
a *Grace Notes* course

Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

History 511

Grace Notes

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IV_13 Saul in David's Power at En-gedi - The Story of Nabal - Saul a second time in David's power

1 Samuel 24 to 26

WHEN Saul once more turned upon his victim, David was no longer in the wilderness of Maon. Passing to the north-west, a march of six or seven hours would bring him to En-gedi, "the fountain of the goat," which, leaping down a considerable height in a thin cascade, converts that desert into the most lovely oasis. In this plain, or rather slope, about one mile and a half from north to south, at the foot of abrupt limestone mountains, sheltered from every storm, in climate the most glorious conceivable, the city of En-gedi had stood, or, as it used to be called, Hazazon Tamar (the Cutting of the Palm-trees), perhaps the oldest place in the world (2 Chronicles 20:2). Through this town (Genesis 14:7) the hordes of Chedorlaomer had passed; unchanged it had witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which must have been clearly visible from the heights above, where the eye can sweep the whole district far up the Jordan valley, and across the Dead Sea to the mountains of Moab. Quite close to the waters of that sea, on which the doom of judgment has ever since rested, a scene of tropical beauty and wealth stretched, such as it is scarcely possible to describe. Bounded by two perennial streams, between which the En-gedi itself makes its way, it must of old have been a little paradise; the plain covered with palm-trees, the slopes up the mountains with the choicest vineyards of Judaea, scented with camphor (Solomon Song 1:14). But all above was "wilderness," bare round limestone hills rising from two hundred to four hundred feet, burrowed by numberless caves, to which the entrance is sometime almost inaccessible. These were "the rocks of the wild goats," and here was the cave - perhaps that of Wady Charitun, which is said to have once given shelter to no less than thirty thousand men - where David sought safety from the pursuit of the king of Israel.

Wild, weird scenery this, and it reads like a weird story, when the king of Israel enters alone one of those caverns, the very cave in the farthest recesses of which David and his men are hiding. Shall it be life or death? The goal is within easy

reach! They have all seen Saul coming, and now whisper it to David with bated breath, to rid himself forever of his persecutor. The mixture of religion and personal revenge - the presenting it as "the day of which Jehovah had spoken unto him," is entirely true to Oriental nature and to the circumstances. Who would let such an opportunity pass? But it is not by our own hands that we are to be freed from our wrongs, nor is every opportunity to attain our aims, whatever they be, God-sent. There is ever the prior question of plain duty, with which nothing else, however tempting or promising of success, can come into conflict; and such seasons may be only those when our faith and patience are put on trial, so as to bring it clearly before us, whether or not, quite irrespective of all else, we are content to leave everything in the hands of God. And David conquered, as long afterwards his great Antitype overcame the tempter, by steadfast adherence to God's known will and ordinance. Stealthily crawling along, he cut off a corner from the robe which the king had laid aside. That was all the vengeance he took. It was with some difficulty that David had restrained his men. And now the king had left the cave to rejoin his followers. But still David's conscience smote him, as if he had taken undue liberty with the Lord's anointed. Climbing one of those rocks outside the cave, whence flight would have been easy, his voice startled the king. Looking back into the wild solitude, Saul saw behind him the man who, as his disordered passion had suggested, was seeking his life. With humblest obeisance and in most dutiful language, David told what had just happened. In sharp contrast with the calumnies of his enemies, he described the king's danger, and how he had cast from him the suggestion of his murder. Then bursting into the impassioned language of loyal affection, which had been so cruelly wronged, he held up the piece of the king's mantle which he had cut off, as evidence of the fact that he was innocent of that of which he was accused. But if so - if he had refused to avenge himself even in the hour of his own great danger, leaving judgment to God, and unwilling to put forth his own hand to wickedness, since, as the common proverb had it, "wickedness proceedeth from the wicked" - then, what was the meaning of the king's humiliating pursuit after him? Rather

would he, in the conscious innocence of his heart, now appeal to Jehovah, alike for judgment between them two, and for personal deliverance, should these persecutions continue.

Words like these, of which the truth was so evident, could not but make their way even to the heart of Saul. For a moment it seemed as if the dark clouds, which had gathered around his soul and prevented the light penetrating it, were to be scattered. Saul owned his wrong; he owned the justice of David's cause; he even owned the lesson which the events of the past must have so clearly taught, which, indeed, his own persecution of David had, all unconsciously to himself, prophetically indicated, just as did the words of Caiaphas the real meaning of what was done to Jesus (John 11:49-52). He owned the future of David, and that in his hand the kingdom of Israel would be established; and all this not in words only, but practically, by insisting on a sworn promise that in that future which he foresaw, Oriental vengeance would not be taken of his house.

And yet David himself was not secure against the temptation to personal vengeance and to self-help, although he had resisted it on this occasion. The lesson of his own weakness in that respect was all the more needed, that this was one of the most obvious moral dangers to an ordinary Oriental ruler. But David was not to be such; and when God in His good Providence restrained him as he had almost fallen, He showed him the need of inward as well as of outward deliverance, and the sufficiency of His grace to preserve him from spiritual as from temporal dangers. This may have been one reason why the history of Nabal and Abigail is preserved in Holy Scripture. Another we may find in the circumstance that this incident illustrates not only God's dealings with David, but also the fact that even in the time of his sorest persecutions David was able to take upon himself the care and protection of his countrymen, and so, in a certain sense, proved their leader and king.

The whole story is so true to all the surroundings of place, time, and people, that we can almost portray it to ourselves. Samuel had died, mourned by all Israel. Although his work had long been finished, his name must always have been a tower

of strength. He was the link which connected two very different periods, being the last representative of a past which could never come back, and seemed almost centuries behind, and also marking the commencement of a new period, intended to develop into Israel's ideal future. Samuel was, so to speak, the John the Baptist who embodied the old, and initiated the new by preaching repentance as its preparation and foundation. It was probably the death of Samuel which determined David to withdraw still farther south, to the wilderness of Paran, which stretched from the mountains of Judah far to the desert of Sinai.

Similarly our blessed Lord withdrew Himself after the death of John the Baptist. In the wilderness of Paran David was not only safe from pursuit, but able to be of real service to his countrymen by protecting the large flocks which pastured far and wide from the predatory raids of the wild tribes of the desert. It was thus (25:7, 15, 16) that David had come into contact with one whom we only know by what was apparently his by-name, Nabal, "fool" -an ominous designation in Old Testament parlance, where "the fool" represented the headstrong, self-willed person, who followed his own course, as if there were "no God" alike in heaven and on earth. And so he is described as "hard" - stubborn, stiff, - and "evil of doings" (ver. 3). His wife Abigail was the very opposite: "good of understanding, and fair of form." Nabal, as Scripture significantly always calls him was a descendant of Caleb. His residence was in Maon, while his "business" was in Carmel, a place about half an hour to the north-west of Maon. Here, no doubt, were his large cotes and folds, whence his immense flocks of sheep and goats pastured the land far and wide. It was the most joyous time for such a proprietor - that of sheep-shearing, when every heart would be open. A time of festivity this (ver. 36), which each would keep according to what was in him. And Nabal had cause for gladness. Thanks to the ever watchful care of David and his men, he had not suffered the slightest loss (vers. 15, 16); and the rich increase of his flocks crowned another year's prosperity. It was quite in the spirit of an Eastern chieftain in such circumstances, that David sent what would be a specially respectful embassy of ten of his men,

with a cordial message of congratulation,¹ in the expectation that at such a time some acknowledgment would be made to those who not only deserved, but must have sorely needed the assistance of a rich Judaeian proprietor.

But Nabal received David's message with language the most insulting to an Oriental. The provocation was great, and David was not proof against it. Arming about four hundred of his men, he set out for Carmel, with the determination to right himself and take signal vengeance. Assuredly this was not the lesson which God had hitherto made David learn, nor that which He wished His anointed to teach to others. It was the zeal of the sons of Boanerges, not the meekness of Him Who was David's great Antitype. And so God kept His servant from presumptuous sin.² Once more God's interposition came in the natural course of events. A servant who had overheard what had passed, and naturally dreaded the consequences, informed Abigail. Her own resolve was quickly taken.

Sending forward a present princely in amount,³ even in comparison with that which at a later period Barzillai brought to King David when on his flight from Absalom (2 Samuel 17:27-29), she hastily followed.

Coming down the hollow of a hill ("the covert of a hill"), she found herself of a sudden in the presence of David and his armed men. But her courage was not shaken. With humblest Oriental obeisance, she addressed David, first taking all the guilt on herself, as one on whom David would not stoop to wreak vengeance. Surely one like Nabal was not a fit object for controversy; and, as for herself, she had known nothing of what had passed.

¹ Ver. 6, which is somewhat difficult, should, I think, be thus rendered: "And ye shall say thus: To life! Both to thee peace, to thy house peace, and to all that is thine peace!"

² Although guilty of a rash imprecation (ver. 22), it was at least not upon himself.

³ The "bottles" were, of course, "skins of wine;" "the clusters" and "cakes" of fruit were large compressed cakes, such as are common in the East.

But there were far weightier arguments for David's forbearance. Was it not evidently God's Providence which had sent her for a high and holy purpose? "And now, my lord, as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, that (it is) Jehovah who has withheld thee from coming into blood-guiltiness, and from thy hand delivering thyself." This twofold sin had been averted. Such was her first argument. But further, was it not well to leave it to God - would not Jehovah Himself avenge His servant, and make all his enemies as Nabal - showing them to be but "Nabal," "fools" in the Scriptural sense, with all the impotence and ruin which this implied? It was only after having urged all this, that Abigail ventured to ask acceptance of her gift, offering it, as if unworthy of him, to David's men rather than to himself (ver. 27). Then returning to the prayer for forgiveness, she pointed David to the bright future which, she felt assured, was reserved for him, since he was not pursuing private aims, nor would he afterwards charge himself with any wrong in this matter. How closely all this tallied with her former pleas will be evident. In pursuance of her reasoning she continued: "And (though) a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul, and (yet) the soul of my lord is bound up in the bundle of life with Jehovah thy God; and the soul of thine enemies shall He sling out from the hollow of the sling." Finally, she reminded him that when God had fulfilled all His gracious promises, this would not become a "stumbling-block" to him, nor yet be a burden on his conscience, that he had needlessly shed blood and righted himself.

Wiser speech, in the highest as well as in a worldly sense, than that of Abigail can scarcely be imagined. Surely if any one, she was fitted to become the companion and adviser of David. Three things in her speech chiefly impress themselves on our minds as most important for the understanding of this history. The fact that David was God's anointed, on whom the kingdom would devolve, seems now to have been the conviction of all who were godly in Israel. They knew it, and they expected it. Equally strong was their belief that David's present, as his future mission, was simply to contend for God and for His people. But most important of all was the deep feeling prevalent, that David must not try to right himself,

nor work his own deliverance. This was a thoroughly spiritual principle, which had its foundation in absolute, almost childlike trust in Jehovah the living God, whatever might were arrayed against David, and however the probabilities might seem other to the outward observer. Viewed in this light, the whole contest between David and Saul would assume spiritual proportions. There was nothing personal now in the conflict; least of all, was it to be regarded as an attempt at rebellion against, or dethronement of Saul. The cause was altogether God's; only David must not right himself, but in faith and patience await the fulfillment of God's sure and steadfast promises. To have the matter thus set before him, was to secure the immediate assent of David's conscience. Recognizing the great spiritual danger from which he had just been delivered, he gave thanks to God, and then to the wise and pious woman who had been the instrument in His hand.

Meantime Nabal had been in ignorance alike of what had threatened him, and of what his wife had done to avert it. On her return, she found him rioting and in drunkenness. Not till next morning, when he was once more capable of understanding what had passed, did she inform him of all. A fit of impotent fury on the part of one who was scarcely sobered, resulted in what seems to have been a stroke of apoplexy. If this had been brought on by himself, the second and fatal stroke, which followed ten days later, is set before us as sent directly by God. It is not often that Divine vengeance so manifestly and so quickly overtakes evil-doing. David fully recognized this. Nor can we wonder, that on reviewing his own deliverance from spiritual danger, and the advice which had led to it, he should have wished to have her who had given it always by his side. In connection with this the sacred text also notes the union of David with Ahinoam of Jezreel,⁴ consequent probably on Saul's cruel and heartless separation between David and Michal, whom he gave to one Phalti, or Phaltiel (2 Samuel 3:15) of Gallim in Benjamin (Isaiah 10:30). Thus Saul himself had willfully and

recklessly severed the last ties which had bound David to him.

Yet another bitter experience of betrayal and persecution was in store for David. Probably trusting to his new connection with two, no doubt, powerful families in the district - those of Ahinoam and of Abigail - David seems again to have advanced northwards from the wilderness of Paran. Once more we find David in the wilderness of Ziph - the most northern and the nearest to the cities of Judah. And once more the Ziphites were negotiating with Saul for his betrayal, and the king of Israel was marching against him with the three thousand men, who apparently formed the nucleus of his standing army.⁵

Some years before, when betrayed by the Ziphites, David had on the approach of Saul retired to the wilderness of Maon, and been only preserved by tidings to Saul of a Philistine incursion. On yet another somewhat similar occasion, in the wilderness of En-gedi, David had had his enemy in his power, when Saul had entered alone a cave in which David and his men lay concealed. In this instance, however, the circumstances were different, alike as concerned the situation of Saul's camp, the location of David, the manner in which he came into contact with Saul, and even the communication which subsequently passed between them. The points of resemblance are just those which might have been expected: the treachery of the Ziphites, the means taken by Saul against David, the suggestion made to David to rid himself of his enemy, his firm resolve not to touch the Lord's anointed, as well as an interview between David and his persecutor, followed by temporary repentance. But the two narratives are essentially different. On learning that Saul and his army were encamped on the slope of the hill Hachilah, David and two of his bravest companions - Ahimelech, the Hittite, and Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, David's sister - resolved to ascertain the exact situation of the enemy. Creeping under cover of night through the

⁴ This Jezreel is, of course, not the place of that name in the north (Joshua 19:18), but a town in Judah near Carmel (Joshua 15:56).

⁵ Such a nucleus seems implied in 1 Samuel 13:2, where we have the same number, constituting apparently Saul's standing army. From our remarks it will be seen that we entirely repudiate the rash assertion that this is only another account of what had been related in 1 Samuel 23:19-24:22.

brushwood, which as we know covered the sides of the hill (23:19), they found themselves soon where the camp of Israel lay open to them. As we imagine the scene, the three had gained the height just above the camp. Faithful as was the Hittite, and none more true or brave than he (comp. 2 Samuel 11:3, 6; 23:39), it was David's nephew Abishai, probably of the same age, who now volunteered to share with him the extremely perilous attempt of "going down" into the camp itself. But there was no murderous intent in the heart of David; rather the opposite, of proving his innocence of it. And so God blessed it. A deep sleep - evidently from the Lord - weighed them all down. In the middle, by the "wagons" of the camp, lay Saul, at his head the royal spear stuck in the ground, and a cruse of water beside him. Close by lay Abner, as chief of the host, to whom, so to speak, the custody of the king was entrusted - and all round in wide circle, the people. Once more comes the tempting suggestion to David. This time it is not his own hand, but Abishai's, that is to deal the blow. But what matters it: "For who has stretched out his hand against the anointed of Jehovah, and been unpunished? If Jehovah do not (literally, 'unless Jehovah') smite him [like Nabal], or his day be come and he die, or he go down into the war and be swept away - far be it from me, through Jehovah! - to stretch forth mine hand against Jehovah's anointed." ⁶ And so David stayed the hand of his companion.

Noiselessly the two have removed the royal spear and the cruse from the side of Saul. They have crept back through the camp of sleepers, and through the brushwood, crossed the intervening valley, and gained a far-off height on the other side. Who dares break the king's slumber in the middle of his camp? But another ear than Abner's has heard, and has recognized the voice of David. It has gone right to the heart of Saul, as he learns how once more his life had been wholly in the power of him whom he has so unrelenting and so wickedly persecuted. Again he seems repentant, though he heeds not David's advice that, if these constant persecutions were the effect produced on

his mind by the spirit of evil from the Lord, he should seek pardon and help by means of sacrifice; but if the outcome of calumnious reports, those who brought them should be regarded as sure of the Divine judgment, since, as he put it, "They drive me out this day, that I cannot join myself to the heritage of Jehovah, saying (thereby in effect): Go, serve other gods" (26:19). It is useless to follow the matter farther. Saul's proposal for David's return, and his promise of safety, were, no doubt, honestly meant at the time, just as are the sorrow and resolutions of many into whose consciences the light has for a time fallen. But David knew otherwise of Saul; and it marks an advance in his spiritual experience that he preferred committing himself to God rather than trusting in man.

IV_14 David's Second Flight to Gath - Residence at Ziklag - Expedition of the Philistines Against Israel - Saul at Jezreel He resorts to the Witch at Endor - Apparition and Message of Samuel - David has to Leave the Army of the Philistines - Capture of Ziklag by the Amalekites - Pursuit and Victory of David

1 Samuel 27 to 30

THE parting appeal of David sounds specially solemn when we remember that this was the last meeting of these two. Feeling that some day he might "fall into the hand of Saul," and that henceforth there was "no good for him," he resolved once more to seek shelter with King Achish at Gath.

His reception this time was very different from that on the former occasion. For years David had been treated by Saul as his avowed enemy. He came now not as a solitary fugitive, but at the head of a well-trained band of brave men, to place himself and them, as it would seem, at the disposal of Achish. He met a most friendly welcome, and for a time was located with his men in the royal city itself. This, of course, entailed restraints such as would have proved most irksome, if not impossible, to David. The pretext that the presence of such a large band under their own chieftain was scarcely becoming in the capital of his new royal master, furnished the plea for asking and obtaining another place of residence. For this purpose Ziklag was assigned to him - a city first belonging to

⁶ We have translated as literally as possible. David considers that the guilt would have been equally his, although the deed had been done by Abishai.

Judah (Joshua 15:31), and afterwards to Simeon (Joshua 19:5), which lay close to the southern border of the land of Israel. Of course, the inference is fair that, at the time of which we write, it had been in the possession of the Philistines, and was probably deserted by its former inhabitants. No other place could have suited David so well. Whether we regard his raids against the heathen tribes, which was "his manner" during the whole year and four months that he was with the Philistines, as intended to repel their inroads into the territory of Israel, or else as incursions into heathen lands, the situation of Ziklag would afford him equal facilities. On every such occasion, as he returned laden with spoil, he took care to report himself at Gath, partly to disarm suspicion,⁷ and partly, no doubt, to secure the good will of Achish by giving him a large share of the booty. His reports may have been true to the letter - giving it a forced meaning, - but they were certainly untrue in spirit. But David never brought captives with him to Gath,⁸ who might have betrayed him, but always destroyed all who had witnessed his attacks.

If by means of these reported frequent successes in the land of Israel David secured the confidence of Achish, as one who had irretrievably broken with his own people, and if by the rich booty which he brought he besides obtained the favor of the Philistine, he was once more to experience that real safety was not to be gained by untruthfulness. Again there was to be war between the Philistines and Israel, this time on a larger scale than any since the first contest with Saul. It was but natural that Achish should have wished to swell his contingent to the army of the united Philistine princes by so large, well-trained, and, as he believed, trusty band as that of David. Of course, there was no alternative but to obey such a summons, although it must be admitted that the

words of David, both on this occasion (28:2), and afterwards, when dismissed the camp of the Philistines (29:8), are capable of two interpretations. Achish, however, took them in what seemed their obvious meaning, and promised in return ("therefore" - for that) to make David the chief of his body-guard. It need scarcely be told, what terrible anxieties this unexpected turn of events must have brought to David, or how earnestly he must have prayed and trusted that, at the right moment, some "way of escape" would be made for him.

The sacred narrative now carries us successively to the camp of Israel and to that of the Philistines. The battlefield was to be once more the Plain of Jezreel, where of old Gideon with his three hundred had defeated the hosts of Midian (Judges 7). A spot this full of happy, glorious memories; but, ah, how sadly altered were the circumstances! Gideon had been the God-called hero, who was to conquer in His might; Saul was the God-forsaken king, who was hastening to judgment and ruin. And each knew and felt it - Gideon when he was content to reduce his forces to three hundred men, and then crept down with his armor-bearer to hear the enemy foretell his own destruction; and Saul when viewing the host of the Philistines across the plain, "he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled" (28:5), and when all his inquiries of the Lord remained without answer. It seems strange, and yet, as we think, it is most truthfully characteristic of Saul, that, probably after the death of Samuel, he displayed special theocratic zeal by a systematic raid upon all necromancy in the land, in accordance with Leviticus 19:31; 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10, etc. Such outward conformity to the law of God, not only from political motives, but from those of such religiousness as he was capable of, seems to us one of the most striking psychological confirmations of the history of Saul.

The reason why the scene of battle was laid so far north, distant alike from the cities of the Philistine princes and from the residence of Saul, was, in all probability, that the Philistines now wished to obtain such undoubted supremacy in the north of Palestine as they seem to have virtually possessed in the south. A great victory in Jezreel would not

⁷ The words of the question in 27:10 are so dark in the original as to need slight alteration. The rendering of the LXX., "Against whom made ye invasion?" is evidently the correct reading of the text.

⁸ The Authorised Version supplies erroneously in ver. 11 "to bring tidings" - the reference is clearly to captives. The last clause of ver. 11 is a substantive sentence, being part of the narrative, and not of what the captives had said.

only cut the land, so to speak, in two, but give them the key both to the south and to the north. With this view, then, the Philistines chose their ground. Where the great plain of Esdraelon shelves down to the Jordan it is broken in the east by two mountain-ranges. On the southern side of the valley, which is here about three miles wide, are the mountains of Gilboa, and at their foot, or rather spur, lies Jezreel, where the spring which gushes down is gathered into a pool of considerable size. On the northern side of the valley is Little Hermon, and at its foot the rich village of Shunem (the "twain rest"). Behind and to the north of Little Hermon runs another narrow branch of the plain. On its other side is the mountain where Endor lay amidst most desolate scenery; and in one of its many limestone caves was the scene of Saul's last interview with Samuel. Nor is it void of significance to us that Endor was but a few miles from Nazareth; for it is the close contiguity of these contrasting scenes which often sheds such lurid light upon events.

From his camp on the slopes of Gilboa and by the spring of Jezreel, Saul had anxiously watched the gathering hosts of Philistia on the opposite side at Shunem, and his heart had utterly failed him. Where was now the Lord God of Israel? Certainly not with Saul. And where was there now a David to meet another Goliath? Saul had successively "inquired of Jehovah" by all the well-known means, from the less to the more spiritual,⁹ but without answer. That alone should have been sufficient, had Saul possessed spiritual understanding to perceive its meaning. Had his been real inquiry of the Lord,¹⁰ he would have

⁹ We venture to regard the "dreams," the "Urim," and the "prophets," as marking progress from the lower to the higher modes of inquiry. In accordance with the principles implied when treating of the gatherings of the "prophets," it seems to us that the more passive the instrumentality employed, the lower the stage in the mode of Divine communication. What we have ventured to call the lower or more mechanical stages of communication were adapted to the varying stages of spiritual development. But the absolutely highest stage of intercourse with God is the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the New Testament Church, when man's individuality is not superseded nor suppressed, but transformed, and thus conformed to Him in spiritual fellowship.

¹⁰ If it be asked how Saul could inquire by Urim, since Abiathar, and with him "the Ephod," were with David, we

felt his desertion, and even now returned to Him in humble penitence; just as Judas, if his repentance had been genuine and true, would have gone out to seek pardon like Peter, instead of rushing in despair to self-destruction.

As the event proved, Saul did not really inquire of the Lord, in the sense of seeking direction from Him, and of being willing to be guided by it. Rather did he, if we may so express it, wish to use the Lord as the means by which to obtain his object. But that was essentially the heathen view, and differed only in detail, not in principle, from the inquiry of a familiar spirit, to which he afterwards resorted. Accordingly the latter must be regarded as explaining his former "inquiry," and determining its character. In this sense the notice in 1 Chronicles 10:14 affords a true and spiritual insight into the transaction. Already the utter darkness of despair had gathered around Saul. He was condemned: he knew it, felt it, and his conscience assented to it. What was to happen on the morrow? To that question he must have an answer, be it what it may. If he could not have it from God, he must get it somewhere else. To whom should he turn in his extremity? Only one person, sufficiently powerful with God and man, occurred to his mind. It was Samuel, - the very incarnation to him of Divine power, the undoubted messenger of God, the one man who had ever confronted and overawed him. It seems like fate which drives him to the very man who had so sternly, unrelentingly, and in the hour of his triumph, told him his downfall. But how was he to meet Samuel? By necromancy - that is, by devilry! The Divine through the anti-Divine, communication from on high by means of witchcraft: terrible contrasts these - combined, alas! in the life of Saul, and strangely connecting its beginning with its ending. But no matter; if it be at all possible, he must see Samuel, however he had parted from him in life. Samuel had announced his elevation, let him now come to tell him his fate; he had pushed him to the brow of the hill, let him show what was beneath. And yet who

reply that Saul had evidently appointed Zadok successor to Abiathar (1 Chronicles 16:39, comp. 6:8, 53), and located the tabernacle at Gibeon. This explains the mention of two high-priests in the early years of David's reign (comp. 2 Samuel 8:17; 15:24, 29, 35; 1 Chronicles 15:11; 18:16).

could say what might happen, or to what that interview might lead? For deep down in the breast of each living there is still, even in his despairing, the possibility of hope.

It is the most vivid description in Holy Scripture, next to that of the night of Judas' betrayal. Putting on the disguise of a common man, and only attended by two companions, Saul starts at dark. It was eight miles round the eastern shoulder of Hermon to Endor. None in the camp of Israel must know whither and on what errand the king has gone; and he has to creep round the back of the position of the Philistines, who lie on the front slope of Hermon. Nor must "the woman, possessor of an Ob" - or spirit by which the dead can be conjured up (Leviticus 20:27) - know it, that he who inquires of her is the one who "hath cut off those that have familiar spirits and the wizards out of the land."

It was night when Saul and his companions wearily reached their destination. They have roused the wretched impostor, "the woman, possessor of an Ob," and quieted her fears by promise that her nefarious business should not be betrayed. To her utter horror it is for once truth. God has allowed Samuel to obey Saul's summons; and, to be unmistakable, he appears, as he was wont in life, wrapped in his prophet's meil, or mantle. The woman sees the apparition,¹¹ and from her description Saul has no difficulty in recognizing Samuel, and he falls in lowly reverence on his face.

During the whole interview between them the king remains on his knees. What a difference between the last meeting of the two and this! But the old prophet has nothing to abate, nothing to alter. There is inexpressible pathos in the king's cry of despair: "Make known to me what I shall do!" What he shall do! But Samuel had all his life-time

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¹¹ 1 Samuel 28:13: "I saw gods" (or rather, Elohim) "ascending out of the earth." The expression Elohim here refers not to a Divine, but simply to a supernatural appearance, indicating its character as not earthly. But in that supernatural light she has also recognized her visitor as the king of Israel. Verses 13 and 14 show that Saul had not himself seen the apparition. The question whether the vision of the woman was objective or subjective, is really of no importance whatever. Suffice that it was real, and came to her ab extra.

made it known to him, and Saul had resisted. The time for doing was now past. In quick succession it comes, like thunderbolt on thunderbolt:

"Jehovah thine enemy"; "Jehovah hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to David"; "thy sins have overtaken thee!" All this Saul knew long ago, although he had never realized it as now. And then as to his fate: to-morrow - defeat, death, slaughter, to Saul, to his sons, to Israel!

One by one, each stroke heavier than the other, they had pitilessly fallen on the kneeling king, weary, faint from want of food, and smitten to the heart with awe and terror; and now he falls heavily, his gigantic length, to the ground. The woman and Saul's companions had stood aside, nor had any heard what had passed between the two. But the noise of his fall brought them to his side. With difficulty they persuade him to eat ere he starts on his weary return to Jezreel. At last he yields; and, rising from his prostrate position, sits down on the divan, while they wait on him. But he has no longer speech, or purpose, or thought. As one driven to the slaughter, he goes back to meet his doom. It must have been early morning when once more he reached Gilboa - the morning of the dread and decisive battle.¹²

The sacred narrative now turns once more to the Philistine host. The trysting-place for the contingents of the five allied "lords" or kings of the Philistines was at Aphek, probably the same as on a previous occasion (1 Samuel 4:1).¹³

As they marched past, the division of Achish formed "the rear-ward." When the Philistine

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¹² As will be seen, we regard the apparition of Samuel not as trickery by the woman, but as real - nor yet as caused by the devil, but as allowed and willed of God. A full discussion of our reasons for this view would be evidently out of place. Of two things only will we remind the reader: the story must not be explained on our modern Western ideas of the ecstatic, somnambulistic, magnetic state (Erdmann), nor be judged according to the standpoint which the Church has now reached. It was quite in accordance with the stage in which the kingdom of God was in the days of Saul.

¹³

¹³ Most writers suppose that this Aphek was close to Shunem, though the supposition by no means tallies with the narrative. There is, however, this insuperable objection to it, that as Shunem is between eighty and ninety miles from where Ziklag must be sought, David and his men could not possibly have reached the latter "on the third day."

leaders saw David and his men amongst them, they not unnaturally objected to their presence. In vain Achish urged their faithfulness since they had "fallen away" to him. As it appeared to them, one who had in the past taken such a stand as David could never be trusted; and how better could he make his peace with his master than by turning traitor to the Philistines in the hour of their supreme need? And so, however reluctantly, Achish had to yield. David's remonstrance, couched in ambiguous language, was perhaps scarcely such (1 Samuel 29:8), but rather intended to make sure of the real views of Achish in regard to him. But it must have been with the intense relief of a realized God-given deliverance, that early next morning, ere the camp was astir, David and his men quitted its outskirts, where the rear-guard lay, to return to Ziklag.

It was the third day when the Hebrews reached their Philistine home. But what a sight greeted them here! Broken walls, blackened ruins, and the desolateness of utter silence all around! The Amalekites had indeed taken vengeance for David's repeated raids upon them (27:8). They had made an incursion into the Negeb, or south country, and specially upon Ziklag. In the absence of its defenders, the place fell an easy prey. After laying it waste, the Amalekites took with them all the women and children, as well as the cattle, and any other booty on which they could lay hands. It was a terrible surprise, and the first effect upon David and his men was truly Oriental (30:4). But it is both characteristic of David's followers, and indicates with what reluctance they must have followed him to Aphek, that they actually thought of killing David, as if he had been the author of that ill-fated expedition after Achish which had brought them such hopeless misery. It was bitter enough to have lost his own family, and now David was in danger of his life from the mutiny of his men. Had God spared him for this? On the very morning when they had broken up from Aphek, making almost forced marches to traverse the fifty miles to Ziklag, their homes had been utterly laid waste. Why all this? Did the Lord make him tarry, as Jesus did "beyond Jordan," till Lazarus had been three days dead? Never more than on occasion of extreme and seemingly hopeless straits did David prove the reality of his

religion by rising to the loftiest heights of faith and prayer. The text gives a marked emphasis to the contrast: "But David strengthened himself in Jehovah his God." His resolve was quickly taken. The first thing was to inquire of the Lord whether he should pursue the Amalekites. The answer was even fuller than he had asked, for it promised him also complete success. The next thing was hasty pursuit of the enemy. So rapid was it, that when they reached the brook Besor, which flows into the sea to the south of Gaza, two hundred of his men, who, considering the state in which they had found Ziklag, must have been but ill-provisioned, had to be left behind.¹⁴

They soon came on the track of the Amalekites. They had found an Egyptian slave, whom his inhuman master had, on the hasty retreat from Ziklag, left by the wayside to starve rather than hamper himself with the care of a sick man. Food soon revived him; and, on promise of safety and freedom, he offered to be the guide of the party to the place which, as he knew, the Amalekites had fixed upon as sufficiently far from Ziklag to permit them to feast in safety on their booty. A short-lived security theirs. It was the twilight - the beginning, no doubt, of a night of orgies - when David surprised them, "lying about on the ground," "eating and drinking, and dancing." No watch had been set; no weapon was in any man's hands; no danger was apprehended. We can picture to ourselves the scene: how David probably surrounded the camping-place; and with what shouts of vengeance the infuriated Hebrews fell on those who could neither resist nor flee. All night long, all the next day the carnage lasted. Only four hundred servant-lads, who had charge of the camels, escaped. Everything that had been taken by the Amalekites was recovered, besides the flocks and herds of the enemy, which were given to David as his share of the spoil. Best of all, the women and children were safe and unhurt.

It was characteristic of the wicked and worthless among the followers of David, that when on their

¹⁴ It is a curious instance of the resemblance of the popular parlance of all nations and ages, that the word in vers. 10:21, rendered by "faint," literally means "were corpses" - the same as in some districts of our own country. The Hebrew word is evidently a vulgarism, for it occurs only in these two verses.

return march they came again to those two hundred men who had been left behind "faint," they proposed not to restore to them what of theirs had been recovered from the Amalekites, except their wives and children. Rough, wild men were many among them, equally depressed in the day of adversity, and recklessly elated and insolent in prosperity. Nor is it merely the discipline which David knew to maintain in such a band that shows us "the skillfulness of his hands" in guiding them, but the gentleness with which he dealt with them, and, above all, the earnest piety with which he knew to tame their wild passions prove the spiritual "integrity," or "perfectness, of his heart" (Psalm 78:72). Many a wholesome custom, which ever afterwards prevailed in Israel, as well as that of equally dividing the spoil among combatants and non-combatants in an army (1 Samuel 30:24, 25), must have dated not only from the time of David, but even from the period of his wanderings and persecutions. Thus did he prove his fitness for the government long ere he attained to it.

Yet another kindred trait was David's attachment to friends who had stood by him in seasons of distress. As among his later servants and officials we find names connected with the history of his wanderings (1 Chronicles 27:27-31), so even now he sent presents from his spoil to "the elders" of the various cities of the South,¹⁵ where his wanderings had been, and who had proved "his friends" by giving him help in the time of need.

It may indeed have been that the south generally had suffered from the incursion of the Amalekites against Ziklag (30:1). But such loss could scarcely have been made up by "presents" from David. His main object, next to grateful acknowledgment of past aid, must have been to prepare them for publicly owning him, at the proper time, as the chosen leader of God's people, who would make "spoil of the enemies of Jehovah." At the proper time! But while these gifts were passing, all unknown to David, that time had already come.

¹⁵ The places enumerated in 1 Samuel 30:27-31 were all in the south country. The Bethel mentioned in ver. 27, was, of course, not the city of that name in the tribe of Benjamin, but Bethuel, or Bethul (1 Chronicles 4:30), in the tribe of Simeon (Joshua 19:4).

IV_15 The Battle on Mount Gilboa - Death of Saul - Rescue of the bodies by the men of Jabesh-gilead - David punishes the false Messenger of Saul's Death - David king at Hebron -Ish-bosheth king at Mahanaim - Battle between the forces of Abner and Joab - Abner Deserts the cause of Ish-bosheth - Murder of Abner - Murder of Ish-bosheth

1 Samuel 31 to 2 Samuel 4

BRIEF as are the accounts of the battle of Gilboa (1 Samuel 31; 1 Chronicles 10), we can almost picture the scene. The attack seems to have been made by the Philistines. Slowly and stubbornly the Israelites yielded, and fell back from Jezreel upon Mount Gilboa. All day long the fight lasted; and the darkness seems to have come on before the Philistines knew the full extent of their success, or could get to the sad work of pillaging the dead. Ill had it fared with Israel that day. Their slain covered the sides of Mount Gilboa. The three sons of Saul - foremost among them the noble Jonathan - had fallen in the combat. Saul himself had retreated on Gilboa. But the battle had gone sore against him. And now the enemy's sharpshooters had "found him"¹⁶ - come up with him. Thus the fatal moment had arrived: "Saul was sore afraid." But if he fell, let it at least not be by the hand of the Philistines, lest Israel's hereditary enemy "make sport"¹⁷ of the disabled, dying king.

Saul will die a king. The last service he asks of his armor-bearer is to save him from falling into Philistine hands by thrusting him through. But the armor-bearer dares not lift his sword against the Lord's anointed, and Saul plants his now otherwise useless sword on the ground, and throws himself upon it. The faithful armor-bearer follows his master's example. Soon all Saul's personal attendants have likewise been cut down (1 Samuel 31:6; comp. 1 Chronicles 10:6).

And now darkness stayed further deeds of blood. Before the morning light the tidings of Israel's defeat had spread far and wide. North of the valley

¹⁶ So correctly, and not, as in our Authorised Version (ver. 3), "the archers hit him, and he was sore wounded."

¹⁷ So literally in ver. 4, rendered in the Authorised Version, "abuse me."

of Jezreel, and even across the Jordan,¹⁸ which rolled close by, the people deserted the cities and fled into the open country, leaving their strongholds to the conquerors.

Meantime the plunderers were busy searching and stripping the dead in Jezreel and on Mount Gilboa. They found what they could scarcely have expected: the dead bodies of Saul and of his three sons. To strip them would have been comparatively little; but to add every insult, they cut off the heads of the king and of his sons, leaving the naked carcasses unburied. The gory heads and the bloody armor were sent round through Philistia, "to publish it in the houses of their idols, and among the people." Finally, the armor was distributed among the temples of the Ashtaroth (the Phoenician Venus), while the skull of Saul was fastened up in the great temple of Dagon.

But the Philistine host had not halted. They advanced to occupy the towns deserted by the Hebrews. The main body occupied Bethshan, the great mountain-fortress of Central Palestine, which from the top of a steep brow, inaccessible to horsemen, seemed to command not only the Jordan valley, but also all the country round. As if in utter scorn and defiance, they hung out on the walls of Bethshan the headless trunks of Saul and of his sons. And now night with her dark mantle once more covered these horrible trophies. Shall the eagles and vultures complete the work which, no doubt, they had already begun? The tidings had been carried across the Jordan, and wakened echoes in one of Israel's cities. It was to Jabesh-gilead that Saul, when only named but not yet acknowledged king, had by a forced night-march brought help, delivering it from utter destruction (1 Samuel 11). That had been the morning of Saul's life, bright and promising as none other; his first glorious victory, which had made him king by acclamation, and drawn Israel's thousands to that gathering in Gilgal, when, amidst the jubilee of an

exultant people, the new kingdom was inaugurated. And now it was night; and the headless bodies of Saul and his sons, deserted by all, swung in the wind on the walls of Bethshan, amid the hoarse music of vultures and jackals.

But it must not be so; it cannot be so. There was still truth, gratitude, and courage in Israel. And the brave men of Jabesh-gilead marched all the weary night; they crossed Jordan; they climbed that steep brow, and silently detached the dead bodies from the walls. Reverently they bore them across the river, and ere the morning light were far out of reach of the Philistines. Though it had always been the custom in Israel to bury the dead, they would not do so to these mangled remains, that they might not, as it were, perpetuate their disgrace. They burned them just sufficiently to destroy all traces of insult, and the bones they reverently laid under their great tamarisk tree, themselves fasting for seven days in token of public mourning. All honor to the brave men of Jabesh-gilead, whose deed Holy Scripture has preserved to all generations!

It was the third day after the return of David and his men to Ziklag. Every heart must have been heavy with anxiety for tidings of that great decisive struggle between the Philistines and Saul which they knew to be going on, when all at once a messenger came, whose very appearance betokened disaster and mourning (comp. 1 Samuel 4:12). It was a stranger, the son of an Amalekite settler in Israel, who brought sad and strange tidings. By his own account, he had fled to Ziklag straight out of the camp of Israel, to tell of the defeat and slaughter of Israel, and of the death of Saul and of Jonathan. As he related the story, he had, when the tide of battle turned against Israel, come by accident upon Saul, who stood alone on the slope of Gilboa leaning upon his spear, while the Philistine chariots and horsemen were closing in around him. On perceiving him, and learning that he was an Amalekite, the king had said, "Stand now to me and slay me, for cramp has seized upon me for my life is yet wholly in me."

¹⁹ On this the Amalekite had "stood to" him, and killed him, "for" - as he added in explanation,

¹⁸ Commentators have raised, as it seems to me, needless difficulties about an expression which always means "east of the Jordan." There cannot be anything incredible in the border-towns on the other side of Jordan being deserted by their inhabitants. If such a strong fortress as Bethshan was given up, why not smaller places across the Jordan?

¹⁹ This is the correct rendering of 2 Samuel 1:9.

probably referring to the illness which from fear and grief had seized Saul, forcing him to lean for support on his spear - "I knew that he would not live after he had fallen;²⁰ and I took the crown that was on his head, and the arm-band which was upon his arm, and I brought them to my lord - here!"

Improbable as the story would have appeared on calm examination, and utterly untrue as we know it to have been, David's indignant and horrified expostulation, how he had dared to destroy Jehovah's anointed (2 Samuel 1:14), proves that in the excitement of the moment he had regarded the account as substantially correct. The man had testified against himself: he held in his hand as evidence the king's crown and arm-band. If he had not murdered Saul, he had certainly stripped him when dead. And now he had come to David, evidently thinking he had done a deed grateful to him, for which he would receive reward, thus making David a partaker in his horrible crime. David's inmost soul recoiled from such a deed as murder of his sovereign and daring presumption against Jehovah, Whose anointed he was. Again and again, when defending precious life, Saul had been in his power, and he had rejected with the strongest energy of which he was capable the suggestion to ensure his own safety by the death of his persecutor. And that from which in the hour of his supreme danger he had recoiled, this Amalekite had now done in cold blood for hope of a reward! Every feeling would rise within him to punish the deed; and if he failed or hesitated, well might he be charged before all Israel with being an accomplice of the Amalekite. "Thy blood on thy head! for thy mouth hath testified upon thyself, saying, I have slain the anointed of Jehovah." And the sentence thus spoken was immediately executed.

It was real and sincere grief which led David and his men to mourn, and weep, and fast until even for Saul and for Jonathan, and for their fallen countrymen in their twofold capacity as belonging

²⁰ Most critics understand the expression "after he had fallen," to refer to his defeat. But there really seems no occasion for this. It is quite rational to suppose that the Amalekite meant that, in his state of body, Saul would be unable to defend himself against an attack.

to the Church and the nation ("the people of Jehovah and the house of Israel," ver. 12). One of the finest odes in the Old Testament perpetuated their memory. This elegy, composed by David "to teach the children of Israel," bears the general title of *Kasheth*, as so many of the Psalms have kindred inscriptions. In our text it appears as extracted from that collection of sacred heroic poetry, called *Sepher hajjashar*, "book of the just." It consists, after a general superscription, of two unequal stanzas, each beginning with the line: "Alas, the heroes have fallen!" The second stanza refers specially to Jonathan, and at the close of the ode the head-line is repeated, with an addition, indicating Israel's great loss. The two stanzas mark, so to speak, a descent from deepest grief for those so brave, so closely connected, and so honored, to expression of personal feelings for Jonathan, the closing lines sounding like the last sigh over a loss too great for utterance. Peculiarly touching is the absence in this elegy of even the faintest allusion to David's painful relations to Saul in the past. All that is merely personal seems blotted out, or rather, as if it had never existed in the heart of David. In this respect we ought to regard this ode as casting most valuable light on the real meaning and character of what are sometimes called the vindictive and imprecatory Psalms. Nor should we omit to notice, what a German divine has so aptly pointed out: that, with the exception of the lament of *Jabesh-gilead*, the only real mourning for Saul was on the part of David, whom the king had so bitterly persecuted to the death - reminding us in this also of David's great Antitype, Who alone of all wept over that Jerusalem which was preparing to betray and crucify Him! The elegy itself reads as follows:

"The adornment of Israel on thy heights thrust through! Alas,²¹ the heroes have fallen!

Announce it not in Gath, publish it not as glad tidings in the streets of Askelon, Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, Lest the

²¹ Our translation is an attempt at a literal rendering, which in poetry is specially desirable. The word rendered in our Authorised Version "How," has been translated "Alas," not only because this gives more fully the real meaning, but also because our word "how" might be taken interrogatively instead of exclaimatively.

daughters of the uncircumcised jubilee! O mountains in Gilboa - no dew, nor rain upon you, nor fields of first-fruit offerings - For there defiled is the shield of the heroes, The shield of Saul, no more anointed with oil! From blood of slain, from fat of heroes The bow of Jonathan turned not backward, And the sword of Saul returned not void (lacking)! Saul and Jonathan, the loved and the pleasant, In their life and in their death were not parted - Than eagles were they lighter, than lions stronger! Daughters of Israel, over Saul weep ye, Who clad you in purple with loveliness, Who put jewels of gold upon your clothing! Alas, the heroes have fallen in the midst of the contest - Jonathan, on thy heights thrust through! Woe is me for thee, my brother Jonathan, - Pleasant wast thou to me exceedingly, More marvelous thy love to me than the love of women! Alas, the heroes have fallen - And perished are the weapons of war!" ²² (2 Samuel 1:19-27.)

But the present was not a time for mourning only. So far as men could judge, there was no further necessity for David's exile. But even so he would not act without express Divine guidance. In answer to his inquiry by the Urim and Thummim he was directed to take up his residence in Hebron, where he was soon anointed king by his own tribe of Judah. As yet, however, and for the next seven and a half years, his rule only extended over that tribe. It is further evidence of the entire submission of David to the leading of Jehovah, and of his having fully learned the lesson of not seeking to compass his own "deliverance," that he took no steps to oppose the enthronement of Saul's son, however contrary this was to the Divine appointment; and that the contest which ultimately ensued originated not with David, but with his rival. On the contrary, David's first act as king of Judah was to send an embassy to Jabesh-gilead to express his admiration of their noble loyalty to Saul. ²³

²² The attentive reader will notice that throughout the body of the ode, the thoughts move forward in sentences of three lines each, indicated in our translation by a sign of exclamation.

²³ Keil has well noticed the frequent conjunction of the expressions "mercy and truth" (2 Samuel 2:6; comp. Exodus 34:6; Psalm 25:10). It is ever so with God: first, "mercy" - free, gracious, and forgiving; then "truth" - faithfulness to His

Nor does it detract from this mark of his generosity that, now their master was dead, he intimated his own elevation, to bespeak, if possible, their allegiance. The support of such men was well worth seeking. Besides, Jabesh-gilead was the capital of the whole of that district; and already the standard had there been set up of a rival, whose claims were neither founded on the appointment of God, nor on the choice of the people.

As we infer from the sacred narrative, there had been among the fugitives from the battle of Gilboa a son of Saul - whether the youngest or not must remain undetermined. ²⁴

From the language of the text (2 Samuel 2:8), as well as from his subsequent history, he seems to have been a weak character - a puppet in the hands of Abner, Saul's uncle, whom that ambitious and unscrupulous soldier used for his own purposes. His original name, Esh-Baal, "fire of Baal" (1 Chronicles 8:33; 9:39), became in popular designation Ish-Bosheth, "man of shame," - Baal and Bosheth being frequently interchanged according to the state of popular religion (Judges 6:32; Jeremiah 11:13; Hosea 9:10). Even this may be regarded as indicating the popular estimate of the man. Immediately after the battle of Gilboa, Abner had taken him across the Jordan to Mahanaim, "the twain camp," where probably the broken remnants of Saul's army also gathered. The place was well chosen, not only from the historical remembrances attaching to the spot where angels' hosts had met Jacob on his return to the land of promise (Genesis 32:2), but also as sufficiently far from the scene of the recent war to afford safe

promises, and experience of their reality. The expression rendered in our Authorised Version, "And I also will requite you this kindness," should be translated: "And I also am showing you this goodness," referring to the kind message which David sent them.

²⁴ Although Ish-bosheth is always mentioned fourth among the sons of Saul, it does not necessarily follow that he was the youngest. He may have been the son of another mother, and stand last in respect of dignity rather than of age. The different cast of his name from that of the others, seems rather to point in that direction. This would also account for his age - thirty-five at least - at the time of his father's death. At the same time we would not put too much stress on numerals in the Hebrew text, in which, from the nature of the case, clerical errors would most easily arise.

shelter. Here Abner raised the standard of the Pretender to the throne of Israel; and, probably in the course of five and a half years, ²⁵ succeeded in gradually clearing the country from the Philistines, and subjecting it, with the exception of the territory of Judah, to the nominal rule of the "man of shame."

The first conflict between the armies of the rival kings was undoubtedly provoked by Abner. With all the forces at his disposal he marched upon Gibeon, primarily with the view of again establishing the royal residence at "Gibeah of Saul," but with the ulterior object of placing Ish-bosheth in the room of his father, and gradually pushing back David. Upon this, Joab advanced with the seasoned troops of David, to oppose his progress. The town of Gibeon was built on the slope of a hill overlooking a wide and fertile valley. On the eastern side of the hill deep down in a rock is a beautiful spring, the waters of which are drained into a large rectangular pool, about seventy-two feet long and forty-two feet wide (comp. also Jeremiah 41:12). South of this pool lay the army of Joab, north of it that of Abner. The two generals seem to have been previously acquainted (ver. 22); and perhaps Abner may from the first have had in his mind the contingency of having to make his peace with David. Be this as it may, the provocation to actual hostilities came once more from Abner. On his proposal, - perhaps with a view to decide the conflict by a kind of duel, instead of entering upon an internecine civil war - twelve young men from either side were to engage in a personal combat. ²⁶

But such was the embitterment and determination of parties, that each one rushed on his antagonist, and, taking hold of him, buried his sword in his

²⁵ This probably explains the seeming discrepancy between the two years of his reign and the seven and a half of David's over Judah. Erdmann has well remarked that the preposition "over," which occurs six times in ver. 9, is represented in the Hebrew three times by *el*, and three times by *al* - the latter indicating the gradual subjection of territory. The word "Ashurites" should probably read Geshurites, their land lying on the borders of Gilead and Bashan (Deuteronomy 3:14; Joshua 12:5).

²⁶ The expression, ver. 14, "Let the young men play before us," refers here to the terrible "game" of single combat.

side; whence the spot obtained the name: "Plot of the sharp blades." This bloody and, in the event, useless "game" having proved indecisive, a fierce battle ensued; or rather, a rout of the Israelites, in which three hundred and sixty of them fell, as against nineteen of David's seasoned and trained warriors. The pursuit was only stopped when night had fallen, and Abner had rallied his scattered forces in a strong position on the top of a hill and then only at Abner's special request. ²⁷

An incident in that day's pursuit is specially recorded for its bearing on the after-history. Of the three sons of Zeruiah, David's sister (1 Chronicles 2:16), - Abishai (1 Samuel 26:6), Joab, David's general-in-chief, and Asahel - the youngest was "light of foot as one of the roes in the field." Flushed with the fight, the youth singled out Abner, and followed him in his flight. After a little Abner, recognizing his pursuer, stood still. Probably the youth thought this meant surrender. But Abner, having ascertained that his pursuer was really Asahel, and deeming that his ambition would be satisfied if he carried away the armor of some enemy, bade him gratify his wish on one of the men-at-arms around. When the youth, bent on the glory of slaying Abner himself, nevertheless continued the pursuit, the captain once more stopped to expostulate. But neither the well-meant and kindly-spoken warning of Abner, nor the manifest discrepancy of fighting power between the two, could stay a lad intoxicated by perhaps a first success. To get rid of him, and almost in necessary self-defense, Abner now struck behind him with the butt-end of his lance, which was probably sharpened with a point, to be capable of being stuck in the ground (1 Samuel 26:7). Mortally wounded in "the abdomen," ²⁸ the lad fell, and soon "died in the same place." The sight of one so young and brave weltering in his blood and writhing in agony no doubt greatly increased the bitterness of that day's pursuit (ver. 23).

²⁷ The Hebrew construction of ver. 27 is difficult. The probable meaning is as follows: "As the Elohim liveth! For unless thou hadst spoken - then if before the morning the people had returned, each from after his brother!" In other words, the pursuit would have been continued till the morning.

²⁸ This is the correct rendering, and not "under the fifth rib," as in the Authorised Version (2 Samuel 2:23).

The battle of Gibeon seems to have been followed rather by a protracted state of war²⁹ than by any other actual engagement between the forces of the two kings.

The general result is described as the house of Saul waxing weaker and weaker, and that of David stronger and stronger. Of both evidence appeared. The increasing political strength of David was shown, as usual among Eastern monarchs, by the fresh alliances through marriage into which he now entered. These would not only connect him with powerful families throughout the country, but prove to his subjects that he felt himself safe in his position, and could now in the Oriental fashion found a royal house. On the other hand, the dependence of Ish-bosheth upon Abner became constantly more evident and humiliating. At last the all-powerful general took a public step which in those days was regarded as implying an open claim to the succession to Saul's throne (comp. 2 Samuel 16:21; 1 Kings 2:21). Whether or not Abner had intended this when he took Rizpah, Saul's concubine, or merely wished to gratify his passion, with utter and marked disregard of the puppet whom it had suited his purpose to keep on the throne, Ish-bosheth at any rate resented this last and crowning insult. But Abner, who had no doubt for some time seen the impossibility of maintaining the present state of affairs (comp. ver. 17), was in no mood to brook even reproof. He broke into coarse invective,³⁰ and vowed to Ish-bosheth's face that he would henceforth espouse the cause of David, and soon bring it to a successful issue. Nor did the wretched king even dare to reply.

If Ishbosheth had regarded it as only the threat of an angry man, Abner at least was in full earnest. Negotiations with David were forthwith set on foot. But they met with a preliminary condition - right and proper not only in itself, but also from political considerations. It was a standing

memento of David's weakness in the past, and a lasting disgrace, that his wife Michal should be parted from him, and continue the wife of another - a mere subject of the kingdom. Besides, as the husband of Saul's daughter, and as recalling how he had obtained her hand, her restoration would place him on a manifest political vantage ground. Accordingly David sent Abner this message in reply: "Well, I will make a covenant with thee; only one thing I demand of thee, viz.: Thou shalt not see my face, unless thou before bringest Michal, the daughter of Saul, when thou comest to see my face." But it would have ill become David to address such a demand to Abner, except as all-powerful with Ish-bosheth, and therefore really responsible for his acts. The formal demand was made to Ish-bosheth himself, and grounded on David's rights. The son of Saul immediately complied - of course, under the direction of Abner, who himself executed the commission to fetch her from her present husband, and restore her to David. The publicity with which this was done - the husband being allowed to accompany her with his lamentations as far as the boundary of Judah - and the influential character of the embassy, as well as the act of restoration itself, must have given to the whole nation an idea of David's acknowledged position, and contributed to their speedy submission to his rule.

When Abner brought Michal to Hebron, at the head of an embassy of twenty men - whether sent by Ish-bosheth, or coming as a sort of representative deputation from Israel - he had, with characteristic energy, already taken all his measures. First he had assured himself of the co-operation of the tribal "elders," who had long been weary of a nominal rule which left them defenseless against the Philistines and others. After that he had entered into special negotiations with the tribe of Benjamin, which might naturally be jealous of a transference of royalty from themselves to Judah. Having secured the consent of all, he was able to offer to David the undivided allegiance of Israel. The king had favorably received Abner and his suite, and entertained them at a great banquet. Already the embassy was on its way back to accomplish its mission, when Joab and his men returned to Hebron from some raid, such as in the then circumstances of David might

²⁹ The expression in 2 Samuel 3:1: "Now there was long war," refers not to actual war, of which there is no evidence in the record, but to a state of chronic warfare.

³⁰ The words of Abner (ver. 8) should be thus rendered: "Am I a dog's head which belongeth to Judah? This day" (at present) "I show kindness to the house of Saul thy father," etc.

still be necessary for the support of the troops. On learning what had passed in his absence, he made his way to the king, and violently expostulated with him for not having acted treacherously towards his guest. Abner had come bent on treachery, and he ought not to have been allowed to escape. We can scarcely suppose that this pretense of zeal imposed upon any one, any more than afterwards, when he had murdered Abner, that of having acted as avenger of blood. In both instances his motives, no doubt, were envy, personal jealousy, and fear lest his position might be endangered. As David gave him no encouragement, he acted on his own responsibility, whether or not he used the name of David in so doing.

A swift messenger soon brought back Abner to Hebron. Joab, who had concerted his measures with Abishai, his brother (ver. 30), met the unsuspecting victim "in the gate;" and taking him aside from the pathway into the interior and darker roofed part, as if for some private communication, "slew" him by a wound in "the abdomen," similar to that by which Asahel had died.³¹

As we understand it, the murderers would then turn round, and addressing the bystanders, declare that they were justified, since they had acted as "avengers of blood." But that such plea could not be urged in this instance must have been evident to all, since Abner's had been an act of self-defense, and certainly not intentional murder (comp. Deuteronomy 4:42, etc.; Joshua 20). Abner, however, represented a low type of Israelitish valor. If we were to credit his protestations (vers. 9, 10, 18) of desiring to carry out the Divine will in the elevation of David, we should, of course, have to regard him as having previously acted in conscious opposition to God, and that from the most selfish motives. But probably - put in an Oriental and Jewish fashion - it meant no more than the thousand protestations of "God wills it" and the "Te Deums" which in all ages of the world have covered human ambition with a garb of religiousness. But none the less foul and

treacherous was Joab's deed, and it behooved David not only to express his personal abhorrence of it, but to clear himself of all suspicion of complicity. In this instance it was impossible for human justice to overtake the criminals. Probably public feeling would not have supported the king; nor could he at this crisis in his affairs afford the loss of such generals, or brave the people and the army. But David did all that was possible. Those whom human justice could not overtake he left in the hands of Divine vengeance to mete out the punishment appropriate to the inordinate desire after leadership which had prompted such a crime (ver. 29).³²

A public mourning was ordered, in which the murderers themselves had to take part. The king in his official character followed the murdered man to his burying, pronounced over him an appropriate elegy, and publicly announced his intention to fast, in token of personal mourning. From the remark added in the sacred text (ver. 37), it seems that such proofs of sincerity were requisite to counter-balance the suspicions otherwise excited by such an instance of treachery and deception in high places. To his own immediate surroundings - his "servants" (vers. 38, 39) - David spoke more unreservedly, lamenting the circumstances which still made him comparatively powerless in face of such reckless chiefs as the sons of Zeruiah.

But, on the other hand, increasing public confidence rewarded David's integrity of purpose. It was needed, if high-handed crime was to be suppressed in the land. Another glaring instance of the public demoralization consequent on Saul's long misrule soon occurred. The death of Abner had naturally the most discouraging effect, not only upon Ish-bosheth, but upon all his adherents. No one was now left of sufficient prominence and influence to carry out the peaceable revolution which Abner had planned. The present weak government could not long be maintained; and if Ish-bosheth died, the only representative of Saul's line left was a crippled child, Mephi-bosheth ("the

³¹ The difference is marked in the original of ver. 30: Joab and Abishai slew or murdered Abner because he made Asahel die.

³² Of course, we must in all such instances not lose out of view the religious standpoint of the times, even in the case of a David.

exterminator of shame," or "of Baal" ³³), the son of Jonathan, whose deformity had been caused by the nurse letting him fall when snatching him up for hasty flight on receiving tidings of the disastrous day at Jezreel.

Not even the most ardent partisan could have wished to see on the throne of Israel a child thus permanently incapacitated. But few could have been prepared for the tragedy which was so soon to put an end to all difficulties.

It seems that two of Ish-bosheth's "captains of bands," prompted, no doubt, by the hope of rich reward, had in the most deliberate and treacherous manner planned the murder of Ish-bosheth. They were brothers, from Beeroth, on the western boundary of Benjamin, but included in its territory (Joshua 18:25). Hence they were of the same tribe with Saul, which, of course, aggravated their crime. For some unexplained reason the Beerothites had fled en masse to Gittaim - perhaps, as has been suggested, on the occasion of Saul's slaughter of the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21:1, 2). This, however, can scarcely be regarded as the motive of their crime.

Probably on pretense of superintending the receipt of what was necessary for the provisioning of their men, they entered the royal residence at the time when Ish-bosheth was taking the customary Eastern midday rest, made their way into his bed-chamber, stabbed him in his sleep in the abdomen, and cut off his head, to carry it to David as gory evidence of their deed. ³⁴

The reception which they met was such as might have been expected. To the daring appeal of those interested murderers that they had been the instruments of Jehovah's vengeance upon Saul's wrongs to David, the king gave no further reply than to point to what had hitherto been the faith and experience of his heart and the motto of his life: "Jehovah liveth, Who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity!" It needed not man's help, least of all the aid of crime. Never - not even in his

darkest hour - had he either desponded, doubted, or sought to right himself. His strength, as his confidence, had lain in realizing Jehovah as the living God and his all-sufficient Savior. No other deliverance did he either need or seek. But as for this crime - had not his conduct to the lying messenger at Ziklag sufficiently shown his abhorrence of such deeds? How much more in regard to a murder so foul as this! Swift, sure, and signally public punishment was the only possible reply in such a case.

And thus at last, not by his own act, but through circumstances over which he had had no control, - allowed by Him Who gives full liberty to each man, though He overrules even the darkest deeds of the wicked for the evolving of good - David was left undisputed claimant to the throne of Israel. Faith, patience, and integrity were vindicated; the Divine promises to David had come true in the course of natural events - and all this was better far than even if Saul had voluntarily resigned his place, or Abner succeeded in his plans.

IV_16 David anointed King over all Israel - Taking of Fort Zion - Philistine Defeat - The Ark brought to Jerusalem - Liturgical Arrangements and Institutions

2 Samuel 5 and 6; 1 Chronicles 11 to 16

THE cessation of the long-pending rivalry and the prospect of a strong monarchy under David must have afforded sincere relief and satisfaction to all the well-disposed in Israel. Even during the time when his fortunes were at the lowest, David had had constant accessions of valiant and true men from all tribes, not excluding Saul's tribe of Benjamin and the country east of the Jordan. Yet it implied no ordinary courage to face the dangers and difficulties of the life of an outlaw; no common determination to leave home and country in such a cause. The Book of Chronicles furnishes in this as in other instances most welcome notices supplemental to the other historical writings of the Old Testament. ³⁵

³³ I explain the word: "He who blows down Baal," which seems best to correspond with the parallel name Merib-Baal, in 1 Chronicles 8:34.

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³⁵ Without here entering on a detailed analysis of the Books of Chronicles (for which see the Table at the beginning of this Volume), we may remark that their position in the canon appropriately indicates their character relatively to the Books of

Thus it gives us (1 Chronicles 12:1-22) the names of the leading men who joined David at different periods, with their tribal connection, and even helps us to guess what motives may have actuated at least some of their number. From these notices we learn that considerable accessions had taken place on four different occasions. When David was at Ziklag (vers. 1-7), he was joined by certain tribes-men ("brothers") of Saul (vers. 1-8), and by some men from Judah (vers. 4, 6, 7). While in the mountain-fastnesses, in the wilderness of Judah (1 Samuel 22-24), certain of the Gadites separated themselves unto him, "men of the army for war" - soldiers trained for war (ver. 8), "chief of the host" (not "captains of the host," ver. 14), "one to a hundred the least, and the greatest one to a thousand," who when breaking away from the army of Saul had not only crossed Jordan in the dangerous flood time of early spring, but cut their way through those who would have barred it (ver. 15). A third contingent from Benjamin and Judah came during the same period (vers. 16-18). Their names are not mentioned; but they were headed by Amasai, probably another nephew of David - the son of Abigail, David's younger sister (1 Chronicles 2:16, 17). When challenged by David as to their intentions, Amasai had, under the influence of the Spirit, broken forth in language which showed the character of their motives (ver. 18). The last and perhaps most important contingent joined David on his road back to Ziklag, when dismissed from the armies of the Philistines. It consisted of seven chieftains of

thousands of Manasseh, who gave David most valuable aid against the Amalekites.

If such had been David's position and influence in Israel even during Saul's lifetime, we can readily understand the rush of enthusiasm at his accession to the throne of a people once more united, now that there was no longer any rival claimant left. As they afterwards told David at Hebron, they all felt that he was their own, - just as Israel will feel when at last in repentant faith they will turn to their Messiah King; that in the past, even in Saul's life-time, he alone had been the victorious leader and chief of all; and that to him had pointed the express Divine promise as spoken through Samuel (1 Chronicles 11:3). And while the "elders of Israel" made a regular "covenant" with David, and anointed him king over Israel, hundreds and thousands of the men of war marched down to Hebron from the most remote parts of the country (1 Chronicles 12:23-40). Such enthusiasm had never before been witnessed. Not bidden to the war, but voluntarily they came, some bringing with them even from the northernmost parts of the land - from Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali - contributions in kind for the three days' popular feast which David's former subjects of Judah, and especially those around Hebron, were preparing in honor of this great and most joyous event. From both banks of the Jordan they came. Of course, we do not look for a large representation from Judah and Simeon (the latter being enclosed in the territory of Judah), since they were already David's, nor from the Levites, many of whom may previously have been in David's territory (1 Chronicles 12:24-26). Issachar was represented by two hundred of its most prominent public leaders, "knowing (possessing) understanding of the times, to know what Israel should do." ³⁶ Only the contingents from Ephraim and Benjamin were comparatively small, the former, owing either to the old tribal jealousy between Ephraim and Judah, or else from a real diminution in their number, such as had appeared even in the second census taken by Moses, while in the case of Benjamin it is sufficiently accounted for by the

Samuel and of the Kings. These latter are prophetic, while the Books of Chronicles are hagiographic. In the one series all is viewed from the prophetic standpoint; in the other, from that of the "sacred writer." In the one case, it is the theocracy, with its grand world-wide principles, which dominates the view; in the other, it is rather the sanctuary which is in Judah - God-appointed in its location, ordinances, priesthood, and law, allegiance to which brings blessing, while unfaithfulness entails judgments. Accordingly, after general genealogical tables (in which the work abounds), the kingdom of David is traced to the Babylonish captivity, while the history of the kingdom of Israel is wholly omitted. Even in the history of the kingdom of David and of his successors - especially in that of David and Solomon - all the merely personal parts are passed over, and the narrative is, if one may use the expression, rather objective than subjective. The reader will easily find for himself what parts of history are omitted, although the plan is not always consistently carried out, especially in regard to the later reigns.

³⁶ The expression refers, of course, to these two hundred representative men, and not to the tribe as a whole.

circumstance that "even till then the greatest part of them were keeping their allegiance to the house of Saul" (ver. 29).

Taking all these circumstances into account, the grand total of warriors that appeared in Hebron - 339,600 men, with 1222 chiefs, and so many of them from the other side Jordan, - afforded a truly marvelous exhibition of national unanimity and enthusiasm. And the king who was surrounded by such a splendid array was in the prime of his vigor, having just reached the age of thirty-seven and a half years (2 Samuel 5:5).

What a prospect before the nation! Well might they joy at the national feast which David gave in Hebron! Viewing this history in its higher bearing, and remembering the grounds on which the elders of Israel in Hebron based the royal claims of David, we venture to regard it as typical of Israel at last returning to their Savior-King. And surely it is not to strain the application, if thoughts of this feast at Hebron carry us forward to that other and better feast in the "latter days," which is destined to be so full of richest joy alike to Israel and to the world (Isaiah 25:6-10).

Surrounded by a force of such magnitude and enthusiasm, David must have felt that this was the proper moment for the greatest undertaking in Jewish history since the conquest of the land under Joshua. The first act of David's government must appropriately be the conquest of Israel's capital. ³⁷

The city of the Jebusites must become truly Jerusalem - "the inheritance," "the abode" "of peace:" the peace of the house of David. The town itself had indeed already been taken immediately upon Joshua's death (Judges 1:8). But "the stronghold" on Mount Zion, which dominated the city, still continued to be held by "the Jebusites." Yet Jerusalem was almost marked out by nature to be Israel's capital, from its strength, its central position, and its situation between Benjamin and Judah. Far more than this, it was the place of which the Lord had made choice: to be, as it were, a guarded sanctuary within the holy land. So long

as Zion was in possession of the Jebusites, as the original Canaanite "inhabitants of the land," the land itself could not be said to have been wholly won. Thither accordingly David now directed the united forces of his people. Yet such was the natural and artificial strength of Zion that "to say (express), David shall not come hither" (ver. 5), the Jebusites taunted him with what afterwards became a proverb, perpetuating among the people the fact that no conquest is too difficult for God and with God: "He will not come in hither, for even the blind and the lame shall drive thee away!" It was wise and right in David to take up this defiant taunt of the heathen, when he gave his men charge - perhaps directing them to scale the bare rock by the water-course, ³⁸ which may at that time have come down the brow of Zion: "Whoever smites Jebusites - let him throw (them) down the water-course: both 'the blind and the lame' who are hated of David's soul!"

At the same time no means were neglected of encouraging the leaders in the attack. As we learn from the Book of Chronicles (1 Chronicles 11:6), the leader who first scaled the walls was to be made general-in-chief. This honor was won by Joab, who had commanded David's separate army, before his elevation to the throne had united the whole host of Israel. And so, in face of the Jebusites boast, the impregnable fort was taken, and called "the City of David," - a lesson this full of encouragement to the people of God at all times. Henceforth David made it his residence. To render it more secure, "he built," or rather fortified, "round about from (fort) Millo and inwards," or, as in 1 Chronicles 11:8: "From the surrounding (wall) and to the surrounding," - that is, as we understand it: Zion, which had hitherto been surrounded by three walls, had now a fourth added on the north, reaching from Castle Millo (either at the north-eastern or at the north-western angle) to where the other wall ended. Similarly,

³⁷ This might have been inferred from the circumstance that both in 2 Samuel 5 and in 1 Chronicles 11 the capture of Jerusalem is recorded immediately after David's coronation. But the wording of 2 Samuel 5:5 places it beyond doubt.

³⁸ The expression rendered in the Authorised Version "gutter," occurs only again in the plural in Psalm 42:7, where it undoubtedly means "cataracts" or "waterfalls." Accordingly we translate the singular of the noun by "watercourse down a steep brow." Keil, Ewald, and Erdmann render it "abyss." The interpretation of this difficult verse (ver. 8) in The Speaker's Bible seems to us not warranted by the language of the text.

Joab repaired the rest of the city walls (1 Chronicles 11:8).

What we have just related must, of course, not be taken as indicating a strict chronological succession of events. The building of these walls no doubt occupied some time, and many things occurred in the interval, which are related afterwards. Apparently the intention of the sacred historian was to complete his sketch of all connected with David's conquest of Zion and his making it the royal residence, not to write in chronological order. Hence we have also here notices of the palace which David built on Mount Zion, and of the help which Hiram, king of Tyre, gave him both in men and materials, and even of David's fresh alliances and of their issues, although the children were born at a much later period than this.³⁹ As we understand it, soon after his accession, probably after the capture of Jerusalem and the final defeat of the Philistines, Hiram sent an embassy of congratulation to David, which led to an interchange of courtesies and to the aid which the king of Tyre gave in David's architectural undertakings.⁴⁰

Different feelings from those in Israel were awakened in Philistia by the tidings of David's elevation to the throne of united Israel, and of his conquest of the Jebusite fort. The danger to their supremacy was too real to be overlooked. On their approach, David retired to the stronghold of Zion. While the Philistines advanced unopposed as far as the valley of Rephaim, which is only separated by a mountain-ridge from that of Ben-Hinnom, David "inquired of Jehovah." So near had danger come, and so strongly did the king feel that he must take no step without Divine direction to avert it. For, placing ourselves on the standpoint of those times, this was the best, if not the only way

³⁹ So, notably, the four sons of Bathsheba or Bathshua (comp. 1 Chronicles 3:5), and, of course, the others also. In 1 Chronicles 3:6, 7, two names (Eliphelet and Nogah) are mentioned, which do not occur in 2 Samuel. These two must have died.

⁴⁰ The building of David's palace must have taken place in the first years of his reign in Jerusalem. This is evident from many allusions to this palace. We must, therefore, in this, as in so many other instances, consider the dates given by Josephus as incorrect (Ant. 8. 3, 1; Ag. Ap. 1. 18).

of manifesting entire dependence on God's guidance - even to the incurring of what seemed near danger in so doing, and also the best if not the only way of teaching his followers much-needed lessons of allegiance to Jehovah, with all that religiously and morally followed from it.

The answer of the Lord conveyed promised assurance of help, and hence of victory. And in this light David afterwards described his triumph, exclaiming, "Broken in hath Jehovah upon mine enemies before me." To perpetuate this higher bearing of the victory, the spot was ever afterwards called "Baal-perazim" ("possessor of breaches"), - and from Isaiah 28:21, we know that the solemn import of the name never passed from memory. The victory and its meaning were the more notable that the Philistines had brought their gods with them to the battle, as Israel the Ark on a former occasion. Their idols were now burned by command of David, in accordance with Deuteronomy 7:5, 25. Yet a second time did the Philistines come up to Rephaim to retrieve their disaster. On this occasion also David was divinely directed - no doubt the more clearly to mark the Divine interposition: "Thou shalt not go up (viz., against them in front); turn thyself upon their rear, and come upon them from opposite the Bacha-trees."⁴¹ And when thou hearest the sound of marching in the tops of the Bacha-trees, then be quick, for then shall Jehovah go forth before thee to smite in the host of the Philistines." It was as David had been told; and the rout of the Philistines extended from Gibeon⁴² to the Gazer road, which runs from Nether Bethhoron to the sea.

Thus far for the political results of David's elevation, which are placed first in the "Book of Samuel," as dealing primarily with the political aspect of his kingdom, while in the Book of Chronicles, which views events primarily in their

⁴¹ I have left the word untranslated. The guess of the Rabbis, who render it by mulberry-trees, is as unsupported as that of the LXX. who translate: pear-trees. The word is derived from bacha, to flow, then to weep. Ewald and Keil suggest with much probability that it was a balsam-tree (as in the Arabic), of which the sap dropped like tears.

⁴² So in 1 Chronicles 14:16. The word Geba, in 2 Samuel 5:25, is evidently a clerical error, since Geba lay in quite another direction.

theocratic bearing, they are recorded after another of greatest importance for the religious welfare of the new kingdom.⁴³ For the same reason also, the Book of Chronicles adds details not recorded in that of Samuel, about David's consultation with his chiefs, and the participation of the priests and Levites in what related to the removal of the ark of the Lord.

About seventy years had passed since the ark of Jehovah had stood in the Tabernacle,⁴⁴ according to the express ordinance of God.

And now that Israel was once more united, not only in a political, but in the best and highest sense, and its God, appointed capital had at last been won, it was surely time to restore the ancient worship which had been so sadly disturbed. Nor could there be any question as to the location of the Ark. No other place fit for it but the capital of the land. For was it not the "ark of God" over which the Lord specially manifested His Presence and His glory to His people? - or, in the language of Holy Scripture⁴⁵ (2 Samuel 6:2): "over which is called the Name, the NAME of Jehovah Zevaoth, Who throneth upon the cherubim." Much, indeed, had still to be left in a merely provisional state.

We cannot doubt that David from the first contemplated a time when the Lord would no longer dwell, so to speak, in tents, but when a stable form would be given to the national worship by the erection of a central sanctuary. But for the present it must remain - if in Jerusalem - yet in a "tabernacle." Nay, more than that, the tent which David would prepare would not be the tabernacle which Moses had made. This was in Gibeah, and there, since the murder of the priests at Nob, Zadok officiated, while Abiathar acted as high-

priest with David. Neither of these two could be deposed; and so there must be two tabernacles, till God Himself should set right what the sin of men had made wrong. And for this, as we believe, David looked forward to the building of a house for the God of Israel. An undertaking of such solemn national importance as the transference of the Ark to Jerusalem must be that of the whole people, and not of David alone. Accordingly representatives from the whole land assembled to the number of thirty thousand, with whom he went to bring in solemn procession the Ark from Baalah of Judah, as Kirjath-Jearim ("the city of the woods.") also used to be called⁴⁶ (Joshua 15:9; 1 Chronicles 13:6; comp. also Psalm 132:6).

One thing only David had omitted, but its consequences proved fatal. The act of David and of Israel was evidently intended as a return to the Lord, and as submission to His revealed ordinances. But if so, the obedience must be complete in every particular. Viewed symbolically and typically, all these ordinances formed one complete whole, of which not the smallest detail could be altered without disturbing the symmetry of all, and destroying their meaning. Viewed legally, and, so far as Israel was concerned, even morally, the neglect of any single ordinance involved a breach of all, and indeed, in principle, that of obedience and absolute submission to Jehovah, in consequence of which the people had already so terribly suffered. Once more we must here place ourselves on the stand-point of the stage of religious development then attained. For only thus can we understand either the grave fault committed by David, or the severity of the punishment by which it was followed. The arrangements which David had made for the transport of the Ark differed in one most important particular from those which God had originally prescribed. According to God's ordinance (Numbers 6) the Ark was only to be handled by the Levites - for symbolical reasons on which we need not now enter - nor was any other even to touch it (Numbers 4:15). Moreover the Levites

⁴³ If the reader will keep in view this fundamental difference in the object of the two histories, he will readily understand not only why events are differently arranged in them, but also the reason why some events are left unrecorded, or more briefly narrated in one or the other of these works.

⁴⁴ Keil reckons about twenty years to the victory of Ebenezer, forty years in the time of Samuel and Saul, and about ten in that of David.

⁴⁵ We have translated the verse correctly, as our Authorised Version is manifestly in error.

⁴⁶ Baalah "of Jehudah," to distinguish it from others of that name (Joshua 19:8, 44), or also Kirjath-Baal (Joshua 15:60; 18:14) was the same as Kirjath-Jearim. Comp. also Delitzsch Com. 2. d., Ps. vol. 2 p. 264.

were to carry it on their shoulders, and not to place it in a wagon. But the arrangements which David had made for the transport of the Ark were those of the heathen Philistines when they had restored it to Israel (1 Samuel 6:7, etc.), not those of the Divine ordinance. If such was the case on the part of the king, we can scarcely wonder at the want of reverence on the part of the people. It was a question of the safe transport of a sacred vessel, not of the reverent handling of the very symbol of the Divine Presence. It had been placed in a new cart, driven by the sons of Abinadab,⁴⁷ in whose house the Ark had been these many years, while David and all Israel followed with every demonstration of joy,⁴⁸ and with praise.

At a certain part of the road, by the threshing-floor of "the stroke" (Nachon, 2 Samuel 6:6; or, as in 1 Chronicles 13:9, Chidon, "accident"), the oxen slipped, when Uzzah, one of Abinadab's sons, took hold of the Ark. It scarcely needs the comment on this act, so frequently made, that Uzzah was a type of those who honestly but with unhallowed hands try to steady the ark of God when, as they think, it is in danger, to show us that some lesson was needed alike by the king and his people to remind them that this was not merely a piece of sacred furniture, but the very emblem of God's Presence among His people. It was a sudden and terrible judgment which struck down Uzzah in his very act before all the people; and though David was "displeased" at the unexpected check to his cherished undertaking, the more so that he must have felt that the blame lay with himself, he seems also to have learnt its lesson at least thus far, to realize, more than ever before, that holiness befitted every contact with God (2 Samuel 6:9).

⁴⁷ By a copyist's mistake the first two clauses of 2 Samuel 6:3, are repeated in ver. 4. The text of ver. 3 should continue in ver. 4 with these words: "with the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark."

⁴⁸ A clerical error, similar to that just mentioned, occasion the wording of ver. 5, "on all manner of instruments made of cypress wood." The expression should read as in 1 Chronicles 13:8: "with all their might and with singing." The instruments translated in the Authorised Version (2 Samuel 6:5) "cornets," are the sistras, consisting of two iron rods furnished with little bells.

The meaning of this judgment was understood by David. When three months later the Ark was fetched from where it had been temporarily deposited in the house of Obed-Edom, a Levite of Gath-Rimmon (Joshua 21:24; 19:45), and of that family of that Korahites (1 Chronicles 26:4; comp. Exodus 6:21), to whom the custody of the Ark was specially entrusted (1 Chronicles 15:18, 24), David closely observed the Divine ordinance. Of this, as indeed of all the preparations made by David on this occasion, we have, as might be expected, a very full account in 1 Chronicles 15:1-25. As the procession set forward a sacrifice of an ox and a fatling was offered (2 Samuel 6:13); and again when the Levites had accomplished their task in safety, a thank-offering of seven bullocks and seven rams was brought (1 Chronicles 15:26).

David himself, dressed as the representative of the priestly nation, in an ephod, took part in the festivities, like one of the people. It is a sad sign of the decay into which the public services of the sanctuary had fallen in the time of Saul, that Michal saw in this nothing but needless humiliation of the royal dignity. She had loved the warrior, and she could honor the king, but "the daughter of Saul"⁴⁹ could neither understand nor sympathize with such a demonstration as that in which David now took part.

As she looked from her window upon the scene below, and mentally contrasted the proud grandeur of her father's court with what she regarded as the triumph of the despicable priesthood at the cost of royalty, other thoughts than before came into her mind alike as to the past and the present, and "she despised David in her heart."

The lengthened services of that happy day were past. David had prepared for the reception of the Ark a "tabernacle," no doubt on the model of that which Moses had made. The introduction of the Ark into its "most holy place"⁵⁰ was made the feast of the dedication of the new sanctuary which had been reared for its reception, when burnt-offerings and peace-offerings were brought. But

⁴⁹ Thus Michal is here significantly designated, and not as the wife of David.

⁵⁰ The Hebrew expression implies the innermost part.

there was more than this to mark the commencement of a new religious era. For the first time the service of praise was now introduced in the public worship of Israel.⁵¹

Shortly after it was fully organized, as also the other ritual of the sanctuary (1 Chronicles 16). The introduction of fixed hymns of praise, with definite responses by the people (as in 1 Chronicles 16:34-36), marks the commencement of that liturgy which, as we know, was continued in the Temple, and afterwards in the Synagogues throughout the land. The grand hymn composed for this occasion was no doubt Psalm 24, as its contents sufficiently indicate. But besides we have in the Book of Chronicles (16:8-36), what must be considered either as a liturgical arrangement and combination of parts from other Psalms introduced at that time into the public worship, or else as a separate Psalm, parts of which were afterwards inserted into others. This question is, however, of little practical importance. In favor of the first view is the undoubted fact that the successive parts of the hymn in the Book of Chronicles occur in Psalm 55 (1-15), 46, 57 (1), and 56 (47, 48), and the circumstance that the expressions (1 Chronicles 16:4) "to record, and to thank, and to praise," mark a liturgical division and arrangement of the Psalms. The first of the three classes indicated, the Ascharah or "memorial" Psalms, were sung when meat-offerings were brought⁵² (Leviticus 2:2).

Psalm 38 and 70 in our Psalter may be mentioned as examples of this class. As to the second and third classes, we need only remark that Psalm 55 is the first of the Hodim, or Thank-Psalms, and Psalm 56 of the "Hallelujah," or "Praise" Psalms. Nor is it said that the hymn in Chronicles was actually sung in the form there indicated, the inference to that effect being derived from the

⁵¹ This is expressly stated in 1 Chronicles 16:7, omitting, of course, the words in italics.

⁵² At the time of our Lord the Psalms for the day were chanted when the drink-offering was poured out. Comp. my Temple: its Ministry and Services at the time of Jesus Christ, pp. 143, 144. But the arrangement then prevailing may not date further back than the time of the Maccabees - at any rate, it forms no criterion for the order of the services in the time of David.

words in italics in our Authorized Version (1 Chronicles 16:7). These are, of course, not in the Hebrew text, which has it: "On that day then gave" (appointed) "David first" (for the first time) "to thank Jehovah" (i.e. the service of song) "by the hand of Asaph and his brethren." On the other hand, however, the hymn in the Book of Chronicles is so closely and beautifully connected in its various parts, as to give the impression of one whole, parts of which may afterwards have been inserted in different Psalms, just as similar adaptations are found in other parts of the Psalter (comp., for example, Psalm 40:17, etc., with Psalm 70).

But, whatever may be thought of its original form, this "Psalm" of eight stanzas,⁵³ as given in the Book of Chronicles, is one of the grandest hymns in Holy Scripture.

If the expression might be allowed, it is New Testament praise in Old Testament language. Only we must beware of separating the two dispensations, as if the faith and joy of the one had differed from that of the other except in development and form. From first to last the hymn breathes a missionary spirit, far beyond any narrow and merely national aspirations. Thus, in the fifth stanza (vs. 23-27), we have anticipation of the time when God's promise to Abraham would be made good, and all nations share in his spiritual blessing, - a hope which, in the sixth (28-30) and seventh stanzas (31-33), rises to the joyous assurance of Jehovah's reign over all men and over ransomed earth itself.

That this hymn is deeply Messianic, not only in its character but in its basis, needs no proof. In truth, we regard it and the earlier hymns of the same spirit, as that by the Red Sea (Exodus 15) and that of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), as forming links connecting the earlier with the later (prophetic) portions of the Old Testament, showing that,

⁵³ Stanza 1 (vers. 8-11): Eulogy of God and of His wonders; stanza 2 (vers. 12-14): Memorial of God's great doings; stanza 3 (vers. 15-18): Memorial of the covenant and its promises; stanza 4 (ver. 19-22): Record of gracious fulfillment; stanza 5 (vers. 23-27): Missionary; stanza 6 (vers. 28-30): The Universal Kingdom of God; stanza 7 (vers. 31-33): The reign of God upon earth; stanza 8 (vers. 34-36): Eucharistic, with doxology and liturgical close.

however gradually the knowledge may have come of the precise manner in which the promise would ultimately be fulfilled, the faith and hope of believers were, in substance, always the same. Nor, to pass from this to what to some may seem a comparatively secondary point, ought we to neglect noticing as an important advance, marked even by this Psalm, the establishment of a liturgical worship, apparent even in the introduction of a fixed hymnody, instead of occasional outbursts of sacred poetry, and by very distinct though brief liturgical formulas - the whole last stanza being, in fact, of that character.

⁵⁴

The solemn services of the consecration ended, David dismissed the people, giving to each individual, probably for the journey homewards, needful provisions.

⁵⁵

But in that most joyous hour David had once more to experience, how little sympathy he could expect, even in his own household. Although we can understand the motives which influenced Michal's "contempt" of David's bearing, we would scarcely have been prepared for the language in which she addressed him when, in the fullness of his heart, he came to bless his assembled household, nor yet for the odious representation she gave of the scene. Such public conduct on her part deserved and, in the circumstances, required the almost harsh rebuke of the king. The humiliation of the proud woman before man was ratified by her humiliation on the part of God:

⁵⁴

If the reader will compare the last stanza of this hymn with corresponding parts in Psalm 106, 107, 118, 136 - not to speak of the liturgical close of each of the five books of which the Psalter consists, - and consider such passages as 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3; 20:21, or Jeremiah 33:11, he will understand what is meant in the text.

⁵⁵

Of the three expressions in 2 Samuel 6:19, there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the first and the last: "a cake of bread... and a cake of raisins" (not "flagon of wine," as in our Authorised Version). Much doubt prevails about what the Rabbis and our Authorised Version render by "a good piece of flesh" - probably on the assumption that it had formed part of the "peace-offerings." But such a distribution of "peace-offerings" would have been quite contrary to custom - nor does the gift of "cakes of raisins" accord with it. The most probable rendering of the word in question is: "measure," viz., of wine. We venture to think that our explanation of these gifts as provisions for the journey will commend itself to the reader.

"Therefore Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child unto the day of her death."

The placing of the Ark in the capital of Israel, thus making it "the city of God," was an event not only of deep national but of such typical importance, that it is frequently referred to in the sacred songs of the sanctuary. No one will have any difficulty in recognizing Psalm 24 as the hymn composed for this occasion. But other Psalms also refer to it, amongst which, without entering on details that may be profitably studied by each reader, we may mention Psalm 15, 68, 78, and especially Psalm 101, as indicating, so to speak, the moral bearing of the nearness of God's ark upon the king and his kingdom.

IV_17 David's Purpose of Building the Temple, and its Postponement - The "Sure Mercies" of David in the Divine Promise - David's Thanksgiving

2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17

THOSE who, with devout attention, have followed the course of this history, and marked in it that of the kingdom of God in its gradual unfolding, will feel that a point had now been reached when some manifestation of the Divine purpose, fuller and clearer than ever before, might be expected. As we look back upon it, not only the whole history, but every event in it, has been deeply significant, and fraught with symbolical and typical meaning. Thus we have marked how as each event, so to speak, kindled a light, which was reflected from the polished mirror of the Psalter, it seemed to throw its brightness far beyond its own time into that future on which the day had not yet risen. But even to the men of that generation what had taken place must have carried a meaning far beyond the present. The foundation of a firm kingdom in Israel, its concentration in the house of David, and the establishment of a central worship in the capital of the land as the place which God had chosen, must have taken them back to those ancient promises which were now narrowing into special fulfillment, and have brought into greater prominence the points in these predictions which, though still towering aloft, sprung out of what was already reached, and formed part of it. A never-ending kingdom, a never-passing king; a sanctuary never to be abolished: such were the hopes still

before them in the world-wide application of the promises of which they already witnessed the national and typical fulfillment. These hopes differed, not in character, but only in extent and application, from what they already enjoyed. To use our former illustration, they were not other heights than those on which they stood, but only peaks yet unclimbed. These considerations will help us properly to understand the narrative of David's purpose to build a temple, and the Divine communication consequent upon it. For clearness' sake we first sketch the facts as stated in sacred history, and then indicate their deeper meaning.

To complete the history of the religious movement of that period, the sacred writers insert in this place the account of David's purpose to build a temple. The introduction to the narrative (2 Samuel 7:1), and the circumstance that at the time most if not all the wars mentioned in 2 Samuel 8 and 10 were past, sufficiently indicate that in this, as in other instances, the history is not arranged according to strict chronological succession. Still it must have taken place when David's power was at its zenith, and before his sin with Bath-Sheba. The king had been successful in all his undertakings. Victorious and world-famed, he inhabited his splendid palace on Mount Zion. The contrast between his own dwelling and that in which His ark abode ⁵⁶ to Whom he owed all, and Who was Israel's real King, was painfully great.

However frequent and unheeded a similar contrast may be in our days between the things of God and of man, David too vividly apprehended spiritual realities to remain contented under it. Without venturing to express a wish which might have seemed presumptuous, he told his feelings on this subject to his trusted friend and adviser, the prophet Nathan. ⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The expression (2 Samuel 7:2) is: "Abideth in the midst (within) the Yeriah," or "curtain," that is the Yeriah (in the singular), composed of the ten Yerioth (in the plural), mentioned in Exodus 26:1. These formed the Mishcan, or dwelling - thus proving that "the curtains" hung within the wooden framework, and constituted the "dwelling" itself.

⁵⁷ Nathan, "given" - a prophet (whereas Gad is designated as a "seer," 1 Samuel 9:9), whose name here appears for the first time. For further notices of him see 2 Samuel 12; 1 Kings 1:10, 22, 34; 1 Chronicles 29:29; 2 Chronicles 9:29. From the latter two

As might have been expected, Nathan responded by a full approval of the king's unspoken purpose, which seemed so accordant with the glory of God. But Nathan had spoken - as ancient writers note - from his own, though pious, impulse, and not by direction of the Lord. Oftentimes our thoughts, although springing from motives of real religion, are not God's thoughts; and the lesson here conveyed is most important of not taking our own impressions, however earnestly and piously derived, as necessarily in accordance with the will of God, but testing them by His revealed word, - in short, of making our test in each case not subjective feeling, but objective revelation.

That night, as Nathan was busy with thoughts of the great future which the king's purpose seemed to open, God spake to him in vision, forbidding the undertaking; or rather, while approving the motive, delaying its execution. All this time, since He had brought them up out of Egypt, God's Presence had been really among Israel; He had walked about with them in all their wanderings and state of unsettledness. Thus far, then, the building of an house could not be essential to God's Presence, while the "walking about in tent and dwelling" had corresponded to Israel's condition. Another period had now arrived. Jehovah Zevaoth ⁵⁸ had chosen David, and established his kingdom.

And in connection with it as concerned Israel (ver. 10) and David (ver. 11): "And I have appointed a place for My people Israel, and have planted it that it may abide in its place, and no more tremble; and that the children of wickedness" (malice) "may no more oppress it as at the first, and from the day when I appointed judges over My people Israel. ⁵⁹ And I give thee rest from all thine enemies, and Jehovah intimates to thee that a house will Jehovah make to thee."

passages it appears that Nathan wrote a history of David and (at least in part also) of Solomon.

⁵⁸ The use here of the name "Jehovah of Hosts" is very significant. It marks, on the one hand, the infinite exaltation of the Lord above all earthly dwellings, and, on the other, the real source of David's success in war.

⁵⁹ It is quite evident that the sentences must be arranged and punctuated as we have done, and not as in our Authorised Version. The same remark applies to the tenses of the verbs.

Thus much for the present. As for the future, it was to be as always in the Divine arrangement. For God must build us a house before we can build one to Him. It was not that David was first to rear a house for God, but that God would rear one for David. Only afterwards, when all Israel's wanderings and unrest were past, and He had established the house of His servant, would the son of that servant, no longer a man of war (1 Chronicles 20:8; 28:3), but a man of peace, "Solomon," build the house of peace. There was inward and even outward congruity in this: a kingdom which was peace; a king the type of the Prince of peace; and a temple the abode of peace. This, then, was the main point: a promise alike to David, to Israel, and in regard to the Temple, that God would build David a house, and make his kingdom not only lasting, but everlasting, in all the fullness of meaning set out in Psalm 72. What followed will be best given in the words of Holy Scripture itself: "I shall be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son, whom, if he transgress, I will correct with the rod of men, and with stripes of the children of men; but My mercy shall not depart from him as I made it depart from Saul, whom I put away from before thee. And unfailing" (sure) "thy house and thy kingdom forever before thee; and thy throne shall be established forever!"

That this promise included Solomon is as plain as that it was not confined to him. No unprejudiced reader could so limit it; certainly no sound Jewish interpreter would have done so. For on this promise the hope of a Messianic kingdom in the line of David and the title of the Messiah as the Son of David were based. It was not only the Angel, who pointed to the fulfillment of this promise in the Annunciation to the Virgin (Luke 1:32, 33), but no one, who believed in a Messiah, would have thought of questioning his application. All the predictions of the prophets may be said to rest upon it. While, therefore, it did not exclude Solomon and his successors, and while some of its terms are only applicable to them, the fulfillment of this promise was in Christ. In this view we are not hampered but helped by the clause which speaks of human chastisements as eventual on sins in the successors of David. For we regard the whole history from David to Christ as one, and as closely connected. And this prophecy refers

neither only to Solomon nor only to Christ; nor has it a twofold application, but it is a covenant-promise which, extending along the whole line, culminates in the Son of David, and in all its fullness applies only to Him. These three things did God join in it, of which one necessarily implies the other, alike in the promise and in the fulfillment: a unique relationship, a unique kingdom, and a unique fellowship and service resulting from both. The unique relationship was that of Father and Son, which in all its fullness only came true in Christ (Hebrews 1:5). The unique kingdom was that of the Christ, which would have no end (Luke 1:32, 33; John 3:35). And the unique sequence of it was that brought about through the temple of His body (John 2:19), which will appear in its full proportions when the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven (Revelation 21:1-3).

Such was the glorious hope opening up wider and wider, till at its termination David could see "afar off" the dawn of the bright morning of eternal glory; such was the destiny and the mission which, in His infinite goodness, God assigned to His chosen servant. Much there was still in him that was weak, faltering, and even sinful; nor was he, whose was the inheritance of such promises, even to build an earthly temple. Many were his failings and sins, and those of his successors; and heavy rods and sore stripes were to fall upon them. But that promise never failed.

Apprehended from the first by the faith of God's people, it formed the grand subject of their praise, not only in Psalm 89, but in many others, such as Psalm 2, 45, 72, 110, 132, and continued the hope of the Church, as expressed in the burning language and ardent aspirations of all the prophets. Brighter and brighter this light grew, even unto the perfect day; and when all else seemed to fail, these were still "the sure mercies of David" (Isaiah 55:3), steadfast and stable; and at last fully realized in the resurrection of our Blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Acts 13:32-34).

It was significant that when David received, through Nathan, this Divine communication, "he went in," no doubt, into that "tabernacle," which was to be to him what the Pisgah-view of the land

had been to Moses, and "remained" ⁶⁰ before Jehovah, uttering prayer, in which confession of unworthiness formed the first element, soon followed by thanksgiving and praise, and concluding with earnest entreaty. And such must all true prayer be - mingling humble confession with thanksgiving and with petition for the promised blessing.

⁶⁰ Not "sat," as in our Authorised Version (2 Samuel 7:18). Sitting was not the attitude of prayer, either under the old dispensation or in Apostolic times.
