

# **DAVID:**

## **SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING**

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### **CHAPTER TWENTY**

#### **OH FOR THE WATER OF THE WELL OF BETHLEHEM!**

(II Samuel 5:17-25; 21:15; 23:8)

“Let us be patient, God has taken from us  
The earthly treasures upon which we leaned,  
That from the fleeting things that lie around us  
Our clinging hearts should be for ever weaned.”

- Anna L. Waring

IT must have been a rare and imposing assembly that came to crown David king of all Israel. The Chronicles record the names and numbers of the principal contingents that were present on that memorable occasion (I Chronicles 12:23, etc).. Mighty men of valor from Judah and Simeon; Levites, led by Jehoiada and Zadok; famous men from Ephraim; men of Issachar that had understanding of the times; of Zebulun, such as were not of double heart, and could order the battle array. These and many more came with a perfect heart to Hebron to make David king over all Israel. For three days they remained with him, keeping high festival, the provisions being contributed by such distant tribes as Zebulun and Naphtali, as well as by those near at hand, so that all Israel participated in the joy of the occasion.

The Philistines, however, were watching the scene with profound dissatisfaction. So long as David was content to rule as a petty king in Hebron, leaving them free to raid the northern tribes at their will, they were not disposed to interfere; but when they heard that they had anointed David king over all Israel, all the Philistines went down to seek David. They probably waited until the august ceremonial was over, and the thousands of Israel had dispersed to their homes, and then poured over into Judah in such vast numbers spreading themselves in the Valley of Ephraim, and cutting off David's connection with the northern tribes that he was forced to retire with his mighty men and faithful six hundred to the hold, which, by comparison of passages, must have been the celebrated fortress-cave of Adullam (II Samuel 5:17 and 23:13, 14).

#### **I. A SUDDEN REVERSAL OF FORTUNE**

It was but as yesterday that David was the center of the greatest assembly of warriors that his land had seen for many generations. With national acclaim he had been carried to the throne of a united people. He realized that he was fondly enshrined in the hearts of his countrymen; but today he is driven from Hebron, where for more than seven years he had dwelt in undisturbed security, back to that desolate mountain fastness, in which years before he had taken refuge from the hatred of Saul.

It was a startling reversal of fortune, a sudden overcasting of a radiant noon, a bolt out of a clear sky. It is probable, however, that he took refuge in God. These were days when he walked very closely with his Almighty Friend, and he did not for a moment waver in his confidence that God would perfect what concerned him, and establish him firmly in his kingdom.

Such sudden reversals come to us all to wean us from confidence in men and things; to stay us from building our nest on any earth-grown tree; to force us to root ourselves in God alone. It was salutary that David should be reminded at this crisis of his history that he was as dependent on God as ever, and that He who had given could as easily take back his gifts.

Child of mortality, such lessons will inevitably be set before thee to learn. In the hour of most radiant triumphs, thou must remember Him who has accounted thee fit to be his steward; thou must understand that thy place and power are thine only as his gift, and as a trusteeship for his glory.

Be not surprised then if He makes thy throne tremble now and again, that thou mayest remember that it rests, not on some inherent necessity, but only on the determination of his will, the forth-putting of his might.

This contrast between the anointing of Hebron and the conflict of Adullam presents a striking analogy to the experiences of our Lord, who, after his anointing at the banks of the Jordan, was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness of Judaea to be forty days tempted of the devil. It is the law of the spiritual life. The bright light of popularity is too strong and searching for the perfect development of the Divine life. Loneliness, solitude, temptation, conflict these are the flames that burn the Divine colours into our characters; such the processes through which the blessings of our anointing are made available for the poor, the broken-hearted, the prisoners, the captives, and the blind.

## II. GLEAMS OF LIGHT

The misty gloom of these dark hours was lit by some notable incidents.

The mighty men excelled themselves in single combats with the Philistine champions. Then Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, smote the giant, who with his new sword thought to have slain David; and Elhanan slew the brother of Goliath of Gath; and Jonathan, David's nephew, slew a huge monstrosity who had defied Israel; and Eleazar stood in the breach, when the rest had fled, and smote the Philistines till his hand was weary, and the discomfited soldiers returned only to spoil.

Such prodigies of valor were performed around the person of their Prince, whom his followers delighted to call the Light of Israel, albeit for the hour obscured by clinging mists (21:17).

What marvels may be wrought by the inspiration of a single life! We cannot but revert in thought to that hour when, hard by that very spot, an unknown youth stepped forth from the affrighted hosts of Israel to face the dreaded Goliath.

Alone, so far as human succour went, he had encountered and defeated that terrible antagonist; but now, after some fourteen or fifteen years had run their course, he no longer stood by himself, there were scores of men, animated by his spirit, inspired by his faith, who pushed him gently back, and told him that they must be permitted to bear the brunt of the conflict, since his life, which was the fountain-source of all their energy, must be carefully withheld from needless peril.

Thus the lives of great men light up and inspire other lives. They mould their contemporaries. The inspiration of a Wesley's career raises a great army of preachers. The enthusiasm of a Carey, a Livingstone, a Paton stirs multitudes of hearts with missionary zeal. Those who had been the disciples of Jesus became his apostles and martyrs. His own life of self-sacrifice for men has become the beacon-fire that has summoned myriads from the lowland valley of selfishness to the surrender, the self-denial, the anguish of the Cross, if only they might be permitted to follow in his steps.

### III. A TOUCHING INCIDENT

Adullam was not far from Bethlehem. Often, in his earliest years, David had led his father's flocks to pasture amid the valleys where he was now sheltering; and the familiar scenes recalled, as a scent or strain are wont to do, memories which came trooping back from the past, and spoke to him of Jesse, his mother, and his boyhood home.

One sultry afternoon, as it would seem, these recollections were unusually fresh and vivid. He was a semi-prisoner in the hold. Over yonder, almost within sight, a garrison of Philistines held Bethlehem.

Suddenly an irresistible longing swept across him to taste the water of the well of Bethlehem, which was by the gate. Almost involuntarily he gave expression to the wish. He did not suspect that any of his stalwarts were within earshot, or if there were, that they would be foolhardy enough to attempt to gratify his whim.

If he had thought this, however, he miscalculated. He had not gauged the warmth of the affection with which those strong men loved him.

Three of his mightiest warriors overheard their chieftain's wish, stole secretly out of the cave and down the valley, burst through the host of the Philistines, drew water from the well, and, before they had been missed, placed the brimming vessel in David's hands.

It was the priceless expression of a love that was stronger than death. He could not drink it. To him the vessel seemed gleaming crimson with the blood it might have cost. With that instinctive chivalry of soul which made him in all the changes of his fortune so absolutely kingly as to compel the enthusiastic devotion of his adherents, he arose and poured it out as a libation to God, as though the gift were fit only to be made to Him; saying, as he did so, **“My God forbid it me, that I should do this, shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy?”**

We have another example in this graphic episode of David's marvellous self-control.

Up to this time of his life, he seems always to have lived with the tightly-girded loin - no desire was allowed to have unchallenged sway. The wayward impulse of passion, the assertion of caprice, were repressed by the iron determination of the purpose in all things to live according to the loftiest ideals of manhood and kingliness. The question of selfish gratification was always secondary to the considerations of high and noble principle.

It were well if all young men and women, aye, and others also, who read these words would ask themselves whether certain gratifications in which they, with others of their class, have been accustomed to indulge, are not purchased at too dear a cost. Could they quaff the cup of pleasure in the theatre and opera-house, if they realized that it was presented to their lips at the cost of scores of souls, whose modesty and virtue were being sacrificed behind the scenes?

Could they drink of the intoxicating cup, as a beverage, if they realized that the drinking customs of society were annually costing the happiness, the life, and the eternal welfare of myriads?

How often we sigh for the waters of the well of Bethlehem!

We go back on our past, and dwell longingly on never-to-be-forgotten memories. Oh to see again that face; to feel the touch of that gentle hand; to hear that voice! Oh to be again as in those guileless happy years, when the forbidden fruit had never been tasted, and the flaming sword had never been passed! Oh for that fresh vision of life, that devotion to the Saviour's service, that new glad outburst of love! Oh that one would give us to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is beside the gate! They are vain regrets; there are no mighties strong enough to break through the serried ranks of the years, and fetch back the past.

But the quest of the soul may yet be satisfied by what awaits it in Him who said, "**He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but it shall be in him a spring of water, rising up to everlasting life.**"

Not in Bethlehem's well, but In Him who was born there, shall the soul's thirst be quenched for ever.

#### IV. THE OVERTHROW OF THE PHILISTINES

Prosperity had not altered the attitude of David's soul, in its persistent waiting on God.

As he was when first he came to Hebron so he was still; and in this hour of perplexity, he inquired of the Lord, saying, "**Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand?**"

In reply, he received the Divine assurance of certain victory; and when the battle commenced, it seemed to him as if the Lord Himself were sweeping them before Him, like a winter flood, which, rushing down the mountain-side, carries all before it in its impetuous rush.

**“The Lord,”** said he **“hath broken forth upon mine enemies.”** The routed foe had no time even to gather up their gods, which fell into the conqueror’s hands.

Again the Philistines came up to assert their olden supremacy, and again David waited on the Lord for direction.

It was well that he did so; because the plan of campaign was not as before. Those that rely on God’s co-operation must be careful to be in constant touch with Him. The aid which was given yesterday in one form, will be given to-morrow in another.

- In the first battle the position of the Philistines was carried by assault;
- In the second it was turned by ambush.

To have reversed the order, or to have acted on the two occasions identically, would have missed the method and movement of those Divine legions who acted as David’s invincible allies.

This movement in the mulberry trees, which indicated that the ambush must bestir itself, and advance on the foe, suggests the footfalls of invisible angelic squadrons passing onward to the battle. **“The Lord is gone out before thee to smite the host of the Philistines.”**

Then David broke on their ranks and pursued them from Gibeon down into the heart of the maritime plain.

Sometimes we have to march, sometimes to halt; now we are called to action, again to suffering: in this battle to rush forward like a torrent; in the next to glide stealthily to ambush and wait. We must admit nothing stereotyped in our methods. What did very well in the house of Dorcas will not suit in the stately palace of Cornelius. Let there be living faith in God; the calm waiting on the housetop in prayer; the perception of the new departure which the Spirit of God is intending and foreshadowing; and the willingness to follow, though it be at the sacrifice of all the older prejudices. Then shall we know what God can do as a mighty co-operating force in our lives, making a breach in our foes, and marching his swift- stepping legions to our succour.

**~ end of chapter 20 ~**

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