now in a protracted war success does not uniformly attend the efforts of that side which is ultimately victorious. Far from it. It usually falls out that many a minor skirmish is lost; yes, and sometimes a major one too, before the issue is finally determined. At times, even the main army may have to fall back before the fierce onslaughts of the enemy. There are severe losses, and disappointments, heavy sacrifices, the receiving of many wounds, before success is ultimately achieved. Why do we forget these well known facts when it comes to our spiritual warfare? They apply with equal force thereto. Even under the inspired leadership of Joshua, Israel did not conquer and capture Canaan in a day, nor in a year; nor without drinking the bitters of defeat as well as tasting the sweets of victory.

We are well aware that one of the principal hindrances against our rendering to God the praise which is His due, for the victories He has given us over our enemies, is a sense of *present* defeat. But if we are to wait until that be removed, we shall have to wait until we reach Heaven before we sing this song, and obviously that is wrong, for it is recorded for us to use here on earth. Ah, says the desponding reader: others may use it, but it is not suitable to such a sorry failure as I am; it would be a mockery for *me* to praise God for my triumphs over the enemy. Not so fast, dear friend: ponder these questions. Are you not still out of hell?—many of your former companions are not! Though perhaps tempted to do so, has Satan succeeded in causing you to totally apostatize from God?—he has many others! Have you been deceived and carried away by fatal errors?—millions have! Then what cause have you to thank God for such deliverances!

As the believer carefully reviews the whole of his career, while on the one hand he finds much to be humbled at in himself, yet on the other hand he discerns not a little to be elated over in the Lord. Thus it was with David. Though there had been tragic failures, there were also blessed successes, and it was these he celebrated in this song. After affirming that God had acted righteously in favoring him as He had (verses 20-28), the purely personal tone is again resumed and he bursts forth into joyful strains of praise. The leading difference between the second half of this song from its first is easily ascertained by attention to its details: in the former David dwells on God's delivering him *from* his enemies (see verses 3-17), in the latter half he recounts his victories *over* his enemies: in each the glory is ascribed alone to Jehovah. In the first David was passive—God's arm alone was his deliverance; in the second he is active, the conquering king, whose arm is strengthened for victory by God.

"For You are my lamp, O Lord: and the Lord will lighten my darkness" (2 Samuel 22:29). This is the verse which links together the two halves of the song. At first sight the force of its connection is not too apparent, yet a little reflection will ascertain its general bearing. David's path had been both a difficult and a dangerous one. At times it was so intricate and perplexing, he had been quite unable to see where it was leading. More than once the shadows had been so dark that he had been quite at a loss to discern what lay ahead. Once and again there had been much which tended to cast a heavy gloom upon David's soul, but the Lord had graciously relieved the tension, supplying cheer in the blackest hour. It is to be remembered that with the Orientals the "lamp" is used for *comfort* as much as for illumination—many of them will stint themselves of food in order to buy oil; which helps us to understand the figure here used.

"For You are my lamp, O Lord." This is the grand recourse of the believer in seasons of trial: he can turn unto One to whom the poor worldling is a total stranger; nor will he turn to Him in vain, for God is "a very present help in trouble." It is then that the oppressed and depressed saint proves Him to be "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). Though his night be not turned into day, yet the welcome radiance of God's countenance affords such cheer as to sustain the trembling heart in the loneliest and saddest hour. In the cave of Adullam, in the hold of Rephaim, in the fastnesses of Mahanaim, the Lord had been his solace and support; and now that old age drew near, David could bear witness "You are my lamp, O Lord." And is not this the testimony of both writer and

"And the Lord *will* lighten my darkness." This was the language of faith and hope: He who had so often done this for David in the past, would not fail him in the future. No matter how dense the gloom would be, there should be a break in the clouds. That which is incomprehensible to the natural man is often made intelligible to the spiritual. That loss of health, financial disaster, or family bereavement: yes, but "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." Divine providence is often a mysterious deep, but God is his own interpreter, and He will make plain what before was obscure. Particularly is this the case with the believer's being plagued so fiercely and so frequently by his enemies. Why should his peace be so rudely disturbed, his joy dampened, his hopes shattered? Why should the conflict so often go against him and humiliating defeat be his portion? Here too we can confidently affirm "the Lord will lighten my darkness": if not now, in the hereafter.

"For by You I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall" (v. 30). Occurring as they do in the second half of this Psalm, we do not (as some) regard these words as referring to David's escapes from his enemies, but to his vanquishing of them. It was not that he was almost surrounded by hostile forces and then managed to find a loophole, or that he was driven into some stockade and then climbed over it; rather that he successfully attacked them. Instead of picturing the difficulties from which David extricated himself, we consider this verse portrays his foes as occupying two different positions: in the open field, sheltering behind some battlement; and his prevailing over them in each case. The leading thought seems to be that the Christian warrior must expect to have a taste of *every form* of fighting, for at times he is required to take the offensive, as well as the defensive. A "troop" of difficulties may impede his progress, a "wall" of opposition obstruct his success: by divine enablement he is to master both.

"As for God, His way is perfect" (v. 31). What a glorious testimony was this from one who had been so severely tried by His adverse providences! Severely as he had been buffeted, rough as was the path he often had to tread, David had not a word of criticism to make against God for the way He had dealt with him; so far from it, he vindicated and magnified Him. What a resting-place it is for the heart to be assured that all the divine actions are regulated by unerring wisdom and righteousness, infinite goodness and patience, inflexible justice and tender mercy. "The Word of the Lord is tried" like silver refined in the furnace. Tens of thousands of His people have, in all ages and circumstances, tested and proved the sufficiency of God's Word for themselves: they have found its doctrine satisfying to the soul, its precepts to be their best interests to follow, its promises absolutely reliable. "He is a buckler to all them that trust in Him" (v. 31): the covenant-keeping Jehovah is a sure Shield of protection to His warring people.

"For who is God, save the Lord? and who is a rock, save our God?" (v. 32). There is none to be compared with Him, for there is none like unto Him: all others worshiped as deities are but counterfeits and pretenders. "Who is like unto You, O Lord, among the gods? who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). Who else save the living and true God creates, sustains, and governs all creatures? He is perfect in every attribute, excellent in every action. The opening "for" may be connected both with verse 30 and verse 31: "by my God have I leaped over a wall," for there is none else enables like Him; "He is a buckler to all that trust in Him," for He, and He alone, is reliable. Where can lasting hopes be fixed? Where is real strength to be found? Where is refuge to be obtained? In the Rock of Ages, for He is immovable and immutable, steadfast and strong.

"God is my strength and power: and He makes my way perfect" (v. 33). by Him David had been energized and enabled, upheld and preserved, both as a pilgrim and as a warrior. How often the Christian soldier has grown weary and faint, when fresh vigor was imparted: "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." How often the task before us seemed impossible, the difficulties insurmountable, when such might was ours that we mounted up with wings as eagles and ran and were not weary. Nor can *we* take any credit for this to ourselves: God Himself is our strength and power, both physically and spiritually. "He makes my way perfect," by which we understood David to mean that his course had been successful. There is a real sense in which each believer may make these words his own: because his steps are ordered by the Lord and because his path shines more and more unto the "perfect day."

"He makes my feet like hinds' feet; and sets me upon my high places" (v. 34). "As hinds climb the craggy rocks and stand firm upon the slippery summit of the precipice, so David had been upheld in the most slippery paths and advanced to his present elevated station by the providence and grace of God" (Thomas Scott). The feet of certain animals are specially designed and adapted to tricky and treacherous ground. A threefold line of thought is suggested by the figure of this verse. First, God fits the believer for the position which He has appointed him to occupy, no matter how honorable and hazardous. Second, God furnishes him with alacrity and agility when the King's business requires haste, for speed as well as sureness of foot characterizes the hind. Third, God protects and secures him in the most dangerous places: "He will keep the feet of His saints" (1 Samuel 2:9).

"He teaches my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms" (v. 35). Whatever skill he possessed in the use of weapons, David, gratefully ascribed it unto divine instruction. The general principle here is of wide application: the artisan, the musician, the housewife, should thankfully acknowledge that it is God who has imparted dexterity to his or her fingers. In its higher significance this verse has reference to divine wisdom being imparted to the Christian warrior in the *use* of the armor which grace has provided for him. As it is in the natural, so it is in the spiritual: weapons, whether the offensive or defensive ones, are of little avail to us until we know how to employ them to advantage. "Take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Ephesians 6:13) not only means appropriate to yourself the panoply which God furnished, but also look to Him for guidance and help in the use of the same. The second half of our verse seems to indicate that David, like Samson, was at times endued with more than ordinary strength.

"You have also given me the shield of Your salvation" (v. 36). Here we find David looking higher than the material and temporal blessings which God had so freely granted him, to those special favors reserved for His own elect. There are common gifts of Providence bestowed upon the wicked and the righteous alike, but there are riches of grace communicated only to the high favorites of Heaven, that infinitely surpass the former. What are bodily deliverances worth if the soul be left to perish! What does protection from human foes amount to, if the devil be permitted to bring about our eternal destruction! David was not only granted the former, but the latter also. Here is a plain hint that we should seek after the higher meaning throughout this song and interpret spiritually. Let it be noted that this is not the only place in it where God's "salvation" is referred to: see verses 47, 51.

"And Your gentleness has made me great" (v. 36). The Hebrew word which is here rendered "gentleness," is one or considerable latitude and has been variously translated. The Septuagint has "Your discipline," or Fatherly chastening; another gives "Your goodness," referring to the benevolence of God's actions; still another, and more literally, "Your condescension." They all amount to much the same thing. This acknowledgment of David's is blessed: so far was he from complaining at the divine providences and charging God with having dealt with him harshly, he extols God's perfections for the pains that bad been taken with him. David owns that God had acted toward him like a tender parent, tempering the rod with infinite patience; he affirmed that God had graciously sanctified his afflictions to him. Though he had been raised from the sheepcote to the throne and had become great in prosperity and power, a successful conqueror and ruler, he fails not to give God all the glory for it.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

His Sacred Song

(Continued)

2 Samuel 22

If we are now to complete our exposition of this song we must dispense with our usual introductory remarks: we therefore proceed at once to our next verse. "You have enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip" (2 Samuel 22:37). Here David praises the Lord because He had not only preserved but prospered him too, blessing him with liberty and expansion: compare verse 20. From the narrow mountain pass and the confinement of caves, he had been brought to the spacious plains, and there too he had been sustained, for the latter has its dangers as well as the former: "It is no small mercy to be brought into full Christian liberty and enlargement, but it is a greater favor still to be enabled to walk worthily in such liberty, not being permitted to slide with our feet" (C. H. Spurgeon). To stand firm in the day of adversity is the result of grace upholding, and that aid is no less needed by us in seasons of prosperity.

"I have pursued mine enemies, and destroyed them; and turned not again until I had consumed them" (v. 38). David was here alluding to occasions like that recorded in 1 Samuel 30: the Amalekites thought themselves clear away with their booty (v. 2), but when David's God guided him in pursuit, they were soon overtaken and cut in pieces (verses 16-18). It is not sufficient that the believer stand his ground and resist the onslaught of his Foes. There are times when he must assume the offensive and "pursue" his enemies: yes, as a general principle it holds good that attack is the best means of defense. Lusts are not only to be starved, by making no provision For them, they are to be "mortified" or put to death. God has provided the Christian warrior with a sword as well as with a shield, and each is to be used in its season. Observe that verse 38 follows verse 37: there must be an enlargement and revival before we can be the aggressors and victors.

"And I have consumed them, and wounded them, that they could not arise: yes, they are fallen under my feet" (v. 39). This calls attention to the *completeness* of the victories which the Lord enabled David to achieve. But does not this present a serious difficulty to the exercised saint? How far, far short does *his* actual experience come of this! So far from his enemies king consumed and under his feet, he daily finds them gaining the ascendancy over him. True; nevertheless, there is a real sense in which it is his holy privilege to make these words his own: they are the language of *faith,* and not of sense. The terms of this verse may be legitimately applied to the judicial slaughter of our foes: we may exult over sin, death, and Hell having been destroyed by our conquering Lord! Forget not His precious promise, "because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19): His victory in the past, is the sure guarantee of our complete victory in the future.

"For You have girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me have You subdued under me" (v. 40). David had been both vigorous and valiant, yet he takes no credit to himself for the same. He freely acknowledges that it was God who had qualified him for his warfare, who had given him ability therein, and who had crowned his efforts with such success. Any measure of liberty from sin and Satan which we enjoy, any enlargement of heart in God's service, our preservation in the slippery paths of this enticing world, are cause for thankfulness, and not ground for glorying in self. It is true that *we* have to wrestle with our spiritual antagonists, hut the truth is that the victory is far more the Lord's than ours. It has long been the conviction of this writer, both from his own experience and the close observation of many others, that the principal reason why the Lord does not grant us a much larger measure of present triumph over our spiritual foes, is because we are so prone to be self-righteous over the same. Alas, how deceitful and wicked are our hearts.

"You have also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me" (v. 41). There is no doubt that such will be our peon of praise in Heaven in a far fuller sense than ever it is in this world. Do we not get more than a hint of this in Revelation 15:1-3, where we are told that "those that had gotten the victory over the Beast," etc. sing "the song of Moses, the servant of God (see Exodus 15) and the song of the Lamb"? Meanwhile, it is our blessed privilege to rest upon the divine promise: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your Feet shortly" (

Romans 16:20). Rightly did Adams the Puritan when commenting on this verse in our song, exhort his hearers "Though passion possess our bodies, let patience possess our souls." In a protracted warfare *patience* is just as essential as is valor or skill to use our weapons. The promise of ultimate salvation is made only unto those who "endure to the end." In due season we shall reap if we faint not. The fight may be a long and arduous one, but the victor's crown will be a grand recompense. Then look above the smoke and din of battle to the Prince of Peace who waits to welcome you on High.

"They looked, but there was none to save: even unto the Lord, but He answered them not" (v. 42). The Companion Bible has pointed out that there is here a play on words in the Hebrew which may be rendered thus in English: They cried with fear, but none gave ear. They called both to earth and Heaven For help, but in vain, God heeded them not For they were His enemies, and sought Him not through the Mediator; being given up by Him, they fell an easy prey to David's righteous sword. "Prayer is so notable a weapon that even the wicked will take to it in their fits of despair. But men have appealed to God against His own servants, but all in vain: the kingdom of Heaven is not divided, and God never supports His foes at the expense of His friends. There are prayers to God which are no better than blasphemy, which bring no comforting reply, but rather provoke the Lord unto greater wrath" (C. H. Spurgeon).

"Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad" (v. 43). Let not the *connection* between this and the preceding verse be missed—emphasized by its opening "Then." It shows us how utterly helpless are those who are abandoned by God, and how fearful is their fate—compare the case of King Saul: 1 Samuel 28:6 and 30:3, 4! The defeat of those nations which fought against David was so entire that they were like powders pounded in the mortar. Thomas Scott saw in this verse, and we think rightly so, a reference to "the inevitable destruction which came upon the Jews for crucifying the Lord of glory and rejecting the Gospel. They cried, and they still cry, to the Lord to save them, but refusing to obey His beloved Son, He vouchsafes them no answer." How accurately did the figures of this verse depict the tragic history of *the fetus:* "dust" which is scattered by the wind to all parts of the earth; "mire" that is contemptuously trampled underfoot!

"You also have delivered me from the strivings of my people, You have kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not shall serve me" (v. 44). In the first clause David refers to the intense strife which had so gravely threatened and menaced his kingdom. There had been times when internal dissensions had been far more serious and dangerous than anything which the surrounding nations threatened; nevertheless God had graciously preserved His servants from their malice and opposition. Thus it is with the Christian warrior: though be opposed from without by both the world and the devil, yet his greatest danger comes from *within*—his own corruptions and lusts are continually seeking his overthrow. None but God can grant him deliverance from his inward foes, but the sure promise is "He which has begun a good work in you will finish it" (Philippians 1:6). The same principle holds true of *the minister:* his most acute problems and trials issue not from without the pale of his church, but from its own members and adherents; and it is a great mercy when God gives peace within,

"You have kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not shall serve me." God's signal preservation of David intimated that he was designed and reserved for an important and imposing position: to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel, notwithstanding all the opposition the Benjamites had made against him, and to be exalted over heathen nations also: the decisive defeats of the Amalekites and Philistines were regarded as the pledge of still more notable triumphs. The practical lesson inculcated therein is one of great importance: hereby we are taught that the unchanging Faithfulness of God should encourage us to view all the blessings which we have received at His hands in the past as the earnest of yet greater favors in the future. God has not preserved you thus far, my faint-hearted brother, to let you flounder in the end. He who did sustain you through six trials declares "in seven there shall no evil touch you" (Job 5:19). Say, then, with the apostle, "Who has delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver; in whom we trust that He will *yet deliver us*" (2 Corinthians 1:10).

"Strangers shall submit themselves unto me: as soon as they hear, they shall be obedient unto me" (v. 45). It will be observed that in this verse, as well as in the second half of the preceding one, our translators have made a change of tense from the present to the future. Opinions vary considerably as to where the last section of the song really commences, in which memory passes into hope, in which the successes of the past are regarded as the guarantee of still greater triumphs in the future. God had been David's "buckler" (v. 31), his "strength and power" (v. 33). His condescension had made him great (v. 36), He had given him the necks of his enemies (v. 41): from all of which he draws the conclusion that God had still grander blessings in store for him. There can be little room for doubt that in the verses we are now pondering David was carried forward by the spirit of prophecy unto this New Testament era, his own kingdom being the symbol and portent of the spiritual reign of his Son and Lord.

The only matter on which there is any uncertainty is the precise point in this song where the historical merges into the prophetical, for the Hebrew verb does not, as in English, afford us any help here. As we have seen, Thomas Scott considers that verse 43, at least, should be included in this category. Alexander Maclaren suggested, "It is perhaps best to follow many of the older versions, and the valuable exposition of Hupfield, in regarding the whole section from verse 38 of our translation as the expression of the trust which past experience had wrought." Personally, we consider that too radical: we are on much safer ground if we take the course followed by the American Version and regard verse 44 as the turning point, where it is evident David was conscious that his kingdom was destined to be extended further than the confines of Palestine: strange tribes were to submit unto him and crouch before him in subjection.

Not only were the severe conflicts through which David passed and the remarkable victories granted to him prefigurations of the experiences of Christ, both in His sufferings and triumphs, but the further enlargements which David expected and his being made head over the heathen, foreshadowed the Redeemer's exaltation and the expansion of His kingdom far beyond the bounds of Judaism. First, the antitypical David had been delivered from the strivings of his Jewish people (v. 44), not by being preserved from death, but by being brought triumphantly through it, for in all things He must have the preeminence. Second, He had been made Head of the Church, which comprised Gentiles as well as Jews. Third, those who had been "strangers" (v. 45) to the commonwealth of Israel, submitted to the sound of His voice through the Gospel and rendered to Him the obedience of faith. Fourth, Paganism received its death-wound under the labors of Paul, its pride being humbled into the dust: such we take it is the prophetic allusion in v. 46.

"As soon as they hear, they shall be obedient unto Me" (v. 45). "In many cases the Gospel is speedily received by hearts apparently unprepared for it. Those who have never heard the Gospel before, have been charmed by its first message, and yielded obedience to it; while others, alas! who are accustomed to its joyful sound, are rather hardened than softened by its teachings. The grace of God sometimes runs like fire among the stubble, and a nation is born in a day. 'Love at first sight' is no uncommon thing when Jesus is the wooer. He can write Caesar's message without boasting, 'Veni, vidi, vici'; His Gospel is in some cases no sooner heard than believed. What inducements to spread abroad the doctrine of the Cross" (C. H. Spurgeon).

"Strangers shall fade away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places" (v. 46). "Out of their mountain fastnesses the heathen crept in fear to own allegiance to Israel's king; and even so, from the castles of self-confidence and the dens of carnal security, poor sinners come bending before the Savior, Christ the Lord. Our sins which have entrenched themselves in our flesh and blood as in impregnable forts, shall yet be driven forth by the sanctifying energy of the Holy Spirit, and we shall serve the Lord in singleness of heart" (C. H. Spurgeon).

"The Lord lives: and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation" (v. 47). After offering praise for past conquests and expressing his confidence in future victories, David returned to the more direct adoration of God Himself. Some of the glorious names of deity which he had heaped together at the beginning of his song, are now echoed at its close. The varied experiences through which he had passed had brought to the Psalmist a deeper knowledge of his living Lord: the One who had preserved Noah and ministered to Abraham long before, was his God too: swift to hear, active to help. One of the lesser known Puritans commented thus on this verse: "Honors die, pleasures die, the world dies; but the Lord *lives.* My flesh is as sand, my fleshly life, strength, and glory is as a word written on sand; but blessed be my Rock. Those are but for a moment; this stands forever; the curse shall devour those, everlasting blessings on the head of these" (P. Sterry).

"It is God that avenges me, and that brings down the people under me, and that brings me forth from mine enemies: You also have lifted me up on high above them that rose against me: You have delivered me from the violent man" (verses 48, 49). Here David recurs to the dominant sentiment running through this Song: all his help was in God and from God. To take matters into our own hands and seek personal revenge, is not only utterly unfitting in one who has received mercy from the Lord, but it is grossly wicked, for it encroaches upon a prerogative which belongs alone to Him. Moreover, it is quite unnecessary, for in due time the Lord will avenge His wronged people. Though we may join with Stephen in praying "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," yet when divine justice takes satisfaction upon those who have flouted His law, the devout heart will return thanks. After the battle at Naseby, in a letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons, Oliver Cromwell wrote, "Sir, this is none other than the hand of God, and to Him alone belongs the glory, wherein none are to share with Him."

"Therefore I will give thanks unto You, O Lord, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto Your name" (v. 50). What an example does David here set us of a holy soul making its boast in God in the presence of ungodly men. There is a happy medium between an unseemly parading of our piety before believers and a cowardly silence in their presence. We must not suffer the despisers of God to shut our mouths and stifle our praises; especially is it our duty to bow our heads and "give thanks unto the Lord" before partaking of a meal, even though we are "among the heathen," Be not ashamed to acknowledge your God in the presence of His enemies. This verse is quoted by the apostle and applied to Christ in Romans 15:9, which affords clear proof that David had his Antitype before him in the second half of this Song.

"He is the tower of salvation for His king; and shows mercy to His anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore (v. 51). David contemplated God not only as "the rock of his salvation"—the One who undergirded him, the One on whom all his hopes rested—but also as "the tower of salvation—the One in whom he found security, the One who was infinitely elevated above him. Though saved, he yet had need of being shown "mercy"! The last clause indicates that he was resting on the divine promise of 2 Samuel 7: 15, 16, and supplies additional evidence that he had here an eye to Christ, for He alone is his "Seed for evermore."

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE

His Last Words

2 Samuel 23

The passage for our present consideration (2 Samuel 23:1-7) presents somewhat of a difficulty, especially to those who are not accustomed to the drawing of distinctions and the taking of words relatively as well as absolutely. It opens by telling us, "These be the last words of David," when in fact the close of the patriarch's life was not yet reached. It seems strange that we should read of this here, when so much else is recorded in the chapters which follow, for we naturally associate the "last words" of a person with his closing utterances as life is expiring. Nor is the difficulty decreased when we note what vastly different language is upon his lips in 1 Kings 2:9. Thomas Scott suggested that "perhaps he repeated them in his dying moments as the expression of his faith and hope and the source of his consolation." This may be the case, for quite likely such sentiments were in his heart and mouth again and again during his declining days.

However, it seems to us that 2 Samuel 23 refers to "the last words of David" not so much as those merely of a *man,* but rather as being a *mouthpiece* of God, thus forming a brief appendix to his Psalms. That our passage concerns the final inspired utterance of David appears to be quite plain from the specific terms used in it. First, he makes definite mention of himself as "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" (v. 1), which obviously refers to his official character as the Lord's servant and seer. Second, he states "the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His Word was in my tongue" (v. 2), which language could only be used of one appointed to formally deliver the oracles of God, of one so completely controlled by the Holy Spirit that his utterance was a divine revelation. Third, what he said in verses 3 and 4 looked beyond himself, being a prophetic announcement concerning the antitypical 'Ruler"—proof that he was "moved by the Holy Spirit." Further, there is nothing in the chapters following which indicate David was giving forth a formal utterance by divine revelation.

There is still another distinction which may be drawn, that clears away any remaining difficulty from our passage. Not only are we to distinguish between David's utterances as a man and as the mouthpiece of Jehovah, but also between his acts and words looked at *historically* and considered *typically.* In the course of this lengthy series of chapters we have pointed out again and again that in many (though by no means in all) of his experiences David is to be viewed *representatively,* as treading the same path and encountering the temptations and trials common to all the saints as they pass through this wilderness of sin. 1 Kings 1 gives us the historical close of the patriarch's life, the last utterance of the aged king being "but his hoar head bring you down to the grave *with blood.*" "Blood" is the final word on the lips of the dying warrior, a "man of war" from his youth, as Philistine enemies and Amalekite foes could testify.

But in 2 Samuel 23 we are permitted to gaze upon the other side of the picture, a most blessed and refreshing one. Here, the Spirit of God brings before us not "the man of war" (1 Samuel 16:18), but "the man after God's own heart," the one who had found favor in His eyes and had been loved with an everlasting love, and thus the representative of His chosen people. Here we listen to the holy breathings of the saint, and the scene becomes to us a "gate of Heaven." As the believer draws near the end of his wilderness journey, like David, he reviews the Lord's goodness, dwells upon the amazing grace which lifted him from the dunghill and made him to sit in the heavenlies in Christ (v. 1), and while he laments the spiritual condition of some near and dear to him and his own failure to grow in grace as he ought, yet he found unspeakable comfort in the fact that God had made with him an everlasting covenant.

"Now these be the last words of David" (2 Samuel 23:1). Rightly did Matthew Henry point out that "When we find death approaching, we should endeavor both to honor Cod and to edify those about us with our last words. Let those who have had long experience of God's goodness and the peacefulness of wisdom's ways, when they come to finish their course, leave a record of that experience and bear their testimony to the truth of the promise." It is not all who are granted a clear token of their approaching dissolution or given a season of consciousness, so that they may clearly avow their faith and hope; but when such *is* afforded, their duty and privilege is plain. David thus acquitted himself to the glory of God and the comfort of His people, and everything else being equal, so should we.

"David the son of Jesse, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said" (v. 1). The Hebrew word for "said" (twice used in this verse) signifies to speak with assurance and authority, thus confirming what we have pointed out above concerning the divine character of this utterance. David described himself, first, by the lowliness of his origin—"the son of Jesse," unknown among those arrayed in purple and fine linen. The stock from which he came was indeed an humble one, for when it was asked in Saul's court "whose son is he?" the answer was returned "O king, I cannot tell" (1 Samuel 17:55); and so David had to answer for himself, "I am the son of your servant Jesse, the Bethlehemite"—a small and despised house, and he the least in that house. Typically speaking, this is the believer owning his humble origin, looking back to the hole of the pit from which he was dug.

"And the man that was raised up on high": here he makes mention, secondly, of the dignity of his elevation. Though of such mean parentage, from one of the humblest of Saul's subjects, yet he found favor in the sight of the Lord, being exalted to the throne and made ruler over all Israel. The nearer the believer approaches the close of his life, the more is his heart made to wonder at the sovereign grace of God in laying hold of one so utterly unworthy and raising him to a position of dignity and honor above that occupied by the holy angels. Third, David described himself as "the anointed of God': as such he was again the typical believer, for of Christians it is written, "Now He which establishes us with you in Christ, and has *anointed* us, is God" (2 Corinthians 1:21). Finally, "and the sweet psalmist of Israel": that of course refers to his official character, and yet this too is representative: though he composed the Psalms, they are for our use (James 5:13).

"The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was in my tongue" (v. 2). Though it be useless for us to attempt any explanation of the rationale of divine inspiration, yet this is one of many statements found in Holy Writ which serves to define its nature and extent. When we come face to face with the conjunction of the divine and the human, we confront that which transcends the grasp of the finite mind; nevertheless by the aid of what is revealed *we* may make certain postulates, so as to guard against terror at either extreme. The Scriptures are indeed the very Word of God, inerrant and imperishable, yet the instrumentality of the creature was employed in the communication and compilation of them. The mouth uttering it was human, but the message was divine; the voice was that of man, but the actual words those of God Himself.

"Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). those holy men were the actual mouthpieces of the Almighty: their utterances were so absolutely controlled by Him that what they said and wrote was a perfect expression of His mind and will. It is not simply that their minds were elevated or their spirits sublimated, but that their very tongues were regulated. It was not merely that their wills received a supernatural impulse or that their minds were divinely illuminated, but the very words of their message was conveyed to them. Nothing less than this can be gathered from the verse before us: when David affirmed God's Word was "in his tongue," far more is denoted than that a concept was conveyed to his mind and he felt free to express it in his own language. Nothing less than their *verbal inspiration* is predicated of the Scriptures themselves—compare 1 Corinthians 2:13.

"The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me, He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (v. 3). The older writers saw in these verses, and we believe rightly so, a reference to the blessed Trinity. First, in verse 2 David affirmed "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me," and that a divine person rather than a spiritual inflation was denoted is plain from "and *His* word was in my tongue." Second, "the God of Israel said": that is, God the Father spoke, as a reference to Hebrews 1:1 and 2 makes clear. Third, "the Rock of Israel spoke to David" alludes to the Son, in His mediatorial capacity, of whom it was predicted, "And a man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Isaiah 32:2). Though a fuller and brighter manifestation of the Godhead has been made under Christianity, nevertheless the Tri-unity of God was definitely revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures.

There is a distinction to be drawn between what is recorded in the verse preceding and in verse 3: there it was "the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me," here "spoke *to* me"—that relates to what he was moved to record by divine inspiration (principally in the Psalms), this a more personal message for himself and family. "Let ministers observe that those by whom God speaks to others are concerned to hear and heed what the Spirit speaks to themselves. They whose office it is to teach others their duty, must be sure to learn and do their own" (Matthew Henry). Particularly must due attention be paid unto these two things: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." The immediate reference is to civic leaders, hut the principle applies strictly to ecclesiastical ones too: impartiality and righteousness ought ever to characterize both magistrate and minister alike, while the office of each is to be discharged in the awe of Him to whom an account will yet have to be rendered.

"And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun rises, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" (v. 4). Here is the blessing and prosperity assured to those who faithfully discharge their obligations, keeping both tables of the Law. "Light is sweet and pleasant, and he who does his duty shall have the comfort of it; his rejoicing will be the testimony of his conscience. Light is bright, and a good prince (or minister) is illustrious; his justice and piety will be his honor. Light is a blessing, nor are there greater and more extensive blessings to the public than princes that rule in the fear of God. It is like 'the light of the morning,' which is most welcome after darkness of the night; so was David's government after Saul's. It is likewise compared to the tender grass, which the earth produces for the service of men; it brings with it a harvest of blessings" (Matthew Henry).

Verses 3 and 4 can also be rightly regarded as a Messianic prophecy, for the Hebrew may be rendered "There shall be a Ruler over men which is just, ruling in the fear of God." The qualities essential in the one who is to rule for God's glory and His people's good, are righteousness and dependence—found alone in their perfection in that blessed One who came not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. Saul wielded the power for himself; David had to hang his head and own "my house be not so with God" (v. 5); which requires us to turn to Christ. He orders the affairs of the Father's kingdom according to the divine will. He is "as the light of the morning" because "the Light of the world," and "as the tender grass' because He is "the Branch of the Lord" and the Fruit of the earth (Isaiah 4:2).

"Although my house be not so with God" (v. 5). Here again the historical merges into the typical. After the prophetic fore-view just granted him, David turned his reflections upon himself and his own house, and sorrowed over the state of the same. "By his own misconduct, his family was much less religious and prosperous than it might have been expected, and both he and Israel had suffered many things in consequence. Several grievous and scandalous events had occurred: matters were not yet as he could wish, and he seems to have had his fears concerning his descendants, who should succeed him in the kingdom" (Thomas Scott). Grief, then, was mingled with his joy, and dismal forebodings cast a dark shadow over his lot.

As the believer nears the end of his course, he not only meditates upon the lowliness of his original estate and then the elevated position to which sovereign grace has lifted him, but he also reviews his follies, bemoans his failures, and sorrows over the wretched returns he has made unto God's goodness. This is the common experience of the pious: as they journey through this wilderness they are sorely tried and exercised, pass through deep waters, experience many sharp conflicts, and are often at a loss to maintain their faith.

Favored saints of God,
His messengers and sears,
Your narrow path have trod,
'Mid sins, and doubts, and fears.

And at the end they generally have to mourn over the graceless condition of some that are nearest and dearest to them, and exclaim, "Although my house be not so with God."

"Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (v. 5). Blessed antithesis. The opening "yet" is placed over against the "although" at the beginning of the previous clause: it is the faithfulness of God set in delightful contrast from David's failures. It illustrates most solemnly the awe-inspiring sovereignty of God: Divine justice had been meted out to his foes, divine grace had dealt with himself. At least one of his children had evidenced himself to be among the reprobate, but God had entered into an eternal compact of peace with the father. Here was indeed sweet consolation for his poor heart. The allusion is to that covenant of grace which God made with all His people in Christ before the foundation of the world. That covenant is from everlasting in its contrivance, and to everlasting in its consequences.

That everlasting covenant is so "ordered" as to promote the glory of God, the honor of the Mediator, and the holiness and blessing of His people. It is "sure" because its promises are those of Him who cannot lie, because full provision is made in it for all the failures of believers, and because its administration is in the hands of Christ. "For this is all my salvation." David rightly traced his salvation back to "the everlasting covenant": alas that so many today are ignorant of this inexhaustible well of comfort. It is not enough that we go back to the hour when we first believed, nor even to the Cross where the Savior paid the price of our redemption; to the everlasting covenant we must look, and see there God graciously planning to give Christ to die for His people and impart the Spirit to them for quickening and the communicating of faith. This is "all our salvation" for it entirely suffices, containing as it does a draft of all the salvation-acts of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In consequence of the nature, fullness and sufficiency of the everlasting covenant, it must be "all my desire": that is, obtaining by the Spirit's help an assurance of my personal interest in its grand promises. "Although He make it not to grow." First, with reference to his house: "in number, in power; it is God that makes families to grow, or not to grow (Psalm 107:41). Good men have often the melancholy prospect of a declining family, David's house was typical of the Church of Christ. "Suppose this be not so with God as we could wish: suppose it be diminished, distressed, disgraced, and weakened by errors and corruptions, yes, almost extinct, yet God has made a covenant with the church's Head, that He will preserve to Him a seed: this our Savior comforted Himself with in His sufferings: Isaiah 53:10, 12" (Matthew Henry). Second, with reference to himself: he had received the grace of the covenant, but it had not flourished in him as could be desired—his own neglect being the criminal cause.

David concluded (verses 6 and 7) with a most solemn reference to the awful fate awaiting the reprobate. Destitute of faith, self-willed, unconcerned about God's glory, despising and ill-treating His servants, righteous retribution shall surely fall upon them. "As thorns thrust away" is a figure of their rejection by God; ultimately they shall be "utterly burnt with fire." It was a prediction of the eternal undoing of all the implacable enemies of Christ's kingdom.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-SIX

His Mighty Men

2 Samuel 23

The last thirty-two verses of 2 Samuel 23 have received comparatively scant attention from those who are accustomed to read the Scriptures, and even most of the commentators are nearly silent upon them. Probably the average Christian finds it somewhat difficult to glean much from them which he feels is really profitable to his soul. A number of men are enumerated—some of them mentioned in earlier chapters, but the great majority otherwise quite unknown to us—and one or two of their deeds are described; and then the second half of our chapter is taken up with a long list of names, over which most people are inclined to skip. Nevertheless, these very verses are included in that divine declaration, "Whatever things were written

aforetime were written for *our learning*" (Romans 15:4); and it is therefore to the dishonor of God and to our own real loss if we ignore this passage.

There is nothing meaningless in any section of Holy Writ: every part thereof is "profitable" for us (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). Let us therefore settle it at the outset that this passage contains valuable instruction for us today, important lessons which we do well to take to heart. Let us, then, humbly bow before God and beg Him to open our eyes, that we may behold "wondrous things" in this part of His Law. Let us gird up the loins of our minds, and seek to reverently ponder and spiritually meditate upon its contents. Let us bear in mind the law of the context, and endeavor to ascertain the relation of this passage to the verses immediately preceding. Let us duly take note of how these "mighty men of David" are classified, and try to discover what is suggested thereby. Let us look beyond the historical and trace out what is *typical, at* the same time setting bounds to our imagination and being regulated by the analogy of faith.

Before entering into detail, let us point out some of the general lessons inculcated—suggested, in part by the brief notes of Matthew Henry. First, the catalogue which is here given us of the names, devotion and valor of the king's soldiers is recorded for the honor of David himself, who trained them in their military arts and exercises, and who set before them an example of piety and courage. It enhances the reputation of, as well as being an advantage, when a prince is attended and served by such men as are here described. So it will be in the Day to come. When the books are opened before an assembled universe and the fidelity and courage of God's ministers is proclaimed, it will be principally for the glory of their Captain, whom they served and whose fame they sought to spread, and by whose Spirit they were energized and enabled. Whatever crowns His servants and saints receive from God, they will be laid at the feet of the Lamb, who alone is worthy.

Second, this inspired record is made for the honor of those worthies themselves. They were instrumental in bringing David to the crown, of settling and protecting him in the throne, and of enlarging his conquests; and therefore the Spirit has not overlooked them. In like manner, the faithful ministers of God are instrumental in establishing, safeguarding and extending the kingdom of Christ in the world, and therefore are they to be esteemed highly for their works' sake, as the Word of God expressly enjoins. Not that they desire the praise of men, but "honor to whom honor is due" is a precept which God requires His people to ever observe. Not only are the valorous soldiers of Christ to be venerated by those of their own day and generation, but posterity is to hold them in high regard: "The memory of the just is blessed." In the Day to come each of them shall "have praise of God" (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Third, to excite those who come after them to a generous emulation. That which was praiseworthy in the sires should be practiced by their children. If God is pleased hereby to express His approbation of the loyalty and love shown unto David by his officers, we may be sure that He is pleased now with those who strengthen the hands of His ministers, be they in the civil or the ecclesiastical realm. Those alive today should be inspired and encouraged by the noble deeds of heroes of the past. But to raise the thought to a higher level: if those men held David in such great esteem that they hesitated not to hazard their lives for his sake, how infinitely more worthy is the antitypical David of the most self-denying sacrifices and devotion from His servants and followers! Alas, how sadly they put most of us to shame.

Fourth, to show how much genuine religion contributes to the inspiring men with true courage. David, both by his Psalms, and by his offerings for the service of the temple, greatly promoted piety among the grandees of the kingdom (see 1 Chronicles 29:6), and when they became famous for piety, they became famous for bravery. Yes, there is an inseparable connection between the two things, as Acts 4:13 so strikingly exemplifies: even the enemies of the apostles "took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus" when they "saw their *boldness.*" He who truly fears God, fears not man. It is written, "The wicked flee when no man pursues: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Proverbs 28:1). History, both sacred and secular, abounds in examples of how pious leaders imbued their men with courage: Abraham, Joshua, Cromwell, being cases in point. From the record of their exploits courage should be inspired *in us.*

Let us now inquire, What is the connection between our present portion and the one preceding it? This is a principle which should never be neglected, for the ascertaining of the relation of one passage to another often throws light upon its typical scope, as well as supplies a valuable key to its interpretation. Such is the case here. The first seven verses of 2 Samuel 23 are concerned with "the last words of David," and what follows is virtually an honor role of those who achieved fame in his service. What a blessed foreshadowment of that which will occur when the earthly kingdom of the antitypical David comes to an end. Then shall His servants receive their rewards, for the righteous Judge will then distribute the crowns of "life" (Rev. 2:10), of "righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8), and of "glory" (1 Peter 5:4). Then shall He pronounce His "well done you good and faithful servant, enter you into the joy of your Lord." Let therefore those now engaged in fighting the Lord's battles be faithful, diligent and valorous, assured that in due course they will be richly compensated.

"These be the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite: he lift up his spear against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time." (2 Samuel 23:8). When God calls a man to perform some special service in the interests of His kingdom and people, He also graciously raises up for him those who support his cause and strengthen his hands by using their influence on his behalf. Some of those helpers obtain the eye of the public, while others of them are far more in the background; but at the end each shall receive due recognition and proportionate honor. It was so here. David could never have won the victories he did, unless a kind Providence had supplied him with loyal and courageous officers. Nor had men like Luther and Cromwell performed such exploits unless supported by less conspicuous souls. Thus it has ever been, and still is. Even such a trivial work as the ministry of this magazine is only made possible by the cooperation of its readers.

The first one mentioned of David's mighty men is Adino the Eznite. He is described as "The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains," by which we understand that he presided over the counsels of war, being the king's chief military adviser. In addition to his wisdom, he was also endowed with extraordinary strength and valor, for it is here stated that he "lift up his spear against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time." His case seems to have been one similar to that of Samson's—a man endued with supernatural strength. Typically, he reminds us of Paul, the *chief* of the apostles, who was not only enriched with unusual spiritual wisdom, but was mightier than any other in the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan; but whereas the one was famous for the taking of life, the other was instrumental in the communicating of life.

"And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away (v. 9). Here is the second of David's worthies, one who acquitted himself courageously in an hour of urgent need. Nothing is said of him elsewhere, save in what some term "the parallel passage" of 1 Chronicles 11. This son of Dodo was one of the heroic triumvirate that enabled their royal master successfully to defy the assembled Philistines, and that at a time when, for some reason or other, the king's army was "gone away." Eleazar refused to flee before the massed forces of the enemy, and he not only nobly stood his ground, but took the offensive, and with his confidence in the living God fell upon and slew hundreds of them.

The Spirit has placed special emphasis upon the noteworthiness of Eleazar's prowess by informing us it was exercised on an occasion when "the men of Israel had gone back." *That* is the time for true courage to be manifested. When through unbelief, lack of zeal, or the fear of man, the rank and file of professing Christians are giving way before the forces of evil, then is the opportunity for those who know and trust the Lord to be strong and do exploits. It does not require so much courage to engage the enemy when all our fellow-soldiers are enthusiastically advancing against them, but it takes considerable grit and boldness to attack an organized and powerful foe when almost all of our companions have lost heart and turned tail.

God esteems fidelity and holy zeal far more highly in a season of declension and apostasy than He does in a time of revival. A crisis not only tests, but reveals a man, as a heavy storm will make evident the trustworthiness or weaknesses of a ship. What is here recorded to the lasting honor of Eleazar makes us think of the beloved Paul. Again and again he stood almost alone, yet he never made the defection of others an excuse for the abating of his own efforts. On one occasion he had to lament, "This you know, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (2 Timothy 1:15). Later, in the same epistle he wrote, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding

the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me" (4:16, 17). Let the servants of God today take heart from these blessed examples.

"He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand cleave unto the sword" (v. 10). Let it be duly noted that Eleazar did not stop when his work was half done, but went on prosecuting the same as long as he had any strength remaining. "Thus, in the service of God, we should keep up the willingness and resolution of the spirit, notwithstanding the weakness and weariness of the flesh; faint, yet pursuing (Judges 8:4); the hand weary, yet not quitting the sword" (Matthew Henry). Alas, in this age of ease and flabbiness, how readily we become discouraged and how quickly we give in to difficulties! O to heed that emphatic call "Be not weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Colossians 6:9). Such incidents as these are recorded not only for our information but also for our inspiration, that we should emulate their noble examples; otherwise they will put us to shame in the Day to come.

"And the Lord wrought a great victory that day." It is the *daring* of faith which He ever delights to honor, as He had so signally evidenced a few years previously, when David as a stripling had challenged and overcome the mighty Goliath. It is the *perseverance* of faith which the Lord always rewards, as was strikingly demonstrated after Israel had marched around the walls of Jericho thirteen times. No doubt God struck this army of the Philistines with a terror as great as the courage with which He had endowed this hero. It is ever God's way to work at both ends of the line: if He raises up a sower He also prepares the soil; if He inspires a servant with courage He puts fear into the hearts of those who oppose him. Observe how the glory of the victory is again ascribed to the Lord, and carefully compare Acts 14:27 and 21:19. "And the people returned after him only to spoil" (v. 10). How like human nature was this: they *returned* when there was "spoil" to be had!

"And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines" (v. 11). This incident concerned an armed force of Israel's enemies who were out foraging, and who struck such terror into the hearts of the countryside that the peaceful locals fled. But there was one who refused to yield unto the marauders, determined to defend the food supply of his people, and under God, he completely routed them. Here is another courageous man of whom we know nothing save for this brief reference: what a hint it furnishes that in the Day to come many a one will then have honor from God who received scant notice among his fellows. No matter how obscure the individual, or how inconspicuous his sphere of labor, nothing that is done in faith, no service performed for the good of His people, is forgotten by God. Surely this is one of the lessons written plain across this simple but striking narrative.

"But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the Lord wrought a great victory" (v. 12). How this reminds us of what is recorded in Acts 14:3: "Long time therefore abode they speaking *boldly* in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the Word of His grace and granted signs and *wonders* to be done by their hands." Then let us heed that divine injunction, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that *you* may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10, 11). Let us duly observe how, once more, the victory is ascribed to the Lord. No matter how great the ability and courage of the instruments, all praise for the achievement must be rendered alone unto God. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches" (Jeremiah 9:23), for what has he who he did not first receive from above! How needful is this exhortation in such a day as ours, when pride is so much in the saddle and men's persons are "had in admiration." God is jealous of His glory and will not share it with the creature, and His Spirit is quenched if we do so.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-SEVEN

His Mighty Men

(Continued)

2 Samuel 23

2 Samuel 23 supplies a vivid illustration of the great variety of spiritual gifts and graces which God bestows upon His people in general and on His ministries in particular. All are not called upon to engage in the same specific form of service, and therefore all are not alike qualified. We see this principle exemplified in the natural sphere. Some have a skeptical aptitude for certain avocations, while others are fitted for entirely different ones: those who find it easy to work a typewriter or keep books, would be quite out of their element if they attempted to do the work of a farmer or carpenter. So it is in the spiritual realm: one is called to some particular sphere and is endowed accordingly, while another is appointed to a different junction and is suitably equipped for it; and naught but confusion would follow if the latter attempted to discharge the duties of the former.

"Every man has his proper gift of God: one after this manner, and another after that" (1 Corinthians 7:7), but whether our talents be more or fewer it is our duty to use and improve the same for the good of our generation. "But all these works that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Corinthians 12:11), and therefore we must be content with the gifts and position which God has allotted us, neither despising those below nor envying those above us. There are various degrees of usefulness and eminence among Christians, just as there were different grades of honor among those worthies of David. Of one of them we read, "Therefore he was their captain, howbeit he attained not unto the first three" (v. 19), and later in the chapter we are given a list of another thirty who occupied a yet lower rank. First in eminence were the apostles; next to them were the Reformers; and below them are those who have followed during the last four centuries.

Throughout the long and checkered career of David there were two things to cheer and comfort him: the unchanging faithfulness of God and the loving devotedness of his servants. Another has pointed out that at the close of Paul's career he had the same spring of solace to draw from. "In his second epistle to Timothy he glances at the condition of things around him: he sees the 'great house,' which assuredly was not so with God as He required it; he sees all that were in Asia turned away from him; he sees Hymenaeus and Philetus teaching false doctrine, and overthrowing the faith of some; he sees Alexander the coppersmith doing much mischief; he sees many with itching ears, heaping to themselves teachers, and turning away from the truth to fables; he sees the perilous times setting in with fearful rapidity; in a word, he sees the whole fabric, humanly speaking, going to pieces; but he, like David, resting in the assurance that the foundation of God stands sure, and he was also cheered by the individual devotedness of some mighty man or other, who, by the grace of God, was standing faithful amid the wreck. He remembered the faith of a Timothy, the love of an Onesiphorus; and moreover, he was cheered by the fact there would be a company of faithful men in the darkest times who would call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

In the preceding chapter we called attention to the logical connection of 2 Samuel 23 with the previous chapter, where "the last words of David" (his final inspired and official message) are recorded. We may also notice that our present passage comes immediately after David's reference to the "Everlasting Covenant" which Jehovah had made with him (v. 5). How significant is this, and what blessed instruction it conveys to us. The two things are intimately, yes inseparably connected: the eternal counsels of God's grace and His providing us with all needed assistance while we are in a time state. In other words, that "Everlasting Covenant" which God made, with His elect in the person of their Head guarantees the supply of their every need in this world, the interposition of the Lord on their behalf wherever required, and the raising up of faithful friends to help in each hour of emergency. Thus David found it, as the verses before us amply demonstrate.

If the Spirit of God has been pleased to chronicle some of the bravest exploits of David himself, He has not been altogether silent upon the heroic achievements of those who stood loyally by him when he was menaced by his numerous foes. This too adumbrated something yet more blessed in connection with the antitypical David and His officers. Some of their deeds of devotion may not be known among men, or at most little valued by them, but they are recognized and recorded by *God,* and will yet be publicly proclaimed from His throne. We should have known nothing of these deeds of David's worthies had not the Spirit here described them. So, many a heart which now throbs with affection for Christ of which the world is not cognizant, and many a hand which is stretched forth in service to Him which is unnoticed by the churches, will not pass unheeded in the Day to come.

In our last chapter we dwelt upon the exploits of the first triumvirate of David's mighty men—Adino, Eleazar and Shammah (verses 8-12): our present passage opens with a most touching incident which records (we believe) another heroic enterprise in which the same three men acted together. We are told "And three of the thirty chiefs went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim" (v. 13). This most probably takes us back to what is narrated in 1 Samuel 22, when the uncrowned son of Jesse was a fugitive from the murderous designs of King Saul. It was not, then, in the hour of his popularity and power that these three officers betook themselves unto David, but in the time of his humiliation and weakness, while taking refuge in a cave, that they espoused his cause. No fair weather friends were these, but unselfish supporters.

"And David was then in a hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem" (v. 14). How strangely varied is the lot of those who are beloved of God! What ups and downs in their experience and circumstances! Bethlehem was the place where David was born—presaging the incarnation of his Son and Lord; but now it was occupied by the enemies of God and His people: how many a dwelling-place which once gave shelter to an eminent servant of God is now the abode of worldlings. From the fertility and peacefulness of Bethlehem David was forced to flee and seek refuge in a cave: then let us not be cast down if a lowly and uncongenial habitation be our portion. But David was not forgotten by the Lord, and He graciously moved the hearts of others to seek him out and offer their loving service. Take heart, then, lonesome believer: if God does not raise up earthly friends for you, He will doubly endear Himself to your heart.

"And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" (v. 15). Some of the Puritans believed that David was not here expressing his desire for literal water, but rather for the Messiah Himself, who was to be born at Bethlehem. Though this does not appear to be borne out by what follows, yet it is surely significant that such excellent and desirable water was to be found there. Bethlehem means "the house of bread," and as the Lord Jesus declared, He is in His own blessed person both the Bread of Life and the Water of Life—the sustainer and refresher of the new man. Personally, we agree with Matthew Henry that what is recorded in this verse "seems to have been an instance of his weakness," when he was dissatisfied with what divine providence had supplied, giving way to inordinate affection and yielding to the desires of mere nature.

It was summer time, when the weather was hot and trying, and David was thirsty. Perhaps good water was scarce at Adullam, and therefore David earnestly cried, "Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem" True, it is natural to hanker after those things which Providence withholds, and such hankering is often yielded to even by godly men in an unguarded hour, which leads to various snares and evils. "David strangely indulged a humor which he could give no reason for. It is folly to entertain such fancies, and greater folly to insist upon the gratification of them. "We ought to check our affections when they go out inordinately toward those things which are more pleasant and grateful than others" (Matthew Henry). The best way, and perhaps the only one, of doing this is by heeding that injunction "giving thanks always for all things unto God" (Ephesians 5:20), thereby evidencing we are content with such things as we have—instead of lusting after those we have not.

"And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David" (v. 16). What proof this gave of how highly these brave men valued their leader, and how ready they were to face the greatest of dangers in his service. It must be remembered that at this time David was uncrowned, a fugitive from Saul, and in no position to reward their valorous efforts on his behalf. Moreover, no command had been issued, no one in particular was commissioned to obtain the water from Bethlehem: it was enough for them that their beloved master desired it. How little they feared the Philistines: so absorbed were they in seeking to please David, that terror of the enemy had no place in their hearts! Do they not put all of us to shame? Flow feeble in comparison is our devotedness to the antitypical David! How trifling the obstacles which confront us from the peril which menaced them.

"Nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord" (v. 16). Blessed is this, and a lovely sequel to what has just been before us. Those three men had spontaneously responded to the known wish of their leader, and, not counting their lives dear unto themselves, they had—whether by use of the sword or by strategy we are not told, but most likely the former—obtained and brought back to David the longed-for refreshment. Such devotion to his person and such daring on their part was not lost upon David, and being recovered from his carnal lapse and seeing things now with spiritual discernment, he deemed that water a sacrifice too costly for any but Jehovah Himself, and hence he would not suffer the sweet odor of it to be intercepted in its ascent to the throne of God.

"And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men" (v. 17). This is ever one of the marks of a gracious man. When he is conscious of making a mistake or of committing folly, he does not feign ignorance or innocence, but acknowledges and seeks to correct the same. The outstanding characteristic of regeneration is that where this miracle of grace is wrought an *honest heart* is ever the evidence of the same. It is those who are under the full sway of Satan who are crafty, deceitful and serpentine in their ways. Those whom Christ saves He conforms unto His image, and *He* was without deceit. David was now ashamed of his inordinate desire and rash wish, and regretted exposing his brave officers to such a peril on his behalf. This is another mark of the genuine child of God: he is not wholly wrapped up in himself.

Sin and self are synonymous terms, for as someone has quaintly pointed out the center of Sin is "I," that is why when the Church confesses "all we like sheep have gone astray," she defines it by saying "we have turned every one to *his own* way." If sin and selfishness are synonymous, grace and unselfishness are inseparable, for when the love of God is shed abroad in the heart there is awakened a genuine concern for the good of our fellows, and therefore will the Christian seek to refrain from what would injure them. "Upon reflection and experience, a wise man will be ashamed of his folly, and will abstain not only from unlawful indulgences, but from those also which are inexpedient and might expose his brethren to temptation and danger" (Thomas Scott).

"And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew them, and had the name among three" (v. 18). We are not here informed when or where this extraordinary feat was accomplished, but from the analogy supplied by the other examples in this chapter, we know it was performed by divine enablement, for the public good, and in the service of David. It is solemn to note that Abishai's more famous, and yet infamous brother, has no place in his role of honor, illustrating the solemn truth that if "the memory of the just is blessed" yet "the name of the wicked shall rot." "Was he not most honorable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the first three" (v. 19). These degrees of eminence and esteem exemplify the fact that men are not designed to all occupy a common level: the theory of "socialism" receives no countenance from Scripture.

"And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lion-like men of Moab" (v. 20). It is good to see the sons walking in the steps of their sires when a noble example has been set before them: God takes notice of the one as much as the other. Those men of Moab might be fierce and powerful, but nothing daunted, Benaiah went forth and slew them. This too is recorded for our encouragement: no matter how strong and furious be our lusts, in the strength of the Lord we must attack and mortify them. "He went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow" (v. 20). Amid the frosts of winter our zeal is not to be relaxed. Nor must the soldiers of Christ expect to always have plain sailing: even when engaged in the best cause of all, formidable obstacles will be encountered, and the soldiers of Christ must learn to endure hardness and acquit themselves like men.

"And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear" (v. 21). If his slaying of the lion is a figure of the servant of Christ successfully resisting the devil (1 Peter 5:8), his vanquishing of this Egyptian (spoken of in 1 Chronicles 11:23 as a "man of great stature") may well be regarded as a type of the minister of God overcoming the world, for in Scripture "Egypt" is ever a symbol of that system which is hostile to God and His people. And how is victory over the world obtained? We need go no farther than this verse to learn the secret: by maintaining *our pilgrim character,* for the "staff" is the emblem of the pilgrim. If the heart be fixed upon that fair Land to which we are journeying, then the shows of this "vanity fair" will possess no attraction for it. The world is overcome by "faith" (1 John 5:4): a faith which grasps the good of God's promises enables us to reject the evils of this world.

"These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men. He was more honorable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three. And David set him over his guard" (verses 22, 23). Once again we are reminded that there is a gradation among the creatures and servants of God: there is no such thing as equality even among the angels. How wrong it is, then, for any of us to be dissatisfied with the status and position which the sovereign will of God has assigned to us: let us rather seek grace from Him to faithfully discharge our duties, however exalted or lowly be our station in life. Our chapter ends with a list of thirty men who were in the third grade: the first being Asahel (v. 24) and the last Uriah (v. 39), the former being murdered by Joab and the latter being sent to his death by David—deliverance from one danger is no guarantee that we shall escape from another.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-EIGHT

His Final Folly

2 Samuel 24

We are about to look at one more of the dark chapters in David's life, though it has a much brighter ending than had some of the others. It concerns an episode which though simple and plain in some of its features, is in other respects shrouded in deep mystery; nor do we profess to be able to solve it fully. The incident which is narrated in 2 Samuel 24 concerns the purpose which David formed for numbering Israel and Judah, in order that he might know the exact fighting strength of his people. Apparently this was quite an innocent undertaking, yet it promptly met with disfavor and opposition from the commander and officers of his army. A little later David himself acknowledged that therein he had "sinned greatly," and the Lord Himself manifested His sore displeasure by slaying no less than seventy thousand of his men by a pestilence.

On two occasions the Lord Himself had directed Moses to number the people. First in connection with their encampment in the Wilderness (Numbers 1), and later it was enjoined with special reference to the allotments which the different tribes were to receive in Canaan (Numbers 26:2). On each occasion Moses numbered the male Israelites from twenty years old and upwards, "all that were able to go forth to war"—the fighting strength of the congregation being thereby ascertained. We mention this because it would thus appear that David had clear precedent to warrant his procedure. It is true that after Israel settled in Canaan God never again issued a command for His people to be numbered, and while we are not informed that He gave any such order to our hero at this time, yet we *are* told that the Lord "moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah" (v. 1).

We are not left in any doubt that on this occasion David committed a grave fault, yet wherein lay the *evil* of it is not so certain. Varied indeed have been the conjectures formed and the explanations advanced by different writers thereon. Some have drawn the inference from 1 Chronicles 27:23, 24 that David's sin lay in numbering those who were *under* twenty years old (yet sufficiently developed as to be able to bear arms), and that because his act was thus illegal it was not formally entered in the state records. Others conclude from the same passage that he erred in numbering the people at all, that his act sprang from *unbelief* in the promises of God to the patriarchs that their seed should be as innumerable as the sand of the seashore. Others think that he was guilty of *presumption,* acting without any instruction from God. Others think that the fault lay in his failure to require the half shekel, which was to be paid for the service of the sanctuary when the people were numbered, as "a ransom for their souls" (Exodus 30:12).

Now we are not one of those who take pleasure in pitting the interpretations of one expositor against another, rather do we prefer to combine them when this seems permissible and helpful. In the absence of any authoritative word from God as to the precise nature of David's sin in the case before us, we shall, as we proceed to comment upon it, bear in mind these several views, which may well supplement each other. One other explanation has been advanced, which impresses us personally most strongly of all, namely, that it was *pride of heart* which moved Israel's king to here commit such folly. If he was intoxicated with the successes which Heaven had granted to his arms, and was more occupied with them than their Giver, then that would readily account for his disastrous lapse, for "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Some light may be cast on this mysterious episode by taking into account the relative period in David's history at which it occurred. As the previous chapters have informed us, the sword of David and of Israel had been successful over all their enemies. The Philistines had been subdued, Moab had brought gifts, garrisons had been stationed in Damascus, and the Syrians as well as the Edomites had become their servants. To such a remarkable extent had his arms been permitted to triumph, that we are told, "And the fame of David went out into all lands; and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations" (1 Chronicles 14:17). Naught of the good of which Jehovah had spoken to him had failed. But David was human, a man of like passions with us. Man—no matter who he be—if left to himself is quite incapable of holding a blessing, as was clearly demonstrated in Eden at the beginning. The fuller be our cup of joy, the steadier the hand required to hold it.

The history of David's sin is stated thus, "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah" (2 Samuel 24:1), or as 1 Chronicles 21:1 gives it, "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." Those two statements are not, as some have foolishly supposed, contradictory, but are complementary. Though God is not the Author of sin, and can never be charged with evil, yet as the Governor of the universe He is the Controller and Director of it, so that when it serves His righteous purpose even Satan and his hosts are requisitioned by Him: 1 Kings 22:20-22; Ezekiel 14:9, etc. In this instance it is clear at least that God permitted Satan to tempt David, and David being left to himself yielded to the temptation and sinned. Moreover, the fact that David yielded so readily, and so obstinately rejected the counsel of his servants, seems to indicate that he had not been walking with holy watchfulness before God.

It was a remarkable juncture in the history of David. The ancient foes of Israel, after centuries of conflict, had at last succumbed. Even the powerful sons of Goliath had been so crushed by his vanquisher that they no longer made any effort to antagonize. But not only had the surrounding nations been subdued, they were despoiled, and the huge quantities of gold which had been taken from them was dedicated unto the Lord (see 1 Chronicles 18:11; 20:4). "Triumphs had been gained and a rest attained such as Israel had never known before. The sword was about to be sheathed and the reign of Solomon (the typical Prince of Peace) was at hand. The Ark of God, ceasing from its lengthy wanderings, was no longer to dwell in curtains. The Temple was about to be built. Israel was to be gathered there in solemn and associated worship, and God's house was to be filled with His glory. It was a bright and blessed era, but it was only a typical and shadowy one" (B. W. Newton).

Ah, that was the very point: this wonderful juncture in Israel's history was but "a typical and a shadowy" one, and therefore it made all the difference whether it were viewed by the eye of faith or with the eye of sense. To those who contemplated it with the eye of faith, and saw therein a blessed foreshadowment of a yet distant future, it afforded holy encouragement, strengthening them in patient endurance and hope. But to those who looked upon this successful period with the eye of sense, it could prove only a snare. As another has pointed out, "When the Feelings of nature predominate (and they always do predominate when faith is not in vigorous exercise), triumph or success even when recognized as a gift of God's undeserved mercy, will, nevertheless, be so used as to exalt ourselves. As weeds flourish under sunshine and flowers, so when there is not watchfulness, the tendencies of our nature germinate under mercies.

This, it seems to us, is the chief practical lesson inculcated by our present passage. It points a most solemn warning against *the dangers of success.* If adversity carries with it a measure of menace to the spiritual life, the perils of prosperity are far greater. If through our unwatchfulness the former leads to discontent and murmuring, the latter will, unless we be doubly on our guard, issue in self-complacency and self-sufficiency. It is when we are brought low, by losses and trials, that we are the most cast upon God; as it is when success crowns our efforts and our barns are well filled, that we are most apt to walk independently of Him. Little wonder, then, that the Lord entrusts few of His people with much of this world's goods. The same applies to spiritual blessings: if earnests of a coming rest are granted, they will be regarded as realities instead of foreshadowings, and then we shall rest before our time to rest be come—instead of continuing to press forward.

It seems likely that David had fallen into this snare, encouraging imaginations which were completely at variance with the actual facts of both his own and Israel's actual condition: that is, utterly inconsistent with the truth that their national prosperity was but typical and transitory. In the first place, to number the people was but the natural act of one who had persuaded himself that Israel had entered upon a period of stable and permanent rest. In the second place, to number the people was an act indicative of ownership, and it was obviously wrong for David to regard Israel as though they were *his* people, whom it was legitimate to number as *his* inheritance and strength. Instead, he should have viewed them as the congregation and inheritance of Jehovah, to be numbered only when He gave the command. Finally, he ought to have looked upon them as Jehovah's *redeemed* inheritance, and therefore never to be numbered without a typical ransom for the soul of each being rendered to God.

The divine statute was very definite on this point: "When you take the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man *a ransom for his soul* unto the Lord, when you number them . . . And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, that it may he a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord to make an atonement for your souls" (

Exodus 30:12, 16). "The very mention of the 'atonement money' was sufficient to banish every feeling of pride or independency both from him who numbered and from those who were numbered among the congregation of Jehovah: for 'according to Jehovah's fear so is His wrath': that is, the nearer we draw to Jehovah to fear and to serve Him, the more do we supply occasions for His displeasure and wrath, for the higher and holier the service, the more does our natural sinful incompetency appear.

"The very fact of being His congregation, appointed to draw near to Him and serve Him in His holiness, must entail chastisement and plague on all numbered as His people, unless atonement interposed and provided a ransom for the soul. If David unbidden, and in unholy elation of heart presumed to number Israel as if there had been in them a strength that needed not to fear any chastisement, or dread any abasement, it is no wonder that the atonement money would have been withheld. It seems to have been utterly forgotten. No mention is made thereof. He seems not to have recollected the words 'that there be no *plague* among them when you number them.' Israel was numbered as if they could forego that protection of grace which the atonement money signified, and stand firm on the basis of that strength which in their recent triumphs had been so marvelously exhibited" (B. W. Newton).

But we must now look at this strange and solemn incident from another angle, from the side presented to us in 1 Chronicles 21:1, where we are permitted a glimpse behind the veil: "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." Expositors have pointed out that these words "stood up" (carefully compare Zechariah 3:1) have a forensic force, being an expression which alludes to the posture of those who accuse or charge another person with a crime in a court of law. In Revelation 12:10 Satan is expressly designated "the accuser of our brethren," which office we behold him discharging in Job 1:9-12. All these passages are admittedly deeply mysterious, yet in the light of them it appears that the spiritual condition of Israel at this time gave the adversary an advantage, and that he promptly used the same by representing their condition to the Lord as a reason why they should be *punished.* This seems to be clearly borne out by the terms of 2 Samuel 24:1.

"And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He moved David *against them* to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." "The Israelites had offended God by their ungrateful and repeated rebellions against David, by not duly profiting under the means employed for the revival of religion; and probably by that pride, luxury and ungodliness, which generally springs from great prosperity. They had before, in a famine which lasted three years, experienced the effects of the divine displeasure, and it is likely they had not been amended by the correction: but some think that the sin immediately intended was the setting up of Absalom for king, and rebelling against David. This, David had cordially forgiven; but it was a national defection from God, which He did not judge it proper to leave unpunished. So that 'again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel,' and He permitted Satan to tempt and prevail against David, that in *chastising* him, He might *punish* them" (Thomas Scott).

The Nation at large was not made up of those who walked by faith and trod the path of the divine statutes. Very far from it, as is clearly intimated by David's prayer, "Help Lord, for the godly man ceases; for the faithful fail from among the children of men" (Psalm 12:1). From 2 Samuel 23:6 it is also plain that the "sons of Belial" were strong and numerous in the midst of Israel, so that we need not be surprised that the signal triumphs which had been given them should have awakened in the hearts of the majority a proud and self-sufficient arrogance, which was bound to affect their fellows, and which thus called forth the sore displeasure of God. Nothing gives Satan so easy an approach to and such an advantage over us as when we are swelled by a sense of our self-importance. Few things are more detestable unto God than a heart that is inflated by egotism: note how the seven things which He hates is headed by "A proud look" (Proverbs 6:16-19). How urgently we need to heed the exhortation of Christ and take His yoke upon us and learn of Him who is "meek and lowly in "

It is indeed solemn to see one so near the end of his earthly pilgrimage, one who had (in the main) for many years walked so closely with God, now giving place to the devil and being overcome by him. What proof is this that neither age nor experience is (in itself) any safeguard against his attacks! As long as the believer is in this world the great enemy of our souls has access to us, is often permitted to work upon our corruptions, and under certain restrictions to tempt us. And therefore it is we are called upon to "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:6-8). We have purposely quoted the whole of that passage because it is imperative that we heed the order of its several precepts: we cannot obey those in verse 8 unless and until we respond to those in verses 6 and 7.

There never comes a time, then, when the saint on earth can dispense with any part of the armor which God has provided, nor when he may relax his vigilance against his untiring and remorseless adversary. If the time of youth be dangerous because of hot passions, the season of old age is imperiled by the surgings of pride: therefore must we watch and pray always lest we enter into temptation. And, the higher be the rank of the saint, the more important and influential be the office he holds, then the greater is his need to be doubly on his guard. It has ever been Satan's way to level his principal attacks against those who are eminent for usefulness, knowing full well that if he can encompass *their* downfall, many others will be involved either in his sin or in his sufferings. We must leave for our next other important lessons taught by this incident.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-NINE

His Final Folly

(Continued)

2 Samuel 24

The Word of God supplies us with two separate accounts of David's sin in numbering the people: one in 2 Samuel 24 and the other in 1 Chronicles 21, and both of them need to be carefully pondered by us if we are to have the advantage of all the light the Lord has given us on this mysterious incident, infidels have appealed to these two chapters in an endeavor to show that the Scriptures are unreliable, but their efforts to do so are utterly vain: what they, in their blindness, suppose to be discrepancies are in reality supplementary details, which enable us to obtain a more comprehensive view of the various factors entering into this incident. Thus once more God takes the wise in their own craftiness and makes the wrath of man to praise Him, for the attempt of His enemies to pit 1 Chronicles against 2 Samuel 24 has served to call the attention of many of His people to a companion passage which otherwise they had probably overlooked.

The first help which 1 Chronicles 21 affords us is to indicate the moral connection between David's folly and that which *preceded* it. 1 Chronicles 21 opens with the word "And," which bids us look at the immediate context—one which is quite different from that of 2 Samuel 24. 1 Chronicles 20 closes with "These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants" (v. 8). That closes a record of notable exploits and victories which David and his mighty men had obtained over their foes. And then we read, And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:1). Is not the connection obvious? Flushed with his successes the heart of David was lifted up, and thus the door was opened for Satan successfully to tempt him. Let us seek constantly to bear in mind that, the only place where we are safe from a fall is to lie in the dust before God.

Some have wondered wherein lay David's sin in taking this military census. But is it not plain that, as king over all Israel and victorious over all his enemies, he wished to know the full numerical strength of the Nation? —losing sight of the fact that his strength lay wholly in that One who had multiplied his power and given him such success. Would it not also serve to strike terror into the hearts of the surrounding nations for there to be publicly proclaimed the vast number of men capable of taking up arms that David had under him? But if this was one of the motives which actuated the king, it was equally unnecessary and unworthy of him, for God is well able to cause His fear to fall upon those who oppose us without any fleshly efforts of ours to that end—efforts which would deprive Him of the glory were He to grant them success. What honor does *the* Lord get as the Protector of any nation while they boast of and rely on the vastness of their armaments?

But David was far from being alone in this folly, for as 2 Samuel 24:1 tells us, "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled *against Israel,* and He moved David against them." The Lord had a controversy with the Nation. He had dealt governmentally with David and his house (chaps. 12-21), as He had likewise dealt with Saul and his house (21), and now His grievance is more immediately with Israel, whom He chastised through the act of their king—the "again" looks back to 1 Chronicles 21:1. No one particular sin of Israel's is mentioned, but from David's Psalms we have little difficulty in ascertaining the general state of his subjects. Ever prone to remove their eyes from Jehovah, there is little room for doubt that the temporal successes which God had granted them became an occasion to them of self-congratulation, and like the children of this world, in the unbelief of self-confidence, they were occupied with their own resources.

The second help which 1 Chronicles 21 affords us is the information which it supplies that *Satan* was instrumental in mowing David to commit this great folly. Not that this in any wise excused David or modified his guilt, but because it casts light on the governmental ways of God. "In the righteous government of God rulers and their subjects have a reciprocal influence on one another. Like the members in the human body, they are interested in each other's conduct and welfare; and cannot sin or suffer without mutually affecting each other. When the wickedness of nations provokes God, He leaves princes to adopt pernicious measures, or to commit atrocious crimes, which bring calamities on the people: and when the ruler commits iniquity, he is punished by the diminution of his power, and by witnessing the distresses of his subjects. Instead therefore of mutual recriminations under public calamities, however occasioned, all parties should be remanded to repent of their own sins, and to practice their own duties. Princes should hence be instructed, even for their own sakes, to repress wickedness and to promote righteousness in their dominions, as well as to set a good example: and the people, for the public benefit, should concur in beneficial measures, and pray continually for their rulers" (Thomas Scott).

The solemn principles which are illustrated in the above quotation are of wide ramification and go far to explain many a painful incident which often sorely puzzles the righteous. For example, only the Day to come will reveal how many ministers were permitted by God to fall into public disgrace because He had a controversy with *the churches* over which they were set as pastors. God left David to himself to be tempted by Satan because He was displeased with his subjects and determined to chastise them. In like manner, He has left more than one minister of the Gospel to himself, to be tried and tripped up by the devil, because He had a grievance against the people he served, so that in the fall of their leader the pride of the people was humiliated. Yet, be it said emphatically, this is in nowise a case of making the *innocent* suffer because of the guilty: the pride of David's own heart left him an easy prey to the enemy.

"For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number you the people, that I may know the number of the people. And Joab said unto the king, Now the Lord your God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?" (2 Samuel 24:2, 3). From the human side of things, it seems strange that Joab should have been the one to demur against David's act of vain glory. As we have seen in earlier chapters, Joab was a man of blood and eminently one of the children of this world, as the whole of his career makes plain; yet was he quick to see, on this occasion, that the step David proposed to take was one fraught with grave danger, and therefore did he earnestly remonstrate with the king.

It is indeed striking to find that this infatuation of David was met by an objection from the commander of his army. Not that it was the ungodliness of David's project which filled Joab with horror: rather that he realized the impolity of it. As we pointed out in the preceding chapter, after Israel entered into Canaan God never gave a command for the numbering of His people, and there was no occasion now for a military census to be taken. Joab was conscious of that and expostulated with his master, being wiser in his generation. This serves to illustrate a solemn principle: many a man of the world exercises more common sense than does a saint who is out of communion with God and under the power of Satan. This fact is written large across the pages of Holy Writ and a number of examples will no doubt come to mind if the reader meditates thereon.

The force of Joab's objection to David's plan was, why take delight in such a thing as ascertaining the precise numerical strength of your army, and thereby run the danger of bringing down divine judgment upon us? Thus this child of the world perceived what David did not. Most solemn is the lesson which is here pointed for the Christian. It is in *God's* light that we "see light" (Psalm 36:9), and when we turn away from Him we are left in spiritual darkness. And as the Lord Jesus exclaimed, "If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23). A believer who is out of fellowship with the Lord will make the most stupid blunders and engage in crass folly such as a shrewd unbeliever would disdain. This is part of the price which he has to pay for wandering from the narrow path.

But we must now look at Joab's opposition to David's plan from the *divine* side. Had David been walking with holy watchfulness before the Lord he had not yielded so readily to Satan's temptation, still less had he been prepared to act contrary to the express requirements of Exodus 30:12-16. Nevertheless, God did not now utterly forsake David and give him up fully to his heart's lusts. Instead, He placed an obstacle in his path, in the form of Joab's (probably, most unexpected) opposition, which rebuked his folly, and rendered his sin still more inexcusable. Behold here, then, the wondrous mingling of the workings of divine sovereignty and the enforcing of human responsibility. God decreed that Pilate should pass the death sentence upon Christ, yet He gave him a most emphatic deterrent through his wife (Matthew 27:19). In like manner, it was God's purpose to chastise Israel through the folly of their king, yet so far from approving of David's act He rebuked him through Joab.

Yes, remarkable indeed are the varied factors entering into this equation, the different actors in this strange drama. If on the one hand the Lord suffered Satan to tempt His servant, on the other hand He caused Joab to deter him. It was David's refusal to listen to Joab—backed up by his officers (v. 4)— which rendered his sin the greater. And is not the practical lesson plain for us! When we are meditating folly and a man of the world counsels us against it, it is high time for us to "consider our ways." When the merciful providence of God places a hindrance in our path, even though it be in the form of a rebuke from an unbeliever, we should pause in our madness, for we are in imminent danger to ourselves and probably to others as well.

"Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host" (v. 4). Joab perceived that David's purpose sprang from carnal ambition and that it was against the public interest, and accordingly he remonstrated with him. When that failed he summoned to his aid the additional pleas of the captains of the army. But all in vain. David's mind was fully made up, and in self-will he committed this grievous sin. "When the mind, instead of taking a comprehensive view of all the circumstances before it, persists in viewing them partially in some favorite aspect, it is astonishing how blind it may become to things obvious as the day to every one who has no such bias to warp his judgment. David's soul, while absorbed in contemplating the might and triumphs of Israel, had no desire to consider other circumstances, the consideration of which would leave on the heart a sense of weakness—not of strength" (B. W. Newton).

How merciful is God to raise up those who oppose us when we anticipate doing that which is displeasing to him! Yet how often, in the pride of our hearts and the stubbornness of our wills, do we resent such opposition. Everything that enters our lives contains a message from God if only we will pause and listen to it, and many a thorny path should we have escaped if only we had heeded that hedge which divine providence placed in our way. That hedge may take the form of a friendly word of advice from those around us, and though we are far from suggesting that we should always follow out the same, yet it is for our good that we prayerfully weigh it before God. If we do not, and in our self-will force our way through that hedge, then we must not be surprised if we get badly torn in the process. How much better had it been both for David and his subjects to have responded to the council of Joab and his officers.

"And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel" (v. 4). On other occasions Joab had lent himself readily to the furthering of the king's evil designs (2 Samuel 11:16; 14:1, 2), but at this time he carried out his orders with great reluctance. How strongly he was opposed to David's policy appears from "the king's word was abominable to Joab" (1 Chronicles 21:6). The service on which Joab now embarked was most distasteful to him, nevertheless he carried it out, for it was "of the Lord" (as verse 1 shows) that he should do so. Yet that did not excuse him; the less so when he clearly perceived the wrongfulness of it. What God has decreed must come to pass, nevertheless the entire guilt of every wicked deed rests upon him who performs it. It is never right to do wrong, and Joab certainly ought to have declined having any part in such an evil course.

Joab commenced his distasteful task in the remotest sections of Palestine, and took his time about it, perhaps hoping that long before it was completed the king would repent him of his folly. The compilers of the census first numbered the inhabitants of the country to the east of Jordan, from thence proceeding to the northern part of Canaan, and finishing up in the region to the west of Jordan (verses 5-7). They compiled a complete register of all the men capable of taking up arms, excepting only the Levites and the Benjamites: the former because their sacred vocation exempted them from military service: the latter, probably because they could not yet be relied upon to render wholehearted devotion to David (compare 2:28; 3:1, etc.). Nearly ten months were spent on this task: how patient the Lord is and how great His mercy in giving us "space for repentance—alas, how great is our madness and sin in refusing to repent.

"So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men" (2 Samuel 24:8, 9). The careful student will note that the figures given here are different from those found in 1 Chronicles 21:5—a variation which sceptics are quick to seize upon as one of the "errors the Bible is full of"; but most deplorable is it to find that some of the orthodox commentators solve "the difficulty" by suggesting that the records were "inaccurate." The fact is that the two classifications are quite different, the one supplementing the other. It is to be carefully observed that 2 Samuel 24 qualifies the first total by "there were in Israel 800,000 *valiant* men," whereas 1 Chronicles only says 1,100,000 "men that drew sword" in Israel, so that an additional number to the "valiant men" was there included! Again, in Chronicles the men of Judah "were 470,000 that drew sword," whereas in 2 Samuel 24 the "men of Judah were 500,000—evidently 30,000 drew not the sword.

It is striking to note that the Hebrews had not multiplied nearly so much during their five hundred years' residence in Canaan as they did in their briefer sojourn in Egypt; nevertheless, that such a vast multitude were sustained in such a narrow territory is clear evidence of the remarkable fertility of the country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Whether the total figures which Joab presented to his royal master reached his expectations, or whether they mortified his pride, we are not told; but probably his subjects were not so numerous as he had expected. It usually follows that when we set our hearts upon the attaining of some earthly object, the actual realization of our quest proves to be but a chimera. But such disappointments ought only to serve in weaning our affections from things below, to fix them on things above which alone can satisfy the soul. Alas, how slow we are to learn the lesson.

CHAPTER NINETY

His Wise Decision

"When you take the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when you number them; that there be no *plague* among them, when you number them" (Exodus 30:12). In the absence of any commission From God to do so, David not only did wrong in yielding to the pride of his heart by insisting that a military census should be taken of Israel, but he also erred grievously in the way it was carried out. This it is which explains to us why divine judgment followed upon his being so remiss, and why that plague fell on all the nation, for the law laid the responsibility on every individual alike. The amount of the required "ransom" was so small (a shilling—a quarter) that it lay within the capacity of the poorest. "The rich were not allowed to give more, thus teaching us that all mankind are, in this matter, equal. All had sinned and come short of the glory of God; therefore all needed, equally needed a ransom.

"This numbering was a solemn ceremonial that could not be done quickly, as we see by the first chapter in the book called Numbers. Therefore there was time for the officers to have looked up in the Law what was required of them. For a man to present himself to God without a ransom was a solemn and dangerous thing to do. The fact that the result, which they were warned by this law to avoid, came upon them, shows us that we are expected to read the Word, and that God will not contradict His own Word. As Paul warns us, 'If we believe not, yet He abides faithful; He cannot deny Himself': (2 Timothy 2:13)" (C. H. Bright). How loudly ought this incident to speak unto us in this flesh-pleasing and God-defying age: to ignore the requirements of the divine law is to court certain disaster—true alike for the individual and for the nation.

"So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king" (2 Samuel 24:8,9). For nine long months the pride of David's heart deceived him, as alas, lust had before dimmed his eyes the same length of time (2 Samuel 11, 12). During this season his conscience slumbered, and there was no exercise of it before God over his action—such is ever the case when we are caught in the toils of Satan. Does it strike us as well-near incredible that one so favored of God and one who had so signally honored Him in the general course of his life, should now have such a deplorable and protracted lapse? Let each of us answer the question out of his checked experience. We doubt not that the majority of our Christian readers will hang their heads with shame, as they are conscious of similar backslidings in their own history; and if perhaps a minority have been preserved from such falls, well may they marvel at the distinguishing mercy which has been given them.

"And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people" (v. 10). This indicated that he was a regenerate soul, for it is ever one of the marks of a true believer to repent of his misdeeds, for though on the one hand the flesh lusts against the spirit, on the other the spirit (the nature received at the new birth) is contrary to the flesh, and delights not in its works. For almost a year David appears to have been indifferent to his sin, but now he is conscious of his wickedness, without, so far as we are informed, any human instrument convicting him of the evil which he had done. It is good to see that though he had remained so long in the path of self-will, yet his heart was not obdurate: though his conscience had indeed slumbered, yet it was not dead. It is cause for real thanksgiving when we

We are not here told what it was that aroused David from his spiritual stupor and caused his heart to smite him: simply the bare fact is stated. Here again is where we receive help by comparing the supplementary account furnished by 1 Chronicles 21, for there we are told "And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly" (verses 7, 8). In 2 Samuel 24 David's confession of his sin (v. 10) *followed* his contrition, so that a careful comparison of the two passages enables us to ascertain that the chiding from his heart was the effect of the Lord's being displeased at what he had done. This is one of many illustrations which serves to bring out the characteristic differences of the two books: the one is mainly exoteric, the other largely esoteric: that is to say, 1 and 2 Samuel narrates the historical facts, whereas 1 and 2 Chronicles generally reveals the hidden springs from which the actions proceed.

"And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He smote Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:7). Here we learn how *God* regarded the policy David had pursued: He was offended, for His Law had been completely disregarded. "And He smote Israel": observe particularly that this comes before David's confession of his sin (v. 8), and before God "sent pestilence upon Israel" (v. 14). Before God caused the plague to fall upon the Nation, He first smote David's heart! He did not turn His back upon David! As another has pointed out, "The whole system of Israel, by this national transgression, was now defiled and tainted, and ripe for severity or judgment: this pride was the giving up of God, and God would have been dealing righteously had He at once laid Israel aside, as He did Adam, in such a case." Instead, He acted here in sovereign grace.

No, the Lord was far from utterly forsaking David. Put together the two statements, and in this order, "And God was displeased with this thing; therefore He smote Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:7), "And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people" (2 Samuel 24:10). Do not these two statements stand related as cause to effect, the one revealing the Lord's working, the other showing the result produced in his servant. God now smote David's heart, making him to feel His sore displeasure. David, as a child of God, might be tempted, over-taken in a fault, and thus brought to shame and grief; but could he be left impenitent? No; no more than Peter was (Luke 22:32). The reprobate are given up to hardness of heart; but not so the righteous; the Lord would not suffer David to remain indifferent to his sin, but graciously wrought conviction and contrition within him. And so far from David's conscience being as one which had been "seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2), it was sensitive and quick to respond to the influences of God's Spirit.

"And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people." What a warning is this for us. How it should speak to *our* hearts! What a solemn and beneficial lesson does it point: the very thing which David imagined would bring him pleasure, caused him pain! This is ever the case: to listen unto Satan's temptations is to court certain trouble, to be attracted by the gilt on the bait he dangles before us, will be to our inevitable undoing. It was so with Eve, with Dinah (Genesis 34:1, 2), with Achan. Indulging the pride of his heart, David fondly supposed that to secure an accurate knowledge of the full military strength of his kingdom would prove gratifying; instead, he now grieves over his folly. What insanity it is for us to invest folly with the garb of satisfaction: not only will a sense of sin dampen the Christian's carnal joy, but "at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder" (Proverbs 23:32).

"And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech You, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly" (v. 10). David had been convicted by the Spirit, and a heavy sense of guilt oppressed him—ever an intolerable burden to a renewed soul. Sensible of his wrongdoing, he earnestly sought forgiveness of the Lord. Where divine grace possesses the heart, the conscience of a saint, upon reflection, will reprove him for his transgressions. It is at this point there appears the great difference between the regenerate and the empty professor or religious hypocrite. The latter may afterwards have a realization of his madness and suffer keen remorse therefrom, but he will not get down in the dust before God and unsparingly condemn himself; instead, he invariably excuses himself by blaming his circumstances, his associates, or those lusts which are now his master. This is one of the outstanding characteristics of depraved human nature: Adam took not upon himself the blame for his fall, but sought to throw the onus of it upon his

But it is far otherwise with those who have been made the subjects of a miracle of grace. One who is born again has been given an honest heart, and one of the plainest evidences of this is that its possessor is honest with himself, with his fellows, and above all, with God. An honest soul is sincere, open, candid, abhorring deception and lies. Therefore in unmistakable contrast from the hypocrite the genuine believer will, upon realizing his transgressions, humble himself before the Lord, and with sincere contrition and fervent prayer seek His forgiveness, sincerely purposing by His grace to return no more to his folly. Wondrous indeed is the ministry which grace performs, making our very pride to be an occasion of increasing our humility! Thus it was with David. The same appears again in the case of Hezekiah: "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him: for his heart was lifted up: therefore was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah *humbled* himself for the *pride* of his heart" (2 Chronicles 32:25, 26).

"And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech You, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly." It is by the depth of his conviction, the sincerity of his repentance, and the heartiness of his confession, that the child of God is identified. So far from making any attempt to extenuate himself, so far from throwing the blame upon Satan (who had tempted him), David unsparingly condemned *himself.* To others it might seem a small thing that he had done. But David felt he had "sinned greatly." Ah, he now saw his deed in the light of God's holiness. In true confession of sin we do not spare ourselves or minimize our misdemeanors, but frankly and feelingly acknowledge the enormity of them. "I have done very foolishly," David owned, for what he had done was in the pride of his heart, and it was veritable madness for him to be vain of his subjects when they were *God's* people, as it is insane for the Christians to be proud of the gifts and graces which the Spirit has bestowed upon him.

"For (Hebrews "And") when David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer" (v. 11). This seems to indicate that David's confession had been made during the hours of darkness. God "gives His beloved sleep" (Psalm 127:2), and likewise He withholds it when it serves His purpose. And it is always for our *good* (Romans 8:28) that He does so, whether we perceive it or no. Sometimes He "gives songs in the night" (Job 35:10); we read too of "visions of the night" (Job 4:2, 13); but at other times God removes sleep from our eyes and speaks to us about our sins. Then it is we can say with Asaph, "My sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted" (Psalm 77:2), and then it is that we have a taste of David's experience: "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears" (Psalm 6:6). But whatever be God's object in withholding sleep, it is blessed when we can say, "By night on my bed I *sought Him* whom my soul loves" (Song of Solomon 3:1).

"And when David was up in the morning, the word of the Lord came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and say unto David, Thus says the Lord, I offer you three things; choose you one of them, that I may do it unto you" (verses 11, 12). The solemn exercises of David's heart during the night season were to prepare him for God's message of judgment. He had been made to taste something of the bitterness of his folly while others were slumbering, but now he is to know definitely how sorely displeased God was. When the Lord is about to send us a special message, be it one of cheer or of reproof. He first fits the heart to receive it. When the morning broke, the Lord commissioned Gad to deliver His ultimatum to the king. Gad was a prophet, and he is here designated "David's seer" because he was one who, on certain occasions, was accustomed to counsel him in the things of God (cf. 1 Samuel 23:5). At this time he had to deliver a far-from-pleasant message—such often falls to the lot of God's servants.

His heavenly Father must correct David, yet He graciously gave him leave to make choice whether it should be by famine, war, or pestilence: whether it should be a long-protracted judgment or a brief yet terribly severe one. Matthew Henry suggested that the Lord had a fourfold design in this. First, to humble David the more for his sin, which he would see to be exceeding sinful, when he came to consider that each of the judgments were exceeding dreadful. Second, to upbraid him for the proud conceit he had entertained of his own sovereignty over Israel: he had become so great a monarch that he might now do whatever he would: very well, says God, choose which of these three things you prefer. Third, to grant him some encouragement under the chastisement: so far from the Lord having utterly disfellowshiped him, He let him decide what He should do. Fourth, that he might more patiently endure the rod seeing it was one of his own selection.

"So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto you in your land? or will you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? or that there be three days' pestilence in your land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to Him that sent me" (v. 13). Here is the third thing connected with this incident which is apt to greatly puzzle the casual reader. First, that such an apparently trifling act on David's part should have so sorely displeased the Lord. Second, that He suffered Satan to tempt David, and then was angry with him for doing as the tempter suggested. These we have already considered. And now, after David had been convicted of his sin, sincerely repented of the same, had confessed it, and sought the Lord's forgiveness, that judgment should fall so heavily upon him. It is really surprising that so many of the commentators when dealing with this "difficulty" fail to bear in mind the opening sentence of the chapter—the key to all that follows: "And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against *Israel.*"

God had a controversy with the Nation, and this it is which accounts for the character of His governmental dealings with them. His judgment could not be averted, and therefore He punished their pride and rebellion by leaving them to suffer the consequences of their king's following out the natural impulse of his heart. But there are several other aspects of the case which must be borne in mind. David's sin had not been a private but a *public* one, and though God forgave him as to his personal concern, yet he had to be publicly humiliated. Again, while God remits the penal and eternal consequences of sin unto a contrite saint, yet even penitents are chastised and often made to smart severely in this world for their folly. Though God be long-suffering, He will by no means clear the guilty. True, His gifts and calling are without repentance (Romans 11:29), and unto His own His compassions fail not (Lam. 3:22); yet, the righteousness of His government must be vindicated.

What has last been pointed out holds good in all dispensations, for God's "ways" change not. Correction is ever a characteristic of the Covenant, for whom the Lord loves He chastens" (Hebrews 12:6). Had David walked in his integrity and in humility before God, he would have been spared severe discipline, but now he must bear the rod. "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes; nevertheless My loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail" (Psalm 89:32, 33): that clearly states the principle. "And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man" (v. 14). Here was his wise decision, the meaning and blessedness of which we must leave for consideration in our next chapter.

CHAPTER NINETY-ONE

His Wise Decision

(Continued)

2 Samuel 24

It will be remembered that in the last two chapters upon the life of David we chose for their title "His Final Folly," but here we are to be occupied with his wise decision. What a strange mingling there is in the life of the believer of these two things—clearly exemplified in the recorded history of both Old and New Testament saints. This it is which often makes the experiences of a Christian to be so perplexing to him; yet the explanation thereof is not difficult to determine. There are two opposing principles operating within him: the "flesh" and the "spirit,' and if one be essentially evil, it is also the cause of all his folly; while if the other be intrinsically holy, it is the spring of all true wisdom. Hence it is that in the Scriptures (outstandingly so throughout the book of Proverbs) sin and folly are synonymous terms, while holiness and wisdom are used interchangeably.

It is only by an unsparing and ceaseless judging of ourselves and by the maintenance of close and constant fellowship with God, that indwelling sin can be suppressed and ourselves preserved from deeds of madness. When communion with the Holy One is broken, we have forsaken the Fountain of wisdom, and then we are left to follow a course from which even the "common sense" of the worldling frequently deters him. We have seen this most solemnly illustrated in the case of David. First, he had allowed his heart to be lifted up over the strengthening and extension of his kingdom and by the great successes which had attended his arms. This led to the folly of his causing a needless military census to be taken of his subjects, without any divine authorization. Worse still, he persisted in this mad course against the express remonstrance of his officers. And worst of all, he failed to meet the requirements of Exodus 30:12 and provide the necessary ransom.

Painful as it is to dwell upon the failures of so eminent a servant of God, yet the same will prove beneficial to us if we duly take to heart such a solemn warning, and learn therefrom to walk more softly before God. The same evil tendencies lie within both the writer and the reader, and it is only as we are truly humbled by such a realization and are moved to deeper self-distrust and self-loathing, and only as we are led to more earnestly and definitely seek God's subduing and preserving grace, that we shall ourselves be kept from falling into similar evils. These Old Testament histories are not merely given for information, but for our edification, and growth is possible only by feeding on God's Word. Feeding on the Word means that we appropriate and masticate it; taking it unto ourselves and assimilating the same.

But alas, David fell; and so have we. Who among us dares to say that he has never followed a course of folly since he became a Christian? that he has never been guilty of God-dishonoring acts of madness? But as we are now to see, David recovered his sanity, and once more acted wisely. It was what lay *between* these two things which we would again call attention to, for it is at this very point that most important and precious practical instruction is furnished us. Surely those Christians who have entered the paths of folly desire to tread once more the ways of wisdom. Does it not behoove us, then, to attend closely unto our present narrative and observe the several steps by which the one path is left and the other path returned unto? How gracious of the Holy Spirit in here revealing to us the way of recovery and the means of restoration.

And what, my reader, do you suppose is the first step which leads us back into communion with God? what the particular exercise which recovers us from the disease of folly? If you have any acquaintance with divine things the answer will promptly be forthcoming, for the history of your own experience will prompt it. "And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people" (2 Samuel 24:10). We have previously commented upon this verse, so our remarks thereon must be brief. Yet once more we would point out what a mercy it is when an erring saint finds his heart reproving him for his madness and weighed down with a sense of guilt, for this is both a mark of regeneration and a sign that the Lord has not abandoned him—given him up to total hardness and blindness. But it is as intimating the first step in David's recovery that we would now particularly consider the verse.

"And David's heart smote him." This is basic and indispensable. There can be no real restoration to communion with a holy God until we unsparingly condemn ourselves for the lapse; that thing which broke the communion must be judged by us. God never forgives, either sinner or saint, where there is no repentance; and one essential ingredient in repentance is *self-judgment.* "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from Heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14). The first thing, then, is the humbling of ourselves, and that is what repentance is; it is the taking of sides with God against ourselves and sorrowing over our wickedness. Thus it is the tears of contrition which cleanse the eyes of our hearts from the grit of folly, and enable them once more to look on things with the vision of prudence.

And what, dear reader, do you suppose is the next step in the return to the ways of wisdom? And again the answer is very simple, where there is a true and honest judging of self, there will also be an humble and contrite owning of the fault to God. Consequently we find in the passage quoted above (2 Chronicles 7:14) that immediately after, If my people "shall humble themselves" is, "and pray and seek My face." This is exactly what we find poor David did; "And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done; and now, I beseech You, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Your servant; for I have done very foolishly" (v. 10). He made honest confession of his transgression, emphasizing the greatness of his folly. And this is what every backslider must do before he can be recovered from his madness and restored to fellowship with the Lord.

It is to be observed that coupled with David's confession of sin to the Lord was his request "take away the iniquity of Your servant." By that petition at least three things were denoted. First, remit the guilt of the same, both from before Your accusing Law and the weight of the same upon my conscience. Second, cleanse the defilement thereof, both from before Your holy sight and in my polluted soul. Third, cancel or annul the governmental consequences of my crime, so that I may not be punished for it. We need to be clear upon these distinctions, for they are something more than mere technicalities. Now where the holy requirements of God have been duly met and He is pleased to bestow a pardon, the first two of these elements are always included; guilt is blotted out and defilement is cleansed. But the third by no means always obtains.

God ever reserves to Himself the sovereign right to mete out the governmental consequences of our sins as best sub-serves His glory and the accomplishment of His eternal purpose. So far as the believer himself is concerned, those consequences are not penal but disciplinary, visited upon him not in wrath but in love. Yet it must not be forgotten that wider interests are involved than our own personal ones. Were God to remit all the consequences of sin every time a believer committed a flagrant offence and then sincerely repented of and confessed-the same, what impression would be received by men in general! Would not the ungodly draw the conclusion that the Lord regarded transgressions as trifles and was indifferent to our conduct? Thus it is that, as the moral Ruler of this world, God often gives solemn tokens of His disapproval of our sins by making us suffer some painful effects of them in this life.

Yet it would be a great mistake for an afflicted saint to draw the inference from what has just been said, that such tokens in his present life of God's displeasure are so many evidences that the sins he has penitently confessed are still unpardoned. A striking case in point occurs in the earlier life of David himself. After he had transgressed so grievously in the matter of Uriah's wife, the prophet was sent to charge him with his crime. Whereupon David acknowledged, "I have sinned against the Lord," and none who have read seriously Psalm 51 can doubt either the sincerity or the depth of his repentance. Accordingly Nathan told him "the Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die." Yet he at once added, Howbeit, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto you shall surely die" (2 Samuel 12:14).

A much commoner example is met with in the case of those who in their unregenerate days lived reckless and profligate lives. Upon their conversion God graciously remits the guilt of their sins, canceling the penal consequences of the same so far as eternity is concerned, as He also cleanses them from all the defilements thereof but it is rare indeed that debauchee is given back again the health and strength which he had squandered in riotous living; rather is he (in the vast majority or cases, at least) left to now reap in his body the wild oats sown in his mad youth. So it was with David in the matter of his awful crime against Uriah; the "sword" of God's displeasure was not sheathed, but was used against him and his household during the remainder of his earthly pilgrimage.

In the instance now before us, the prophet Gad was sent unto David to say unto him, "Thus says the Lord, I offer you three things; choose you one of them, that I may do it unto you. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto you in your land? or will you flee three months before your enemies, while they pursue you? or that there be three days' pestilence in your land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to Him that sent me" (2 Samuel 24:12, 13). It must be borne in mind (as we pointed out more than once in our chapters on the earlier verses of this chapter) that the Lord had a grievance against Israel, and therefore His governmental displeasure could not be averted by David's prayer. Divine judgment must fall upon the Nation which had so grievously provoked the Lord, but the form in which it was to come lay with David to choose, though within the prescribed limits.

"And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord" (v. 14). David was now made to taste the bitterness of his sin, yet it is most blessed to see that he neither hardened his heart nor murmured against God when he heard the terrifying message of the prophet. His beautiful response thereto clearly evidenced the genuineness of his repentance and the sincerity of his confession. This is another point in our narrative which we do well to heed, for alas our hearts frequently deceive us therein. How often have we mourned over our iniquities and acknowledged them unto the Lord, and then have fretted and fumed when made to feel the governmental consequences of the same—thereby manifesting the superficiality of our repentance and the dishonesty of our confession.

As we have said in a previous paragraph, genuine repentance is a taking sides with God against ourselves. It is not only the unsparing condemnation of ourselves and a sorrowing for having displeased the Lord, but it is also a heartfelt acknowledgment that we richly deserve to receive the due reward of our iniquities. It is the recognition and acknowledgment that God will be righteous in making us smart severely under His chastening hand. But it is the sequel which will show how genuine or else how disingenuous is our confession; it is how we carry ourselves under the rod itself, whether meekly or rebelliously—that evidences the reality and depth of our self-judgment. Let us not forget that Pharaoh, king of Egypt, owned "I have sinned against the Lord your God" (

Exodus 10:16), yet as soon as the plagues of Jehovah returned to his land, he again hardened his heart.

His heavenly Father must correct David himself, yet He graciously permitted him to determine whether it should be a long protracted or a brief yet terribly severe one. "Years of famine he and Israel had recently experienced. For three years had that scourge prevailed. What misery would seven years of it inflict on them all. During this period a Sabbatical year would fall, throughout which the land must rest, and the Nation would have to pass through it without the gracious provision of the sixth's years prolific crop. Seven years' famine would have been a heavy infliction indeed, as the history of such a scourge in the days of Joseph had made plain. Eight before his enemies was not an unknown trial to David. Years of harassment at the hands of Saul he had experienced, and Bight before Absalom he had known. Those trials, we may be sure, were nor forgotten, though they were ended; and they must have taught him of what men were capable, if allowed by God to pursue him" (C. E. Stuart).

In the previous chapter we quoted from Matthew Henry, who pointed out that the Lord had a fourfold design in presenting unto David the choice of what particular form His judgment should take, namely:—First, to humble David for his sin, which he would see to be exceedingly sinful, when he discovered what dreadful judgment it entailed. Second, to upbraid him for his pride; he had acted in self-will, deeming himself so great a monarch that he could do as he pleased; now he is bidden to exercise his choice in selecting from these dread alternatives. Third, to grant him some encouragement under the chastisement; so far from the Lord having totally deserted his servant, he is granted the power to decide what He should do. Fourth, that he might more patiently endure the rod, seeing it was one of his own choosing. To these we would add, fifth, to try out his heart and give opportunity for the exercise and exhibition of his *faith.*

"Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man" (v. 14). What proof was this that David had recovered his sanity. The wise decision which he now made clearly demonstrated his recovery from the paths of folly and his return to the ways of prudence. And how this illustrates once more the blessed fact that God ever honors those who honor Him. And let it be clearly grasped by us all, that we *do* honor God when we humble ourselves before Him and penitently confess our sins. And one of the ways in which He honors us in return is to grant us a renewed power of spiritual discernment, by which our hearts are drawn out to Him in warmer love and assurance, and by which we obtain a fuller realization of the greatness of His mercies. How much we miss, dear reader, by refusing to judge ourselves and take our place in the dust before the Throne of Grace!

How wondrous are the ways of Jehovah. He had not only dealt with David's conscience, but He now drew out unto Himself the affections of his heart! He not only brought him to repentance, but He called forth the faith of His beloved servant—the order of which is ever the same. There must be repentance before there can be faith (Mark 1:15; Matthew 21:32) for it is impossible for an hard and impenitent heart to truly trust in the Lord. Thus we may learn that it is impenitency for our sins which lies at the root of our wicked unbelief. But after David *had* repented, the Lord (as we have said above) granted him the opportunity to display his faith. And what a grand exhibition of it he now gave. What acquaintance with and confidence in the divine character do these words breathe, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord"!

Ah, my reader, even when the Lord is sorely chastening us for our faults, He is infinitely more gracious, more faithful, more deserving of our trust than is any creature. "And let me not fall into the hand of man." Poor David had had abundant experience of what man could do. His own brethren had been jealous of and had cruelly slandered him (1 Samuel 17:28). Saul had evilly requited him for his kindness. Ahithophel had basely deceived him and betrayed his trust. His beloved son had arisen up in rebellion against him and almost succeeded in dethroning him. Good reason, then, had he to say, "Let me not fall into the hand of man": unstable, treacherous, cruel man.

CHAPTER NINETY-TWO

His Prevailing Intercession

2 Samuel 24

It is both interesting and instructive to note in how many different characters David is brought before us in 2 Samuel 24. First, as the proud and haughty one: which may be inferred from the opening "And" of the chapter (Following upon his remarkable victories, and the extension of his kingdom), and confirmed in Psalm 30:6, which refers to this very time, and will be considered by us in a later chapter. Second. the tempted one, as 1 Chronicles 21:1 more definitely shows. Third as the foolish one, deciding upon a military census when there was no need or divine commission For it. Fourth, the intractable one, when he stubbornly refused to yield unto the counsel of his officers or listen to their remonstrance (verses 3, 4), determining to have his own way. The logical order in these downward steps is apparent on the surface.

Now on the other side, we behold him, fifth, as the penitent one, mourning over his sins and confessing the same to God (v. 10). Sixth, as the submissive one: not murmuring against the severity of God as he heard the terrible pronouncement of the prophet, but meekly bowing to the divine verdict. Seventh. the prudent one: preferring to fall into the hand of the Lord rather than into the hand of man. Eighth, as the believing and confident one: recognizing and owning the greatness of the divine mercies (v. 14). Ninth, as the chastened one: the judgment of God Falling upon his beloved subjects (v. 15), which he felt more keenly than had the rod descended upon himself and his own house. Tenth, as the intercessor before God: stepping into the breach and making supplication For his afflicted kingdom. Here, too, we may perceive clearly the logical sequence of these things.

It is, however, in this last character, as *the intercessor* before God, that we are now to specially consider David. But we shall miss one of the most striking points in connection therewith, and one of the most instructive and valuable lessons for our own hearts therein, if we fail to observe very particularly the order before us. It is not every believer who has power with God in prayer. Far from it; rather are there, alas, only few who can prevail with the Lord in their supplications on the behalf of others. Nor is the reason for this far to seek: they possess not the requisite qualifications. They do not have those marks which fitted David on this occasion. If we are walking contrary to the divine commandments (1 John 3:22), or there be un-mourned and unconfessed sin in our lives, then the Lord will not hear us (Psalm 66:18).

We sincerely trust the reader does not weary of our so often calling attention to the order of events in a narrative, for often lessons of fundamental importance are thereby inculcated. It is so in the case before us. It is by duly noting *what preceded* David's prevailing intercession, that we learn how we may become successful supplicants on behalf of others. First, there must be a putting right of what in our own lives is displeasing to a holy God: by a genuine contrition for and humble acknowledgment to Him of our offences. Second, there must be entire submission beneath His chastening hand, meekly bowing to His righteous rod. Third, an implicit confidence in His wisdom, faithfulness, and goodness, so that we freely yield ourselves into His hands. Fourth, a real persuasion of the greatness of His mercies, laying hold thereof by faith and pleading the same before Him.

"So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men" (2 Samuel 24:16). First of all, let us note now exactly the punishment answered to the crime! Penitent though he was, yet David must be corrected; and as his offence had been a public one, so is the retribution. But it is indeed striking to see that the rod of God fell in the very place of His servant's transgression. David had doted upon his thousands, and his thousands must be drastically reduced! God now numbered to the sword, those whom David had numbered to his self-complacency—one twentieth (cf. v. 9) being slain. Clearly, then, it was *the pride* of David against which this divine judgment was directed. "Whatever we idolize or grow proud of, God will generally take from us or else convert it into a cross" (Thomas Scott).

Yet it is also to be noted that God's scourge fell immediately upon the people themselves, for it was against *them* Jehovah bad a controversy (v. 1). "A solemn time it must have been. Pestilence was walking in darkness, and destruction was wasting at noonday, The destroying angel was actively at work, and no man was able to withstand him. Throughout the length and breadth of the land death was claiming its victims. Who would next be struck no one could tell. No remedy availed to cure the sick. No intercession, however urgent, succeeded in preserving the life of a beloved one. All joy must have fled: all energy for ordinary pursuits must have been paralyzed. God was working, and in power. Of old He had laid bare His arm, and worked in power on behalf of Israel; now His hand was outstretched, but in this deadly way *against* them. Could any charge Him with injustice? No. They deserved the chastisement, though David's act in numbering them was the proximate cause for this visitation. Helpless, how helpless were they all. Their only hope was in the mercy of God" (C. F. Stuart).

Let us see in this solemn incident a demonstration of how easily God can reduce the haughtiest of sinners; the "day of the Lord" (His acting in judgment) is ever upon those who are proud and lifted up (

Isaiah 2:12). Then how greatly are we indebted daily to His long-sufferance! Stout-hearted rebels, who carry themselves with such effrontery against the Most High, little realize how much they owe to His wondrous patience; but they shall yet discover there are limits even to that. Someone had pertinently pointed out that, "If the power of angels be so terrible—a single one smiting with death seventy thousand Israelites in a single day—what is that of the all-mighty Creator!" Rightly then does He ask "Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with you?" (Ezekiel 22:14).

"So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel From the morning even to the time appointed." This expression "the time appointed" can mean either the close of the third day or, as many think, the season of the evening sacrifice of the first day. The Hebrew may be literally rendered "until the time of appointed assembly," that is, the hour set apart for the meeting together of Israel for the evening worship. The renowned scholar Hengstenberg remarks as follows: "The calamity according to 2 Samuel 24: 16 lasted from morning until the time of meeting, by which we are to understand 'the evening religious assembly'—compare 1 Kings 18:29, 36; 2 Kings 16:15." But altogether apart from the meaning of the Hebrew, there are two considerations which seem to require this rendering. First, because the phrase, "until the time appointed," stands in opposition to "from the *morning.*" Second, from the statement in the next verse, "The Lord repented Him of the evil."

The last-quoted clause appears to us to plainly denote that He did not go to the Full length of the judgment announced. Yet even in that brief period there fell of Israel seventy thousand, in as many hours as Joab had taken months in numbering the people. But by the mercy of God the duration of the awful pestilence was contracted. Judgment is God's "strange work," for He delights in mercy, yet His mercy never ignores the requirements of His holiness nor sets aside the demands of His justice. And most blessedly may we perceive here the meeting-place of these two grand sides of the divine character. It was the sweet savor of the evening sacrifice which stayed the desolating plague! What a wondrous foreshadowing was this—brought out still more plainly in what follows—of that which is set forth without veil or symbol in the New Testament. The Cross of Christ is where the varied attributes of God all shine forth in blended harmony.

"And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented Him of the evil" (v. 16). Let us first remove a misapprehension at this point. Enemies of the Truth have not been slow to seize upon this reference to the Lord's repenting (and similar passages, such as Genesis 6:6; 1 Samuel 15:11, etc.), and have drawn the wicked inference that God is fickle, subject to changes of mind like the creature is. But nothing is more clearly revealed in Holy Writ than the *immutability* of God. "God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: has He said, and shall He not do it?" (Numbers 23:19); "But He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desires, even that He does" (Job 23: 13); "For I am the Lord: I change not" (Malachi 3:6); "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). It is impossible For language to be more explicit, emphatic and unequivocal. If such definite declarations do not mean what they say and are not to be understood at their face value, then it is a waste of time to read the Bible.

Now it is quite obvious to any spiritual mind that the Scriptures cannot contradict themselves, and that there is perfect harmony (whether we can perceive it or no) between those verses which appear to conflict with each other. When we are unable to discern their complete accord then it is the part of wisdom to acknowledge our ignorance and wait upon God for fuller light. And while so doing, those passages which perplex us must be subordinated to others which are plain to us. Thus we may rest assured that those declarations which so positively affirm God's immutability or unchangeableness are to be regarded absolutely without any qualification, whereas those which seem to speak of His changing His mind are to be taken relatively and figuratively. If some deem this a begging of the question, then we ask them. Does not the express declaration of 1 Samuel 15:29 *oblige us* to interpret 1 Samuel 15:11 in a non-natural sense? Certainly the Holy Spirit would not contradict Himself within the scope of two verses in the same chapter!

The Fact of the matter is that God often condescends to employ anthropomorphisms in His Word, that is, He graciously accommodates Himself to our limited capacities and *speaks after the manner of men.* Thus we read of Him being "wearied" (Isaiah 42:24; Malachi 2:17), yet in another place we are told "the Creator faints not, neither is weary" (Isa 40:28). In Deuteronomy 32:27 Jehovah speaks as "fearing the wrath of the enemy," which is manifestly a figure of speech. Again, in Psalm 78:65 we read. "The Lord awaked as one out of sleep" yet we know full well that He never slumbers. In Isaiah 59:16 it is said that He "wondered," yet nothing can take Him by surprise. Jeremiah 7:13 pictures Him as "rising early," to denote His earnestness. And so we might go on. The "repenting" of the Lord in 2 Samuel 24:16 signifies no change of mind but intimates an alteration in His *outward* course—the cessation of His judgment.

"And when the angel stretched out His hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it. the Lord repented Him of the evil." Scripture is many-sided and it is only by carefully comparing one passage with another that we are enabled to obtain the full light up any given incident. Such is the case before us here. Above, we have called attention to the significant and blessed fact that the destructive plague upon Israel was stayed at the hour of the evening sacrifice. Now we would point out another and supplementary angle. Of old the Lord had declared concerning Israel. "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they have trespassed against Me, and that also they have walked contrary unto Me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them . . . If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then *accept of the punishment* of their iniquity: then will I remember My covenant with Jacob. Isaac and Abraham" (Leviticus 26:40-42). This was exactly what David had, in principle, done. He not only confessed his iniquity and humbled his heart (v. 10), but also bowed to God's rod "accepting the punishment" (v. 14). So that it was now in *covenant faithfulness* Jehovah acted in causing the plague to cease!

"And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented Him of the evil." In the supplementary account supplied us in 1 Chronicles 21 we are told, "And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the Heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem" (v. 16). That "drawn sword" was the emblem of divine justice. How it reminds us of those solemn words of Jehovah, "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the Man that is My Fellow, says the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd" (Zech, 13:7). And how striking the contrast between the two passages. There in Zechariah, the sword was, as it were, slumbering, and was called to "Awake." Why? because it was against the Holy One: there was nothing in Him personally with which the "sword" could find fault! But different far was it here with guilty Israel: the sword needed no 's hand.

"And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented Him of the evil and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now your hand" (v. 16). How blessedly this presents to us once more the precious truth, which is the sure ground of all our hopes, that with our God "mercy rejoices against judgment" (James 2:13). The whole system of Israel had exposed itself to the wrath of the Lord. He might have broken it at once as a vessel wherein was no pleasure. He might have taken away His vineyard from His unthankful and wicked gardeners: but "mercy rejoices against judgment" in the heart of their God, and therefore He commanded the destroying angel to stay his hand. And why? God's holiness had been satisfied, His justice had been appeased. "It is enough: stay now your hand": how these words remind us of that blessed utterance of our Savior's, "It is finished"—proclaiming the

"And David spoke unto the Lord when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let Your hand, I pray You, be against me, and against my father's house" (v. 17). The exact point at which this intercession occurred is made much plainer in 1 Chronicles 21. There we learn there were two distinct parts or stages to the divine judgment. First, we are told, "So the Lord sent pestilence upon Israel: and there were two distinct parts or stages to the divine judgment. accomplished by angelic agency as is clear from 2 Samuel 24, and it was terminated at the time of the evening sacrifice, and that, by the Covenant faithfulness of Jehovah. Second, "And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it" (v. 15)—a separate thing from the preceding. "And David lifted up his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord . . . then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed" (verses 16, 17). It was at that critical moment he stepped into the breach and made successful intercession.

First, let us notice that David did not here make the fatal mistake of supplicating the *angel:* no, he was better instructed than are the poor deluded Papists of our day. Second, observe that David did not throw the blame upon the Nation, but criminated himself. "Most people, when God's judgments are abroad, charge others with being the cause of them, and care not who falls by them, so *they* can escape; but David's penitent and public spirit was otherwise affected" (Matthew Henry). This is most beautiful and striking. David took the blame entirely upon himself: "Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed"—it was as though he could not paint his own faults in sufficiently dark colors. "As for these sheep, what have they done?" How dear were they to his heart! No charge would he prefer against them. "Let Your hand, I pray You, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on Your people, that they should be plagued" (v. 17): smite their shepherd, but spare the flock, O Lord.

CHAPTER NINETY-THREE

His Grand Reward

2 Samuel 24

We were obliged to omit several points of importance at the close of our last chapter, so we will commence here at the stage where we then left off There we called attention to an essential detail—one which, so far as we can discover, has escaped the notice of all the commentators—namely, that God's judgment upon Israel was twofold, or in two distinct stages; and we would also observe that this corresponded exactly with David's sin. First we are told, "The Lord sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men" (1 Chronicles 21:14). In Samuel's account it reads, "there died of the plague from Dan *even to Beersheba* seventy thousand men." How remarkably did the punishment fit the crime, for David had commanded Joab, "Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan *even to Beersheba,* and number you the people" (v. 2). It will be remembered that the account of the census-taking closed by saying, "So when they had gone through all the land, they came to *Jerusalem* at the end of nine months and twenty days."

Second, "And God sent an angel unto *Jerusalem* to destroy it" (1 Chronicles 21:15). Samuel tells us "and when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented Him of the evil" (v. 16), and follows with David's prayer. But the account in Chronicles evidently observes a closer chronological order, for there we read, "And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the Heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered?" (verses 16, 17). The dreadful spectacle of the avenging angel, about to fall upon the holy city, deeply affected David. He had previously repented of and confessed his sin, but the calamity which now threatened the capital itself, caused him to pour out his heart afresh unto the Lord, both in humble contrition and earnest supplication.

"And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed." What blessed self-abnegation was this. David takes the entire blame unto himself, adding "but as for these sheep, what have they done?" Rightly did Matthew Henry answer the question by saying, "Why, they had done much amiss: it was their sin which had provoked Jehovah to leave David to himself, as He did." "Let Your hand, I pray You, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house" (v. 17). How nobly did David here stand in the breach, and that, at his own cost. He not only shouldered the guilt, but was willing to bear the retribution.

As we pointed out in our last chapter, it was as though David said, Smite me, the shepherd, but let the flock be spared. Ah, but *that* could not be: God would not allow David to suffer in the stead of all Israel. No, none could fill that awful and honorable place of substitution but David's Son and Lord. Nevertheless, we see how grandly he, in spirit, foreshadowed the good Shepherd, who, that they might be rich, Himself became poor, and actually took upon Himself the sins of His sheep and died in their room. "But not on Your people, that they should be plagued" (v. 17). Is it not lovely to behold David here referring to Israel not as "the people," but as "Your people." In his folly he had regarded them as *his* people, but in his wisdom he now saw them as the *Lord's.*

Let us point out just here that the confession and prayer of David on this occasion should be taken to heart by every minister of the Gospel. In his comments, Thomas Scott applied the principle of David's heart-exercises to preachers thus, "While ministers mourn over the state of their congregations, they may sometimes profitably inquire whether their own supineness, pride, want of zeal and simplicity, their self-indulgence or conformity to the world, do not bring a secret blight upon their labors, although more open evils do not bring a blot upon their profession? and whether the people's souls are not suffering for their correction, and to bring them to deeper humiliation, greater fervency in prayer, and a more spiritual frame of mind and devotedness to God. And surely we should choose to be chastened in our own persons, rather than that the blessing should be withheld from our congregations: for though the Lord is righteous in these dispensations, yet the people have not deserved at *our hands,* that we should occasion this evil to them. Grace teaches men to condemn themselves rather than others, and to seek the interests of their fellows in many respects before their own: and earnest prayers offered in this temper of mind, by those who unreservedly cast themselves on the mercies of the Lord are very prevalent."

Returning now to the case of David, we may observe that his supplication prevailed with God. Such deep humiliation, such unsparing acknowledgment of his faults, such utter self-abnegation and such tender pleading for the people, touched the heart of Him who is filled with compassion. If the unselfishness of Moses prevailed at another grave crisis in their history, when he asked God to blot him out of His book (Exodus 32:32) rather than that the nation should be destroyed; equally so did the readiness of David for God's judgment to fall upon himself and his house instead of his subjects, turn the tide; for it was in direct answer to his pleading that God said to the angel stay now your hand." This gives beautiful completeness to our type, portraying as it does the efficacy of our great High Priest's intercession on behalf of His people.

There is one other point of deep practical importance to be noted here. "God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, (or as 2 Samuel 24:16 puts it, "when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem *to* destroy it"), the Lord beheld, and He repented Him of the evil" (1 Chronicles 21:15). And *what was it* that He now "beheld"? Why, David and his servants, "clothed in sackcloth," fallen "upon their faces" (v. 16)! It was not simply that He "saw," but "*beheld*"—with concentrated attention. And then follows immediately David's supplication. Here, then, is the final lesson: it is the one clothed with sackcloth, on his face in the dust, whose intercession prevails with God! In other words, it is the one who is thoroughly humbled, who is brought to the place of self-loathing, and who takes upon his own spirit the afflictions of others, who alone is qualified to plead on their behalf.

Were we asked whose prayers we would rather have on our behalf, we should unhesitatingly reply, Not those who are in raptures on the mountain top, but those who are mourning before God over their own sins and the sufferings of others. Personally, we appreciate far more highly the supplications of those who are (spiritually speaking) clothed in sackcloth, than those arrayed in their wedding garments. It is the absence of the "sackcloth" which renders ineffectual the prayers of so many today. Here, then, is holy encouragement for those of Gods people who are bowed in the dust before Him: if we have repented of and confessed our sins, and are truly humbled before Him, then is the very time to intercede for other tried souls. Finally, observe the prompt compliance of the angel to the Lords order "stay your band": if celestial creatures are so obedient to their Maker's word, how promptly should *we* respond to His revealed will.

"And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (2 Samuel 24: 18). If we compare at this point the supplementary account we learn that, then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the Lord" (1 Chronicles 21:18). The relief, then, for David in this dark hour was announced (through Gad) by the avenging angel, and thus we may say once more that the eater himself yielded meat, the strong one sweetness (Judges 14:14). Most blessed was this, for an "altar" calls for an accepted worshiper, and the Lord would not have given directions for the one, if He had not provided the other. Thus it was with the very first worshiper: "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering" (Genesis 4:4)—his person was first accepted and then his sacrifice; and here the Lord's readiness to accept an offering at the

This divine direction for David now to erect an altar, denoted, first, that God was thoroughly reconciled to him, and therefore might he infer with Manoah's wife, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands" (Judges 13:23), Secondly, that peace between God and guilty sinners is effected by sacrifice, and not otherwise than by Christ, the great Atoning sacrifice . Thus, while God's mercy rejoiced against judgment on this solemn occasion, yet He made it abundantly clear that His grace reigns through righteousness (

Romans 5:21) and not at the expense of it. It is the blood which makes an atonement for the soul (Leviticus 17:11), because it is the blood which placates the retributive justice of God. Third, that when Gods judgments are graciously stayed, we ought to acknowledge it with thankfulness to His praise: "I will praise You: though You were angry with me" (Isaiah 12:1).

It will be remembered 2 Samuel 24:16 informed us that when the angel of the Lord stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, he was "by the threshing floor of Araunah." The peaceful occupation of this Gentile (for he was a Jebusite), quietly continuing to thresh his wheat on the floor of his own isolated garner (1 Chronicles 21:20) *without* the walls of Jerusalem, stands out in marked contrast from the troubled scene *within* the city, where David and the elders of Israel clothed in sackcloth, fell on their laces. Nevertheless, Araunah too was threatened, for the avenging angel drew near to and stood over the peaceful threshing floor itself, and as 1 Chronicles 21 tells us, "Oman (Araunah) turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves" (v. 20). But the angel smote them not: telling us most blessedly, in figure, that Gentiles as well as Jews are delivered from judgment on the ground of the Antitypical Sacrifice.

The tranquil plot of ground of Araunah was not to be the scene of judgment, but was ordained to be the place of grace, forgiveness and peace. And *where* was that threshing floor situated? Most significantly, on Mount Moriah. We are not left in any doubt upon this point, though the information is supplied neither in 2 Samuel 24 nor 1 Chronicles 21—not for lazy people is the Bible written! "Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (2 Chronicles 3:1). And Moriah, as its name intimates, was the very place where Jehovah appeared as "Jehovah-jireh" to Abraham and where—true to His covenant name—He appeared to meet and provide for the need of David. How remarkable and inexpressibly blessed: Moriah was and continued to be the place of sovereign *grace!*

Moriah was the mount to which Abraham went when commanded to offer up Isaac. In Genesis 22:14 we read, "And Abraham called the name of the place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen," that is seen as the Provider, or as Gesenius, the celebrated Hebraist, renders it "in the mount of Jehovah it shall be provided." B. W. Newton tells us that Moriah is "a name derived from the same root, and signifies the place of appearing, that is of the appearance of Jehovah as the Provider. It should be observed that all the thoughts connected with Moriah and the provision there made, are to be traced back to the words of Abraham, 'my son, God will provide' (Hebrews "for" Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering— Genesis 22:8)."

But now observe the contrast. Confiding implicitly in God, even when he understood not the reason of His commands, Abraham went to Moriah to give full proof of his faith and obedience. Far otherwise was it with poor David. He went there as one whose disobedience had encompassed him with sorrow, judgment and death. He came clothed with sackcloth, bowed down by anguish. He came because he saw the sword of the avenging angel drawn against him and his people. He came as the "troubled one," as one who needed to be delivered from "going down to the pit" (Psalm 30:3). True, Abraham was afflicted, yet how different was the sorrow of the consciously-obedient Abraham from the consciously-disobedient David! Nevertheless, David found on Moriah the same God that there met Abraham. In the very place where Abraham by a countermand from Heaven was stayed from slaying his son, the angel by a like countermand was stayed from destroying Jerusalem!

"And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite" (v. 18). It is to be duly noted that the "altar" was *God's* thought and not David's. This is blessed, telling us that the initiative is ever with God in all salvation matters. God is the great Provider: our privilege is to accept His gracious provision. Christ—to whom the altar pointed—was the gift of God and not the product of man. We love Him because He first loved us. And how gracious He was not to keep David in suspense a whole day, nor even hour. No sooner had he sought unto God, than He immediately responded. The ark was then at Mount Zion and the tabernacle at Gibeon (2 Chronicles 1), but David was bidden to go neither to the one nor the other.

"And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded" (v. 19). What beautiful completeness this gives to all that has been before us. The penitent, prudent, submissive and supplicating one, is now seen as the *obedient* one. How could it be otherwise? He who is, spiritually speaking, clothed with sackcloth, does not follow a course of self-will and self-pleasing. David made no demur against being told to see unto this Gentile and ask a favor at *his* hands. A truly meek heart neither reasons about nor objects to the divine demands, but complies promptly. Here, then, is the final mark of the prevailing intercessor: he who has the power with God in prayer (after his recovery from folly) is one that now treads the path of obedience. If God is to respond to our petitions, we must respond to His precepts.

In closing, let us call attention to one other point of analogy between the experiences of Abraham and David on this memorable mount, the one which is most pertinent of all to our present subject—David's grand reward. God called the patriarch to Moriah not only that he might there give proof of his faith and obedience, but more especially that this trial of Abraham might be the occasion of unfolding to him (and through him, to us) a fuller revelation of His own *ways in grace:* for as we now know, the touching drama there enacted provided a striking adumbration of the Father Himself not sparing His own beloved Son, but freely delivering Him up for all His people. In like manner, God not only provided a substitute for David on Moriah, but He there given him a revelation of the counsels of His grace. Moriah was not only the place where David obtained forgiveness for his sins, but it was also made to him the place of *honor and blessing.*

Upon the altar he there erected, David "offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings" (1 Chronicles 21:26). Nor did he do so in vain: the Lord "answered him from Heaven by fire"—in token of His approval and acceptance. But more: this was the time when he and the place where he received commission to prepare for the building of God's House. "Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel" (1 Chron, 22:1).

Now it was that David learned where was the sacred spot which Jehovah had chosen for the site of the Temple. This, then, was David's grand reward: unto him, and not to any of the prophets, nor even to the high priest, was given the holy privilege of entering into Gods mind concerning His House and to make provision for the same! How true it is, dear reader, that God ever honors those that honor Him—even though it be by appearing before Him in sackcloth: though He does not always make His approbation so evident to our senses as He did here to David's.

CHAPTER NINETY-FOUR

His Fervent Praise

2 Samuel 24

"And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded" (2 Samuel 24:18, 19). Here we behold David's trustful and thankful acceptance of the mercy given him. He received not the grace of God in vain, but complied promptly with His revealed will. To unbelief it would seem too good to be true that God's displeasure was now appeased; but faith laid hold of the prophet's word, knowing that an "altar" spoke of atoning sacrifice and acceptance. And this is ever the way with those who have truly repented of their sins and humbled themselves before the Lord. Satan may seek to persuade them that they have transgressed beyond the hope of forgiveness, but sooner or later the heart of the Christian will turn again to the Antitypical Altar, and overcome the Adversary with the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11).

How different, for the moment, was the attitude of Araunah, "And Araunah turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him *hid* themselves" (1 Chronicles 21:20). This is in direct contrast, and presents to us a most important truth. On the one hand, the case of Araunah terror-stricken with the sight of the destroying angel, tells us that no flesh can stand naked, as in its own resources, before the Lord. On the other hand, David here exemplified the fact that penitent sinners may confidently draw near to Him in the power of simply believing in His wondrous grace. At this time the greatness of God's mercy had not been revealed to Araunah: he knew nothing of the "altar" that was to be set up in his threshing floor, and therefore, as nakedly a creature in the sight of God—like Adam before Him in such a case—he hid himself.

But David *had* revealed to him the remedy, which mercy rejoicing against judgment had provided, and therefore he hesitated not. Though shamed and humbled, he immediately responded to Gad's message, and "went *up*"—significant word (cf. Genesis 13:1-3, etc.)—delivered from the mire into which he bad fallen. The angel's "sword," *still unsheathed,* had no alarms for him now, for he goes to the very place where be stood (1 Chronicles 21:16)! Is not this remarkable? The very spectacle which filled Araunah with fear, had no tenor for David. Believing, he was neither ashamed not confounded. Consequently we see in his action here no disturbance of the flesh, but all is quietness and assurance as he rested on the Word of God. What a lesson is there here for our needy hearts. Alas, what cowards we are! What trifles we allow to affright us. O for more confidence in the living God, more reliance upon His promises; less occupation with what intimidates the flesh.

"And as David came to Araunah, Araunah looked and saw David, and went out of the threshing floor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground" (1 Chronicles 21:21). Let us not lose sight of the blessed *humility* of David here—ever a prominent spiritual grace in his character and conduct. Does the reader perceive to what we now call attention? It is this: David did not treat with Araunah mediately, through one of his underlings, but *directly.* Was not this in perfect keeping with the "sackcloth"? He still took the place of self-abnegation. Ah, dear friends, it is the emptied vessel which God fills. Rightly did Matthew Henry declare, "Great men will never be less respected for their humility, but the more." Those who are self-important and pompous only display their littleness and baseness.

"And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To *buy* the threshing floor of you, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people" (2 Samuel 24:21). Here we behold David as the *righteous* one. Though be was a king, and though he had received commandment from the Lord to build an altar at this particular place, nevertheless be insisted upon making fair payment to this man, even though a Gentile. This is ever a mark of true spirituality: those who walk with God, are honorable in dealing with their fellow men. "Owe no man anything" (Romans 12:8) is a necessary application of "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Neither high office nor pressure of circumstances can justify one in taking an unfair advantage of another. Nothing lower than "in all things willing to *live honestly*" (Hebrews 13:18) must be the Christian's standard. Those who attended Christ most closely during the days of His public ministry, neither imposed upon the kindness of others nor begged favors, but *bought* their food (John 4:8).

"And Araunah said unto David, let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt-sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood" (v. 22). The language of 1 Chronicles 21:23 is yet more definite: "Take it to you, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I *give* you the oxen also for burnt-offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat-offering; I give it *all.*" What noble generosity was this! But we prefer to look at Araunah's liberality from the divine side—when any one befriends us, we should ever discern *the* Lord's prompting such kindness, But what we would particularly emphasize now is, that here we have another illustration of the principle that when God works, he always works at *both ends* of the line. He who wrought in David a readiness to comply with His request, was the Same as now moved Araunah to meet him more than half way. If He sends Elijah to Zarephath, He makes a widow willing to share her portion with him. There is great encouragement in this if faith lays hold of the same. If God continues to grant us messages, He will continue to prepare hearts to receive them.

"All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The Lord your God accept you" (v. 23). Some have drawn the conclusion from these words that Araunah himself was of royal stock, for the Jebusites were the original owners of Zion (2 Samuel 5:6-9), but there is nothing else in Scripture to support this view. Rather do we understand our verse to signify that Araunah acted with royal munificence. A most laudable contention it was between a good king and a good subject. Since it was to David, and since it was for the Lord, Araunah would not sell, but give. On the other side, David, since it was for the Lord, would not take, but pay. So far from his words "The Lord your God accept you" denoting that he was not himself a believer in and worshiper of Jehovah (as if an idolater had been permitted to dwell on mount Zion!) they evidence that Araunah was possessed of faith and spiritual intelligence.

"And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of you at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which does cost me nothing" (v. 24). Here again we should view things from the standpoint of the divine workings. God's moving Araunah to act so magnanimously afforded David an opportunity to display his devotedness to the Lord. A gracious heart will not serve God with that which costs him nothing, nor will he deem that true piety which involves no sacrifice. This is the fruit of *faith.* Carnal nature begrudges everything, and says with Judas, "To what purpose is this waste?" but faith will not withhold from God its Isaac (Hebrews 11:17). It is also the fruit of *love,* which deems nothing too good for the Lord—witness the woman with her precious spikenard. The denial of self and the mortification of his lusts are the unfailing marks of a genuine saint. How these words of David need to be laid to heart in this flesh-pleasing age!

"So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver" (v. 24). As usual, infidels have called attention to the "discrepancy" in 1 Chronicles 21, where we are told, "So David gave to Araunah for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight" (v. 25). But two different things are in view. Samuel mentions David buying the threshing floor and the oxen, whereas Chronicles refers to his purchase of "the place," which probably signifies the whole of his land—which afterwards becomes the extensive site for the temple. It is to be noticed that for the former David paid in "silver," which speaks of *redemption,* whereas for the latter he gave "gold," the emblem of *divine glory.* Spiritually speaking we do not learn the value of the "gold" until we are experimentally acquainted with the "silver." The amount of the gold was twelve times as great as that of the silver, showing this was for the complete number of Israel's tribes, and typifying the entire Body of Christ.

"And David built there an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings" (v. 25). This supplies the final line to our typical picture, for here be behold David as the accepted worshiper. "Accepted" we say, for 1 Chronicles 21 tells us that the Lord, "answered him from Heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt-offering" (v. 26), which announced that his sacrifice had been received on High (cf. Leviticus 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38, 39; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3). Thus does the God of all grace delight to honor those who confide in Him, by granting tokens of His approbation. But note well the *strength* of David's faith and the heartiness of his thanksgiving: he offered on that altar not only burnt-offerings, but peace-offerings as well. Now the "peace-offering" spoke of *communion,* for (while the burnt-offering was wholly consumed upon the altar) *this* was shared in by God, all the males of the priesthood, and that of the offerer himself (Leviticus 7:6, 15)—each had his portion.

"And the Lord commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof" (1 Chronicles 21:27). "So the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel" (2 Samuel 24:25). What a remarkable *ending* is this to the second book of Samuel! The atoning sacrifice appeasing the just displeasure of God, the erring one restored to full communion with Him, and the discovery made to David of the place where the temple was to be built and the worship of Israel subsequently to be carried on. Sorrow was turned into joy for all who had their portion of the peace-offerings that day. What thoughts must then have occupied their hearts as they partook of that sacrifice according to divine appointment: they feasted on the very offering which God had accepted. 2 Samuel, then, closes by showing us David *in full fellowship with the Lord.* What a blessed foreshadowment of eternity! How it reminds us of the closing words of the parable of the prodigal son: "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let *us* eat, and he merry" (Luke 15:23)! In addition to the two historical accounts furnished us by 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, Psalm 30 (composed very shortly afterwards) throws further light on the exercises of David's heart at that time. As C. H. Spurgeon pointed out in his introductory remarks upon Psalm 30, "A Psalm and Song at the Dedication of the House of David; or rather, A Psalm: a Song of Dedication for the House. By David." It is "A Song of *faith* since the house of Jehovah, here intended, David never lived to see. A Psalm of *praise,* since a sore judgment had been stayed and a great sin forgiven." The translation and punctuation of the title to this Psalm is definitely settled for us by David's own words in 1 Chronicles 22: "Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God (referring to Araunah's threshing floor) and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel" (v. 1).

"I will extol You, O Lord; for You have lifted me up, and have not made my foes to rejoice over me" (Psalm 30:1). This Psalm is a song and not a complaint. An experimental realization of the joy of deliverance contrasted from previous anguish, is its characteristic note. The "foes" to which David refers are to be understood of evil spirits as well as Satan's serfs among men: they are ever ready to rejoice at the falls, griefs and chastisements of those who fear God. For having recovered him from his fall and thus saving him from utter discomfiture before his enemies, David praised God.

"O Lord my God, I cried unto You, and You have healed me. O Lord, You have brought up my soul from the grave: You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit" (Psalm 30:2, 3). It is beautiful to see how David had owned Him according to His covenant title, for as we pointed out in our last, it was in His covenant faithfulness that Jehovah had acted when He caused the desolating pestilence to cease. His "I cried unto You" tells of the acuteness of his distress: he was too agitated to

pray, yet he poured out his soul unto Him who understands the language of inarticulate groans. So desperate had been his plight, and so signal the Lord's intervention in mercy, David felt as one who had been recovered from the dead.

"Sing unto the Lord, O you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness. For His anger endures but a moment; in His favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:4, 5). It was not only in mercy but in holiness God had acted, as His bidding David to erect an altar clearly evidenced. Does not the Psalmist teach us here a much-needed lesson? How often we praise the Lord for His goodness, His long-sufferance, His restoring grace; but bow rarely we bless Him for His *holiness,* which is chief among His perfections! David found cause for rejoicing in the brevity of the divine judgment: the plague had lasted but a few hours, but His favor is life everlasting. What a mercy it is that His chastisements (even if continued to the end of our earthly course) are but "for a moment" (2 Corinthians 4:17), in contrast from the eternity of bliss which awaits His beloved.

"And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong: You did hide Your face, and I was troubled" (Psalm 30:6,7). How clearly this confirms the exposition we gave, tracing back David's folly in numbering the people to the *pride* of his heart. Here is plainly revealed to us the secret of his sad fall. It is true that he had not attributed the success of his arms to anything in himself, or his men, but rather had freely ascribed the victories to the Lord's favor (2 Samuel 22:1, 48-50), yet he fondly imagined that God had made his kingdom invincible, one that would never he overthrown. And the Lord had hidden His face, as He always does when we forsake the place of conscious weakness and dependency upon Him. And poor David was "troubled"—brought to confusion and dismay, for no "mountain," however firm, can yield a saint satisfaction when the smile of Jehovah's countenance is concealed from him. What a warning is there here for us against cherishing a sense of carnal security.

"I cried to You, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication" (v. 8). "Prayer is the unfailing resource of God's people. If they are driven to their wits' end, they may still go to the mercy-seat. When an earthquake makes our mountain tremble, the throne of grace still stands firm, and we may come to it" (C. H. Spurgeon). On a former occasion at Ziklag, when David was deeply distressed, for the people had spoken of stoning him, he had "encouraged himself in the Lord" (1 Samuel 30:6); so now he sought for refuge in God, and the divine faithfulness failed him not. Not in vain do believers commit themselves into the hands of the Lord.

"What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise You? shall it declare Your truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be You my Helper" (Psalm 30:9, 10). The intensity of David's sufferings are plainly discovered to us here. Outwardly he was clothed in sackcloth, but that was a feeble expression of his inward anguish. As the king of Israel, it had specially devolved upon him to honor the divine statutes, but he had broken them, and caused his subjects to do so too. Just retribution had fallen upon his kingdom. Plaintively does he plead with Jehovah: Would his death promote God's cause on earth? Would it issue in divine adoration? Let then mercy rejoice against judgment.

"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing: You have put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness: to the end that my glory may sing praise to You, and not be silent. O Lord my God. I will give thanks unto You Forever" (Psalm 30:11, 12). Here is further proof (if any be needed) that this Psalm treats of the same period of David's life as is before us 2 Samuel 24. And a grand finale do its closing verses supply. David had begged God to be gracious unto him, and He was gracious. Such wondrous mercy made "glory" vocal with the voice of ceaseless thanksgiving, for Glory is to be the dwelling-place of redeemed and rescued sinners—those who have, like David, proved for themselves the greatness and sufficiency of the Lord's mercies. "I will give thanks unto You forever": such will be our employ in glow, and all because of *Sacrifice.* Verses 11 and 12 are true of Christ Himself, and therefore of the members of His Body also.

CHAPTER NINETY-FIVE

His Closing Days

1 Kings 1

The public life of David had been a stormy one throughout, nor was he permitted to end his career in tranquility—such is generally the lot of those in high station, who are ignorantly envied by so many. Even in his declining days, when the infirmities of old age were upon David, serious trouble broke our in his kingdom, so that both the public peace was jeopardized and his own family circle again threatened by the assassin. Another of his own sons now set himself not only against the will of his father, but also against the declared purpose of God; in which he was abetted by those who had long held positions of honor under the king. No doubt we should look deeper and see here a setting forth of the conflict which obtains in a higher realm: the enmity of the Serpent against the woman's Seed and his opposition to the will of God concerning His kingdom. But it is with that which refers more immediately to David we shall concern ourselves.

The record of what we have referred to above is found in 1 Kings 1. That chapter opens by presenting to us the once virile and active king now going the way of all the earth: his natural spirits dried up, no longer able to attend to public affairs. The events chronicled therein occurred very near the close of David's eventful career. Though not yet quite seventy he is described as "old and well stricken in years." Though blessed with a vigorous constitution, the king was thoroughly worn out: among the contributing causes, we may mention the strenuous life he had lived and the heavy domestic griefs which had fallen upon him. That he was still dearly beloved by his followers is evident from their kindly if ill-advised efforts for his comfort (verses 1-3). David's falling in with their plan shows him taking the line of least resistance, apparently out of deference to the wishes of his attendants. It was a device which has been resorted to in various climes and ages, yet surely it was one which did not become a child of God.

Old age as well as youth has its own particular snares, for if the danger of the latter is to disdain the advice of seniors and be too self-willed, the infirmities of the former place them more in the power of their juniors and they are apt to yield to arrangements which their consciences condemn. It is not easy to deny the wishes of those who are tending us, and it seems ungrateful to refuse well-meant efforts to make our closing days more comfortable. But while on the one hand the aged need to guard against irritability and a domineering spirit, yet on the other they must not be a willing party to that which they know is wrong. Legitimate means of restoring health and for prolonging our days should be employed, but unlawful measures and anything having the appearance of evil or which may become an occasion of temptation to us, should be steadfastly refused, no matter by whom it be proposed.

The Lord's *displeasure* against David's weakness in consenting to the carnal counsel of his friends, is plainly marked in the immediate sequel. Serious trouble now arose from yet another of his sons. It is true that this was the fruit of his earlier laxity in ruling his children, for he was much too easy-going with them: yet *the time* when this impious insubordination occurred leaves us in no doubt that it is to be regarded as a divine chastening of David for being a party to such a questionable procedure as that to which we have briefly alluded above. "*Then* Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (1 Kings 1:5). Nothing is more conspicuous throughout the whole history of David than that, whenever a believer sows to the flesh, he will most certainly of the flesh reap corruption; and another solemn example of this is here before us.

David was now stricken in years, and the time for one to succeed him to the throne had well-near arrived. Yet it was for Jehovah alone to say who that one should be. But Adonijah, the oldest living son, determined to be that successor. Nor is this to be wondered at, for "His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why have you done so?" (v. 6). David had permitted him to have his own way. He never crossed his will, never inquired the motive of his actions, nor at any time rebuked him for his folly. In allowing his son to be guided by his own unbridled will, David sadly failed to exercise his parental authority and to fulfill his parental responsibility; and bitterly did he now pay for his folly, as many since have also been made to do.

That which immediately follows verse 6 is recorded for our learning, and a most solemn warning does it point for our own day, when so many fond parents are allowing their children to grow up with little or no restraint placed upon them. They are only preparing a rod for their own backs. God Himself has forbidden parents to refrain from chastening their children when they need it: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if you beat him with the rod, he shall not die" (Proverbs 23:13). And again, "He who spares his rod hates his son: but he who loves him chastens him early" (Proverbs 13:24). And yet again, "Chasten your son while there is hope, and let not your soul spare for his crying" (Proverbs 19:18). Because of his parental neglect David himself was in large measure responsible for the lawlessness of his son. Lax and indulgent parents must expect willful and wayward children, and if they despise the infirmities of their sires and are impatient to get possession of their estates, that will be all which they deserve at their hands.

David's unruly son now determined to exalt himself, even though he certainly knew that Solomon had been appointed by God to succeed David in the kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Kings 2:15-18). "Then Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him" (v. 5). In this magnifying of his state, he followed the evil example of his rebellious brother Absalom (2 Samuel 15:1)—a solemn warning this for older brothers to set their younger ones a good example. Adonijah dared to usurp the throne of Israel: he made a feast, gathered the people about him, and incited them to proclaim him as king (verses 7-9, 25). In this too he was again following the example of Absalom (2 Samuel 15:10), confident that where his brother had failed, he would now succeed. But like Absalom before him, Adonijah reckoned without God: "The Lord brings the counsel of the heathen to naught: He makes the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever" (Psalm 33:10, 11).

Nevertheless, for a time it looked as though the daring revolt of Adonijah would be successful, for both Joab the commander of the army and Abiathar the priest, threw in their lot with him (v. 7). Thus does God often allow the wicked to prosper for awhile, yet their triumphing is but short. Joab, as we have seen in other connections, was a thoroughly unprincipled and ungodly man, and no doubt the impious Adonijah was more congenial to his disposition than Solomon would be. Moreover if this son of Haggith obtained the kingdom, then his own position would be secure, and he would not be displaced by a successor to Amasa (2 Samuel 19:13). So too Abiathar the high priest seems to have been less regarded by David than Zadok was, and probably he feared that Solomon would set his family aside for the line of Eleazar to which Zadok belonged (1 Kings 1:25).

Characters like Joab and Abiathar are ever actuated by selfish motives, though individuals like Adonijah often flatter themselves that the service of such is rendered out of love or esteem for their persons, when in reality very different considerations move them. Unselfish loyalty is a rare thing, and where found it cannot be valued too highly. Those in eminent positions, whether in church or state, are surrounded by mercenary sycophants, who are ever eager to turn to their own advantage everything which transpires. It matters nothing to Joab and Abiathar that their royal master was a pious and faithful one, who had steadily sought the good of the kingdom, or that Adonijah was a grasping and lawless semi-heathen; they were ready to forsake the one and espouse the other. So it is still: that is why those in high places are afraid to trust the ones nearest to them in office.

"There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand" (Proverbs 19:21). No planning on man's part can thwart the purpose of the Most High. Saul had proved that; so too had Absalom; so now shall Adonijah. Yet the Lord is pleased to use human instruments in bringing His counsel to pass. He always has His man ready to intervene at the critical moment. In this instance it was Nathan the prophet: "Wherefore Nathan spoke unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith does reign, and David our lord knows it not?" (v. 11). Nathan had been faithful in rebuking David for his sin in former days (2 Samuel 11:7-12), he was faithful now in recalling to him the promise he had made concerning Solomon. He interviewed Bathsheba and persuaded her to go unto David and remind him of his oath (verses 11-13), and arranged that while she was speaking to the king, he also would come into his presence and confirm her testimony (v. 14).

It is blessed, both from the divine and human side, to see how readily and how graciously Bathsheba responded to Nathan's suggestion. From the divine side, we may behold how that when God works He works at both ends of the line: if the prophet gave counsel under divine prompting, the queen was willing in the day of God's power, as David also yielded thereto—each acted under divine impulse, yet each acted quite Freely. From the human side, we may note that Bathsheba made no demur to Nathan's counsel but readily acquiesced. Though David was her husband she "bowed and did obeisance to the king" and addressed him as "my lord" (verses 16, 17), thereby evidencing that she was a true daughter of Abraham. First she reminded him of his solemn oath that Solomon should reign after him (v. 17). Then she acquainted him with the revolt of Adonijah (v. 18). Next she assured the king that the Nation awaited an authoritative word from him about the accession; and ended by warning him that if he failed in his duty she and Solomon would be in grave danger of their lives

"And, lo, while she yet talked with the king, Nathan the prophet came in" (v. 22). It was something more than a politic move on Nathan's part to appear before the king at the psychological moment and second what Bathsheba had just said. It was an act of obedience to the Word of God, for the divine law required that matters of solemn moment must be confirmed by one or more witnesses. "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sins: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15). The same principle was insisted upon by Christ on more than one occasion, and therefore it is binding on us today. Much needless trouble had been avoided in the church (Matthew 18:16), many a false accusation had been exposed (John 8:13, 17), many a breach had been healed (2 Corinthians 13:1), and many an innocent servant of God had been cleared (1 Timothy 5:19) if only this principle had been duly heeded.

According to his promise to Bathsheba Nathan entered the king's presence and bore out what she had just told him. The prophet showed how urgent the situation was. First, he declared that the supporters of the revolter were so confident of success that they were even now saying "God save king Adonijah" (v. 25). Second, he pointed out the ominous fact that neither himself nor Zadok the priest, Benaiah or Solomon had been invited to the feast (v. 26), which made evident his lawless designs: neither the will of God nor the desire of his father were going to be consulted. Third, he endeavored to get the aged David to take definite action before it was too late. He asks the king point blank if this thing was being done with his approval (v. 27), to make him realize the better what blatant insolence Adonijah and his party were guilty of in thus acting without authority from the crown. Thus did he make clear to David his public duty.

It was now that the real character of David asserted itself. Weak he was in the ruling of his own household, but ever firm and fearless where the interests of God's kingdom were concerned. Nothing could induce him to resist the revealed will of the Lord for Israel. First, he now acknowledged again the faithfulness of God unto himself: "And the king swore, and said, As the Lord lives, that has redeemed my soul out of all distress" (v. 29). The Lord is the Deliverer of all who put their trust in Him, and repeatedly had He delivered David out of the hands of his enemies. Second, God's faithfulness to David now inspired him to be faithful to his covenant promise concerning Solomon: "Even as I swore unto you by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day" (v. 30). Most blessed is this: whatever danger his own person might be threatened with, he hesitated not.

In what immediately follows we are informed of the decisive measures taken by David to overthrow the plot of Adonijah. "Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king. The king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to Gihon: and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel: and blow you with the trumpet and say, God save king Solomon. Then you shall come up after him, that he may come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah" (verses 32-35). Orders were given for the proclaiming of Solomon: he was to be set upon the royal mule, formally anointed, and duly proclaimed king. This important transaction was entrusted to men of God who had proved themselves in His service. Solomon would thus have the necessary authority for conducting state affairs until David's decease, after which there would be no uncertainty in the public mind as to his rightful successor.

"And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen: the Lord God of my lord the king say so too. As the Lord has been with my lord the king, even so be He with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord king David" (verses 36, 37). The measures proposed by the king met with the hearty approval of his advisers. Speaking in the name of the others, Benaiah expressed their complete satisfaction in the royal nomination: his "Amen" shows the original meaning and emphasis of this term—it was faith's affirmation, assured that God would make good His promise. Benaiah's language was that of fervent piety, for he realized that the plans of his master, no matter how wise and good, could not be carried to a successful conclusion without the blessing of divine providence—alas that this is so largely lost sight of today. He added the earnest prayer that God would bless Solomon's reign even more than He had his father's.

The orders which David had given were promptly executed. Solomon was brought in state to the place appointed and was duly anointed. This gave great joy and satisfaction to the people. "And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them" (v. 40): thereby they evidenced their cheerful acceptance of him as David's successor. In like manner, all who belong to the true Israel of God gladly own the Lordship of His Son. The sequel was indeed striking. No sooner was Solomon acclaimed by the loyal subjects of David, than news thereof was borne to Adonijah and his fellow conspirators (verses 41, 42). Instead of ending in joy, the feast of the rebel terminated in consternation: "And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way. And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar" (verses 49, 50). Thus did the Lord graciously show Himself strong on David's behalf to the end of his course.

In closing we would call attention to a most blessed typical picture, in which both David and Solomon are needed to give it completeness—compare the joint-types supplied by Joseph and Benjamin, Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha. First, David had been successful as "a man of war" (1 Chronicles 28:3), for by him the Lord so overcame the enemies of Israel as to "put them under the soles of his feet" (1 Kings 5:3): in like manner the Lord Jesus by His death and resurrection was victorious over all His foes (Colossians 2:14,15). Second, Solomon had been chosen and ordained to the throne before he was born (1 Chronicles 22:9): so too Christ was the Elect of God "from all eternity" (Isaiah 42:1). Third, Solomon rode on a mule, not as a warrior, but in lowly guise: so did Christ (Matthew 21:1-9). Fourth, he was anointed with the sacred oil—type of the Spirit: so Christ received the Spirit in His fullness at His ascension (Acts 2:23; Rev. 3:1). Finally, rest and quietness was granted unto Israel throughout Solomon's reign (1 Chronicles 22:19): so Christ is now reigning as "the Prince of peace" over His people.

CHAPTER NINETY-SIX

His Closing Days

(Continued)

1 Chronicles 22

The sand in David's hour-glass was running low; the time appointed for his departure from this world had almost arrived; yet it is beautiful to behold him using his remaining strength in the service of God, rather than rusting out amid the shadows. The sun of his life had often been temporarily overcast, but it set in golden splendor, illustrating that word, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (Ecclesiastes 7:8). The revolt of Adonijah was the last dark cloud to pass across his horizon, and it was quickly dissolved, to give place to blue skies of peace and joy. The final scenes are painted in roseate colors and the exit of our patriarch from this world was one which well fitted the man after God's own heart. Blessed is it to see him using his fast-failing energies in setting in order the affairs of the kingdom and to mark how the glory of the Lord and the good of his people was that which now wholly absorbed him.

The Holy Spirit has dwelt at quite some length upon the closing acts of David's reign, supplementing the briefer account given in 1 Kings by furnishing much fuller details in 1 Chronicles. It is to these supplementary accounts we now turn. In them we, first, behold him completing the extensive preparations he had made for the building of the temple. Second, his giving solemn charge unto Solomon concerning the erection of the Lord's house, concerning his own personal conduct, and concerning the removal of his enemies. Third, his charge to the princes to stand by and assist his son. Fourth, his ordering of the priesthood in their courses. Fifth, his charge to the officers of the Nation. Sixth, his entrusting to Solomon the pattern or plan of the temple which he had received from God. Seventh, his final charge to the whole congregation. Most carefully did David prepare for the end of his reign and for the welfare of his successor.

"And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be built for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical of fame and of glory, throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death" (1 Chronicles 22:5). The dearest desire of his heart had been to erect a permanent house for the worship of God, and a tremendous amount of materials had he already acquired and consecrated to that end. But his wish was not granted: another was to have that peculiar honor; yet he did not, like so many peevish persons when their wills are crossed, mope and fret, and then lose all interest in the Lord's service; but readily acquiesced in God's will and continued his preparation. Yes, so far from advancing age and increasing infirmities deterring him, they quickened him to increased diligence and effort.

The extent and value of the materials which David had gathered for the temple may be seen by: "Now, behold, in my trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver; and of brass and iron without weight; for it is in abundance; timber also and stone have I prepared" (1 Chronicles 22:14). These were all ready to hand for his successor, who made good use of the same. What encouragement is there here for us: much good may appear after our death, which we were not permitted to witness during our life. Often we grieve because we see so little fruit for our labor, yet if we are diligent in preparing materials, others after us may build therewith. Then let us sow beside all waters, and confidently leave the outcome with God. Those who are mature and experienced should consider the younger ones who are to follow, and furnish all the help they can to make the work of God as easy as possible for them.

We turn next to the charges which David gave to his son. The first concerned his building of the temple, for this lay most of all upon his heart. "Then he called for Solomon his son, and charged him to build an house for the Lord God of Israel. And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build a house unto the name of the Lord my God. But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, You have shed blood abundantly, and have made great wars: you shall not build a house unto My name, because you have shed much blood upon the earth in My sight" (1 Chronicles 22:6-8). Here we see how jealous God was of His types—as was also evidenced by His displeasure against Moses for striking the rock (the second occasion) instead of speaking to it; and by His smiting Gehazi with leprosy for seeking a reward from the healed Naaman. The erection of the temple was a figure of Christ building His Church, and this He does not by destroying men's lives, but by saving them.

Continuing the "word" which David had received from the Lord, he adds, "Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon (Peaceable), and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name; and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever. Now, my son, the Lord be with you, and prosper you, and build the house of the Lord your God, as He has said of you" (1 Chronicles 22:9-11). In what follows David enjoined his son (v. 13) to keep God's commands and to take heed to his duty in everything. He must not think that by building the temple he would secure a dispensation to indulge the lusts of the flesh. Nay, let him know that though king of Israel, he was himself a subject of the God of Israel, and would be prospered by Him in proportion as he made the divine law his rule (cf. Joshua 1:8).

A little later he addressed him thus: "And you, Solomon my son, know you the God of your father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts: if you seek Him, He will be found of you but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever, Take heed now; for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary: be strong and do it" (1 Chronicles 28:9, 10). How concerned David was that his son should be pious. Faithfully did he set before him the inevitable alternative: blessing if he served the Lord, woe if he turned away from Him. Here was a case where divine foreordination had made irrevocably certain the end, and yet where human responsibility was insisted upon. The perpetuity of God's kingdom to David's posterity was absolutely assured in Christ, yet the entail of the temporal kingdom was made contingent on the conduct of David's descendants: if they were self-willed and remained disobedient, the entail would be cut off.

The same note of contingency is struck again unmistakably in "*If* your children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you (said He) a man on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 2:4). Alas, we know from the sequel what happened: God punished the idolatry of Solomon by the defection of the ten tribes from his son, until ultimately the family of David was deprived of all royal authority. It has been thus all through the piece: man has utterly failed in whatever trust God has committed to him: sentence of death was written upon the prophetic, the priestly, and the kingly office in Israel. Was then the divine purpose thwarted? No indeed; that could not be: the counsels of God are made good in the Second Man and not in the first. It is in and by and through *Christ* the divine decrees are secured. And as it is in the Second Man and not in the first, so it is in a *heavenly* realm and not in the earthly that the Old Testament promises find their fulfillment. Christ according to the flesh, was made of the seed of David, and in Him the kingdom of God is *spiritually* realized.

"And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, even my God, will be with you; He will not fail you, nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 28:20). It is noteworthy that that to which David principally exhorted his son was firmness and boldness. Courage is one of the graces most needed by the servants of God, for the devil as a roaring lion will ever seek to strike terror into their hearts. This was the charge given to Joshua when called to succeed Moses: "Only be you strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the Law" (Joshua 1:7). To His servant the prophet the Lord said, "Fear them not, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house" (Ezekiel 3:9): the frowns of those who hate the Truth are no more to be regarded than the flattery of those who would quench the Spirit by puffing us up with a sense of our own importance. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" (

Matthew 10:28) said Christ to the apostles—gifts are of no avail if we lack courage to use them.

The charge which David gave to Solomon concerning his old enemies is recorded in 1 Kings 2. "Moreover you know also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the—two captains of the host of Israel, unto Abner the son of Her, 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 belt that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. Do therefore according to your wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace and, behold, you have with you Shimei . . . which cursed me with a grievous curse . . . now therefore hold him not guiltless . . ." etc. (verses 5-9). These orders are not to be regarded as issuing from a spirit of private revenge, but rather with a regard for the glory of God and the good of Israel. Joab had long deserved to die for his cold-blooded murders, and the part he had recently played in aiding the revolt of Adonijah. While such men as he and Shimei lived they would be a continual *menace* to Solomon and the peacefulness of his reign.

The charge David made to the princes is found in 1 Chronicles 22: "David also commanded all the princes of Israel to help Solomon his son, saying, Is not the Lord your God with you? and has He not given you rest on every side? for He has given the inhabitants of the land into mine hand; and the land is subdued before the Lord, and before His people. Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God. arise therefore, and build you the sanctuary" (verses 17-19). Once more we see how deeply concerned David was that the honor of Jehovah should be promoted by the erection of a suitable dwelling-place for His holy ark, and therefore did he command the princes to give whatever aid they could to his son in this undertaking. Monarchs can only forward the work of God in their dominions as they are supported by those nearest to them in high office. David urged upon them their obligations by insisting that gratitude to God for His abundant mercies called for generosity and effort on their part. He bids them be zealous by fixing their eyes on God's glory and making His favor their happiness. When the Lord truly possesses the heart neither sacrifice nor service will be begrudged.

From 1 Chronicles 23 and the chanters which follow we learn of the considerable trouble David went to in fixing the arrangements for the temple services and putting in order the offices of it, in which he prepared For the house of God as truly as when he laid up silver and gold for it. It is noticeable that the tribe of Levi had multiplied almost fourfold (23:3, and cf. Numbers 4:46-48), which was a much greater increase than in any other tribe. It was for the honor of Jehovah that so great a number of servants should attend His house—an adumbration of the countless millions of angels which wait upon the heavenly throne. A detailed account is supplied of the distribution of the priests and Levites into their respective classes and of their duties, such particularization showing us that God is a God of order, especially in matters pertaining to His worship. The distribution of the officers was made by lot (24:5, etc.) to show that all was governed by the divine will (Proverbs 16:33). The priesthood was divided into twenty-four courses (24:18), a figure perhaps of the "twenty-four elders" of Revelation 4:4.

"Then David gave to Solomon his son the pattern of the porch, and of the houses thereof . . . And the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, . . . All this, said David, the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern" (1 Chronicles 28:11, 12, 19). David had received full instructions from God concerning the design of the temple and how everything was to be ordered in it: nothing was left to chance or the caprice of man, nor even to the wisdom of Solomon; all was divinely prescribed. Moses had received a similar pattern for the building of the tabernacle (Exodus 25:9) both of them being a figure of Christ and heavenly things. But the worship of God in this Christian era is in marked contrast from that which obtained under the Mosaic economy: in keeping with the much greater liberty which obtains under the New Covenant, precise rules and detailed regulations for the external worship of God in every circumstance are nowhere to be found in either the Acts or the Epistles.

The charge which David gave to the congregation was the longest of any. First, he warned them that Solomon was of tender years—less than twenty—and therefore very young to assume such heavy responsibilities (1 Chronicles 29:1). Second, he reminded them how he had himself "prepared with all his might for the house of his God" (v. 2), having "set his affection" thereon, and urged his hearers to emulate his example by giving of their substance unto the Lord (v. 5). Both the leaders (verses 5-8) and the people (v. 9) responded "willingly" and liberally, so that David "rejoiced with great joy." Then he magnified the Lord in these notable terms, "Your. O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the Heaven and in the earth is Your; *Your* is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted as Head above all. Both riches and honor come of You, and You reign over all; and in Your hand is power and might" (verses 11, 12).

The *deep humility* of the man was again evidenced when David added, "But who am I, and what is my people, that *we* should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of You, and of Your own have we given You. For we are strangers before You, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build You an house for Your holy name comes of *Your hand,* and is all Your own" (verses 14-16). Beautiful is it to hear the king in his last words giving honor to whom honor is due. "And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshiped the Lord, and the king. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto the Lord . . . And they did eat and drink before the Lord on that day with great gladness (verses 20-22). What a grand finale was this to the reign of David: the king surrounded by his subjects engaged in joyfully worshiping the King of kings!

"Now the days of David drew near that he should die" (1 Kings 2:1): not that extreme old age necessitated his demise, but because his appointed time had arrived. The length of our sojourn on this earth is not determined by the care we take of our health (though human responsibility requires that we abstain from all intemperance and recklessness), nor upon the skill of our physicians (though all lawful means should be employed), but upon the sovereign decree of God. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days . . . His days are *determined,* the number of his months are with You, You have appointed his bounds that he cannot pass" (Job 14:1, 5). No, when the divinely-ordained limit is reached, all the doctors in the world cannot prolong our life a single moment. Thus we are told of Jacob, "The time drew near that Israel *must* die" (Genesis 47:29)—"must" because God had decreed it. So it was with David: he had fulfilled God's purpose concerning him, his course was finished, and he could now enter into his eternal rest.

"And he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth" (1 Kings 2:1). He realized that his end was near, yet he was not diffident to own it nor afraid to speak of dying. He calmly referred to his decease as a "way": it was not only an exit from this world, but an entrance into another and better one. He speaks of his death as "the way of all the earth": from the earth its dwellers are taken, and to it they return (Genesis 3:19). Even the heirs of Heaven (except those alive at Christ's return: 1 Corinthians 15:51) must pass through the valley of the shadow of death, yet they need fear no evil. In like manner Paul spoke of his "departure" (2 Timothy 4:6), using a nautical term which refers to a ship being loosed from its moorings: so at death the soul is released from the cables which bound it to the shores of time, and it glides forth into eternity.

David made all the preparations for his departure with unruffled composure because he knew that death did not end all. He knew that as soon as he drew his last breath. the angels of God (Luke 16:22) would convey him into the abode of the redeemed. He knew the moment his soul was absent from the body, he would be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:19). He knew that in the grave his flesh should rest "in hope" (Psalm 16:9), and that in the morning of the resurrection he should come forth fully conformed to the image of his Savior (Psalm 17:15). And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead" (1 Chronicles 29:28). His epitaph was inscribed by the Holy Spirit: "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep . . . (Acts 13:36). May we too be enabled to serve our generation as faithfully as David did his.