

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

JERUSALEM, THE HOLY CITY

(II Samuel 5)

“Fair Jerusalem,
The Holy City, lifted high her towers.”

- Milton, *Paradise Regained*

ONE of the first acts of the new king was to secure a suitable capital for his kingdom. And his choice of Jerusalem was a masterpiece of policy and statesmanship. Surely it was more; it was the result of the direct guidance of the Spirit of God. This was the time of which the Lord speaks in that passage of Ezekiel: **“Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine.”** (16:8).

It was highly desirable that the capital should be accessible to the whole country, and should possess the necessary features that rendered it fit to become the heart and brain of the national life. It must be capable of being strongly fortified, so as to preserve the sacred treasures of the kingdom inviolate. It must combine features of strength and beauty, so as to arouse the national pride and devotion. It must be hallowed by sacred associations, so as to become the religious center of the people’s holiest life. All these features blended in Jerusalem, and commended it to David’s Divinely-guided judgment. In this he greatly differed from Saul, who had made his own city, Gibeah, his capital - an altogether insignificant place, and the scene of an atrocious crime, the infamy of which could not be obliterated. To have made Hebron the capital would have excited the jealousy of the rest of Israel; and Bethlehem, his birthplace, would have struck too low a keynote.

None were to be compared with the site of Jerusalem, on the frontier between Judah and Benjamin, surrounded on three sides by valleys, and on the other side, the north, strongly fortified.

I. ITS PREVIOUS HISTORY

To the Jew there was no city like Jerusalem. It was the city of his God, situate in his holy mountain: **“Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth.”**

The high hills of Bashan were represented as jealous of the lowlier hill of Zion, because God had chosen it for his abode. The mountains that stood around her seemed to symbolize the enviroing presence of the Lord.

The exile in his banishment opened his windows towards Jerusalem as he knelt in prayer, and wished that his right hand might forget its cunning sooner than his heart fail to prefer Jerusalem above its chief joy. The charm of the yearly pilgrimage to the sacred feasts was that the feet of the pilgrim should stand within her gates; and when at a distance from her walls and palaces, pious hearts were wont to pray that peace and prosperity might be within them for the sake of those brethren and companions who were favored to live within her precincts.

The noblest bosom that ever throbbd with true human emotion heaved with convulsive sobs at the thought of the desolation impending over her. Jesus wept when He beheld the city and said: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathers her chickens beneath her wings: and ye would not!”**

But it had not always been so. Her birth and nativity were of the land of the Canaanite. An Amorite was her father, and her mother a Hittite. In the day that she was born she was cast out as a deserted child on the open field, weltering in her blood.

For a brief spell the priest-king Melchizedek reigned over her, and during his life her future glory must have been presaged: the thin spiral columns of smoke that arose from his altars, anticipating the stately worship of the Temple; his priesthood foreshadowing a long succession of priests.

Thereafter a long spell of darkness befell her; and for years after the rest of the country was in occupation of Israel, Jerusalem was still held by the Jebusites. Joshua, indeed, nominally subdued the city in his first occupation of the land, and slew its king; but his tenure of it was very brief and slight, and the city speedily relapsed under the sway of its ancient occupants.

II. THE CAPTURE

Making a levy of all Israel, David went up to Jerusalem.

For the first time after seven years, he took the lead of his army in person. Passive, when he was called to wait for the gift of God, he was intensely active and energetic when he discerned the Divine summons.

The Jebusites ridiculed the attempt to dislodge them.

They had held the fortress for so long, and were so confident of its impregnable walls, that in derision they placed along the walls a number of cripples, and boasted that these would be strong enough to keep David and his whole army at bay. But it appears from the narrative given by Josephus, that Joab, incited by David's proclamation of making the captor of the city his commander-in-chief, broke in by a subterranean passage, excavated in the soft limestone rock, made his way into the very heart of the citadel, and opened the gates to the entire army.

Whether this story be true or not, it is certain that through Joab's prowess the city speedily fell into David's hands; and he dwelt in the stronghold, afterwards known as Zion, or the City of David.

This was only part of what was afterwards known as Jerusalem. Moriah, where afterwards the Temple was erected, was probably an unoccupied site. Araunah, the Jebusite, had a threshing-floor there.

David's first act was to extend the fortifications; "**He built the city round about, even from Millo round about;**" whilst Joab seems to have repaired and beautified the buildings in the city itself.

This first success laid the foundation of David's greatness. "**He waxed greater and greater; for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.**"

Indeed, neighboring nations appear to have become impressed with the growing strength of his kingdom, and hastened to seek his alliance (I Chronicles 11:7-9; II Samuel 5:11).

III. A FAIR DAWN

It has been suggested that we owe Psalm 101 to this hour in David's life.

He finds himself suddenly called to conduct the internal administration of a great nation, that had, so to speak, been born in a day, and was beginning to throb with the intensity of a long-suspended animation.

The new needs were demanding new expression. Departments of law and justice, of finance, and of military organization, were rapidly being called into existence, and becoming localized at the capital. Functionaries and officials of every description were being created. The palace and court were every day thronged with those who sought promotion to offices of trust. It was highly desirable that no mistake should be made in these early selections, and that the country should be reassured as to the character of the men whom the king was prepared to entrust with its concerns. For these purposes this psalm may have been prepared. In any case, it exactly suits such an occasion and purpose.

The royal psalmist declares that he will behave himself wisely in a perfect way, and will walk within his house with a perfect heart. He will set no base thing before his eyes, and hate the work of those that turn aside. Then he describes those who shall be his chosen counsellors and ministers.

He will listen to no privy slanders, subtly suggested to his ear, as from another Doeg or Cush. He will not suffer Hamans with their high looks and proud hearts, to rule his privy-council, and oppress the poor Mordecais at the gate. If he discovers deceit or falsehood in any of his attendants, any species of deception or misrepresentation, he pledges himself to dismiss him instantly.

His earliest and best energies should be devoted to cutting off all workers of iniquity from the city of the Lord, and to the destruction of all the wicked of the land; whilst his eyes should be upon all the faithful of the land, they should dwell with him, and he would choose as his most favored attendants those who walked in a perfect way.

It was a fair ideal. These early days of the new kingdom were fitly described by him, as he reviewed them from the threshold of eternity, as a morning without clouds, or as when the tender grass springeth out of the earth through clear shining after rain.

The conception of the righteous ruler, ruling men in the fear of God, and thrusting away the ungodly as thorns and briars, stood out sharply defined, and clear-cut before him. It beckoned to him to follow, and if only he had obeyed and followed, without swerving to the right or left, what tears of blood, what years of anguish would have been saved!

As a dying man, that ideal of more than thirty years before came back on him, and compared sadly with what had actually befallen him. It was bitter to contrast what had been, with what might have been; the muddy swamp in which the river of his life had nearly lost itself, with the clear crystal of its first inception (II Samuel 23:1-5).

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