

# **DAVID:**

## **SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING**

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### **CHAPTER NINETEEN**

#### **THRICE CROWNED**

(II Samuel 1-4)

“For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love;  
And that we hold henceforth to the uttermost  
Such prize, despite the envy of the world.”

Browning

TWO whole days had passed since that triumphant march back from the slaughter of Amalek to the charred and blackened ruins of Ziklag, and it appeared as though David were awaiting some sign to determine his future course. What should he do next? Should he begin to build again the ruined city? Or was there something else in the Divine program of his life? His heart was on the watch. He could not forget that when, but a few days back, he had left the camp of Achish, a battle was imminent between the Philistines and his countrymen. Had that battle been fought? and, if so, what had been the issue? How had sped the fortunes of that momentous day? What tidings were there of Saul, of the beloved Jonathan, and of his comrades? Surely it could not be long ere rumours, breathed as on the wind, would answer the questions which were surging through his mind.

On the third day a young man rushed breathless into the camp, his clothes rent and earth upon his head. He made straight for David, and fell to the ground at his feet. In a moment more his tidings were told, each word stabbing David to the quick. Israel had fled before the foe; large numbers were fallen on the battlefield; Saul and Jonathan were dead also. That moment David knew that the thundercloud which had been so long luring over his head had broken, and that the expectations of years were on the point of being realized; but he had no thought for himself or for the marvellous change in his fortunes. His generous soul, oblivious to itself, poured out a flood of the noblest tears man ever shed, for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel, because they were fallen by the sword.

#### **I. DAVID’S TREATMENT OF SAUL’S MEMORY**

There could be no doubt that he was dead. His crown, the symbol of kingly power, and the bracelet worn upon his arm, were already in David’s possession. The Amalekite indeed, to lay David more absolutely under obligation, had made it appear that the king’s life had been taken, at his own request, by himself.

“He said unto me,” so the man’s tale ran, “**Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me; for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen.**”

David seems to have been as one stunned till the evening, and then he aroused himself to show respect to Saul’s memory.

*He gave short shrift to the Amalekite.*

The bearer of the sad news had been held under arrest, because on his own showing, he had slain the Lord’s anointed; and, as the evening fell, the wretched man was again brought into the chieftain’s presence. David seems to have had some doubt as to his tale, and it afterwards appeared that the story was false; still it was necessary that the regicide should pay the extreme penalty for the deed to which he had confessed.

With that reverence for the Lord’s anointing which had smitten him to the heart when he cut off the piece of his robe, David asked, an expression of horror in his tone, “**How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed!**” Then calling one of the young men, he bade him go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died.

*He next poured out his grief in The Song of the Bow.*

Which at first was taught to and sung by the children of Judah, and has since passed into the literature of the world, as an unrivalled model of a funeral dirge. The Dead March in Saul is a familiar strain in every national mourning. It was originally called *the Song of the Bow* (ver. 18), because of the reference to that weapon in the poem.

The greatness of Israel’s loss is brought out in the fancied exultation with which the daughters of Philistia would welcome their returning warriors; in the lasting curse invoked on the mountains where the shield of the mighty was polluted with gore and dust; and in the exploits which the heroes wrought with bow and sword before they fell. And then the psalmist bursts into pathetic reminiscences of the ancient friendship which had bound him to the departed. He forgets all he had suffered at the hands of Saul; he thinks only of the ideal of his early manhood.

His chivalrous love refuses to consider anything but what had been brave and fair and noble in his liege lord, before self-will had dragged down his soul into the murky abyss, where for the last few years it had been entombed as in a living grave. “**Lovely and pleasant,**” such is the epitaph he inscribes on the memorial cenotaph.

But for Jonathan there must be a special stanza. Might had been his, as Saul’s. Had he not, single-handed, at tacked an army, and wrought a great deliverance? But with all his strength, he had been sweet. A brother-soul; every memory of whom was very pleasant, like a sweet strain of music, or the scent of the spring breeze. Tender, gentle, loving as a woman. A knightly nature; dreaded by foe, dearly loved by friend; terrible as a whirlwind in battle, but capable of exerting all the witchery of a woman’s love, and more.

**“Thy love to me was wonderful,  
Passing the love of women.”**

*Moreover, he sent a message of thanks and congratulation. to the men of Jabesh-Gilead.*

The indignity with which the Philistines had treated the royal bodies had been amply-expiated by the devotion of the men of Jabesh-Gilead. They had not forgotten that Saul’s first act as king had been to deliver them from a horrible fate; and had organized an expedition which had taken the bodies of Saul and his three sons from the walls of Bethshan, to which, after being beheaded, they were affixed; and had carried them through the night to their own city, where they had burned them to save them from further dishonour the ashes being reverently buried under the tamarisk tree in Gilead. As soon as David heard of this act, he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, thanking them for their chivalrous devotion to the memory of the fallen king, and promising to requite the kindness as one done to the entire nation, and to himself.

In all this David evinced great magnanimity. There was no thought of himself or his own interests. He had learnt the secret of escaping from himself in his devotion and care for another. It is the secret of all self-oblivion. Live in another’s life, especially in the interests of your Master, Christ, and you will be freed from the constant obtrusion and tyranny of self.

## **II. DAVID’S ATTITUDE WITH RESPECT TO THE KINGDOM**

There is something very beautiful in his movements at this juncture, evidencing how completely his soul had come back to its equipoise in God. He had resumed his old attitude of waiting only upon God, and directing all his expectation to Him. It was for God to give him the kingdom, and therefore he refused to take one step towards the throne apart from the direct Divine impulse.

This was the most remarkable, when so many reasons might have been alleged for immediate action. The kingdom was overrun by Philistines; indeed it is probable that for the next five years there was no settled government among the northern tribes.

It must have been difficult for his patriot heart to restrain itself from gathering the scattered forces of Israel and flinging himself on the foe. He knew, too, that he was God’s designated king, and it would have been only natural for him immediately to step up to the empty throne, assuming the sceptre as his right. Possibly none would have disputed a vigorous decisive policy of this sort.

Abner might have been out-manuevered, and have shrunk from setting up Ishbosheth at Mahanaim. So mere human judgment might have reasoned. But David was better advised. Refusing to judge according to the judgment of his eyes, he inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And when the Divine oracle directed him to proceed to Hebron, he does not appear to have gone there in any sense as king or leader, but settled quietly with his followers among the towns and villages in its vicinity, waiting till the men of Judah came, and by a consentaneous movement owned him king. Then for a second time he was anointed.

Anointed first by Samuel in the secrecy of his father's house, he was now anointed king over his own people; just as the Lord Jesus, of whom he was the great exemplar and type, was anointed first by the banks of the Jordan, and again as the representative of his people, when He ascended for them into the presence of the Father, and was set as King on the holy hill of Zion.

We cannot turn from this second anointing without emphasizing the obvious lesson that at each great crisis of our life, and especially when standing on the threshold of some new and enlarged sphere of service, we should seek and receive a fresh anointing to fit us to fulfil its fresh demands.

There should be successive and repeated anointings in our life-history as our opportunities widen out in ever-increasing circles.

It is a mistake to be always counting back to an anointing which we have received; we must be anointed with fresh oil.

- When leaving the school for the college, and again
- When stepping forth from the college to the first cure of souls;
- When standing at the altar to become a wife, and again
- When bending over the cradle of the first babe;
- When summoned to public office in Church or State.

Each new step should be characterized by a definite waiting on God, that there may be a fresh endowment of power, a recharging of the spirit with his might.

### **III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF DAVID'S REIGN IN HEBRON**

For seven years and six months David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah.

He was in the prime of life, thirty years of age, and seems to have given himself to the full enjoyment of the quiet sanctities of home. Sandwiched between two references to the long war that lasted between his house and that of Saul, is the record of his wives and the names of his children (3:2-5).

Throughout those years he preserved that same spirit of waiting expectancy, which was the habit and temper of his soul, and which was so rarely broken in upon.

In this he reminds us of our Lord, who sits at his Father's side, till his foes are made the footstool of his feet. Similarly, David sat on the throne of Judah, in the city of Hebron which means *fellowship* waiting until God had leveled all difficulties, removed all obstacles, and smoothed the pathway to the supreme dignity which He had promised. The only exception to this policy was his request that Michal should be restored to him; it would perhaps have been wiser for them both if she had been left to the husband who seemed really to love her. But David may have felt it right to insist on his legal status as the son-in-law of the late king, and as identified by marriage with the royal house.

With this exception, he maintained an almost passive policy; what fighting was necessary, was left to Joab. The overtures for the transference of the kingdom of Israel were finally made by Abner himself, who for years had known that he was fighting against God; and who at last told the puppet king whom he had set up and supported, that what God had sworn to David, he was resolved to effect namely, to translate the kingdom from Dan even to Beersheba, from the house of Saul to that of David.

The negotiations with Israel and Benjamin were carried out by Abner in entire independence of David; it was he who had communications with the elders of Israel, and spake in the ears of Benjamin, and went finally to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel and to the whole house of Benjamin.

It was Abner who proposed to David to go and gather all Israel unto him, addressing him as lord and king, and bidding him prepare to rule over all that his soul desired (3:17-21).

Throughout these transactions, David quietly receives what is offered; and only asserts himself with intensity and passion on two occasions, when it was necessary to clear himself of complicity in dastardly crimes, and to show his detestation and abhorrence of those who had perpetrated them.

It was a noble spectacle when the king followed the bier of Abner, and wept at his grave. He forgot that this man had been his persistent foe, and remembered him only as a prince and a great man; and he wove a chaplet of elegiacs to lay on his grave, as he had done for Saul's. Is it not wonderful that all the people took notice of it, and that it pleased them, as whatever the king did pleased the people.

Then followed the dastardly assassination of the puppet king, Ishbosheth.

His had been a feeble reign throughout. Located at Mahanaim, on the eastern side of Jordan, he had never exercised more than a nominal sovereignty, all his power was due to Abner, and when he was taken away the entire house of cards crumbled to pieces, and the hapless monarch fell under the daggers of traitors.

As soon as they bore the tidings to David, bringing his head as ghastly evidence, David turned to the Lord, who had redeemed him from all adversity, and solemnly swore that he would require at their hands the blood of the murdered man. The reward for the tidings borne by the Amalekite, who asserted he had taken Saul's life was death; and surely nothing less could be the sentence on wicked men who had slain a righteous man in his own house upon his bed.

Then came all the tribes of Israel to that "long stone town on the western slope of the bare terraced hill," and offered him the crown of the entire kingdom. They remembered his kinship with them as their bone and flesh; recalled his former services, when, even in Saul's days, he led out and brought in their armies; and reminded him of the Divine promise that he should be shepherd and prince.

Then David made a covenant with them, and became their constitutional king and was solemnly anointed, for the third time; king over the entire people as the Son of Man shall be one day acknowledged king over the world of men, and shall reign without a rival.

It is to this period that we must attribute Psalm 18, which undoubtedly touches the high-water mark of rapturous thankfulness and adoration. Every precious name for God is laid under contribution; the figure of his coming to rescue his servant in a thunderstorm is unparalleled in sublimity. We can hear the rattle of the hailstones, see the forked lightning flash, and the gleam of the coals of fire; but there is throughout an appreciation of the tenderness and love of God's dealings with his children, which might have been written by the apostle whom Jesus loved:

**“Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation;  
And Thy right hand hath holden me up;  
And thy gentleness hath made me great.”**

~ end of chapter 19 ~

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