

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

F. B. Meyer, B.A.

No Copyright

CHAPTER TEN

ALMOST GONE (I Samuel 21; Psalm 56)

“But oh, whatever of worst ill betide,
Choose not this manner to evade your woe:
Be true to God; on Him in faith abide,
And sure deliverance you at length shall know.
It may be that some path his hand will show
To your dear earthly homes; or He will shape
For you at length a way of glad escape.”

- Trench

IT is not easy to walk with God. The air that beats around the Himalaya heights of Divine fellowship is rare, and hard to breathe; human feet tire after a little: and faith, hard put to it, is inclined to give up the effort of keeping step with the Divine pace. So David found it; and there came in his experience a terrible lapse, the steps and consequences of which, together with his recovery, must engage us for a space.

I. THE STEPS OF DAVID'S DECLENSION

The first sign of what was impending was his remark to Jonathan, that there was but a step between himself and death (I Samuel 20:3).

Evidently his faith was beginning to falter; for nothing could have been more definite than the Divine assurances that he was to be king. He looked at God through the mist of circumstances, which certainly to the eye of sense were sufficiently threatening, instead of looking at circumstances through the golden haze of God's very present help. The winds and waves were more daunting than the promise of God was inspiring.

The javelin of Saul intercepted the remembrance of the hour, now rapidly receding into the distance, when he had received the anointing oil at the hand of Samuel. The apostle John says, that it is not enough to receive the anointing once, it must abide on us: and this was characteristic of our Lord, that the baptism saw the Spirit descending, and abiding upon Him. But perchance David relied too absolutely on what he had received, and neglected the daily renewal of the heavenly unction (John 1:33, 34; I John 3:24).

Next, he adopted a subterfuge, which was not worthy of him, nor of his great and mighty Friend.

This was a further descent from the high place of heavenly fellowship and testimony. God is light, and light is truth; and those who walk with Him must put off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light, walking as children of the day.

Late in the afternoon of the day preceding the weekly Sabbath, the king's son-in-law arrived, with a mere handful of followers at the little town of Nob, situated among the hills about five miles to the south of Gibeah.

It was a peaceful secluded spot, apart from the highways of commerce and war, as became the character and calling of its inhabitants, who were engaged in the service of the sanctuary. Four score and six persons that wore the linen ephod dwelt there with their wives, their children and sucklings, their oxen, asses, and sheep.

Into the tranquil course of existence in that holy and retired spot hardly a ripple came from the storms that swept the outer world. There was at least no provision made to repel invading footsteps; for no weapon was found there but the sword of Goliath, deposited years before as a trophy by the youthful champion. Probably the great annual convocations had fallen into disuse, and the path to the simple sanctuary was only trodden by occasional visitors, such as Doeg, who came to pay their vows, or be cleansed from ceremonial pollution. There was, evidently, no attempt made to prepare for large numbers; the hard fare of the priests only just sufficed for them, and the presence of two or three additional strangers completely overbalanced the slender supply; there were not five loaves of common bread to spare.

It was necessary to answer the questions, and allay the suspicions of the priest; and David did this by pleading the urgency of the mission on which his royal master had sent him. He led Ahimelech to suppose that his young attendants and himself had been at least three days on this expedition; that the king had specially insisted on privacy and secrecy; and that a large escort awaited him at a distance.

But a chill struck to his heart whilst making these excuses to the simple-minded priest, and enlisting his willing co-operation in the matter of provisions and arms, as he saw the dark visage of Doeg, the Edomite, **“the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul.”**

He knew that the whole story would be mercilessly retailed to the vindictive and vengeful monarch. Uneasiness for his unsuspecting host and fear for himself filled his heart; and as soon as the Sabbath was over, he left the spot, and with all haste struck across the hills in a south-westerly direction until he cut the deep depression of the valley of Elah, where he had achieved the great victory of his life. Its aspect was strangely altered, its only tenants then being the wild things of earth and sky.

Ten miles beyond, lay the proud Philistine city of Gath, which at that time had sent its champion forth in all the pride of his stature and strength. Behind, David had left an implacable foe. What worse fate could await him at Gath, than that which threatened him each hour he lingered within the limits of Judah!

He therefore resolved to make the plunge, probably hoping that the shepherd lad of years ago would not be recognized in the mature warrior, or that the Philistines would be glad to have his aid in their wars against his countrymen.

Not a little to his dismay, and perhaps on account of Goliath's sword hanging at his belt, he was instantly recognized; and the servants of Achish recalled the refrain, which had already awoken the jealousy of Saul. He was instantly regarded with hatred, as having slain his ten thousands. His hands had been imbrued in Philistine blood; his fortunes reared from the dust, at the expense of bereaved hearts and homes throughout the Philistine territory.

Here, however, was an easy opportunity of avenging all. By some means David became aware of the evil impression at court, and saw the immense peril in which he stood of imprisonment or execution. He saved himself by descending to the unworthy subterfuge of counterfeiting the behavior of a madman, drumming on the leaves of the city gate, and allowing his spittle to fall down upon his beard. His device succeeded; and Achish dismissed him with the humorous remark to his servants that he had already madmen enough around him, and had no need of another.

This certainly was one of the least dignified episodes in David's varied life, very unworthy of God's anointed; and the shame was that there would have been no need for it, if he had not departed through unbelief from the living God.

II. THE PSALM OF THE SILENT DOVE

At first sight we are startled with the apparently irreconcilable discrepancy between the scenes we have just described and the 56th Psalm, the inscription of which associates it with them. But there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of that ancient note, which is probably due to David's hand, and is at least as old as the first arrangement of the Psalter, in the days of Solomon.

Closer inspection will reveal many resemblances between the singer's circumstances and his touching words: and we are reminded that beneath much which is unworthy and contemptible there may burn a true devotion, an eager yearning after God, a soul of good amid things evil. The cursory spectator would not have supposed that this dissembling madman was meditating thoughts which were to express for all generations the most implicit faith, the sincerest trust. But so it was. The major part of this exquisite psalm consists of two stanzas, which culminate in the same refrain; the remainder is full of hope and praise, and expression of the joy with which the Psalmist anticipates walking before God in the light of life.

First Stanza (1-4).

He turns to God from man; to the Divine mercy from the serried ranks of his foes, who, surging around him, threaten to engulf and swallow him up; he counts himself as a lonely dove far from its native woods; his heart trembles and misgives, amid the many that fight proudly against him; yet he contrasts fear with faith, arguing with himself as to the baselessness of his dread, and contrasting man's fleshy might with God's supreme power.

Thus he climbs up out of the weltering waves, his feet on a rock, a new song in his mouth, the burden of which is, “**I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.**” Oh, happy soul, who hast learnt to take thy stand on God as thy Rock and Fortress!

Second Stanza (5-9).

Again, he is in the depths. The returning wave has sucked him back. His boast changed to a moan, his challenge to complaint. Never a moment of intermission from the wrestling of his words; not a glint of respite from the hostility of their thoughts; not a step which is not watched by the scrutiny of those who lie in wait for his soul. He wanders fitfully from shelter to shelter; his tears fall thick and fast; his enemies are numerous as the hairs of his head. Ah, soul! is this thy voice which but a moment ago was resonant with praise? Alas for thee! Yet as we condole, we hear the voice of faith again ringing out the positive assurance, “**I know; for God is for me,**” and again the old refrain comes back:

Third Stanza (10-13).

**“In God will I praise his word,
In the Lord will I praise his word;
In God have I put my trust,
I will not be afraid,
What can man do unto me!”**

There is no further relapse. His heart is fixed, trusting the Lord; the vows of God are upon his head. He looks back upon the dark abyss into which his soul had well-nigh gone, and knows that he is delivered from it forever. As the morning breaks he sees the mark of his footprints to the edge of the precipice, and recognizes the Divine power and grace which has delivered his feet from falling. And now, as once again he regains the sunny uplands, which he had so shamefully renounced in his flight from Gibeah to Nob, from Nob to Gath, from Gath to feigned insanity, he is sure that hence forth he will walk before God in the light of life. Truth, purity, joy, shall be the vesture of his soul.

In the extreme anguish of those hours at Gath, when he thought that the torch of his life would go out in the dark waters of Philistine hatred, the backslider had returned to God, had caught the rope by which to spring from the abyss into the light, and once again sat, as a child at home, anointed with oil, with a table spread before him in the presence of his enemies.

III. THE CONSEQUENCES TO AHIMELECH

A child of God may be forgiven and restored, yet the consequences of his sin may involve sufferings to many innocent lives. So it was in this instance. It happened shortly after, when Saul was sitting under the tamarisk tree in Ramah with his spear in his hand, and his servants around him. He was endeavoring to excite their sympathy by enumerating the supposed wrongs he had suffered at the hand of David, and Doeg took the opportunity of ingratiating himself in the royal favour, by narrating what he had seen at Nob.

He carefully withheld the unsuspecting innocence and ignorance of the priest, and so told the tale as to make it appear that he and his house were accomplices with David's action, and perhaps bent on helping David to gain supreme power.

It was in vain that Ahimelech protested his innocence, enumerated David's services, referred to the many occasions on which David had sought his help, persisted in the avowal of his unconsciousness of the quarrel between Saul and his son-in-law - before night fell the white vesture of the priests was soaked with their blood, and every living thing in the little mountain town was smitten with the edge of the sword. By one ruthless act, the entire priestly community was exterminated.

There was but one survivor, for Abiathar escaped, carrying the ephod in his hands; and one day, to his horror, David beheld the disheveled, blood-besmeared form of the priest, as he sped breathless and panic-stricken up the valley of Elah, to find shelter with the outlaw band in the Cave of Adullam. We shall hear of him again.

Meanwhile, let children of God beware! Sin is bitter to the conscience of the sinner, and in its consequences upon others. Let us walk circumspectly, watchfully, prayerfully, exercising our consciences repeatedly to see if there be any swerving from the path of strict integrity; lest seeds be scattered beyond recovery, to bear bitter harvests in the lives of those who, through their mysterious union with ourselves, are inextricably involved in the consequences of our deeds.

~ end of chapter 10 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
