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THE LIFE OF DAVID

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CHAPTER 50

HIS KINDNESS REPULSED

<0000> 2 SAMUEL 10

“I have seen an end of all perfection; but Thy commandment is exceeding broad” (<19996> 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 Thy 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 Thy 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” (<19905> 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 Thy 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 (<19916> Psalm 36:6), so high that it is established in heaven (<19989> Psalm 119:89), so long that it will endure forever (<60123> 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 (~~<1000>~~ 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 ~~<1000>~~ 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 (~~<10129>~~ 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 ~~<10000>~~ 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 ~~<10000>~~ 2 Samuel 9.

On this occasion, instead of admiring the lovely typical picture which ~~<10000>~~ 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” (vv. 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 ^{<13190>}1 Chronicles 19 which is the same as the *remoter* context in 2 Samuel for ^{<13180>}1 Chronicles 18 is parallel with ^{<10900>}2 Samuel 9. And what do we find there? David engaging in warfare, subduing the Philistines (^{<10800>}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 (vv. 15-18).

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” (^{<10100>}2 Samuel 11:1).

Thus, in the light of the immediate context, both before and after what is recorded in ^{<10000>}2 Samuel 10 and ^{<13190>}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 nought.

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that *the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*” (~~3000~~ 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” (~~4000~~ 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” (~~4188~~ 1 Peter 3:8), and to “do good unto all, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (~~4360~~ Galatians 6:10). Moreover, the Christian must be watchful against assuming an “I am holier than thou” 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 (~~4920~~ 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 profferer; something upon the nature of what is proffered. 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 Jabeshgilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. 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” (^{<9110>}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,

“Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord!” (^{<1492>}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 (^{<6218>}Deuteronomy 23:3, 4). But more: concerning both the Ammonites and the Moabites God expressly prohibited,

“Thou shalt *not* seek their peace nor their good all thy days forever” (^{<6216>}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, Thinkest thou that David doth honor thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?” (~~10103~~ 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 (~~011516~~ Genesis 15:16; ~~40232~~ Matthew 23:32): their hearts were ripe for ruin, and therefore were they hardened to their destruction (~~101101~~ 2 Samuel 11:1). God had not forgotten what is recorded in ~~091101~~ 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 51

HIS FEARFUL FALL

<BIB>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 answereth 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’ (<BIB> 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” (<BIB> Genesis 8:21), “the heart is deceitful above all things, and

desperately wicked” (^{<24170>}Jeremiah 17:9), “in my flesh dwelleth no good thing” (^{<45718>}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” (^{<12340>}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” (^{<010921>}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 his wife to misrepresent her relationship to him, and through the acted falsehood imperils his peace and her own” (^{<011212>}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; yea, 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 thirsteth for God, for the living God” (¹⁹³²Psalm 42:2) now lusted after a forbidden object. Alas, what is man? Truly “man at his best estate is altogether vanity” (¹⁹³⁵Psalm 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 eveningtide, 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 enquired 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 uncleanness: and she returned unto her house” (^{<10110>}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 sin; second, the steps of the sin; third, the aggravations of the sin.

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 ^{<101017>}2 Samuel 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 Saviours 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 “thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy 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” (⁵¹¹⁸2 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 (⁴⁹¹¹³1 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 ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (⁴⁹⁶¹¹Ephesians 6:11).

“And it came to pass in an eveningtide, 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 eveningtide 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” (⁴⁹¹³³Matthew 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*” (⁴⁹¹²⁴Proverbs 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” (⁴⁹⁴³⁰Proverbs 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 thy poverty come as

one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man” (vv. 33, 34)—are not those verses a solemn commentary on ^{<10102>}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 ^{<23315>}Isaiah 33:15 and 16 we are told concerning the one that “shutteth 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” (^{<19337>}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 enquired 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 wilt Thou 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” (^{<19A102>}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 enquired 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 ^{<5014>}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 ^{<1028>}2 Samuel 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 52

HIS TERRIBLE SIN

1010 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 offenses, 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 ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (^{<40641>}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 thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life” (^{<2023>}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” (^{<51042>}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 nought 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 eyes 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, till 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” (⁽¹⁰¹⁰⁵⁾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” (⁽²⁰³¹⁵⁾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 impugny; 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” (⁽⁵⁸¹²⁵⁾Hebrews 11:25), and a very brief one at that: nevertheless “at the last it biteth like a serpent and stingeth like an adder” (⁽¹²³²⁾Proverbs 23:32). Make no mistake on that point, dear reader: “Be sure your sins will find you out” (⁽⁰⁸²²³⁾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 committeth adultery with another man’s wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and adulteress shall surely be put to death” (⁽¹³¹⁰⁾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 intercourse 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 ~~<101106>~~ 2 Samuel 11:6-21 ere 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 that

covereth his sins shall not prosper” (~~21213~~ 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*” (~~19113~~ Psalm 146:3).

“And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy 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 of some who may express good will toward us by their presents.

“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, Camest thou not from thy journey? Why then didst thou not go down into thine 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 thou livest, and thy soul liveth, 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 thee 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 Uriah in Jerusalem a little longer, his base desire might be realized.

“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 53

HIS TERRIBLE SIN (CONTINUED)

<0110> 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 (<0111> 2 Samuel 11:11). Second, he had endeavored to make him drunk (<0113> 2 Samuel 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*" (<0117> 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, till crimes are multiplied and magnified beyond computation, and till 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” (~~5406~~ 1 Timothy 3:6).

How we need to pray that God would mercifully *hide* pride from” us (~~18317~~ 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 ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die” (~~10114~~ 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 (^{<0210>}1 Samuel 21:2), his dissimulation before the king of Gath (^{<0212>}1 Samuel 21:12), his rash vow to destroy Nabal (^{<0233>}1 Samuel 25:33), his unbelieving “I shall one day perish at the hand of Saul” (^{<0270>}1 Samuel 27:1), his injustice in the matter of Mephibosheth and Ziba (^{<0164>}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 any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, *save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite*” (^{<1155>}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 shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth 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 thou 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 committed such atrocious crimes, and so long remains impenitent, be indeed a child of God, a member of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit, and an heir of everlasting glory? Can one spark of divine life 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; yea, 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 marvellous 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, whilst 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, whilst 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 ^{<2840>}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 seemeth good in thy 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 (²⁴⁴⁰⁶Jeremiah 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 “giveth no account” of His actions (¹⁸³³¹³Job 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” (²⁴⁷⁰⁹Jeremiah 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, hath it come to pass that the profession of many hath 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 ⁵¹⁰⁷⁶Colossians 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 (^{<10101>}2 Samuel 11:1, 2) how it behooves us to watch against the *beginnings* of negligence and self-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 ^{<10115>}1 John 3:15: “Ye know that no murderer hath 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 ^{<10111>}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*” (^{<10103>}2 Samuel 11:3; ^{<11135>}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 54

HIS CONVICTION

<0121> 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 hast thou done, and I kept silence,” yet He adds “but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes”
(<0121> 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 bowels is turned, *it is the gall of asps within him*. He hath 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” (vv. 12-16, 26, 27). Notably is this the case with backsliders, for God will not be 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” (^{<1017>}Proverbs 20:17). Soon will the guilty one have to cry out,

“He hath made my chain heavy... He hath made me desolate: He hath filled me with bitterness... Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace” (^{<2807>}Lamentations 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” (^{<1933B>}Psalm 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” (^{<1933B>}Psalm 32:3): groans of remorse were wrung from his yet unbroken heart. “For day and night Thy 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 ^{<1004>}2 Samuel 5:4)—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 Thy salvation” (v. 12) he cries, for spiritual comforts had entirely deserted him. “O Lord, open Thou my lips: and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise” (v. 15): the dust had 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 thy 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*” (¹⁹⁸⁶ 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” (¹⁰¹²⁰ 2 Samuel 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” (¹⁹⁵⁷²⁴ 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” (^{<10121>}2 Samuel 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 (^{<46157>}1 Corinthians 15:5). O the marvel of it! How it should melt our hearts. “If we believe not, yet *He* abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself” (^{<58213>}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 lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail” (^{<19892>}Psalms 89:32, 33).

So it was here: David still had an interest in that everlasting covenant “ordered in all things and sure” (^{<10276>}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 (^{<10124>}2 Samuel 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 marvellous 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” (^{<23717>}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 offenses: 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” (~~19510~~ 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 the 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*” (~~4068~~ 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 (~~10704~~ 2 Samuel 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 was come to him” (~~1013~~ 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 any thing 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 offense, 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 liveth, the man that hath 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 ^{<51021>}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 “*Thou* art the man” (v. 7), and speaks directly in the name of God: “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel.”

First, David is reminded of the signal favors which had been bestowed upon him (vv. 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. ^{<198411>}Psalm 84:11.

Third, in view of God's tender mercies, faithful love, and all-sufficient gifts, he is asked “Wherefore hast thou *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 till our next chapter.

CHAPTER 55

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 (~~2440~~ Jeremiah 44:4), that horrible disease which brought death into the world (~~4512~~ Romans 5:12), that fearful thing which nailed to the Cross the Lord of glory (~~41124~~ 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; yea, 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 ere 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 whilst in a state of nature. Sin blinds and hardens, and nought 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 seemeth 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 (^{<1801>}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”
(^{<2001>}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” (^{<1908>}Luke 5:8). Those on the day of Pentecost were “pricked in their heart” (^{<4027>}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; yea, 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 (^{<10130>}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 offense, 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 exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (^{<47015>}2 Corinthians 10:5).

"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (^{<10123>}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. "Travellers" *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 ^{<5048>}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 hath done this thing shall surely die" (^{<10235>}2 Samuel 12:5). Then it was that the prophet turned and said to him, "*Thou art 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 proffer 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 ‘Thy loving-kindness,’ ‘the multitude of Thy 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” (vv. 1, 3) and of his “iniquity” and “sin” (vv. 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 Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy 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 shapen 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: *Thou* hadst nothing to do with my sin: it was all mine own—out of the proneness unto evil of my depraved nature. It was not *Thou*, 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 ^{<195101>}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 56

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 offenses. 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 Thee, O Lord"
(^{<19001>}Psalm 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 ^{<19001>}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 department 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 Thee, Jehovah, to Thee alone. And in this my application unto Thee, the greatness and urgency of my troubles makes my

soul urgent, earnest, and pressing in my supplication. Whilst I have no rest, I can give Thee 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, Ye are our gods: for *in Thee* the fatherless (the grief-stricken and helpless) findeth mercy (^{<384B>}Hosea 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”
(^{<3846>}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 Thou heardest my voice”
(^{<384D>}Jonah 2:2).

It was his hope in the plenitude of divine grace that moved David to seek unto the Lord.

“If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth *wait*, and in His word do I *hope*” (~~1900B~~ 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” (~~1986I7~~ Psalm 86:17), some “answer of peace” (~~014116~~ Genesis 41:16) from the Lord.

But it is in ~~19510I~~ 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 till 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 “Thou shalt *un-sin* me.”

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (¹⁹⁵¹¹⁰Psalm 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 Thy 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 nought but vain presumption or insane enthusiasm. “And uphold me with Thy free Spirit” (v. 12). First, he had prayed, “Take not Thy 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.

Ere 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*” (^{<510213>}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 (^{<30416>}Hebrews 4:16), and a fresh application to our conscience of the cleansing blood (^{<61107>}1 John 1:7, 9).

The saints of old prayed for pardon:

“For Thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (^{<192511>}Psalms 25:11).

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples *to pray* “Forgive us our debts” (^{<40612>}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 Thy servant” (^{<14932>}Psalms 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 Thou hast broken may rejoice” (^{<95108>}Psalms 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” (^{<41510>}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 Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy 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 imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (~~Psalm~~ 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 Thee” (v. 6). Finally, how precious the deep assurance which enables the restored one to say, “Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble; Thou shalt 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 57

HIS CHASTENINGS

<1021> 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*" (<1019> Philippians 1:9, 10 margin).

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (<10213> 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 impugny. Let us proceed to follow out this double thought a little further.

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (~~19A310~~ 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 hath 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 hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” This is true *penally* (i.e. 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 ~~80807~~ Galatians 6:7; ~~61129~~ 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,

“Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions” (^{<19908>}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 ^{<19906>}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 ^{<04202>}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 hath 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 Thou our God hast punished us *less* than our iniquities deserve” (^{<15013>}Ezra 9:13).

Ere 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 exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth” (~~<181106>~~ 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 hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun (~~<101239>~~ 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 thine house”; he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, and now he hears that his own wives shall be defiled. How true are those words

S“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again”
(~~<101212>~~ Matthew 7:2)!

God hath declared that to the froward He will show Himself froward” (~~<191626>~~ Psalm 16:26), 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 (^{<011924>}Genesis 19:24). Jacob deceived his father by means of the skin of a kid (^{<012916>}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 (^{<013731>}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 (^{<010102>}Exodus 1:24), the Egyptian king and all his hosts were swallowed up by the Red Sea (^{<0121426>}Exodus 14:26). Nadab and Abihu sinned grievously by offering "strange fire" unto the Lord, and accordingly they were consumed by fire from heaven (^{<0103001>}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 (^{<0107006>}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 (^{<0101533>}1 Samuel 15:33).

What proofs are these that

"the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (^{<0101503>}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 that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption": it is also added (though not nearly so frequently quoted) that "he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (^{<0104008>}Galatians 6:8). The same principle of God's granting an exact quid pro quo applies to the service of His ministers:

"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (^{<0104006>}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” (~~4008~~ 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 (~~2340~~ Isaiah 49:4). So too with the rank and the 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 whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord” (~~4008~~ 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” (~~8009~~ 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” (~~1306~~ 1 Chronicles 3:5), and it was from *him* that Christ, according to the flesh, descended (~~4081~~ 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 thee 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 (^{<01172>}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 worshipped: 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” (^{<90513>}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 thee, 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” (~~1321~~ 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 (vv. 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 58

HIS SON ABSALOM

<10130> 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" (<10235> 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" (<10124> 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

"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts" (<24029> 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 thee out of *thine own house*" (<10121> 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 (~~101218~~ 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" (~~101315~~ 2 Samuel 13:5) he might proffer 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 (~~101339~~ 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" (~~101815~~ 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 hast thou done so?" (~~101016~~ 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 (^{<10139>}2 Samuel 12:9, namely, "Thou shalt 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 (^{<10130>}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 (^{<10182>}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" (^{<201921>}Proverbs 19:21), and though it evidenced His "severity" (^{<451122>}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 (^{<101115>}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 ^{<OR17>}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 spake 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 (^{<OR3>}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 shalt thou make marriages with them: thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (^{<OR3>}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, till 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 thy peace, my sister; he (Amnon) is thy 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 spake 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 59

HIS SON ABSALOM(CONTINUED)

<10130> 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" (<4035> 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 ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (<4026> 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 subtilty 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 guile 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 guile 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 sheepshearers in Baalhazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king’s Sons” (^{<10312>}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 ^{<013812>}Genesis 38:12, 13 and ^{<02704>}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 sheepshearers 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 “spake 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, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy 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 thee.” 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 benediction upon him.

“Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, 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 considerably 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 thee?” (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 turneth it whithersoever He will” (~~21:10~~ 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 ‘thine house” and “I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house” (~~10:12~~ 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 ye 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 “thou shalt *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 (^{<10113>}2 Samuel 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—“thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (^{<12701>}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 gat 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 hath 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 hath 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” (vv. 37, 38).

By his foul crime the land of Israel had been defiled and his own life forfeited (^{<04533>}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 (^{<05178>}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” (^{<08153>}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, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood

by man shall his blood be shed” (^{<01006>}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” (^{<10402>}2 Samuel 14:2), but *her* wisdom was the guile 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 (^{<10406>}2 Samuel 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 (~~101224~~ 2 Samuel 12:24, 25), so that there was no immediate danger of the royal line becoming extinct, as the woman represented (~~101407~~ 2 Samuel 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.

CHAPTER 60

HIS SON ABSALOM (CONTINUED)

<10140> 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 (<1162> 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, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple"
(<2146> Luke 14:26).

No wonder that He bade intending disciples to "set down first and count the cost" (<2148> 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”
(~~5043~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

We are exhorted to *mortify* “inordinate affection” (~~5105~~ 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” (vv. 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” (^{<101337>}2 Samuel 13:37, 39),

whereas now that he is brought back to Jerusalem orders are given that he must *not* see the king’s 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 ~~101818~~ 2 Samuel 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” (vv. 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 hath 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 thy 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 thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee 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 unbecoming 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.”

Whilst all this trouble was brewing around David a strange passiveness seems to have crept over him, and to have continued till 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 till 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 out 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 speaketh 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 goeth abroad, he telleth 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’ (i.e. a destructive disease) say they, ‘is poured out upon him, and now that he lieth, 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 (vv. 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 61

HIS SON ABSALOM (CONTINUED)

<10150> 2 SAMUEL 15

“And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him” (<10150> 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 (<10143> 2 Samuel 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 heathen.

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* himself” (<10176> 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 ass*” (<10105> 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 (<10139> 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 <10081> 1 Samuel 8:11; <11005> 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 (^{<1043>}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 *guile* 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 art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. 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" (^{<1052>}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 ^{<0190>}Genesis 19:1; 23:10, 18; 34:20; ^{<0840>}Ruth 4:1). "Thy matters" in verse 3 signifies "thy 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 "thy 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 thee" 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."

Ere 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” (^{<101425>}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*” (^{<101216>}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 thee.” 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 proffered 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 (vv. 1-8); a vehement supplication against his foes, and indignant recounting of their treachery (vv. 9-16); and, finally a prophecy of the retribution that is to fall upon them (vv. 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 thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee... I will trust in Thee.”

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 (^{<100712>}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 thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron” (^{<101307>}2 Samuel 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 ^{<102101>}2 Samuel 21:1. Possibly it is to be dated from the time of his first anointing (^{<101613>}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 thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord. And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron” (vv. 8, 9).

Absalom’s duplicity and hypocrisy appear in all their hideousness. He cloaked his insurrection under the guise of offering sacrifice unto Jehovah (^{<102321>}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 ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth 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 (^{<1032>}2 Samuel 3:2,3) but it was also where David had commenced his reign (^{<1030>}2 Samuel 5:1-3). These "spies" that he sent forth were either his own trusted "servants" (^{<1043>}2 Samuel 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 reigneth" 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 any thing" (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 counsellor, 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 62

HIS FLIGHT

<0150> 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” (<0042>Philippians 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” (<0007>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” (<0065>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" (^{<81314>} 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" (^{<4142>} Acts 14:22), and therefore we should make up our minds to *expect* the same, and to "think it not strange" (^{<10412>} 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" (^{<101513>} 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 thee out of thine own house" (^{<10121>}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 counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh" (^{<101512>}2 Samuel 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 counselled 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" (^{<101623>}2 Samuel 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 eyes 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 ^{<1010B>}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” (^{<1041D>}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 (^{<1015D>}2 Samuel 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" (~~1882~~ 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 Bridechamber 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, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever 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 thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall be with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel” (~~<10121>~~ 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” (~~<10162>~~ 2 Samuel 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.” (~~<51136>~~ 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 negated. 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” (vv. 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 63

CROSSING KIDRON

<0150> 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 counsellor 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 goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king (Absalom, who now usurped the throne): for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go hither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee” (~~101519~~ 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” (~~4816~~ 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 ye seek Me, let these go their way” (~~4818~~ 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 liveth, and my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in life or death, even there also will thy 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. Antotypically, 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 liveth” (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 thee” (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 ^{<4380>}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 ~~<B180>~~ 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” (~~<B144>~~ 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 ~~<I41516>~~ 2 Chronicles 15:16; 30:14; ~~<I2230>~~ 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 (~~<I990D>~~ 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” (~~<A400B>~~ 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 (~~4237~~ 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” (~~4513~~ 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” (~~4127~~ 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 till 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 till 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" (^{<19706>}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, yea that He did *not* exercise it till Christ appeared—a view based on an entirely erroneous interpretation of ^{<40117>}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 ^{<04408>}Numbers 14:8; ^{<05105>}Deuteronomy 10:15; ^{<11109>}1 Kings 10:9; ^{<14908>}2 Chronicles 9:8; ^{<40746>}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 thee: behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth 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” (~~<12319>~~ 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” (~~<181315>~~ Job 13:15).

A sin-entangled soul with guilt burdening his conscience, sees that, in himself, he 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 hath hardened himself against God and hath prospered?” (~~<181004>~~ 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 thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth 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?” (~~<31019>~~ Jonah 3:9),

or a “Who can tell *whether* God will be gracious to me?” (~~<101222>~~ 2 Samuel 12:22), is far better than giving way to a spirit of hopelessness.

“Who knoweth if He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him” (~~2024~~ Joel 2:14):

there the soul must abide until more light from above break forth upon it.

CHAPTER 64

ASCENDING OLIVET

<0150> 2 SAMUEL 15

We resume at the point left off in our last. “The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy 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” (vv. 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. ^{<2312>}Isaiah 20:2, 4; ^{<2347>}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*” (^{<2867>}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*” (^{<2245>}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” (~~19514~~ Psalm 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 David (v.21).

“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 ~~19401~~ Psalm 41 he mentions one evil after another which afflicted him, and finishes with “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (v. 9)—that was the climax: anything worse could scarcely be imagined, as the opening “Yea,” 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 that hated me that did magnify himself against me: then I would have hid myself from him. But it was

thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance”
 (<19512> Psalm 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” (<194904> Psalm 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* Thee, 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 (<101623> 2 Samuel 16:23).

“And David said, O Lord, I pray Thee, 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” (<181217> 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 nought 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 availeth 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 ^{<101714>}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 every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let our requests be made known unto God” (^{<10106>}Philippians 4:6).

“And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God” (v. 32).

This is blessed and teaches a lovely practical lesson: “weeping must never hinder worshipping” (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 worshipping 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 worshipped 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 of 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 say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah” (^{<10100>}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 (^{<101512>}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 thou, O Lord, *art* a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head” (^{<1988>}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 “Thou art 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” (^{<1984>}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” (^{<1985>}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” (^{<1986>}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 Thou *host* smitten all mine enemies upon the cheekbone; Thou *host* broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord: Thy blessing is upon Thy people. Selah” (^{<1987>}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, ‘Thou, O Lord, art 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 ^{<13733>}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 (^{<10175>}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 thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me; But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father’s servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing so ever, thou shalt hear out of the king’s house, thou shalt 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 ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear. So Hushai David’s friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem” (vv. 33-37).

“As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (^{<12719>}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” (¹⁹³⁷⁶Psalm 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 65

MISJUDGING MEPHIBOSHETH

<0160>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” (<0724> 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” (~~4:1724~~ 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” (~~5472~~ 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 own fault if we are imposed upon by wolves in sheep’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 (~~10101~~ 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 (^{<101924>}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 discerneth all things” (^{<40125>}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” (^{<101601>}2 Samuel 16:1).

The topographical references connects with ^{<101530>}2 Samuel 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 (^{<101724>}2 Samuel 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 ^{<061811>}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" (^{<4721>}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, counselling 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 (^{<4015>}2 Samuel 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 that is spiritual discerneth all things" (^{<41215>}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 thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (^{<4062>}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 asses 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 ^{<0900>}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 (^{<0904>}1 Samuel 4:4), with whom David had made a covenant that he would not cut off his kindness to his house forever (^{<0901>}1 Samuel 20:11-17). In ^{<0900>}2 Samuel 9 we read,

“The king called to Ziba, Saul’s servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master’s son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master’s son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master’s son shall eat bread always at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants” (vv. 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” (^{<1805>}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 thou 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 asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summerfruit 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 maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men" (²⁰¹⁸¹⁶ 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 ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations" (²¹¹⁶⁹ Luke 16:9).

“And the king said, And where is thy master’s son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To-day 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 taketh a gift out of the bosom to pervert the ways of judgment” (²⁰¹⁷²³Proverbs 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 thine 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 thee that I may find grace in thy 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 66

CURSED

<0160>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 had 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 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* hath 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 hath 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 head, he bowed before Him: ‘The Lord hath 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 thee, 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” (~~1016B~~ 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 “thou 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 world, far more than he has its frowns.

“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 ~~1016B~~ 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 (~~1010~~ 1 Samuel 16:1-13; ~~1011~~ 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 he 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 ere passing on, let us not overlook the fact that Bahurim has been mentioned previously in this book: see ~~1016~~ 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, thou bloody man, and thou son of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou has reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man” (vv. 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 interest for us today.

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*” (^{<1123>}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:

“Thou shalt not revile the judge, nor curse the ruler of thy people” (^{<1228>}Exodus 22:28);

“Curse not the king, no not in thy thought” (^{<2103>}Ecclesiastes 10:20).

Second, it was despicable beyond words that Shimei should wait to vent his malice upon David till the time when his cup of sorrow was already full, thus adding to his grief

“For they persecute him whom Thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of Thy wounded” (^{<1925>}Psalms 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: ^{<1012>}2 Samuel 1:12.

“And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou son of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man” (vv. 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” (⁵³²¹⁹2 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 thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who then shall say, Wherefore hast thou done so?” (vv. 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, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven, and consume them, even as Elijah did?” (⁴⁰⁵⁴Luke 9:54).

As Christ answered “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye 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” (⁴¹²³1 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 (~~13100~~ Leviticus 10:1-3)—knowing he deserved yet sorer judgment, he was silent.

“And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath 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 crucifiers of Christ were guiltless because they did what God's hand and counsel “determined before to be done” (~~44023~~ 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 ourself by giving a quotation from the Westminster Confession: “God's providence extendeth itself to all sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath 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 proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God” (chap. 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 bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath 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” (vv. 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, He 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 67

BEFRIENDED

<1060> 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 (<4100> 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 Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain” (<19760> 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 nought 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 (~~4828~~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” (~~23106~~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

“*Thou* preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies” (~~19216~~Psalms 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” (~~4883~~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” (~~47127~~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” (~~4482~~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 hath *set the one over against the other*” (^{<2074>}Ecclesiastes 7:14).

“And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there” (^{<1064>}2 Samuel 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 thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy 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 thy father’s presence, so will I be in thy presence” (vv. 16-19). This is the sequel to what was before us in ^{<1052>}2 Samuel 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 thy father, and am now devoted solely to

thee and thy 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 intentions, 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” (^{<40112>}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 seemeth Him best. This is what David had done at first (^{<101531>}2 Samuel 15:31); but, later, he spoiled it by resorting to a carnal policy (^{<101534>}2 Samuel 15:34). Ere 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 thy kindness to thy 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 enquired “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 (^{<1021>}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 thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace” (^{<1070>}2 Samuel 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 granddaughter 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” (³¹¹³John 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” (^{<4127>}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 shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (^{<3048>}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 saith” (v. 5).

This is surely striking. In the previous instance Absalom had acted promptly on the evil counsel of Ahithophel (^{<10162>}2 Samuel 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 turneth it whithersoever He will” (^{<12101>}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” (~~23318~~ 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 68

BEFRIENDED (CONTINUED)

10160 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 unmeetness 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 saith. And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not, speak thou”
(^{<10175>}2 Samuel 17:5,6).

Let it not be forgotten that

“the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom”
(^{<101623>}2 Samuel 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 ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whosoever He will” (^{<20417>}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 “setteth up over the kingdom of men, *the basest* of men” (^{<20417>}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 been duplicated in the politics of this world, particularly in those of Europe.

“And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath 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 (^{<101617>}2 Samuel 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 counsellors 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, thou knowest thy 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 thy 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 (~~Q1428~~ 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 whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that followeth 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 knoweth that thy 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 eventuate 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 thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person” (v. 11).

This was the only logical inference to draw from the preceding premises. The “twelve thousand men” Ahithophel asked for (^{<1070>}2 Samuel 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 counselling 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 thine 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" (vv. 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 taketh the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong" (~~180513~~ Job 5:13)!

No doubt Absalom was priding himself in his prudence by obtaining the advice of both these experienced counsellors, 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 goeth 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 falleth 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 69

HIS STAY AT MAHANAIM

<10170> 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 (<10175> 2 Samuel 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 hath Ahithophel counselled 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” (<101721> 2 Samuel 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 ^{<318B>}John 18:8, 9.

It was at this time, most probably, that David wrote ^{<19201>}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 (^{<19204>}Psalms 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 (^{<19413>}Psalms 43:3, 4). These Psalms bring before us 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 intercourse 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 (^{<19522>}Psalm 55:22) when we cast 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 Thee* 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 ass, and arose, and gat 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” (^{<101723>}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 enquired at the oracle of God” (^{<101623>}2 Samuel 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 (^{<101714>}2 Samuel 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 thee, before the leaders of my people, and *before* Israel” (^{<0153>}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 saith 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 glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (^{<2023>}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” (^{<1976>}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 (^{<0133>}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 had 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”
(vv. 24, 26).

At last the perfidious 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 (^{<1301>}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" (vv. 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" (^{<1002>}2 Samuel 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 watereth others, shall himself be watered! "Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar" was the man who had given shelter to Mephibosheth (^{<1005>}2 Samuel 9:5): the king had relieved him of this trust by giving Mephibosheth a place at his own table (^{<10011>}2 Samuel 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" (~~101922~~ 2 Samuel 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 70

HIS SON'S DEATH

<10180> 2 SAMUEL 18

“The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment” (<18316> 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” (<81125> Hebrews 11:25), whereas the pleasures which are at God’s right hand are “for evermore” (<191611> 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 (<101501> 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 (<101510> 2 Samuel 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 (<101724> 2 Samuel 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 doom.

“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: marshalling 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 renitent* 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, Thou shalt 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 thou art worth ten thousand of us, therefore now it is better that thou succor 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,

“*Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel*” (~~102117~~ 2 Samuel 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 seemeth 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 save Absalom’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 (~~10124~~ 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 (~~4188~~ 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” (~~4130~~ John 13:1).

Verily, such love “passeth 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” (~~10172~~ 2 Samuel 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” (~~07126~~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” (vv. 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 (^{<10436>}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 hangeth on a tree" (^{<4813>}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" (^{<6121>}Revelation 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 "despiseth his father's instruction" (~~2015B~~ Proverbs 15:5), and that

"whoso curseth his Father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in obscure darkness" (~~2011B~~ Proverbs 20:20);

and again,

"The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it" (~~2017B~~ 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, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver and a girdle. 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 thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom" (vv. 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 71

HIS SON'S DEATH (CONTINUED)

<10180> 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” (<10185> 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” (<101810> 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, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle” (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 the finer sensibilities of others.

“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 thee 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 thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me” (vv. 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 thee. 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. Whilst 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 ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die” (¹⁰¹¹⁴2 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, he openly asserted his authority by *compelling* Joab to rend his clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn before this very Abner (^{<10138>}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 “whatsoever the king did, pleased all the people” (^{<10136>}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 (^{<10138>}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 thee in all this?" (^{<1049>}2 Samuel 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 thee, 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” (^{<101817>}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 (^{<052118>}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 “whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased” (^{<021411>}Luke 14:11); so it was in the history of Haman and of Nebuchadnezzar, and such was the case here. Absalom had three Sons (^{<101427>}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 hath avenged him of his enemies” (v. 19).

Ahimaaz was the son of Zadok the priest (^{<101527>}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 (^{<101717>}2 Samuel 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, hath gotten Him the victory” (^{<1980>}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, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt 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 be 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 (^{<1015>}2 Samuel 1:15), and therefore he probably thought that a similar vengeance might be visited upon the one who should inform him of Absalom’s death.

“Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab. But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast 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 howsoever” 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 wilt thou, *my son*,” indicates that he held Ahimaaz in some esteem, and his “thou hast 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 thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the King” (v. 28).

CHAPTER 72

HIS INORDINATE GRIEF

<1018011> 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 graveside 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 thy heart with all diligence" (<10023> 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” (^{<51085>}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”
(^{<51082>}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” (^{<90211>}Psalms 2:11), on the other hand we are exhorted to “sorrow not, even as others who have no hope” (^{<52043>}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 bowels of natural affection in the prophet that he sat up all night weeping for him (^{<91511>}1 Samuel 15:11), yea, he continued mourning until the reproof of heaven stopped the torrent of his tears.

“And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?” (^{<91601>}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 that is slow to anger is better than the mighty: and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (~~2062~~ 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 our 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” (^{<101612>}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” (^{<101801>}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, ^{<194201>}Psalm 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: ^{<101427>}2 Samuel 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” (^{<101824>}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 bringeth tidings” (vv. 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 of horses in Israel, so that these couriers came on foot.

“And the watchman said, Me thinketh 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 cometh with good tidings” (v. 27).

It will be remembered that Joab had first dispatched Cushy 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 Cushy” (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 thyself a pattern of good works” (~~1~~ 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 thy God, which hath 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~~ 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” (~~1~~ 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 thy 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” (vv. 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 hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. 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 thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is” (vv. 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, whither 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 thee, 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 spake 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 thy children have sinned against him, and he hath cast them away in their transgression (thou shouldest submit) for doth God pervert judgment?’ (~~1808~~ Job 8:3,4 and compare ~~1808~~ 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 God's glory, moved David to send for his son. As chief magistrate in Israel he condoned his grievous offenses. 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 73

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, and 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 weepeth and mourneth 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 gat 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!” (~~101901~~ 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 think themselves frowned on” (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 weepeth and mourneth 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 “gat 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 were really appreciated.

“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 grief 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 maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (^(16:7)Proverbs 16:7):

yes, “maketh,” 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 (^(26:26-30)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, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest 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 thee well” (vv. 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 thy servants: for I swear by the Lord, if thou go not forth, there will

not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy 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 doth 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 proffer 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” (~~19105~~ 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 ye not a word of bringing the king back?” (vv. ~~10910~~ 2 Samuel 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 ye 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. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king?” (vv. 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 ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou 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 (^{<13217>}1 Chronicles 2:17), Absalom had set him over the rebel army (^{<10175>}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 (^{<10210>}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 thou and all thy 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 (^{<2101>}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 till 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: ~~1911~~ Psalm 110:2, 3” (Matthew Henry).

CHAPTER 74

HIS RETURN TO JORDAN

<0190> 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” (~~195723~~ 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 salutary 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 gay, 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 flight 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" (~~4281~~ 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” (^{<101915>}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 thou, and all thy 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 of its tribes separated, and were never again restored.

“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 (^{<101812>}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*” (^{<01114>}1 Samuel 11:14)—thus was history now virtually repeating itself.

“And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted 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 (~~1016B~~ 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 (~~1016B~~ 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 ere 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 thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For thy servant doth 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” (vv. 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”
(~~25517~~ 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 offenses, 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 (~~1016B~~ 2 Samuel 16:9): mercy was foreign to his nature, and even though Shimei now publicly acknowledge his offense 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. ~~4194E~~ 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, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye 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, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him” (vv. 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” (~~4187~~ 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 ye forgive men their trespasses, your

heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (^{<4064>} 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 (^{<09178>} 1 Samuel 17:28); when persecuted, he threatened not, but suffered it (^{<09193>} 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 (^{<09001>} 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” (^{<09210>} 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

“receiveth 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 “Thou shalt 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 75

HIS RESTORATION

<10190> 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” (<101924> 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 (<100901> 2 Samuel 9). Mephibosheth was practically a cripple, being lame on both his feet (<10093> 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 ass 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 (<101601> 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” (~~4015~~ 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” (~~4018~~ 1 Corinthians 4:8).

“The king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou 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 (vv. 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 thine 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 didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine 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 had 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 speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou 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, yea, 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, thine are *all* that pertained unto Mephibosheth”
(~~101604~~ 2 Samuel 16:4).

But now: since David did *not* confirm here the order he had given in ~~101604~~ 2 Samuel 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" (~~1Kings~~ 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, Yea, 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 unfeigned and disinterested 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" (~~2Samuel~~ 2 Samuel 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" (vv. 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 thou over with me, and I will feed thee 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 best this earth has to offer.

“But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king, and do to him what shall seem good to thee” (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 thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee” (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 shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother” (<10237> 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” (<24117> 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 thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David’s men with him over Jordan?” (vv. 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, yea, 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 ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king’s cost? or hath 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 ye: why then did ye 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” (vv. 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 offense 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; till 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 76

HIS RESTORATION (CONTINUED)

<000> 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 king's 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, yea, 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 that cometh in the name of the Lord” (~~4200~~ Matthew 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” (~~1020B~~ 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” (~~1019B~~ 2 Samuel 19:43).

“And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel” (~~1019B~~ 2 Samuel 19:43).

This was only adding fuel to the fire.

“A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger” (~~10150I~~ 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 (^{<1028>}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 foes.

“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” (^{<1092>}2 Samuel 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 ^{<3219>}John 2:19-21 and compare ^{<1270>}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 clave 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 and-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 (^{<101516>}2 Samuel 15:16; 16:21, 22). God often has to take severe measures with us ere 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 thou 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 thou 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 (^{<101725>}2 Samuel 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 (^{<101913>}2 Samuel 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 death-warrant—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 thou thy 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 “thy 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, yea, 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 ruleth 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 cometh from God only” (Thomas Scott).

CHAPTER 77

HIS PURPOSE THWARTED

<000> 2 SAMUEL 20

In previous chapters it has been pointed out that Joab was a man of a fierce and intractable spirit, and that he 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: <0114> 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 giveth “no account of His matters” (<0313> 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*” (<0128> 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 much in the present will also become intelligible by the sequel in the future—

“What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter”
(^{<0137>}John 13:7).

If these principles were more steadily borne in mind, we should be less nonplussed 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 (^{<0137>}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 (^{<0137>}Ezekiel 20:7, 8). There was a reason why God permitted Doeg to brutally slay no less than eighty-five of the priestly family (^{<01218>}1 Samuel 22:18): it was the execution of the solemn judgment which He pronounced upon the house of Eli (^{<00231>}1 Samuel 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 (~~1075~~ Matthew 27:25).

“The curse causeless shall not come” (~~1040~~ 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—i.e. 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 cases 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” (~~1018~~ 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 thou 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 thou thy 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 girdle 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, Art thou 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 bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died” (vv. 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 thine house” (^{<101210>}2 Samuel 12:10), and Amasa was David's *own nephew*: see ^{<101725>}2 Samuel 17:25 and compare ^{<13213>}1 Chronicles 2:13, 16. “Be sure your sin will find you out” (^{<04323>}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”
(~~<10175>~~ 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. ~~<10175>~~ 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 that favoereth Joab and be that is for David, let him go after Joab” (vv. 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” (vv. 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 78

HIS HONORABLE CONDUCT

<1210> 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” (<1210> 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 enquired 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 till 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 Thou contendest with me” (^{<18102>}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 ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these (material) things shall be added unto you” (^{<4163>}Matthew 6:33).

“And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house because he slew the Gibeonites” (^{<12101>}2 Samuel 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” (~~47125~~ 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” (~~81221~~ Hebrews 12:21), but there is no record in the Old Testament of this. ~~81323~~ 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 sware unto them” (~~8915~~ 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 sware unto them” (vv. 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: ^{<5401>}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” (vv. 26, 27).

From that time onwards, the Gibeonites remained in Israel’s midst, acting as their servants—a peaceful and useful people, as ^{<1687>}Nehemiah 3:7 and other passages intimate.

“And Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah” (^{<1020>}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, whilst neglecting the great task He *has* assigned them. What numbers of the rank and the 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 offenses 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 wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye 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-onement 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 shalt thou 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 ye 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” (vv. 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. ~~15:10~~ 1 Samuel 15:20, 42.

CHAPTER 79

HIS HONORABLE CONDUCT (CONTINUED)

<1210> 2 SAMUEL 21

“Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year: and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites” (<1210> 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 Lord.

God does not always manifest His displeasure at once, either against individuals or nations; instead, He usually gives “space for repentance” (<1221> Revelation 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” (<23610> 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” (<210811> Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Men regard God’s patience as indifference to their sins, thereby emboldening themselves in their wickedness:

“These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (^{<15821>}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 pecuniary 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” (^{<12106>}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 (^{<152416>}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 tapelines. 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 shalt thou 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~~ 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 till 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 (^{([Ex2416](#))}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 thou hang him on a tree: his body shall *not remain* all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day, for he that is hanged is accursed of God" (^{([Ex2122](#))}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 withholden good things from you” (²⁴⁶²⁵Jeremiah 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 self-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” (³¹²¹²Titus 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 ¹⁰²¹⁹2 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 that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (~~2013~~ 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 lengthily 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 Jabeshgilead, 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” (vv. 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 thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee” (~~26166~~ 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 till the end of our earthly pilgrimage, and therefore the work of mortification is to go on till 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 (vv. 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 80

HIS SACRED SONG

<020> 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 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 till 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, paying 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 (^{<01223>}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 (^{<04217>}Numbers 21:17). Moses ended his wilderness wanderings with a song (^{<03122>}Deuteronomy 31:22). Upon Israel's victory over the Canaanites they sang a song (^{<07081>}Judges 5:1). Job speaks of God giving "songs in the night" (^{<183510>}Job 35:10)—a real, if a rare, experience, as many saints can testify. The Psalmist said. "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (^{<19354>}Psalms 119:54).

There is a most marked similarity between the Song of David in ^{<10201>}2 Samuel 22 and ^{<191801>}Psalms 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 ^{<10201>}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 (^{<4019>}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 spake 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” (^{<1020>}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 spake 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 delivereth him out of them all” (^{<19349>}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 (^{<4316>}John 20:26). When the long drought completely dried up the water which sustained Elijah at Cherith, God maintained him with oil at Zarephath.

This too is written for our learning and comfort. As we have traced the life of David through the two books of Samuel, we have seen him in some sore

straits: again and again it looked as though his foes must surely prevail against him; yea, on one occasion, he himself dolefully declared, “I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul” (^{<0270>}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 that is in you, than he that is in the world”
(^{<0404>}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”
(^{<0401>}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 spake 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 see 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:

“thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel” (~~091745~~ 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 thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (⁴¹⁰²³Mark 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” (⁴¹⁰²⁹Matthew 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 thine hand, O king” (²⁰⁸¹⁷Daniel 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*” (²⁰⁶²³Daniel 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 runneth into it, and is safe” (~~201810~~ 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 second death.

“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; Thou savest 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. Yea, 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; Thou savest 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. “Thou

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*” (~~1974~~ 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 81

HIS SACRED SONG (CONTINUED)

<120> 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 (vv. 1-4) he is occupied with extolling Jehovah's perfections: this section we have already considered. In the second (vv. 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” (<121> 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, till 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 snare, unable to fly away.

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" (~~(1270)~~ 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 hath 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 ere 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 ^{<80213>}Hebrews 2:13, and “I will give thanks unto Thee O Lord, among the heathen (Gentiles), and I will sing praises unto Thy name” (v. 50) is found in ^{<6159>}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” (^{<40638>}Matthew 26:38) was but an echo of these words of David’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, yea, 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” (^{<90513>}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” (²⁰⁵¹⁵ 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 our 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 ⁵⁸¹⁷ 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 our situation, nor how acute our grief, let us unburden ourselves to God.

“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” (~~41625~~ 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” (~~3807~~ 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 ghost. 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” (~~41745~~ 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” (vv. 9, 10).

These expressions are borrowed from the awe-inspiring phenomena which attended the appearing of Jehovah upon mount Sinai: compare ~~121916~~ 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 succor, 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" (²³⁰¹⁸Isaiah 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 (¹²¹⁴⁰Exodus 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"(vv. 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” (vv. 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, wilt Thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us” (^{<14012>}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 82

HIS SACRED SONG (CONTINUED)

<1020> 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” (<10217> 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 sitteth 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 (<10237> 1 Samuel 23:7-12) and the Ziphites repeatedly informed of him (<10230> 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 affords unspeakable comfort to the oppressed and despondent.

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” (⁴⁵⁸¹⁵Romans 8:15). Our frail craft is made to battle long against the angry waves, before the Lord appears for our relief (⁴⁰¹⁴²Matthew 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 hath begun a good work in you, *will* complete it...” (³⁰⁰⁰⁶Philippians 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 cometh in the morning.” Sometimes we are granted a foretaste of that joy even in this vale 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: ²³⁴⁰¹Isaiah 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 Thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of Thy 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” (³⁰⁰⁷2 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. Yea 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” (vv. 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 ~~(122)~~ 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 purport of these verses (20-25—repeated in substance in ~~1918~~ 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 blest 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 communion he had with God in them.

“The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath 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 (^{<091728>}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 (^{<193519>}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 offense toward God and men” (~~4214~~ 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; whithersoever 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 likeminded, 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 "thou shalt 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 hath 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. Yea, 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 thee hence, Satan.” “And have not wickedly departed from My God”: “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” (^{<4386>}John 8:46) was His challenge to His enemies. “For all His judgments were before Me”:

“I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me”
(^{<3178>}John 17:8)

He affirmed.

“I was also upright before Him”: “I do always those things that please Him” (^{<3029>}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 (^{<42251>}Luke 22:51). “Therefore the Lord hath recompensed Me according to My righteousness”: “Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows” (^{<19457>}Psalms 45:7) is the Spirit’s confirmation.

“With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful, and with the upright man Thou wilt show Thyself upright But Thine eyes are upon the haughty, that Thou mayest bring them down” (vv. 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. (^{<38136>}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 83

HIS SACRED SONG (CONTINUED)

<1020> 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”

(<1837> 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 fancied 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; yea, 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 till that be removed, we shall have to wait till 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 (vv. 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 vv. 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 Thou art my lamp, O Lord: and the Lord will lighten my darkness” (~~10223~~ 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 whither 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 Thou art 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” (~~47018~~ 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 “Thou art my lamp, O Lord.” And is not this the testimony of both writer and reader? Have we not abundant cause to witness to the same glorious fact!

“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 Thee 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 Thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (~~(1511)~~ 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 maketh 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 maketh 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 shineth more and more unto the “perfect day.”

“He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet; and setteth 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 requireth 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 teacheth 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 till we know how to employ them to advantage.

“Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye 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.

“Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy 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 Thy gentleness hath made me great” (v. 36).

The Hebrew word which is here rendered “gentleness,” is one of considerable latitude and has been variously translated. The Septuagint has “Thy discipline,” or Fatherly chastening; another gives “Thy goodness,” referring to the benevolence of God’s actions; still another, and more literally, “Thy 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 had 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 84

HIS SACRED SONG (CONTINUED)

<1020> 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.

“Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip” (<10237> 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 (vv. 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: yea, 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: yea, 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, ye shall live also” (^{<B1419>}John 14:19): His victory in the past, is the sure guarantee of our complete victory in the future.

“For Thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me hast Thou 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, but 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.

“Thou hast 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 ^{<66150>}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”
(^{<6161>}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 thee 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 succors 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: ⁽¹²⁸¹⁶⁾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!

“Thou also hast delivered me from the strivings of my people, Thou hast 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 he is 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 hath begun a good work in you will finish it” (⁽⁵¹⁰¹⁶⁾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,

“Thou hast 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 hath not preserved thee thus far, my faint-hearted brother, to let thee flounder in the end. He who did sustain thee through six trials declares “in seven there shall no evil touch thee” (^{<18519>}Job 5:19). Say, then, with the apostle, “Who hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that He will *yet deliver us*” (^{<70110>}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 prophetic, 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 ~~1054~~ 2 Samuel 5:46.

"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 liveth: 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:

“Honours die, pleasures die, the world dies; but the Lord *liveth*. 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 for ever; the curse shall devour those, everlasting blessings on the head of these” (P. Sterry).

“It is God that avengeth me, and that bringeth down the people under me, and that bringeth me forth from mine enemies: Thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose against me: Thou hast delivered me from the violent man” (vv. 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 unbecoming 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 Thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto Thy 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 thy God in the presence of His enemies. This verse is quoted by the apostle and applied to Christ in ^{<4539>}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 showeth 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 ^{<10715>}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 85

HIS LAST WORDS

<1020> 2 SAMUEL 23

The passage for our present consideration (<1020> 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 <1020> 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 spake 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 thou 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~~ 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” (~~1020~~ 2 Samuel 23:1). Rightly did Matthew Henry point out that “When we find death approaching, we should endeavor both to honor God 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 amongst 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” (^{<19175>}1 Samuel 17:55); and so David had to answer for himself, “I am the son of thy 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 digged.

“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 stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God” (^{<40121>}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 (^{<391513>}James 5:13).

“The Spirit of the Lord spake 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 spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”
(^{<61021>}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 ^{<61213>}1 Corinthians 2:13.

“The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth 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 spake 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 spake, as a reference to ^{<80101>}Hebrews 1:1 and 2 makes clear. Third, “the Rock of Israel spake 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” (^{331D} 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 spake by me,” here “spake *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 that ruleth 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 riseth, 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 that 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 (²³⁰⁴Isaiah 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.

*Favour'd saints of God,
His messengers and sears,
Thy 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 hath 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 (^{<19A74>} 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, yea, 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: ^{<23510>} 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 (vv. 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 86

HIS MIGHTY MEN

<1020> 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,

“Whatsoever things were written *aforetime* were written for our *learning*” (<5150> 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 (<50816> 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" (~~4015~~ 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 ^{<13906>}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 ^{<44013>}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 pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion” (^{<12801>}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” (^{<61210>}Revelation 2:10), of “righteousness” (^{<3048>}2 Timothy 4:8), and of “glory” (^{<61804>}1 Peter 5:4). Then shall He pronounce His “well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy 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.” (~~1023B~~ 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 endowed 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 the 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 thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (^{<5015>}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*" (^{<5016>}Timothy 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 clave 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 (^{<0780>}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” (⁵¹⁰⁶⁹Colossians 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 ⁴⁴⁴²⁷Acts 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 ~~<414B>~~ 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 *ye* may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (~~<40610>~~ 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” (~~<40923>~~ Jeremiah 9:23),

for what has he that 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 87

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 sceptical 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 hath his proper gift of God: one after this manner, and another after that” (^{<4370>}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 worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (^{<6121>}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 standeth 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, yea 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 (vv. 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 proffer their loving service. Take heart, then, lonesome believer: if God does not raise up earthly friends for thee, He will doubly endear Himself to thine 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 withhold, 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” (~~1~~ 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 guile. 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 Zeruah, 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 lionlike 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 (^{<10108>}1 Peter 5:8), his vanquishing of this Egyptian (spoken of in ^{<131123>}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” (^{<10104>}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” (vv. 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 88

HIS FINAL FOLLY

<0240> 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 (<0241> 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 <13723> 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" (^{<12302>}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 goeth 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" (^{<13147>}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” (^{<10240>}2 Samuel 24:1),

or as ^{<13210>}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: ^{<11221>}1 Kings 22:20-22; ^{<26149>}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 ^{<13181>}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 earnestness 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 thou takest 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 thou numberest them... And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord to make an atonement for your souls” (^{<12310>}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 amongst 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 nigh 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 thou numberest 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 marvellously 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 ^{<13210>}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 ^{<3810>}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

<61210> Revelation 12:10 Satan is expressly designated “the accuser of our brethren,” which office we behold him discharging in <18010> 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 <10201> 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 ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men” (<191210> Psalm 12:1).

From <10216> 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 vouchsafed 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” (~~2116~~ 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 heart.”

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 careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith” (~~2116~~ 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 89

HIS FINAL FOLLY (CONTINUED)

<020> 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 vouchsafed 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 taketh 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" (<1210> 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 ^{<10240>}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 ^{<13210>}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 moving 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 salutary 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 ye the people, that I may know the number of the people. And Joab said unto the king, Now the Lord thy 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 doth my lord the king delight in this thing?” (~~1011~~ 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" (^{<19309>}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 thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (^{<40623>}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 ^{<123012>}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 (⁴²⁷¹⁹Matthew 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, whilst 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 (^{<10116>}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” (^{<13206>}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 ere 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 (vv. 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 ^{<10128>}2 Samuel 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” (~~1048~~ 2 Samuel 24:8, 9).

The careful student will note that the figures given here are different from those found in ~~13105~~ 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 90

HIS WISE DECISION

<0201> 2 SAMUEL 24

“When thou takest 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 thou numberest them; that there be no *plague* among them, when thou numberest them” (<02012> 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 abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself’: (<50213> 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” (~~10248~~ 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-nigh 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 perchance a minority have been preserved from such falls, well may they marvel at the distinguishing mercy which has been vouchsafed 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 lusteth 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 end that we have hearts which smite us for wrong doing.

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” (vv. 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” (^{<132107>}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). Ere 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” (^{<132107>}1 Chronicles 21:7),

“And David's heart smote him after he had numbered the people” (^{<102410>}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 (^{<42232>}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” (^{<5042>}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 salutary 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 (^{<01301>}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 biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (^{<1033>}Proverbs 23:32).

“And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy 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 wife, and she upon the Serpent.

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 unfeigned 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” (¹⁴³²⁵2 Chronicles 32:25, 26).

“And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy 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 “giveth His beloved sleep” (^{19C7D}Psalm 127:2), and likewise He withholds it when it serves His purpose. And it is always for our *good* (^{4E8B}Romans 8:28) that He does so, whether we perceive it or no. Sometimes He “giveth songs in the night” (¹⁸⁵¹⁰Job 35:10); we read too of “visions of the night” (^{1844D}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” (^{<19712>}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” (^{<19086>}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 loveth” (^{<21801>}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 saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee” (vv. 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 wont to counsel him in the things of God (cf. ^{<19236>}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 disfellowshipped 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 thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days’ pestilence in thy 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 (⁵¹²⁹Romans 11:29), and unto His own His compassions fail not (²¹⁸²Lamentations 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 loveth He chasteneth” (⁸¹²⁶Hebrews 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” (~~1983~~ 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 91

HIS WISE DECISION (CONTINUED)

<0200> 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 ^{<023012>}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 amongst 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" (⁽¹²⁴¹⁰⁾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” (~~140714~~ 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 (~~140714~~ 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 Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy 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 Thy servant.” By that petition at least three things were denoted. First, remit the guilt of the same, both from before Thine accusing Law and the weight of the same upon my conscience. Second, cleanse the defilement thereof, both from before Thy 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 offense 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 hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Yet he at once added, Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (~~101214~~ 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 saith the Lord, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days’ pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to Him that sent me” (¹⁰²⁴¹²2 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” (⁽²¹⁰¹⁶⁾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 (~~4015~~ Mark 1:15; ~~4013~~ 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 (~~09178~~ 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 92

HIS PREVAILING INTERCESSION

<1240> 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 <1306> Psalm 30:6, which refers to this very time, and will be considered by us in a later chapter. Second. the tempted one, as <1310> 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 (vv. 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 (^{<6182>}1 John 3:22), or there be un-mourned and unconfessed sin in our lives, then the Lord will not hear us (^{<19618>}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 offenses. 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” (^{<10246>}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 offense 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. ^{<1089>}2 Samuel 5:9) 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 had 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 (^{<2312>} 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. Some one 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 thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee?” (^{<2214>} 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 “till 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 ^{<10216>} 2 Samuel 24:16 lasted from morning till the time of meeting, by which we are to understand ‘the evening religious assembly’—compare ^{<11839>} 1 Kings 18:29, 36; ^{<12165>} 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, “till 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 delighteth 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 ^{<01006>}Genesis 6:6; ^{<09151>}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: hath He said, and shall He not do it?”
(^{<02319>}Numbers 23:19);

“But He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what His soul desireth, even that He doeth” (^{<18213>}Job 23:13);

“For I am the Lord: I change not” (^{<3006>}Malachi 3:6);

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (^{<3017>}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 ^{<0152>}1 Samuel 15:29 *oblige us* to interpret ^{<0151>}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” (^{<2424>}Isaiah 42:24; ^{<3127>}Malachi 2:17), yet in another place we are told “the Creator fainteth not, neither is weary” (^{<2408>}Isaiah 40:28). In ^{<1627>}Deuteronomy 32:27 Jehovah speaks as “fearing the wrath of the enemy,” which is manifestly a figure of speech. Again, in ^{<0786>}Psalms 78:65 we read. “The Lord awaked as one out of sleep” yet we know full well that He never slumbers. In ^{<23916>}Isaiah 59:16 it is said that He “wondered,” yet nothing can take Him by surprise. ^{<240713>}Jeremiah 7:13 pictures Him as “rising early,” to denote His earnestness. And so we might go on. The “repenting” of the Lord in ^{<102416>}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”
 (<1364> 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, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the Shepherd”
 (<3137> Zechariah 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 awaking, but was drawn in the angel'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 thine 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 rejoiceth against judgment” (⁹⁰²¹³James 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 husbandmen: but “mercy rejoiceth 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 thine hand”: how these words remind us of that blessed utterance of our Savior's, “It is finished”—proclaiming the glorious truth that all the claims of God are now fully met.

“And David spake 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 Thine hand, I pray Thee, 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” (vv. 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 crimated 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 Thine hand, I pray Thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father’s house; but not on Thy people, that they should be plagued” (v. 17): smite their shepherd, but spare the flock, O Lord.

CHAPTER 93

HIS GRAND REWARD

<1020> 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” (<13214> 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 ye 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” (<13215> 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?" (vv. 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 Thine hand, I pray Thee, 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 Thy 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 "Thy 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 enquire 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 (^{<1232>}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 thine 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 ^{<1246>}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" (^{<1315>}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 thine 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” (~~10248~~ 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” (~~13218~~ 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 (~~071414~~ 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” (~~01004~~ Genesis 4:4)—his person was first accepted and then his sacrifice; and here the Lord’s readiness to accept an offering at the hands of David was proof that David himself had been received.

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” (~~071323~~ Judges 13:23),

Secondly, that peace between God and guilty sinners is effected by sacrifice, and not otherwise than by Christ, the great Propitiation. Thus,

while God's mercy rejoiced against judgment on this solemn occasion, yet He made it abundantly clear that His grace reigns through righteousness (^{<4862>}Romans 5:21) and not at the expense of it. It is the blood which maketh an atonement for the soul (^{<6171>}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 Thee: though Thou wast angry with me" (^{<2310>}Isaiah 12:1).

It will be remembered ^{<10246>}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 threshingfloor 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 (^{<1323>}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 faces. Nevertheless, Araunah too was threatened, for the avenging angel drew nigh to and stood over the peaceful threshingfloor 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 threshingfloor 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 threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite" (^{<4401>}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 ^{<01214>}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,” i.e. 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, i.e. 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—^{<01278>}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” (^{<19818>}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 threshingfloor 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 vouchsafed 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” (^{<132126>}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” (^{<13221>}1 Chronicles 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 94

HIS FERVENT PRAISE

<1040> 2 SAMUEL 24

“And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the Lord in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite. And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the Lord commanded” (<1048> 2 Samuel 24:18, 19).

Here we behold David’s trustful and thankful acceptance of the mercy vouchsafed 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 propitiation 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 (<6121> Revelation 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” (<1323> 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 nigh 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 threshingfloor, 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. ^{<011301>}Genesis 13:1-3, etc.)—delivered from the mire into which he had fallen. The angel's "sword," *still unsheathed*, had no alarms for him now, for he goes to the very place where he stood (^{<132116>}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 nor 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 threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground" (^{<132121>}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 meanness.

"And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To *buy* the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the Lord, that the plague may be stayed from the people" (^{<102421>}2 Samuel 24:21).

Here we behold David as the *righteous* one. Though he was a king, and though he had received commandment from the Lord to build an altar at this particular place, nevertheless he 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 fellowmen. "Owe no man anything" (^{<51218>}Romans 12:8) is a necessary application of "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." 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*” (^{<381318>} 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 (^{<43048>} John 4:8).

“And Araunah said unto David, let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth 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 ^{<132123>} 1 Chronicles 21:23 is yet more definite: “Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I *give* thee 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 thy God accept thee” (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 (^{<10186>} 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 thy God accept thee” denoting that he was not himself a believer in and worshiper of Jehovah (as if an idolator 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 thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth 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 (⁸⁸¹¹⁷ Hebrews 11:17). It is also the fruit of *love*, which deemeth 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 threshingfloor 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 threshingfloor 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 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. ^{<1024>}Leviticus 9:24; ^{<1188>}1 Kings 18:38, 39; ^{<1470>}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 (^{<1070>}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” (^{<1327>}1 Chronicles 21:27).

“So the Lord was entreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel” (^{<1025>}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” (^{<2153>}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 threshingfloor) and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel" (v. 1).

"I will extol Thee, O Lord; for Thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me" (~~1900~~ 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 Thee, and Thou hast healed me. O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit" (~~1900~~ 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 Thee" 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 ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness. For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (~~1900~~ 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” (^{<4047>}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 Thy favor Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled” (^{<1906>}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 (^{<1021>}2 Samuel 22:1, 48-50), yet he fondly imagined that God had made his kingdom invincible, one that would never be 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 Thee, 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” (^{<0806>}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 Thee? shall it declare Thy truth? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be Thou my Helper” (^{<1910>}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.

“Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness: to the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God. I will give thanks unto Thee Forever” (¹⁹⁰¹¹Psalm 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 Thee 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 95

HIS CLOSING DAYS

<1010> 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 out 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 blest 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 (vv. 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” (~~1006~~ 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-nigh 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 hast thou 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 thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die” (^{<10213>}Proverbs 23:13).

And again,

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (^{<10134>}Proverbs 13:24).

And yet again,

“Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (^{<101918>}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 (^{<100712>}2 Samuel 7:12-16; ^{<1010215>}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 (^{<101501>}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 (vv. 7-9, 25). In this too he was again following the example of Absalom (^{<101510>}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 bringeth the counsel of the heathen to naught: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth forever” (^{<19310>} 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 (^{<101913>} 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 (^{<110125>} 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. Disinterested 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” (^{<201921>} 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 spake unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, Hast thou not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith doth reign, and David our lord knoweth it

not?” (v. 11). Nathan had been faithful in rebuking David for his sin in former days (^{<10107>}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 (vv. 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” (vv. 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 sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established” (^{<051915>}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 (^{<01816>}Matthew 18:16), many a false accusation had been exposed (^{<03013>}John 8:13, 17), many a breach had been healed (^{<471301>}2

Corinthians 13:1), and many an innocent servant of God had been cleared (~~5:19~~ 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 sware, and said, As the Lord liveth, that hath 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 sware unto thee by the Lord God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy 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 ye with the trumpet and say, God save king Solomon. Then ye 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” (vv. 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 hath 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” (vv. 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 (vv. 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” (vv. 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” (^{<1320B>}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” (^{<1108B>}1 Kings 5:3): in like manner the Lord Jesus by His death and resurrection was victorious over all His foes (^{<510214>}Colossians 2:14,15).

Second, Solomon had been chosen and ordained to the throne before he was born (^{<13219>}1 Chronicles 22:9): so too Christ was the Elect of God “from all eternity” (^{<23401>}Isaiah 42:1).

Third, Solomon rode on a mule, not as a warrior, but in lowly guise: so did Christ (^{<42101>}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 (^{<44023>}Acts 2:23; ^{<661801>}Revelation 3:1).

Finally, rest and quietness was granted unto Israel throughout Solomon’s reign (^{<13219>}1 Chronicles 22:19): so Christ is now reigning as “the Prince of peace” over His people.

CHAPTER 96

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" (²¹⁰⁷⁸Ecclesiastes 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 builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnificent of fame and of glory, throughout all countries: I will

therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death” (^{<13216>}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. Yea, 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” (^{<13214>}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, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build a house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight” (^{<13216>}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 thee, 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 for ever. Now, my son, the Lord be with thee, and prosper thou, and build the house of the Lord thy God, as He hath said of thee” (^{<13219>}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. ^{<00108>}Joshua 1:8).

A little later he addressed him thus:

“And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever, Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build a house for the sanctuary: be strong and do it” (^{<13219>}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 thy 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 thee (said He) a man on the throne of Israel*” (^{<1103>}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, till 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 thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord” (^{<1333>}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 thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law” (^{<1300>}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” (^{<3119>}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” (~~Q1028~~ 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 thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruah did to me, and what he did to the—two captains of the host of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace and, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei... which cursed me with a grievous curse... now therefore hold him not guiltless...” etc. (vv. 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 hath He not given you rest on every side? for He hath 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 ye the sanctuary” (vv. 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 ^{<1320>}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 (^{<1323>}1 Chronicles 23:3, and cf. ^{<0046>}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 (^{<1324>}1 Chronicles 24:5, etc.) to show that all was governed by the divine will (^{<20163>}Proverbs 16:33). The priesthood was divided into twenty-four courses (^{<13248>}1 Chronicles 24:18), a figure perhaps of the “twenty-four elders” of ^{<0040>}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” (^{<13281>}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 (^{<0259>}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 (<1390> 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 (vv. 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, “Thine. 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 Thine; *Thine* is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as Head above all. Both riches and honor come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might” (vv. 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 Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before Thee, 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 Thee an house for Thine holy name cometh of *Thine hand*, and is all Thine own” (vv. 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 worshipped 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 (vv. 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 nigh that he should die”
(<1100> 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 Thee, Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass” (^{<181401>}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 nigh that Israel *must die*” (^{<01472>}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” (^{<11030>}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 (^{<010319>}Genesis 3:19). Even the heirs of heaven (except those alive at Christ’s return: ^{<46151>}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” (^{<50406>}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 (^{<21622>}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 (^{<40519>}2 Corinthians 5:19). He knew that in the grave his flesh should rest “in hope” (^{<19169>}Psalms 16:9), and that in the morning of the resurrection he should come forth fully conformed to the image of his Savior (^{<19175>}Psalms 17:15). And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead” (^{<13228>}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... (^{<44136>}Acts 13:36). May we too be enabled to serve our generation as faithfully as David did his.