

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

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CHAPTER TWELVE

THE WHITE STONE (I Samuel 23:6; Psalm 27)

“Will not God impart his light
To them that ask it? Freely ‘tis his joy,
His glory, and his nature, to impart;
But to the proud, uncandid, insincere,
Or negligent inquirer, not a spark.”

- Cowper

IT is not perfectly clear where David was when he was joined by Abiathar. If we consider the time, we are disposed to fix the massacre of the priests shortly after his flight to Gath; and, in that case, Abiathar must have come to him whilst David was in his first prolonged hiding-place in the cave of Adullam. It is on this supposition that we have already sketched the fugitive coming thither, breathless and disheveled.

If, however, we judge by the position given to the incident on the page of Scripture, we should be disposed to locate it in the forest of Hareth, a tract of country a little to the south of Adullam, and not far from Hebron. The prophet Gad, who had recently joined the young refugee, and was destined to share the fortunes of his long career, living to chronicle his entire history, seems to have advised this exchange. The open country, in the case of pursuit, would be safer than a cave, which might be closed at the entrance and become a death-trap (I Samuel 22:5; I Chronicles 21:9; 29:29).

“It came to pass when Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, fled to David to Keilah, having the ephod in his hand.”

The enquiries mentioned in the previous verses (1-5) would have been made, as was the custom in those days, through the Urim and Thummim.

There is no need to delay further in the attempt to fix what is of no material importance. Our present purpose is rather to bring into prominence David’s lifelong habit of waiting upon God for direction and guidance. It is instructive and stimulating to notice that the successive steps of his chequered career were taken after very definite waiting upon God. It was as though the advice he gives to us all, in the Psalm which dates from this period, was the outcome of his own deepest experience and practice:

**“Wait on the LORD:
be of good courage,
and he shall strengthen thine heart:
wait, I say, on the LORD.”**

The expression of the Psalmist’s soul in Psalm 27; his practice, as delineated by the historian; and the lessons which we may well incorporate into our daily walk such is the trend of our thought.

I. THE PSALMIST’S ATTITUDE AND DESIRE

There are several items of internal evidence which connect Psalm 27 with this period of David’s life.

His fortunes were as dark as the interior of Adullam’s cave, therefore he spoke of God as his light; he was in daily peril, therefore it was his comfort that God would be his salvation. The Lord was more really his stronghold than even that fortress of rock. Evil-doers might come on him to eat up his flesh, but they would stumble and fall, as Goliath had done in that very ravine; hosts might encamp against him, but his heart would not fear; war might rise against him, but in this would he be confident.

He would be hid in the covert of God’s tent from all pursuit, or be set upon a rock at an elevation inaccessible to his foes. True, he had no longer the asylum of the old home in Bethlehem; in that sense his father and mother had forsaken him (10). But God would gather him, and be father and mother both.

The further references to his extreme need and anguish, to the necessity of being led in a plain path, to the false witnesses who had arisen against him, and who breathed out cruelty an allusion that may be very well accounted for by Abiathar’s account of Doeg’s treachery combine to associate this lovely and pathetic psalm with David’s residence in the cave. It is just such a cry as must frequently have broken from his heart in those sad and dark days.

Often must the splintered rocks around have heard his strong cryings and tears; and witnessed the awful swoon of his soul, nigh unto death, as he looked down on the abyss from which he was hardly delivered. He could not forget that, by his recent lapse at Gath, he had given cause to God to hide his face from him, to leave him, and put him away in anger: but he pleads that, through all those bitter passages of his life, he **“believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living”**; and he comforts himself by the reflection that He who sustained his soul with the blessed hope, could not fail to realize the vision with which He had allured the wanderer back to Himself.

The main objection that obtains against the supposition that the Psalm dates from this period of David’s life arises from his mention of the Lord’s house, tabernacle, and temple. Still, this is not conclusive. We met with the germ of the same thought in the 23rd Psalm, where the shepherd-minstrel desired to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It is not likely that, in his young life, he could have desired seclusion for the rest of his days in the narrow limits of Levitical service. This had been a morbid craving, entirely out of keeping with his heroic soul. Surely, then, the desire for an abiding-place in the house of the Lord, which was the wish of his shepherd days, of his cave experiences, and of his exile when fleeing from Absalom, can only be interpreted as referring to an intimacy of Divine fellowship, a constant flow of blessed communication which should supply guidance and direction in all the dark and tortuous pathways of his history.

What fresh and vivid meaning invests his words when read under this light!

He desired to abide in communion with God, and to have face to face converse with Him. as the priests within the precincts of the shrine at Nob. He wished to be able at any moment to inquire of the holy oracle. It was his choice to live so near to God, that whenever the Divine summons was heard, though in whispers too faint for ordinary ears:

**“Seek ye My face:”
My heart said unto thee,
“Thy face, Lord, will I seek.”**

II. HIS HABITUAL PRACTICE

When the trembling priest had told his story, David addressed to him words which have a sweet application when placed in the lips of Christ. It is thus that our outcast King, driven beyond the camp, receives each fugitive soul that has recourse to Him: **“Abide thou with Me,”** He says; **“fear not! for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life: but with Me thou shalt be in safeguard.”**

The special reason that made David glad to welcome Abiathar was that he brought with him, rescued from the sack of the little town, the sacred ephod, within which were the sacred Urim and Thummim. The words signify *“Light and Perfection”*; it is by no means certain what they refer to. The most probable explanation, however, is the following:

The High-Priest’s inner garment was a white linen tunic; over this he wore a blue robe, and above this the ephod, made of white twined linen, inwrought with blue, and purple, and scarlet, and gold. To this was affixed the breastplate, in which were twelve precious stones, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel.

In this breastplate, perhaps part of it, or attached to it, were probably either one or two very beautiful and resplendent diamonds, through which God manifested his will. If to any question reverently put to Him by the Priest, the answer was No, the light in these precious stones dimmed; if on the contrary, it was Yes, they flashed with splendor.

It was obviously a great gain to David to have at hand this priceless method of communication between the Lord and himself. Already Gad was with him, as the representative of the prophetic office; now Abiathar and the ephod represented the most precious prerogative of the priesthood.

By one or other of these, and probably in these earlier days especially by the latter, he was able at any moment to know the will of God.

- Do tidings come that the Philistines are plundering Keilah - he dares not pursue till he has asked the Lord.

- Do the cowardly townspeople propose to betray their deliverer - he dares not leave the little city till he has received Divine directions to go.

In one of the most awful experiences of his life, when his men spoke of stoning him, instead of taking up his cause, he said to Abiathar, the priest, "**I pray thee, bring hither the ephod.**" Then Abiathar brought the ephod to him, and David enquired of the Lord. Long after he had become the acknowledged king of the land, in his conflicts with the Philistines he was careful to enquire of the Lord as to the very method of attack (I Samuel 30:7; II Samuel 5:17-25).

Evidently this was the holy practice of his life: to wait on God, quelling the fever of his soul, and compelling the crowd of impetuous thoughts to be in abeyance until time had been given for the clear disclosure of the Divine purpose and plan. Like a child that dares not take one step alone, like a traveller in a strange country, who is utterly dependent on his guide, so David lifted up his soul for the supreme direction, which God only can give; to whom the future is as clearly defined as the past, and from whom no secrets can be hid.

III. THE LESSON FOR OURSELVES

When Israel came up out of Egypt, they were led across the desert by the pillar of cloud and fire. After they were settled in their own land, the Urim and Thummim took its place. After awhile, this method of ascertaining God's will fell into disuse, and the prophets spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. These, even in the early Church, played a very important part in the ordering of God's people in his way.

But the voices of the prophets were silenced as the apostolic age came to a close. What is our oracle of appeal? Are pious souls without the means of enquiring of the Lord, and receiving his clear direction on the difficult questions perpetually demanding solution? Not so; for in one of the last messages given by the ascended Lord to his Church, through the apostle John, it was foretold that he who overcame should receive a white stone, and the word white means resplendent, or lustrous. It may, therefore, denote a diamond, and probably refers to those ancient stones in the High Priest's breastplate, that dimmed or flashed with the Divine oracles. On them the Holy Name, the Lord, was inscribed in mystic characters; and similarly it is said that on the white stone, which each believer should receive who had overcome in the spiritual conflict against sin and the world, a new name should be written, unknown save to him that received it (Revelation 2:17).

In other words, each child of God has his own Urim and Thummim stone, which is a conscience void of offence, a heart cleansed in the Blood of Christ, a spiritual nature which is pervaded and filled by the Holy Spirit of God.

When we are in doubt or difficulty, when many voices urge this course or the other, when prudence utters one advice and faith another, then let us be still, hushing each intruder, calming ourselves in the sacred hush of God's presence; let us study his Word in the attitude of devout attention; let us lift up our nature into the pure light of his face, eager only to know what God the Lord shall determine and ere long a very distinct impression will be made, the unmistakable forth-telling of his secret counsel.

It is not wise, in the earlier stages of Christian life, to depend on this alone; but to wait for the corroboration of circumstances. But those who have had many dealings with God know well the value of secret fellowship with Him, to ascertain his will.

The journals of George Fox are full of references to this secret of the Lord, which is with them that fear Him, to whom He shows his covenant.

Are you in difficulty about your way? Go to God with your question; get direction from the light of his smile or the cloud of his refusal. If only you will get alone, where the lights and shadows of earth cannot interfere, where the disturbance of self-will does not intrude, where human opinions fail to reach and if you will dare to wait there silent and expectant, though all around you insist on immediate decision or action the will of God will be made clear; and you will have a new name in addition, a new conception of God, a deeper insight into his nature and heart of love, which shall be for yourself alone a rapturous experience, to abide your precious perquisite forever, the rich guerdon of those long waiting hours.

~ end of chapter 12 ~

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