

H. L. Rossier

**Comments on
the 2nd book of Samuel**

Extracted from “Stempublishing”

Reformatted by www.bible.beauport.eu

bible@beauport.eu

Rue du Château d’Or n°16/6

1180 Uccle (Brussels)

Belgium

Comments on the 2nd book of Samuel

By H.L. Rossier

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1.....	6
God's Judgment upon Israel and Saul.....	6
<i>Chapter 1:1-16 — The Amalekite.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Chapter 1:17-27 — The Song of the Bow.....</i>	<i>12</i>
Chapters 2 to 4.....	20
The Kingdom Established over Judah.....	20
<i>Chapter 2 — Hebron.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Chapter 3 — Abner.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Chapter 4 — Ishbosheth.....</i>	<i>44</i>
Chapters 5 to 24.....	56
The Kingdom over Israel.....	56
<i>Chapters 5 to 10 - David Before His Fall.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Chapter 5:1-10 — The Stronghold of Zion.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Chapter 5:10-25 — Victories.....</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>Chapter 6 — The Ark at Zion.....</i>	<i>78</i>
<i>Chapter 7 — Communion.....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>Chapter 8 — New Victories.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Chapter 9 — Mephibosheth.....</i>	<i>118</i>

H. L. Rossier – Comments on 2 Samuel

- - -

- - -

Chapter 10 — Hanun.....	127
Chapters 11 to 20 - David's Fall and Its Consequences.....	137
Chapter 11 — The Fall.....	139
Chapter 12 — Forgiveness, Discipline, and Restoration.....	149
Chapter 13 — Amnon.....	164
Chapter 14 — Joab.....	169
Chapter 15 — David's Flight.....	176
Chapter 16 — Friends and Enemies.....	190
Chapter 17 — Service.....	198
Chapter 18 — Absalom's Death and David's Broken Heart.....	205
Chapter 19:1-40 — Grace.....	213
Chapters 19 v.41 to 20 - Conflict between Brothers.....	220
Chapters 21 to 24 - Epilogue.....	228
2 Samuel 21:1-14 — Rizpah.....	228
2 Samuel 21:15-22 — The Sons of the Giant.....	235
Chapter 22 — The Song of Deliverance.....	241
Chapter 23:1-7 — David's Last Words.....	245
Chapter 23:8-39 — David's Mighty Men.....	252
Chapter 24 — Moriah (2 Chron. 3:1).....	263

Introduction

The historical books of the Old Testament deal with God's ways toward Israel beginning with their entry into Canaan. On every page of these books this people's conduct and the lives of men of God offer great moral lessons. And lastly we find here in various types the person, the work, and the glories of the Lord Jesus.

Naturally we find these three important subjects in the First and Second Books of Samuel. The first of these books begins with the ruin of the priesthood, that which ought to have maintained Israel in direct relationship with God. But neither the judgment that fell on Eli's sons, the capture of the ark, nor the breaking off of His relationship with His people prevented the Lord from raising up for that same people a prophet, Samuel, charged with maintaining merciful relations with Israel. Then God declares that He will establish a new relationship between His people and Himself through a king, His anointed, before whom a faithful priest should always walk.

Introduction

Introduction

Introduction

Instead of patiently waiting for the Lord's anointed the rebellious people asked for a king like all the nations. God granted this request in His wrath, but tempered this with mercy. Saul disobeyed and was rejected. Then the Lord raised up David, the king according to His own heart. Reproved, Saul persecuted the true king. The remainder of this book is filled with David's sufferings. Around Jesse's son there gathers a feeble remnant of the children of Israel, faithful witnesses of his afflictions who will share in his reign when he receives the crown.

The period presented in the First Book of Samuel is a type of the Messiah's sufferings in the midst of Israel. This period ends with David's victory over Amalek, a type of Satan in the Scriptures (Ex. 17:8-16). The king according to God's mind smites the enemy which Saul had spared. But the king according to the flesh, who had once conquered the Philistines, now falls when they attack him, and all the initial successes of his career come to nothing.

The beginning of the Second Book of Samuel presents David, the conqueror of Amalek, and how first Judah and then all Israel gradually recognize his dominion. Yet this dominion is not really complete until Solomon's glorious throne is set up in Jerusalem. Thus we find in this book the establishment in power of David, the king of grace, a striking picture of the Messiah at the beginning of His reign.

The First Book of Kings opens with Solomon, the king of righteousness and peace, whose glorious dominion over the entire world is a magnificent type of Christ's millennial reign.

Nevertheless, let us note that in the book before us David is not only a picture of the Messiah, but also the responsible king to whom God has entrusted the government of His people. In this respect his rule was a failure, as every other divinely instituted relationship also has been. This is why in this book we find David's fall, its terrible consequences, the discipline exercised upon him, his restoration, his confession; and at the very end, when sin had given occasion for sacrifice, we find this sacrifice

Introduction

Introduction

Introduction

staying God's wrath and establishing at the altar on Moriah a place of meeting for the Lord and His people.

All the experiences of David, a fallible man, are full of solemn instruction for our souls. They also serve as a model anticipating the experiences of the remnant of Judah, driven out of Jerusalem and then restored, experiences which are expressed prophetically in the Psalms.

Chapter 1

God's Judgment upon Israel and Saul

Chapter 1:1-16 — The Amalekite

Two events mark the dawn of David's reign: the judgment of Israel and of Israel's prince on the mountains of Gilboa, and the victory over Amalek won by the man who will soon be king. Christ's reign will bear the same characteristics. His reign cannot be established except by judgment of the Antichrist and the apostate Jews, and by a victory rendering powerless the great

enemy of God and of His Anointed and of men. Indeed, Satan will be bound for this very purpose: for the introduction of Christ's millennial reign (Rev. 19:19-20:3).

Scarcely is Amalek conquered than a messenger comes from Saul's camp “with his garments rent, and earth upon his head.” He bore the outward marks of sympathy, mourning, and grief, and was bringing homage to the one he presumed was king. “And as soon as he came to David, he fell to the earth and did obeisance” (2 Sam. 1:2). Anyone but the man of God would have been influenced by these marks of deference, but simple communion with the Lord, along with the prudence of a serpent (Matt. 10:16) in matters of relations with the world, prevent him from falling into this snare. In a similar situation we ourselves might perhaps have had difficulty in deciphering the intentions of the enemy — but let us always guard against making hasty decisions. This is what David did. “Whence comest thou?” “Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped.” “What has taken place? I pray thee, tell me.” “How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?” It is only at David's third

question that the liar is unmasked. David, a spiritual man, already suspects the unlikelihood of this story: “I happened by chance to be upon mount Gilboa.” What? by chance? - in the thick of battle? “Behold, Saul leaned on his spear; and, behold, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him.” Here the Word itself convicts this man of lying. Saul had leaned upon his sword and it was not the horsemen but the archers who had threatened him (1 Sam. 31:3-4). The remainder of his account is a bare-faced lie. Saul could not have asked the Amalekite to end his life, for the king's armorbearer did not kill himself until he had seen that Saul was dead (1 Sam. 31:5). “So I stood over him and put him to death” (2 Sam. 1:10).

This lying spirit emanates from that great enemy who could not understand the heart of Jesse's son. How could Satan, the wicked one, imagine that David was full of grace and love toward his enemies, that their defeat would fill his heart with unfeigned sorrow? But he was seeking above all to seduce David into receiving Saul's crown, the sign of his investiture with the kingdom, from his hand. His plot is foiled. Later, he will trans-

port the Messiah, David's Son, to the top of a very high mountain, and there offer Him all the kingdoms of the world on condition that He render homage to him, and in this will suffer a new and supreme defeat.

When he learns of the fall of the royal family and of Israel, David immediately mourns. How touching is his attitude! “Then David took hold of his garments and rent them; and all the men that were with him did likewise. And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of Jehovah, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword” (vv. 11-12). The man of God has forgotten everything: hatred, ambushes, persecutions, and the continual danger threatening his life; he remembers only one thing: that the Lord had entrusted His testimony to Saul and had anointed him, and that he had formerly led Israel to victory. He also mourns for Jonathan. And guilty as the people of God might be, he does not set himself apart from them as though he were not part of them, but weeps over their calamities.

What a solemn lesson for us! Judgment has already been pronounced and is ready to fall on Christendom which hates, despises, and often persecutes Christ's true witnesses. Do we have David's true feelings toward Christendom and her leaders? Do we mourn rather than rejoice? Are we distressed rather than condemnatory? Are our hearts afflicted at the thought that Satan is getting what he is expecting in the overthrow of that which bears Christ's name or professes to belong to Him? Such should always be the case. Tears shed over the ruin, and grace and pity toward those gone astray speak more to the hearts of the Lord's sheep who are mixed up in this state of things than do the most righteous criticisms. They also open the Lord's people's eyes to the necessity of seeking refuge with the Shepherd of Israel when the sword is already being raised for destruction.

The messenger silently witnesses this scene of affliction without understanding its meaning. He does not suspect the fate hanging over his head. Only then does David ask him his last question: "Whence art thou?" When Satan who can dis-

guise himself as an angel of light seeks to tempt us, we must compel him to tell his origin and confess his real name. If we are with God, he will always in the end betray himself. This liar who had probably come to Gilboa only to spoil the dead had already let the name of his people slip from his mouth when he had reported Saul's supposed talk with himself. Now he cannot contradict himself. "I am the son of an Amalekite stranger" (v. 13). "How wast thou not afraid," David says to him, "to stretch forth thy hand to destroy Jehovah's anointed? ... Thy mouth has testified against thee" (vv. 14, 16). No, there can be nothing in common between David and Amalek, and David will never accept the crown from this Amalekite's hand. If indeed our hearts must be full of mercy with regard to the necessities and tribulations of God's faithless people and of those who, rejected like Saul, still bear His testimony, they must, however, be without mercy for the instruments sent by Satan to tempt us; they must without any hesitation whatsoever call evil evil and the enemy the enemy.

Chapter 1:17-27 — The Song of the Bow

“And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan.” In this lament he expresses his grief over the disasters of Israel's leaders and their army, but this song of the bow is to be learned by the children of Judah (v. 18). It is an instruction for them. As witnesses of Israel's disaster they must know how to avoid such disaster in the future. Saul had been overcome by the archers (1 Sam. 31:3) when he himself had been deprived of archers. Indeed, from 1 Chronicles 12:1-7 we learn that before Saul's defeat the band of archers belonging to the tribe of Benjamin and in large part to the family of Kish had rallied around David and had joined him at Ziklag. This is why Saul “was much terrified” (1 Sam 31:3) by the archers.

This Song of the Bow has a poignant refrain: “How are the mighty fallen!” (v. 19). “How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!” (v. 25). “How are the mighty fallen, and the instruments of war perished!” (v. 27). What did they lack? The bow which had overcome Saul!

Throughout Scripture the bow is the symbol of strength to conquer the enemy. The sword is used in hand-to-hand combat; the bow is used to attack from a distance, opposing the enemy's approach. The archer sees the enemy approaching in the distance, takes account of his movements and his plans, and levels him to the ground before he has opportunity to attack. The bow is a weapon requiring greater skill than the sword, but it is above all the symbol of strength, for it takes powerful arms and hands to draw a bow and make proper use of it.

Israel's mighty men with Saul at their head had met the bow of an enemy stronger than they. The error that led to their ruin was esteeming their own strength to be sufficient. But there is no strength without dependence, for strength is not to be found in us, but rather in Him whose strength is infallible on our behalf. The Man Jesus Christ is the example of this. He did not seek strength except in God nor would He otherwise have been the Perfect Man. Smitten by the archers (Gen. 49:23-24), His strength did not leave Him. When His weakness appeared to succumb to the enemy's power His bow remained strong — His

strength was full. This strength existed only in dependence: “The arms of His hands are supple by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob.”

Had He not already manifested God's power in His life through complete dependence on Him? All His acts were proof of this. Thus at the tomb of Lazarus He demonstrates His might by the resurrection of one who was dead and adds, “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me” (John 11:41).

In His death, although crucified in weakness, He was nevertheless the power of God. Before the cross all the strength of man and of Satan was reduced to nothing. Through death He overcame him who had the power of death. It is especially there that His bow remained firm and that His hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.

His resurrection is the public demonstration of this power of God in whom He trusted. God declared Him to be the Son of God in power by raising Him from among the dead. He had the power to take up His life again as He also had the power to lay

down His life, but even when it came to His resurrection, His soul dependently waited on the power of God: “Thou wilt not leave My soul to Sheol, neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). “From the horns of the buffaloes hast Thou answered Me” (Ps. 22:21). “He brought Me up out of the horrible pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and set My feet upon a rock” (Ps. 40:2). “Christ has been raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom. 6:4). “The surpassing greatness of [God's] power ... in which He wrought in the Christ in raising Him from among the dead” (Eph. 1:19-20).

This is not all. His bow will remain firm; His strength will be full forever. When the Son of Man comes to judge the nations the bow of brass that will strike down sinners will be in His hand. There again, it is His God who will gird Him with strength, who will teach His hands to war (Ps. 18:32, 34). In this dependence He will pierce His enemies so that they cannot rise (Ps. 18:38). His arrows will be sharp and will strike the heart of the king's enemies (Ps. 45:5).

Yes, His bow remains firm and the arms of His hands are made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob until He comes to sit on the throne of His power forever.

Man may have a bow, but in his hands it fails when he uses it. “The sons of Ephraim, armed bowmen, turned back in the day of battle” (Ps. 78:9), and as for the Lord's enemies, “the bow of the mighty is broken” (1 Sam. 2:4; Ps. 46:9; Jer. 49:35; Hosea 1:5; Hosea 2:18).

As for ourselves, fellow Christians, our bow will remain whole on condition that we place our confidence in God who communicates His strength to us. “Go in this thy might,” the Lord says to Gideon (Judges 6:14), and the apostle himself experienced that when he was weak, then he was strong (2 Cor. 12:10). Nothing is weaker than a Christian who has given up Christ as his strength. We need to know how to use our bow and then, like Christ, the arms of our hands will be strong through the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob. Let us learn the song of the bow by exercising ourselves in drawing it, by aiming the arrow

toward its mark. The more we use it, the stronger we will be against the enemy. The archers of Benjamin who found refuge with the son of Jesse — his faithful followers at the eleventh hour just prior to Israel's defeat — showed by this action that they did not trust in their bows, with Saul as their master, but rather trusted in the strength of the despised David. Let us do the same; let us gather around the rejected King. Let us not weep over our weakness, as though we were resourceless: this would not be faith, nor confidence in Christ. In very humble dependence let us count on His strength to make our hands firm to war for Him until the day when, the conflict ended, we shall enter His eternal rest.

David's lament is the touching expression of the affections of this man of God. A heart full of love has no room for resentment or complaints. If in the past David had wept at unjust accusations and hatred, he has now forgotten everything. There is no word of reproach against the man whose bones now lay under the tamarisk at Jabesh. But it is not enough for this noble heart to merely forget. He loves to remember. He recalls that

Saul had been the Lord's anointed, the bearer of His testimony, that he had led His people to victory. He recognizes the natural gifts that had made him pleasant during his life and had attracted Israel's love to him. He sees him magnificently dressing the daughters of his people. His song expresses respect for and grief over the man who had always hated and persecuted him. His lament is Israel's lament — Israel against whom in a day of weakness he had thought to fight by joining himself to the Philistines. David now identifies himself with Israel and shares in its tears. Joy may be the portion of the daughters of the uncircumcised, but never will David share in it. Let the mountains of Gilboa, the witnesses of God's people's defeat, be accursed!

His anguish over Jonathan is unbounded. Oh! how the tender heart of the son of Jesse valued the affection of his friend! “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant wast thou unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing women's love” (v. 26); his was a completely selfless affection, something that affection for one of the opposite sex can only with difficulty be. Jonathan had indeed stripped himself of his dig-

Chapter 1

Chapter 1:17-27 — The Song of the Bow

Chapter 1:17-27 — The Song of the Bow

nities and glory and the bow of his strength to give them to David in the day of his victory over Goliath. Then with all the warmth of his convictions he had pleaded the cause of his friend. Lastly, his admiration for the son of Jesse had not diminished during David's time of shame and exile — he had visited him then, although it is true he had lacked the courage to follow him. David says nothing about this last point. He covers the memory of his friend with inexpressible tenderness. He does not speak of his own love for him, but gives proof of it by exalting Jonathan's love.

Oh, how these words all bear the odor and fragrance of the heart of Christ! Only David had to be molded through discipline to produce such outpourings; Christ's heart had no such need. His entire life was only love and grace. "I have called you friends," He says to those who were at the point of either denying Him or of fleeing and leaving Him alone. "Ye are they who have persevered with Me in my temptations," He says in Luke 22:28 to those who shortly afterward could not even

watch one hour with Him! Let us follow the example of this perfect Model!

Chapters 2 to 4

The Kingdom Established over Judah

Chapter 2 — Hebron

While voicing a lamentation over Saul and Jonathan, David's purpose, as we have seen, was to teach the sons of Judah to use the bow. We have noted that for the believer the bow signifies God's strength which is manifested only in dependence. At the beginning of 2 Samuel 2 David's behavior illustrates this truth. The days of his affliction are past; a new era is beginning; the path to the throne is opening up before him; he is about to take the place that God had long before purposed for him. The first thing David now does is to consult the Lord, to show that he depends completely on Him. We could say that above all else, dependence is the characteristic feature of his career. Whether

it be in the pastures of the sheep, grappling with the lion and the bear, confronting Goliath, in the wilderness of Judah, at Keilah, or at Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:6-7), David is a dependent man and consequently a strong man. Nothing is more pleasing to God than this. Our walk's uncertainties and vacillations are explained by our lack of dependence. Where this dependence exists we will ever be asking ourselves that most important question: "What is God's will? What work has He prepared for us? We will inquire of Him to know the answer, for we consult Him when we depend on Him. Thus our path will be simple and blessed because it will be God's path. The path will not be a complicated one unless we fail to turn to God before making a decision.

Nevertheless, there were occasions in David's life when he forgot to consult the Lord. Often the enemy attacks us at points where we consider ourselves invulnerable. We can say that David's history, a model of dependence, shows us independence and its dangers and consequences more than the history of any other life. Twice we have seen David going down to the

court of the king of the Philistines on his own initiative. The first time he reaped only disdain and humiliation; the second time, governed by fear and thinking to save his life, he forsook the blessed experiences of the wilderness of Judah, lost his character as a witness, and ran the danger of allying himself with the uncircumcised in a project of fighting against God's people. Under discipline, he learned again to consult the Lord and recovered everything that he had forfeited through his lack of faith. In 2 Samuel 6 we shall see that lack of faith was the cause of the “breach upon Uzzah.” All these incidents are sources of practical instruction for our souls.

“David enquired of Jehovah, saying, Shall I go up into one of the cities of Judah? And Jehovah said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron” (2 Sam. 2:1). It is God who chooses the special place where His anointed is to go. David left to himself might perhaps have hesitated to choose from among many places, but God designates one place alone for His servant: that place was Hebron.

In the book of Joshua we have noted the significance of Hebron: a burial place, a place of death, the end of man, a striking picture of what the cross of Christ is for us. According to God's mind, it was necessary that David go up to Hebron, for Hebron was the point at which his reign, typically speaking, must begin, David's reign being but a type of Christ's reign which is based on the cross. Christ's kingdom is the consequence and the reward of His cross. The elders gathered around the throne sing a new song: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open its seals; because Thou hast been slain" (Rev. 5:9). He will usher in all the governmental ways of God, ways that lead Him to His millennial throne, because He has suffered and shed His precious blood — eternal wonder! In heaven we see in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb slain who is the center of all. He is not on the throne, but in the midst of the throne (Rev. 5:6). All God's counsels written within the book and all God's ways written on its backside issue forth from Him, its center, and head up in Him. He rises; these ways open up; the four liv-

ing creatures, these attributes of the divine judgments, begin to move; the kingly rights of the Lion of Judah are established; and God's counsels are accomplished forever. The “it is done” of eternity has its starting point at the shameful gibbet where the Son of Man suffered, where the world nailed the Son of God!

But Hebron is also the gathering center of those whom David loves. There his companions dwell around him. “His men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household; and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron” (v. 3). There where David resides, his own have many dwellingplaces. Thus the Lamb that was slain, the King of eternity, will be “in the midst of the elders” who are types of all the glorified saints. While we are awaiting this glorious moment His cross is that which gathers us around Himself. It remains and will always remain the gathering center of the children of God.

Hebron also becomes the gathering center of all the tribes of Israel (2 Sam. 5:1). When God's earthly people recognize Him

whom they have pierced and submit themselves to Him, they will be the primary object of the blessings of His reign. Still another event seems to be indicated in these verses. “David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite” (v. 2). The man of sorrows, the rejected king, not only has companions and a people at Hebron, but also his wife and bride. Abigail (the father's joy), like Rebecca, is one of the rare types in the Old Testament who prefigures the Church; she is the Bride, David's voluntary, humble, joyful associate during the days of his rejection. Ahinoam (the son's grace), who is more in the background, represents rather, as I see it, the remnant of Israel who have entered into relationship with the Messiah before the establishment of His reign. However it may be, at Hebron David has ties more intimate than merely his relationships with his people. Thus at the end of Revelation we see the Bride of the Lamb associated with Him in all His glory, and in the prophets Jerusalem is recognized as the beloved of the Lord. Thus by His death Christ becomes the center of blessing for all.

“The men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah” (v. 4). Just as with David's reign, so the reign of Christ will not be established in this world by a sudden dramatic stroke. His judgment will be sudden, but not His reign. That would not be according to the mind of God who desires to give the consciences of those who are His own time to be exercised. Christ must have a willing people in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3) — not a people like those of the nations who, except for the great multitude of those saved from among the Gentiles, will only approach the king with flattering, lying words of apparent submission. Here David is first recognized by those who had been his companions during his rejection, and next Judah gathers around him. Then (2 Sam. 5:1) the other tribes come after they have lost the support of the flesh, pictured by the person of Ish-bosheth. Lastly (2 Sam. 5:11) the nations approach, charmed by the king's grace and delighted to serve him.

The continuation of this chapter offers important events, part of which we will return to in the following chapter. First, accord-

ing to the spirit of grace that characterizes him, David praises the men of Jabesh-gilead because they had showed kindness toward Saul and had buried him. He tells them that Judah has anointed him as king, and thus this news penetrates to the far borders of Israel's territory.

Next we find Abner, captain of Saul's army, who is unwilling to submit to David. Abner is an honorable man according to the world's standards, very valiant, with natural nobility of heart, but he has a violent and proud character. In supporting Ishbosheth he is supporting the principle of succession by fleshly ties, clothed with the appearance of right, for Saul had been chosen by God. Men defend this principle to the extreme, for it is the principle of their fathers' religion, national religion, which is much more respectable in man's sight than the opinion of some who make themselves conspicuous by following the son of Jesse. An entire political system is linked with this religious system. It must be good since God has put His seal on it in a far past and thus respectable period. Abner uses his natural energy to defend it. What objection is there? Only that this en-

tire system is opposed to the mind of God and makes war against His anointed. Men fight for their own cause and, like Saul of Tarsus at a later date, they find themselves enemies of Him to whom God has given supremacy.

It is worth noting that David does not appear in this conflict and plays no role in it, even when it appears that it concerns him. One of his attendants, Joab, accompanied by his brothers, leads the king's servants. In 1 Chronicles 2:16 we see that they were David's nephews, his sister Zeruiah's sons. Accordingly, they held a high position and were closely related to the royal house. Joab, an ambitious man, seeks to advance in the world and to win the first place in the kingdom. Though he is not named — with just cause — among “David's mighty men,” he is a man of courage. He can appreciate righteousness and unrighteousness, but he does not oppose unrighteousness except when it runs counter to his personal designs; and when something righteous runs contrary to his interests he suppresses it. Nothing stops him; he has no scruples in satisfying his ambition. Someone has said of him: “We find Joab wherever there is

evil to do or much to gain.” Joab is a figure of political flesh. It is to his advantage to support David's cause. If we compare Abner with Joab, Abner is the better man. Nevertheless Joab comes on the scene as a champion of the testimony. On this man the weight of military and other matters will soon be resting; he is the man who will direct things in an under-handed way and who will set many an intrigue in motion. In the presence of such cleverness David himself feels weak (2 Sam. 3:39). The moment the flesh takes over the testimony, see the result: ruin, nothing but ruin. One man is fighting for David, and the other for one whom God no longer recognizes. Is one better than the other? When the flesh is supporting David — or Christ — the results are no better than when the flesh is supporting the Antichrist.

The two troops meet (vv. 12-17). For what purpose? To test their strength. Where is God? Absent. Where is David? His name is not even mentioned. It is a matter of who will come out on top in this tourney. Not a single one of the contending

parties escapes. David loses his servants and his cause is not advanced in the least.

The sequel of this singular contest is an ordered battle in which Joab loses a cherished brother toward whom Abner had shown his natural nobility of character. But Asahel would not take heed; he charges forward, filled with presumption and, victim to his own desire for glory, falls to the ground, struck down by Abner's spear. Joab will not forget this death but will satisfy his desire for vengeance then when this will bring him the greatest advantage.

Alas! what is the result of all these struggles? We find nothing of God and nothing for God in them. Even the world in appearance contends under Christ's banner. The soul of the faithful has no other resource but to seek refuge at Hebron with the one who is the only center of blessing and whose presence gives peace, happiness, and wonderful rest. But when our David rises to do battle let us follow Him bravely, for to fight with Him is to win a sure and enduring victory over the enemy.

Chapter 3 — Abner

At the beginning of 2 Samuel 2 we have seen David's blessed dependence at the moment when he was named king of Judah. The gradual establishment of his kingdom has turned our thoughts to the future when Christ's reign will be established in power. But 2 Samuel 2 also mentions a fact not yet alluded to and worth noting. The kingdom has barely been established when the tone of the account changes, turning our attention to sad, humiliating circumstances.

This is because David is not only a type of Christ but also — we will see this many times as the book continues — the representative of a kingdom entrusted to the hands of man and responsible to maintain it. As king, David possesses power (but not yet all power) on behalf of God. He is free to use this power for good as he sees fit; he is free to humble or exalt the men who surround him at his pleasure and to engage them for his purposes; lastly, he is free to issue ordinances and decrees

for the good of his people and for the glory of his God. But, alas! this formidable responsibility and this almost unlimited power have been entrusted to a mere man. Indeed, originally royalty was not restricted, as in our days, by all sorts of laws, nor was it more or less under the control of the will of the people. The king, according to the Word, was responsible only to God. He answered for the behavior of the people, and if the people fell into error the king had to bear the consequent judgment. We shall see what becomes of this authority in David's hands.

2 Samuel 2 (vv. 8-32) already shows us the beginning of this history. David is surrounded by his relatives, valiant men who aspire to have the first place among the captains. The sons of Zeruah might claim this rank according to the flesh, but according to God they had no greater claim to it than did the others: to the contrary. Abishai did not attain to the “first three”; Asahel was among “the thirty” (2 Sam. 23). Joab, as we have seen, is not even named among the mighty men. But courageous and clever as he was, as well as ambitious, deceitful,

cruel, and a man of blood whenever he met an obstacle to the realization of his plans, and being very shrewd in playing on the king's spirit by flattering his weaknesses (2 Sam. 14), this man managed to direct matters, at least in appearance, according to his own will.

Throughout the entire second portion of 2 Samuel 2 the king disappears before these men. The men surrounding him become restless, make decisions, and fight against the enemy from the house of Saul without even dreaming of consulting the one who alone had the right to take any initiative. Sad accompaniment of power! In the days of his tribulations David, so to speak, breathed his own character into his companions, or on the other hand in face of their rebellion he sought refuge with the Lord and inquired of Him (1 Sam. 30:6-8). Here, while responsible for the authority which he has, he lets it slip out of his control, and his companions who make it appear that they are using this authority for his cause in reality use it to compromise the character of the Lord and of His anointed. The designs of those who surround the throne create multiple diffi-

culties for the king throughout his entire reign, and he confesses that he is too weak to direct their way of thinking and repress their acts.

2 Samuel 3 continues this same history. In presence of such difficulties David's only safeguard was to live in dependence on the Lord. Discipline will cause him to find this dependence once again. But here the Spirit of God wants to teach us that the believer who has received a position of authority from God soon loses the awareness of his dependence because of the flesh which dwells in him. As he exercises power he begins to have confidence in himself without realizing his need for the Lord's help, as he had back in the time when he wandered like a partridge hunted on the mountains. Before the crown was on his head except on rare occasions he would inquire of God, not taking a single step without Him; but from the moment he receives the crown he forgets his safeguard. He will again find this a little later after he has made bitter experiences, for we must remember that in David - and this is one of the leading features of his character — discipline always bears admirable

fruit. This continues to the very last moments of his life and to his very last words.

We too need to be disciplined in order to learn dependence. If we allow our will, which is nothing other than independence, to be active, the Lord must break us so that He may bring us back under His blessed yoke which is so light and easy to bear.

The first five verses of our chapter offer a striking example of what we have just said. David takes several wives at Hebron besides Ahinoam and Abigail, his companions in his wanderings. Had he inquired of the Lord before doing so, what would the Lord have replied? Read my Word! Dependence on God and dependence on His Word are one and the same thing. David had the books of the law in hand, and he needed only to meditate on them in order to see his path. Does it not say in Deuteronomy 17:17 concerning the king: “Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away”? He might have all sorts of good reasons according to man's mind for doing as he did: to secure a royal posterity and so on, but

this was not according to God. To be convinced of this we need only trace the descendants of his wives. Had David had only godly Abigail as his companion, would he have seen an Amnon bring shame and dishonor upon his house, an Absalom rebel against his own father, or an Adonijah try to seize control of the kingdom and ask for the Shunammite to be his wife?

Not content with these marriages, this man of God who can do as he will — how dangerous this liberty is — demands from Ishbosheth his wife Michal (2 Sam. 3:13-16), become an adulteress by taking another husband — Michal, Saul's daughter, who after having loved David in times past with a love according to the fleshly nature, will later show her disdain for the seed of God whose piety and devotion to the Lord's interests she could not understand (2 Sam. 6:20-23). David takes this adulterous woman from her home, instead of leaving her to her new husband. Thus he breaks the heart of this man, an honest man after all, deeply devoted to his companion, and who follows her weeping without dreaming of rebelling against the established authority.

Such, alas, is this pious king as he makes use of the still limited but soon to be unlimited authority which God is placing in his hands.

We need not be surprised that Abner knowingly and willingly resists the Lord by supporting Ishbosheth. Abner knows that David is the Lord's anointed: "So do God to Abner, and more also, if, as Jehovah has sworn to David, I do not so to him!" (v. 9), and later (v. 18): "Jehovah has spoken of David, saying, By My servant David will I save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies." Abner is aware that he is not on God's side, but not having the Lord as the object of his plans and activity he hardly cares about such a contradiction between his opinions and his conduct. Abner only pretends to defend a politico-religious system of succession. It is an honor to be able to say that one is among the direct descendants of that which God had established. And if God has replaced Saul's kingdom and the forms of a lifeless religion with David's kingdom and with the religious resources which He gives His people in the midst of ruin, what does that

matter to Abner? Despite all this he is determined to support the house of Saul. Ishbosheth relies on him, but let him beware of offending this firm supporter of his throne. When he wants to oppose Abner's corruption, Abner with his wounded pride will abandon his master and turn to David. "Am I a dog's head?" he asks, and openly announces his plans to Ishbosheth. He carries them out in broad daylight with all the openness of his character, and that poor king with no strength to reply can only tremble before his threats. But in all this we see divine providence which, hidden beneath men's passions and even working through them, is preparing the path of His anointed.

We watch these events without expecting anything for God on part of those who like Abner do not belong to Him. But what are we to think of David? Why doesn't he consult the Lord when this covenant is proposed to him? He had refused the crown from the hand of the Amalekite; he will refuse it from the hand of Ishbosheth's murderers; but will he accept it from Abner's hand? Yes, because he feels free to do so, because he has all sorts of reasons to act thus for the good of his kingdom.

This covenant will smooth out difficulties; war has lasted long enough ... All this is very reasonable according to man, but it is not according to the mind of God.

Abner speaks to the eleven tribes, succeeds in convincing them — even the tribe of Benjamin, allied to Saul — and then comes to give David an account of his proceedings. “And Abner said to David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thy heart desires” (v. 21). But God is opposed to this; He does not wish David to receive the kingdom from any hand other than His own. No one is to boast of having established the Lord's anointed on the throne. And what is more, how could He permit the pride of man's heart to carve out the steps by which David rises to power? Abner is assassinated. God is able to turn man's very worst iniquities to fulfill His designs. He uses Joab's infamous act to cut off the man in whom David had already placed his confidence.

Joab commits murder in a time of peace and thus avenges himself for Asahel's death, even though Abner had “slain [him] in the battle” (v. 30), proof that there was nothing reprehensible in Abner's act (cf. 2 Sam. 2:20-23). This is the personal motive behind this terrible act, but anyone knowing Joab and his ambition to become captain of the host suspects another motive. Joab fears Abner's worth and authority which at that time had been demonstrated much more than his own merits. If Abner should succeed in concluding an alliance, wouldn't he have the first place? Joab has everything to gain through his vengeance.

So Abner is not to restore the kingdom. Joab would be still less the one to restore it, for without divine intervention the murder he committed would have triggered a longer, more pitiless war than the one which had just come to an end.

What gains the heart of Israel is the king's indignation against this evil, his distress about a crime which had dishonored the character of the Lord and of His anointed. David's humiliation, his fasting, his public mourning in the presence of all the

people — this is what wins over Israel. “And all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to put Abner the son of Ner to death” (v. 37).

Ah, how David recovers the precious features of his character in the midst of these difficult circumstances! Repudiating any solidarity with this evil, he proves that, “in every way [he was] pure in the matter” (2 Cor. 7:11). He invokes God's judgment on Joab: “Let [the blood of Abner the son of Ner] fall on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that has an issue, or that is a leper, or that leans on a staff, or that falls by the sword, or that lacks bread!” (v. 29). And again: “Jehovah reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness!” (v. 39). Later this judgment of God pronounced by David is executed (1 Kings 2:31-34).

When it comes to Abner, David the king again finds those accents of grace which David rejected had used with regard to Saul. He laments over Abner: “Should Abner die as a fool dies? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters; as a

man falls before wicked men, fellest thou” (vv. 33-34). He proclaims that “a prince and a great man” had fallen that day in Israel” (v. 38).

Alas, even with power in his hands what could he have done against these “wicked men?” God alone could have worked for good. The sons of Zeruah were too hard for David (v. 39). He himself recognized his weakness as it became manifest at that time. How we can empathize with David when he says: “I am this day weak, though anointed king!” (v. 39). That which is taking place touches his heart as a serious form of discipline. Yes, you were weak indeed, beloved servant of the Lord, despite your anointing, but do not fear; God will be your strength and your safeguard in weakness, and your feet will be kept from falling if you seek your strength in communion with Him. Such is the case for us too. Two inseparable things are our safeguard: the realization of our weakness, joined with dependence on God and His Word. In this chapter David began by using his power and, acting on his own initiative, he did not consult the Lord. The events overwhelming him lead him to become aware

of his incapability, but now once again he will be swift to learn the dependence which he had so quickly forgotten.

In the midst of all these events, Ishbosheth loses his kingdom. He was completely dependent on Abner who had assured him of victory and had maintained him on the throne. Once this man is removed, Ishbosheth has nothing left. When he tries to oppose Abner's lack of respect to his father's memory, he is abandoned by this man who had supported him. This too is what is destroying the whole strength of professing Christendom, which attempts more or less to establish itself on human religious succession. For its survival Christendom has associated itself with the governments and powers of a world at enmity against Christ, and so it has become their slave and is powerless to oppose their disorder or to reprove them. I am here speaking not so much of Roman Catholicism, which like the great whore pretends to "sit on the beast" and govern it (Rev. 17), as of the Reformation which soon degenerated by abandoning the principle of faith and seeking its support from this world's great men. The necessary consequence of this was

ruin. Let us be content to separate ourselves from all man's intervention in religious things, and may we say like David, realizing our incapability to rectify evil: “These men, the sons of Zeruah, are too hard for me.”

Chapter 4 — Ishbosheth

This chapter is the last one that records the preludes to David's reign. Satan, the seducer, is not discouraged in his evil work against the Lord's anointed and, driven back the first time, does not fear to attack again. In 2 Samuel 1 he had offered the crown to David through an Amalekite. According to man's thoughts it would have been quite natural to accept it, but David cannot accept any gift whatsoever from the hand of an enemy. His faith triumphs. He punishes him who “was in his own sight a messenger of good.” “I took hold of him,” David says, “and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings” (2 Sam. 4:10 KJV). Thwarted thus, the enemy is not afraid to take the offensive again. Meanwhile David had received the rule over Judah from the hand of God

(2 Sam. 2). But with regard to the rule over Israel (2 Sam. 3) he had been tempted by Abner's propositions, proffered insidiously so that the king was less prepared to resist them. We have seen God intervening and delivering him, using Joab's iniquity to this end. Thus the covenant with the eleven tribes, the fruit of man's planning, is brought to nothing. Not from this quarter is David to obtain the crown.

Nevertheless danger is not averted, for the great seducer does not weary. Two wicked and criminal men assassinate Saul's son, whom David himself calls "a righteous person" (v. 11).* Baanah and Rechab bring Ishbosheth's head to the king and by their crime open the way for him to reign over all Israel: "Behold the head of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, thine enemy who sought thy life; and Jehovah has given to my lord the king to be avenged this day of Saul and of his seed" (v. 8). Instead of accepting their offer David, holy in his ways, judges the evil, hates it, and separates himself from it.

* Ishbosheth was a righteous man in contrast to those wicked men. David does not mean that he was righteous before God,

but once again we see here the grace of David who always recognises the good in his enemies — a great lesson for us.

The arm of flesh was indispensable to Ishbosheth. When Abner was murdered “his hands were enfeebled, and all Israel was troubled” (v. 1), for the son of Saul had “a great man” to support his throne, and everything collapsed when this support failed him. Such was not the case with David. Experience had led him to know the value of man and the value of God. This experience, it is true, is often repeated in a believer's life. When every natural support fails, even that given by God Himself, we are found in most absolute weakness. This is a lesson we must learn, for as Christians we often place our confidence in foundations that can be shaken. Then our faith is put to the test, and it becomes a matter of knowing whether God is a sufficient resource for us.

Thus we experience what is mentioned in Psalm 30:6: “As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved.” David was a man of faith who had learned many things during the trials of the First Book of Samuel. But when he wrote the thirtieth

Psalm as the “dedication-song of the house,” all the experiences of this First Book were already past. “Jehovah, by Thy favor Thou hadst made my mountain to stand strong” (v. 7). This is not Mount Zion, the mountain of God, which cannot be shaken, but here he is speaking of himself and the human resources that are his from God. If these resources fail us, what will our state of soul be? Will our hands be feeble like those of Ishbosheth, or will we enjoy settled peace and firm assurance? Alas! how often we must reply: “Thou didst hide Thy face; I was troubled” (v. 7).

Whatever our difficulties may be, we must watch that they do not influence our state of soul. If faith is active, we will refuse to seek help in external circumstances. Thus David says in Psalm 11:1: “In Jehovah have I put my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?” When we go through trials the world tells us: Seek your help in the mountain; use the resources which you have laid up for yourself in this world. Faith answers with David: No, for there is no foundation here on earth which will not be destroyed, but “Jehovah is in the

temple of His holiness; Jehovah — His throne is in the heavens” (Ps. 11:4); that is where I take refuge.

At Ziklag David in anguish “strengthened himself in Jehovah his God” (1 Sam. 30:6). Ishbosheth did not know this resource. In those happy days when God's favor gives stability and strength to our mountain we must carefully and daily seek the true source of our strength. Then if difficulties arise we will not be like fearful little birds carried about, one knows not where, by the stormy wind; but we will know how to seek our refuge in an evil day in the One who gathers His chicks under His wings, in whose shadow we will rejoice! (Ps. 63:7).

By murdering Ishbosheth Rechab and Baanah blaze a path for David to the throne. We are faced with the question whether he had the right to take advantage of the situation. A more exercised spiritual sensibility would have caused him to refuse the covenant that Abner had proposed to him in the preceding chapter. Here he understands that not only can he not make use of the human assistance which is being offered to him, but that

he must also refuse it as being offered by Satan. This is what we must do too when the world offers to help us.

This history shows us that God uses everything to accomplish His designs of grace toward David: Abner, Joab, Rechab and Baanah. He disapproves of them, certainly, but His providence causes even evil itself to contribute to the furtherance of His ways. Evil will be judged, but it will have served to advance God's counsels. Is not the cross the supreme proof of the way He works?

And now, if God uses these means do I have the right to use them? In no way, for God is sovereign and I am not. He may make use of evil, even of Satan himself, as He will; I am a creature, dependent upon Him, and I must obey. Obedience causes me to walk in the path that God's Word reveals to me, a path of holiness separating me from evil and from the world. When the world offers me its services I refuse them, for I have to do with God. "As Jehovah lives, who has redeemed my soul out of all distress ... " (v. 9). Such is the One in whom I trust. I

will receive nothing from the world because I depend on the Lord.

At a time of revival not long ago (a revival spoiled from its very beginning by unscriptural doctrines which are still bearing their sad fruit today, but a revival in which God nevertheless worked in converting souls) someone asked a certain servant of God, Why do you not associate yourself in this activity? Isn't it evident that God is at work here through His Spirit? The servant answered in these words which, no doubt, were not understood: "The Spirit blows where He will, but I must obey." This answer illustrates what we have just said. God is sovereign; He alone may use evil, but I have no option but to withdraw from evil.

This mixing of good and evil is like a stream flowing with polluted water. Shall I drink of this water that may poison me? I cannot, but this stream is absorbed by the river into which it flows. The river is a great waterway receiving water from the muddiest of streams and bearing them to the sea. So it is with

the ways of God; His ways make use of the most unlikely elements to feed the vast sea of His counsels. The sea engulfs and deposits in its depths — in other words, judges — every impure element so that nothing but pure water rises from the sea to the sky to which the sun draws it. This is the work of the sea and the sun and not our work.

But David might have reasoned like this: By allowing this murder, God providentially is giving the throne to me; I am therefore free to accept the throne at the hands of these murderers. He would have been deceived, for even God's providence may place us in circumstances where our faith is put to the test in order that we may refuse to accept the things set before us. We have an example of this in Moses at Pharaoh's court. Providence had not led him here so that he might accept this position and enjoy “the pleasures of sin for a season,” but that when the moment was come he might separate himself from it by faith. Thus his faith was exercised and, confronted with the alternative of adoption by Pharaoh's daughter on the one hand

or suffering affliction with the people of God on the other, he did not hesitate to choose the latter.

Likewise here to David the circumstances seem to open the way to the throne that God wanted to give him. With indignation David refuses any complicity with evil and orders the execution of the guilty men. These lessons are very important for us, for we are continually faced with the same principles. If God puts us in an easy position here on earth it is not His purpose to establish us in it. Rather He wants our faith to learn to break these bonds and, freed from hindrances, joyfully leave them to walk before the Lord. May we then know when evil is presented to us in any form whatsoever, to judge it like David did, and openly refuse it and have no fellowship with it.

David's act at the end of this chapter thus was according to God's mind. "David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron" (v. 12). David, having authority,

was responsible to exercise it in holiness and righteousness in order that this terrible chastisement would serve as an example.

This chapter offers us still another instruction that is useful and should not be omitted, for despite his personal experiences David remains a type of Christ until 2 Samuel 11. The event I am speaking of here is that before obtaining kingly rights over all the tribes David is misunderstood by all: no one appreciates his motives.

Beeroth was a city of the Gibeonites with whom the people of Israel had once made a covenant (Joshua 9). Beeroth was considered a part of Benjamin (2 Sam. 4:2), the tribe of Saul, David's ardent enemy. "The Beerothites had fled to Gittaim, and were sojourners there until this day" (v. 3). The cause of their flight is not definitely stated, but this event is presented in relation to Baanah and Rechab, the sons of a Beerothite. We may conclude the account of their flight to be anticipatory, and that it did not actually take place until after the judgment which David pronounced on these murderers. At that time all the

Beerothites seem to have become frightened and fled to Gittaim.

This is because these men did not know David. They supposed that the king entertained a desire for vengeance and would seek to satisfy it by holding them jointly liable for the murder committed by two of Beeroth's citizens. If they had known David they would rather have sought refuge with him by entrusting themselves to his grace. Theirs is the attitude of the world toward the Lord Jesus. Being unable to trust in a heart which they do not know and fearing His judgment, the world prefers to flee rather than to enter into contact with Him. In the parable of the talents the servant who hid his talent in the earth likewise misjudged this master so full of grace. When called into His presence to give account of his stewardship, he said to him, "My lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man" (Matt. 25:24).

In verse 4 an event following Saul's death takes us yet further back into the past. Mephibosheth's nurse had fled, carrying this five-year-old child in her arms. This story is the same as that of

the Beerothites: the very same misapprehension of the son of Jesse, the very same feelings so natural to man's heart. David, learning of the death of Saul and Jonathan, had mourned and lamented over them, but it does not enter this poor woman's mind that he might not execute vengeance on his friend's son. She flees rather than running to the one who had sworn to Jonathan and even to Saul that he would not wipe out their descendants. She does not trust in David's love and sure word any more than sinners trust in the grace and word of Christ. The result was that Mephibosheth “fell, and became lame.” David finds him later, afflicted and lame as a consequence of the lack of faith of this woman who had not taken advantage of the favorable moment to entrust her burden to the hands of Jonathan's friend.

Rechab and Baanah are also ignorant of David's character, of this man whose heart rejects evil. They run headlong to their ruin because they did not properly know the holiness of the Lord's anointed. They think that they can approach him in their

sin without David abhorring it, and without him thrusting aside these hands defiled by the blood of a righteous man.

In fact, only His own can know the true David and can approach Him in all confidence, being assured that His mercy endures forever and His promises are sure.

*Thy words, always faithful,
Lord, will never pass away,
And our soul which believes them
Henceforth has nothing to fear!*

Chapters 5 to 24

The Kingdom over Israel

Chapters 5 to 10 - David Before His Fall

Chapter 5:1-10 — The Stronghold of Zion

Moved by a spirit of vengeance against Ishbosheth, Abner had commended David to the eleven tribes: “Jehovah has spoken of

David, saying, By My servant David will I save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies” (2 Sam. 3:18). In one sense Abner was a messenger of the Lord to bring the hearts of the people back to His anointed; but there was a great gulf between his functions and his moral condition. We can find instruction for ourselves here. God may act through a man who proclaims truths that are according to God although in heart he has no relationship to God Himself. It was becoming for Israel to listen to Abner's words, but it was not becoming that they should be attached to his person. When we listen to those who present the Word of God we must be careful to distinguish between the person and the message he announces, and we must not attribute to the person an importance which belongs to the Scriptures alone. How happy it is if we see that the conduct of the one speaking is consistent with his doctrine and inseparable from it! Such was the case of Timothy with respect to the apostle Paul; he could know and follow both his doctrine and his conduct (2 Tim. 3:10) because both were in such close accord in the great apostle to the Gen-

tiles. It is well to insist on this point: gift is distinct from moral condition. When a man has a gift he must judge himself before God continually, so that his moral state may be consistent with the gift entrusted to him. If on the one hand there is great danger for listeners to follow a man because of his gift, on the other hand there is an equal danger that the one who speaks may act without having his heart and walk consistent with the truths which he presents.

Indeed, Abner's words had no real effect on the people because the Spirit of God was not at work in their hearts. In no way did they change their behavior until Ishbosheth had been removed from the scene and only then, when their prop had been taken away from them, did “all the tribes of Israel [come] to David to Hebron” (v. 1).

What is remarkable about the state of these tribes is that they knew and had always known what God thought of David. The people say: “Even aforetime, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel; and Jehovah

said to thee, Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be prince over Israel” (v. 2). They knew this perfectly well, but this knowledge had had no effect on their consciences. The same phenomenon occurs today among Christians. God's Word is familiar to them; they know God's thoughts concerning His Son and His Church, but these truths have no practical effect on them. These truths have not sunk into their consciences. This is where we must look for the main reason for the divisions existing among God's children. One follows one group, another follows another; one accepts this doctrine, another an opposite doctrine; one boasts in a certain man, another in another man. Such differences are not due so much to the state of their understanding as to the state of their consciences, and the fact that they do not feel it necessary to walk according to the truth they know.

The first three verses of our chapter show us that Israel lacked one more thing. They had had no affection for David; their affection had been for Ishbosheth. When the heart is turned to the world it cannot be turned to the man according to God. How

can one possibly unite Christians around Christ when their thoughts are taken up with earthly things and their hearts are unreached by the Lord's grace and beauty? His person has little value for a divided heart; that heart does not seek after Him. But if consciences are reached, soon hearts will be reached also: "Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh" (v. 1). Now these Israelites proclaim their relationship to David; they had been well aware of this relationship, but they had failed to recognize it as a fact that should govern all else. Then all at once they remember what God had said concerning His beloved. When the Spirit begins to work in souls the conscience speaks up, the heart turns to Christ, and one is led to acknowledge His sovereignty and His rights. "They anointed David king over Israel" (v. 3). "David made a covenant with them in Hebron before Jehovah" and by this pact recognized Israel as being his people from that time forth.

This chapter inaugurates the second period of David's reign. From this time onward he is king over all Israel at Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit underscores this distinction in verse 5: "In

Hebron [David] reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.”

So it will be for Christ: this book considered in the light of prophecy is of particular interest as a history typifying the establishment of Christ's reign. In the Second Book of Samuel, let us repeat, it is not a question of the kingdom being established (such will not be the case until Solomon), but rather it is a question of founding the kingdom in the person of David, which is quite another thing. Therefore we find here God's ways in founding David's throne, gathering the twelve tribes around him, and bringing the nations into submission to him by subjugating his enemies.

Now that David has been recognized as king by all Israel, we see a series of events taking place in relation to this proclamation.

The first of these events is of prime importance (vv. 6-9). Often facts of immense bearing are treated by the Word in a very few

verses. We cannot measure the value that God sets on an event by the length of the account about it. Sometimes a short parenthesis contains a vast amount of most profound truths, for example: the parenthesis in the first chapter of Ephesians which unfolds the counsels of God concerning Christ and the Church (Eph. 1:20-23). Likewise the first three verses of Revelation 21 introduce us into all the glories of eternity. And again, Psalm 23 in six verses gives us the entire life, conduct, and experiences of the believer on earth from the cross to his introduction into the house of the Lord. We could vastly multiply these examples. We find one such example in the passage before us now. It concerns the capture of Jerusalem. This is the beginning of an entirely new manner in which God now acts: it is the establishment of His grace in the person of the king — power united with grace in order to accomplish God's intentions when on man's side everything has failed.

The Book of Judges and the First Book of Samuel (not to mention the books of Moses) have already presented this latter truth: the complete ruin in man's hands of all that God had en-

trusted to his responsibility. Israel placed under the law was ruined as a people; the judges were ruined, the priesthood was ruined, and the kingdom according to the flesh was ruined; all this was now irrevocably ended. Faced with all this ruin, “What has God wrought?” (Num. 23:23). Once the end of the people's history under law has been manifested, His grace is manifested. Grace would not be grace if it did not concern itself with fallen creatures. Its fullness bursts forth when the people's history in responsibility has ended in irremediable ruin. God chooses the moment when the king according to His own heart is proclaimed to take possession of Jerusalem and give it to David.

What reason did God have to interest Himself in this place more than in another? There was no reason whatsoever except that He loved this city which had been under the power of the Jebusites, the enemies of Jehovah and of His anointed. His heart was attached to this place, for this is where He desired to definitively establish the throne of His grace on earth. “Jehovah has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His dwelling: this is My rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it” (Ps.

132:13-14). “His foundation is in the mountains of holiness. Jehovah loves the gates of Zion more than all the habitations of Jacob” (Ps. 87:1-2).

This is what God says of Zion: He loved it. When His eyes looked out over the earth they rested on this special place in view of making it His dwelling place. “Why do ye look with envy, ye many-peaked mountains, upon the mount that God has desired for His abode? Yea, Jehovah will dwell there for ever” (Ps. 68:16). This is therefore the place which God chose, the place of His good pleasure, because this is where He in grace introduces and establishes His king. Is it not also the place where the Son of David would lay the foundation of eternal salvation? Jesus, the Root of David, is the King of grace when all is ruined, just as Jesus, the Offspring of David, the true Solomon, will be the king of glory.

Mount Zion offers the most complete contrast to Mount Sinai. In Hebrews 12:22 the apostle tells the Jews who had been delivered from the law and become Christians: “Ye have come to

mount Zion; and to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem.” This is an absolute change in God's ways concerning Israel. 2 Samuel 5:6-9 indicates to us the moment in history when this change took place, when God chose a new mountain in contrast to Sinai in order to establish the stronghold of David there forever. In actual fact, this transfer could not be realized for Israel at that time on account of the unfaithfulness of the king in responsibility, and the people must wait for the establishment of Christ's reign in order to be introduced into the blessings of this new covenant. For us Christians this transfer has already taken place. “Ye have come to mount Zion,” says the apostle. None of the requirements, none of the terrors of Sinai exist any more for those who believe. While yet here on earth we have found the mountain of grace in that place where the cross of Christ was set up. We have set our foot on this sure foundation, the first rung for ascending up into all the heavenly blessings, from “the city of the living God” to “the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.” All these things belong to us now; soon we will possess them in glory.

The various passages of this chapter correspond to other passages in First Chronicles, which sometimes gives us additional details concerning these events. The capture of Jerusalem is related in 1 Chronicles 11:4-9. In our present chapter the Jebusites say to David: “Thou shalt not come in hither, but the blind and the lame will drive thee back” (v. 6). They were so sure of their walls and of their impregnable stronghold that they did not judge it necessary to use sound, healthy men to repel the king's attack; even these disabled people would be well sufficient for this task, they thought. “But David took the stronghold of Zion” (v. 7). Not another word about it; the project succeeded as simply as if it had cost nothing. In effect, this victory costs God nothing. This is how He will fight all man's enmity against Himself and against His Anointed. What divine irony! “Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us!” God answers: “He that dwells in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision!” (Ps. 2:3-4).

David is indignant at these outrageous words of the Jebusites and his indignation is according to God. When we see the

world occupying God's domain while yet the enemy of Christ, our hearts moved by the Holy Spirit may well be filled with indignation. We can ardently desire that the Lord might at last have the place that is His by rights, that He be no longer scoffed at by the world which has rejected Him, and that His reign may be established on earth after the judgment of the living nations. To feel thus is in order.

But we find another emotion, one we can approve of less, in David's heart. Besides that which he typifies in his person, he is the energetic man to whom God has entrusted power. His authority is contested; he is indignant — and his words display it (1 Chr. 11:6): “Whoever smites the Jebusites first shall be chief and captain.” What happens? “Joab the son of Zeruah went first up, and was chief.” Joab, the man whose craftiness we have seen from the very beginning; Joab, whose wickedness David had recognized, whom he had branded with the name “wicked man” before all the people, on whose head he had invoked God's judgment (2 Sam. 3:28-30), whom he had de-

clared to be “too hard for me”: this Joab is the man whom David's word gave occasion to become general in chief.

The fact that Joab is elevated to be head of the army is one of the most unfortunate events of David's reign, and here we see the king's weakness. A single word not dictated by the Holy Spirit and which stirred up fleshly rivalry brought such consequences in its wake. How easily man abuses the power which God has entrusted to him, using it in an independent manner! This fact should make us reflect. A fleshly word often results in more dangerous fruit than does an evil act.

At the end of verse 8 we read: “The lame and the blind hated of David's soul ... ! Therefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.” Who is it that speaks like this? It is David himself. How he differs from Christ in this point! Coming into the world, the Lord Jesus did exactly the opposite: “Blind men see and lame walk” (Matt. 11:5). He cannot meet a single one of these unfortunate souls but what His love and His power unite to give healing. Even when His wrath, divine

wrath, is expressed, is it not marvelous to see it opening up the floodgates of His grace? “And Jesus entered into the temple of God, and cast out all that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold the doves. And He says to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of robbers. And blind and lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them” (Matt. 21:12-14). His wrath and indignation are expressed in the zeal of God's house which devoured Him (Ps. 69:9), but He purifies His house, not to prevent the blind and the lame from entering it like David, but in order to introduce them there by healing them. We find a second example in the parable of the great supper. All the guests excused themselves from coming. “Then the master of the house, in anger, said to his bondman, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring here the poor and crippled and lame and blind” (Luke 14:21). The master's anger against his guests results in seating the blind and the lame at the table of his great feast.

The same thing has happened to us. The Master's wrath against this people who would not hear His call of grace has opened the door of the marriage supper to poor Gentiles, strangers to His promises, incapable of seeing Him or going to Him.

All these facts prove how important it is if we are to have a proper understanding of this portion of Scripture to maintain the distinction between David as a man and David as a type of Christ.

Chapter 5:10-25 — Victories

The first result of the establishment of the throne on mount Zion is that David is acknowledged by the nations. “Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and timber of cedars, and carpenters, and masons; and they built David a house” (v. 11), for Hiram wanted to contribute as best he could to the splendor of the reign that had begun. Later under Solomon this same Hiram works on the construction of the temple. In this history he plays an important role as representative of the

friendly nations who will come willingly to submit to Messiah's reign.

The history of David as a type of Christ continues to unfold in this chapter. Among the nations there are those who do not acknowledge his supremacy and who seek to shake off his yoke. The Philistines come up against David; revolt begins with this internal enemy who occupies the people's inheritance. Later we will see the nations located on Israel's borders — Moab and the children of Ammon, then Syria and Assyria — revolting in their turn. Victory over the nations, just like the submission of the tribes of Israel, takes place gradually. Philistia is subjugated and the Lord will say of her by David's mouth: “Over Philistia will I triumph” (Ps. 108:9 KJV). We must not forget — prophecy is very explicit on this subject — that Israel's ancient enemies which have now in part disappeared will reappear in the end times, whether it be to undergo their final judgment, or whether it be to share in the blessings of the millennium together with the people of God. The Philistines are subjugated and their idols are destroyed.

Simultaneously with the history of David as type of the Messiah the history of David as responsible king continues to unfold also. This history shows us many weaknesses requiring discipline, leading David to judge himself so that once he is restored he again enjoys fellowship with God. It is most profitable to learn to recognize ourselves in this history and to understand the requirements of God's holiness and His ways toward us.

The conclusion of this chapter gives us a special lesson. When Hiram comes to submit to the king something takes place that is both touching and characteristic. A special feature of David's character is the complete absence of self-confidence: he was humble and had retained this character from the time that God had taken him "from the sheepfolds." While he appreciated God's favor in giving him a glorious throne he did not have a high opinion of himself. "David perceived that Jehovah had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom because of His people Israel" (v. 12); not for his own sake — David loses sight of himself — but for the sake of His

people Israel. Knowing that this kingdom of which he is head is exalted because God is thinking of His people whose blessing He had in view, David does not set himself above the people as lording it over them by insisting on his rights, but places himself beneath them, having only their welfare in view. He sees the place that Israel occupies in God's heart and recognizes that God has directed all things with His people in view. Our perfect model, the Lord Jesus, through His sufferings has acquired a place in glory, but He has taken this place for us His people, His beloved Church. Thus David's character as a man answers to Christ's character, and so it ought always to be with us.

But now the same thing that took place at Hebron (2 Sam. 3:2-5) again takes place at Jerusalem (vv. 13-16). We have said above that the traits of independence seen in David resulted from the fact that he was invested with sovereign power. He uses his power for himself and thus acts in opposition to God's thoughts (Deut. 17:17-19). Beside his political and other reasons for taking many wives David may have forgotten God's

prohibition. He should not have forgotten: “It shall be, when he sits upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests, the Levites; and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life.” The majority of our disobedient acts stem from not maintaining living daily contact with the Word of God. To follow our own thoughts by neglecting this positive, absolute direction is disobedience.

Two things ought to characterize the walk of every child of God. David's career in First Samuel illustrates the first feature: dependence. But there is a second characteristic which we are not accustomed to regarding as important as the first: that is obedience. Dependence and obedience should never be separated in the child of God.

We have just seen David disobedient; we shall see him dependent without this lack of harmony influencing his spiritual life for the moment. But if David is in the school of God he will learn never to disassociate these two characteristics in the fu-

ture. At the end of our chapter God obliges him, so to speak, to join one to the other, and when later in the following chapter David fails to meet this obligation and does not follow the will of God expressed in His Word, we see him come under discipline.

The Philistines go up against David (vv. 17-21); the king learns of it and goes down to the stronghold. His retreat was the place where God desired to dwell. “David inquired of Jehovah, saying, Shall I go up against the Philistines? wilt Thou give them into my hand?” (v. 19). Here we see him depending on God as was his habit. Is it a question of going up against the enemy? David does not know what to do: God alone knows and David asks Him for direction, saying in effect: “What shall I do?” God answers him immediately: “Go up; for I will certainly give the Philistines into thy hand.” David goes up; the bulwark that the enemy attempts to set in his way is breached, and David and his army rush through like an overflowing torrent, swallowing up the Philistines and their idols. In 1 Chronicles 14:12 we see what the king did to these idols: “And they left their

gods there; and David commanded, and they were burned with fire.” In just this way the idols of the nations will be destroyed in the end times (Isa. 2:18).

But all is not over. The enemy renews his attack: the conditions are the same, the people are the same, the methods are the same, the place is the same. David might have said to himself: Since the situation is identical I will do as I did at the first attack. No way! He depends entirely on the Lord's direction. He goes about the matter in the right way, for this time the Lord gives him a completely different answer: “Thou shalt not go up.” The circumstances of this attack were the same as before: why then did God show David a completely different way of fighting? “Turn round behind them and come upon them opposite the mulberry-trees. And it shall be, when thou hearest a sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry-trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself; for then will Jehovah have gone forth before thee, to smite the army of the Philistines” (vv. 23-24). The reason for this change is that God wanted to bring together in His servant's heart the two things that David had more or

less tended to separate, as we have seen in the preceding events. David needed not only to depend upon God but also to obey His word, whether or not he understood it. To obtain a new victory he had to obey, to follow out the order that God gave. “And David did so, as Jehovah had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou comest to Gezer.”

This is how God in His mercy granted David to experience the blessings that accompany dependence united with obedience. David might have taken some credit for this second victory himself and perhaps he might have become proud, but God does not want this. His servant must understand that he is accountable to obey, and to this end God gives him certain signs to observe. The marching army, the sound of which is heard in the tops of the mulberry trees, is the Lord Himself and His army. When David heard this sound he could set forward from the post assigned to him, for acting on God's word he would take the enemy from behind. Before him were the mulberry trees. He knew that the Lord would attack the enemy head on and that he, David, would rush upon them from behind: their

defeat would thus be complete. The main part was the Lord's; David remains humble. He listens, he does what the Lord commands: this is obedience. He wins the victory.

How important this is for us! Our dependence and our obedience are seen not only in major circumstances as here but also in the day by day details of life. If we fail here, we will expose ourselves to chastening, and David is going to be an example of this.

Chapter 6 — The Ark at Zion

It is not sufficient that the seat of the kingdom of David — or of Christ — be set up at Zion, the mountain of grace. God Himself desires to dwell there with His king forever (cf. Rev. 22:1, 3). Thus David is entirely within the current of God's thoughts when he goes to seek the ark in order to bring it back to Jerusalem. God's glory finds no rest except in the place of grace. The ark, God's throne, is intimately associated with the throne of David, the throne of the Son of God. The Lord who up to this point had no permanent dwelling place because of

the unfaithfulness of His people may now dwell with that same people because He desires to dwell with His anointed.

The king gathers together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand, to go to get the ark (v. 1). This may appear unusual. When it is a matter of the Lord's battles we do not see men of God gathering their whole army together. It is rather the contrary. Gideon with three hundred men, Jonathan with a single man, together with so many other captains won most signal victories. God fought with them and what are few or many soldiers to Him? It may suit Him to test His entire people in battle — with Him it is not as with the nations. Numbers count for nothing in His victories.

When on the other hand it is a matter of giving testimony to the God who sits between the cherubim, of setting up the place where He is to be worshipped, all those who represent the strength of Israel are not too many. How little this is understood among the children of God! Do all the chosen men gather around Christ before the throne of God the Father to honor and

worship Him? Does worship have more value in the sight of Christians than all the activity they carry out for Him, however blessed it may be? Many would make the Christian life consist only in fighting for the gospel — no doubt a blessed combat, but an activity for which it is not at all necessary to gather together “all the chosen men.” We would soon see this degenerate into work based on human association — while worship would be ignored, neglected, unfamiliar. The gathering center of God's children would be despised and they would continue to be scattered as sheep which have no shepherd!

Such was not David's thought, thanks be to God. The object of his entire life as a wanderer, of all his afflictions, had been to arrive at this moment at which our chapter opens. We find proof of this in Psalm 132 to which we will return later.

The connections between 2 Samuel 5 and 2 Samuel 6 are not limited to those we have mentioned. As a responsible king, David, despite his many failings was pleasing to God. The

Lord did not hide His face from him. He loved David for his faithfulness, for the grace displayed in his ways, and for his humble and submitted spirit. As we have seen, He had taught him to join obedience to dependence. David understood these things when it was a matter of fighting the enemy. Would he understand them in the events about to unfold?

When the moment had come to gather the tribes of Israel around the ark, their divine center, what should David do? Consult the Lord. Even though in bringing back the ark he had God's mind, it was not for David to determine how to do this. Had he understood this he would have avoided serious chastening. Had he consulted the Lord and His Word he would have known in what manner he should bring the ark back to Jerusalem.

The Philistines had set the ark on a “new cart” to send it back to Israel's territory (1 Sam. 6:7). They had acted in ignorance, but God instead of expressing His disapproval had taken into account the fear that motivated them. Evidently David re-

membered this when he imitated the nations' way of bringing the ark back to the place it was meant to occupy. "They set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was upon the hill" (v. 3).

But although God might take the ignorance of the Philistines into consideration He will not tolerate a positive act of disobedience to His Word on part of those who belong to Him. The Levites had been expressly commanded to carry the ark as well as all the vessels of the sanctuary (Num. 4:15).

What David did ought to speak to the conscience of every child of God. Man has organized a system of will-worship according to his own ways and thoughts which are always opposed to God's thoughts. In God's eyes it is of greatest importance that His own obey Him when it comes to worship, the highest expression of the Christian life, as also in the minutest details of life, and God must deal with the disobedience of His children.

While David demonstrates a heart filled with piety toward God, he disobeys because he is ignorant of the bearing and con-

sequences of his act; but David has no excuse, because he ought not to be ignorant of this. This is all the more striking as he was full of joy at the thought of finally giving His God the place due to Him. “David and all the house of Israel played before Jehovah on all manner of instruments made of cypress wood, with harps, and with lutes, and tambours, and with sistra, and with cymbals” (v. 5). Nothing was lacking in the expression of their joy — yet nevertheless something was missing. There were no trumpets: those silver trumpets which ought to have sounded when the ark set out (Num. 10:1-10; cf. Ps. 150 and 2 Sam. 6:15). It was only a detail, you may say, like the new cart; but this detail revealed a fact of serious significance: David had not taken the Word of God as the rule for his conduct.

In spite of this all the house of Israel rejoiced. There was much piety in this solemn ceremony but it was spoiled by human arrangement. This was of little importance for these rejoicing hearts, but it was of great importance for Him who had said: “To obey is better than sacrifice.” There comes a time when

man's meddling in the worship of God makes this worship limp in one way or another. “The oxen had stumbled” (v. 6), and naturally the men, thinking they ought to help, lent the support of their arms to this shaking system. They forgot that it is profane folly to want to help God. This was the problem of Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, who was the first, the chief agent of this transportation. He feels an entirely natural need to support what he had made and does not take into account that he is, as it were, laying his hand upon God. “When they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah reached after the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen had stumbled” (v. 6).

I am speaking here of the worship of God's children, but what should we add about the so-called worship of the world? The world does not only sin in a few particulars, for in its forms that appear to be divine worship there is not even a shadow of reality. Nevertheless we do not see God's judgment falling on this state of things. The reason is simple: God is absent. It was otherwise with Uzzah: “The anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and

there he died by the ark of God” (v. 7). His judgment was immediate, for when it is a matter of children of God whom the Lord has set in a place of testimony, He does not allow them to introduce any human element into worship without causing them to feel His judgment.

What happened to David here also happened to the Corinthians who had introduced a carnal element at the Lord's table. God could not tolerate such a thing. “On this account many among you are weak and infirm, and a good many are fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 11:30). God was a consuming fire for them, as well as for Uzzah, and we must remember this. David was forced to understand this. The Lord had made a breach before him against the Philistines at Baal-perazim; now God's judgment makes a breach against him. “He called that place Perez-uzzah [breach of Uzzah]” (v. 8).

The king's first feeling is that of vexation: “David was indignant, because Jehovah had made a breach.” This is understandable but it is not excusable. Here is a man full of desire to serve

the Lord, of giving Him the honor due Him; here he is, full of joy and praise; he has arranged everything in order to re-establish the worship of his God — he fails in one detail and the wrath of God blazes against him! David's heart was more godly than ours. What a wound to his affections! How can God judge me in this way - he might have said — when He sees my intention to glorify Him!

In verse 9 a second feeling arises in the king's heart, a feeling no more excusable than the first. “David was afraid of Jehovah that day.” He carries the ark aside. “How shall the ark of Jehovah come to me? So David would not bring the ark of Jehovah home unto himself into the city of David; but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite” (vv. 9-10). Because of this discipline David regarded the Lord as a pitiless judge and was vexed with Him. At this moment he forgot that it was a God of grace who had chosen him, led him, kept him, made him victorious, and who had given him the kingdom on Mount Zion. He cannot understand that grace can judge him, and that the closer one is to God, the less God toler-

ates in His own anything that dishonors Him. But God is about to prove to him that others will profit from that of which David had deprived himself to his great loss. The ark's presence is a source of abundant blessings for the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. And Jehovah blessed Obed-Edom and all his household” (v. 11).

At last David had learned his lesson! He is told what had happened (v. 12) and we see that these things were fruitful for his conscience. In 1 Chronicles 15:11-13 concerning this same incident, “David called for ... the priests, and for the Levites ... and he said to them ... Hallow yourselves, ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of Jehovah the God of Israel to the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, Jehovah our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order.” David realized that this breach had been made because of his disobedience and that holiness can be found only in the path of obedience.

When the ark had been set on the new cart the priests and the Levites had no need to sanctify themselves, but when they carried it themselves they must do so; they could not come into contact with the objects of the sanctuary without self-judgment.

Thus the priests occupy the place that God has assigned to them, but what is more, David enters into an order of things that is in absolute conformity to God's thoughts regarding worship. “It was so, that when they that bore the ark of Jehovah had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatted beast” (2 Sam. 6:13). David makes sacrifice the very center of this worship. The first time (astonishingly enough) they had forgotten the sacrifices! The cart (notice the importance of one omitted detail) had no need to stop, whereas when the priests and Levites carried the ark, pauses during which sacrifices were offered were necessary.

And the trumpets! And joy! And David rejoicing with all his might before the Lord! The king was clothed with a linen ephod (v. 14), the distinctive garment of the priests. Here we

see him once more become a type of Christ in His future glory. There is a bit of Melchisedek in the person of David as he is presented to us here. Here we have kingship united to priesthood. Blessing goes up from the people to God by David's mouth, and blessing comes down from God upon all the people through His mediator (vv. 17-18).

“David danced before Jehovah with all his might” (v. 14). He made himself ridiculous; at least that is what Michal, Saul's daughter, felt and said when she saw her husband forgetting his dignity that he might exalt the Lord alone. Often the world judges the worship given to God by His children to be ridiculous; and the more it is according to God the more those who offer it will be despised. This is because the worshipper makes no account of himself. “We ... worship by the Spirit of God,” says the apostle, “and boast in Christ Jesus, and do not trust in flesh” (Phil. 3:3). David in himself was nothing; he was vile: “I will make myself yet more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight” (2 Sam. 6:22). This cannot suit the world, but thanks be to God, there are simple souls who understand this

abasement and esteem it an honor when the Lord is concerned: “And of the handmaids that thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honor.”

David danced before the Lord and did it for Him, forgetting himself so that God might be glorified. He divested himself of his royal dignity. David was nothing more than a simple worshipper, full of joy in the presence of the Lord of hosts who is seated between the cherubim and who had come to make His dwelling forever in the midst of His people.

“They brought in the ark of Jehovah, and set it in its place, in the midst of the tent that David had prepared for it” (v. 17). All the people are blessed and are satisfied. Michal, left in her haughty solitude, to her shame is stricken with barrenness until her death. From that time on she is a stranger to David. The character of this daughter of Saul reflected that of her father. In Saul there was hatred; in Michal there was contempt for the Lord's anointed. There can be no more fellowship between her and the king. Typically speaking, He abandons the daughter of

this fallen race to judgment while he, the chosen one of the Lord, is established as prince over His people Israel.

Chapter 7 — Communion

The two preceding chapters have shown us the important changes produced in God's ways toward Israel by the establishment in Zion of David's kingdom. The king brings the ark to Zion, thus associating God's throne with his own government. This is not yet however, as we have seen, a perpetually established state of things as will be the case under Solomon's reign.

That is why we do not find the regular order of worship here. David brings the ark to Jerusalem but not the other furnishings of the tabernacle. He sets up a tent for the ark, but it is not the tent of the wilderness. “They brought in the ark of Jehovah, and set it in its place, in the midst of the tent that David had spread for it” (2 Sam. 6:17). The tabernacle itself with the altar was found elsewhere.

In the First Book of Samuel the tabernacle and the ark are found at Shiloh. The ark is taken captive by the Philistines, but when it returns in grace it does not return to its place in Shiloh, to the place where God might be approached through sacrifice.

In the Second Book of Samuel Shiloh disappears, but the tabernacle is not transported to Jerusalem. It is found at Gibeon without any indication of how it got there. One thing is certain: the tabernacle and the altar of sacrifice are at Gibeon when David brings the ark to Mount Zion: “And [David] left there before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, Asaph and his brethren, to do the service before the ark continually, as every day's duty required ... and Zadok the priest, and his brethren the priests, before the tabernacle of Jehovah in the high place that was at Gibeon, to offer up burnt-offerings to Jehovah on the altar of burnt-offering continually” (1 Chr. 16:37-40). Later, at the time of the plague at Jerusalem when David at the Lord's command built an altar on Mount Moriah and sacrificed there, it says: “The tabernacle of Jehovah, which Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt-offering, were at that time

in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God; for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of Jehovah” (1 Chr. 21:29-30). Again, at Gibeon Solomon sacrificed at the beginning of his reign: “And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt-offerings did Solomon offer up upon that altar” (1 Kings 3:4).

All this shows us a state of disorder or of great weakness with regard to the worship of the Lord during David's reign. Shiloh was virtually abandoned from the time of the ruin of the priesthood (Ps. 78:60-61); the Lord's house was not yet built at Jerusalem and worship was, so to speak, divided between the ark at Zion and the altar at Gibeon. The other vessels were still in the tabernacle. They are mentioned in 1 Kings 8:4. Gibeon was a city of the sons of Aaron (Joshua 21:17). We would suppose that, as was the case at Nob (1 Sam. 21:6), the furnishings of the sanctuary were kept guarded there by the priests.

However that may be, the worship of the Lord under David's reign was quite far from what ought to have been. But one thing was sufficient for David — the object of all his desires during his afflictions (Ps. 132:1-8): he had found a resting place for the throne of the Lord of hosts, for the ark of His strength. There where David was established he now had with him the God of Israel, for the “name” (2 Sam. 6:2) represents the person. His resource — precious above all else amid the dispersal of the holy vessels in this time of transition that would be succeeded by his successor's glory — his resource, I repeat, was the presence of God Himself with him and with His people Israel.

This also constitutes the blessing of believers in our present day. The Church is in a state of ruin and utter disorder, but one thing is enough for us: to have the Lord's personal presence in our midst. With such a privilege how can we allow ourselves to be discouraged by the state of things surrounding us? With Him, more so than in David's case, do we not have worship?

This presence sufficed to fill the king's heart with joy and thanksgiving.

In 2 Samuel 7 David is dwelling in his house: God's power had given him rest from all his enemies; his kingdom had been proclaimed; the ark was with him. Now in his affection for the Lord he desires to build Him a permanent place of rest. Could the ark still dwell “under curtains” in a temporary dwelling place, when David was living in a house of cedar, solid and well founded in its beauty? He tells Nathan the prophet of his desire. It is the desire of a godly heart, for he wanted to see the glory established in Israel. Nathan approves: “Go, do all that is in thine heart; for Jehovah is with thee” (v. 3).

Though David was piously occupied with God's rest in Israel, neither he nor the prophet knew the time that God had decreed for this. David ought not do what was in his heart; he must depend upon God and wait upon Him. Nathan could not trust in his gift as prophet to direct David. The king, despite his godliness, is mistaken; the prophet with all his light makes an error.

David is a man who really depends upon the Lord, but how often does this dependence fail! He could not even depend upon his affection for the Lord, and he had learned this at the “breach of Uzzah.” He must inquire of God, nor was Nathan exempt from this obligation any more than the king. Each of us individually must depend upon God alone; even the most godly of men cannot replace Him. Lot walks with Abraham for a time. Alas! look at his end! Abraham walked with God. Let us consider the outcome of his conduct and imitate his faith. Certainly we can listen to counsel, ask counsel of those who are more advanced than we in understanding, in wisdom, and in true godliness; this is what humble hearts which have no confidence in themselves do. But we must depend upon God alone for our decisions and for our walk.

The Lord has compassion on His servant. He sees the desire in David's heart to honor Him, and He reveals His most secret thoughts to him. “It came to pass that night that the word of Jehovah came to Nathan, saying, Go and say to My servant, to David, Thus saith Jehovah: Wilt thou build Me a house for Me

to dwell in? For I have not dwelt in a house since the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but I went about in a tent and in a tabernacle” (vv. 4-6). He says in effect, Never have I rested up to now; I have always wandered with My people. As long as the final order has not yet been established I have not said a word about building a place of rest for Me.

Why so? Because God still did not feel He had found His ultimate rest. He continued to work. He sacrificed His own rest in favor of His people's and His king's rest. He was still actively working on their behalf in order to establish them in the mountain of His inheritance, to plant them, as it is said in the song of Moses: “Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance” (Ex. 15:17). God had not yet finished this work. He wanted to finish it and took the place of a worker on behalf of this miserable people, entirely setting aside His own interests, so to speak, so that He might establish His people in their ultimate rest that nothing will trouble forever. The word “forever” characterizes all the blessings of this

chapter (vv. 13, 16, 24, 26, 29). Such is God's thought concerning His own.

We have the Lord who is working for our blessing too. Has He not said: “My Father works hitherto and I work” (John 5:17)? He has not yet ceased working by His Spirit and He will continue to work until the moment when “He shall see of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa. 53:11). Then God will be able to rest and give rest to His people and to His King whom He will establish as Head over all things; then He Himself will rest. “The king of Israel, Jehovah, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not; Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. Jehovah thy God in thy midst, a Mighty One that will save: He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will exult over thee with singing!” (Zeph. 3:15-17). This is God's rest. When He will have brought all the objects of His love into rest, when He will have them round about Himself in glory without any more change to come, without the

possibility of any cloud passing over them, then God's rest will be ushered in.

*Us wilt Thou contemplate —
Pearl of Thy heart's deep longing,
Travail of Thy lone soul,
Fruit of Thy wondrous cross!*

Yes, He will rest in His love. Creation's rest lasted for one day and was disturbed; redemption's rest will never be disturbed and will last “forever.”

The First Book of Kings presents this rest in type in Solomon's glorious reign, a feeble picture of Christ's reign. Then righteousness and peace will reign over the earth after having “kissed each other” at the cross (Ps. 85:10). And that will not be the end. A new heaven and a new earth will succeed the first heaven and earth and righteousness will dwell there after its reign shall have ended (2 Peter 3:13).

Before these things take place, here in 2 Samuel we find a period of transition when God is at work to bring about the full accomplishment of His counsels.

God tells David what He had done for him: “I took thee from the pasture-grounds from following the sheep, to be prince over My people, over Israel” (v. 8). This was his origin. “I have been with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are on the earth” (v. 9). God in grace had sustained him from his first step to his last step; He had been with him throughout and had wanted to make him powerful and honored.

“And I will appoint a place for My people, for Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and be disturbed no more; neither shall the sons of wickedness afflict them any more, as formerly, and since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel” (vv. 10-11). What grace, what tender pity for this people! With delight He calls

them His people. And as for David: “I have given thee rest from all thine enemies,” but I want to do yet more for you. You desire to build a house for me? I am the One who is placing Myself at your service in order to establish one for you — not a house of cedar, but: “Jehovah tells thee that Jehovah will make thee a house. When thy days are fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. It is he who shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever (vv. 11-13). Is this only in the person of Solomon? No, God directs David’s attention to Christ, the Seed of David. What thoughts must have filled the king’s heart in the presence of such an honor conferred on his house! The promises of grace extend to the eternal kingdom: “I will be to Him for father, and He shall be to Me for son.” The son of David will be the Son of God! (Heb. 1:5). What a prospect for David’s heart! A river of grace flows to him and shall flow out from him!

After this God speaks to David of Solomon, no longer as a type of Christ, but as a fallible man to whom, as such, responsibility would be confided. He can fall under God's discipline and chastening. "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the sons of men" (v. 14). But his lineage will be established forever: "My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before thee. And thy house and thy kingdom shall be made firm for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (vv. 15-16).

Did God lie? David's lineage seems to have come to an end. The feeble vestiges of his throne seem to have fallen into the dust with Zerubbabel who does not merit the title of king, yet even now Zechariah's voice is heard crying out to Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:6-10). "Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion; shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King comes to thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9). There is thus no interregnum ... But the Messiah, the true King, is rejected by His

people! No doubt the throne is now lost and God's promise to David has not been realized. Where is the King? Where is the Successor of David's seed? The throne exists. Before God re-establishes it on earth it will be established in heaven. The Son of David has gone “to receive for Himself a kingdom and return” (Luke 19:12). He is acknowledged as head of the heavenly part of His kingdom before the earthly part in its turn submits to Him. “The king is dead, long live the king!” men say when they acclaim the successor of a deceased sovereign. But Christ has died once — Christ, His own successor, lives eternally!

From the time of Christ's cross and His rejection by the Jews we have a parenthesis continuing from the formation of the Church to the moment when the Lord will rapture her and introduce her into glory with Himself. Only then will He claim His rights to the earthly part of His kingdom. All the “sure mercies of David” will be realized in Him whose kingdom will be established forever.

I love to give this chapter the title “Communion.” God is confiding all His thoughts to David, not only about himself and his people but also about Christ. David “went in, and sat before Jehovah” (2 Sam. 7:18) and in complete freedom, complete confidence, he now speaks to the Lord of hosts who is seated between the cherubim, telling Him his thoughts, thoughts of deepest appreciation for all that God had done for him. He rejoices with God in what God is purposing to accomplish for him, for his people, and for his house.

The first thing worth noting is the king's humility. He has no thought of pride. Communion with the Lord, instead of exalting man, lowers him in his own estimation. “Who am I, Lord Jehovah, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto?” (v. 18). David is well aware of his origin and glories in it because this origin exalts the God who took him from the sheepcote!

Can not we say the same thing? We have been drawn out from such depths to have part in that glorious era about to open up.

“Who am I, Lord Jehovah, and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me hitherto? and this has been a small thing in Thy sight, Lord Jehovah; but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come” (vv. 18-19). Thou hast shown me Thy greatness by giving me a great name though I am a poor, worthless creature. Oh, it is not I, it is Thou, whose greatness is so magnificent! “Is this the manner of man, Lord Jehovah?” (v. 19). “And what can David say more to Thee?” He stands before God, giving free vent to the emotions filling his heart, but knowing that his words will always be too feeble to be expressed. Then he blesses the Lord for what He has done for His people (vv. 23-24).

In verse 25 we come to the prayer that ends this chapter. Here we find the character of a true prayer of communion: Do as Thou hast desired to do and as Thou hast said. “Let the house of Thy servant David be established before Thee. For Thou ... hast revealed to Thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house ... Let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant ... for Thou, Lord Jehovah, hast spoken it” (vv. 26-29).

Let us take this attitude as a model for ourselves. Having received divine communications in our hearts, let us sincerely request of God the things that He Himself has promised us. He loves to give us the things we ask of Him, to grant them according to our thoughts and our desires, for since these are the fruit of communion with Him they are His own thoughts and desires.

Chapter 8 — New Victories

After 2 Samuel 7 which, morally speaking, is the high point of David's entire history 2 Samuel 8 relates a series of victories. The victories of this chapter grow out of David's communion with his God just as the victories of 2 Samuel 5 were the fruit of his dependence and obedience. When we are in communion with Him God has no need to discipline us as He did with Uzzah. Communion lets us advance, sure of being in God's pathway without needing special instruction to show this pathway to us. "I will instruct thee and teach thee the way in which thou shalt go; I will counsel thee with Mine eye upon thee"

(Psalm 32:8) will become reality to us. Our path becomes God's path because our thoughts do not differ from His. Thus it is said twice in this chapter: “Jehovah preserved David whithersoever he went”* (vv. 6, 14).

- * We must also note that the victories of chapter 5 follow the establishment of the kingdom in Zion, and those of chapter 8 the establishment of God's throne in the same place. In the first case, God vindicates the character and dignity of His anointed against the nations; in the second case, He defends His own glory as the God of Israel. The nations must bow down to this double supremacy. I have no doubt that similar events will precede the final establishment of millennial blessing.

Like the Lord will do at the end when He will judge the nations, so David applies judgment to them in various ways and measures: according to the character of his enemies or according to the way in which they have treated his people.

First of all he smites the Philistines and subjugates them (v. 1), capturing their capital city, Metheg-ammah (the bridle of the

capital), and these sworn enemies of Israel are thus deprived of what was the bulwark of their strength.

Moab is the proud enemy rising up against God and His anointed, a cruel people without pity for Israel. David destroys two-thirds of this people but extends grace to a remnant whose life he preserves: “He measured ... one full line to keep alive. And the Moabites became David's servants and brought gifts” (v. 2).

Likewise the Syrians of Damascus who had come to help Hadadezer, king of Zobah, were conquered by David's power and “became servants to David, and brought gifts” (vv. 3-6).

In verses 13-14 Edom is completely subjugated. In 1 Chronicles 18:12 they are overcome by the hand of Abishai, Joab's brother; in Psalm 60, they are defeated by Joab himself. Whatever the instruments employed may be, here the victory is attributed to David. Edom is the only one of all the nations reappearing at the time of the end for judgment that will have no “remnant” preserved. God will judge the Edomites without mercy on account of the way they behaved toward His people,

for they were the most wicked and the most desirous of destroying Israel. Had they not formerly “refused to give Israel passage through [their] territory” to enter the land of Canaan (Num. 20:21)? “Remember, O Jehovah,” says the afflicted remnant in Babylon, “against the sons of Edom, the day of Jerusalem; who said, Lay it bare, Lay it bare, down to its foundation!” (Ps. 137:7). The prophet Obadiah who deals only with the judgment of Edom says: “The house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble; and they shall kindle in them and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau: for the Lord has spoken it” (Obadiah 18); whereas a “remnant” out of all the other nations is preserved. Thus this terrible word spoken by the Lord will be fulfilled at the time of the end: “I hated Esau” (Mal. 1:3), for, says Obadiah, “the Lord has spoken it.”

Another event takes place in verse 9 of our chapter. When Toi king of Hamath learns that David has smitten Hadadezer who was continually at war against him, he sends his son Joram to

the king with vessels of silver, gold, and brass. Toi freely and willingly acknowledges the deliverance which God wrought by David and offers his presents without being constrained to (cf. vv. 2 and 6).

All this shows us that the nations will have quite varied characters at the time of the end. Some will be broken with a rod of iron and forced to submit; others will put on an appearance of submission, as it is said: “Strangers come cringing unto me” [i.e., render forced or feigned obedience] (Ps. 18:44; 2 Sam. 22:45 JND with explanatory note at Deut. 33:29); and lastly still others — not like an isolated Toi, but a great multitude which no man will be able to number (Rev. 7:9-10) — will submit themselves to Christ's yoke, accepting His victory as their deliverance.

David consecrates all the spoil from the victory over the enemy (vv. 11-12) as well as Toi's free-will offerings to the Lord. He claims nothing of all for himself. What purpose will these riches serve? 1 Chronicles 18:7-8 shows us that they were

brought to Jerusalem and that Solomon made “the brazen sea, and the pillars, and the vessels of brass” for the temple of the Lord out of this great quantity of brass. In 2 Samuel 6 David had given the Lord's throne the place due to it in the government of the kingdom. Henceforth his only thought is that the fruit of all his victories be used to ornament the ultimate, unchangeable dwelling place of his God in the midst of Israel. The victories of 2 Samuel 5 had served to strengthen David's throne; the victories of 2 Samuel 8 serve to glorify the throne of God who is seated between the cherubim.

Two or three psalms are linked in a special way to the events of this chapter. It is interesting to see how David's prophetic songs are the fruit of his personal experiences or are related to them, but also how these experiences are only a minor factor in the prophetic course of events, a weak picture of Christ's sufferings and the glories that shall follow them.

Psalm 60 as it refers to this chapter proves, if this is necessary, that these events are not simply the history of David, but that

typically they represent the future establishment on earth of Christ's kingdom.*

- * The second book of Psalms, to which Psalm 60 belongs, deals with the future circumstances of the remnant when they will have been driven out of Jerusalem, and brings us to the establishment of David's kingdom and victory over the nations. Psalm 72 ends this book with the reign of Solomon, who is established over his people as the king of righteousness and peace.

The heading of this psalm tells us that it is a “Testimony. Michtam of David; to teach: when he strove with the Syrians of Mesopotamia, and the Syrians of Zobah, and Joab returned, and smote the Edomites in the valley of salt, twelve thousand.” The beginning of this psalm is remarkable: “O God, Thou hast cast us off, Thou hast scattered us, Thou hast been displeased: Restore us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble, Thou hast rent it: heal the breaches thereof; for it shakes. Thou hast shown Thy people hard things; Thou hast made us to drink the wine of bewilderment” (vv. 1-3). There is no event in the

Second Book of Samuel corresponding to these words, but this was precisely the history of Israel in First Samuel. Following their unfaithfulness under the priesthood and the rule of Saul Israel had in effect drunk the wine of bewilderment at the end of this book; Israel will drink an even more lethal wine under the Antichrist.

“Thou hast given a banner to them that fear Thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth, Selah, that Thy beloved ones may be delivered” (vv. 4-5). What is this banner? It is David, as we see in Isaiah 11:10. “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, standing as a banner of the peoples: the nations shall seek it; and his resting-place shall be glorious.” This blessing is only partial in this chapter; it will be completely fulfilled in “Jehovah-Nissi” (the Lord my banner), in Christ, the true Root of Jesse, before His establishment as the true Solomon in His reign. Christ will be the banner around which Israel will gather to go from victory to victory. “That thy beloved ones may be delivered”; in effect these victories of the true David will be the deliverance of the remnant of Israel.

“God has spoken in His holiness: I will exult, I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth” (Ps. 60:6). Shechem and Succoth remind us of how Israel's history began with Jacob, their father (Gen. 33:17-20). These are the first places where he settled when he returned to the land of promise after wandering in a strange land. So it will one day be for the remnant of Israel surrounding the true David and regaining possession of their land as they follow Him.

“Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine, and Ephraim is the strength of my head; Judah is my lawgiver” (v. 7). All the tribes of Israel will acknowledge the true king.

“Moab is my washpot; upon Edom will I cast my sandal; Philistia, shout aloud because of me!” (v. 8). After the Messiah has been acknowledged the three great enemies of 2 Samuel 8 are subdued; Philistia acclaims the supremacy of the Lord's Anointed.

In verses 9 to 12 the remnant asks: “Who will bring me into the strong city? Who will lead me unto Edom?” and answers: “Wilt

not Thou, O God, who didst cast us off? and didst not go forth, O God, with our armies?” A greater than David, their Messiah, God Himself, will be there to lead them. This psalm, inspired by David's experiences and the events of his history, therefore applies in a positive way to the person of the Lord Jesus.

We find this same Psalm 60, at least in part, again in the fifth book of Psalms in Psalm 108:6-13. The first five verses of Psalm 108 are borrowed from Psalm 57:7-11 of the second book of Psalms. Psalm 57 was composed in the cave during David's flight from Saul. In verses 7 to 11 David rejoices in the results of the deliverance which the Lord wrought in his favor. He passes, as it were, from the First Book of Samuel to the Second and says: “My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing, yea, I will sing psalms. Awake, my glory; awake, lute and harp: I will wake the dawn. I will give Thee thanks among the peoples, O Lord; Of Thee will I sing psalms among the nations: for Thy loving-kindness is great unto the heavens, and Thy truth unto the clouds. Be exalted above the heavens, O God: let Thy glory be above all the earth!”

Verses 6-13 of Psalm 108 are the same as in Psalm 60, but in them the thought differs from the latter psalm; that is, David wins the victory so that the Lord may be celebrated among the nations and also so that His beloved ones may be delivered, whereas in Psalm 60, it is only a question of the deliverance of His beloved ones.

The circumstances before us in the fifth book of psalms, of which Psalm 108 is a part, are that Israel is returning to their land. They are not yet under the reign of Solomon, a type of Christ during the millennium. But rather they are under the reign of David, the king of grace, and in times (similar to 2 Sam. 8) that are troubled by the appearance of the Assyrian who at the dawn of the millennial period wants to capture the land of Israel. When all enemies are defeated and the king shouts aloud over Philistia (Ps. 108:9, cf. Ps. 60:8) the remnant asks who will lead them into Edom (v. 9-10). Isaiah 63:1-6 gives us the answer: “Who is this that comes from Edom ... I have trodden the winepress alone, and of the peoples, not a man was with Me ... For the day of vengeance was in My

heart, and the year of my redeemed had come ... And I have trodden down the peoples in Mine anger.”

This will be the last of the Messiah's successive victories over His enemies: alone, He will tread upon them.

How interesting it is to relate all the history of the Old Testament to its Antitype and to go beyond the moral lessons that we may draw, for all the Word speaks of the Lord Jesus. He is the One whom we must seek above all else. If we study the Word prayerfully under the Lord's eye it will lead us to the knowledge of His Person. We need to be occupied with Himself above all else. Then the glory of His kingdom, His victory over the nations, the renewing of His relations with His people will all be subjects of great interest to us although these things do not concern us personally. We will rejoice at the thought of seeing Him occupy the place that is due Him, for Jehovah will establish this reign of glory over the earth for Him who has accomplished the wonderful work of redemption, the work which has thoroughly glorified God and saved us forever.

Here we have come to one of the divisions of this book. This division is marked by verses 15 to 18 of our chapter, 2 Samuel 8. We find these verses once again with some modifications in 2 Samuel 20:23-26. These verses present the order of David's reign, and 2 Samuel 8 ends the history, properly speaking, of the establishment of the king as a type of the Messiah. But the presence of Joab at the head of the army and the exercise of the priesthood by two high priests prove that the ultimate order has not yet been established as it will be under Solomon's reign.

Chapter 9 — Mephibosheth

2 Samuel 9 and 10 are a sort of appendix. 2 Samuel 9 presents in type the Messiah's grace toward Israel and 2 Samuel 10 the same grace extended to the nations who reject it and bring down the judgment of God upon themselves.

In 2 Samuel 9 the time comes when David remembers the house of Saul. He looks for some survivor of this family that he may show him kindness on account of his friend Jonathan (v. 1). He finds Mephibosheth, a poor offshoot of this family, who

bears in his person the consequences of the lack of faith of the woman who had had charge of him in his childhood.

As it was with David, so it will be with the Lord Jesus. The time will come when the Messiah will renew His relationship with the remnant of Israel whose fathers, like Jonathan, acknowledged Him during the days of His rejection and despite their weakness loved Him as their own soul. This first remnant converted during Jesus' time on earth ended, and merged, so to speak, into the Christian Church after the Lord's resurrection. At present the Church forms the great parenthesis that will be closed by the Lord Jesus' coming to rapture His saints. Only then will the true David remember Jonathan's offshoots, morally the descendants of the first Jewish disciples. He will be able to discover these descendants in a poor remnant that once turned their backs on the Messiah because they did not trust in grace and who now suffer the results of their unbelief.

This remnant will have two characteristics that again we find throughout the psalms. They will bear the weight of divine

governmental wrath against a rebellious people from whom the remnant ought to have separated themselves. But this remnant will also, like Mephibosheth, bear the character of the grace that will be their portion. Through the mouth of the remnant the psalms express these two lines of thought which appear to contradict one another: first, God's government acting in outward wrath against the remnant because they are part of the people who crucified the Messiah and also called down upon themselves "bloodguiltiness" (Ps. 51:14). Secondly, grace operating in the hearts of these righteous ones to lead them to acknowledge the Lord as Savior and to share the glory of His kingdom.

Let us now point out the features in our account that relate to our own relationship with Christ.

David gives free flow to his mercy toward those whom he desires to bless. There was no reason that his interest should be drawn toward the house of Saul; this house had ever made war against David and, as far as its present condition was concerned, only its misery could attract the king's attention. But it

is precisely misery that attracts grace. David says: “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?” (v. 1), and then: “Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?” (v. 3) — that is, divine kindness. Ziba comes to tell him that there was a poor miserable person, a man whose both feet were lame. They were lame because in time past he had fled from the one whose only thought was to bless him. The king sends for him, for this Mephibosheth who was numbered among “the lame and the blind hated of David's soul” (2 Sam. 5:8), and this lame man presents himself before David. What emotions must have stirred in the heart of this poor cripple! With what anguish he must have pictured the fate awaiting him! David had indeed told Ziba that he would exercise mercy toward Saul's descendants, but when once he had this offshoot of the family which had hunted him mercilessly would David still dream of exercising the promised mercy toward him?

“And David said, Mephibosheth!” He calls him by name, the name that no one had pronounced in his presence. David

knows me then; does he remember me? the wretch must be thinking. And Mephibosheth, bowed at the king's feet, says: "Behold thy servant!"

David does what the Lord always does when He desires to gain a sinner's confidence. He says to him: "Fear not," when this poor soul terrified by the judgment he was expecting finds himself at the feet of his judge. "Fear not; for I will certainly show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake." He remembers his covenant with Jonathan; he had bound himself to Jonathan by promises not to be repented of (1 Sam. 20:14-17); he could not and would not break them. Mephibosheth had nothing to fear for his judge is telling him: "I will surely show thee kindness."

But David does not stop there: I "will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father." He gives Mephibosheth his inheritance. Then: "Thou shalt eat bread at my table continually." The king's grace gives Mephibosheth a most privileged place at his court. He eats with the king; and much more, he does so "as

one of the king's sons” (v. 11). Before the eyes of one and all David gives him the title and relationship of a son!

To look at him, this man must have been wretchedness itself. This poor cripple could not move about by himself and must be carried to the king's table. What must outsiders who were present at a feast at the palace have thought of him? But to David he is a son, set in the highest place he could give him. Is not this what we find in Ephesians 2:6-7? God “has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, that He might display in the coming ages the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.” David acts in the same way toward Mephibosheth. The fact of his being seated as a son at his table was a thousand times more precious in the king's mind than the fact of being an heir, and so he repeats these words to him three times (vv. 7, 10, 13).

Notice that the fact of being introduced into this glorious relationship changed nothing about Mephibosheth's condition. The chapter ends with the words: “And he was lame on both his

feet.” In the eyes of others and in his own eyes he is just the same. “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, good does not dwell,” says Paul in Romans 7:18. In David's eyes it is quite otherwise; he is clothed in all the dignity of a son of the king. Thus we Christians who “have no confidence in the flesh” ought to remain where we are, considering what God has made of us. He no longer sees us in our misery. In order to exalt His grace He gives poor persons crippled in both feet a right to enjoy His presence in glory.

How does Mephibosheth respond, beholding himself as the object of such favor? “He bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?” In David's presence he terms himself a dog, unclean and despicable, the very image of defilement; a dead dog, a foul and repulsive object worthy only of being kicked aside. Speaking in this manner to David he took — and others might well know this — the place that David had taken in reference to Saul, Mephibosheth's forebear: “After whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog?” (1 Sam. 24:14). The powerful king before

whom Mephibosheth stood had in time past taken the same place as he was taking; he had come to know the meaning of defilement, death, and rejection during the days of his sufferings. It was with such a savior that Mephibosheth had to do.

When the Syrophenician woman found herself in the presence of the Messiah He told her: “It is not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs.” “Yes, Lord,” she replied. She accepts this sentence. “Yes, Lord,” it is true; I affirm what You have just told me; I am unworthy, but You are the very grace in which I confide. “Even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs” (Mark 7:24-30). These words go directly to Jesus' heart. Faith which despite our profound unworthiness in no wise doubts His love and power is sure to receive an abundance of divine blessings in exchange. Our unworthiness only serves to bring to light the grandeur of grace.

The Jewish remnant in the end times will also come to thorough self-judgment in the presence of the One whom they have rejected. They will say: Is it possible that we “esteemed Him

not,” the very Son of God? And as the object of my hostility He allowed Himself to be stricken in my place! He entered into my condition, like a lamb led to the slaughter, dumb, resolved to save me at any price.

Mephibosheth's portion cannot be taken away from him: He will “eat bread at my table continually” (vv. 7, 10); “He did eat continually at the king's table” (v. 13). “Thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever” (1 Sam 20:15). He dwelt at Jerusalem, the same place that the king had chosen for his dwelling. We possess these same privileges, and this series of favors that were Mephibosheth's is also our present and future portion. We have the inheritance and we shall possess it. We dwell in the Father's house and we will dwell there forever. He has seated us at His table; we will be there forever. And truly, when we are at that feast in time to come the love that humbled itself to save us will consent to be servant of our joy eternally!

Like Mephibosheth we must measure ourselves in the presence of grace and, having judged ourselves, understand that our

glorious position as children of God depends solely on the love that fills Christ's heart for poor creatures such as us.

Chapter 10 — Hanun

David's grace does not only address the Jewish remnant. In 2 Samuel 10 he extends it toward rebellious Gentiles. Moab and Ammon, Lot's descendants, for all practical purposes formed a single people. They had always been allies one with another and with Israel's other enemies, seeking to harm the people of God. “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not come into the congregation of Jehovah; even their tenth generation shall not come into the congregation of Jehovah for ever; because they met you not with bread and with water on the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt, and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor, of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. But Jehovah thy God would not listen to Balaam; and Jehovah thy God turned the curse into blessing unto thee, because Jehovah thy God loved thee” (Deut. 23:3-5). Such is God's ordinance concerning them. Israel ought never to seek

their peace nor their prosperity. Nevertheless, even if he cannot gain this nation as such David desires at least to win their [national?] head's heart by his grace, sending to comfort him.

It will be likewise in the end time: God's grace brought in by the reign of Christ will be offered to the nations. Messengers will be sent to urge the Gentiles to submit to Him. Many of them will find David's Son's yoke an easy one to bear; others, like Hanun, will refuse to accept anything from Him.

But this history, just like Mephibosheth's, speaks to us of yet other things besides Christ's future reign and His grace extended to the nations in the end time. In this history we also find God's ways for the present.

“David said, I will show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me” (v. 2). We have no reason to think that this Nahash is any other than the one presented to us in 1 Samuel 11, whose pride and fury had sought the satisfaction of putting out the right eye of all the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead in order to put Israel to shame. God had de-

livered them by Saul's hand, but we see how decidedly this wicked, blood-thirsty man was the enemy of God's people. His natural character brings out all the more that which our chapter has to say about him.

“His father showed kindness to me.” The Word says nothing about this in the account of David's wanderings; the First Book of Chronicles makes no mention of it. In a word, history does not recall this kindness — but David, a type of Christ, remembers an act of kindness on the part of this man who must have hated him as the future king of Israel. At a time when the Lord's anointed was rejected this Nahash (in any case, God was above all his doings) had shown him good-will.

It may happen that the world or a man belonging to the world at enmity with the people of God may do something for Christ, may be inclined to offer some sort of assistance to those who here on earth represent the Lord Jesus. This man may forget his act. The world may forget it as well. It is nowhere recorded. But the Lord does not forget. Such a man does not receive a re-

ward in heaven, but the eyes, heart, and thoughts of the Lord Jesus are drawn to him; He will not remain debtor to one who although he is essentially an enemy has done something for Him. “David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father.” Nahash was dead; no doubt he had been a good king to his people, and Hanun, his son and successor, grieved by this great loss needed to be consoled. David thinks of him.

So it is today. The Lord forgets nothing. In exchange for an act of kindness shown Him even by an otherwise evil man He sends that which may encourage him. These are consolations to comfort a soul burdened with the sorrow that sin has brought into the world. David knew the needs of Hanun's heart; he knew how to replace sorrow with feelings of kindness and joy. He does not send him presents, or riches, or honors, but rather what is infinitely better: consolation. This he sends at the hand of his servants; to receive these servants was to receive David himself.

Just so the gospel is announced to the world. How encouraging to think that the Lord's eyes are on each one and that He does not forget the hearts of sinners that may be inclined to Him, even if it be but for a single moment. He would extend His blessings to them and to their children.

What good Hanun would have enjoyed had he understood the king's intentions. Grace ever characterizes David. Grace, to say nothing of his sufferings and afflictions, makes him a remarkable type of the Lord Jesus. Had David not shown grace in this very book in presence of Saul's sad fate and the tragic fate of Abner and of Ish-bosheth? David has nothing but good to say of His enemies; he forgets their animosity and their insults; his large and noble heart rises above every personal consideration, viewing his enemies only in the pure light of grace. Thus it is that Jesus sends the message of salvation to His worst enemies!

Hanun is not receptive. Had he been alone his heart might perhaps have been touched; he does not immediately drive the messengers away, but he is poorly counseled; the princes of the

Ammonites incite his distrust: “Is it not to search the city and to spy it out, and to overthrow it, that David has sent his servants to thee?” How easily such suggestions succeed when Jesus is not known! These men, they say, are hypocrites; their purpose is to make war against us.

Oh, how many times have such insinuations hindered the Lord's servants in their work of winning souls to Christ!

The world has more confidence in the opinion of its counselors than in the message of Christ. These counselors will do anything to turn aside from the gospel those of their followers who show any inclination at all to receive it. The distance between distrust and insult is shorter than we might suspect.

“Hanun took David's servants, and had the one half of their beards shaved off, and their raiment cut off in the midst, as far as their buttocks, and sent them away” (v. 4). This was the most shameful treatment that could be inflicted on the ambassadors of a king. They must pass through Hanun's territory dishonored, half naked, mocked at, and made a laughing-stock. Is

it surprising that they were “greatly ashamed”? David sends to meet them and says, “Abide at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return” (v. 5).

The last message of grace — and how little Hanun suspected that it was the last — was refused. The consequence is a terrible judgment that begins in this chapter and continues in the following chapters, a judgment without pity, brought on by indignation against the insult to grace.

“And the children of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David; and the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Beth-rehob, and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and the king of Maacah with a thousand men, and the men of Tob twelve thousand men. And David heard of it, and he sent Joab, and all the host, the mighty men” (vv. 6-7).

Men insult the Lord Jesus and are afraid of Him; they show themselves to be His enemies, and hoping to escape judgment they join together to resist Him. “Why are the nations in tumult-

tuous agitation, and why do the peoples meditate a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the princes plot together, against Jehovah and against His Anointed: Let us break Their bonds asunder, and cast away Their cords from us! He that dwells in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision. Then will He speak to them in His anger, and in His fierce displeasure will He terrify them: And I have anointed My King upon Zion, the hill of My holiness” (Ps. 2:1-6.) Events are developing rapidly in the world. The moment is not far off when a confederation of peoples will speak in this very way against the Lord's Anointed. Woe to them! Nor is the moment far off when God will mock at them and through His judgment exalt Him whom He has anointed King over Zion.

Once again we find indications of weakness in David. Shouldn't he have led his army personally instead of entrusting it to Joab? It seems that this life of continual struggle weighed a bit heavily on him, and that he thought he could delegate direction of the war to others so as to grant himself a little rest.

The children of Ammon come out to face Israel's army while Ammon's allies seek to surround them. Joab cleverly works out his battle strategy. Setting his brother Abishai against the Ammonites, he himself faces the Syrians. He says to his brother: "If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me; and if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee." Joab adds: "Be strong, and let us show ourselves valiant for our people and for the cities of our God; and Jehovah do what is good in His sight" (vv. 11-12). Let us begin by being strong, says Joab. Let us fight for the honor of our nation and for sake of the cities of our God. This is what we are to do and then let the Lord do as seems good to Him — we will not refuse His help. This is more or less the motto of the world. Heaven helps those who help themselves. Joab's piety does not go beyond this level.

Joab wins the victory but it is a useless victory. The children of Ammon and the Syrians flee; the former re-enter their city. They are simply beaten back rather than conquered or taken prisoner. There is no fruit from this battle; it must all be begun

again. David had delegated to another man's hands the responsibility God had entrusted to him personally. This lesson is brought home to him in all gentleness, for David does not suffer a defeat; but the Lord's instruction causes him to return to the true path.

The Syrians gather themselves together once again; then David “gathered all Israel, and passed over the Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him. And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew of the Syrians seven hundred in chariots, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there. And all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were routed before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. And the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.” This was a true and complete victory; a victory so complete that these kings submitted to Israel.

David must have received instruction from such an event. He had shirked his responsibility, but now in the school of God he had learned the danger of this holding back.

The children of Ammon must still be dealt with; this task is more difficult, as we shall see. But we will also witness the terrible experiences that David underwent because he failed to learn once and for all the lesson that the Lord had so mercifully given him.

Chapters 11 to 20 - David's Fall and Its Consequences

From 2 Samuel 11 to 2 Samuel 20 we have the history of David as the responsible king. These chapters record the king's terrible fall, the discipline carried out on him, the consequences of his sin, and lastly, his recovery. 2 Samuel 20 ends, as we have previously said (cf. 2 Sam. 8:15-18), with the declaration of the order of his kingdom, but an order less complete than the first as David is no longer being presented as a type of the Messiah.

It is a remarkable fact that the First Book of Chronicles does not mention a single word of the episodes about Bathsheba, Amnon and Tamar, Absalom, David's flight, or the king's restoration. 1 Chronicles 20:1-3 contains 2 Samuel 11:1 and 2 Samuel 12:29-31. There is complete silence about all the rest. The explanation is simple. This omission is one of countless proofs of a divine plan in the various books of the Bible. Chronicles does not tell us of the responsible king who, as such, is put to the test, but rather it tells us of the king as established in grace and blessing according to the counsels of God.

In 2 Samuel 21 we find a new appendix setting forth the judgment of the house of Saul.

2 Samuel 22 and 23 relate the words of David as a type of Christ to the words of David as the responsible king.

Lastly, after enumerating David's mighty men the book ends in a wonderful way in 2 Samuel 24 with the sacrifice of Morijah which, as one has said, "ends the wrath of God through grace

and establishes the foundation of the place of worship where He can meet with Israel.”

Chapter 11 — The Fall

When reading this chapter, a feeling of deep humiliation fills the heart of every child of God. These events took place more than three thousand years ago, but the fact that three thousand years have passed do not change the fact that God was dishonored by one of His servants. It has been possible to blot out the sin but the shame brought upon God remains.

The sin is all the more serious in that it occurs in the life of this man who despite more than one weakness had received the testimony that evil had not been found in him all his days (1 Sam. 25:28). And yet in the midst of his career this servant of God becomes an adulterer, a hypocrite, and a murderer! Oh, if we have any zeal at all for the Lord's glory, any affection for His redeemed, let us weep to see David in contradiction of his entire past trampling upon the Lord's holiness — David who ought to have been the representative of His holiness before the

world! How humbling to think that David, the beloved, could compromise the Lord's name which he bore: David who had been favored by such special nearness to God and upon whom such marvelous grace had been heaped!

The lives of believers present very different features all at the same time:

We see believers, Christians, beginning their career poorly, but learning to judge themselves under God's disciplinary hand they finish their course well and sometimes even gloriously. This was the case with Jacob whose days were “few and evil” but whose life ended with a full vision of glory.

More frequently we see believers who begin their career well and finish it poorly. Such is the history of Lot who, not having Abraham's faith, nevertheless followed in his footsteps. His life then becomes morally weaker and weaker due to his love of earthly goods and it ends in a most shameful manner. Such is the history of Gideon, humble and distrustful of himself, courageous in cleansing his house of false gods, then leader of Is-

rael and the victor over Midian — but at the very end he causes his house and all the people to sin through an ephod which he had made an idol. Lastly, such is the history of Solomon. He had everything: wisdom, practical righteousness, forgetfulness of self, understanding in the thoughts of God, the desire to glorify Him, and power. God uses him to communicate wisdom's sayings to future generations. But Solomon finishes badly. He loved many strange wives who turned his heart away after their false gods. The servant of the true God became an idolater!

Between these two paths we see the path of a believer who from beginning to end walks faithfully without faltering in a spirit of personal holiness and separation from the world. Such was the case with Abraham whose faith and dependence only rarely were in contradiction and who judged his walk whenever it troubled his communion with God. But such was, above all, the path of Christ, the uniform path of the perfect Servant as we see in Psalm 16. There we find not a single imperfection, but rather: absolute confidence, complete obedience, perfect

dependence, flawless practical righteousness, divine holiness in a Man, unshakable faith, unlimited love, unfaltering hope. When we consider such a path we can only worship. But we can also follow Him, and He gives us the capacity and the power to do so. Between ourselves and Him there will always be the difference between the imperfect and the perfect, the finite and the infinite, but as long as our eyes are fixed on Him we will find the secret of a walk that glorifies Him to the end in this world.

David's case is rare but not unique in Scripture. David began well and finished well, but in the middle of his career there was a moral downfall. We could also cite the account of the apostle Peter, but we will not go into this.

Why did God allow this fall on part of David? The answer is full of instruction and in one sense is very valuable for us. Just as Abraham is a model of faith, so David in 1 Samuel is a model of grace. On every hand grace flourishes in him and governs his ways. He always manifests grace, whether it be to-

ward his enemies, his friends, or all those who surround him. His heart is full of God's love and is permeated with unspeakable tenderness. The tears that he shed over Saul, his persecutor, are sincere; he has forgotten everything and there is no room in his heart for anything but grace. Yet nevertheless it was sufficient that such a man be given up to himself only a moment for him to sink into darkness so that every trace of what had previously filled his heart was wiped out.

We need examples like this in order to come to know the flesh in ourselves: "In me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing" (Rom 7:18 KJV). There is no culture, no cleansing, no improvement possible for this flesh; the only fitting place for it is to be nailed to the cross.

After this sin is confessed to God this fall that was so rapid is followed by a long and painful work of recovery. Peter shed bitter tears when he went out of the courtyard that had witnessed his denial, but he did not regain fellowship with the Lord at that time. In the same way only later could David cel-

celebrate grace with a perfectly free heart. It was not enough that he had shown himself to be more or less faithful in his career; God wanted to show him His own grace, full and complete, in circumstances that had made a murderer out of David. David is a miserable object of judgment who becomes the man in whom God exalts and glorifies His triumphant grace.

But how could a man of God ever have fallen from such heights? The Lord had entrusted him with authority and responsibility. He was to use these in incessant activity of faith to serve the Lord and His people. What did David do? He rested. He rested at the season when the kings of the earth go forth to battle; for men of the world often deploy greater activity to successfully accomplish their purposes than Christians do to serve Christ. Believers think that they can rest for a moment and sit down by the side of the road. But we have not been engaged as servants in order to be lazy slaves.

“And it came to pass ... that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel.” The lesson he had learned at the end

of 2 Samuel 10 ought to have again set him at the head of his army. Such is the beginning, often so insignificant, of a fall. Once and again God reproves His servant; he fails and God restores him; he falls again and God allows him to follow his own path. David remains behind at Jerusalem; a little idleness detaches him from the interests of the war. A passer-by appears on the scene: this traveler is lust. The king's gaze is attracted by an object that seems desirable to him; his flesh is conquered; the authority at his disposition becomes servant to his desire; the evil is consummated; the Lord's anointed is an adulterer!

How long did the satisfying of his flesh last? Hardly has the fault been committed but it bears its fruits — a pregnancy. The situation is serious and the king is full of apprehension. His character is compromised; his sin will be revealed; he must hide it. We always behave in this way when we have lost the appreciation of God's presence. David is caught in these circumstances; he struggles, wants to handle them, and in his blindness fails to see that God is directing them.

He has Urijah brought from the camp and hypocritically asks him about Joab, the people, and the war (v. 7). Did he really care? Were not all his thoughts directed toward the single object of hiding his sin? Urijah, whom the king sent to his wife, instead slept with all the king's other servants at the palace door. "Why," asks the king, "didst thou not go down to thy house?" What a beautiful answer Urijah gives: "The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in booths; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into my house!" (v. 11). He had learned this devotion in the school of David himself. In 2 Samuel 7:2 did not David say to Nathan: "See now, I dwell in a house of cedars, and the ark of God dwells under curtains"? This godly desire and this testimony on David's part had been received and had borne fruit among his attendants. Urijah speaks like the David of earlier days. What an unwitting reproach he addresses to his respected master! The man is simple and noble in heart. He says, God is calling me to perform a service, an activity for Himself, and as long as He does not rest I cannot rest.

David pays no attention to these earnest words; he is solely preoccupied with pushing Urijah to the act that will allow the king to cover up his sin. He gets his servant drunk, but in spite of this Urijah remains firm in his decision. Like a caged bird David struggles without resource against the hand that has shut him up. Satan suggests to him the only means of escaping public exposure of his fault; he becomes Urijah's murderer, responsible for the same sin that his people would later commit by putting to death “the just” who did not resist (James 5:6). The same David who had said: “Let [the blood of Abner] fall on the head of Joab” (2 Sam. 3:28-29) now takes this Joab, a murderer himself, as his accomplice and so becomes the slave of the man who had every interest in bringing him into bondage.

On receiving news of the death of Urijah, killed close to the wall of Rabbah along with certain of the “mighty men,” David sends this message to Joab: “Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devours one as well as another” (v. 25). Having achieved his purpose, David reassures his accomplice and then

takes Bathsheba into his house, and she becomes his wife and bears him a son.

The story, instead of ending, only is beginning at this point. At the end of this chapter, so full of corruption and shame, we find a little expression, the only thing David had not thought of and the only one he ought to have remembered: “But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of Jehovah.”

Let us take heed to our ways. It takes only an instant to fall, but to avoid falling we must constantly be on the alert in all that precedes the incident. Yes, we must watch daily to avoid walking in “any grievous way” so that we may be led “in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:24). In this path all is peace for our souls; this is the path of life that leads to unclouded rejoicing in God's presence: “Thy countenance is fullness of joy; at Thy right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:11).

Chapter 12 — Forgiveness, Discipline, and Restoration

A certain period of time passed after David committed this sin. The war against Ammon (begun in the preceding chapter, which covers nearly one year) still continued. The siege of Rabbah had not been brought to its conclusion, and we know that at this time a city could be besieged for years. During this entire period David's conscience was silent although his sin weighed upon him and the fruit of his transgression was evident before his eyes.

Then the Lord intervenes, after having waited a long time for David to repent. Nathan the prophet, bearer of His word, comes on the Lord's behalf to stir up the king's soul. How this chapter differs from 2 Samuel 7! Then, in a time of prosperity and joy, David served the Lord wholeheartedly and had but one thought: to build a house for his God. That first time the Lord had sent Nathan to him to tell him that the time had not yet come for this, but also to open up to him the treasures of His grace, for His object was to bring joy to David's soul. Now the scene has changed. The prophet is sent to him to set him in the

light of a holy and righteous God whose eyes are too pure to behold evil and who must judge it.

Nathan speaks in a parable, and in his blindness David does not detect that he himself is the one this account is about. The prophet says, There were two men in a city, the one rich and the other poor. One had many flocks and herds; the other had only one little lamb which he cherished. A traveler came to the rich man who, in order to spare his own flock, took the poor man's lamb and butchered and cooked it for the man that had come to him.

Let us watch out for this sort of traveler, for we are all prone to be visited by him. Certainly when he appears it is better to close the door against him. This wayfarer is lust, a passing desire, and not one that we habitually entertain and feed. This wayfarer had entered the king's house, knowing he would find something to feed on there. Our hearts too ever contain that which it takes to succumb to Satan's temptations. David forgot to depend on God and thought he could relax instead of serving

and fighting. This was enough to allow the traveler to open the door and let himself in and to mark his visit with disorder and ruin.

“David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As Jehovah lives, the man that has done this thing is worthy of death; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity” (vv. 5-6). David's heart and conscience are in a bad state, nevertheless his judgment continues to be righteous. Although he himself was under sin's yoke he judged it severely in others. Where we are not personally concerned we often have clear and full discernment of evil in others, although our own hearts are unjudged (Matt. 21:41).

“And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man!” How suddenly everything caved in! David had pronounced his own sentence; he deserves death! Yes, this blow reaches his heart, but it also goes down to the deepest recesses of his conscience. Suddenly exposed to the light a sinner who does not know God may be

convicted, may have his mouth shut without such conviction penetrating any deeper, but for a child of God such a state can only be momentary.

The Lord reminds David of all that He had done for him: “I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things” (vv. 7-8). The treasures of My grace were yours and you sinned in the presence of My love! “Wherefore hast thou despised the word of Jehovah to do evil in His sight?” How had David despised it? God had heaped blessings on him and David had preferred to satisfy his lust!

This same judgment was pronounced against Eli (1 Sam. 2:30) because he honored his sons more than God. He feared the Lord, but he despised Him by allowing his sons to “trample upon [His] sacrifice and upon [His] oblation, which [He] had

commanded in [His] habitation.” And so the Lord tells him: “They that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” We find the same truth in Luke 16:13: “No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will cleave to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” To covet the things the world can offer is to despise God. In general our souls are very little aware of this, but this is how God looks at things. “Because thou hast despised Me,” He repeats in verse 10.

David had preferred his sin to God. What a terrible thing! Do our consciences have nothing to say to us? Every natural heart has lusts that attract it. By “lusts” we mean not only the defiling things of the world but also “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” — pleasures, vanity, and ambition. These things find easy access into a Christian's heart. How many days and years often pass without our shutting the door to them! Every time we open the door to this visitor we are despising the Lord Himself. This is the reason for God's judgment on His servant here.

The graces granted to David were earthly; ours are “spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ.” Do our hearts value these things so much that they offer no asylum to this “traveler”? The Lord's discipline and judgment will fall on us in the measure that we receive or reject this visitor.

The prophet announces three things to David: “The sword shall never depart from thy house.” God did not revoke this sentence of bloodshed. Then in verses 11-12: You sowed to the flesh, from it you will reap corruption. Violence and corruption, these two things that from the beginning have characterized the world which was made subject to sin (Gen. 6:11), would now be habitual lodgers at this poor guilty king's house.

Before we expose ourselves to God's government in discipline let us remember that this government is inflexible. We cannot avoid the consequences of our acts, of our behavior; all God's Word proves this to us. The First Epistle of Peter shows us that even under the dispensation of grace the principles of God's government are unchangeable. No doubt the soul of a Christian

who falls must be restored, but in this world such a one is not delivered from the consequences of his act.

David had this bitter experience to the very end of his career although his soul, fully restored, was once again able to take up the harp and sing the sweet psalms of Israel. Discipline itself then becomes a new reason for celebrating the riches of grace.

Nathan speaks but one phrase, “Thou art the man,” to convict David. David too says but one thing in God's presence: “I have sinned against the Lord.” When a soul has seen this it has taken a tremendous step forward. When a Christian has fallen and God has exposed his sin we habitually find the confession of his fault: “I have sinned.” But what difference does that make when this sin has already been brought to light? David says: “I have sinned against Jehovah,” not: I have sinned against Urijah or against Urijah's wife. Our sins against others may be forgiven by those whom we have offended; we may make amends in a certain measure for the sins we commit against ourselves, but what can we say when we have sinned against the Lord?

One says: “I have sinned,” for he is ashamed of his sin because men see it; but it is quite another thing when one is convicted that the thing he has done is evil in the sight of the Lord.

Having produced this thorough conviction of sin, God does not keep his poor guilty servant waiting. Again He speaks but one sentence to him: “Jehovah has also put away thy sin.” He does not say: Jehovah will, but rather “has put away thy sin.” He had dealt with His servant's sin beforehand; He had made provision so that the sin was put away from David and so that it no longer came up before God. This is what we find at the cross of Christ.

Then Nathan tells David: “Thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme, even the child that is born to thee shall certainly die. And Nathan departed to his house” (vv. 13-15). “Thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme.” Such is the consequence that the world draws from our faults. Satan uses each of our sins to produce

open aversion in men's hearts against God and against Christ. Look, the world says, what their religion leads them to do! — and God is blasphemed. Satan excites lusts in a Christian not only to be able to accuse him, but also to produce aversion to Christ in those who witness his fall, so that these may not turn to Him for salvation.

David had been told that violence and corruption would be found in his house as the fruit of his sin. The third judgment is the death of his child. Death does not strike down David, the guilty one, but rather his cherished son. It is necessary for God's judgment to fall on the king's house in a visible, immediate way before the eyes of all. The child falls sick; the poor father is distressed and fasts and supplicates God. If it were possible, may God show him grace! No, discipline must run its course. What anguish for David's extremely tender heart in the presence of the innocent victim of his sin!

The child dies. David rises from the earth, washes himself, anoints himself with oil, and changes his clothing. It is as

though he were a new man beginning a new career. He goes into the house of the Lord and bows down. Is he mourning? No, he acknowledges the righteousness, holiness, and love of God as well as the clearing of His character through discipline. David rises up a restored man; he can go to his house and call for a meal to be served him. After having bowed down before the Lord he is on his way to renewed fellowship with Him.

His servants say to him: “What thing is this which thou hast done? Thou didst fast and weep for the child alive; but as soon as the child is dead, thou dost rise and eat bread.” David answers: “While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I thought, Who knows? Perhaps Jehovah will be gracious to me, that the child may live. But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me” (vv. 21-23). “I shall go to him.” Now David is satisfied to bear the seal of this discipline to which the death of his son testifies till the end of his career. “He will not return to me.” David can never know this joy, but he accepts as neces-

sary the path of death through which he must one day walk in order to find his son.

The king is now able to console Bathsheba. Grace flows out to him anew. He has a son whom he names Solomon (meaning, Peaceable) and whom the Lord through Nathan calls “Jedidiah” (meaning, Beloved of Jehovah). Grace brings Bathsheba, whom defilement would prevent from having a portion in God's blessings, into the Messiah's line of descent (Matt. 1:6). She becomes the mother of the king of peace and glory. Grace delights to work on behalf of fallen creatures whom it associates with Christ in order to show its “exceeding riches” in the ages to come.

In order to understand how David's soul was restored we must consider Psalm 51. Other psalms refer to the same circumstances, but as usual we are quoting only those psalms whose headings refer to the events which occasioned them. Psalm 51 is such a psalm: “A Psalm of David; when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.” This psalm,

which is prophetic as are all the psalms, goes far beyond the circumstances of David's life. Thus: “Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build the walls of Jerusalem” (v. 18), is about future events. “Bloodguiltiness” refers not only to the murder of Urijah but also to the killing of the Messiah. David himself, as we shall see in the continuation of this history, is a type of the remnant of Judah placed under the governmental wrath of God. This same psalm can also be used in preaching the gospel to describe the condition of a sinner who returns to God like the prodigal son and says: “I have sinned against heaven and before thee” (Luke 15:18). But here we are looking at those special feelings produced in the soul of a believer who is deprived of fellowship through his fall, having lost the joy of his salvation.

Two thoughts dominate David's heart at the beginning of this psalm: his first thought is that grace is the only resource for his transgression (v. 1); the second thought is that he has sinned against God and God alone (this is what David said when confronted by the prophet Nathan, as we have seen), “that Thou

mayest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest” (v. 4). I have sinned, the king says, in such a way that Thy righteousness against sin must be manifested. Oh God! Thou dost discover the means through my sin of justifying Thyself. Thou dost justify Thyself by showing that Thou dost not excuse sin. As for myself, there is only thorough condemnation, but as for Thee, Thou art able to bring glory to Thyself in this! These are feelings worthy of a saint whom God brings into His own presence in a self-judged and humbled condition.

Then the psalm shows us three conditions of heart found in the restored believer. These three conditions and their consequences are described in the three divisions of this psalm.

(Vv. 1-6). The first condition of heart is described in the words: “Behold, Thou wilt have truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part Thou wilt make me to know wisdom.” “Truth in the heart” — God's desire, first of all, is to produce this by bringing us into His presence when we have sinned. Often a

soul will judge a particular action and go no further, but this is not yet all the truth in the heart. David judges his action: “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is continually before me” (v. 3); but he also judges his condition: “Behold, in iniquity was I was brought forth, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (v. 5). It is not enough for him to judge only his sin; he judges sin in him — that which he was from birth. He is not content to say, I have committed an outrage against God, but he goes back to the source of this outrage and realizes that the reason for all the evil was in his heart. Wisdom consists in discerning these things.

(Vv. 7-13). Truth in the heart has borne its fruit: a second condition of heart is the consequence: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (v. 10). How could this clean heart be produced? “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (v. 7). He speaks of hyssop which was used to sprinkle blood on the leper, and then he refers to washing with water. Under the law at each sin the sprinkling of blood was to be renewed;

for us the sacrifice has been offered once for all. But in addition to this the soul of the believer needs the washing of water by the Word continually, applied by our High Priest to the defilement we contract as we walk: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” - But in order to have a clean heart something other than our personal purification is needed: “Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities” (v. 9); it is essential that God Himself remember them no more. This was not yet an accomplished fact for a saint in the Old Testament, nor should we believers express ourselves in the same way as verse 9 does. But when our hearts have been cleansed from all iniquities we can present ourselves before God with a consciousness that He remembers them no more. The result of this is that the joy of our salvation returns and we are sustained in the spirit of liberty.

In verses 14-19 we find a third and final condition of heart, a condition which from the time of his fall and restoration until the end of his career would characterize David. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O

God, Thou wilt not despise” (v. 17). What breaks David's heart is to find himself confronted with “bloodguiltiness” (v. 14), to realize that he had shed the blood of righteous Urijah. This is a prophetic picture of the blood of Christ shed by Israel that remains upon this people and their descendants until that time when the remnant will return to Him, broken-hearted and humbled. We will return to this subject later. But let us remember that God disciplines us in order by degrees to lead us from the condition of a true and cleansed heart to that of a broken heart: the only condition becoming to us in the presence of the cross, the only sacrifice that God accepts with the sacrifice of praise (v. 15), and the only state of heart that does not expose us to fresh falls.

Chapter 13 — Amnon

David's soul is restored, his conscience is purified, and his heart is humbled; in spite of this the ways of God's government as they concern him must run their course. What Nathan had foretold: “The sword shall never depart from thy house ... I

will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house ... I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun” — all this must be fulfilled without fail: David will undergo this necessary discipline with a broken heart.

The incident recorded in this chapter is loathsome. It was infamy in Israel (vv. 12-13). God's Word relates it because it is “the truth” and depicts man as he is in all his ugliness so that we may abhor his corruption. These terrible acts of immorality and violence are the doings of two of David's sons, Amnon and Absalom, who are far from God, the one as much as the other. A friend named Jonadab who is a cousin and a counselor is there on the scene urging Amnon onward in his miry path (vv. 4-5); this same man later knows of Absalom's plot but does nothing to oppose it (v. 32).

How short-lived and vain are the pleasures of sin! Scarcely are one's lips moistened at the rim of the cup but already one is tasting intolerable bitterness! “Amnon hated [Tamar] with an exceeding great hatred, for the hatred with which he hated her

was greater than the love with which he had loved her” (v. 15). Immediately he abhors this poor unwilling victim of his infamous act. He judges everything except himself. Violent and crafty, Absalom avenges himself of his sister's dishonor by fratricide.

Nevertheless one thing strikes me that has a general application to David, now restored. He lacks a certain spiritual discernment, and this was not a feature of his character before his fall. Everything was already in order between his soul and God when in 2 Samuel 12:26-31 he went to lay siege to Rabbah. The judgment of the children of Ammon was righteous and according to God's mind, but David seems to have injected his personal feelings both into his victory and his vengeance. His spiritual discernment no longer had the same acuity as it did earlier. He takes the king's crown and sets it on his head, whereas formerly (2 Sam. 8:11; cf. 1 Chr. 20:2) he had consecrated all the treasures of the nations to the Lord. He executes cruel vengeance on the people, part of which at least is omitted in 1 Chronicles 20:3, in the book that presents the king accord-

ing to the counsels of God. David had never done such things at other times.

But there is more. Here in 2 Samuel 13 all David's good intentions and his desires for harmony among his children turn against him. Unwittingly he acts in a way contrary to what he should have done. Thus it is David in verse 7 who sends Tamar to Amnon's house. Later, when Absalom's plans for murder have ripened David initially tries to resist, thinking that should he yield to his son's request evil might be the result; but he finally yields, sending his other sons along in order to protect Amnon. All this probably does not indicate a very clear spiritual judgment.

Verse 39 shows us moreover that wicked Absalom was the son David cherished. "And king David longed to go forth to Absalom; for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead." In the following chapter David is easily persuaded to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem, and this decision is the immediate cause of all the disaster which follows. No doubt

through this means God fulfills His purposes, but all these events afford us a serious lesson. When a believer falls by yielding to his own self-will, his soul even though it is restored loses a certain spiritual acuity. If he has come to despise or set little value on fellowship with the Lord it takes him a certain time to recover the spiritual intelligence that accompanies this fellowship. It is as though the fall had brought with it a cessation of spiritual growth.

A soul exposed to the Lord's discipline and that of the assembly frequently is an example of this. The soul may be restored and may recover fellowship with God and with the saints; but a secret strength is lost when sin becomes active, and it is possible that the soul may never recover this strength.

May God grant us to esteem fellowship with Himself as extremely valuable, so valuable that we may jealously watch lest it be lost as well as the strength and discernment that accompany it.

Chapter 14 — Joab

We have already noticed that 1 Chronicles is silent about the events now before us. In our account David is only incidentally a type of Christ. Here he is seen as especially representing the restored remnant going through the Tribulation with the guilt of the death of the Righteous One. Nevertheless all David's experiences in these chapters also have a direct application to us, because we like he are set in a responsible position and are therefore the objects of discipline as David was.

2 Samuel 14 shows us how Joab succeeds in winning David over to himself. We have already noted that Joab never does anything that does not serves his self-interest. If he is embracing David's cause his motive is not affection although he does demonstrate a certain attachment to his master, but because he thinks that David's side is more likely to advance his ambitions. These ambitions did not go so far as to covet the kingdom. Joab was sufficiently shrewd to know that access to the throne was closed to him; his ambition was limited to desiring the place of a “generalissimo,” to be minister of war and the king's

counselor. If any obstacle to his plans should arise he was quick to overcome it, and if need be even commit a crime.

Above all, Joab sought to make himself indispensable. The best way to achieve this was to cater to the king's weaknesses. When David rid himself of Urijah by placing him in Joab's hands, Joab did not speak a single word of reproach; he acted without hesitation. Guilty David had gained a discreet accomplice, but he is an accomplice who through this very discretion becomes David's master. From now on the king's reputation depends on Joab. Only, Joab's plans are thwarted by divine intervention. God speaks and David acknowledges his guilt; the leprosy, spiritually speaking, instead of remaining hidden is publicly manifested and acknowledged in humiliation and tears not only before God but also before men.

And so, all Joab's plans are foiled, all his selfish interests are set back; he can no longer dominate his master by means of his secret crime; he must find another way to regain his influence. When Rabbah, already cut off from its water supply, was cap-

tured, Joab sent this message to David: “Now gather the rest of the people, and encamp against the city and take it: lest I take the city and it be called by my name” (2 Sam. 12:28). What disinterestedness! But is not this the means by which he may regain control of the king's heart? David obeys. In the previous chapter we have seen that his victory over Rabbah is no credit to his spiritual instincts. Now Joab again has become indispensable and has regained the control that he had lost.

At the end of 2 Samuel 13 the king was longing for Absalom. This was an unfortunate weakness. Absalom was a murderer; the law of the Lord did not allow David to long after him. The murderer fell into the hands of the avenger of blood, and expiation could not be made except by the blood of the one who had shed blood (Num. 35:33). David had demonstrated this in the cases of the Amalekite and Baanah and Rechab. When Absalom returned from his voluntary exile, the sentence ought to have been executed. To spare him would be to add disobedience to transgression. The fact that David had married Maacah, the daughter of Talmi the king of Geshur (Absalom had taken

refuge with his grandfather), was already a transgression. Talmai was one of the Canaanite kings spared through the unfaithfulness of the people (Joshua 13:2-3); Israel was forbidden any intermarriage with them (Ex. 34:15-16). Long before this prohibition was pronounced Abraham's spiritual sense had made it a law for him (Gen. 24:3). David had used his sovereign power to violate this ordinance instead of obeying the law.

All these humiliating facts ought to have suppressed David's affections; but Joab watches, interested in seeing the king turn aside from the simple path of obedience. "Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom" (v. 1). He is not a man to let this occasion pass without using to his personal advantage, and so he resorts to an unworthy intrigue in order to lead David to recall the fugitive to Jerusalem. The words he puts in the mouth of the woman of Tekoah lead us to suppose that Joab's hidden motive was that David might designate Absalom as his successor: "Deliver him that smote his brother ... and we will destroy the heir also" (v. 7). "Why then hast thou thought such a thing against God's people?" (v.

13). “The man that would destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God” (v. 16). In truth, in the words of this woman we can see that Joab had in mind to secure a future position for himself with Absalom, who would certainly be thankful to him for having brought him back to the court.

And in order to carry out this scheme Joab had the audacity to vouch for God's mind before the king: “God has not taken away his life, but devises means that the banished one be not expelled from him!” (v. 14).

In all this David was excusable, no doubt, when we think of the natural feelings of a father for his son, but as a servant of God he was guilty. Through the prophet's mouth the Lord had let him know (2 Sam. 12:24-25) which of his sons He had chosen; this son was Solomon, the son of Bathsheba, whom God had called “Jedidiah, the beloved of the Lord.” Joab realized that David's heart secretly cherished the thought of having Absalom as his successor, although perhaps David would not even have admitted this desire to himself. Could the king hesitate between

God's positive word and Joab's self-seeking insinuations? He ought to have understood that Absalom despite all his outward advantages (vv. 25-27), although he was a most handsome man and perhaps just as imposing as Saul, could not be the man according to God's counsels. He had seen his brother Eliab, of whom even Samuel had thought: "Surely Jehovah's anointed is before Him" (1 Sam 16:6), set aside despite his handsome appearance to give place to himself, David, the poor keeper of the sheep. It is a serious thing to allow ourselves to be directed by our natural affections, however legitimate they may be, rather than by the spiritual judgment God has given us.

Certainly at this time not only weakness was to be found in this well-loved king. In his heart there was a divine cord that always responded faithfully when touched. Joab was well aware of this and did not fail to avail himself of it. An appeal to grace always found its echo in David; therefore the woman of Tekoah comes to plead with the king for grace. He yields, forgetting that grace is not the only principle involved; God is also a righteous God, and His grace cannot be exalted at the expense

of His righteousness. Joab's counsel which David followed leads the king to an abuse of grace, which is all the more serious because his natural affections were involved. This is like the honey that was forbidden to be mixed with the sacrifices (Lev. 2:11). Grace ought not to yield to feelings, human ties, or the gentleness of human nature. But it did with David. Yielding to his fatherly affection he did not sufficiently discern the work of the enemy, although this could not completely escape him: “Is the hand of Joab with thee in all this?” (v. 19.) The woman acknowledges: “Joab [has] done this thing” (v. 20); and the king says to Joab: “Behold now, I have done this thing” (v. 21). He now takes the responsibility for what Joab wanted to do. The enemy, Absalom, is received at Jerusalem — and what an enemy he proves to be!

Nevertheless David does not desire that this guilty person should present himself before him. Joab accepts his master's decision. Once, twice, he refuses to see Absalom who had called him, for he senses that it is in his interest to side with the king. Absalom in his fury sets Joab's field on fire, using viol-

ence against the man who had pled his cause had then gone to get him at Geshur, and had brought him back to Jerusalem, figuring on putting Absalom under obligation to himself. Joab, motivated by personal interest comes to ask Absalom to account for his deed and is obliged against his will to intercede with David that the king might consent to see his son again.

Joab found his master in Absalom. God allows all these things. He had already made use of Joab's deceits, his artfulness, his wickedness, and his cruelty in order to carry out His own purposes. He will use Absalom to the same end, and ultimately His ways will be only ways of grace toward David. But Joab is obliged to obey the man he had thought to dominate. He will not forget this. Absalom has become an obstacle to his designs, a power Joab can no longer count on and one who has turned against himself. At a favorable moment Joab will kill Absalom.

Chapter 15 — David's Flight

If Joab all the while he is cooperating with David has none of this man of God's motives, Absalom's character from the begin-

ning is that of a reprobate, morally a child of Satan who is “a murderer from the beginning.” Later all the evil instincts of his nature are unleashed to attain their object. He uses flattery and puts on an appearance of righteousness, disinterestedness (vv. 3-4), and love (v. 5) in order to steal the hearts of the men of Israel (v. 6). He deceives the simple (v. 11) and makes a pretense of worshipping and serving the Lord (vv. 7-8) in order to seize the kingdom and to take the place of the Lord's anointed, yes, of his own father, on the throne — for he hates his father; he hates everyone but himself. He allies himself with Ahithophel for this man had the reputation in the people's eyes that a prophet would have had: “The counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired of the word of God” (2 Sam. 16:23). Finally Absalom exalts himself, nearly deifying himself during his lifetime (2 Sam. 18:18).

At the time of the end all these features will characterize the true King of Israel's great enemy “the Antichrist,” “the man of sin,” and “the lawless one” (2 Thess. 2:3, 8). He will seduce the people, will support their national form of worship only to later

overthrow it, will arise and exalt himself to the point of being worshipped as God, will present himself as the true Messiah, will deny the Father and the Son, and will at the same time be both the false king and the false prophet in one. We find him described from the Jewish point of view in the book of Daniel (Dan. 11:36-39). The Lord warns His disciples, who until the rejection of the Messiah in their midst formed the first nucleus of the Jewish remnant of the end times, to flee as soon as they would see the abomination which Daniel had spoken of established in the temple at Jerusalem.

This is what happens here. David fleeing before Absalom is a striking type of the faithful Jews at the time of the end. In both David and the remnant we see bloodguiltiness, whether it be of Urijah or of the rejected Messiah. In both we see the soul restored after this crime. In both we see uprightness of heart mingled with deep sensitivity to the sin committed. And lastly, in both we see the consequences of this sin in God's government which does not leave the crime unpunished. But it also sustains the restored soul in the midst of the apparent wrath

which that soul must endure before the eyes of all. This wrath is a burden from which the soul knows God will ultimately deliver it in order to bring it back to the cloudless joy of His presence.

David, such a beautiful type of Christ at the beginning of his career, has through his sin become a type of the suffering remnant. Only, throughout the Psalms the remnant is encouraged as they find — by the pen of David as prophet — that the Messiah Himself in sympathy for them and in order to show them the way has beforehand entered into the tribulations and distresses that they must undergo. Thus the faithful will be strengthened every day by the words spoken by the Spirit of Christ. In these they will find amid their distress the prophetic expression of their faith and confidence in God. Therefore in this part of David's history we will encounter the experiences of one undergoing the consequences of his sin and the encouragements which the Spirit of Christ gives under God's government.*

* It is well worth noting that the series of psalms from Psalm 3 to Psalm 7 which serves as a preface to the whole book of

Psalms,** begins with the "Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." Indeed, this entire series belongs to this period, as shown by Psalm 7, which mentions the insults of Shimei related in 2 Samuel 16. All this proves that David's flight from Absalom is indeed a prophetic type of the position and feelings of the remnant in the Psalms. And let us add that Psalm 71, as well as a portion of the second book, to which it belongs, relates directly to this period in David's history.

** Psalms 1 and 2 summarize the Psalms. They present the two major subjects of the Psalms: the character of the children of the kingdom (Ps. 1), and God's counsels concerning the Messiah (Ps. 2). All the actors of this drama are indicated here: the righteous, the apostate people, the nations, and the Messiah.

David flees in haste as soon as he learns that the hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. This is not cowardice or weakness on his part: it is faith. Faith never follows the path that the natural man would choose. Who would not at this moment oppose a budding conspiracy with an army trained to endure the hardships of war? Who would not at least once have had recourse to weapons while all Jerusalem was still with the legit-

imate king? David flees, not because Absalom is stronger, but because he is God's rod raised to chasten His servant. But David does not think of himself alone: he is thinking of Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, the city he desires to spare from the trial or ruin that resistance on his part would surely bring with it.

And so the king leaves and stops at the banks of Kidron. This hasty flight is nevertheless so calm that it has the appearance of a royal procession rather than a defeat. This is because the flight is dominated by the deep feeling that one is with God in tribulation. The fleeing king immediately becomes the center of his people during this exodus. Behind him walk his household and all the people who have remained faithful to him; at his sides are his servants; before him are his warriors. Isn't it striking that his soldiers are not his rear-guard when the enemy is at the heels of this defenseless people? But no, they march in front of the king, his heralds and his witnesses on the way of the wilderness. Absalom's companions may consider this march a rout for David; the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and the Gittites

view it as a supreme honor. Now notice this: at the moment when through the rebellion of his people the true king of Israel becomes a stranger and fugitive strangers are set in the place of honor. The Cherethites and the Pelethites, Philistine tribes, were emigrants, it is said, from Crete; and the Gittites, (people of Gath), left that Philistine city and the land of their origin to join their lot to that of David. Their former king had lost his authority over them; the Lord's king had become the compass that would direct them from this time onward.

All this speaks to us of Christ. Rejected by Israel, He has become the center of attraction for nations who were strangers to the promises and who had no right to the blessings of the people. Rejected, He has become moreover the center of all, the One whom His own follow with delight because they find security nowhere else but in Him whom the world refused, because they know that the time of His rejection will come to an end, and that those who have shared in His tribulations will certainly share in His glory. Yes, this Man who still bears the character of a stranger, despised by the world, is the center of

everything — the pattern to follow — the object of service, for His servants surround Him, attentive to His desires — the object of testimony — and what a blessed testimony it is!

It is during this period of David's history that hearts are manifested. Under the rule of the throne it is a question of submission rather than of love, but a rejected Christ attracts devotion and it is in these circumstances that we can see whether His followers are truly attached to Him. There were those at Jerusalem in those days who were well content with Absalom's godless rule. But thank God, there were also devoted hearts who did not doubt David and who knew in spite of everything that the Lord was with him. They bound their lot together with the king's and did not fear to endanger themselves by openly declaring their allegiance to him. Oh! this fear of endangering oneself! It is not surprising to find this among Christians who are Christians in name alone and who, when it comes down to it, belong to the world and do not want to separate themselves from it. But what a shame if this is found among God's children! What: you do not dare confess your Savior's name before

men? Does the world's opinion have such a great influence over you then? Isn't the disgrace it gives your highest honor? Do you want to behave like an enemy of the cross of Christ? Is not this the very thing that caused the apostle to weep when he saw men bearing His name who preferred earthly things to the shame of the cross (Phil. 3:18)?

Ittai the Gittite was different from these people. Every factor combined to excuse him from casting his lot in with David's. He was a stranger, an immigrant who had not yet acquired the right of citizenship in Israel, one come only yesterday. Morally he was like a little child venturing to take his first steps. David himself did not expect of Ittai the effort that it would take to follow him. "Return," David tells him, "and take back thy brethren. Mercy and truth be with thee!" He even blesses him in order to make him realize that under such circumstances a lack of decision would in no way be imputed to him as evil. But this stranger gives evidence of great faith. In order to have great faith there is no need of great intelligence nor of a long Christian life; it is enough to have a high estimation of the

Lord, to know that nothing can be equal to Him nor compare with Him, to know that He alone is capable of completely satisfying all needs. Even though David excuses him, dismisses him, exhorts him to return, nothing convinces him; he remains, he knows no other place, no other master. Whom could he serve if not David? Is not Absalom his lord's enemy? What will stop him? Death? But if David must die, death is welcome to Ittai. He is expecting it and puts it first: "Whether in death or life." For him life comes after death. In whatever manner, whatever place, wherever David may be "even there also will [his] servant be." How such feelings refresh the heart of the fleeing king, the heart of our well beloved Savior. What Ittai desired is what Jesus promises to us: "If any one serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also shall be my servant. And if any one serve Me, him shall the Father honor" (John 12:26). The Lord tells us: In death, perhaps, but certainly in glory. In serving Him we are assured of the glory because that is where He is forever. Note again that the Father's heart is satisfied with devotion to His Son. If we have served Him in His

humiliation then we may be sure that the Father will give us a place of honor because we have not been afraid of sharing His shame before the world. A poor ignorant Gittite will have this place; a poor Moabite will occupy it also — she who did not hesitate to follow Naomi, the ancestress of the fugitive king: “Do not intreat me to leave thee, to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

“Go and pass over!” the king tells Ittai, and he goes over the brook Kidron, turning his back on the triumphant enemy, having the desert path before him (v. 23). What does it matter? David is his shepherd; he will lack nothing.

What a contrast between this stranger and Peter, the Jewish disciple who had followed the Lord from the beginning. Oh! how quick that one was to say, unbidden by Jesus: “Lord, with Thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33). Peter thought of what he himself was; Ittai thought of what his

lord was to him. Poor Peter! Although he did not suspect it, his faith was the least, the most miserable that could possibly be found, for he had a high opinion of himself.

And now Zadok and Abiathar appear bearing the ark of the Lord. David refuses it; he cannot accept such an honor. The ark has entered into its rest and cannot again begin the wanderings of the wilderness with David. Here David once again takes the role of the repentant, suffering remnant. The nations may apparently with reason ask him, “Where is thy God?” and mock his confidence, as in the second book of Psalms which expresses the feelings of the remnant fleeing far from Jerusalem from before the Antichrist (Ps. 42:10; etc.). With such feelings David says to the priest: “Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favor in the eyes of Jehovah, He will bring me again, and show me it, and its habitation. But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seems good to him.” What an admirable result of the action of God's Spirit on a heart exercised by discipline. What perfect submission to God's will, knowing that one deserves judgment

— what perfect confidence in His goodness that endures forever and in His interest in His own although they are unworthy of it! All that happens to him is righteous but David counts on grace, accepting this humiliation and leaving to God the care of justifying him, for “It is God who justifies.”

These feelings are in contrast to Ittai's, but the one are no less beautiful in their place than the other. We find God's power in faith, but it is just as marvelous when it produces “all patience” in a poor, weak creature beaten by the tempest with no strength in himself to resist the rising flood of evil.

David goes up the ascent of the mount of Olives weeping, bare-foot, with his head covered. The people following him mourn like he. Christ endured and bore this humiliation toward the end of His career in sympathy for his loved people. He who wept over Jerusalem found Himself grappling with Satan's terrible assault at Gethsemane. Doubtless it was a greater and more far-reaching question than that of sympathy for the suffering remnant of Israel, and a much more important work than

that of the final deliverance of His people, but it did consist of this as well, for “in all their affliction [Christ] was afflicted.” Here at Gethsemane the man who had eaten with Him lifted up his heel against Him (as Absalom had done), betrayed him with a kiss; here too in the anguish of His soul He shed more than David's tears and His sweat became as drops of blood falling to the ground.

At this moment the poor king is overwhelmed by all. He learns of Ahithophel's betrayal. Every resource fails him save one, but that one is perfectly sufficient: He bows before the Lord. “Turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness,” David asks Him.

God gives an immediate answer to his servant's prayer. Hushai, the king's intimate friend, rejoins him. David, filled with spiritual discernment, sends him back, knowing that God has destined him to “defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.”

Hushai returns to Jerusalem. Whatever our preferences may be, we must ever be in the place where Christ would have us. A servant of Christ can always be there where the ark and the

priesthood are found, for he finds Christ there. Is He not at the same time both ark and priest? We are called to various occupations in His cause. The testimony and service are one thing, the struggle to cause Christ's name to triumph against the wiles of the enemy another, and coming into His presence to worship Him yet another. All these various occupations are ours. Hushai's was a difficult task; so it is today for those who struggle against Christ's enemies who like Ahithophel pretend to be prophets in character, but who when it comes down to it are false prophets who know the Lord's thoughts and use their knowledge to deny His authority. But if the Lord sends us into the midst of enemies let us go without fear. Is not defeating Ahithophel's counsel really restoring to our David the place that belongs to Him?

Chapter 16 — Friends and Enemies

The circumstances David is passing through test the state of hearts; so too, the various characters of the men who come to the king are very instructive for us in this respect.

We have seen Ittai, a heart born but yesterday for David and by this very fact a simple heart. The king, whose servant he has become, is everything for him. When one has such an object one is always well directed. Zadok and Abiathar are not wrong in esteeming that the ark ought to be with the king; they have a general understanding of God's mind but take His ways with David less into account. David himself teaches them this by sending them back. He must count entirely on God to bring him back, for he has merited this discipline; and were he even to be completely rejected, David submits, for all that God does is good.

Hushai has another character, one just as beautiful in its way as that of Ittai and, indeed, he is much better acquainted with God's thoughts. Hushai is David's intimate friend; a great love unites them and they have no secrets from one another but yet Hushai in contrast to Ittai consents to be separated from his friend for a time. This is painful for this man who had come to David to express his sympathy, but he chooses the best way to serve him and returns to Jerusalem. With his deep, calm love

for his friend Hushai has an understanding that not even the high priests had. This understanding is communicated to him by David himself: Thou shalt “defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.” It is in intimacy with Christ that we receive the communication of His thoughts.

2 Samuel 16 tells us first of Ziba who is prompt to act and prompt to serve. He saddles the asses and loads them with all that is necessary for the king's companions in flight: he spares himself no trouble. What beautiful zeal, the lovely result of grace at work in his heart, for nothing obligated him to do this. Nevertheless this zealous heart lacks uprightness, or to say the least, it imputes to Mephibosheth motives foreign to him. I do not believe that he lies knowingly; he does not say that Mephibosheth had told him of his plans, but since he noticed delay in his master's decisions he attributed intentions to him that, as we see in 2 Samuel 19, were far from his heart. Nothing is as dangerous as to pretend to read the thoughts of others in order to know their motives. A certain keenness of judgment joined with a certain knowledge of the human heart easily leads

us to do this. Our conclusions are always lacking in charity. We have little interest in discerning another's good intentions, insisting rather on those that are evil. But God reserves for Himself the right to judge hearts; He alone knows what is in them and He judges their secrets. The Lord tells us: "Judge not, that ye may not be judged" (Matt. 7:1); let us therefore refrain from exposing ourselves to being judged by others. This is what later happened to Ziba in Mephibosheth's presence. David, who is not a type of Christ here, seems to lack a certain sharp-sightedness. He changes his decision later (2 Sam. 19:29); notwithstanding here he affords us a beautiful example of the One who will reward what is done for him a hundredfold, however weak His servants may be: "Behold, thine are all that pertained to Mephibosheth" (v. 4).

After this example of devotion we find an example of hatred. God allows this for it is part of His discipline toward David, but it was also Christ's portion: "They hated Me without a cause" (John 15:25). How could it be otherwise for His disciples? But He alone could say: "Without a cause." The

motives for Shimei's hatred were doubtless unjust and David had in no wise given occasion for them, but the humbled king looks upon his enemy's judgment as true. Shimei maligns David: "Away, away, thou man of blood and man of Belial! Jehovah has returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and Jehovah has given the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and behold, thou art taken in thine own evil, for thou art a man of blood" (vv. 7-8). Unworthy calumny! So David was accused — David who had spared Saul when he slept in the cave and in the midst of his camp, who had returned Saul only good for evil, and who had shown himself righteous, patient, and holy in all his ways (1 Kings 15:5). David had never avenged himself, had always respected Saul as the Lord's anointed, and had honored his enemy's death with a funeral lamentation!

All of David's integrity might rise up against such an accusation - and yet indeed he was a bloody man! Shimei did not know it, but God knew it. This wicked man was a divine instrument to remind David of his fault: "So let him curse, for Je-

hovah has said to him, Curse David!” (v. 10). David accepts the curse; his broken heart seeks neither defense nor excuse nor compensation of any kind for his past righteousness. For him this is God's judgment and his only recourse is grace: “It may be that Jehovah will look on mine affliction, and that Jehovah will requite me good for my being cursed this day” (v. 12). Isn't this once again a striking type of the Jewish remnant: integrity, practical righteousness, and humiliation caused by the murder of the Just One — of whom they had said: “His blood be on us and on our children” — united in one and the same heart?

Abishai, Zeruah's honorable son, tries to turn David aside from humble submission to God's ways in discipline. “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.” We cannot expect Abishai to call himself a dead dog as Mephibosheth does or as David did before Saul. Despicable as Shimei might be, he and Abishai are equal in God's eyes. The realization of our unworthiness preserves us from using insulting words against the race to which we belong. A misanthrope is always a man who considers him-

self better than others. Yet the occasion seemed to justify these words. God had been despised and insulted. Shouldn't Abishai have taken sides against this violent man? This is what Peter did when Judas the traitor's band led his Master away. Was Peter right when it was a matter of One greater and more worthy than David? "Return thy sword to its place," Jesus tells him, "for all who take the sword shall perish by the sword." (Matt. 26:52). Besides, Abishai's words display a complete incapacity to enter into David's sufferings under God's discipline, to understand his humble submission as well as his unswerving resolution to walk in this path. How can the flesh, whose will being at enmity with God can never submit to Him, understand perfect dependence that has no other will but that of the Father? Peter again provides us with an example. After the Lord had shown His disciples that He must suffer much from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and that He must be put to death, "Peter taking Him to him began to rebuke Him, saying, God be favorable to Thee, Lord; this shall in no wise be unto Thee!" What does the Lord say to him? "Get

away behind Me, Satan: thou art an offense to Me: for Thy mind is not on the things that are of God, but on the things that are of men” (Matt. 16:22-23). David says to Abishai: “What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah?” Their thoughts could only be produced by the flesh and came from the enemy. David accepts the cup from God's hand, as Jesus did later in Gethsemane. “It may be that Jehovah will look on mine affliction, and that Jehovah will requite me good for my being cursed this day.” What a statement! We can well be assured that God is the God of grace and that cursing is not the end of His ways toward those whom He loves any more than cursing was the end of His ways with regard to Christ!

Hushai is welcomed by Absalom. He does not oppose Ahithophel's counsel as to David's concubines. His intimacy with David is a great help to him for he could not be ignorant of what God had told the king and he must let the divine decree run its course (2 Sam. 12:11-12). Ahithophel, thinking to strengthen Absalom's hands in this way, only worked out the accomplishment of God's word, advanced the goal of His ways,

and hastened the restoration of the man he thought to destroy. This wicked man will soon be caught in his own snare. Ahithophel, who seems to have had no motive for doing evil but simply the desire to do evil, ends up like Judas whom he resembles: this “familiar friend” who lifted up his heel against David (Ps. 41:9) hangs himself and dies.

Chapter 17 — Service

As we have seen, the king had sent Zadok, Abiathar, and Hushai back to Jerusalem in order to utilize them in his service. Demonstrations of devotion are not enough, however dear they may be to the master's heart, but are only the prelude to service. So it is for us Christians; and like Hushai and the priests, we do not have the option of choosing the place or the manner in which we are to serve the Lord. He will decide this. Here it was a matter of defeating Ahithophel's counsel, of preventing this false prophet from ruining David's cause.

In verses 1 to 4 we discover the enemy's hidden design: he wants to get at David. With reason he figures that if David is

done away with, everything will fall to pieces and the people will become Absalom's prey. "I will smite the king only; and I will bring back all the people to thee" (vv. 2-3). This is how the prince of darkness operates: all his efforts are directed against Christ. To this end he stirred up the world against Him, but at the cross instead of winning the conflict, he lost and his power was broken. But he will not admit defeat. In the future at a time he believes favorable he will stir up the kings of the earth to break off Christ's yoke. Then "He that dwells in the heavens shall laugh, the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2).

And the saying of Ahithophel "was right in the eyes of Absalom, and in the eyes of all the elders of Israel" (v. 4), who were convinced that the plan this man was proposing was excellent. How was it then that Absalom decided to call Hushai the Archite also to hear his advice? How is it that after hearing Hushai Absalom and all the men of Israel say: "The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel" (v. 14)? It is because God is directing the circumstances, men's decisions and their appreciations — in short, everything — as He

will and to carry out His designs. Outwardly it would seem that God is indifferent to what is taking place; evil is triumphing, evil is reigning, men are exceeding the imaginations of their hearts; but God is hidden behind the scenes. Nothing can resist God: even Satan serves as His instrument. For us, Satan's power is formidable; for God it is less than a speck of straw that a puff of breeze blows away. “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,” we are told. It is neither the mighty Creator nor the God of vengeance who will break this formidable power; it is the God of peace. This act costs Him no effort; He will peacefully bruise this enemy under His saints' feet.

The fragrance of service pervades this entire chapter. Everyone cooperates in this activity in order give their master his rightful place, a place the wicked have taken away. Hushai, David's friend, is the first to face danger, but also the first instrument of victory. The priests are his first confidants. Their sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, carry the message that is to save David and his band. A simple obscure servant girl (v. 17) is used to

forward it to them. The woman of Bahurim is equally obscure and as seldom mentioned as the Mary of Matthew 26:6-13; she is just as deferential as Mary in the sphere that God has entrusted to her responsibility as a woman keeping her home. She renders service to the messengers and arranges a hiding place for them that the enemy is unable to discover. Though it has the two messengers as its immediate object her service is a “good work” on behalf of David. In this scene there is an uninterrupted chain of service working together toward a common goal. Had one link been missing David would become Absalom's prey. The poor servant girl's devotion is just as valuable to the king as Hushai's lovely disinterestedness. None is to be despised and the most humble will perhaps have the best place when it shall be said: “This one and that one was born in her” (Ps. 87:5). “Wheresoever these glad tidings may be preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her,” says the Lord (Matt. 26:13).

Not only do the various services, whatever they may be, form one whole because they have but one goal and one object, but

it is worth noting that one individual's service calls for the service of the other, as it were. From one end of this account to the other each agent goes to work as stirred up by the preceding one. Often in moments of weariness and spiritual discouragement we complain how those who follow us in serving the Lord lack the eagerness to serve Him effectively, to risk something — be it comfort, gain, or reputation — to maintain our Master's rights over against the world. Such complaints are ineffectual, and are much like Elijah's cry: "I am left, I alone!" What we need to do is to redouble our zeal, an unfailing zeal to serve the Beloved. Like sound waves, light waves, and heat waves this activity will soon make itself felt beyond our restricted sphere.

David is warned and all his people pass over the Jordan: not one is missing.* Thanks to this service, God's true people set a barrier between themselves and the enemy. Ahithophel, whose pride is wounded but who above all is apprehensive of David's final triumph, takes his own life, precipitating himself into eternal judgment in order to escape future vengeance (v. 23)!

- * Here we find again the picture of the remnant fleeing from Jerusalem pursued by the dragon, the Beast, and the false prophet, and preserved beyond Israel's boundaries notwithstanding the overflowing flood without a single hair of their head falling (Rev. 12:16).

David, pursued by Absalom, comes to Mahanaim. Here it was that Jacob returning from exile met the host of God sent to secure him against Esau's undertakings. Here too David, under discipline again taking a path of exile, is found beneath the same shield. How reassuring to our soul! Our circumstances may change: whether it be strength or weakness, the testing or the restoration of the soul — in one case as in the other the danger is the same, whether it comes from an Esau or an Absalom, and the resources of our God remain unchangeable.

Amasa replaces Joab at the head of David's rebellious son's army. He was a cousin to Joab — cousin through his mother, but also through his mother's dishonour. Joab, as we shall see, never forgives anything: whether it be a blot against his family

or the usurpation of his position, or the danger of competition for the place of supreme command.

At Manahaim we find service directed toward David's people as previously we have seen service directed toward David himself. It is touching to see the same zeal introducing three individuals to us, so different in position, nationality, and character. A common object of interest makes every barrier fall. Shobi the Ammonite, the son of Nahash, the brother of that same Hanun who had insulted David's messengers (2 Sam. 10), a man of royal line, is associated with Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, a simple servant of Saul and formerly poor Mephibosheth's guardian (2 Sam. 9:4). Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim joins them; he had the authority of age and the prestige of great riches (2 Sam. 19:32); but age does not impede his service and all his riches are used to maintain the king and his people. The people very especially attract the sympathy of these men: "The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness" (v. 29). They spare nothing when it comes to the companions of the fleeing king; they act in faith; their per-

sonal interest does not enter into consideration in their service. The authority of the one, the activity of the other, the riches and the attention of the third are all laid down at David's feet, as represented by his companions. Like Abigail all these men desire to wash the feet of the servants of their lord, and this abasement is not really abasement, for it exalts and glorifies a David who has today been abased but who will tomorrow be established in glory above all the kings of the earth.

Chapter 18 — Absalom's Death and David's Broken Heart

David marshals the people and arrays them under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite, the only man deemed worthy by the king to have the same rank in leading the army as its already long accredited leaders. Yet Ittai had “come but yesterday,” a stranger who had no connections with God's people. What reason was there for exalting him to a post of such importance at this critical moment? His unreserved attachment to David. The Lord likewise entrusts us with service according to the measure of our love for Him.

David wants to go forth with his people into battle. They all reply: “Thou shalt not go forth.” Both these sentiments are according to God. Instead of going out with his people David had remained at Jerusalem in the past (2 Sam. 11:1), and had had to bear the consequences; now he understands that his place is with the army; but the people are right also, for they appreciate David's worth; “Thou art worth ten thousand of us” (v. 3). The people in their love for David understand even better than does Ahithophel what this false prophet in his hatred against David was well aware of: “I will smite the king only ... the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned” (2 Sam. 17:2-3). On both sides there is the conviction that everything depends on David. Only, on the part of the people faith is active; for them David absent from the battle field is just as much as David present. “It is better that thou succor us out of the city,” they say. David yields to their request: “I will do what is good in your sight” (vv. 3-4). This is how the Lord Jesus acts toward us. As He once did with the centurion and the Syrophenician woman, He yields to faith, He allows Himself to be con-

strained, for He cannot do other than to respond to what His own grace has wrought in the heart.

The people pass before the king. In presence of one and all David commands the leaders to “Deal gently ... with the young man Absalom” (v. 5). What tenderness toward this rebellious son! — mixed with weakness perhaps but which nonetheless makes us think of the Lord's boundless love for His enemies. Oh! if only they would return and repent at this eleventh hour! Does not His patience with them reach to the furthest limits? Only when His patience is completely exhausted will God pour out the cup of His wrath; then there will be no more mercy.

What follows needs no commentary. The ungodly son is hanged in a tree to his cursing and shame. The magnificent hair that was his glory becomes the means of his ruin. This man who in his youth before he had any sons (v. 18, cf. 2 Sam. 14:27) had erected a monument “to keep [his] name in remembrance” is buried under an unknown heap of stones in the wood of Ephraim while his monument which remains to this day is a

reminder of his humiliation and his terrible judgment. So it will be with the Antichrist and the Beast who will rise up against the Lord. Their fall will be all the more terrible because they will have exalted themselves to be as God (Isa. 14:12-20).

We see God's hand in this disaster, but we also see Joab's murderous hand, a terrible thing. He is always committing evil. Here he shows what measure of respect he has for the king's will and person. His self-interest leads him to get rid of Absalom who had once humbled his pride (2 Sam. 14:32-33) and who might one day thwart him by setting Amasa in his place. Joab will kill Amasa himself when he sees that Absalom's murder has not produced the desired results. A man from among the people has more respect for the king's will than does the very head of his army (vv. 12-13).

Israel is completely overthrown and flees before victorious Judah. Ahimaaz wants to be the first to bring the good news to David. He had risked his life to warn him of impending danger. Now he does not want to let another have the privilege of an-

nouncing his triumph to the king. Joab, always politically shrewd and knowing the king's feelings toward Absalom, tries to discourage him, but in vain. It matters little to Ahimaaz whether this may hurt him personally or hinder his career; he does not share Joab's politics. Whatever may come of it, he desires to be the first, bowed before the king, to acknowledge the dignity that again is his. This is the focus of all his energy, for he belongs to David wholeheartedly. Perhaps he also is thinking of breaking and softening the blow that Absalom's death will inflict on his beloved master's heart. One thing is certain: he has only David's glory in view. May we run like Ahimaaz! May we run to be the first at the feet of our victorious Lord, permitting no one to outstrip us!

When the Cushite announces the fatal news David's heart is broken with unconsolable sorrow: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died in thy stead, O Absalom, my son, my son! (v. 33).

“Would God I had died in thy stead!” David could not do this. This was reserved for One alone who would die for the ungodly, the only One who was counted among the transgressors and who bore the sin of many (Isa. 53:12). But David could give free vent to his sorrow over the irrevocable loss of that one whose salvation he had so ardently desired.

No doubt human sentiments were mixed with all this mourning; this is why David needed to have a broken heart. While it is much, a broken spirit (Ps. 51:17) is not enough. With a broken spirit, self-will cannot be active. Before he had a broken spirit David had followed his own will which had led him into adultery and to Uriah's murder. A broken spirit gives up its own will in order to depend on God (2 Sam. 15:25-26; 2 Sam. 16:10-12; 2 Sam. 18:4). There was no need for Jesus' spirit to be broken. Did He not say, when He came into the world: “Lo, I come to do, O God, Thy will”?

But sooner or later our heart must be broken as well as our spirit. Sometimes God begins with the one, sometimes with the

other. When Peter wept bitterly he truly had a broken, humbled heart, for brokenness of heart is always accompanied by humiliation (Ps. 51:17). Peter's spirit was not broken until later: “When thou wast young,” Jesus says to him, “thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst where thou desiredst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and bring thee where thou dost not desire” (John 21:18).

Often the heart is not broken all at one time; David's heart was broken on three occasions: at the court of Achish when he saw that he had dishonored the Lord and he himself was in the dust (Ps. 34:18); after the loss of his child (Ps. 51:17); and finally in our chapter. Here his humiliation was already complete, yet still his natural affections must be consumed and reduced to ashes so that divine affections alone might occupy his heart. God does not obtain this result except by this means. Only in a broken heart can the Lord occupy the full place.

Christ's heart was also broken, but in a way quite different from how our hearts are broken. His love was disregarded: this is

what broke His heart. The more His love was demonstrated, the more hatred rose up against Him. “Reproach has broken My heart” (Ps. 69:20). He did not need, as do we, this breaking in order to be laid bare. He was love itself, but His human heart was broken by the impossibility of showing forth this love in face of the hatred of man, whose only response to so much grace was the shame and ignominy of the cross. And in spite of all this the Savior's broken heart bore the curse and all the weight of God's judgment, so as to save those who railed on Him and spit in His face.

Nor let us forget that we need continual brokenness. Each time God wants to manifest some new feature of Christ in us, He breaks our heart so that it may appear. Thus it was with the apostle Paul. Jesus' light and life shining through this broken vessel warmed and quickened the soul of his brethren.

From this time onward God has no further need to break David. At last the radiant sun is rising; his heart is full of grace emer-

ging from his cruel trial, and he becomes the dispenser of this divine grace toward others.

Chapter 19:1-40 — Grace

Joab reproaches David for his weakness; Joab is exhorting David! But who other than he alone had brought on this evil and had so wrung the bowels of this father's affections? No doubt, it was according to the ways of God who was giving free course to the chastening that had been announced (2 Sam. 12:10-11), and David must acknowledge His hand in all this. But woe to the unrighteous instrument by whom these ways were carried out. Only, the time of retribution had not yet come. God does not even permit that Joab be replaced by Amasa as David, offended, meant to do (v. 13). David complies with Joab's counsel. I do not doubt that this is because he knows the justice of God's ways toward himself. When he later delegates Joab's judgment to Solomon, it is not actually Absalom's death of which he accuses him, but above all of the murder of Abner and Amasa during a time of peace (1 Kings

2:5). David then sits at the gate of the city where all the people present themselves before him.

The discipline is now ended. Discipline was exercised in 1 Samuel to keep David in the path of dependence. There was no bitterness then, but rather the happy consciousness of divine favor. In the Second Book discipline is bitter for it is accompanied by the consciousness of having dishonored a holy God. But what fruit it bears too! God fills the broken heart as He alone is able to do, and outwardly the life of Jesus is manifested. We enter upon a scene of grace, forgiveness, and peace, the expression of what now occupies the king's heart.

In verses 9-15 we see grace. The ten tribes had betrayed and abandoned David in order to follow unrighteous Absalom; they are the first to return and speak of bringing back the king. David knows of this and opens his arms to Judah, so slow, so slothful until now to acknowledge the throne of their king, and who ought to have borne the penalty for this. “Ye are my bone and my flesh,” he tells them (v. 12). Amasa had been the head

of the army that had pursued David, and he was all the more guilty in that he like Joab was the king's nephew. “Art thou not my bone, and my flesh?” David sends to say to Amasa (v. 13). His grace demands nothing; much rather it delights in doing good to his enemies.

In verses 16 to 23 we find forgiveness. The king forgives Shimei who in order to avoid the fate awaiting him comes to submit himself: “Let not my lord impute iniquity to me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely ... for thy servant knows that I have sinned” (vv. 19-20). Abishai, still the same (cf. 2 Sam. 16:9), would like to take revenge against Shimei. David stops him: “What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries to me? Should there any man be put to death this day in Israel?” No, this is the day of grace and forgiveness. Whether or not the feelings Shimei expresses are sincere David does not stop to consider; he is not judging them now; Shimei will have to give account for them later when his conduct will reveal their reality

(1 Kings 2:36-46). “Thou shalt not die,” David tells this guilty man.

In verses 24 to 30 we have a scene of peace (vv. 24, 30). Mephibosheth comes down to meet his benefactor; he had been in mourning ever since David's departure. Ziba had deceived him and slandered him. Here we discover a new feature of Ziba's character. It was in wicked Shimei's company that Ziba had crossed the Jordan to meet the king (vv. 16-17). David's silence as to Ziba is characteristic. Why, it appears that he is reproaching Mephibosheth. Perhaps his infirmity was not as great an obstacle as he had thought for following a fleeing David. Perhaps like Jonathan his father he lacked a certain moral courage to associate himself with the dangers facing his benefactor. This is not revealed to us and we can only guess. But what is certain is that in the king's absence his life had been a life of affliction, mourning, prayers and ardent longing for his return (v. 24). How then can David treat him so rudely? “Why speakest thou any more of thy matters?” (v. 29). These words remind us a little of those, seemingly so hard, that Jesus

spoke to the Syrophenician woman. The Lord spoke them to put this woman's faith to the test. When an engineer builds a bridge he has very heavy loads go across it in order to test it. David's words do the same. Mephibosheth's precious faith is put to the test and what comes forth is only the perfume of dependence and self-denial. This faith has three characteristics: Mephibosheth accepts David's will as being the will of God: "My lord the king is as an angel of God; do therefore what is good in thy sight" (v. 27). This will, whatever it may be, is good in Mephibosheth's eyes because it is good in David's eyes (cf. Rom. 12:2). Secondly, he recognizes that he has no right to the king's favor based on his ancestry or personal worth: "For all my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king; and thou didst set thy servant among them that eat at thine own table. What further right therefore have I? and for what should I cry any more to the king?" (v. 28). Finally when David replies, saying, "I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land,"* Mephibosheth answers: "Let him even take all, since my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house" (v.

30). He renounces all his temporal advantages; for Mephibosheth it is enough that his lord has recovered the place due him.

* This is not what David had said (cf. 2 Sam. 16:4), which seems to indicate that he realized that in some measure he had erred.

Oh! may our faith when put to the test ever produce fruit like this!

In contrast to Mephibosheth Barzillai (vv. 31-40) is tested by the offer of temporal blessings. He was very rich but very different from the young man whom “Jesus loved,” and he had placed his fortune at the king's disposition during his stay at Manahaim (v. 32). His great age had not hindered him from giving himself, body and goods, in service to David. David offers him a reward proportionate to his devotion: “Pass thou over with me, and I will maintain thee with me in Jerusalem” (v. 33). But Barzillai had not labored for a reward, and judging himself unworthy of it, he refuses. “How many are the days of the years of my life, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? I am this day eighty years old: can I discern between

good and bad? can thy servant taste what I eat and what I drink? ... why should thy servant be yet a burden to my lord the king?” (vv. 34-35). Let his son Chimham profit from the fruit of his labor: far from opposing this, Barzillai rejoices in it (vv. 37-38). Later, like Mephibosheth at David's table, Barzillai's sons eat at Solomon's table (1 Kings 2:7).

Three things suffice this man of God beyond the happiness of once more seeing the king's rights acknowledged beyond the Jordan and seeing him established in his kingdom again. The first is the lovely promise of verse 38: “Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which seems good to thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee.” The second is that when leaving him David gives him a token of his love: “The king kissed Barzillai.” Through this kiss he, like Enoch, receives the testimony of having pleased God in the person of His anointed. The third is that the king “blessed him” (v. 39). Jesus also when leaving His beloved disciples lifted His hands to bless them and today maintains the same attitude with regard to us. His hands although invisible

remain lifted up over us, leaving in our hearts the certainty of the full efficacy of His work. Barzillai returns to his place with the warmth of love, the joy of blessings, and with David's promise: “Whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee,” and that other glorious promise that his son, yes, even his sons should pass over with the king, never to leave him, and to be seated forever at the king of glory's table!

Chapters 19 v.41 to 20 - Conflict between Brothers

Just as David so Israel's remnant will rediscover a path to again enter Canaan in reality, as the people once did in figure. The Jordan, the river of death, is this path. Death with Christ is necessary in order to enter into the inheritance and blessings of the promises. Then comes Gilgal (2 Sam. 19:40), the place of circumcision where Egypt's shame was rolled away from the people. For the first time these end time believers will in fact know what is the true circumcision of Christ, “the putting off of the body of the flesh.” They will enter the kingdom of God as those who have been born anew.

This passage that applies to the remnant also applies to us, although in another way. No doubt we are now dead with Christ; we have been circumcised once for all with a circumcision not done by hand, which is the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11). We cannot be driven out of the heavenlies which are our inheritance; but the necessary consequence of our unfaithfulness is the Lord's discipline. Thus we can and must lose the joy of heavenly things after a fall, and if we are not driven out of Canaan as with David or the remnant, at least we become strangers to it, being thrown back into the world from which the grace of God had separated us.

In order for this to be it is enough that we forget for an instant by returning to those things from which the cross has separated us that Christ's death, like the Jordan and Gilgal, separates us from the world and from the flesh. Then in order to recover the power of that which our foolishness has despised we must in a practical way begin again the path already followed, renewing our familiarity with our Jordan and with our Gilgal and by repentance rediscovering the purpose of the cross and power of

death with Christ, by which means we have been crucified to sin and the world. May God grant us to make these experiences through His Word and not by actual falls. David's history teaches us the immense loss that a fall brought to his soul despite the perfection of the grace that was glorified in his restoration.

From 2 Samuel 19:41 to 2 Samuel 20:2 we see discord between Israel and Judah. Indeed, neither side was fully right. Israel as a whole had betrayed David but was the first to return after Absalom's death (2 Sam. 19:8-10); Judah had been slow and slothful at first, but had made up for this lack of alacrity by answering the call of grace while Israel was still deliberating (2 Sam. 19:11-15).

Jealous of Judah's decision, the ten tribes complain to the king. Judah answers by asserting their close ties with the son of Jesse and by suggesting that when they brought back the king, they did not have — as did others — motives of self-interest (2 Sam. 19:42). Israel replies: “I have ten parts in the king and I

have also more right in David than thou: and why didst thou slight me? and was not my advice the first, to bring back my king?” (v. 43). All these exchanges are of the flesh. Ambition for playing a role in the things of God, jealousy as we view our brethren's activities, wounded self-love, and preoccupation with ourselves is certainly not the fruit of the Spirit and of divine affections. Despite their superior position Judah was no better than the ten tribes. “The words of the men of Judah were harsher than the words of the men of Israel” (v. 43). Those who are right act without love and division is the inevitable result. This division is realized in 2 Samuel 20:1-2. At the instigation of Satan (who uses Sheba, the son of Bichri, for this work), Israel, who had just said: “I have ten parts in the king,” now cries: “We have no portion in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse” (v. 1). Thus all Israel separate themselves from him over a selfish question; this is exactly what the enemy desires. At the beginning it is often difficult to guess his intentions, but the time always comes when he unmask himself and draws poor blind saints after himself. What folly to

prefer a “man of Belial,” a Sheba the son of Bichri, a Ben-jaminites, to David! Such is always the case in the internal conflicts of God's people. Satan's object is to turn souls aside from Christ. It matters little to him if after this Judah is still attached to the Lord's anointed. Hasn't this little group been discredited by their having spoken more harshly than Israel? It is humiliating for Judah to have failed in this struggle, but one thing remains to them: David's grace had anticipated them. “Ye are my bone and my flesh.” He it was who had inclined their hearts like one man by reawakening the sense of their intimate unity with himself (2 Sam. 19:14). All merit must accrue to David. By grace “the men of Judah clave to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem” (v. 2). Thus Judah finds blessing despite their fault, for they remained there where David was.

Having retaken his place in the midst of the remnant of his people, David purifies his house of the corruption which had come into it. He does not drive out his defiled wives to rebuild it on a new footing, for he himself was responsible for all this ruin. Evil, vessels to dishonor, and defilement are there. David

bears the pain and humiliation of this while personally purifying himself from these things in order to be a vessel to honor for the Lord. In no wise does he link himself with the evil which, however, he had provoked. On the contrary, his separation is public. He understands that from this time on he must be a “vessel to honor, sanctified, serviceable to the Master, prepared for every good work.”

These things apply to us also, dear reader. We live in the time of ruin announced in the Second Epistle to Timothy. We can neither rebuild God's house nor break the vessels to dishonor, but we can separate ourselves from iniquity, thus bearing the seal of the “firm foundation of God” (2 Tim. 2:19-21).

David, who has decided to dismiss Joab, attempts to fulfill the promise made to his nephew Amasa by making him head of the army (cf. 2 Sam. 19:13); he charges him with gathering together the men of Judah to pursue the son of Bichri. Amasa delays in accomplishing his mission. Perhaps David was impatient, for Amasa was not a traitor and had already come to

Gibeon, not far from Jerusalem, when the company led by Abishai and the mighty men went out of the capital (v. 8). The fact is that through fear of the evil that Sheba might do David once again falls into Joab's hands through Abishai's instrumentality. Could not David have inquired of the Lord at this renewing of his reign? God had once before inclined Israel's heart; could He not do so a second time?

Joab, who is ambitious and has no scruples, for whom every act advancing his personal interests is legitimate, becomes a murderer for the third time in order to regain his position.

There before the city of Abel a woman's wisdom brings an end to the shedding of blood. This fratricidal war comes to an end through the death of Sheba, the real culprit. Joab himself speaks a word of wisdom here. He accuses Sheba of having "lifted up his hand against the king, against David" (v. 21). This was in fact getting to the heart of the matter, for Sheba's attack was directed against the king. The woman of Abel realizes that the only way of restoring peace is by judging the

guilty one: “Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall” (v. 21). It is not as is often said, a matter of everyone admitting his wrongs and humbling himself; this does not remove the evil; rather, the one who had lifted up his hand against David must be cut off.

Is not this what should always take place in conflicts between brethren about doctrine? Some judge a heretic, others accept him, and peace cannot be re-established except by cutting off the wicked person.

This chapter ends like 2 Samuel 8:15-18 by listing the restored order of the administration of the kingdom. What follows is a sort of epilogue to the book.

Chapters 21 to 24 - Epilogue

2 Samuel 21:1-14 — Rizpah

Now that the kingdom of Israel was again restored after terrible and well-merited trials had assailed it, we might think that a period of peaceful prosperity would begin; but instead, Israel is visited by a new plague. I do not doubt that this famine may have taken place at some other time during his reign, for it says: “There was a famine in the days of David” (v. 1), but whenever the Spirit of God inverts the order of an account He has a specific purpose for this, as we see at the end of Judges and in hundreds of incidents in the Gospels.

God's government cannot ignore evil, whatever it may be, and it judges it all the more severely when the congregation is in a relatively good condition. Many years had passed since Saul's bloody deed; this king's history does not mention it; the people had perhaps forgotten it, perhaps it was also unknown to David, but God had not forgotten it and this deed still remained before His eyes. The congregation of Israel had not been im-

plicated in the crime; Saul who had committed it had died long ago; why then call it to mind again? Here it is a matter of a very important principle in God's ways, whether toward His ancient people or toward the Church. The people are jointly liable for Saul's act, for it took place on the territory of the congregation of Israel. The violation of pledges and of an oath made in the name of the Lord (Joshua 9:18) rendered the people guilty of the sin which their leader had committed. Generation had followed generation since the time of that act; the people might appeal to their ignorance in the matter — but the crime remained, and God in His time calls it to remembrance.

Do not similiar events take place in our days and do they not speak to the consciences of saints? Little does it matter how much time has elapsed: the Assembly is jointly liable for the iniquity which it has let be committed, and it remains defiled by an act against which it has not protested.

The reader knows the history of the Gibeonites. We can read it in Joshua 9. The Amorites had used trickery in order to be re-

ceived by the congregation of Israel and thus escape the judgment of their people. God considered that which the congregation had bound as bound; they could not revoke their oath. No doubt by placing the Gibeonites in a relationship of slavery to the people God's grace had freed Israel from the consequences of a false step taken lightly and in ignorance, but the consequences of a decision made according to the flesh remained permanently. Saul judged otherwise, for a man in the flesh always does exactly the opposite of what the Spirit would instruct one to do. And still Saul was full of "zeal for the children of Israel and Judah" (v. 2), but it was a zeal that, alas, was only too closely allied to hatred against the Lord's anointed. Saul of Tarsus too was full of a zeal which made him the persecutor of Christ in His Assembly. In our days we also may be zealous for our own nation or for our church without God having any part in the matter.

Once Saul would have sacrificed his own son, Israel's deliverer, for sake of the rash oath which he had made (1 Sam. 14:24, 44). Now this same Saul despised the oath by which Joshua

and the princes of Israel had bound themselves in the name of the Lord with regard to the Gibeonites.

The famine rages for three consecutive years: blow upon blow falls upon the congregation of God. By this trial David's conscience is brought to seek out the cause: "David inquired of Jehovah" (v. 1). This was his only resource and God answered him immediately: "It is for Saul, and for his house of blood, because he slew the Gibeonites" (v. 1). "His house of blood!" When the son of Gera, pursuing a humbled David, had cried out after him: "Away, away, thou man of blood and man of Belial! Jehovah has returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul ... for thou art a man of blood," God had recorded these insults of this man of the house of Saul; but now the time had come for Him to express His thought about this outrage: God characterizes Saul's house as "bloody" and justifies the house of David.

After having inquired of the Lord to learn the reason for this chastisement, David should no doubt have continued to inquire

of Him regarding the manner of rendering justice to the Gibeonites. Instead of this he consults the Gibeonites, who demand seven men from Saul's family “and we will hang them up to Jehovah in Gibeah” (v. 6). David consents to this for, whatever his weakness might be, judgment was necessary. Mephibosheth is spared. David who had treated him earlier with apparent severity here shows that he always bore him on his heart. David was not a man to forget his oaths. Had he not sworn to Jonathan: “Jehovah be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever” (1 Sam 20:42)?

Rizpah's two sons and the five sons of Michal (or Merab) the daughter of Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 18:19) are delivered up to the Gibeonites. Their procedure — one can hardly be surprised at their indifference to the prescriptions of the law — is not in accord with the ordinance given in Deuteronomy: “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou have hanged him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day (for he that is hanged is a curse of God); and thou shalt not

defile thy land, which Jehovah thy God gives thee for an inheritance” (Deut. 21:22-23).

The “barley harvest” might be an excuse for thus disobeying the injunctions of Scripture, but excuses do not justify disobedience. It is likely however, according to the account, that they were removed from the gallows and left exposed on the rock instead of receiving burial.

Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the mother of two of these, (already mentioned earlier in the matter of the quarrel between Abner and Ish-bosheth (2 Sam. 3:7), performs an act of piety that makes her name deserve to live on in the memory of believers. She makes herself guardian of the seven corpses. The motive for her devotedness is not that her two sons are among the condemned, for she watches over the five others as well as over the corpses of her own sons. She is concerned about the posterity of the one who had been “the chosen of Jehovah” (v. 6). She shows her piety toward her husband and master’s house. Moreover Rizpah is a woman of faith. She guards their

bodies from all profanation and watches over them, the sackcloth of mourning she spreads for herself being her only means of carrying out this painful task. Thus she combines her mourning with her watchful piety toward the dead. At least their burial must be honorable. She does not want to leave them as food for the birds of the heavens by day or for the beasts of the field by night as though they were criminals and reprobates. So it is that the nations will act toward God's people (Ps. 79:2), but this is not how the Lord had commanded nor how one should act in Israel!

Rizpah's faith is rewarded: "It was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done" (v. 11). This woman's deed is worthy of being registered in the king's heart. In the midst of her mourning, what joy! She has found a heart that understands her and that delights to reward her — grace answering to her desires. Saul's descendants' bones are united with those of their fathers in the sepulchre of Kish. This woman was on God's path and obtained the answer her faith craved.

Henceforth the Lord can be favorable to the land, for judgment has been executed, but grace also has run its course; for in His ways God never stops at judgment, but rather judgment prepares the way for the triumph of grace.

2 Samuel 21:15-22 — The Sons of the Giant

The end of David's history has the same character as its beginning. Goliath seems to come to life again. So it was for the Lord also: after the temptation in the wilderness Satan left Him for a time and reappeared at Gethsemane, seeking to terrify Him so that He would abandon His work. His efforts were in vain and at Gethsemane as well as in the wilderness Jesus won the victory.

After Christ's victory, even though the “children of Raphah” (i.e., of the giant) attack His redeemed, thinking to overcome them more easily than their Master, their fate is the same; they come out of the strife defeated. This conflict is repeated four times with the Philistines. It is from these internal enemies that

the sons of the giant proceed, these “ravening wolves” who seek to ravish the flock by frightening their leaders.

The first time David personally is involved (vv. 15-17). He had gone down with his servants, taking neither his age nor his strength into account: “David was exhausted” (v. 15). Ishbibenob who was of the children of the giant, formidable with his weapon - ”the weight of his lance was three hundred shekels of bronze” - invulnerable because of the “new armor” he was wearing, thinks to take advantage of the king's apparent weakness. But “Abishai the son of Zeruah succored him, and smote the Philistine and killed him” (v. 17). Thus this servant of David is put to the test; he does not abandon his master in danger and has the honor of saving David. Is it not likewise with us? The Lord has fought for us and delivered us; do we not in a sense have the duty of helping Him? His name, His person, and His glory are threatened by the enemy's agents. This enemy attacks our David in order to destroy all remembrance of Him, and he knows that his time is short, for already the dawn of our Lord's glorious reign is about to break in the

person of Solomon. Will the enemy succeed? We are responsible for his victory or his defeat. It is up to us now in the power of the Spirit of God to smite the giant's son, to conquer Christ's attackers, to keep His name and His word intact in face of the enemy who would destroy them.

And even if we are not “David's mighty men,” should we not swear to Him as all David's servants did: “Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the lamp of Israel” (v. 17)? And so each one's faith is put to the test. They realize that they themselves must fight, each in his rank, so that the light of God's people might not go out but continue to shine in all its splendor. No doubt our David is never weary like the David of this history: “The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not nor tires” (Isa. 40:28). But in order to test and strengthen our faith, to encourage our hearts in conflict and cheer them with victory and reward, He loves to place Himself in a position in relation to His own where He, the victor over Satan, seems to need our help. What a privilege to fight for Him! The time is solemn; Christ is being

attacked on every hand; the enemy's effort seems formidable and surpasses our feeble resources by far. Those who ought to be with Him and defend the integrity of His Word and His Person, more often than not, alas, make common cause with the sons of the giant. Let us not be disturbed about this.

It does not matter if our David is absent as in the two battles at Gob (vv. 18-19); the same Spirit that urged Him on is still with us. Perhaps we may be alone as Sibbechai the Hushathite was alone against Saph — for the stricken giant is always reappearing in another form. What does that matter? Perhaps — discouraging situation — Gob, the place where he was defeated, will become a battlefield for us a second time. What does it matter if we must retrace the same steps when we thought that we had finished with a treacherous struggle?

Look now! Goliath, that ancient enemy, reappears on this ground. “And there was again a battle at Gob with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, smote Goliath the Gittite; now the staff of his spear was like a

weaver's beam” (v. 19). Was not Goliath defeated by David? Be not troubled, be not afraid, Elhanan, hero of “the grace of God”! (Elhanan means “the grace of God”) This Goliath, this Gittite, is a false Goliath bearing a deceptive name, a lying name. He is only Lahmi, Goliath's brother (cf. 1 Chr. 20:5). Yes, but he has the same spear, like a weaver's beam, doesn't he (cf. 1 Sam. 17:7)? Ask him, Elhanan, where his sword is. His sword is in David's hands and it will remain there forever. Victory is assured you, Elhanan! To win this victory there is no need even of a slingstone which you surely could never wield as deftly as your king anyway. It is confidence, the humble dependence you saw in David, that will overcome him. Yes, at any rate the victory is yours; it is ours, because it is His!

The last enemy, a monstrous intimidating man, is not named but he also was born to the giant, “a man of great stature, that had on each hand six fingers, and on each foot six toes, four and twenty in number” (vv. 20-22). As once Goliath did, so he defies Israel (v. 21; 1 Sam. 17:10). In Christ's absence we must fight for Him as well as for His people. To defy the one is to

defy the other. We have brothers who are captives of the enemy, like Lot, sadly linked up with the world as he was, who must be saved “with fear, snatching them out of the fire” (Jude 23). Let us stand in the breach like Jonathan the son of Shimeah and let us demonstrate that like him by grace we bear the name “David’s brothers” (cf. v. 21). Like him may we have the interests of His people at heart.

How painful it is to hear: Why are you meddling? We are all right where we are. You are making war against us — for they identify themselves with the enemy enslaving them and prefer their slavery to the liberty which is offered to them. But what of it? Let us fight for them, let us smite this terrible power that defies God’s people. Another blow, this one will be the last. Just one more victory and the Lord will deliver us from the hand of all our enemies, and we shall in peace be able to raise the words of our song to Him, as did David!

Chapter 22 — The Song of Deliverance

We have now reached David's final deliverance. All his enemies, of whom Saul was one (v. 1), have disappeared. This song which historically belongs at the beginning of 2 Samuel 7 is placed here because the last enemy of David and of his people has just been defeated (2 Sam. 21:21) and from now on this hostile power will never again raise its head. Indeed, these words which we find again in Psalm 18 could not have been spoken on this occasion, for they mention a time when David was not under discipline but had by grace been preserved from falling amid his cruel enemy's pursuit. But even in these times of strength and holiness which had characterized the first period of his career David could never have applied all the verses of this psalm to himself, as we shall see. David was a prophet; his prophetic songs arise from his personal experiences, but they would not have been prophetic if they did not have Christ as their object. In his experiences David is a reflection of Christ, and this is an immense privilege; but this is only a feeble light, a small reproduction of the perfect Model.

This psalm here before us is divided into three parts.

The first part (vv. 1-19) celebrates deliverance from Saul's hand: "He delivered me from my strong enemy" (v. 17). This deliverance recalls that of Israel, saved from Pharaoh's pursuit, crossing the Red Sea: "The beds of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered at the rebuke of Jehovah, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils. He reached forth from above, He took me, He drew me out of great waters" (vv. 15-16). However, this picture does not correspond exactly to David's deliverance or to Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. It treats of a time yet future and prophetic. It deals with the remnant's deliverance at the time of the end when God will intervene openly and visibly in their favor (vv. 8-15). They will be led to death's door, and then God will intervene in their favor and will scatter their enemies in an instant. Before this deliverance the remnant will learn that their Messiah, David's Son, passed through this anguish alone and bore it, thus associating Himself with the future distress of His people, in order that He might deliver them. David could only in feeble measure realize

these words which make us think of the agony at Gethsemane: “The waves of death encompassed me, torrents of Belial made me afraid. The bands of Sheol surrounded me; the cords of death encountered me” (vv. 4-5).

The second part of the Psalm (vv. 19-30) is even more striking in this respect than the first. The reason for David's deliverance is that God takes pleasure in His anointed according to all the perfection of his character. Now, even before David's fall and how much less after that fall, David's character did not exactly correspond to these verses: “He brought me forth into a large place: He delivered me, because He delighted in me. Jehovah has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands has He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of Jehovah, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His ordinances were before me, and His statutes, I did not depart from them, and I was upright before Him, and kept myself from mine iniquity. And Jehovah has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in His sight. With the gracious Thou dost show Thy-

self gracious; with the upright man Thou dost show Thyself upright; with the pure Thou dost show Thyself pure; and with the perverse Thou dost show Thyself contrary” (vv. 19-26). David is celebrating the perfection of Someone other than himself: “Jehovah has recompensed Me according to My righteousness, according to My cleanness in His sight.” Christ alone could give His Father a reason for loving Him and for saving Him — but His salvation has become His people's salvation (v. 27).

In the third part of the Psalm (vv. 31-51) David celebrates what God had done for him. God had answered him by delivering him “from the strivings of my people” (which corresponds to 2 Samuel 20 in David's history), by making him “head of the nations” whom he had subjugated (v. 43). The children of Ammon, the Philistines, the Syrians, and Edom had had to bow beneath his yoke. But how all this speaks to us of One who is greater than David! He comes forth from the trial to be acknowledged as King of Israel and Head of the nations. “Strangers come cringing unto [Him]” (v. 45) God avenges

Him and brings the peoples under Him (v. 47). He lifts Him up above them that rose up against Him (v. 48; cf. Ps. 2:2,6).

Nevertheless David could celebrate these things with a heart filled with thanksgiving. Grace rested on him at that time on account of the integrity and perfection of his conduct. He was at the end of his path of difficulties, and this path was the path of a walk with God. With a peaceful rejoicing heart he celebrated the deliverance that grace accorded his faithfulness. On David's side all is joy, liberty, power, and thanksgiving; on God's side all is favor and grace.

What will we find in the following chapter where it is a question of the king's responsibility?

Chapter 23:1-7 — David's Last Words

Now we come to the concluding words of David's career. Just prior to his death he considers the result of his entire life as a king favored by God but yet responsible. This life embraces all his experiences, his fall, and the discipline that followed.

Ready now to leave the world he looks backward, forward, and round about him, and his sight is clearer than it had ever been before. He reviews the past, considers the present, and contemplates the future, and we learn his thoughts enlightened by the teaching and inspiration of the Spirit of God.

The first verse is not part of David's last words. It solemnly presents to us as something of greatest importance that which characterized the man who spoke these words. The first point is that in order to speak them he was inspired by God. The twice repeated word “saith” indicates that David spoke in oracles. Thus he was inspired in all four respects in which he is presented in this verse: as “the son of Jesse” in the humble character of his human descent, as “the man who was raised up on high” in the character God gave him in raising him up as a man, as “the anointed of the God of Jacob” in his character as king of Israel, the people who had received the promises, and lastly, as “the sweet psalmist of Israel” in his character as prophet bringing grace to his people.

What now are the words of this man whom God has just described to us? First of all he testifies that it was the Spirit of God who spoke by him: “The Spirit of Jehovah spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (v. 2). Next he declares that God had directly communicated His thoughts about His people Israel to him: “The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me” (v. 3). Here we have solemn divine authority at the same time as clearest affirmation of what inspiration is. Inspiration uses man, all of man, and to express itself inspiration uses all this human instrument's characteristics. If he says something, it is as an oracle; if he speaks, it is the Lord speaking by him. Man has mixed in nothing that is of himself: “His word was on my tongue.” God uses what He wants of man in order to present His thoughts in the absolute integrity of His Word. But if God speaks by David, He also speaks to David: “The Rock of Israel spoke to me.” What He told him is part of the treasure of his personal experiences.

What does this word, so marvelously preserved, convey to us? We have already mentioned it, and we shall see it: the past, the

present, and the future: The past is me and my history; the present is grace; the future is Christ and glory.

However, the first object that God presents to David and by him is not David himself, that is, his past; but rather Christ, that is, his future and our future with Him. Doubtless David was here announcing the immediate future, Solomon's reign, but in reality Solomon did not answer to the glorious description given us here of the future king of glory. This was as always a prophecy of Christ. The future is the immediate thing in God's thoughts and so it ought to be in our thoughts as well, just as it was in David's thoughts. What a wonderful revelation of the true king's character! "The ruler among men shall be just, ruling in the fear of God; and he shall be as the light of the morning, like the rising of the sun, a morning without clouds" (vv. 3-4). How fresh, new, young, and immaculate everything is in this glory, in this dawning of the sun of righteousness! This will be the beginning of an era of unmixed happiness. Who has not looked upon the rising sun in a sky of perfect purity on a spring morning? Who has not felt his heart expand, over-

whelmed with this freshness and this inexpressible peace? The beauty of the scene ravishes us; nothing troubles this joy; there is not a dark spot on the horizon; the possibility of a storm seems to be past forever; we live, we enjoy this spectacle without distraction — a morning without clouds!

But the rising of the sun presents even more than the splendor of this star in a pure heaven: “When from the sunshine, after rain, the green grass springs from the earth” (v. 4). The renewed earth seems resurrected by its shining. Of Solomon, a type of Christ we read: “He shall come down like rain on the mown grass, as showers that water the earth” (Ps. 72:6).^{*} Men, His people, are affected by his rays. Grass mowed down by judgment gives way to new grass: the remnant, a willing people. The shining of the sun of righteousness will cause it to sprout up with abundance of blessings after He descends like a refreshing rain on His humbled people. “From the womb of the morning shall come to thee the dew of thy youth” (Ps. 110:3).

* Cf. Deut. 32:2; Prov. 19:12; Isa. 66:14; Micah 5:7.

Thus the appearance of Christ's glory, their joy and their hope, will surpass every other thought in the hearts of those who know and love Him.

At the sight of this glory David now turns back to himself and his history. It is as though he were saying: This is what I should have been and what another will be; now here is what I am: “Although my house be not so before God” (v. 5). Alas, it takes only a few words to write and to read this story of humiliation and shame. But here we see that in the presence of death David has nothing more to learn. He has no confidence in himself nor in his house and he condemns them both. Is not this like the patriarch's expression: “Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life”? So much for the past. David had not answered to what God expected of him nor had he shown what the “just ruler over mankind” ought to be.

But one thing remained, established for the present and for eternity: “Yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in every way and sure” (v. 5). The present is grace: that

which God had done for David despite what David had been. “At this time it shall be said ... What has God wrought!” (Num. 23:23). God's covenant is eternal and secure. It is a new covenant, for the old covenant was indeed ordered but it was neither secure nor eternal because of man's responsibility. God sought a ground for the new covenant in Himself; man does not enter into this covenant as a contracting party. This is why it can endure and never end. David rests upon that which God has done: “For this is all my salvation, and every desire, although He make it not to grow” (v. 5). This covenant is not growing at present; it will spring up in relation to a new people (v. 4). For it to grow and for full blessing to be introduced, judgment must first be executed: “The sons of Belial are all of them as thorns thrust away ... and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place” (vv. 6-7). But David can firmly rely on this covenant and on God's promises.

We always find the three things we have just spoken of with a soul that is in the Lord's presence. Did they not shine in all their splendor even in the thief on the cross? This man judged

himself by acknowledging the righteousness of God's judgment: “Dost thou too not fear God, thou that art under the same judgment? and we indeed justly, for we receive the just recompense of what we have done.” His standard was what Christ had been: “But this Man has done nothing amiss.” He counted on His grace: “Remember me,” and looking forward to His future glory he added: “Lord, when Thou comest in Thy kingdom” (Luke 23:39-43).

Chapter 23:8-39 — David's Mighty Men

After David's last words God shows us that He preserves the memory of his mighty men, companions of His anointed until the final establishment of his reign. He had met still other devoted men such as Ittai and Shobi when he fled from Jerusalem, but those who are mentioned here were his associates from the very beginning. So too the twelve disciples were distinguished because they had companied with the Lord “all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out” among them (Luke 22:28-29; Acts 1:21). In like manner those who

have followed Him during the time that the world has rejected and disowned Him will be singled out for honor.

In number there are thirty-seven men here (cf. 1 Chr. 11-12).

Joab who had held the top position as the head of the army until the end of David's reign is excluded from his mighty men. Perhaps he had performed more brilliant actions than all the others; much courage and even a certain outward devotedness to the king was found in him, but these qualities in themselves do not give one a place in God's register; otherwise the Word would list nearly all the great heroes of humanity. Psalm 87:4 teaches us what God understands by "mighty men": "I will make mention of Rahab (Egypt) and Babylon among them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia: this man was born there." The glory of these heroes of the nations was past and did not extend beyond their short lifespans although they had filled the earth with the fame of their names. "And of Zion it shall be said, This one and that one was born in her; and the Most High Himself shall establish her" (v. 5). Such was the

character of David's mighty men: through their origin they were considered to belong to the city of royal grace. But the Spirit adds: “Jehovah will count, when He inscribes the peoples, This man was born there” (v. 6). Despite every “this one” of the past, when the register of the nations shall be opened before the Lord He will find but one, the Man of His right hand, who deserves to have His origin in Zion. The leaders of the nations have had their day, and their glory has vanished in smoke; this Man will rule over all peoples; the start and the center of His kingdom will be at Jerusalem, and “all [the] springs” of those who belong to Him will be found in Himself (v. 7). But His mighty men, “this one and that one,” will be associated with Him in His reign.

What characterized David's mighty men therefore was the association that grace had given them with the Lord's anointed. Joab had never had such a relationship; this book has fully demonstrated this. He sought his personal interest in serving David, and his actions never originated in fellowship with his head. His name is passed over in silence.

Among the mighty men the Word first of all cites three who were more honored than all the others. What was the reason for this honor? These men proven that they had persevering energy in procuring the deliverance of God's people, but in the conflict they did not count upon themselves: the Lord wrought deliverance through them. “Jehovah,” verses 10 and 12 repeat, “wrought a great deliverance.”

From where did their perseverance come? Had they been alone they certainly would have weakened, but all three were “with David” and under his eyes during the combat. He inspired them with courage and patience in their efforts. They had taken as their model David who could say: “By Thee I have run through a troop”; “He teaches my hands to war; and mine arms bend a bow of brass”; and again: “I pursued mine enemies, and destroyed them, and I turned not again till they were consumed” (2 Sam. 22:30, 35, 38).

Who was the enemy against whom these men of valor fought? The Philistines — the enemy within — as we have so often

seen in the course of these meditations. No enemy is more dangerous than this one; the Egyptians and the Moabites were less to be feared than these who living within Israel's borders continually stood in the way of their peacefully possessing the land that God had given them as an inheritance.

These three men had not weakened in this struggle. The first, Joseb-Bassebeth, had brandished his spear against eight hundred men;* he had killed them at one time and had not stopped until there were no opponents left. Hence his pre-eminence, for his name translated means: “He who sits in the first place.”

*There is a difficulty in the translation here. Perhaps there is also some error on the part of the copyist. (Cf. 2 Sam. 23:8 with 1 Chron. 11:11).

The second, Eleazar the son of Dodo, fought alone in presence of the men of Israel. He expected no help from them, for he did not count on man's strength. Being with David (v. 9) was enough for him to defy the Philistines. He smote them and did not stop until “his hand was weary” (v. 10). There may be lim-

its in the fight of faith, for God uses imperfect instruments subject to reaching limits of their strength; but Eleazar's perseverance was such that “his hand clave to the sword” (v. 10), so that it was impossible to separate him from the weapon he was using. May Eleazar's victory be ours as well! Our weapons are not fleshly; we have the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Let us use it in such a way that we are, so to speak, one with it even after the battle. May the conflict ever result in our valuing the Word more and more so that it will be impossible to separate us from it.

The third of these men was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. Under Eleazar the people had gone up quite indolently, it seems, since they came after Eleazar “only to spoil” (v. 10). Here, the people “had fled before the Philistines” (v. 11). The object they were contesting was “a plot of ground full of lentils,” a very little part of the inheritance that God had given Israel, but one containing food for the people. The enemy was seeking to deprive them of the field and its crop. Shammah* stood in the middle of the field and preserved it for God's

people. This deed speaks to our consciences. Our inheritance and our “plot of ground” are heavenly, and we must defend them as well as our heavenly food, the Word which God has entrusted to us. God's people flee in a cowardly manner from the enemy, acknowledging to their shame the rights of unbelief to set the Word of God at nought. May we be like Shammah; may we fearlessly defend it for sake of the saints, for we are with David. Let us count on God who will work “a great deliverance.”

** And the other two with him (1 Chron. 11:14).*

Verses 13 to 17 present a second series of three chiefs. There is reason for their not being named in the deed these verses recount, but they are named subsequently in connection with their acts of valor.* Why this remarkable omission of their names in the account of their exploit? It is because here it is no longer a matter of energy and perseverance, but one of the devotion of faith. And this devotion flows naturally from the hearts of servants who know and appreciate their Master. By its very nature devotion is something obscure. What man has the

right to boast of devotion? Does or does not our rejected David, unseen by the world, have the right to our devotion because of His character's all powerful perfection? To know Him is to love Him. These three visitors to the cave of Adullam were immediately attached to him. A simple desire on part of their king sufficed to prompt them to overcome all obstacles without taking their lives into account, just so that they might satisfy that desire. Their affection, much more so than their energy, was thus put to the test. Danger did not frighten them when it was a matter of going to draw a bit of water from the well at Bethlehem, because the one they loved was thirsty at harvest time here. Had they succumbed after this enterprise, such a price would not have been too high for having had the privilege of offering David something for his satisfaction, even if momentarily. God records this devotion in His book; the king appreciated it, but did not wish to take advantage of it: "Is it not the blood of the men that went at the risk of their lives?" (v. 17). If on the one hand he elicits the devotion of his men, on the other hand his character is to devote himself for them. The water offered to

him only passes through his hands to be presented as a drink offering “to Jehovah” (v. 16), for all that is done for Christ is done for God and God accepts it, offered up by Christ, as an excellent sacrifice. A simple cup of water given to “one of these little ones” for Christ's sake passes from His heart to the heart of God Himself.

- * It may be of interest to give here the reasons for seeing in Abishai, Benaiah, and Asahel the three chiefs of verse 13. Verse 17 says: "These things did the three mighty men," and verse 22: "He had a name among the three mighty men." Moreover we must note that when it says in verse 23 that "[Benaiah] was honored above the thirty," these thirty are actually thirty-two in verses 24 to 39. If Asahel who "was one of the thirty" but who together with Abishai and Benaiah completed the three is removed from the number, and if we set apart Uriah the Hittite who is so remarkably placed at the end of the list (while 1 Chronicles 11 mixes him in with the others), we find "the thirty"; but as we have said the complete number of mighty men is thirty-seven. For another reason 1 Chronicles 11 and 12 cite a much greater number.

These three men's deeds of valor did not attain to those of the first three. First there is Abishai who like Joseb-Bassebeth brandished his spear against three hundred men whom he slew, but he did not have the same perseverance of faith (vv. 18-19).

Next we find Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. He fought the enemies from without, Moab and Egypt. He killed two Moabite heroes.* Like David he fought a lion all by himself; he killed the Egyptian just as David had struck down Goliath, and just as David had taken the giant's sword to decapitate him, so Benaiah put the Egyptian to death with his own spear. Benaiah walks faithfully in his master's steps and his great affection for David leads him to reproduce his model's traits. Such a walk finds its reward: "David set him in his council" (v. 23), a place of confidence, intimacy, and communion. Benaiah shares his master's secrets, is informed of his projects, and sees the king's face at all times. What a blessed portion! If we love the Lord Jesus and follow Him obediently and serve Him, we will be rewarded with a nearness like that enjoyed by John, the beloved disciple whose place was in the bosom of Jesus.

* "Two Ariels" or lions of God, heroes.

No special mention is made of Asahel. He might have accomplished some act of valor, but his confidence in himself and in his agility deprived him of his career very early through his encounter with Abner (2 Sam. 2:18-24).

Finally we find the “thirty,” less renowned than the six preceding men, although the Lord forgets none of His own. When David looked over the list of His servants, with what sorrow his eyes must have paused at the name of Uriah the Hittite which ends the list. He was among the mighty men and not the least of those hearts devoted to the king and his people. And David had had him put to death to satisfy his own lust! His name remained there in testimony against the one whom he had served. This single name of Uriah reminded David of all his past of shame and chastening; but condemning himself and exalting the grace that had restored him, he would never have dreamed of erasing his name from the book in which it was recorded.

Chapter 24 — Moriah (2 Chron. 3:1)

Second Samuel ends with the most wonderful revelation of the work of redemption given us under the dispensation of the law.

The Word tells us that “the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel” (v. 1). It does not reveal the occasion for this, but in 2 Samuel 21 we have seen that events that happened long ago remain present before God when it is a matter of chastening or disciplining His people. David becomes the instrument of this chastening: “[Jehovah] moved David against [Israel] saying, Go, number Israel and Judah.” In 1 Chronicles 21:1 we find that as in the case of Job, Satan was the agent used against the people and to seduce David. “The accuser of the brethren” would have liked for God to curse the people and their prince; he could not know that God would use him as an involuntary servant for His designs for the ultimate blessing and triumph of those He had chosen.

We might ask in what way this numbering of the people was so contrary to the Lord's mind, for from the time of the departure

from Egypt many numberings of the able-bodied men of Israel had been commanded and approved by God.

The object of the first numbering mentioned (Ex. 38:25-27) was to gather the silver (amounting to a bekah per man) intended to form the bases of the pillars of the tabernacle; thus this numbering had taken place for the Lord and in view of worshipping Him. The second numbering (Num. 1:2-3) at the time when Israel was about to engage in conflict with the enemy was intended to determine the number of men able to go to war. This was according to God; every Israelite from twenty years and upward needed to understand his personal responsibility in the battles of the Lord.* The Word mentions a third numbering (Num. 26:2, 52-65) of those who were capable of military service, this in view of dividing up the land. Here again the numbering was all important, for each family would see its inheritance in Canaan increase or decrease according to the number of its sons.

* A supplementary census was commanded (Num. 3:40) of all the firstborn males from a month old and upward. The Levites were

substituted for them as belonging to the Lord. Those who were over and above the number of Levites had to be redeemed, and the redemption money was given to Aaron and his sons.

The numbering in our chapter has none of these characteristics. The tabernacle having been built, the Levites having been substituted for the firstborn, and the conquest of the inheritance having been in large part accomplished, there were still men able to go to war, but God “had delivered [David] out of the hand of all his enemies” (2 Sam. 22:1). What need had he yet to take knowledge of the number of his warriors? His purpose, as he said to Joab, was to “know the number of the people” (v. 2). At the end of his life at Satan's instigation this godly king's heart underwent a temptation quite contrary to his character. David had always been a humble man before the Lord (2 Sam. 7:18) and before men (1 Sam. 26:20). It did not seem necessary for him to be on guard against pride. In the past the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh had enticed him, and he had been severely punished for this; now, tempted by the pride of life, he does not resist the desire to reckon up his forces in order to

know to what extent he could rely upon them. Chastening befalls him to teach him that he could not and ought not count on anything but God alone.

Joab censures his master. This man who had never judged himself condemns the man of God. The king's word “was abominable to Joab” (1 Chr. 21:6). What a shame for a David to be reproached by a Joab! We can discover but one reason for Joab's repugnance to obeying the king's orders. There was no profit to be gotten from this act and no advantage in defying God. Joab would never have done so except if it were profitable to him and if his interests were at stake. Why then should David commit this profane and useless act?

The king's desire prevails. For over nine months Joab and the captains of the army number the people and during these nine months David's conscience is silent, but once he has obtained the fruit of his desire he finds it has a bitter taste. How much effort put forth for such a miserable objective! And something was still lacking, for Levi and Benjamin had not been

numbered. Faced with this incomplete result, David must have doubly felt the folly of his proceedings.

We make the same experiences as he. Satan entices us by lusts. Yet possessing the objects of these lusts can never satisfy a child of God's heart, because they cannot silence his conscience. The man of the world finds no more satisfaction in them than the Christian does, but he sets right out in pursuit of new objects by which he hopes to fill the void he feels. Not the Christian — he comes to his senses, dismayed, his hands empty, his heart empty, the very picture of moral wretchedness: having lost his fellowship with God and heaven's joy and having not gained that of earth. His conscience reproaches him and he comes to God filled with repentance. Oh, how David now might wish to erase those nine baneful months! He cannot do so. And so he lays hold of the only resource left to him and addresses the Lord: "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; and now, I beseech Thee, Jehovah, put away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly" (v. 10). On another occasion he had seen how much it cost to trespass against God's

holiness. Was a new judgment going to fall on him? The consequences of his act cause him to fear, but too late; they ought to have frightened him before he followed this path. His repentance cannot lessen the guilt of the evil committed or make it less worthy of judgment; his repentance cannot atone for his sin or deliver him from its consequences. What is left for David? To submit to the judgment which he would like to have avoided.

But here his faith appears. By the mouth of Gad the Lord sets three alternatives before him; he chooses the last of these. The sword of the Lord, this two-edged sword, is more reassuring to him than the sword of man because he knows God. Had he not learned during his long career of sorrows, trials, and battles that “His mercies are great”? (v. 14). He commits himself into His hands of righteousness for he knows that His righteousness is inseparable from mercy. David is in a “great strait” (v. 14), like the remnant of Israel at the end, but he knows that he can count on God's grace (cf. 2 Sam. 12:13).

The pestilence rages; the angel smites from north to south, from Dan to Beer-sheba (v. 15), throughout all the sphere where the numbering had taken place (cf. vv. 5-7); he comes to Jerusalem and stretches forth his sword over the beloved city (1 Chr. 21:16). At that moment “Jehovah repented him” and arrests the hand of the angel. He does not stop it on account of David's repentance, but on account of His own repentance. His judgment yields to His grace without the one or the other being weakened or sacrificed.

But before this David intervenes as intercessor and arbiter between God and the people: “Behold, it is I that have sinned, and it is I that have committed iniquity; but these sheep, what have they done? let Thy hand, I pray Thee, be on me, and on my father's house!” (v. 17). He takes the judgment upon himself and sets himself in the breach so that the sheep may be spared; he charges himself with sin and iniquity — but alas! this sin was his sin and this judgment was judgment that he had merited. Another, a lone Arbiter, bore our sins without having any sins Himself, and making our sins His He laid down His

life for His sheep, saying: “If therefore ye seek Me, let these go away” (John 18:8).

Now a third great factor appears. The first was grace, the second was the intervention of an arbiter between God and men, and the third is sacrifice. It is mercy on the one hand and sacrifice on the other that check the final judgment, and the true arbiter can rise up and say: “I have found a ransom” (Job 33:24). Jerusalem, the city of grace, is spared, but it cannot be spared except through the atoning sacrifice offered on Moriah in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite (2 Chr. 3:1).

Moriah was the historical site where Abraham had offered Isaac* (Gen. 22:2). On this mountain of Jehovah would be provided. How much more so when the sin of Israel and of their king had stirred up Jehovah's judgment against the people. Provision was now made by a sacrifice which cost the people nothing but for which David paid the full price. Provision has been made in a far more perfect manner on this same mountain where Jesus has been crucified for us.

- * This fact has been contested by modern critics, but their objections are without value.

God who had once provided the victim for the burnt offering accepts the sacrifice after having looked forward to its efficacy, and so sovereign grace reigning through righteousness and manifested as such on the cross becomes Israel's means of approach. The tabernacle of former days is forsaken as well as its altar; the ark alone remains on Mount Zion. A new order of things begins. The system of the law is set aside as outdated; free grace that provides the sacrifice is worth more than all that man could offer. This is where the Lord answers the needs of every poor sinner and this is also where the believer sacrifices and worships (cf. 1 Chr. 22:1). It is no longer the tabernacle of Moses but the threshing-floor of a Jebusite, a stranger to the promises, that becomes the meeting place between God and His people!

