



# King David of Israel



Albert O. Hudson

# Preface

Albert Owen Hudson, of Milborne Port England, was a faithful Christian, Bible Student and Scholar of the twentieth century and the author of many books. He was born in 1899 and died in 2000 at 101 years of age. In his early years he worked as an Electrical Engineer for Standard Telephones. His aptitude for detail served him well in research Biblical details. He had access to the British Museum to reference ancient records in support of this and other studies.

The Bible Fellowship Union began publishing a journal in 1924 "*The Bible Students Monthly*". In 1935 the name was changed to "*The Bible Study Monthly*". The journal was headed by Albert O. Hudson since its inception, and included many of his articles. He had a scholarly approach to Bible study particularly Old Testament history and prophecy concerning God's Kingdom and the practical out-working of God's purpose. In 1942 Albert Hudson wrote a series of articles entitled "*Jacob's Trouble*" that appeared as a booklet later that year. There have been two editions and a reprint resulting in many thousands of copies being dispatched across the world. In 1989 he also published "*Bible Students in Britain — The Story of a Hundred Years*".

He had an exceptional memory but also a very methodical filing system to store the fruit of his extensive reading, research and studies. His knowledge of history and the ancient world was outstanding. He loved the study of the Scriptures and sought to clarify doctrinal aspects of the faith. He had a wonderful gift with words, particularly the written word. His treatises contained much valuable information and wisdom.

The following exposition comprised a series of articles first appearing in his journal from 1982-1984 and reprinted in 2002-2004. The British spelling and formatting are retained.

# Table of Contents

1. The Anointing .....	1
2. Encounter with Goliath .....	4
3. The Popular Hero .....	8
4. Fugitive in the Wilderness .....	11
5. King at Hebron .....	15
6. King in Jerusalem .....	18
7. The Ark comes to Jerusalem .....	21
8. Desire for a Temple .....	24
9. David and Bathsheba .....	27
10. Retribution for Sin .....	29
11. Ammon and Tamar .....	32
12. High Treason .....	36
13. Declining Days .....	41
14. Reconciliation .....	45
15. Sunset .....	49

# KING DAVID OF ISRAEL

## The story of Israel's most famous king

### 1. The Anointing

He first appears in view a fresh, likeable young country lad. Born into a farming family, in the midst of a community of farmers, the youngest of a family of eight sons, it was inevitable that at perhaps sixteen years of age he spent his days shepherding sheep. He probably did not expect to do anything else for the rest of his life. His father's inheritance would have to be divided at death between eight sons so that there was not likely to be much for each. In all probability the prospect was that the farm would continue to be worked in partnership by the eight with himself, the youngest, very much the junior partner. The chances are that he did not worry himself much about that. He found shepherding a congenial occupation giving him abundant time for his three favourite diversions, the playing of music on his little set of pipes, reading the sacred Scriptures of his people consisting of their stirring history from the beginning and meditating on the wonders of nature and the majesty of the Almighty.

He came of a godly family. There can be no doubt about that. He manifests even in his early youth, a reverence and a confidence in God that can only have been instilled by his upbringing. His father Jesse must have been one of the faithful in Israel who endeavoured to keep the obligations of the Covenant and due respect for the Lord in the forefront of family life. Nothing more is known about Jesse. He farmed his land as his fathers had done before him. When he died at a noteworthy old age, which in those days may have been up to a hundred and twenty, he left behind him as his only epitaph the fact that he had been responsible for the youthful training and character development of Israel's greatest king.

David the shepherd boy of Bethlehem was destined to rule Israel and extend its boundaries from the modest little land, conquered by Joshua and his forces four hundred years previously, to the Euphrates on the one hand and the borders of Egypt on the other. Never again was the nation to possess such an acquisition of territory. He was a man of destiny. His name in after days was the symbol of Israel's royalty. He became the visible representative of Israel's God. Of him it was said that he sat on the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem. Israel, the theocratic state, whose true king was the Lord himself, looked upon David in all his royal glory and saw in him the embodiment of their heavenly king.

He was not the first to rule Israel. Saul had preceded him — Saul, the arrogant leader of men who himself had started life in the fields as did David and was selected by the Lord to fulfil the people's demand for a king. Saul had been the handsome, muscular stripling, whose physical appearance captivated the nation so much that they clamoured for him. Saul, modest and retiring, hid himself among the baggage. But Saul had proved a failure. His early promise had changed to self-will and self-conceit and he no longer revered the Lord who had called him and raised him to high honour. So at last the Lord deposed him and sent the prophet Samuel to anoint this other lad to take his place. How was it that the Lord called Saul when so soon he proved himself unworthy? Is the Lord so bad a judge of human character? The answer lies in the realm of human free-will and this is a fundamental principle in the Divine scheme of things. Saul had the same opportunity as David. Saul could have been the first of a line of kings ruling eventually in Jerusalem but he chose otherwise. He rebelled against God who had given him the kingship just as in a much higher sphere Lucifer the apostate archangel rebelled against God who had created him *"full of wisdom and perfect in beauty"* as Ezekiel has it. So the Lord disowned him and appointed another. In just the same manner Lucifer, the god of this world, must give place to our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who yielded himself willingly

to the Divine will and in consequence is exalted above the heavens and will ultimately receive the loyalty and allegiance of all creation. It is not by accident that David becomes the type and prefigures Christ in his triumphant royalty. Saul and David both had freewill. The one used it to rebel against God, the other to conform himself willingly to the Divine purpose.

Here then, in David, was a man for God's purpose at a time in history when such a man was needed. There had not been many such in Israel's past history who had remained supremely loyal to the end. Joshua said, just before he died *"not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you; all are come to pass to you, and not one thing has failed"* (Josh. 23:14). There was Caleb, his brother soldier, at the same time and Othniel the first to govern and protect Israel after Joshua was dead, but after that, no one during four long centuries who was faithful to the end of life until Samuel. He it was who was sent to anoint David the future king. As the young lad stood still the anointing oil flowed over his head and he was enshrining within himself the Divine promise. He was being consecrated as a servant of God, to become king for the present and a type for the future, a type of Christ who should come to reign over Israel and the world for ever. The promise made to David a little later on in his life was that his throne should endure for ever. That promise will become a reality when at the last the powers of this world have given place to *"the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever"* (Rev. 11:15). David had a lot to say about that Messianic kingdom in later times, for he was a prophet as well as a king. He was able to depict its glories in wonderfully eloquent language, for he was a poet, a psalmist, as well as a prophet. "The sweet singer of Israel" is a very apt title that has been conferred upon him by later generations; his songs of praise and devotion have enriched, first, the worship of Israel, and second, Christian worship, for thirty centuries, and they will never die.

But there were flaws in the diamond. There were defects in David's character that came out more strongly in later life, when he was established in the glory and power of his kingdom and could command his subjects' compliance with his every whim. It is said that "all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts utterly". That was not fully true in the case of David. He attained what amounted to absolute power in Israel but he was not corrupted utterly. He ended his life in faith and loyalty and continued acceptance with God but in the meantime he had been guilty of serious breaches of the confidence God had placed in him. He ascended into the heights but he also descended to the depths. He won Divine approval in many things, but on occasion he merited and received severe Divine condemnation. He established justice and judgment in the land but he was at times guilty of great injustice. He was wholly devoted to God but he also indulged in the sins of the flesh. He was in fact, typical of every man and he became an illustration of what God can do with weak and fallible man. It is also an example of his great mercy and compassion for men. The story of David is in a very real sense, the story of every man.

\*\*\*\*\*

The smoke of the sacrifice curled lazily upward: the air was very still. The circle of venerable men, elders of the village of Bethlehem, stood silently watching the prophet erect before the rough stone altar, raised his hands to Heaven in silent entreaty. A few moments thus, and he turned, and made his way to the centre of the circle where Jesse the aged and respected farmer of Bethlehem was standing. "I would see your eldest son" he said. A sign from the other and a tall, vigorous-looking middle aged man stepped forward and stood before Samuel. He waited quietly.

"This is Eliab, my eldest son," said Jesse. Samuel's eyes met those of the man before him. He noted the fearless gaze, the strong mouth and muscular arms. He knew this family to be one that revered God and the Covenant. The Lord had sent him here to find Israel's future king. This man looked like one capable of becoming a leader of men. "Surely the Lord's anointed is before me" he thought to himself. He waited quietly for the inward voice.

It came, "Look not on his countenance or the height of his stature; because I have refused him. The Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Samuel sighed and looked across at Jesse, shaking his head. Jesse motioned to his son to step aside, and beckoned. Abinadab stepped forward, and took his place. Eyes met, and there was silence a little space. Then Samuel spoke. "Neither hath the Lord chosen this" he said.

Shammah came into the circle and stood expectantly. Again that silence. Samuel had closed his eyes, as if in communion with his God. He opened them and spoke slowly, "Neither has the Lord chosen this".

Some of the elders looked at each other dubiously. There was a certain amount of head shaking. Jesse's three eldest sons, the mainstay of his establishment, all rejected. They looked back hopefully as the fourth son came forward. Faces fell as he too was rejected in his turn.

So with the fifth, and the sixth, and finally the seventh. As that seventh son strode across the grass to join his brothers, Samuel waited expectantly. There were no more.

"Are these all your children?" he asked Jesse.

The other was perplexed. "These are all, at least, there is one more, but he is only a young lad, and he is out tending the sheep. I did not think the Lord would have use for him". "Send and fetch him" commanded Samuel. "We will not sit down to feast until he has come hither". A brief instruction to a servant, and the man was running across the fields and speedily out of sight. The slow minutes ticked by, every man wrapped in his own thoughts. No one spoke.

A lithe figure in the distance, running with easy trot of an agile youth. He came nearer, dropping into a rapid walk as he neared the waiting group. The circle of elders parted to give him admittance, and he stood before his father in respectful silence.

"This is David, my youngest son" said Jesse. Samuel regarded the lad intently. He saw a fresh, guileless boy whom he judged could not be much more than sixteen years of age, glowing with health and vitality, and something more; enthusiasm for whatever he might undertake. He had attractively handsome features, with promise of development into a virile and strong-minded man, perhaps a leader of men. Samuel mused, as the lad's frank eyes met and fearlessly held his own. But Saul had been such an one, he thought, and now Saul had proved a failure. He had rather expected that after that failure the Lord would have chosen an older and more mature man for the responsible position of king over Israel. This lad was scarcely out of his boyhood. What possible knowledge could he have of life and how could he be expected to lead the armies of Israel against her enemies. And yet there was something appealing in that candid glance, something that had an element of the other world, as though this boy, despite his youth, knew what it was to sense the workings of that same Divine Spirit which had been so potent a factor in Samuel's own life. He suddenly thought of his own boyhood, so long ago now, in the Tabernacle at Shiloh with Eli the old High Priest, and he began to feel a kinship with this young lad, so like he had been in those far-off days. His thoughts came back to the present and then he heard, once again, the Voice, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he!"

Samuel looked across at Jesse and gave him an almost imperceptible nod. Turning back to the altar, he picked up the horn of anointing oil that he had placed there in readiness. Returning, he stationed himself before David, standing there motionless. The eyes of all in the assembly were fixed upon him.

"The Lord has commanded me to anoint you to the service to which He will call you in his own due time" he declared. The lad stood rigid, a look of wonder in his eyes. Samuel raised the horn of oil and allowed its contents to trickle over his head and be absorbed in his flowing locks.

There was a long silence. Every man present knew the implication of the act. That ritual anointing could only be for a priest or a king. David was not of the tribe of Levi; he could never be a priest. Slowly a new light began to dawn in the eyes of the watching elders. They were and had been for a long time under the iron oppression of the Philistines. Several attempts to break the yoke had been unsuccessful. Saul had consistently failed to achieve for them the freedom they had expected when they made him king. Did this mean that the Lord at last was going to provide them the deliverer for which they longed. They thought of Gideon, Jephthah and Othniel, who in past days had wrought deliverance for their fathers. Did this visit from Samuel mean that God was now about to visit them with salvation, to give them a king after his own heart, one who would both lead them to victory and to God. It came to each one of them that nothing must be said about this, for Saul was still king, and this anointing was tantamount to treason. What had been done this day and what they had seen must be locked up in their own hearts until the Lord should see fit to bring it into the open. For the present they must go back to their own occupations, taking with them a hope for the future which they had never expected to cherish.

So the elders dispersed to their homes, and David went back to his shepherding, and Samuel the Lord's instrument returned to his residence in Ramah.

## 2. Encounter with Goliath

Several years had probably elapsed since the prophet Samuel had anointed David prospective king of Israel. David had gone back to his sheep, perhaps pondering what the strange interlude in his life could mean. He probably did not seriously think at this stage in his life, that he really would be king one day. He went back to his pipes and his harp. As the sheep wandered over the grazing land he kept an observant eye upon them while giving vent to his reverential feelings in the words of those pastoral psalms which were probably composed at this time. A few years later, when he was either fighting the Philistines for Saul or else on the run from Saul, he would have had little time for such poetic excursions; still less when he had all the cares of kingship upon his shoulders. So it might well have been in this period that he composed such gems as Psalm 23, "*the Lord is my shepherd*" and Psalm 8 "*the heavens declare the glory of God*" and Psalm 24 "*the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof*" and others like them. These are the psalms of Nature where the world of men and the deeds of men have no place. These were his reflections as he reclined on some grassy bank in the brightness of day, or watched his sleeping flock sitting beside his camp fire in the darkness of the night. This was the time when he learned from Nature herself of the greatness and the power of God, to such good effect that, despite his many failures and transgressions of Divine law, he never lost faith.

These were peaceful days that came to an end all too soon. They never came back. He was shortly to find himself a member of the royal court and implicated in all the intrigues and jealousies which that involved. One more short interval as a shepherd was to be his lot and after that he left his pastoral life and his family for ever. It was his very skill with, and his love for, harp and song that became the occasion for that change and the means by which he embraced the life that eventually led him to the throne of Israel.

King Saul began to develop fits of intense melancholy. He had been king now for perhaps ten to twenty years, it is impossible to say definitely, and the appearances are that the appealing and upstanding youth who Israel so enthusiastically adopted as their first king had become a hasty-tempered and embittered man, increasingly irresolute and uncertain of himself. The reason is not far to seek. At the beginning Saul had followed the Lord's instructions through his mentor Samuel implicitly and faithfully, and had prospered in consequence. His military prowess and leadership had enabled the Israelites to keep their old enemies, the Philistines,

at bay. But for some time now he had been increasingly impatient of Samuel's guidance and more and more disposed to order things in his own fashion and without heed to the word of the Lord. In consequence he began to suffer defeat at the hands of the enemy, and when at last Samuel told him that because of his rebellious attitude the Lord had deposed him from being king and would shortly appoint another "after his own heart", Saul became morose and resentful. The account in 1 Samuel 16 says that "*the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him*". Saul's servants took his fits of melancholy as Divine retribution for his divergence from God's ways. That they knew the seat of the trouble was in Saul's own mind is evidenced by the remedy they proposed; the acquirement of a skilful musician to soothe and cheer the despondent monarch in his bad moments.

Saul agreed to their proposal that they should "*seek out a man, who is a skilful player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well.*" One of them was immediately ready with a suggestion. He knew one such, a son of Jesse of Bethlehem, who was not only "skilful in playing", but "*a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the Lord is with him*". It would seem that Saul rather liked the idea of this paragon of virtue and straightway sent a request to Jesse that his son should attend court.

This remark, that David was "a mighty valiant man, and a man of war" implies that he was quite a bit removed from the sixteen-year-old whom Samuel had anointed. He could hardly merit this description, or have earned this reputation, at less than nineteen. He must have waited some three years at least for the call, long enough to test his faith and his assurance that the anointing had not been in vain. Now he came to Saul, knowing not to what kind of life he was being introduced nor to what destiny the Lord was leading him, but like Isaiah in much later days with the ready response in his heart "Here am I; send me".

The experiment succeeded. Saul instantly took to this fresh and vigorous young man — perhaps seeing in him an image of himself as he had been twenty years earlier, full of enthusiasm to fight the Lord's battles. He himself had come from a farming family and perhaps the pastoral songs which David sang and played before him, were reminiscent, not of royal courts and marching armies, but of fields and streams and serene skies. He was reminded of long past days when he had led a very similar life. At any rate, the consequence was that when the evil spirit came upon Saul, David played, and "*Saul was refreshed, and the evil spirit departed from him*".

This state of affairs could not have lasted very long. To fit all that is recorded of David's activities in the next ten years of his life it is necessary that each incident follow its predecessor quite closely. It might have been that David was less than six months in the royal court before there came a call to arms. The Philistines were invading Israel again.

The Philistines had always been a thorn in the side of Israel. From the days of the entry into the land, they had been there, occupying the strip of land along the sea coast more or less in the area that is now known as the Gaza strip. They were an alien race, hailing from the island of Crete, tall, muscular men arrayed in armour and equipped with weapons that the Hebrews could not equal. Saul had already had one encounter with them, in the early part of his reign, in which he gained the victory so that there was a period of peace from their attacks. Unfortunately on that occasion he had exceeded his authority in the matter of offering sacrifice to the Lord and Samuel had strongly reproved him. Then he had what appears to be a second chance when he went out to do battle with the Amalekites from the southern desert. Again he was guilty of flagrant disobedience and it was on this occasion that it is said the Lord formally disowned him. Now he was faced with the Philistine menace again but this time the Lord was not with him and he knew it. The victory this time, if victory there was to be, must be gained by his own might and that of his army. It must have been with a heavy heart that Saul prepared for the conflict.



The king and his sons took the field. 1 Samuel 17 tells the whole story. David was sent home for the time being; there was no time for music at court (1 Sam. 17:15). In any case he was needed to look after his father's affairs, for the three oldest of Jesse's sons had been drafted into the army and were fighting with Saul's men. Upon their arrival at the scene of operations, however, they found that the Hebrew forces had a problem. The Philistines had a champion warrior, a giant of a man, by name Goliath. He was of unusual height, broad and powerful, for his armour weighed five thousand shekels which is equal to 92 lb. or 42 kg. This would be quite enough for even a giant to carry into battle. The early Hebrew cubit like the Sumerian/Assyrian cubit was shorter than the Egyptian/Jewish cubit which exaggerates Goliath's height to over 9 feet. There is evidence in the records of Josephus and the Septuagint that gives his height as four cubits and a span, whereas the A. V. has six. Goliath was about seven and a half feet tall, an awe-inspiring proposition. He challenged Saul's army to produce a man to meet him in single combat, the side thus losing the contest to submit to the other, without further fighting. The more the Israelites looked at the Philistine champion the less they liked the idea. Ch.17 shows that they were in a state of complete panic over the issue.

This was the army that, only a few years previously, under the leadership of Saul and in the conviction that the Lord was with them, had decimated the Philistine forces and quelled them into submission. Now they had lost that inspiration, their king was apprehensive and undecided, and they were just about ready to give up. Their old national leader Samuel had retired from public life and was living in obscurity. The king they had chosen to lead them to victory in a battle had failed them and all the high hopes of Israel were laid low. This is the point at which David comes back into the story.

According to ch.17, Jesse had instructed David to take some provisions to his three sons fighting at the battle front, with a little gift for their company commander. He was then to bring their father word again as to their welfare. It would seem that army discipline was a little less formal in those days. He arrived at the scene and talking with his brothers, David saw for himself the Philistine giant advancing towards the Israelites with his repeated challenge to come out and fight. He saw the Israelites scattering and running away from their enemy and his indignation mounted. *"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine"* he demanded of those around him *"that he should defy the armies of the living God?"* That must have brought some of them up with a jerk; it was a long time since they had gone into battle with the high praises of God on their lips and faith in their hearts that He would give the victory. But somehow or other news of this youngster and his words of defiance were taken to Saul, and he, curious perhaps but probably no more, gave orders that David should be brought before him.

It would seem from the closing verses of ch.17 that Saul did not recognize David as his erstwhile musician. That is not surprising. There must have been many coming and going in Saul's court and David had not been there very long. The king now faced a sturdy and resolute young man who told him quite plainly that the army need fear no longer: he would go out and fight this Philistine. Saul probably leaned back and laughed scornfully. *"You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him for you are just a boy and he has been a warrior from his youth."* Modestly but resolutely David responded *"Your servant used to keep sheep for his father, and whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them since he has defied the armies of the living God"*. Saul was suddenly serious. He looked again at the fresh-faced youngster before him, and he listened to his frank avowal of faith that the Lord would go with him and protect him and give him the victory, and a thought flashed into his mind. He was painfully conscious that he was the one who ought long since to have armed himself and gone out to meet Goliath in single combat on behalf of all Israel. But the Lord had departed from him and he no longer had faith

in himself. He, Saul, king of Israel, was afraid. But might it be that the Lord would indeed honour the faith of this lad who so openly and avowedly relied upon Him? Was there a chance, after all, that the Lord could be brought back into the picture and induced to give Israel the victory through the instrumentality of this lad who seemed so sure of his standing with God? It was, at least, worth a try. Saul took a sudden decision. He leaned forward and said to David, *“Go, and may the Lord go with you”*.

With the impetuosity of youth, David turned to go. He was stopped by an imperative gesture from the king. Taking off his own armour, a replica of that used by the Philistines, he fitted it on David, followed by placing the heavy bronze helmet on his head. Stepping back to judge the effect, he picked up his great sword, and put it in David’s hand. “If you are going to fight the Philistine, you must do it on equal terms” he said.

David made as if to walk away, and found his movements impeded by the unfamiliar garb. He looked at the sword in his hand, and with a gesture of contempt threw it on the ground. He took off the armour, piece by piece, and threw them down also. “I cannot go with these” he said “for I have not tried them. The Lord has no need of such weapons”. Even as the king opened his mouth to expostulate, David turned his back on him and was walking briskly through the camp in the direction of the Philistine host gathered on the opposite hill half-a-mile away. Saul and his attendants watched him go. The Israelite soldiers, sitting and standing about, wearied at the inaction and lack of leadership from their king, looked at this shepherd lad with increasing interest as he made his way down the hillside, an interest which speedily changed to excitement as they began to perceive his intention. They saw him pause and stoop as he crossed the brook at the bottom of the hill and pick up several pebbles from the bed of the stream, and then he was climbing the opposite slope, taking his sling out of his scrip as he did so.

The Philistine warriors looked on attentively as David crossed the intervening space, uncertain what this shepherd lad was doing between the armies. It was a little while before they realized that he was there to challenge their champion, and as he took his stance there were shouts for Goliath. Soon, the giant appeared, fully dressed in his bronze armour and helmet, carrying sword and spear, looking for his opponent. Discovering that this lad was the challenger, he at first looked incredulous then threw back his head in a gust of coarse laughter. *“Am I a dog”* he demanded, *“that you come to beat me with a stick?”* He stood and regarded David, *“Come you to me, and by all the gods of the Philistines, I swear that I will feed your body to the birds and beasts”*. He moved forward menacingly. David’s clear voice sounded on the air. His own people, venturing now to approach within earshot, could hear him as plainly as did the watching Philistines. *“You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down ... so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel”*.

The giant’s expression changed to one of deep anger and he strode forward with long, quick paces, raising his spear threateningly. David also was advancing, running with lithe, quick steps, to meet his adversary. As he did so he was putting his hand into the scrip hanging from his shoulder.

No one saw quite clearly what happened; David’s action was almost too quick for the eyes of the watchers. He had extracted a pebble from his scrip, fitted it into his sling — a sudden circular movement of his arm; and the Philistine giant reeled back and slowly collapsed in a crumpled heap. David’s sling stone had struck him squarely above the eyes on the only unprotected part of his body. There was a moment’s stunned silence on the part of the observers. Like lightning David had leaped upon the body of his fallen foe, and taken the great sword out of his nerveless hand. A swift flash in the sunlight, first up, then down — and David was holding aloft the severed head of the Philistine champion for all to see.

There came a great shout from the watching Israelites. In another moment the entire host was advancing across the valley, the noise of the clashing of weapons mingling with cries of exultation. The Philistines, aghast at the sudden and unexpected fate of their champion, took one look and ran in panic. Within a few more minutes the Israelites had passed David in hot pursuit of the fleeing enemy, a pursuit that did not stop until they had reached the gates of their cities Ekron and Gath some twenty miles away. Then the Israelites returned more leisurely and looted the abandoned camp.

Saul with his attendants stood outside his tent, watching this unknown shepherd lad making his way back to the Israelite lines, deep in thought, carrying the sword of Goliath in one hand and his head in the other.

1 Sam. 17:54 says that he took the head to Jerusalem but that was much later. Another sixteen years or so were to elapse before Israel gained possession of Jerusalem. It was evident that the head of the Philistine was preserved in some way so that it could be permanently exhibited as a trophy when eventually David ruled in Jerusalem. In the meantime it must have followed David in all the vicissitudes of his adventurous life before becoming king. It was a barbaric act, but he lived in a barbaric age.

There is no evidence that Saul honoured God as a result of this deliverance. This was his third chance to reform and return but he ignored it. He honoured David, but not David's Lord. Nowhere is his unbelief more plainly shown than in this incident. The Lord had sent him the instrument whereby He had delivered Israel with a mighty deliverance, but he heeded it not. He was doubtless greatly relieved that the Philistine menace was lifted, at least for a time, but that was all.

He did not let David go again. This time he was attached to Saul's court and given high rank in his army. Saul attached much greater importance to David's physical valour, which he could see, than to his reliance upon God by which victory could be gained, which he could not see. That was his undoing. To the end of his life he relied upon the power of the sword, and at the end he died by the sword. David, despite his mistakes and misdeeds, did rely upon the power of God, and endeavoured to conform his life and his works to what he believed was the will and guidance of God. This was his first great test, and he came through it with flying colours.

### 3. The Popular Hero

The slaying of the Philistine champion Goliath established David at once as the idol of the people, the hero of the army, and the favourite of Saul. David was at once made a permanent member of the king's entourage at his court at Gibeah, and apparently entrusted with various commissions that he executed with such grace and discretion that he quickly became popular among all his fellows at court and in the sight of the people. This also was the period during which he and Saul's son Jonathan formed the close friendship that meant so much to David in the events that were to follow. Jonathan was probably the youngest of Saul's four sons and about the same age as David. The close companionship of these two, continued until Jonathan perished with his father at the battle of Gilboa, which ended Saul's reign as king. But that event was still ten years away; at this moment Saul looked upon David with his military valour as a most welcome addition to his own warlike sons and other valiant men upon whom he relied to keep the Philistines at bay. It is plain to see that Saul had rejected all thought of reliance upon the Lord and was counting on the strength of his warriors to keep his throne. Samuel, the old prophet, had now been retired into obscurity some four or five years and Saul no longer saw him nor sought his counsel. Neither was he at all interested in David's profession of faith in God; it was his military prowess he valued and that to such an extent that according to 1 Sam. 18:5 he now appointed David supreme commander over all his army. The account reads as if this was directly after the affair of Goliath but this is most unlikely.

More probably David “worked his way up” over a period of several years so that the events of this chapter might have their place when he was about twenty-three years of age.

This is when Saul began to wonder whether he had rather over-reached himself in the matter of David. It was one thing to acquire an exceptionally valiant and successful warrior to lead his troops to victory: it was quite another when that warrior was so outstandingly successful that the people began to compare him with Saul himself, to the King’s discredit. Returning from a victorious battle, Saul and David, with their forces, were met by the women of Israel coming out in dances and singing in triumph, “*Saul bath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*”. That did not please Saul at all well. “*They have ascribed to David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed but thousands, and what can he have more than the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward*” (1 Sam.18:6-9). He suddenly saw in David a possible rival for the kingship, and the jealousy in his nature came to the top.

Saul had originally been made king by command of the Lord and at first he had accepted that position and ruled as the Lord’s anointed. On that basis he had gone forth to war and on that basis he had gained victories. But he then repudiated the Lord’s guidance and turned instead to his own military prowess and that of his soldiers. It was then that his troubles began. Saul and his men were unable to resist the Philistines until the incident of Goliath. Then he was only saved by the timely advent of David who went forth in full faith in God and slew the giant. But Saul had forgotten all that and was still fighting the Philistines in his own strength. That strength was ebbing away and that of David taking its place, so he was morose and resentful. It should be noted that Goliath’s death did not permanently end the Philistine menace; Saul was fighting them more or less continuously to the day of his death. The account in 1 Samuel 18 is often read as though it was on the return from the slaying of Goliath that the women danced and sang. This is not so for in 1 Sam. 18:6 the AV has “Philistine” but in the Hebrew it is in the plural. Saul and David were returning from a later battle with “the Philistines” when they experienced the singing that aroused Saul’s anger.

Back at court after the victory, Saul’s jealousy, and incipient insanity, overcame him again, and David thinking to appease him, produced his harp and sang again some of the songs of God which had pleased the king in the past. Saul was in no mood to listen to the songs of God; irritated beyond endurance, he picked up a javelin and threw it at David. The latter adroitly avoided it, and the incident passed. But David knew then that Saul had become his enemy. This became even clearer a little later when Saul demoted him from being Commander-in-Chief of three hundred and thirty thousand men to the captaincy of just one thousand. Many a soldier treated like that has revolted and led his men against the king who had dared to treat him thus but not so David. He continued in the new sphere to which he had been relegated, and says the chronicler, “*all Israel and Judah loved David*” (18:16). If Saul hoped to provoke retaliation that would enable him to treat David as a rebel he was disappointed. In favour or out of favour, David served his king faithfully, because Saul was the Lord’s anointed.

So David passed his second test which was to treat honour and glory and the plaudits of men on exactly the same terms as disgrace, reproach and insults, all as from the hand of the God he served and in whom he had absolute faith. Saul was afraid that David would try to displace him and set himself up as king. The people and the army regarded him with so great favour that such a revolt had every chance of success and David probably knew that very well but he never gave way to such a temptation. When the Lord was ready for him to be king He would arrange matters in His own way. In the meantime David was content to serve in the place to which he was appointed.

Frustrated, Saul then tried another tactic. He would publicly humiliate David in his deepest feelings in the eyes of all the people. The plot was to offer his eldest daughter, Merab, in marriage to David, thus allying him with the royal house. No greater honour could be imagined. Then at the last moment Saul would give Merab to somebody else and sit back to

observe the effect of his snub. David demurred at first, out of modesty, on the grounds of his lowly birth, but, probably after this being brushed aside by Saul, assented. Merab herself would most likely be only too pleased at the prospect of marrying the handsome and valiant idol of Israel. So the match was arranged, and all Israel rejoiced. Then, just as the nuptials were about to be celebrated, the whole thing was called off and the unfortunate Merab married off in haste to a man of Issachar, Adriel, a man so obscure that he never figures again in the history of the times. If Saul expected a violent reaction, he was disappointed again, for David seems to have taken this insult with studied unconcern. It might well be that he was not particularly drawn to Merab and not sorry at the outcome. What did come out of it was the realization within Saul's household that his younger daughter, Michal, was in love with David. It seems too from the account, although not plainly stated, that David on his part was not insensible to her charms, and this set Saul thinking again.

The plot this time was that David could have Michal if he first brought to the king concrete evidence that he had killed a hundred Philistines. Saul doubtless reasoned that this yielded a first-class chance of David getting himself killed in the process. The more he thought about the scheme the more satisfactory he felt it to be. There was one snag; he felt somewhat diffident about broaching the matter to David himself, after the manner in which he had just treated him over Merab. So he persuaded his household servants to handle the matter for him. They were to enlist David's interest and obtain his consent. David seems to have been much more receptive this time. "*it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law*" (1 Sam. 18:26). He felt perhaps that the proposal constituted a conditional contract that he could easily fulfil on his side and he would ensure the promised outcome without hitch. He set out with some of his men for the land of the Philistines.

Saul must have been considerably vexed upon receiving the announcement from his attendants that David was back, and even more so when his prospective son-in-law produced evidence that he had killed, not merely one hundred, but two hundred Philistines!

Saul probably looked round his circle of attendants but received no looks of sympathy. "They, too, are all on David's side" he must have thought bitterly. With the evidence before them of more of their hated enemies slain they were not likely to do other than applaud the champion. Saul realised he could not afford to lose face. Reluctantly, we may be sure, he gave way and kept his word. So David was married to Michal.

One wonders if this was the point at which the guileless shepherd lad changed into a hardened and, later, embittered man. For something like four years he had waged war against the Philistines in the defence of Israel and in that time had been responsible for the deaths of many men. But in all that he went out in the belief that he was waging the wars of the Lord and what he did was with the power of God behind him. This was different. This time he went deliberately into the enemy land with the avowed purpose of killing two hundred Philistines as the price to be paid to get the woman he wanted. In his Philistine campaigns the previous narrative says that the Lord was with him — in the story of his marriage the Lord has no place and there is no indication that the Lord had anything to do with it. Was this the first time in his colourful and varied career when he embarked upon a major action without first and foremost consulting his Lord?

Be this as it may, it is undeniable that at this point of time David's initial prosperity ended and he entered upon a time of adversity. Saul, of course, did not forgive him. He was resolved more than ever upon the death of David. 1 Samuel 19 tells how he next consulted with his son Jonathan and his house servants to encompass his son-in-law's death. He must have been a singularly obtuse man in many ways, or else the intensity of his hatred clouded his judgment. He knew the regard in which his servants held David. He knew that Jonathan looked upon David as his closest friend. What help could he have expected from them in a murder plot? Naturally enough, Jonathan dissuaded his father, reminding him of the great service David

had done him in slaying Goliath, and for the time being Saul was reconciled. Then the Philistines staged another invasion and David again distinguished himself in repulsing them. It is quite a question whether this invasion was in retaliation for David's incursion and slaughter when he married Michal and once again Saul, in jealousy at David's success, tried unsuccessfully to kill him with his javelin. Michal, knowing her father perhaps better than did David, saw that the position was becoming serious. She urged him to flee for his life, and when Saul's men arrived at her house she met them with the bland assurance that David had gone.

So ended David's association with the court of King Saul. After perhaps five years commencing from the fight with Goliath, he found himself reduced in a moment to the status of a fugitive. He had married the king's daughter, was held high in honour by army and people alike, feared by the Philistines and invincible whenever he led his men against them in combat, but now was without possessions, without friends, without home. He even had to leave his newly married wife behind. He departed from Gibeah in Benjamin in the darkness of that night, not knowing where to go or what to do next. What prospects now for David, would-be king of Israel?

#### 4. Fugitive in the Wilderness

The old man looked up from his writing as a furtive knock sounded on the outer door. His eyes held a question; there should be no one abroad at this late hour of the night. The villagers of Ramah would normally all be asleep and no traveller on lawful business should be out there in the darkness. He listened for a minute; the knock came again.

There was a movement in the big outer room where Samuel's students, "sons of the prophets" were lying asleep and the sound of quiet footsteps going to the door of the house. He heard it unbarred and opened and the murmur of voices. Soon his own door opened silently to reveal the form of a young man.

"David is here" he said quietly. Samuel rose to his feet. Behind the other he perceived the athletic frame of the lad he had once, at the Divine command, anointed as Israel's future king. That had been seven years ago; he had not seen him since. Here in this quiet retreat, remote from the affairs of the nation since his parting from Saul, contentedly spending his time teaching a small band of young disciples the things of God, he had heard from time to time of the exploits of the son of Jesse. He must have rejoiced when he learned of the victory over Goliath and the discomfiture of the Philistines. He must equally have been saddened by news of Saul's continued rejection of God and consequent inability to deliver Israel completely from those same Philistines. Perhaps he wondered at times how the Lord would fulfil His expressed intention to replace Saul by David as king, but if so his faith would rise to the surface and he would rest the matter entirely with the Lord. Meanwhile he continued with the quiet work that the Lord had given him to do here in Ramah, a work seemingly so insignificant compared with the mighty deeds of his earlier life when he ruled supreme as Judge over Israel. Now he looked at David, mingled welcome and question showing in his eyes. David came into the room, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

"I am David, son of Jesse, whom you once anointed to be king over Israel" he said simply.

"I know it, my son" came the calm reply, "What brings you here?"

"I flee from the face of Saul. He seeks my life. He uses me to lead his armies to victory against the Philistines but he cannot bear that I receive the applause of the people when I return in triumph. He fears that I will lead an insurrection to usurp his throne and he cannot understand that I am content to wait until the Lord gives it to me in His own time and way. I have lost my wife, my home and my friends, and I am an outcast, destitute and alone. But I am still the anointed of the Lord. I come to you that you may tell me what the Lord would have me do next.

The older man spoke gently. "You will stay here with me, my son" he said "and soon I will tell you where to go and what to do. For now you will stay with me."

The other dropped into a seat and rested his head in his hands, elbows on knees. "But Saul will find out that I am here and send men to kill me, and you and yours will be involved on my account. I cannot allow that to happen."

Samuel spoke quietly. "Saul will discover that you have taken refuge here in my Naioth, school of the prophets and he will send messengers to take you. And when they come to this house, the Spirit of God will take possession of them and they will be unable to do anything but be caught up in a rhapsody of prophesying and so they will return to Saul without having achieved their purpose." His eyes grew sombre. "In his anger Saul will come himself with his servants to take you. When he sets foot in this house the Spirit of God will come upon him also and he will fall down prostrate before me a day and a night. Then he will rise up and go his way back to Gibeah, not knowing why it is that he cannot take you. That shall be a sign to you, my son, that the protection of the Lord is over you and that you will surely become king over Israel. Lie down now and sleep, my son, for the way before you is arduous and the trials severe. If your faith fails not and you endure to the end, you will yet sit on the throne of the Lord and rule His people in righteousness and equity. Lie down now and sleep, for the way before you is arduous."

\*\*\*\*\*

So David departed from Ramah and went to Nob, five miles away, where the High Priest, Ahimelech, great-grandson of Eli, endeavoured to administer the ritual of the Mosaic Law within what was left of the sacred Tabernacle. Its central glory, the Ark of the Covenant, taken in battle by the Philistines at the battle of Aphek more than seventy years previously was still in the house of Aminadab at Kirjath-jearim in the south. It is not definitely known what happened to the Tabernacle structure at Shiloh after that disastrous battle. Probably it had been hurriedly dismantled and hidden before the Philistines reached and destroyed Shiloh, and in later years re-erected at Nob. So David came to Ahimelech, tired and hungry after three days probably aimless wandering about the countryside since leaving Samuel, begging food and weapons from the High Priest. The poverty of Ahimelech's establishment is shown by the fact that the only food he could offer David and the young men with him was the cast out hallowed "shewbread" from the sacred table in the Holy of the Tabernacle. This bread that once had been consecrated to God should have been destroyed and not profaned by secular use. The measure of David's desperation is revealed in that he took and ate the hallowed bread, a sacrilege he would never have dreamed of doing in normal circumstances. He looked for a sword and the priest produced the sword of Goliath the Philistine giant slain by David, that had been placed in the sanctuary as a remembrance of that notable occasion. Armed with that he made his way across country some twenty-five miles to the Philistine town of Gath, hoping to find sanctuary with Achish the chieftain of the town. That he should run the risk of joining the enemy he had so consistently fought against demonstrates the fear of Saul he had developed. Only in the enemy land would he feel safe. Of course, in taking himself out of the Lord's protection he was not safe at all. It was not long before some of the Philistines discovered his identity. "*Is not this David the king of the land?*" They said. "*Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?*" (1 Sam. 21:11 RSV). In panic David pretended to be mad, acting like an idiot, until the Philistines turned from him in contempt, and he was able to make his escape and get back into the territory of Judah. So he came into the rocky mountainous country between Jerusalem and Hebron and found a cave near Adullam, far from the haunts of men, and there he sank down, and rested, and pondered.

It is impossible to gauge the state of David's mind at this time. He was to be on the run from Saul for another six years, always on the move from place to place and never knowing

where he would be next. The one thing that does stand out in the narrative of 1 Samuel 20-26 is his determination never to take action himself to wrest the kingdom from Saul. He could have done it; there is much evidence that the south country, Judah, was behind him. On two occasions Saul's life was in his hands and he deliberately refrained from taking advantage of the opportunity. He was resolved to wait until the Lord gave him the kingship. There is here the paradox of a man who is possessed of faith on the one hand and consumed by fear of his adversary on the other. Perhaps David was not so unlike the rest of us after all. So often faith and fear, trust and doubt, co-exist in parallel compartments in our lives and it takes the lessons of bitter experience to enable the one to overcome the other. That at any rate is how it turned out for David.

He must have remained in Adullam for something like two years or more. During that time he collected around himself a band of four hundred men, renegades and outcasts mainly, but all consumed by hatred of Saul and prepared to fight under David's leadership. Such a number could only be sustained under such conditions by the material and moral support of the local populace; there is not much doubt that this was forthcoming. Adullam was in the centre of the territories of the southern tribes. Simeon and Judah, that were traditionally at variance with Saul's tribe Benjamin and the tribes of northern Israel. 1 Samuel 22:6 reveals that Saul at this very time had made his headquarters in his home town of Gibeah in a "grove in a high place" which means an idolatrous sanctuary. This indicates that Saul had finally rejected God and gone over to the gods of Canaan, acceptable to the north but anathema to the south. David's cause must have become identified with the re-establishment of national loyalty to God and his friendship with Samuel and Ahimelech would have buttressed that position. His "guerilla campaign" must have taken on more and more the aspect of a "holy war" to restore the worship of the true God in Israel.

For the next two years, David was on the move all the time, changing his headquarters from place to place to avoid detection by Saul's men. He went from Adullam to Hereth, from Hereth to Keilah, from Keilah to Ziph. Then on to Maon, En-gedi by the Dead Sea and back to Ziph again. All these places were within twenty or thirty miles of each other and it is possible that his followers who had now increased to six hundred, were scattered over the whole area and formed an underground movement within the boundaries of Saul's kingdom. The hearts of the people were steadily turning more and more toward David.

It was at this time that there occurred the strange incidents, in which David had Saul at his mercy, but chivalrously refused to take advantage of the opportunity. The accounts are in 1 Samuel 24 and 26. In the one account, David and some of his men were in the recesses of a cave when Saul inadvertently entered, not knowing anyone was there. David silently cut off a piece of his outer garment without being noticed and after Saul had left the cave he called out to him to demonstrate how near death he had been. In the other account David with one companion crept into Saul's camp when all there were asleep and got away with Saul's spear and pitcher, forbearing to take his life. He then called to him from the other side of the valley. In both cases Saul expressed his contrition and vowed he would persecute David no more, but went back on his word almost immediately. What stands out in both events is David's determination not to be responsible for Saul's death. He was still resolved to wait the Lord's time, confident that the Lord would eventually fulfil His word.

David was increasingly becoming a man of violence. The story of his encounter with Nabal, a wealthy farmer (ch.25) shows this. Nabal's far-flung lands lay in the area scoured by David's followers. His shepherds enjoyed the protection of David's men from bandits and, probably, marauding Philistines. David sent a message soliciting a little material consideration for services rendered. Nabal refused with scorn and insult. Immediately David set out with four hundred armed men to seek revenge, vowing to kill all Nabal's household and take his possessions. Bloodshed was only averted when Nabal's wife, Abigail, went out to meet the avenging horde and interceded with David. David rather shamefacedly admitted that God



had kept him from this bloodthirsty vengeance by sending Abigail in this manner, but the fact remains that his character was undergoing a change and that not for the better. In the upshot Nabal died suddenly and David took Abigail to be his wife and inherited her late husband's not inconsiderable property. This made him a wealthy landowner but still a fugitive with a price on his head. At about this time a grievous blow fell upon him; his old friend and mentor, the aged prophet Samuel died.

Samuel must have been well over a hundred years old at his death. His political power had waned considerably with Saul as king, but his moral influence was still great. All Israel remembered and revered him as the man who in earlier generations had saved them from the Philistines: they could not but be painfully conscious that Saul, with all his warlike prowess, had failed to maintain that position. But Saul was still in power, and with Samuel now gone, David evidently felt that his personal safety whilst in Saul's dominions was less secure. *"I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul"* he said (1 Sam. 27:1 RSV). He took a bold decision. He would take his whole household (he now had two wives in addition to Saul's daughter whom he had left behind when he fled) and his six hundred men, and make alliance with his old enemies the Philistines. He went to Achish, a Philistine chieftain of Gath and proposed settlement in his territory. That worthy, knowing something of David of old and eyeing his six hundred stalwart warriors somewhat speculatively, probably reflected that they would form a useful addition to his own forces at the next showdown with Saul, and assigned him the nearby town of Ziklag for his use. What the citizens of Ziklag thought of the arrangement is not stated: they of course were not consulted.

David's occupation of Ziklag lasted sixteen months. He was no longer in fear of Saul and he spent his time now in a systematic ravaging and plundering of the nomadic tribes between Canaan and Egypt. It does not make pleasant reading. *"David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel and returned, and came to Achish"* (1 Sam. 27:9). It looks as if Achish had a share of the spoils, upon which he probably congratulated himself; at the same time David pretended to him that his forays had been directed against the tribes of Israel at which Achish must have congratulated himself still more.

And now the sands were running out for Saul. He had long since lost his best military leader in David. He had lost the sobering influence on the nation exerted by Samuel. His subjects were resentful, his warriors demoralized, he himself, at about sixty-five years of age fearful and panic-stricken at his continuous failures and the ever present Philistine menace. His ill-advised visit to a sorceress at Endor to try and raise Samuel from the nether-world to advise him only brought dark prophecy of doom and death. Now the Philistines, secure in the knowledge that David was no longer a threat, invaded Israel in force. Saul and his men were forced back to the other side of the land, until at last, with virtually the whole of Israel occupied by the enemy, they made a last desperate stand on Mount Gilboa.

That was the end. As the Philistines scoured the deserted battlefield the following morning, they found, lying in the midst of his three dead eldest sons, the body of Saul, king of Israel. The time for the kingship of David had come.



## 5. King at Hebron

Three days had elapsed since the battle of Gilboa, which had ended the reign and life of Saul. The Philistines now occupied the northern half of Israel and the people had no king and no military deliverer. David, newly returned from Ziklag from one of his forays into Amalekite territory, was still in ignorance of the turn of events. All that he knew was that his friend Achish, the Philistine chieftain of Gath, had gone with his men to join the Philistine forces at war with Saul, and had not yet returned. The relationship between the tribes of Judah and Simeon in the south where David was located, and the northern tribes acknowledging Saul, was so tenuous that those in the south neither knew nor cared what happened in the north. The Philistines were not interested in the barren mountains of the south; their goal was the rich pasture territory of the north and so Judah was relatively unaffected by the war.

On the third day a stranger appeared in Ziklag, clothes rent and travel-stained, bearing every evidence of exhaustion and distress. He was brought to David and asked about his mission and whence he had come. *"I have escaped from the Israelite camp"* he replied, and instantly David's interest was aroused. *"What happened? Tell me"* was his quick rejoinder. Thus it was that David heard the dread news of the defeat and decimation of the armies of Israel, the flight of the inhabitants and occupation of the land by the invading Philistines and the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. That must have been a severe blow to David. Jonathan, the one he loved as a brother, the one who had been so faithful a friend during all the changing circumstances of his life with Saul; who had so willingly renounced his own claim to the throne in favour of his friend David; Jonathan was dead. Who can doubt that in the anguish of that news, David the resolute and hardened warrior, turned his face away from his fellows that they might not see his grief.

The moment passed. *"How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead"* he demanded of the man before him. The truth of the news must be checked. In return he received a circumstantial account of how the young man had *"happened by chance"* upon Mount Gilboa and came upon Saul wounded to death, and upon Saul's request, administered a final stroke to end his life. As evidence of the truth of his story he produced the 'crown' and 'bracelets', more properly a kind of chaplet, worn round the head, and an arm-band denoting Saul's kingship. These he had taken from Saul's body and had brought to David, thinking thus to curry favour with the man whom he knew would now become king of Israel.

He had mistaken his man. David had consistently refused to lift up his own hand against the Lord's anointed, waiting the Lord's own time for removing Saul from the scene. He was certainly not going to endorse what this young man claimed to have done. More, he was going to show his disapproval in the sight of all his followers in the most drastic fashion. Because he had not scrupled to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, he should die. David gave the command and the sentence was executed forthwith.

The genuine, original Book of Jasher mentioned in v.18 no longer exists. David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan, recorded in 2 Sam. 1, is a masterpiece of heroic poetry. How much of it was a genuine expression of David's own feelings and how much he intended to win over Saul's erstwhile adherents, is rather difficult to say. Some of the sentiments expressed, if genuinely felt, were more than kind to Saul. To say that (v.23) *"Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided"*, by no means reflects the animosity Saul displayed towards his eldest son. It is also very doubtful if Saul really did treat his people so generously as v.24 would imply. Perhaps the fairest appraisal of this eulogy is that David, in the generosity of his heart closed his eyes to the many faults of Saul and the manner in which he had persecuted David, and extolled his good points. The man was dead now, and in the hands of the Lord and David was not going to bear him any grudge.

Now it was time for action and there could be no further fraternising with Philistines at Ziklag. The king of Israel was dead and many would be waiting and expecting David to make a move to take the crown. Various references in the books of Samuel and Chronicles suggest that many in the northern tribes were secretly in sympathy with David though appearing to remain loyal to Saul. Some had joined David's band during his time in the wilderness. Now was the time to move. But that was not to go unchallenged. Saul was survived by his son Ishbosheth or Ish-baal meaning man of Baal showing Saul's apostasy. Saul's cousin Abner, an astute commander of the army, took Ish-bosheth to Mahanaim, a town on the east side of Jordan, where he was out of reach of both David and the Philistines, and proclaimed him king over Israel in succession to his father. Ish-bosheth was a weakling, mentally and physically and Abner was the power behind the throne. The northern tribes accepted him and he began to exercise a shadow of royal power, whilst David in the south actively prepared to win the allegiance of all Israel.

David selected a capital from which to rule. Jerusalem was still held by the Canaanite tribe, the Jebusites. David enquired of the Lord through Abiathar who had been with him in the wilderness and had been High Priest since Saul annihilated the priesthood some seven years before. David was directed to go to Hebron. So there he went with two wives and six hundred warriors to establish himself. To Hebron came all the responsible men of Judah to pledge their loyalty to David as king.

There were now two kings in Israel, David in the south recognised by Judah and Simeon and Ishbosheth in the east recognised by the other ten tribes. War was inevitable and not long in coming. David made the first move by sending messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, notoriously fierce fighters, to praise them for penetrating Philistine territory to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons. They had given honourable burial and David commended them and promised to hold them in high honour because of their loyalty. He then indicated that the men of Judah had proclaimed him king and left it for them to infer that they would now render him allegiance as they had once given to Saul. David wanted such men on his side.

Meanwhile Abner was not idle and he crossed Jordan with a force, mainly from Saul's tribe of Benjamin and met David's fighters under his nephew Joab. It was at Gibeon in 'enemy territory' for Joab. At Abner's suggestion there was a preliminary skirmish between twelve from each side but this gentlemanly arrangement was frustrated by the fact that all twenty-four were killed. (2 Sam. 2:14-16), The issue was then settled by the more traditional method; *"there was a very sore battle that day"*. Abner's men were beaten and put to flight. The victory was marred by the untimely death of Asahel, Joab's younger brother at the hands of Abner. Political manoeuvring led to David being installed as King over all Israel but he remained at Hebron for seven and a half years. The war with the northern tribes dragged on with David slowly gaining the ascendancy. *"The war between the house of Saul and the house of David was long drawn out, David growing steadily stronger while the house of Saul became weaker"* (2 Sam. 3:1 REB). David found time during the intervals between battles to take four more wives and by the end of this period had become the father of six sons.

The transformation from a guileless shepherd boy to an Eastern autocrat was well under way. Later he was to add ten concubines and a few more wives to his harem. The Lord's prediction to Samuel when Israel first wanted a king proved true in David's life as well as Saul's and most of the kings who followed later.

A disruption arose in the house of Saul. Abner and Ish-bosheth quarrelled about one of Saul's concubines. Abner was indignant and declared his intention of transferring allegiance to David. As an astute politician he must have realised that the cause of Saul was doomed and he welcomed the opportunity to change to the winning side while there was yet time. He went south with the offer to transfer the northern kingdom to David's sovereignty, so that he would rule *"from Dan even to Beer-sheba"*. He took the precaution of consulting the elders of the

northern tribes, reminding them that they had expressed the wish for David to become king and that God had promised to save Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies by his hand. (2 Sam. 3:17-18). The Philistines still occupied the northern tribes and Abner's arguments would carry considerable weight. Added to this Abner had the backing of Saul's own tribe, Benjamin, and the package he took to David would be hard to resist. David would be glad to have such a man on his own side, checking the pressure of his nephews, Joab and Abishai. So David arranged a conference and a feast with Abner at Hebron, at a convenient time when Joab was away with the fighting forces, at which a mutually satisfactory agreement was signed, sealed and settled. David was learning the arts of politics. As proof of good faith, Abner was to bring to Hebron David's wife Michal, Saul's daughter, who he was compelled to leave behind six years earlier. What Michal had to say when she found that her husband had acquired six other wives and six sons the writer of 2 Samuel did not think necessary to record.

David's complacency did not last. Joab returned to Hebron and bitterly reproached David for accepting Abner as an ally. *"You know Abner, the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you, and to know all that you do"* (3:25). He knew that the advent of Abner posed a threat to his own position as David's chief man and he was not going to tolerate that. Moreover, he had a personal grudge against Abner for killing his brother Asahel and sought revenge. He left David, probably in a towering rage and sent messengers after Abner to recall him to Hebron. Joab met Abner, took him aside for quiet conversation and assassinated him on the spot.

The act was a serious breach of hospitality. While at Hebron, Abner was accorded the rigid code of the East under David's protection. In ordinary circumstances the assassin would have been immediately put to death but Joab was David's own nephew. He could do nothing about it. Any advantage David obtained from Abner was now lost. Yet there was no one in the north who counted for anything and David would expect to suppress any further resistance.

He contented himself with making it plain that he had nothing to do with Abner's death and that he condemned the act. The deceased politician was given a state funeral with King David as chief mourner and in a speech at the time said *"there is a great prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel"*. There could be more than a suspicion that David was trying to obtain the good graces of Abner's people so soon to be his own subjects.

The news of Abner's death created consternation in Mahanaim. Both king and people knew that their only champion was gone and they were now entirely at the mercy of David. Ishbosheth had virtually given up the contest (4:1) and waited for the outcome. Inevitably there were two more commanders who concluded it was time to change sides. Baanah and Rechab, men of the tribe of Benjamin, used their privilege of access to go to the house of Ish-bosheth during his mid-day siesta and callously assassinated him, cutting off his head, escaping unseen, and making their way to Hebron and to David. They came gloating into his presence. *"Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The Lord has avenged your majesty today on Saul and on his family"* (4:8 REB).

David was outraged. He rose from his seat in anger. *"As the Lord lives, who has delivered me from all my troubles ... wicked men have killed an innocent man on his bed in his own house! Am I not to take vengeance on you now for the blood you have shed, and rid the earth of you?"* So Banaah and Recheb suffered death for their crime, and their bodies were hung up and publicly displayed in Hebron.

It is easy to dismiss these successive acts of David as mere diplomacy aimed at securing the favour of the men of Israel who formerly supported Saul but it is much more likely that there was genuine magnanimity here on the king's part. He had no real need to court the favour of Israel; he was superior in military force and he knew it, and they knew it. His undisputed acceptance as king by all Israel was now only a matter of time. His past history of sparing Saul's life when he could quite easily have slain him and thus secure the kingship, preferring to wait until the Lord should give it to him, is on a par with his generosity to the

survivors of Saul's house and his supporters. David bore no resentment towards his fallen foes and he had no fear of any future danger from them, and that was because he possessed a fixed faith that because God had promised he should have the kingdom there was no power on earth that could frustrate that design. He was prepared to wait.

He had waited from about sixteen years old when anointed by Samuel as the Lord's choice. He was nineteen when he slew Goliath and first attracted the notice of Saul. He was now thirty-seven and had reigned as king over two tribes for some seven years. The true fulfilment of the promise, that he should reign over all Israel on the throne of the Lord, was about to be realised. With the deaths of Abner and Ish-bosheth there were no other claimants to the throne and no other leader able to challenge the Philistines, who still held the greater part of the country in thrall. By common consent, all the tribes sent their representatives to Hebron to invite David to be their king, and all the elders made a solemn covenant "*before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel*".

## 6. King in Jerusalem

Jerusalem, the city of peace; the city of the great king! Rarely a city of peace during its long and turbulent history, but certainly so in the days of David. He was the man who made Jerusalem the capital of Israel, and laid the foundation of the claim that has endured three thousand years to the present day.

Israel did not possess Jerusalem before the days of David. From at least as far back as the time of Abraham, and probably long before that, Jerusalem was the central fortress of the Jebusites, a powerful Canaanite tribe which most likely occupied the countryside for a considerable distance around. They called the city Jebus, but that was not its original name. In the days of Abraham it was Salim, the name of the Babylonian god of peace. This is why it is known as the city of peace; a name that must go back to when Babylonian or Sumerian influence was prominent in Canaan. The later name 'Jerusalem' is in Hebrew 'Uru-salim', 'ur' being a Semitic term for 'city', hence 'city of peace'. David reverted to the original Semitic name, by which it has since been known.

Fully aware of its strategic importance, David's first action upon becoming king of the united nation was to dispossess the Jebusites. The city was a small place but strongly fortified. The Jebusites taunted David with his inability to capture it (2 Sam. 5:6-10; 1 Chron. 11:4-9). But someone in David's forces knew of a possible means of entrance. David made an announcement coupled with a promise. "*Whoso getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, he shall be chief and captain*" (2 Sam. 5:8). Joab, David's nephew, a daring and skilful warrior, did so, and won the coveted honour.

The AV translators did not understand what was meant by this "getting up to the gutter" (Heb. *sinnor*, meaning a channel or shaft) and the precise means by which David captured Jebus was therefore not known. Then in 1867 an Englishman, Captain Warren, engaged in surveying work in Palestine, was standing at the Virgins Fountain, the spring that rises in a cave well below the city walls which feeds the Pool at Siloam, when he noticed a hitherto unknown hole in the roof. His curiosity aroused, he investigated and found what appeared to be a vertical shaft leading upwards. By means of ropes and other appliances he managed to climb this shaft and found that it led into an underground passage cut in the rock. Following the passage he emerged into a kind of vaulted cave into which a chink of daylight penetrated. Wriggling through a gap in the masonry he found himself standing in a street in Jerusalem inside the city walls. He realised at once that he had solved the mystery of the "gutter". This shaft had been made by the Jebusites to enable them to obtain water from the fountain far below in times of siege, and Captain Warren had repeated the feat accomplished

by Joab and his men three millenniums earlier. Taken unawares by warriors emerging from this unexpected gap in their defences, the Jebusites were overpowered and the fortress surrendered to David.

The Jebusites remained, side by side with the Israelites. Araunah, who later on sold David the land on which the Temple was to be built, was a Jebusite. Solomon made them bondmen, a kind of second-class citizens, condemned to the menial tasks of the community, and after that they disappeared from history. But David now was king of Israel in Jerusalem.

Nothing succeeds like success. The growing power and influence of this new king of a now united and virile nation soon attracted the notice of the rulers round about. The first to take overt action was Hiram, king of Tyre (2 Sam. 5:11) who sent 'messengers', evidently an embassy of congratulation on his success, and to establish friendly relations, with presents consisting of cedars of Lebanon and craftsmen to assist David in his building programme.

Hiram was a king of David's stamp, far seeing, courageous and a born organiser. His people, the Phoenicians, were the merchants and the traders of the ancient world and Hiram evidently saw in this rising kingdom of Israel a new and profitable market for his wares. He himself was the founder of a dynasty of Phoenician kings which endured for something like two centuries and under whose administration the Phoenicians attained the peak of their power and influence. Under Hiram and his successors Phoenician ships sailed to India, West Africa, Britain and South America, two thousand years before Columbus! Jezebel, the idolatrous wife of King Ahab of Israel in the time of Elijah, was a granddaughter of Hiram. Phoenician territory and its seaports extended from Tripolis and Byblos in the north, through Sidon and Tyre to Haifa and Joppa in the south, a coastline two hundred miles long. Behind that coastline lay the new and rapidly expanding nation of Israel, ripe for introduction to the varied products of the wider world which Hiram's merchants would be only too pleased to sell them. No wonder Hiram hastened to make friends with David. But this thing became a snare to David. Up to now Israel had been a pastoral and agricultural people, living on the produce from their farms and pasture lands, simple folk relatively untouched by the glittering prizes this world has to offer. All this was to change. They became aware of the many aids to easier living, to the luxuries and means of indulgence and amusement, which the technology of that age could give them. They were shown articles of utility and works of art that came from far distant lands of which they had never before heard. Rare timbers and costly building stone for their houses, elaborate furnishings and utensils, fine raiment and intricate jewellery, all these could be theirs, at a price. By the time of Solomon the masses of the people were working harder than ever before to produce the foodstuffs and farm products which were to pay for all this. A new class began to emerge in Israel, an 'upper class' of aristocrats who enriched themselves with all this trade at the expense of the working classes below them. It is not always realised that the magnificence of the kingdom of David and Solomon, and the kings who came after them, was built upon the toil and sweat of the people.

Friendship with the Phoenicians brought idolatry, for they were idolaters, worshippers of Baal and Ashtoreth and Dagon. The uncompromising loyalty of David kept it at bay during the forty years of his reign, but it gained a foothold in the days of Solomon and after that Israel was rarely free from its influence. David may have received the ambassadors of Hiram with all sincerity and believed he was acting for the good of his people, but it was a dark day for Israel when he entered into alliance with Hiram the idolater and man of the world. In his enthusiasm he quite forgot the Divine injunction given to his forebears in the early days of their nationhood, "*separate yourselves from the people of the land*".

The Apostle Paul must have had something of the same thing in mind when he advised the Corinthians "*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?*"

*What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? ... Therefore come out from them, and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you”* (2 Cor. 6:14-17 NIV). It is so fatally easy for Christians to become entangled with worldly interests and pursuits hostile to their highest spiritual interests only to find too late, that it has brought leanness into their souls. The principle enunciated by Jesus *“seek ye first the kingdom of God”* stands for all time as the ideal of the Christian life. Like Abraham of old, we must confess that we are *“strangers and pilgrims on the earth”*, seeking another country, a heavenly, in which, when it is attained all our hopes and aspirations will be realised.

The attitude of Hiram king of Tyre was one thing; that of David’s old antagonists the Philistines was quite another. Whilst David was king over Judah in Hebron they had left him alone, content with their domination of northern Israel achieved at the death of Saul. Now that David was the acknowledged king over all Israel, north and south, and rapidly organizing his entire realm into a powerful federation, they could not afford to ignore the threat. 1 Chron. 14:8 tells that as soon as the Philistines heard that David had become king over all Israel, they sallied forth and invaded Judah, spreading themselves in the valley of Rephaim to the south-west of Jerusalem in an endeavour to surround and capture the city. This time David was a little more discreet than he had been with Hiram; he went to the Lord with his problem. It is evident that in the face of this threat he was going to trust in the Lord’s leading rather than in his own military judgment and skill. *“Go up”* said the Lord *“for I will deliver them into your hand”*. The victory must have been a momentous one. The name which David gave to the battlefield, Baal-perazim, the ‘breaking of Baal’, was immortalized three centuries later by Isaiah (28:21) when searching for a simile to describe the rising up of God to bring the powers of evil to an end at the close of this present age. He declared that *“the Lord will rise up as in Mount Perazim, he will be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon”* (RSV) to effect His great work. David followed up the victory by burning the idols of the Philistines which they had left behind in the haste of their retreat. It was a kind of poetic justice for their capture of the Ark of the Covenant some eighty years or so earlier. He then met a second invasion by pursuing them all the way from the valley of Gibeon to their own capital city of Gaza. That intervention of the Lord virtually ended the Philistine menace for Israel. Although David and others had to ward off occasional attacks in later years they never again posed a serious threat to Israel’s security. As it had been in the days of Samuel, it was God, and only God, who gave Israel true victory over the Philistines. When they attempted to fight the invaders in their own strength the result was always disaster. Here is a lesson for the Christian in every aspect of his war against sin and evil. As Paul exhorts, *“Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day”* (Eph. 6:10-17).

So *“the fame of David went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations”* (1 Chron. 14:17 RSV). But these material successes brought their own snares. Secure upon his throne, having the allegiance of all his people, he had nothing to fear from his enemies. Now the products and luxuries, the good things of this world were at his beck and call and there was every incentive for David to use his supreme power as king to sit back and take all that life had to offer. He was not the first, and by no means the last, to have been weaned away in measure from his first sincerity and idealism by the lure of sudden riches.

Nowhere is this better shown than in his matrimonial affairs. His original marriage to Saul’s daughter Michal, the bride of his youth, was now some twenty years old. She was still with him, but during that twenty years, he had taken six more wives and an unspecified number of concubines. Now that he was settled in Jerusalem he went on taking more wives. Not surprisingly, he finished up with nineteen sons and probably as many daughters by his wives and unnamed concubines. He reaped the consequences in later life by the jealousies and intrigues, leading to rebellions and murders, which were common to every Eastern potentate who possessed a similar establishment. It was not said of David, as it was of Solomon his son,

that *"his wives turned away his heart"*. He did at least maintain his faith in God and his abhorrence of pagan idolatry to the end of his days. This is certainly a measure of the steadfastness of his character and loyalty in circumstances that would have wrecked the faith of a lesser man. But the more the history of David is studied the more evident it becomes that nearly all the troubles and disasters of his life were the direct consequence of his many marriages. Had he kept to the Divine ideal first instituted in the Garden of Eden and remained true to his first love, who stood by him so loyally during the dark days of his flight from Saul, he would perhaps have lived, and died, a happier man.

## 7. The Ark comes to Jerusalem

Many things happened in the first three or four years of David's reign and then he began to think out the details of a plan that probably had been forming in his mind for a considerable time. It was nothing less than the transfer of the Tabernacle with all its ceremonies to Jerusalem, which would then by virtue of this association become a hallowed city to all Israel. The Ark of the Covenant had been lying in the house of Abinadab at Kiriath-jearim in Judah for nearly a century and the Leviticus ceremonies, including the annual sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, had fallen into disarray (1 Chron. 13:3). Without the Ark they could not be performed acceptably to God. David, with his zeal for God and the full observance of the Mosaic Covenant by Israel, obviously felt that this was a step he must take as soon as he had established peace and security in the land, and this was the time. So he went to his counsellors and captains and to all the people of Israel with his proposal, a proposal that was enthusiastically endorsed. *"The thing was right in the eyes of all the people"* (1 Chron. 13:4). A great crowd of delegates or representatives from every part of the empire, from the borders of Egypt to those of Syria, gathered together to accompany the project with all ceremony and rejoicing. And so they went to Kiriath-jearim.

Eighty years earlier, in the days of Eli, the Ark of the Covenant had been captured in battle by the Philistines and the town of Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood, had been completely destroyed. The magnitude of that destruction is indicated by the Lord's words to Jeremiah five hundred years later. *"Go now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel"* (Jer. 7:14). The Psalmist also referred to this tragic catastrophe in Psa. 78:60 *"He forsook the Tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men, and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand"*. The same Psalm declares that it was then that God formally declared Judah the royal tribe; although that had been foreseen and prophesied by Jacob many centuries earlier. Now David was about to crown his royalty by re-establishing the sacred ritual of the covenant.

The Tabernacle had suffered a chequered history since the destruction of Shiloh. It is evident that after the capture of the Ark by the Philistines the remaining Levites had hurriedly dismantled and removed the structure and its furniture before the victors had reached and destroyed the town. It is probable that it was re-erected at Gilgal, where it first stood at the entry to the land, by Samuel, continuing thus during the time of Samuel's supremacy. Later on in Saul's reign it is found at Nob, with Ahimelech the great-grandson of Eli officiating, not as High Priest, but as a kind of Priest-in-charge. Saul in his jealousy of David then had the entire priestly fraternity at Nob murdered, Abiathar son of Ahimelech alone escaping, and apparently removed the Tabernacle to Gibeon, his home town which he evidently wanted to make the capital of his kingdom. Zadok of the legal High Priestly line of Eleazar was appointed by Saul to preside over the Tabernacle, which then remained at Gibeon throughout David's reign and into the reign of Solomon until the Temple had been built. There were thus two centres of worship in Israel during David's reign; the original Tabernacle constructed by Moses, without the Ark but with the altar of sacrifice, at Gibeon presided over by Zadok, and



the new “tent” or tabernacle erected by David at Jerusalem as repository for the Ark which he was now about to bring to the city, presided over by Ahimelech.

This was to be the great moment of David’s life, the day that he brought the Ark of the Covenant, the sacred symbol of God’s abiding presence with His people, back into the sanctuary. Eli had lost the Ark, Saul had chosen to ignore it, and now he, David, was to restore it to its rightful place in the city of God’s royalty. But in all his enthusiasm and zeal David quite overlooked some ritual considerations. The tent in which he proposed to place the Ark was not the one made by Moses in which God had placed His name. The great brasen Altar of Moses, on which alone the sin-offerings could be consumed, was away at Gibeon. The priest of David’s choosing, Abiathar of the line of Ithamar, was not the legal High Priest. Perhaps greatest of all, the method chosen by David to transport the sacred object from its resting place in Kiriath-jearim, mounted upon an ox cart in full view of the cheering multitude. It was drawn by men who were not of the tribe of Levi and all this ran directly against the ritual laid down by the Lord and hallowed in Israel since the days of Moses. Instead of treating this whole operation as a sacred religious festival carried out with due reverence to the Lord, David made of it a political demonstration and a public holiday to enhance his own popularity with the people. Is it at all surprising that the whole thing went terribly wrong? The procession moved off, the king at its head, surrounded by musicians playing on every kind of instrument, followed by the militia and the nobility of the land. Then came representatives of the priestly fraternity and behind them the ox-cart bearing its precious load, led by Ahiah and Uzza, the sons of Abinadab in whose house it had lain for so many years. Finally came the shouting multitude of Israel.

The distance was not far; about fifteen miles of winding track climbing the rather precipitous ascent of about two thousand feet to the summit of the hills on which Jerusalem is built. The going was sure to be rather rough and the cart probably swayed a little from side to side under its load. Then one of the oxen stumbled. Instinctively Uzza, who was nearest, put out his hand to steady the Ark, which looked ready to topple over. He touched it, staggered backwards, and fell to the ground, lying motionless. Men rushed to his assistance. He was dead! The procession halted in confusion. The music stopped. The shouting died down to a deathly silence. David came rushing back, his face ashen. The Levites, from their allotted place farther along the procession, looked at him accusingly. The enormity of what he had done came home to him. He buried his face in his hands and groaned.

They waited in silence. The king lifted his head; his countenance was haggard. He looked round him; when he spoke his voice was low. “Where is there a home of a Levite near this place” he asked of the watching crowd. A hand pointed. “Obededom the Levite lives in yonder house” he was told. The king looked at the watching group of Levites. “The Lord has shown his displeasure with me that I allowed His sacred Ark to be carried on a cart made with men’s hands and to be touched by unhallowed men not of Levi. Now take up the Ark and carry it into the house of Obed-edom the Levite that it may stay there until the Lord shall reveal to me his good pleasure.” Silently, reverently, they obeyed. The chronicler of these events says that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza and He smote him because he put his hand to the Ark; so he died before God. Everyone knew that only the Levites were allowed to handle and carry the Ark. But the man the Lord was angry with was David. Whoever loaded the Ark on the cart at the start must have touched it; they were not struck dead. Had Uzza not acted as he did the Ark would have toppled on to the road and someone then would have had to pick it up. Uzza reacted instinctively to the apparent danger, realised suddenly in the moment his hand touched the Ark that he was committing sacrilege, and in the horror and fear of that moment, his heart stopped, and so he died. In any event, what had been intended and expected to be a joyful and triumphal celebration was turned in an instant to stark tragedy; David realised that he could not touch Divine things in other than the Divine way, and he returned to Jerusalem a dispirited and broken man.

It is not uncommon in this our day to find the things of God and the trappings of religion used as aids to secular or political advancement. The powers of this world are not above enlisting the help and support of the Church when their interests can be served thereby. The history of the Christian era furnishes abundant evidence of the disastrous results to Christians of complicity in any such partnership. There can be no fellowship between Christ and Belial. The mission of the church lies in a completely separate province from that in which the world operates and in which its standards operate. *“Separate yourselves, says the Lord; touch nothing unclean.”* In so many spheres today there is the manifest tendency to water down Christian ideals, practices and doctrines to accommodate what is claimed to be the ‘advanced thinking’ of contemporary generations. But they are in no way qualified to adjudicate or pronounce on Christian ethics but need rather to be instructed in such things. The dividing line between secular and sacred needs to be clearly defined and sharply drawn for it is a boundary that may not be crossed. One day all men will be on the sacred side of that boundary, but that will only be when the power of the returned and reigning Christ over the earth shall have put down all opposing rule and authority and power. Then the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

Three months later David was ready for a second attempt. He had probably done some very deep thinking in the interim. Perhaps he had spent some time in quiet communion with God. At any rate, according to the detailed account in 1 Chron. 15 he was meticulously careful that the proceeding was carried out with the utmost propriety and in full accord with the sacred laws. David himself stepped down from the oversight; the direction of affairs was in the hands of the two chief priests, Zadok and Abiathar, and all the minute detail of the procession was undertaken by the various classes of Levites who were ordained to the relevant services. So the procession moved off as before, with David in the lead, and this time arrived safely in Jerusalem and to the enclosing tent that David had erected for the reception of the Ark.

That was a great day for Israel. Many a devout heart must have swelled with pride on reflection that the tragedy of the loss of the Ark two generations earlier had been rectified and that the God of Israel might now be truthfully said to be dwelling in the midst of His people. The days of idolatry were in the past and under the influence of a king who, despite his shortcomings in some directions, was nevertheless a man of sterling faith and loyalty to God. There must have been many who felt that the old bad days had gone and the fulfilment of all God’s promises to His people Israel was at hand. It was at this time that the 132<sup>nd</sup> Psalm was composed by David and used in the celebrations, and in addition the 96<sup>th</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup>, the latter two being recorded in full in the account in 1 Chron. 16. *“The Lord has chosen Zion;”* sang David exultantly, *“he that desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.”* (Psa. 132:13-14). In a sense, which perhaps had not been so true since the stirring days of the Covenant at Sinai, Israel was in truth the people of God, and God was dwelling among them.

There was one discordant note. Michal, his wife, daughter of Saul, viewed from her window the triumphal procession entering Jerusalem, and watched David in his wild enthusiasm leaping and dancing among the players in reckless abandon, *“and she despised him in her heart”*. As David returned to his house when the ceremonies were over she came out to meet him and sarcastically taunted him with his demeaning himself among the riff-raff of the people in a manner unbecoming Israel’s king. Apparently irritated by her words, the king replied sharply, telling Michal that what he did was for the glory of God, and that if he could give more glory by still further demeaning himself he would do so. The chronicler adds *“And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.”* “Therefore” as in the AV implies that David, in his resentment, saw to it that his wife remained childless, a sore grief to any Hebrew woman, but it is incorrect. Michal must have been about forty years of age at

the time and had been married to David for something over twenty years. If by this time she was not a mother, it was most unlikely that she would become one now. The most likely explanation of the remark is, not that David was punishing her for her sarcasm and failure to appreciate the significance of the day's events. Rather, in the view of the writer of 2 Samuel, David's zeal for the Lord contrasted with Saul's religious failure. This marked the fact that of all David's sons, one of whom must succeed him as king, none would be of the ancestry of the rejected Saul. This, in the opinion of the historian, was a good and sufficient reason for Michal's childlessness. So David settled down to enjoy the fruits of his endeavours in the hope of a long and prosperous reign over the people of the Lord.

## 8. Desire for a Temple

King David was at rest in his palace. The Lord had given him victory over all his enemies and Israel was at peace and secure. That is what the chronicler of 2 Sam. 7 declared, and the outward facts appear to establish the justice of his claim. The traditional enemies of Israel, the Philistines, had been effectually overcome and expelled from the land. They were now back over the border and confined to their own land. There had probably not been such a happy state of affairs since the early days of Samuel and the reason is not far to seek. Once again, as in those early days of Samuel, the ruler of the land was God-fearing and righteously inclined and the people in general followed his lead. "*Happy is that people whose God is the Lord*" was David's own testimony (Psa. 144:15) uttered perhaps at just about this time. If the rulers of the nations today would but take God as their Lord, ruling by principle rather than expediency, dealing justly without fear or favour, the peoples of earth would be far happier than they are. But that desirable condition of things cannot be until the One whom David foreshadowed comes in the fulness of Divine power to rule with righteousness and wisdom, establishing justice and equity in the earth, in the days of His promised Messianic reign. Meanwhile the world must wait.

During this period David built himself a magnificent palace at Jerusalem. His alliance with Hiram, king of the Phoenicians at Tyre, gave him access to all the materials he needed, costly stones and timbers, precious metals for ornamentation, and luxurious furniture. He probably travelled to Tyre to see these things for himself. It is likely that the friendship that is known to have grown up between these two men involved a succession of visits to each others' capitals. When David saw with his own eyes the richness and luxuriance of all which this world had to offer he straightway, it would seem, fell in with the idea of a palace befitting the Jerusalem he intended to create out of the old Jebusite fortress. So Hiram named his price, for the Tyrians were traders and merchants first and last, and David became a willing customer. Before long Phoenician ships were sailing down the coast from Tyre to Joppa, there to have their cargoes unloaded and transported by Israelite labourers forty miles up the steep ascent to Jerusalem, and soon the dream palace had become reality. King David the monarch, with his many wives and concubines and numerous progeny, had come a long way from the guileless shepherd boy of the Judean hillsides. But despite all this his heart was still towards God. He sat on his ornate throne and he thought. The fruit of his meditations began to take shape in the form of a dream, a dream of something grander and even more glorious than the splendid palace he had built for himself. So he sent for his spiritual counsellor, Nathan the prophet.

Not much is known about Nathan the prophet. He must have been a very young man at this time for he was still alive at the end of Solomon's reign seventy years later. According to 1 Chron. 27:29 he recorded the history of David's reign, and 2 Chron. 9:29 the history of Solomon's reign, in the "Book of Nathan the prophet". He was a historian and probably, like Isaiah, a statesman and an influence in the royal court. The Book of Nathan has not survived

but would have covered much of the same ground as the existing second Book of Samuel, which was of course written long after Samuel's death. So the youthful prophet came into the presence of his king.

David came to the point. "I am dwelling in a luxury palace, he told Nathan, but the Ark of God, the sacred symbol of His presence with us, is still housed in a flimsy tent of curtains. I want to build a magnificent temple here in Jerusalem, one that will give glory to God and excite the wonder and admiration of the surrounding nations. The Tabernacle in the wilderness made by Moses at Sinai was adequate enough when the people made their way here from Egypt, and in the days when they were getting themselves established in this land. Now we are a great nation, looking forward to a glorious future, and I want to create a Temple that will be a fitting sanctuary for the God of all the earth, a building to which all men can come to worship." Nathan, listening, felt the same enthusiasm rising in his own heart, and impetuously he replied, "*Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you*" (2 Sam. 7:3 RSV).

But that night the Lord came to Nathan and shattered the rosy dream. "*Go and tell my servant David, ... You shall not build me a house for me to dwell in*". (1 Chron. 17:4 and is the correct translation of 2 Sam. 7:5 also). He went on to tell the prophet that He had been content to dwell with His people in a tent of curtains and never at any time had sought anything more ambitious. Far more important than the erection of a material edifice in the city that would inevitably suffer the ravages of time and be no more, was the creation of an enduring kingdom that would last for all time as the means of Divine blessing to the whole world. That is what the Lord purposed to do. He would establish the descendants of David to be a royal dynasty that would endure forever. A son of David, yet unborn, would finish the work begun by David and build the house and royalty of David so that it would eventually be for the glory of God's Name. We know now that in His foreknowledge God was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His humanity of the royal line of David, in His Divinity the only-begotten Son of God. In the fulness of time He will establish that earthly kingdom which will abolish evil and bring about universal righteousness. David could hardly be expected to understand all that in his time. However his later utterances show that he did appreciate in measure the purpose of the Lord and realised that in later times there would be One who would be both his son and his Lord. Through Him the ancient Abrahamic promise "in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed" would at last have its fulfilment. Here, at this time, as recorded in 2. Sam. 7 the Messianic hope had its birth and its first proclamation. From now on the true aim and hope of Israel was to be the coming of the Messiah.

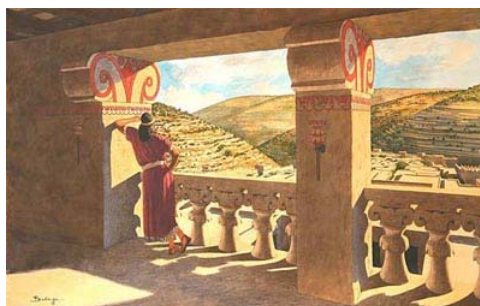
There was another reason why David was not permitted by the Lord to build the Temple which was so much upon his heart, a reason which was not so much to David's credit. That reason is stated in 1 Chron. 22:8. It was because David had been a man of war and had "*shed blood abundantly*" in God's sight. The Temple of the city of peace must be built by a man of peace, and David had not been a man of peace. His warlike propensities led him into many a course of action that exceeded by far the commissions given him by the Lord. The honour he coveted would, therefore, be gained by his more peaceable son, Solomon. David seems to have accepted the Lord's decision with submissiveness and loyalty. In later years he began to get together the materials for the construction of the Temple but he abode by the Lord's decision that Solomon should build it. So, for the present, he put the dream aside and continued with his task of governing Israel in the reverence and service of God.

But not for long for his restless spirit yearned for the field of battle and soon he was out in the field with his men against his old foes the Philistines. The accounts of his wars at this period of his life are a little disjointed and difficult to fit into a consecutive framework. However, it appears that he reigned peacefully in Jerusalem only about six years before he embarked again upon a series of campaigns against neighbouring peoples which was to occupy his time more or less for another seven years. First it was the Philistines (2 Sam. 8:1)

whom he defeated yet again. They were probably the aggressors and he treated them as he had done before. Next it was the turn of Moab, east of Jordan. His brutality to them would seem to be quite indefensible. As the NEB has it (2 Sam. 8:2) *“he made them lie along the ground and measured them with a length of cord”* (a measuring line) *“for every two lengths that were to be put to death, one full length was spared”*. In other words, two-thirds of the fighting men taken prisoners were massacred in cold blood. *“So the Moabites became his servants, and brought gifts,”* i.e. tribute. The land of Moab was, in effect, added to David’s dominions. Next he turned his attention to the north of Israel, where existed a number of petty Aramean states of which Syria with its capital at Damascus was chief. David conquered them all and extended his borders to the Euphrates, slaying many thousands and exacting tribute of precious metals and articles of value, all of which he brought to Jerusalem. Then it was the turn, successively, of Amalek and Edom, and finally Ammon. Every one of the surrounding nations was compelled to submit to the conqueror. From the borders of Egypt to the Euphrates, David ruled supreme and none dared to challenge him.

It might well be that, intoxicated by success, he began to partake more and more of the character of a ruthless Eastern despot rather than a benevolent and justice-loving man of God. His loyalty to the God of Israel was unquestioned: his passionate conviction that he had been called of God and empowered by God to lead Israel into a position of supremacy over the nations was fixed and unshakeable. But the God he worshipped was the God of battles, benevolent to his own people but a terrible destroyer of his enemies. David was in the line of Moses and Joshua and Gideon and Samson, men who interpreted the Spirit that was in them as a spirit of destruction, beating down the enemies of God in the power of their own right arms. It could hardly have been otherwise, in the then state of Israel’s development. It was an early stage of human history and mankind was still very immature. They could only visualize the promised kingdom of righteousness of the future in terms of the kingdoms around them, the only ones they had known, organized and maintained by brute force and the shedding of much blood. The promised eternal kingdom of David and his seed was necessarily pictured in such terms, with the proviso that it was to be David and his kingdom which was to be on top, and the other nations sternly repressed. A kingdom of love and peace was still far from their comprehension and the idea of the brotherhood of man and universal fatherhood of God quite absent from their thoughts.

It was Solomon, the man of peace, the son of David, who first glimpsed the sublime majesty of One who could not be contained even in the heaven of heavens and yet could bend down to hear, and heed, the cry of the most insignificant of his creatures. It was Solomon who first spoke of love, and mercy, and judgment, and peace, in the dealings of the Most High with erring men, and of His readiness to forgive. David never reached that height. He was the last of an old school of stalwarts for God who took their inspiration from Sinai. After him came men, kings and prophets, who began to see God and the ways of God in a different and softer light, taking one more step on the road which was eventually to lead to Christ. *“He has showed you, O man, what is good;”* cried Micah two centuries later *“and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Micah 6:8).



## 9. David and Bathsheba

David continued on his career of conquest. It was during that career that an incident occurred which was to have far-reaching consequences. Nahash, king of the nation of Ammon, died. The territory of Ammon, descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham and therefore of blood-kinship to Israel, lay on the other side of Jordan more or less east of Jerusalem. It would appear that David and Nahash had always been on friendly terms and no animosity existed between the two peoples (2 Sam. 10:1-2). Not unnaturally David sent envoys to the new king, Hanun, to commiserate with him on the death of his father, and probably to reiterate his pledges of friendship. Hanun, however, being in all probability a young man, allowed himself to be advised by his probably equally young advisers, treated the ambassadors with contempt and shameful insults and expelled them from his country. David, furious at this affront and despite his past friendship with Ammon, immediately declared war and sent his forces under Joab, his nephew and commander-in-chief, to teach Hanun a salutary lesson. The Ammonites, knowing that conflict was inevitable, called upon the Syrians to come to their aid and when Joab arrived he found himself facing the joint strength of Ammon and Syria. In the ensuing melee the Syrians were the first to give way and withdraw from the contest; this induced Hadadezer, the king of Syria, to call up reinforcements from his outlying dominions and allies and send Shobach his own senior military commander to direct operations. This escalation of the conflict brought David himself to the scene of operations with a greatly augmented force of Israelites. The result was that the Syrians were defeated and largely annihilated, their commander Shobach slain, their equipment captured by David, and only a pitiful remnant got back to Syria to tell the tale to Hadadezer. In consequence Syria and her allies became tributary to Israel and David extended his dominions still farther. The Israelite historian who recorded these things in 2 Sam. 10 concluded his account, a trifle maliciously and certainly with relish "*So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more*".

David, flushed with success, now set out to even up the score with Ammon. He sent Joab again, with a suitable force, to lay siege to Rabbah their capital city. It is evident that Hanun was next on the list for the chop. Joab and his men took up their positions and David relaxed from the rigours of war in his palace.

That relaxing was his undoing. He would have been better employed in communion with God giving renewed thanks for his unparalleled succession of victories, for the peace and safety Israel now enjoyed, and seeking guidance for the future. Instead he took a stroll upon the roof of his palace, much as did King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon upon a later memorable occasion, looking over the city he had built, and perhaps congratulating himself upon his achievements as had that king. It was while thus occupied that his gaze was attracted by a movement in the courtyard of a private house below him not far from the palace. From earliest times the houses of the relatively well-to-do in Eastern countries consisted of rooms built completely round a central courtyard open to the sky. Complete privacy was afforded in such a courtyard except from above and probably the roof of the palace was the only vantage point from which a view into this courtyard could be obtained. The king looked more closely; a woman was there, engaged in her ablutions, and he could see that she was beautiful. How long he gazed is not stated; eventually he descended to his apartments and summoned a servant. The servant was to ascertain the identity of the woman residing in the house he described. David waited rather impatiently for the man's return. The answer came. The woman was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was one of the thirty stalwarts who had adventured with David and stood by him in those dark days of Adullam when Saul was seeking his life. He was one of David's loyal supporters and a close friend. He was, also, at this moment, not at home in Jerusalem; he was away at the battlefield with Joab, fighting the Ammonites. David thought for a moment, then came to a quick decision. "Bring her to me",

he ordered curtly, and turned and retired to his own apartments. The messenger went as the king had commanded.

Let it be realised that Bathsheba herself had no choice in this matter. The king was supreme; he could do as he liked and he did do as he liked. The messengers came, and she had to go with them. Afterwards she was permitted to go to her own house and so far as David was concerned that was the end of the matter, or so he thought. But a little later on his complacency was rudely disturbed. He received a message from Bathsheba which said, in the succinct words of 2 Sam. 11:5, "*I am with child*".

David probably panicked a little at first. Not because he had committed adultery, and that more or less by force, but because of the scandal in Israel this would create. The king stood as the champion and example of the Divine law and should appear always beyond reproach. And there was the probable reaction of Uriah when he found out. He was a tough and hardened warrior and not likely to take this lying down. The war with Ammon must end eventually, and he would be home. Kings had been toppled from their thrones for less than this. David did some more thinking and in consequence despatched an urgent message to Joab to send Uriah back to Jerusalem for consultations.

The warrior entered into the presence of his king. David, all affable, made him welcome and discussed with him the conduct of the war, the welfare of the troops and how Joab was standing up to the strain. They probably chatted a little about old times, and then David, still affable, told Uriah he deserved a short respite from the rigours of the campaign and he was sending him home to spend a few days with his wife before going back to Rabbah. So Uriah went out from his presence and David leaned back in his chair feeling that all would now be well.

Unfortunately for David, it was not. There was a nobility in the character of Uriah upon which the king had not reckoned. When morning came David's servants told him that Uriah had not gone down to his own home; he had found himself a bed for the night with them. In some annoyance, not unmixed with a certain perturbation, David sent for him and demanded an explanation. He got the answer. The army, and Joab, were enduring the rigours of war in the open fields, said Uriah, and while they are there I will not enjoy the comforts of my home, "*Shall I then go to my house*", he said "*to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing*" (RSV).

David was baulked. His very obvious plot had failed. He must think of something else. But meanwhile he had another try. He called Uriah to a private convivial evening for the two of them and plied his guest with liquor, until he had made him thoroughly drunk. Then he told him to go home to his wife for the night, hoping that he had made him so drunk that his resolve would weaken. But when morning came the position was as before.

The king was getting desperate. Had he been in his right mind he would not have done what he did do next. He was not in his right mind; he was desperately worried and clutching at any expedient that offered a way out of his dilemma. He sent a letter to Joab by the hand of Uriah telling Joab to set Uriah in a battle position where he would be isolated and slain by the Ammonites. "*Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down and die*". To his former crime he was now adding that of murder.

Joab did as he was told. Before long another messenger appeared before David with dispatches from the battle-front. As a casual postscript Joab had added "*Uriah the Hittite is dead also*". David told the messenger to assure Joab that he was not to be cast down "*for the sword devours now one and now another*" he added unctuously, conscious of an inner feeling of relief that the matter had now been very satisfactorily settled. He began to think of Bathsheba again and the beauty that had first attracted him. She, when she heard that her

husband was dead, says the narrator, “*mourned for her husband*” but probably nobody took any notice of that. And after an appropriate period had elapsed, “*David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son*”. He most likely felt that this was the easiest way to regularize the matter and avoid any breath of scandal later; one more wife added to the eleven or twelve he already had was neither here nor there. Bathsheba’s own wishes were, of course, not consulted, but with her husband killed in battle she might have felt this to be the best solution to her own personal problems. David must have developed an affection for her later, for she became his favourite wife and it was one of her sons that he designated to succeed him as king.

But in all his self-congratulations David quite forgot one factor, and that an important one. The narrator records it at the end of the story. “*The thing that David had done displeased the Lord.*” From that moment nothing went right for David. The first eighteen years of his reign were marked by continuous and unqualified success in everything. The remaining twenty-two years were times of continuous disaster, treachery, rebellion, and heartbreak. David ultimately received Divine forgiveness for his sin, but its repercussions never left him to the day of his death.

## 10. Retribution for sin

The guard appeared in the doorway and strode noiselessly across the floor. He bowed low before the throne.

“The prophet Nathan seeks audience with you, O king”, he said. David stared at him morosely. “Let him be admitted” he said at last. His eyes betrayed a slight apprehension. The guard bowed again and retired. David waited, chin on hand. The curtains parted to reveal a tall, commanding figure, flowing locks and beard belying apparent youthfulness, piercing eyes and firm mouth giving evidence of a maturity of character beyond his evident thirty or so years of life. He moved with deliberate steps across the room and stood still, inclining his head slightly in acknowledgement.

“And what, O man of God, have I done wrong now” asked David sarcastically. The prophet regarded him impassively. “I come, O king, that you give judgment on a matter of wrongdoing”.

“Give judgment?” echoed David a little blankly. The apprehension faded from his eyes. “Are there no judges in Jerusalem who can hear the case?”

“This is a matter which only the king can judge.”

David settled himself more comfortably in his seat. He regarded Nathan more amiably. “Proceed then”.

“There were two men in the city” Nathan began, “one rich, one poor. The rich man possessed great wealth in flocks and herds, the poor man only one ewe lamb that he had nurtured. The rich man had a guest. Instead of taking from his own flocks for his needs he sent and deprived the poor man of his one ewe lamb to provide the feast.” He stopped and looked straight at the king. David’s quick temper flared out. He rose from his seat. “As the Lord lives” he declared hotly “the man that has done this thing shall surely die”. He stopped abruptly. Nathan had raised his arm; his accusing finger pointed directly at the king. “You are the man!”

David sank slowly back to his seat, face paling. “Thus says the Lord God of Israel” declared the other “I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. I gave you your master’s house, the houses of Israel and Judah; wherefore then have you despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the



Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife.” He paused a moment. David had shrunk back in his seat and buried his face in his hands to avoid those accusing eyes. The remorseless voice went on. “Hear therefore the word of the Lord. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house. Because you have despised me, and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife, and have slain him, I will raise up evil against you out of your house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbour. You did this thing secretly, but I will do it before all Israel.” He ceased and waited. There was a long silence. David lifted his head at last. His countenance was stricken; his voice broken. “I have sinned against the Lord!”

There was no softening of the austere features confronting him. “The Lord has spoken. You will not die, but the child your wife has given you shall surely die!”

“No, no, not that” cried the distraught man. He received no answer. Nathan had gone.

How long David sat there he never knew. His mind was in turmoil. The transgression was some two years in the past now and he had virtually forgotten it; his passion for Bathsheba had continued and he dearly loved their year-old child. The war with the Ammonites, that had given opportunity for the death of Uriah, was in its closing stages with Joab permanently at the battlefield and David making periodic visits to the scene of operations. He knew that a few more months would see the end of the conflict and with that victory he had been looking forward to a period of peace and ease such as he had enjoyed during most of his past thirteen years in Jerusalem. Now all that was changed; his sin had been brought up before his face and he knew, now, that nothing could ever be the same again. Wearily he got up and went out of the throne-room.

Through the open door of the vestibule he could see, across the palace gardens, a small crowd around the entrance to the house of the women. At first he regarded the scene disinterestedly, and then something caught his attention. He beckoned an attendant. “Is not that Malachi the physician going in there” he exclaimed, “What is going on?” The man looked confused. “I will go and find out, sire” he replied, and promptly disappeared. David waited awhile, then crossed the garden himself towards the crowd. It melted as he approached and he stopped before the guard at the doorway. “What is happening here?” He demanded. The guard looked at him with a troubled expression; he spoke reluctantly. “The child of the lady Bathsheba is sick”. The words were hardly out of his mouth before David had pushed past him and was taking long hasty steps to his wife’s apartment. The Levite, bending low over the child’s couch, straightened up as the king approached and bowed before him. David had time to discern the little form, pale and still, stretched out upon the couch, and Bathsheba’s tearful face. “Tell me” demanded the king of the other, “can you cure him? Will the child live?” He waited an eternity for the answer. Malachi looked down again at the infant, next at the mother, and then at the anxious face of the king.

“O my king”, he said, “I know not what this malady is. Only the Lord God of Israel can save him now.” He bowed low again and left the room.

“And the Lord God of Israel has decreed that he must die, because of my sin” groaned David. He went slowly back to his own apartments.

It was a week later. David had remained all that time in close seclusion, seeing no one. Affairs of state were neglected and forgotten. His ministers came for audience and went away as they came. He refused all food and drink. Prostrate on the ground, he besought the Lord to rescind the sentence and spare the life of his infant son. The entreaties of his ministers and his servants alike were ignored. All else was abandoned in his frantic pleas to the Lord to spare the life of his child. On the seventh day the child died.

The palace servants were afraid to tell David. “If he behaved like this while there was yet some hope that the child would live” they told each other “what is he going to do when he knows he is dead”. So for a while there was a conspiracy of silence, until David perceived by

whisperings and glances, when they thought he was not looking, that there was something amiss.

*“Therefore David said to his servants, ‘Is the child dead?’ And they said, ‘he is dead!’”* And thereupon David rose from the ground, washed himself and donned fresh garments, and went to “the house of the Lord” the tent he had erected in Jerusalem to house the Ark of the Covenant, and there he worshipped. Returning to the palace, he called for food, and began to eat.

Greatly daring, his servants asked the reason for this sudden change of demeanour. Apparently quite affably, he told them that while the child lived, there was always the chance that God would heed his distress and listen to his plea. Now the child was dead and God had not listened; there was no longer any point in keeping up the supplications; he might as well return to normal life. *“I shall go to him”* he said, *“but he shall not return to me”*. *“And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon”*.

\* \* \* \*

To what extent David felt sincere remorse for his crime it is impossible to say. The only indication in the narrative is his frank avowal to Nathan “I have sinned against the Lord”. It has often been suggested that Psalms 32 and 51 were composed by David to express his feelings after realization of his sin came to him, or was forced upon him by Nathan. The language of both Psalms is very fitting, especially his heartfelt plea in Psa. 51:14. *“Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God”*. In the light of those two Psalms it is probably right to conclude that he was indeed remorseful and repentant, and sincerely regretted the momentary weakness which had led him astray and involved him in so grievous a calamity. It is likely that for the rest of his life he was haunted by the memory of the valiant soldier who had served him so faithfully, and whom he had so basely betrayed and murdered. If he was indeed thus sincerely repentant, then of course the Lord did extend him forgiveness; but even so, the consequences remained. The Divine law “what a man sows, that shall he also reap” cannot be avoided or set aside. The death of his child was not the only penalty David was destined to suffer. The rest of his reign was filled with a long succession of disasters, characterized by outrage and murder, all stemming in some degree from the implications of his crime against Uriah.

For the present, David picked up the threads of life again. There is no doubt that Bathsheba became his favourite wife, there is no mention again of any of the others, and she was almost certainly a much younger woman, as is evidenced by other Scriptural deductions. For the present he was still occupied with the war against Ammon. At about this time Joab had virtually ended the campaign by capturing the capital city of Rabbah. He called David to come down and receive the people’s submission in person, which David lost no time in doing and it must be said with regret, treating the defeated citizens with atrocious cruelty, if 2 Sam. 13:31 and 32 are accepted as a true record. His justification probably was the fact that the Ammonites were probably some of the cruellest of the ancient nations and had treated Israel in much the same way in times gone past. David probably reflected that the Mosaic Law demanded an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and he was only doing what Moses commanded.

Less than a year later Bathsheba presented David with a second son, whom he named Solomon. From him came the kings of Israel, the royal line. In later years there was a third son, Nathan, who became the blood ancestor of both Joseph and Mary, and through Mary, of Christ. Then there was a fourth son of whom no further mention is made. David at fifty years of age had what was virtually a second family; there were probably some girls as well as boys. His earlier sons were by now grown up and the eldest was twenty-one years of age. In the ordinary way he would be the prospective heir to the throne but David was now manifestly showing his preference for Solomon, the child of Bathsheba, and obviously Amnon would be looking a little askance at this interloper. He was not the only one. Others of the

older sons of David had their eyes on the throne and here were all the seeds of the conflict that led eventually to the murder of at least three of David's sons. From that casual glance from the roof of his palace on that fateful afternoon David was to reap a bitter harvest.

### 11. Amnon and Tamar 2 Sam. 13-14

Intrigue, rebellion, treachery, outrage, murder; this is the sad catalogue of happenings which was to fill David's life for the remaining years of his reign following the episode of Uriah. Almost every year brought a fresh calamity; David must have wished at times that he had never forsaken his simple life as a shepherd for the chequered career of a king. And yet, despite the dark shadows of that same chequered career, he had been the Lord's choice for the founder of a royal dynasty that is eventually to culminate in Jesus Christ as ruler over the Divine kingdom on earth, and the Lord never makes mistakes. Despite his evident weaknesses and failures, David's heart was right with the Lord and his loyalty never wavered. The Lord never had to say of David, as He did say of Saul "*I am grieved that I made Saul king*" (NIV).

Less than a year after Nathan's condemnation of David, and the subsequent birth of Solomon, and the end of the war with Amnon, and David's settling down to a hoped-for peaceful life in Jerusalem, disaster struck. The tragic story is related in 2 Sam. 13. Amnon, eldest son of David and prospective heir to the throne, became violently infatuated with his half-sister Tamar, daughter of David by another wife. Amnon was just about twenty one years of age and Tamar seventeen. His mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel, the third of David's wives and almost certainly a woman of Israel. Tamar's mother was Maacah, daughter of the King of Geshur, an independent people of Amorite extraction on the northern borders of Israel whom neither Joshua nor any subsequent leader had been able to subdue. In marrying Maacah, David had transgressed the Mosaic Law. Now there was this incipient scandal threatening the serenity of the royal house. The story goes on to relate how Amnon inveigled Tamar into his house and, despite her resistance, violated her. In her distress the girl went to her own brother, Absalom, third son of David, and there found refuge. In the ordinary way such an outrage would be avenged by the shedding of blood, starting a murder feud which sometimes went on for generations, and Absalom as the injured girl's own brother was the one whom custom demanded should be the avenger. But at the moment he bided his time. The chronicler merely states "*Absalom spoke to Amnon, neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar*".

The chronicler also says "*when King David heard of all these things, he was very wroth*". Since Tamar was his daughter one would have expected a more decided reaction. The fact that there was not may well have been due to an inward realization that his own transgression of two or three years earlier had rendered him of all men unfit to pronounce judgment on the offender. David must have been sick at heart as he pondered over the disorder into which his life seemed to be slipping; perhaps now he did enter into a deeper and more sincere repentance than he had known before. In his dilemma, maybe he thought that Absalom, as Tamar's natural guardian, always the system where a king or nobleman had a multiplicity of children by a number of wives, was apparently going to allow the matter to rest and therefore he himself could do so without further apprehension. If he did so conclude, then he was gravely mistaken, as subsequent events were to prove. For the present, however, he took no further action. Under the Mosaic Law, of course, he should have had the offender, king's son or no king's son, put to death.

The Septuagint adds an extra phrase to the statement of David's wrath "*but he did not grieve the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his first-born*". There may be something in this. David was at this time evidently expecting Amnon to succeed him as king, may even already have been grooming him for the kingship, and this might have been an

additional justification in his mind for taking no action. But what he did not know was that the Lord had other ideas as to who should succeed him as king. In His infinite wisdom a man who would combine something of the qualities of the gentle Bathsheba with those of the Bethlehem shepherd-boy was needed to lead Israel into the next stage of its national life.

Two years later the second episode occurred in the tragedy. Amnon had accomplished his crime with the unwitting connivance of the king, who had been deceived by a pretext invented by Amnon into sending Tamar to his house. Now David was to be deceived again, this time by Absalom who although only twenty years of age, had his own estate at Baal-hazor, eighteen miles north of Jerusalem. He was due there to superintend his annual sheep-shearing, which was always made a kind of ritual and accompanied by feasting and celebration (Gen. 31:19 and 38:13 are examples, in the lives of Jacob and Judah). He went to the king and requested the favour of his presence at the feast, knowing his father well enough to be certain he would refuse — the presence of the king would involve a numerous entourage of court notabilities and servants which could be an expensive matter for Absalom. As anticipated, David declined on those grounds. *“Nay, my son”*, he said *“let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable to you”*. To disarm suspicion, Absalom pressed him further; he still declined but gave him his blessing.

Absalom now produced his second card. *“If you will not go”* he suggested *“then let my brother Amnon go with us.”* Amnon as heir apparent would then represent his father at the feast. David demurred a bit; he obviously could not see why Amnon should go, but Absalom pressed him and eventually he consented. So Amnon received what amounted to a royal command to proceed with Absalom, accompanied by most of David’s other sons, to the feast at Baal-hazor.

Absalom’s servants, briefed beforehand by their master, fully loyal to him and doubtless equally indignant at the outrage perpetrated upon his sister, waited until the feast had progressed to the point where the wine was flowing freely, the guests not quite sure what was going on, and Amnon himself in a condition of semi-stupor, fell upon Amnon and assassinated him. *“Then all the king’s sons rose, and each mounted his mule and fled”*.

It would seem that in their semi-inebriated state they did not make very good progress, for news of the affair reached Jerusalem before they did. Probably some of their servants, having less opportunity for revelling and carousal, got there first and in their panic asserted that all David’s sons had been slain, to the consternation of David and his court. But the ensuing lamentation was quickly interrupted by David’s nephew Jonadab, a *“man about court”* who seems to have known more about the whole affair than would appear on the surface. He assured the king that Amnon was the only one slain and the rest would certainly come safely home. It had been Absalom’s intention, he explained, to kill Amnon from the very day Amnon had committed the offence. Sure enough, the party arrived at length, by now sufficiently sobered up to realise the enormity of what had happened, to add their quota to the general expressions of grief pervading the royal court.

In the meantime, Absalom had fled for refuge to his father-in-law, the King of Geshur, and there he remained three years. David seems quickly to have got over the death of Amnon, judging by 2 Sam. 13:39, and began to fret at his third son’s continued absence. Later events show that he developed a greater affection for Absalom than any other of his grown-up sons, and now that Amnon was dead may well have begun to think of him as heir to the throne. Of the second son, Chileab, by David’s wife Abigail the Carmelitess, widow of Nabal, nothing whatever is known; it is possible that he died in infancy or early youth. What is obvious is that David now pinned his hopes on Absalom, yet could not see how he could allow him back into the realm without exacting some severe and deserved penalty for his act. It is very possible that others of his sons were putting pressure upon him; with Absalom permanently out of the way the succession would pass to one of them. There is some basis for thinking that of the first six sons, those born at Hebron during the first seven years of the reign, or earlier,

Absalom was the only one of a non-Israelite mother and there might well have been family hostility to him on that account. David evidently wanted to be reconciled to his exiled son but could not find the way.

That way was eventually found by another crafty politician at court, Joab, nephew of David and commander-in-chief of the army. For reasons which do not readily appear in the narrative, it does seem that Joab was more favourably disposed towards Absalom than to David's other sons. He may have had in mind his own position in the framework of the kingdom after the death of David. He therefore was not averse to ingratiating himself with the man who would succeed the king so that any favour he might show Absalom in his time of distress might well be to his own benefit later on. At any rate, perceiving David's dilemma and his longing for reconciliation with his son and perhaps remembering how Nathan had gone to the king with a fictional tale of injustice in order to bring the king to a recognition of his own wrongdoing, Joab concocted a similar scheme.

The story is in 2 Sam. 14. He procured a "wise woman", probably a prophetess, from Tekoah in the highlands of Judah, and sent her to David with a plausible tale of woe and plea for the king's intervention. As a prophetess she would have ready access to the royal presence. Being thus admitted, she made the customary obeisance and voiced the usual plea "Save, O king", to which she got the usual answer "What is your trouble?" and the king composed himself to listen. The story was simple. She was a widow woman left with two sons and a small farm, her only support. The two sons had quarrelled and in the quarrel one of them had been accidentally killed. Now the family relatives were demanding that the guilty brother be handed over to them to be slain in revenge for the deed. So, she said, there would be left to her dead husband no heir and his name blotted out of Israel and she herself left destitute and alone.

The king was sympathetic, he was also not greatly interested. There were always men getting slain in Israel. He saw no harm in granting the old woman's request. "*Go to your house*", he said, "*and I will give orders concerning you.*"

She was not quite satisfied, there was a point to press. "*My lord O king*", she responded "*On me be the guilt my lord the king and on my father's house, let the king and his throne be guiltless*" (v.9 GNB). What she meant was that the king, by agreeing to set aside the customary practice of vengeance against the murderer, could be accused of an injustice, a breach of the social code. She would take the blame, if the king would but protect her son. David did not seem to think the point a very serious one. "*If anyone says anything to you bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again*".

If David thought the interview was over, he was mistaken. There was a more subtle thrust to come "*Please may the king keep the Lord your God in mind so that the avenger of blood may kill no more and my son not be destroyed*". David was getting a little impatient; he could not see where all this was leading and he spoke somewhat hastily, "*As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground*" (NRSV). He motioned with his hand to indicate that the interview was at an end.

The woman stood her ground. "*Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.*" Resignedly, David assented. "*Speak*".

The woman stood erect and looked the king straight in the face, "*Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch that the king does not bring his banished one home again. We must all die, and are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up. But God will not take away a life, he will devise plans so as not to keep an outcast banished forever from his presence.*"

There was a long silence. David realised there was more to the pleas of this supplicant than he had thought. There was a reproof in the woman's words and a summons to act. He had pardoned the woman's mythical son for his crime and promised his protection. He had sworn

to that by the Lord God of Israel. Now he stood convicted, out of his own mouth, of refusing to pardon his own son for the same crime. He was not afraid of the woman's relatives clamouring for the death of her errant son and had told her to bring them to him to be dealt with; yet he was afraid of his own family thirsting for vengeance upon their exiled half-brother. God had forgiven him for his own crime of the murder of Uriah; he had not forgiven Absalom for his murder of Amnon. And above all things, this woman had revealed to him something he had never realised before; God is not really a God of vengeance. He is a God who must and does exact retribution for wrongdoing but with that retribution devises means of giving the wrongdoer an opportunity of reconciliation. *"God will devise plans so as not to keep an outcast banished forever from his presence."*

Therein lies one of the fundamental principles of the Divine Plan. Notwithstanding the grievous sin of man, God has provided that the man cannot be irretrievably lost whilst any hope or chance of repentance and reconciliation remains. Because of sin, man is banished from the Divine presence but God has devised means whereby the banished one can come back, if he will. And the Father stands ready to meet him; the parable of the Prodigal Son tells us that. Perhaps at this point in his life David began to see that there was a higher plane of understanding of God's character than that of a vengeful Deity intent only in the destruction of His enemies and the punishment of offenders against His laws. Perhaps he began to perceive that the One who would one day "rule upon the throne of the Lord with justice and judgment even for ever" would not, could not, partake of the conception of God he himself had nourished all his life. Rather He would be more as he himself had been at the beginning, a shepherd who would "carry the lambs in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young". He looked at the woman still standing silently before him, and his thoughts came back to the present.

*"Tell me"*, he said gently, keen eyes searching the woman's face, *"is the hand of Joab with you in all this?"* She looked at him, realizing that he had seen through her story, and admitted the fact. David nodded thoughtfully, and dismissed her with the assurance she sought. He sat and ruminated a little longer, then summoned an attendant.

*"Command Joab that he attend upon me"* he ordered.

The attendant bowed silently and withdrew. The king was still sitting, wrapped in thought, when his Commander-in-chief strode in. David looked at him speculatively.

*"You know why I have sent for you?"* Joab bowed respectfully.

*"Yes my Lord the king"*.

*"You have engineered this thing. You have shown me my fault."* He paused a moment *"Go to Geshur and bring my son Absalom back to Jerusalem again. Joab bowed again, a light of triumph in his eyes. "This day I know that I have found favour in your sight, my lord the king".* He turned to go; he was arrested by an imperious gesture from David.

*"Let him dwell in his own house in Jerusalem and let him not see my face."* Joab inclined his head slightly in token of mute assent and strode out of the throne room. David listened to his footsteps, clattering over the courtyard and dying away in the distance. He remained a long time thus, along with his thoughts.

And so Absalom came home again.



## 12. High Treason

Two years had passed since Absalom returned from Geshur. He was now reconciled to David and so far as the king was concerned the past was forgotten. At Joab's instigation, Absalom had appeared before the king, received full forgiveness and allowed to resume his former place at court. It is almost certain that David looked upon Absalom as the one to follow him as king. Solomon would be about eight years of age but it is not likely that David was at this time thinking of him as his successor. The original promise retailed to him by Nathan (2 Sam. 7:12-15) was that one of his sons would build the Temple after his own death without stipulating which one it would be. It was only towards the close of his reign that Solomon's name became coupled with the promise. So at the moment it would seem that David was resting content in the feeling that the succession was assured in the person of Absalom. He, at fifty-eight years of age, could look forward to a reasonable term of years of peace and tranquillity as king over the nation before his time should come. But there was to be no peace and tranquillity for David.

Absalom, at twenty-seven years of age, was not taking kindly to the idea of waiting perhaps another twenty years before succeeding to the throne. His history to date shows him to be headstrong, assertive and ruthless. He was only half Israelite. His Amorite blood through his mother had evidently infused something of the warlike qualities of the invincible Geshurites into his nature and he was thirsting for action. Maybe David had looked speculatively at the young boy, Solomon, son of his beloved Bathsheba, and Absalom had intercepted the glance. He had already disposed of one rival for the throne, Amnon; he was not going to risk the appearance of another as this lad grew up to maturity. So once again there was scheming and plotting in the political sphere of David's kingdom.

The conspiracy was carefully planned and very circumspect at first. Absalom surrounded himself with a retinue of chariots and men, calculated to impress the people with his importance and splendour. He probably spent some time driving around Jerusalem and the adjacent countryside until the people became thoroughly accustomed to him and knew him better than any other of the king's sons. Then he formed the habit of stationing himself by the outer entrance to the royal court at the times appointed for litigants and complainants to seek audience of the king for the redress of their wrongs, and intercept them as they passed in, to ascertain the nature of their troubles. Irrespective of the apparent justice or otherwise of the man's case, Absalom would say sympathetically "*See, your matters are good and right, but there is no one deputed of the king to hear you.*" Then, he would lift his eyes to heaven and remark piously "*O that I were made judge in Israel, that every man that has any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice*". Thus did he foster the impression that he was much more concerned with the welfare of the populace than was his father, and in consequence, says the historian, "*Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*"

It might well be that there was some substance in Absalom's claim. David could well have been losing interest in the day-to-day affairs of his people, and the administration of justice in petty affairs becoming increasingly neglected or delegated to negligent minor officials. David was always more a man of war than a man of peace and his almost continual pre-occupation with military affairs, added to his own domestic troubles, might have led him to relegate other matters to the background. The eventual outcome of this particular series of events shows that he had lost much of the earlier enthusiastic allegiance of the people. Absalom may well have judged rightly that this was the time to act and so he commenced by ingratiating himself with the people at large.

So passed four years during which Absalom insinuated himself into the hearts of Israel (2 Sam. 15:7). The AV says "forty years" but this is a palpable error; forty years from this point would have set the event in the middle of the reign of Solomon. The Syriac, Arabic and

Josephus all give four but the Septuagint has forty so the error must be of very old standing in the Hebrew manuscripts. It is likely that the original text was *arba*, four, a singular noun, and that by mistake a copyist changed this to the plural form, *arbaim*, which means forty. Most modern translations now give four. It would seem that Absalom was in no hurry: he intended the groundwork to be well and truly laid. David, apparently, was quite unsuspecting, and feeling that his reconciliation with his son had cleared the way for the future, with no more wars in prospect, he probably congratulated himself that life would from then on be serene and peaceful.

At the end of the four years Absalom made his bid. He first went to his father with a plausible tale of a vow he had made while exiled in Geshur to the effect that if the Lord brought him back to Jerusalem he would serve the Lord and would ratify his vow in Hebron. This was sacred as the burial place of Abraham and the patriarchs, and where the kingdom of David was first instituted. Now he wanted permission to go to Hebron and there make formal acknowledgement of his conversion before the Lord.

David was, apparently, pleased. It would seem that Absalom had not heretofore made any profession of allegiance to the God of Israel; his alien descent was probably partly accountable for this but there does seem to have been some lack on David's part in the early training of his sons. But he now assented, very readily, and Absalom went out from his presence well satisfied with progress so far. David was blissfully unaware that he was being grossly deceived for the second time by his turbulent son.

The conspiracy had been well organized. Whilst Absalom was on his way to Hebron twenty miles away; messengers were speeding to the northern ten tribes telling them to accept and declare Absalom as king in place of his father, so soon as they heard the trumpets sound. It is plain that he had supporters posted in every part of the country waiting. Directly he arrived in Hebron the trumpeters there sounded their trumpets and the peal was taken up by one and another until it reached the most northerly bounds of the kingdom. The bulk of support for Absalom was clearly among the ten tribes, previously supporters of Saul. The cleavage between the ten tribes and the two, Judah and Benjamin which became a reality at the death of Solomon, fifty years later, was already in evidence now during the latter part of David's reign. His hold on the people was not so strong as is often supposed. Now a considerable proportion of the population was prepared to follow Absalom; *"the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom"* (15:12).

Too late, David found out what was going on and realised that he had lost the allegiance of his people. It must have been a bitter moment. All that he had suffered and endured and achieved since his youth was gone as it were in a moment. In the past his enemies had been aliens of other races and he had gone out against them with the sword, and with the sword he had conquered them and slain them. Now his enemy was his own son; he could not lift his sword against his own son.

Absalom, he knew, would soon be coming to Jerusalem to assert his rulership, and the people in large measure were behind him. There was only one course open if he was to avoid open conflict; an ignominious flight out of the country without delay, thus leaving the field clear for the usurper.

The pitiful journey of David with his principal officers of State, his palace retinue and a considerable body of loyal warriors is strangely out of accord with the known martial character and strategic skill of Israel's most famous warrior king. They crossed the Jordan and went on sixty miles to Mahanaim in Gilead, where he would be out of the immediate reach of his rebellious son. This part of the narrative, as told in 2 Samuel 15-17, has all the signs of panic in the face of an overpowering threat. There is an anxious desire to get away from the enemy at any cost irrespective of the consequences for those left behind. This is the first occasion in David's reign when he is depicted retreating before the enemy. The contrast



is so great that one is compelled to look below the surface of the account to discern the underlying motive. It could not be cowardice; it could not be lack of confidence in his own ability to hold his own and gain the victory if it came to a fight; David's whole past history militates against that conclusion. David's flight to Mahanaim must have been dictated by some other vital consideration.

Did his mind, at this crisis in his career, go back to the early days of his flight from Saul, and his rigid refusal to accept the opportunities he had to encompass Saul's death, insisting that the Lord would give him the kingdom in his own due time? Did he feel that the battle was not his, but the Lord's, and he would do well to remove himself out of the land in peace and wait for the Lord to intervene in His own way? As he left the city behind him on his way to the Jordan he did say to Zadok the priest (15:25). *"If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord he will bring me again, and show me both it (the city) and his habitation"*. It does look as though David left the city, not through fear, but in faith that the Lord would direct the issue and shape his future. It might well be that David was now accepting these successive disasters in his life as just retribution for his crime of the past and was saying, as did Joab some years before him, *"May the Lord do what seems good to him"*. He must have reflected, grimly, as he entered the little town of Mahanaim in Gilead, where he and his were to find refuge, that this was the place where Saul's son Ish-bosheth had set up court to keep out of the reach of David some thirty years before. Now it was David who was the fugitive, awaiting his Lord's good pleasure.

In the meantime Absalom had entered Jerusalem and declared himself king, accompanied by Ahithophel the Gilonite. On the surface this seems strange. Ahithophel was David's chief counsellor, a sort of "Prime Minister" to the nation, high in office and highly esteemed. One would have thought that he, like all the other Ministers of State, would have accompanied David into exile, but here, without explanation, he is revealed as siding with Absalom. A comparison of various scattered texts in Samuel and Chronicles yields the clue. Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba. His son Eliam, her father, was one of the stalwarts who had endured the wilderness hardships with David, as had Uriah, in the days of Saul's enmity. It looks very much as though Ahithophel ended his friendship with David over the affair with his granddaughter and espoused the cause of Absalom. As the narrative unfolds it is clear that he intended the death of David. It is indicated in 16:23 that his advice, both in the days of David and now of Absalom was so highly regarded that it was *"as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God"*. Absalom was probably congratulating himself upon obtaining such a useful adherent to his cause.

There was another apparent convert, Hushai the Archite, another close friend of David, who suddenly appeared at Jerusalem, professing allegiance. *"God save the king; God save the king"* he exclaimed as he came before him. Absalom was more than a little suspicious of this one; he had not the same excuse for breaking with David as had Ahithophel, and he too had been high in honour and a close adviser of the king. *"Is this your loyalty to your friend?"* he queried. *"Why did you not go with your friend?"* "No" responded Hushai *"but the one whom the Lord and this people and all the Israelites have chosen, his I will be and with him remain ... Just as I have served your father, so I will serve you."* Absalom was satisfied; he would not have been so satisfied had he known that Hushai was professing allegiance in order to acquire details of Absalom's intentions and movements so that he could pass them on to David.

So far, so good. Absalom was in possession of the palace at Jerusalem and surrounded by an appreciable company of supporters. But an element of uncertainty seems to have pervaded the assembly. He, and they, were not quite sure what to do next. The would-be king was dubious as to his next move. He appealed to Ahithophel for advice, and that worthy, an experienced politician thirsting for personal revenge, knew just what the first move ought to be so that an irreparable breach between Absalom and his father might be created. He knew that in his flight, David had left behind his ten concubines to "keep the house", and here they

were in the palace. *“Go in to your father’s concubines, the ones he has left to look after the house, and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father; and the hands of all that are with you will be strengthened”*. So they erected an open pavilion on the roof of the palace in the sight of all Israel, and David, when he heard of the deed, must have remembered the prediction of Nathan in ch. 12:11 and realised that the judgments of the Lord were not finished yet.

But this was only part of Ahithophel’s revenge. He now had the ear of Absalom and outlined the scheme he had formulated to give himself the satisfaction of slaying David. *“Let me choose and take twelve thousand men”* he suggested *“and I will pursue after David tonight and come upon him when he is weary and weak. I will smite the king only and bring back all the people who are with him so that your kingship may be established without loss of any other life”*. What fiendish plot he had devised to get access to David and assassinate him before anyone could interfere no one knows, but he evidently felt he could do it and so satisfy his personal enmity over the matter of Bathsheba.

The plot won general approval, but Absalom was still irresolute. The plan seemed too simple to be workable. He knew his father; he was not at all sure that it would succeed. *“Call Hushai the Archite”* he ordered *“and let us hear what he has to say”*. So Hushai came in and listened impassively while the plan was outlined. He pretended to be thinking deeply, while all present waited in silence. At last, with a friendly glance at Ahithophel, he spoke. *“The counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good at this time”*. What he meant by the last few words was that while Ahithophel’s advice was normally wise and beyond reproach, in this particular instance his judgment was at fault; he had not given due weight to several important considerations. *“You know your father and his men”* he said to Absalom *“that they are mighty in battle, and furious at being exiled out of their land. As soon as there is a conflict some of your men will be slain and immediately the word will go round that there is a slaughter among the men that follow Absalom. With the people’s knowledge of your father’s prowess there will be a weakening of their loyalty to you”*. He paused and looked round the circle of faces, listening intently. He resumed *“My advice is that you do not act precipitately, but that you gather together all the fighting men in Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, an invincible host, and that you then lead the army in your own person. So you will overwhelm him and his followers by sheer force of numbers, and of him and all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one”*.

Hushai looked around him again and saw in the eyes of his hearers what he wanted to see and expected to see. He knew that the supporters of Absalom were mainly from the ten tribes of the north while those who had accompanied David in his flight were principally of his own tribe, Judah. These men surrounding Absalom were not at all keen upon an outcome that would bring men of Judah back to Jerusalem to compete for places of favour around the new king’s person. Much better to adopt Hushai’s suggestion of eliminating them and ending the Judean influence in the royal court. The antipathy even then existing between the Ten Tribes and the Two rendered the idea of a massive showdown an appealing one. Hushai’s plan was vociferously endorsed by Absalom and his supporters as the better of the two. Then Hushai turned aside that no one might perceive the gleam of triumph in his eyes. He knew, none better, that there could be only one end to a battle led on one side by the hardened campaigner, David, and on the other by an untried fledgling like Absalom.

Ahithophel knew that also. The narrative (17:23) says that when he saw that his advice was not to be followed, he saddled his ass, went home to his own town, put his affairs in order, and hanged himself. He was not going to be there when David returned in triumph. His ploy had failed, and he knew it.

Hushai left the palace so soon as he could without arousing suspicion, for there was much to be done. David and his company had not yet crossed the Jordan on their way to Mahanaim.

For the present they were safe while Absalom sent to collect all the fighting men of Israel; that much had been attained by Hushai in effecting the acceptance of his suggestion, but David now had to be advised of progress. Hushai went to Zadok and Abiathar, the twin High Priests, who, themselves loyal to David, had remained in the city under cover of discharging their sacred office. They passed the message to their young sons, and they in turn set out to find David and tell him the outcome of Hushai's work and what to expect from Absalom. By the following morning David and his forces were across Jordan and well on the way to Mahanaim, which they must have reached after two or three days' journeying. Upon arrival he immediately began to dispense his men for the ensuing battle. It would seem that his apparent former willingness to leave the outcome in the Lord's hands had rather quickly evaporated when faced with his enemies. Quite likely his commander-in-chief Joab pressed him into it. Joab knew only one language, the language of armed combat, and as a man of Judah himself, he was David's nephew, he was not going to allow men of Israel to gain the ascendancy.

Absalom and his army crossed Jordan into Gilead and before long battle was joined. The issue was not long in doubt. David's hardened veterans made short work of their northern countrymen and it was not long before the latter were in full flight. David had foreseen the outcome and he had ordered Joab and his other leaders to take care that Absalom himself should come to no harm. Despite his son's treason and designs against his own life, he still loved him and was in the mood to forgive him all that he had done. But Absalom, riding a mule in frantic flight to get away, was caught in some way by his head, or perhaps by his luxurious long hair, in the boughs of a great tree in the forest, and hung there, unable to free himself. Joab, apprised of the fact, and in crass defiance of the king's wishes, took some of his men and killed Absalom as he hung there helpless. He had no intention of risking David's soft-heartedness paving the way for perhaps a second rebellion of this nature and what he did was probably dictated by self-interest as much as anything else. Absalom had appointed Joab's cousin Amasa to command the army in his place and he was not going to risk the loss of that position when all was over.

It now remained to acquaint David with the result of the battle and of the death of his son. David had remained at Mahanaim with one section of the force to defend the city; Joab and his men were in the plains of Gilead near Jordan twenty miles away. Two runners were sent to convey the news. The first gave his message *"Blessed be the Lord your God; who has delivered up the men who raised up their hand against my lord, the king"*. David received the welcome news with equanimity but with one overpowering anxiety. He leaned forward. *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* The runner gave an evasive reply; he knew not how to tell the king the truth, and then the second runner arrived. *"Good tidings for my lord the King, for the Lord has vindicated you this day delivering you from the power of all who rose up against you"*. With increasing apprehension came the question again *"Is it well with the young man Absalom?"* The runner looked round at the circle of strained faces, then again at the king, and replied in a lower tone of voice *"May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise to do you harm be like that young man"*.

At those words the king broke down. Rising from his seat, he made his way blindly through the throng towards his own room and as he went they heard his voice rising high in lamentation *"O my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom. Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*



### 13. Declining Days

Joab the commander-in-chief strode out of the conference tent where his officers and the officials of David's court had been sitting in conclave. He began to make his way with purposeful steps towards the house in which David had shut himself up to bemoan the death of his favourite son, Absalom. The warriors of Judah, standing and sitting about in groups watched him go in silence. There was an air of gloom and despondency throughout the camp. Joab glanced morosely at some of them as he walked past. These men had followed David loyally into exile and had fought like tigers to defend him from his rebellious son Absalom and the hosts of Israel. They had won the day, the northern tribes' forces were defeated and dispersed, Absalom their leader was dead and the threat to David's kingship removed. The king could go back to Jerusalem and resume his reign, and everything would be as it was before. The disgrace of their ignominious flight from the capital would be wiped out by the triumph and glory of their return. They would bring back their king with rejoicing to place him once again upon the throne of the Lord. But now, most unaccountably, all this rosy anticipation had vanished. So far from setting himself at the head of his victorious warriors to lead a triumphal march to Jerusalem, he was sitting in a darkened room away from them all weeping and lamenting his lost son. They could hear his voice now, penetrating the closed door. "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son." They looked at each other as men ashamed and uncertain, and watched their leader as he strode up to the door, opened it and went in.

David looked up, cold hostility in his eyes as he recognised his visitor. He made to speak, but Joab waved him peremptorily to silence. "This day" declared the old soldier bluntly "you have put to shame all your loyal servants who have saved your life. You love your enemies and hate your friends. You have shown this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived and all we had died this day, then it had pleased you well". He looked down at the recumbent figure of the man he had served so loyally though unscrupulously, contempt showing on his face. "*Now therefore arise, go out and speak kindly to your servants; for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night; and this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come upon you from your youth until now.*" (2 Samuel 19:7 RSV).

There seems little doubt that from this time, about six years from the end of his reign, David was losing his hold over the nation. More than forty years had passed since the young women of Israel had eulogized his victorious return from battle with dances and the song "*Saul has slain his thousands but David his ten thousands*". The virile, handsome youth they had idolized had become a remote and somewhat embittered old man indulgent towards his close friends but distant from the mass of his people. There are indications too, that at this period of his life his physical powers were failing. In 2 Samuel 18 and 21 there are instances where the men of Israel dissuaded him from going into battle with them on this score. Chapter 21:15-17 alludes to an incident when David, in battle with the Philistines, would have been killed had not his nephew Abishai come to his aid and rescued him, after which David went out to battle no more. Joab's warning therefore was no empty threat; David must be made to realise that his hold on the throne was by no means so secure as he imagined, and the sooner he took active control of the situation the better.

So David bestirred himself and appeared once more at the head of his supporters. They were still at Mahanaim, three days' journey from Jerusalem and even although Absalom was dead anything could be happening there while the king was missing. Joab realised that even if David did not see the danger, he must get the king back to Jerusalem and firmly in control before the pro-Israel and anti-Judah influences in the nation had found another figure among David's remaining sons to set up as king. So preparations for the return went on apace.

Perhaps he need not have worried. There is some ambiguity about the precise order of events at this time as related in 2 Sam. 19 but it does seem that with the death of Absalom there was considerable uncertainty and perhaps some apprehension among the northern tribes as to the next move. They were painfully aware that they, not Judah, had espoused the rebellion of Absalom and now he was dead and the rebellion had failed. What kind of treatment could they expect when David returned in triumph, as return he must? Perhaps the wisest course would be to take the initiative in bringing him back! *“Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle.”* they said. ‘David saved us out of the hand of the Philistines in time gone by.’ *“Why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?”* There must have been ambassadors sent to David at Mahanaim to sound out his attitude, for the next we hear in 2 Sam 19 is David’s demand of the men of Judah back at Jerusalem for an explanation in their tardiness in welcoming him back and so giving the advantage to the northern tribes. *“Why are they last to welcome back the King?”* So the situation developed into an undignified scramble to be the first at Jordan to welcome the king back and to escort him to Jerusalem, a contest which was won by the men of Judah, who had the advantage of being nearer the scene to start with. But it was a contest that only served further to embitter relations between the Ten Tribes and the Two, leading eventually to the separation at the death of Solomon some forty five years later.

A casual allusion in 2 Sam 19:13 throws a flood of light upon the political manoeuvrings of the time and not particularly to David’s credit either. He sent a message to the men of Judah still at Jerusalem appointing Amasa, son of his sister Abigail and therefore cousin to Joab, to be commander in chief of the armed forces in the place of Joab. Amasa had espoused the cause of Absalom and was, therefore, one of the rebels; in thus condoning his disloyalty and appointing him to this high office, David was probably attempting to placate the pro-Absalom faction and encourage their future loyalty to him. It is also probable that he was trying by this means to get rid of Joab, whom he must have suspected, if he did not have positive knowledge, of being responsible for Absalom’s death — as indeed he was, recorded in 2 Samuel 18. He speedily found out that his judgment was at fault again, Joab was not the kind of man to take such an insult lying down and the upshot in the long run was more trouble for David.

Almost immediately the trouble came. A fierce controversy arose between the “men of Israel” and “the men of Judah” — probably the leaders and notables of the various tribes — over the action of Judah in bringing back and re-installing David as king without giving opportunity for the participation of the ten northern tribes. Here was the old rivalry springing up again in full force. According to 2 Samuel 20 the lead in this latest insurrection was taken by one Sheba, a Benjamite, a member of Saul’s own tribe. He raised the standard of revolt. *“We have no part in David”* he cried *“neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel.”* And Judah remained loyal to David. Once again the kingdom was divided.

David acted. He summoned Amasa, his new commander-in-chief, and instructed him to assemble the warriors of Judah and present himself with them within three days. It looks as though he was preparing for a full-scale punitive expedition. Amasa disappeared to execute his commission and the three days passed. There was no sign of Amasa or his men. David was getting edgy. He summoned Abishai, Joab’s younger brother, hitherto not in the forefront of affairs but evidently of some note in the army, instructing him to go in pursuit of Sheba before he could entrench himself in the strongholds of northern Israel. His quarrel with Joab evidently prohibited him from summoning that worthy, even although he was the most experienced tactician of them all. Somehow or other, by the time Abishai had reached Gibeon a few miles north of Jerusalem, he found himself teaming up with Amasa and his men. Amasa apparently had gone into action without the formality of reporting to David first as the latter had instructed.

Now another factor came in to complicate the situation. Joab, that hardened and utterly ruthless old campaigner, although out of office and in disgrace, turned up with his own men and attached himself to the pursuers. It is evident that each of these mutually jealous and competing army leaders held a loyalty of their own men superior even to the loyalty of those men to David. Joab's men were still following him and now in this latest tussle with the northern tribes it was Joab they looked to as their leader and he knew it. So three of David's chief men, each with his own band of adherents, joined in pursuit of the rebel Sheba.

But Joab had another score to settle first. He must have followed the whole process very closely and knew just when to introduce himself into the picture. Chapter 20 tells the story. Joab caught up with Amasa at a point in the pursuit when it seems they were temporarily separated from the rest. He greeted his cousin in a friendly voice and with a sword in his left hand hidden behind his back. Amasa responded to the greeting: taken for a moment off his guard, he was suddenly transfixed by Joab's sword and fell to the ground a dying man. First, Abner; then, Absalom; now, Amasa. Joab allowed no man to stand in the way of his ambition, and the fact that his latest victim was his own cousin and David's nephew made no difference.

So Amasa died, but the pursuit continued, by common consent under the leadership of Joab. No better guarantee of success could be given. It was not long before Joab had got Sheba at bay in a walled town in the extreme north of the country and with his usual thoroughness he proceeded to tear down the walls in order to capture his quarry. Responding to an appeal from a "wise woman", a prophetess, he promised to spare the city if Sheba was given up, whereby the citizens promptly cut off Sheba's head and threw it to Joab over the wall. So the insurrection collapsed and Joab returned in triumph to Jerusalem and to David.

What David thought about all this is not recorded. Right at the beginning of his reign, at the time of the murder of Abner, he had complained that the sons of Zeruiah — Joab, Abishai and Asahel, sons of David's sister Zeruiah — were "too hard" for him, and he, although king, was weak in their presence. They seem to have been a turbulent family whose one redeeming feature was their utter loyalty to David himself. It looks as though at this time, following the death of Amasa, David resigned himself to the inevitable and allowed Joab to resume command of the army. There was probably no one else immediately available for the position, and with Joab's reputation, no volunteers.

Once again, with all enemies apparently defeated, David took his place on the throne of the Lord at Jerusalem. It was a rather insecure throne. He must have been conscious that he had lost the allegiance of the major part of Israel; it was probably upon the fighting men of his own clan, of Judah, that he had to rely in the main. Much of the glory and euphoria of the early part of his reign had passed away. For the first time there had emerged among the people of the Lord a division into two classes, the rich and the poor. Under Saul they had been a pastoral people where opportunities for the accumulation of wealth did not exist. Under David, largely in consequence of his alliance with Hiram king of Tyre and his people, they had been introduced to the refinements and luxuries of what we would today call the industrialized society. Merchants and manufacturers flourished; ornate buildings were erected, then filled with luxurious embellishments. Men left, or were enticed from their farms to work for other men who employed them on these high flown schemes. A new era was opened which Solomon brought to its peak of magnificence. The words of the Lord to Samuel when Israel first asked for a king had become fearfully true. *"He will take your sons, and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands, and commanders over fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war, and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks, and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and your vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants. He will*

*take your menservants and your maidservants and the best of your cattle and your asses and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves ...”* (1 Sam. 8:11-18). All of this, and more, was realised by Israel under the rule of David and the kings who succeeded him, just as it has been realised by men of many nations in all the generations since. And so there was discontent throughout the land.

Then came famine. It is a little difficult to determine the precise sequence of the remaining events in David’s life as narrated in 2 Sam. 21-24. It is fairly obvious that chapters 22 and 23 come from an earlier stage of his life. In any case they add nothing to the story, only repetitions of some of his Psalms and lists of the names of the mighty men of his early life in the wilderness. It does seem though that the famine came soon after the successful crushing of the rebellion of Sheba. It might well be that Nature was not altogether to blame. Since about the thirteenth year of David’s reign for something like a period of twenty years the nation had been practically continuously engaged in war and conflict, either with external foes like the Ammonites or Philistines or the internal rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. Only about seven years out of that twenty were free from war. In those circumstances it would not be surprising if the land was progressively neglected, with many of the men away fighting, so that at last it refused to yield its crops and famine resulted. Chapter 21 opens at a point where the famine had lasted three years and the people were reduced to desperate straits and David went to the Lord to find out what was wrong and what could be done about it.

The Lord’s reply, according to the narrator, was short and to the point. The famine had come from his hand as reprisal for Saul’s slaughter of the Gibeonites half a century previously. The Gibeonites were one of the native peoples encountered by Joshua when he invaded the land. In order to avoid the fate of the other conquered tribes, they secured a treaty of toleration by Joshua by means of a trick (Joshua 9) whereby they were guaranteed safety and life; so they remained in the midst of Israel into the days of the kings. This “slaughter of the Gibeonites” is nowhere referred to in the Old Testament and nothing is known of what Saul did or his motive and it is surmised that in his early zeal for the purity of Israel he tried to exterminate the Gibeonites to cleanse the land. If so, he failed, for here in David’s time there were still the descendants of the Gibeonites in Gibeon. David sent for them and asked them what he should do to pacify them and satisfy the Lord so that the famine could be lifted. Their reply was that David should hand over seven of Saul’s male descendants for them to ‘hang up’, which meant impalement or crucifixion, *“before the Lord in Gibeah”*. David selected the five sons of Merab, the eldest daughter of Saul (2 Sam. 21:8 says “Michal”, the younger, one of David’s wives, but this is an obvious scribal error for Merab, who was the one married to Adriel) and two sons of Saul by his concubine Rizpah. He handed them over apparently without compunction to suffer this appalling fate. *“And after that”* says the narrator in 2 Sam. 21:14 *“God heeded supplications for the land”*.

To imagine that the Lord would in fact devise such fiendish treatment of inoffensive men for a crime half a century old must denote a very limited view of the Divine character. We may be sure that, whoever originated the answer to David’s question, it was not the Lord. There is more below the surface of this story than appears above.

The narrative says that David *“enquired of the Lord”* (21:1). Though king, he could not go to the Lord direct; he must enquire through the High Priest who would then ascertain the Divine reply by means of the mysterious (and still little understood) “Urim and Thummin”. There were two High Priests at the time. Zadok of the line of Eleazar was at Gibeah where the Tabernacle stood with the Brazen Altar. Abiathar of the line of Ithamar was at Jerusalem ministering before the Ark of the Covenant in the “tent” which David had erected for it. David would obviously go to Abiathar whose office it was to enquire before the Ark. And Abiathar himself had a grudge against Saul who had sent warriors to slay his father

Ahimelech, the serving High Priest, his sons and the entire priesthood, Abiathar alone escaping. Is it possible that Abiathar seized this opportunity to have his revenge on the house of the man who had all but extirpated his own father's house? It would seem a lot more feasible to pin the responsibility for this savage deed on the creature rather than the Creator.

So the condemned men went to their fate and hung on stakes *"before the Lord"*, that is in honour of the Lord, probably in front of the Tabernacle that was at Gibeah. It is not likely that the Lord felt honoured. More likely He pitied His people for their hardness of heart and failure to understand His ways. He must have looked with greater tenderness upon the unhappy Rizpah, who sat by those stakes day and night for six months, from the beginning of harvest to the time of the winter rains, keeping the vultures and carrion beasts away from the bodies. When David heard about that he did at least have the decency to have the remains taken away and given decent burial. Only after that was done is it said that God *"heeded supplication for the land"*. The famine continued throughout that six months, which looks as though God did not acknowledge or accept the sacrifice after all. It may be then that it was the woman Rizpah, and not David, who ended the famine. Perhaps He did for her what He would not do for the man of blood.

#### 14. Reconciliation

The sands were running out fast. Only about three years remained for Israel's most famous king. He had achieved tolerable security from external enemies for his people and could bequeath a safe and reasonably prosperous kingdom to his successor. But there were enemies within the nation and he knew that after his death the destined ruler, his young son, Solomon, still less than twenty years of age, would need all his wisdom and sagacity to maintain his kingship. All that came out in his final charge to Solomon when he felt the shades of death closing round him.

In the meantime the old flair for organizing the affairs of the nation asserted itself. His military prowess was spent; no longer did he possess the physical strength to go out at the head of his armies to battle; in any case there were no longer any enemies, to fight. Israel had earned from the surrounding nations that healthy respect for her fighting qualities that never left her afterwards — and remains to this day in this modern world. David had time to think of other matters and other ambitions having to do with the internal affairs of Israel, and more importantly, its religious condition before God.

Perhaps this is why he determined to take a census of the nation. 2 Sam. 24 and 1 Chron. 21 both tell how he ordered Joab to institute and conduct a comprehensive numbering of the people. He wanted to know just how many subjects he had and Joab was to investigate and report. Joab was appalled. *"May the Lord multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?"* (1 Chron. 21:3)

There was always a prejudice in ancient times against the counting of peoples. It was partially based upon the superstitious idea that if the powers of darkness knew just how many people were involved in men's opposition to them their strategy could be better directed to obtaining the victory. There was also the feeling that if the Lord was fighting for them their number was of no consequence, and therefore to take a census of this nature implied a lack of faith and would bring Divine censure upon them. So Joab made his protest.

David took no notice. Joab was told to obey and summarily dismissed from the king's presence to commence the discharge of his commission. 1 Chronicles says that it was Satan who moved David to undertake this census whereas 2 Samuel declares that *"the anger of the Lord was burned against Israel and he incited David against them saying. Go and take a census*



*of Israel and Judah*". The probable explanation of this apparent contradiction is that the word rendered "Satan" in 1 Chron. 21:1 means "an adversary" (the Hebrew word for "adversary" is "*satan*"). Unless the context specifically demands the application of the term to the malevolent evil spirit popularly known as Satan, the term adversary should be used. 1 Chron. 21:1 should read "*An adversary stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel*". The combined import of the two passages then would be that some person unknown instigated the thought in David's mind to do this thing.

It certainly was not the Lord. It is quite illogical to think that if this action was displeasing to the Lord, and merited and received Divine retribution in consequence, it would have been suggested and inspired by the Lord in the first place. The action was inspired by man. The next question is, what was its purpose? Whatever the purpose? it was something which elicited Divine disapproval.

*"The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel"* (2 Sam. 24:1) Note, not against David at this juncture, but against the nation generally. This can mean only one thing, that the nation was passing through one of its periodic times of apostasy, and consequently under the terms of the Mosaic Covenant was due for chastisement. If the occasion of the census became the means of chastisement, so be it. The Lord uses all kinds of agents to execute His purpose.

But why should the Lord be displeased at David's action in this matter. Says 1 Chron. 21:7. "*God was displeased with this thing*". There is nothing immoral in counting heads, no prohibition in the Mosaic Law; in fact God commanded both Moses and Joshua on two notable occasions to do this very thing. The element of evil must, therefore, have been not in the action itself but in the motive which inspired the action. Why did David, after nearly forty years of kingship, suddenly develop or had instilled into him this sudden passion for ascertaining the number of his people. He had never indicated any such desire before. What element was present in his reign at this time which was not there before?

One activity, and that a most noteworthy activity, did come to its culminating point at this period of David's reign. That activity was the collecting together of the materials and the preparation for the erection of the magnificent Temple that he had planned. But the Lord told him it would be built, not by him, but by his son Solomon, for he had been a man of blood, and that great Temple was to be a house of peace. The rather confused and disjointed narrative in 1 Chron. 22 to 28 gives an account of David's actions at this time. It would almost seem as if he sensed his approaching demise and was anxious to leave everything in order and readiness before his decease. There was a great coming and going between the land of Israel and that of Tyre, from which had to be obtained many cedars of Lebanon, floated down the coast from Tyre to Joppa and then hauled forty miles up the mountains, to Jerusalem. There was a great deal of quarrying of limestone from the Judean hills and its shaping by masons into large stone blocks; the casting and fabrication of gold and silver and copper into the ornamentation and furnishing of the building, and a great deal besides. All this required men, teams of labourers and foresters and hauliers and craftsmen toiling in the forests, quarries and factories, to give substance to this creation of David's ambition, to be the crowning glory of his reign. Those chapters in Chronicles, written long after the events they record, tell of the gathering of thousands of workers together to perform all kinds of tasks and the appointment over them of controllers, supervisors, taskmasters, to see that the work ordained was duly and expeditiously executed. When one thinks of the glory of David and Solomon's achievement in that magnificent Temple, rated by the ancients as one of the seven wonders of the world, one is apt not to realise the cost of it all in terms of toil and sweat and human suffering and death. "*There are workmen with you in abundance*" said David to his son. The various categories of workers is catalogued in a meticulous manner down to those who were allocated to "*do the work of the ground for tillage*". These were the growers of crops and fruits and keepers of herds and beasts of burden, apparently to feed and serve the hosts of manual

workers engaged in this great project. All seem to indicate that David conceived and put into execution a comprehensive project for the regimentation and virtual harnessing of the entire nation for the completion of his great project.

Was it for that purpose he ordered the census, that he might ascertain the extent of his manpower resources, that the work might be planned accordingly, that every man in Israel might be assigned his place and directed to work therein? That at least could suggest a logical reason for David's otherwise rather incomprehensible action in sending Joab and his men to number all Israel and bring the results back to him. Suppose then that this was the reason; why should the Lord be "displeased with this thing" to the extent that He sent a pestilence upon Israel? Was not the Temple to be for His honour and was not the purpose that He might be magnified among all nations. Surely all this lavish display of earthly wealth and untiring human effort to His honour could be nothing but pleasing to him?

Perhaps not; perhaps the Lord looked beyond and underneath all this frenzied and much-proclaimed activity, and saw that all was not right, either with David or with his people. *"The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool"* He said much later on to Isaiah, *"Where is the house that you build me, and where is the place of my rest?"* All these things His own hand had made at the beginning, and He derived no particular joy from this great edifice, however magnificent, unless it was a spontaneous expression of the love and devotion and loyalty of His chosen people, and that, the narrative clearly implies, it was not. A lot is said in Chronicles about the willingness of the leaders of the nation giving of their wealth to assist in the compilation of the treasure of which the Temple was built; nothing about the lower orders who had to undertake the hard work. The implication is that they were just drafted into the service at the king's behest and that was that. When Moses built the Tabernacle in the wilderness the Lord's instruction was that each man and woman of Israel was to bring "of his own voluntary will" that which he or she could contribute to the achievement of that work. The people then were fired with an enthusiasm for, and a loyalty to, God and it was that spirit which the Lord honoured and accepted. Things were not the same in the days of David. The king was intent upon a lasting monument to the glory of his reign; that to him was synonymous with the glory of God, but there is no guarantee that the Lord also saw it that way. The notables and politicians and leaders of the nation comprised a rabble of plotters and counter-plotters each ever on the alert to advance his personal interests and ambitions at whatever cost in injustice and suffering to others, even to the extent of murder. The people in general, despite David's own unflinching loyalty to his God and his example, were themselves, retrogressing back into the idolatry from which Samuel had rescued them a century before. We know that, from the statement in 2 Sam 24:11 *"And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel."* These words always mean the same thing. The people had apostatized from the Lord, repudiated the Covenant and turned again to idols. So the penalty of the broken Covenant had to come upon them as it had done so many times before. How could the Lord God of Israel receive and bless the offering of such a Temple to His glory at a time when the hearts of His people were so far from Him?

Twenty-five years earlier David had conceived this scheme of a magnificent Temple to the Lord to supersede the existing Tabernacle constructed by Moses (2 Sam. 7; 1 Chron. 17). On that occasion God had sent the prophet Nathan to tell him, in short, that He did not want such a house and that He was quite content to dwell with His people within the curtains of the Tabernacle. What was more important, Nathan went on to tell David, was that the Lord Himself would build David a house, a royal dynasty, that would culminate in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. He would be the King of all the earth, in the Millennial Day of man's redemption, ruling as a greater David to all eternity. That, to the Lord, was a much more important thing than the erection of a literal building upon earth which must inevitably, with the passage of time, wax old and vanish away, as in fact it did at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers less than four centuries later. Now, at the end of his reign, David had revived

the idea, doubtless believing that the Lord's promises regarding the glory of his successor Solomon whilst he maintained Israel's loyalty to God would incline him this time to accept the proposition and the offering.

So the pestilence which the Lord allowed to come upon Israel might well be regarded as a joint judgment upon David for his ambition and upon the people for their idolatry. It did at least have the effect of causing David to do what he ought to have done at the first, come before the Lord in humility and with sacrificial offering to ask the Lord's blessing and guidance on his project.

David, busy with his planning, the result of Joab's census before him, received a visitor, the prophet Gad. Gad was an old man by now; he had adventured with David since the early days when Saul was king and been with him in the dark days of David's exile in the wilderness. He was probably one of the very few men privileged to "speak his mind" to the king. (It is thought that Gad was the author of the narrative appearing as 1 Sam. 25 to 2 Sam. 9). Now he appeared in the royal presence with a message from the Lord.

The message, as usual, was uncompromising. David had sinned; he must accept the consequences. He had the choice of three options. Three years' famine, three months' invasion of the land by hostile enemies, or three days' pestilence decimating the people. Gad faced his sovereign, "*Choose one of them*". "*I have sinned*" said David dejectedly, "*I have done very foolishly. Let me now fall into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man*" (RSV). The country had just survived three years of famine; he did not want any more of that. He was in no mood, even had he been physically capable, to lead his armies out against an invading host. Three days' pestilence would soon be over and the loss of life probably least of the three alternatives. "*So the Lord sent pestilence upon Israel... and there died of the people about seventy thousand men*" (2 Sam. 24:15).

One might query the justice of the Lord inflicting death by pestilence upon seventy thousand Israelites as retribution for David's fault. It might not have been that way at all. It might well be that what the Lord did do was to restrain famine and invasion which was already poised to strike and allowed the onset of a pestilence which was on the way anyway. If all related factors are taken into account the position was that because Israel generally was in a state of apostasy (2 Sam. 24:7) all these things were due to come, irrespective of David's particular fault at this moment. Was the moral behind this happening the fact that had Israel been righteous and David without fault, none of these things would have smitten Israel? What the Lord did was to accept David's plea and allow only the lightest of the three natural disasters to fall upon the people as a kind of combined retribution for their own apostasy and the lack of real piety in David and to restrain the other two.

David's repentance was sincere, and his repentance was accepted. The prophet Gad came again to him and told him to erect an altar at the spot where the pestilence was stayed, on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. There he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made his peace with God. There, perhaps, at last, his life was cleansed from all arrogance and pride, ruthlessness and blood-guiltiness, leaving only the man of God who fifty years earlier had been described as a "man after God's own heart". Here the sterling faith and tenacious loyalty of the shepherd lad who faced the unbelieving Philistine with one small stone taken from the brook came to the top. He was once again God's man, a fitting type of the One who is to take His place on the throne of David, ruling for ever and ever.

It must have been so, for that piece of land on the top of Mount Moriah where David built his altar and made his reverent offerings to the Lord became hallowed for all time when Solomon not many years later built there the great Temple. That had been David's own ambition to build but which he had been forbidden so to do. That spot was to be famed ever after as the meeting place between God and Israel throughout the period of the Kings, a symbol of the Divine presence with His people, thus revered through the centuries to our own

time. It is entered also in the annals of Heaven as the place where at last the often wayward and errant man whom God, who never makes a mistake, had chosen at the first, became fully and finally reconciled to the One who had never really let him go. So for the few remaining years of his life, David entered into an “afterward of peace”.

In that, David is a true symbol of the course of mankind. He was chosen and decreed by God to be capable of great things, finding his destiny through dark and devious ways of stumbling and error, of selfishness and heedlessness, of outright violation of the laws of God. Yet he emerged at the end into the sunlight of the “*glorious liberty of the children of God*”. David was shown then, as men will be shown at the end of dealing with them, when stripped of all the pollution and defilement of encircling sin, to be pure gold, resplendent in the Divine likeness.

So, at last, David found peace.

## 15. Sunset

He was only seventy years of age, but he was an old man. The vigour of earlier days had departed, the fires of youth had burned themselves out, and it was time to depart. The great king of Israel was secluded in his palace and more or less confined to his bed, dependent upon the ministrations of others. He must have known that the end was near; perhaps he thought of his predecessor Saul, meeting his end on the field of battle, and was content that he, unlike Saul, was leaving his kingdom powerful and independent, secure from enemies. The Lord had promised him that his seed would reign on his throne after him for just so many generations as they remained loyal to their God. In any case at the end of time there would arise one of his descendants who would reign over Israel in peace and righteousness through all eternity. With that he was content. In some unknown way he must have realised that he would be there to witness that wonderful climax to all God’s ways with His people. In a dim and obscure fashion he glimpsed something of the Messianic hope which was to blossom into full flower in the days of the prophets still some two or three centuries later. So he rested, content in faith that God would certainly order the course of His people after he had gone to the grave.

But there was yet to be more trouble for David. He was not to be permitted to enjoy even the last years of his life in peace. The plots and intrigues that were always being devised in and around his court were as active as ever. Now they began to centre around the question as to who should be king after him, and the contestants, sensing the obviously imminent death of the king, began sparring for position.

Adonijah, fourth son of David, by his fourth wife Haggith during the stormy days at Hebron, was the expectant heir to the throne. He was the eldest surviving son and in the ordinary way would have succeeded his father. Amnon, David’s firstborn, had been murdered. Chileab, his second born by his wife Abigail the Carmelitess, must have died young, for he is never mentioned again in the narratives. Absalom, the next, had also been murdered. There were fifteen more sons, by various wives, beside other sons by concubines, so that there could be a certain amount of competition should David die suddenly. Adonijah, now about thirty-six years of age, sizing up the situation with a practised eye, decided it was about time to act.

The story is in 1 Kings 1. Following Absalom’s example twelve years previously, he began to be seen in public riding in a convoy of chariots and footmen in order to ingratiate himself with the people. This was a subtle move to insinuate the thought in men’s minds that the old king was no longer able to lead them in battle and direct the affairs of the nation. Here was an up and coming young man, virile and energetic, ready and willing to assume the burden. There must have been many in Israel who were beginning to concern themselves with the fate of the nation when the king came to his end. Adonijah hoped that he would be the answer appealing to them and acceptable to their hopes. David himself, confined to his palace, could be expected to have no idea what was afoot.

By this time Solomon was nineteen years of age and it was an open secret that David favoured him for the succession. There is no doubt that Bathsheba was David's favourite wife and this would be one reason for David's preference. There is also the fact that, according to David, the Lord had told him that Solomon was to ascend the throne after him (1 Chron. 22:9). It is not possible to ascertain from the narrative just when he received this revelation, but it does seem from related circumstances that it must have been during the last four or five years of his reign. This coincided more or less with the time that he began to gather together the materials for the Temple which he knew, by the Lord's decree, was to be built, not by him, but by Solomon. Adonijah must have known all this and decided to risk everything in the attempt to gain control of the throne before his father issued the decree appointing his successor.

His first overt move was an astute one. He won over to his side that crafty old politician Joab. Joab had been a fiercely loyal supporter of David for more than forty years, right from the days of the wilderness when Saul was still king, and had served David loyally, unscrupulously and ruthlessly. But his every action was dictated by his intention to keep himself at the top. It looks very much as if Joab was conscious that the king was not going to last much longer and he had better look to his own future. The mild and peaceable Solomon was not likely to be much to the old soldier's liking and it is possible that he decided his interests were best served by allying himself with Adonijah right at the outset and becoming the power behind the throne as he had with David. With Joab on his side Adonijah could depend on the support of the army. His next recruit was Abiathar the priest. Here again was a man who had been with David from the days of the wilderness. David had saved him from the vengeance of Saul when his father and brothers had been slain and he had been with David ever since. There is a fairly obvious reason for his defection to Adonijah. Abiathar, of the line of Ithamar, second son of Aaron, under Divine interdict since the days of Eli more than a century previously, was at present officiating as High Priest before the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem. But there was also a rival High Priest in the person of Zadok, of the legal line of Eleazar, son of Aaron, officiating at the Tabernacle of Moses which still stood at Gibeon, although without the Ark. (Why David installed the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem instead of restoring it to its rightful place in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle has never been explained). Both men knew perfectly well that when the new Temple for which David had now accumulated the material was erected and dedicated, the Ark of the Covenant would go into that Temple and there would be only one High Priest. One of them had to lose out. Abiathar, like Joab, probably reasoned that it was time to desert the old king and become well accepted by the new one. Adonijah probably congratulated himself in having the nation's principal political and military leader, and its principal ecclesiastical leader both on his side. So Adonijah organised a great feast, to which he invited the king's remaining sons, except Solomon, and such of the nobility of Judah as he felt would be sympathetic to his cause. During this feast his assumption of kingship could be announced and Joab's soldiers go out immediately to quell any resistance and set the new king firmly on the throne. It was what in our day is called a coup. By the time the common people heard about it the thing would be as good as done and resistance hopeless.

Of course the news was leaked. That sturdy and uncompromising champion of the Lord, Nathan the prophet, got to hear of the plot. Adonijah had taken care not to invite him to the feast; neither had he invited Zadok the High Priest at Gibeon, nor yet another noteworthy army general, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. All of these were noted for their loyalty to David, and so were many of David's "mighty men", those who had adventured with him in the days of his exile in the wilderness and had been his staunch supporters ever since. And before long Nathan was taking action on his own account. He knew that the will of the Lord was that Solomon should be king and it was about time all Israel was apprised of the fact. Although there is no hint of it in the narrative, Nathan probably had perceived the reverence for God

and His ways which later years would reveal was latent in Solomon's character and was determined that he should be king rather than the more or less irreligious Adonijah. It is rather a remarkable fact that of all David's nineteen sons there are only two whose names are recorded as making their mark on history. They are Solomon the wise and most magnificent king of Israel, and his younger brother Nathan, (not the prophet of that name), whose descendants Joseph and Mary a thousand years later were to become the reputed father and true mother of Jesus, the Son of David.

Queen Bathsheba, sitting quietly in her apartments at the palace, received a visitor. Nathan the prophet was announced. She received him graciously and waited for him to reveal the object of his visit. He told her of the plot, and the danger that threatened both her and her son Solomon if it succeeded. *"Adonijah reigns"* he said bluntly *"and David our lord does not know it"*. He knew that David, old and feeble, would need definite arousing to the seriousness of the situation if he was to be persuaded to take positive action. So he unfolded his scheme to Bathsheba. She was to go to the king and ask if it was true that he had appointed Adonijah king despite his promise to her that Solomon should reign. While she was still with the king Nathan himself would come in asking how it was that the king had authorised the proclamation of Adonijah as king without advising either he or Zadok the High Priest, or Benaiah, and they all had been excluded from the ceremonies. *"Is this thing done by my lord the king, and you have not shown it to your servant, who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"*

David was roused to action. He called his three trusty supporters, Nathan, Zadok and Benaiah before him and instructed them to proceed immediately to the formal induction of his son Solomon as king. They were to set him upon the king's own mule and present him to the populace of Jerusalem in a public place. There Nathan and Zadok were ceremoniously to anoint him king in the name of the Lord, and Benaiah's men sound their trumpets and raise the cry *"God save King Solomon"*. As the shout rose on the air, the spectators, seeing which way things were going, responded with considerable vigour *"God save King Solomon"*. *"And all the people came up after him, and the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them"*. It would appear that the proclamation that Solomon was to be their new king met with general approbation. This young lad was perhaps more popular with the general public than was his older and probably more supercilious half-brother.

The noise of the rejoicing penetrated the banquetting chamber as the feast neared its close. By this time most of the guests were most likely in a condition where noises of any sort hardly registered. It was Joab who first noticed it. That hard-bitten old soldier would certainly be able to carry his liquor better than these men-about-court and his instinct told him there was trouble afoot. *"Wherefore is this noise of the city being in an uproar?"* he queried and rose from his seat to investigate. Before he could do so, there was an interruption. Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest entered hurriedly and in an obvious state of agitation, which Adonijah evidently failed to perceive. The nature of his words gives some clue to his condition at the moment. *"Come in"* he cried *"for you are a valiant man, and bring good tidings"*. Jonathan's reply soon sobered the would-be king. *"Verily our lord King David has made Solomon king... and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king in Gihon, and they are come up from thence rejoicing, so that the city rang again. This is the noise that you have heard. And also Solomon sits on the throne of the kingdom."*

There was a deathly silence. Everyone was quite sober now. Men looked at each other and saw their own thoughts reflected in each other's eyes. They looked at Adonijah, ashen-faced. They looked at Joab: for once that old campaigner was at a loss for words. They looked again at each other. They had staked their future on Adonijah, and Adonijah had lost. *"And all the guests that were with Adonijah were afraid, and rose up, and went every man his way"*.

The rebellion had collapsed almost before it had begun. What happened next to Joab and Abiathar is not recorded. They too must have abandoned Adonijah, for the next incident in the narrative is the flight of Adonijah to the Tent in Jerusalem sheltering the Ark of the Covenant, with the altar before it, normally presided over by Abiathar as priest. Here, clutching the altar, he could claim sanctuary. Blood must not be shed on the altar of the Lord. But Solomon showed himself a wise and humane king at the outset. *“If he show himself a worthy man”* he said *“there shall not a hair of him fall to the earth; but if wickedness shall be found in him, he shall die”*. So the rebel came into the presence of Solomon and did obeisance, and was, dismissed to his house. Although not mentioned, it is evident that the same leniency was extended to the other arch-rebels, Joab and Abiathar. It must have been at this time that David had his long talks with Solomon and made the detailed arrangements for the erection of the Temple which are recorded in 1 Chron. 22 to 27. He was now enormously wealthy. According to 1 Chron. 22:14 he had given out of his own resources a hundred thousand talents of gold and a million talents of silver. In today’s terms that would have been three thousand tons of gold and thirty thousand of silver, well-nigh incredible figures. At today’s prices the value of such a hoard would be so astronomical as to be meaningless. The 29th chapter gives another set of figures which imply that the ruling notabilities of the nation contributed 150 tons of gold, 300 of silver, over 500 of copper and 3,000 of iron. The chronicler may have exaggerated the figures but even so they do serve to indicate the enormous wealth of David’s kingdom. Such riches could only have been accumulated by trade and the spoils of war but even so is an almost incredible achievement in the forty-year reign of David.

What were the old man’s thoughts, as he lay quietly pondering the events of the past in which he had taken so prominent a place, and those of the future which he would never see. The great dream of his life, the magnificent Temple for the God of Israel, for which he had assiduously prepared, would be built one day but his eyes would not see it. His mind harked back to the days of his youth when he served Saul; he saw in vision the menacing figure of Goliath the Philistine and felt again the thrill of faith, that God would give him the victory over Israel’s enemy. His memory traced the early conflicts when he led Israel’s forces to battle and returned victorious with the praises of the young women in his ears *“Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands”*. He would not slay any more ten thousands, he reflected; yet he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had established Israel secure among her neighbours, a nation to be treated with respect. He thought of the times he had failed God and fallen from his own high standard of rectitude, and of the reproofs and judgments that had come from the Lord in consequence; he felt the comfort of knowing that at the last he had fully repented of his baser deeds, and become reconciled to his God and that whatever the future beyond the grave held for him, it could only be well. He recalled the promise God had made to him that of his seed, One should come at the end of days to reign upon His throne over all the earth, dispensing mercy and righteousness toward all men everywhere. For him, it could only be well. He recalled the promise, a rule and a world that would never end; a kingdom of Messiah which should be the desire of all nations. The Lord had been very patient and very good to him; he could safely trust himself now to the hands of God.

King Solomon came with hasty steps into the bedchamber in response to an urgent summons. He bent over the bed and looked into the face of his father. David gazed at him straight in the eyes; his voice, though low, was clear and direct. Level and composed, it had the ring of confidence.

*“I go the way of all the earth. Be thou strong therefore and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do, and whither you turn yourself”. Long and earnestly he talked, until the sun faded from the sky and the shades of evening began to gather.*

*“Thus David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour. And Solomon his son reigned in his stead.”*

THE END    AOH

