

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SUNSET AND EVENING STAR

(I Chronicles 20-29)

“Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me;
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea!”

- Tennyson

A PERIOD of ten years of comparative repose was granted David, between the final quelling of the revolts of Absalom and Sheba and his death. The recorded incidents of those years are few. It is probable that David walked softly and humbly with God, not minding high things, and concentrating his attention on the erection of the Temple, which had been the dream of his life. If he might not build it himself, he would strive with all his might to help him who would.

I. ITS SITE

This was indicated in the following manner. He conceived the design of numbering Israel and Judah. The chronicler says that Satan moved him to it, whilst the older record attributes the suggestion to the anger of the Lord. It is not impossible to reconcile these two statements, since the Old Testament writers so frequently attribute to God's agency what we would refer to his permissive Providence.

The sin of numbering the people probably lay in its motive. David was animated by a spirit of pride and vainglory. He was eager to make a fine show among the surrounding nations, and impress them with such a conception of Israel's greatness, that they might not dare to attack any point on the long frontier line. There was a tendency to exchange his chosen position of waiting only on God, and to trust in the arm of human prowess and organization.

In spite of the remonstrances of Joab and others, the king persisted; and the officers went to and fro throughout the land, taking the sum of the people. Truly the nation had grown vastly, since it was a scattered, demoralized remnant after the defeat of Gilboa. Excluding the tribes of Levi and Benjamin, and the city of Jerusalem, the fighting men of Israel numbered about a million, and those of Judah five hundred thousand.

When the enumeration was nearly complete, and the officers had reached Jerusalem, David's heart smote him, and he said unto the Lord: “**I have sinned greatly in that I have done.**”

He saw how far he had swerved from the idea of the theocracy, in which God's sovereignty alone determined the nation's policy. He had substituted his own whim for the Divine edict, and had involved himself and his people in the charge of emulating the kings and nations around. A night of anguish could not, however, wipe out the wrong and folly of nine months. He might be forgiven, but must submit to one of three modes of chastisement. It was wise on his part to choose to fall into the hands of God; but the plague which devastated his people with unparalleled severity cut him to the quick.

Sweeping through the country, it came at last like a destroying army to the holy city, and it seemed as if the Angel of the Lord were hovering over it, sword in hand, to begin his terrible commission. Then it was that David cried unto the Lord, pleading that his judgments might be stayed: "**And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done?"**

And the Angel of the Lord stayed by the threshing-floor of Araunah, or Oman, a Jebusite, who is thought by some to have been the deposed king of the old Jebusite city. There, on Mount Moriah, where centuries before the angel had stayed the uplifted knife of Abraham, God said, "**It is enough; stay thine hand.**" That spot became the site of the Temple. At the direction of the prophet Gad, David purchased the threshing-floor, the threshing instruments, and the oxen that trod out the grain. He insisted on paying the full price, that he might not give God that which cost him nothing; and thenceforward Mount Moriah became the center of national worship, the site of successive temples, and the scene of the manifestation of the Son of Man.

II. ITS BUILDER

The last year of David's life, and the fortieth of his reign, was embittered by a final revolt of the discordant elements which had so often given him trouble. Joab at last turned traitor to his old master; and Abiathar, instigated probably by jealousy of Zadok, joined him in espousing the cause of Adonijah, the eldest surviving son. They must have known God's distinct assurance that Solomon was his chosen king; but they realized that there was little hope of being entrusted with his confidence, and therefore resolved on making one last effort to set him aside, and foist on the nation a nominee of their own.

When the account of the revolt was brought to David, it stirred the old lion-heart, and though he had reached the extreme point of physical exhaustion, he aroused himself with a flash of his former energy to take measures for the execution of the Divine will communicated to him years before.

"And the king sware, and said, As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, as I sware unto thee . . . so will I certainly do." Not many hours passed before tidings broke in on Adonijah's feast at Enrogel, to say that Solomon had been anointed king in Gihon, by the hand of Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and had ridden through the city on the royal mule, escorted by Benaiah and his men-at-arms. Within an hour the whole of Adonijah's supporters had melted away, and he was clinging, as a fugitive, to the horns of the altar. It was probably about this time that David gave Solomon the charge to build the house for God.

He recapitulated the steps by which he had been led; from his desire to build the house, and the Divine refusal on account of his having shed so much blood, to the Divine assurance that a son should be born who should be a man of rest, and should build the Temple of Peace. He then enumerated the treasures he had accumulated, and the preparatory works which had been set on foot. It is almost impossible for us to realize the immense weight of precious metal, the unlimited provision of brass, iron, and timber, or the armies of work men. The surrounding countries had been drained of their wealth and stores to make that house exceedingly magnifical.

At the close of this solemn charge, he added instructions to direct Solomon in his behavior towards Joab and Shimei. These have the appearance of vindictiveness; but we must give the dying monarch credit for being animated with a single purpose for the peace of the realm. Had vengeance been in his heart, he might have taken it forthwith.

III. ITS PATTERN

The Jewish polity required that the king should not only be anointed by the priest but recognized by the entire people. It was therefore necessary that David's choice should be ratified in a popular assembly, which gathered at the royal command (I Chronicles 28:1). What an august spectacle must that have been when for the last time the aged king stood face to face with the men who had helped to make Israel great, many of whom had followed him from comparative obscurity! It resembled the farewell of Moses to the people whom he had led to the threshold of Canaan; or Samuel's parting address. For the last time monarch and people stood together before God. Again he recited the circumstances of his choice, of his desire to build the Temple, and the substitution of Solomon for himself. Then turning to the stripling that stood beside him, he bade him be strong and carry out the Divine purpose. Next followed the gift of the pattern of all the house which had been communicated to David by the Spirit of God, and an inventory of the treasures from which each article was to be constructed.

As Moses saw the Land of Promise gleam before his dying gaze, so to David's imagination the splendid Temple stood forth in every part complete. The contribution from his private fortune had been most munificent; and with this as his plea he turned to the vast concourse, asking princes and people to fill their hands with gifts. The response was splendid. It is probable that never before or since has such a contribution been made at one time for religious purposes; but, better than all, the gifts were made willingly and gladly.

With a full heart David blessed the Lord before all the congregation. His lips were touched with the ooden fire; his thoughts expanded beneath the warmth of his imagination, and rose to heaven; he ascribed to the Lord the universal kingdom, and recognized that all which had been contributed that day had been first received.

Standing upon the threshold of the other world, his days seemed as a shadow in which there was no abiding; and then the king and father pleaded for Solomon, that he might keep the Divine statutes and build the house. Lastly, he turned to the people, and bade them join in ascriptions of praise, and there went forth such a shout of jubilation, of blessing and praise, that the welkin rang again; whilst a great religious festival crowned the proceedings.

It was a worthy conclusion to a great life! How long after David lingered, we cannot tell. The sacred historians do not expend their words in describing dying scenes. One record says simply that "**David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David**"; another, that "**he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour.**" But perhaps the noblest is that uttered by the Holy Spirit, through the lips of Paul, "**David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.**"

It is beautiful to find that word "**sleep**" used of David's death. His life had been full of tumult, storm, and passion, of war and blood; many a revolt had cast its foam in his face; but rest came at last, as it will come to all. Like a tired infant's, those aged eyes closed in the last sleep, and the spirit joined the mighty dead. His sepulchre remained to the day of Pentecost, for Peter refers to it; but the man whom God had raised up was drinking of the river of his pleasures, and became satisfied as he awoke in his likeness. The fairest dreams of his Lord that had ever visited his soul fell short of the reality; and upon his aged face must have rested in death a look of glad surprise, as though the half had not been told.

The parallel between him and our Lord may be carried into minute particulars. In their anointing; their inimitable words; their sufferings; their zeal for the House of God; their love for their friends; their betrayal by those they had trusted; their wars; their love for Jerusalem how much in common! But there the parallel stays. In his atoning death, in his incorruptible nature, in his glorious Ascension the Son of David stands alone. David himself, in the Spirit, called Him Lord, and knew that He alone could fulfil that ideal of kingship which had passed before his inspired thought, given to Him by the Holy Ghost, but which no mere mortal would ever be able to realize.

**"For He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass,
As showers that water the earth . . .
He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
And from the river unto the ends of the earth . . .
He shall deliver the needy when he crieth,
And the poor that hath no helper . . .
His name shall be continued as long as the sun,
And men shall be blessed in Him."**

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