

**DAVID**

**SINNER AND PENITENT**

**CHRISTIAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH**  
**77 WALLACE STREET**  
**BELLEVILLE, NJ 07109**



## NOTES

### Davide - Peccatore e Penitente

By Giuseppe Petrelli

Published in Italian in the year 1915.

Translated from Italian to English in the year 2001.

For Biblical references, both the King James Version and the New Revised Standard Version were used. Biblical references are in italics.

The Seventy referred to in Chapter 1 is the body of scholars who produced The Septuagint, the oldest Greek version of The Old Testament, traditionally said to have been translated by 70 or 72 Jewish scholars at the request of Ptolemy II.

## Dedication

To those who feel the sense of sin always greater and have tasted the sweetness of forgiveness and of the love of God, I dedicate this book.

## Preface

Long prefaces, like long introductions, are not pleasing. I have tried to be brief even in this book. There is a study that merits our attention more than any other, and it is the human heart. However, it is a study requiring reflection, and which is best done by those who have suffered, because we understand others in the measure that we have suffered.

The Bible deals at length with David. Men would not have written many pages about him. His mistakes would have been classified with those of other kings, without seeing perhaps, his great virtues. We see two parallels in the life of this man: the sense of sin and the love of God. If we truly grow in the Christian life, we become always more sensitive of our shortcomings, and we know always more how much God has loved and loves us.

I have dedicated this book to those who have a lively sense of sin. They are those who err the least according to the world and have less time and desire to spy on the faults of others. To such I have dedicated this book and they welcome it. Precisely because they are indulgent with others, they will forgive the author if he has not been able to satisfy them.

Christian brothers, let us shake hands above these pages, because we are all needy travel companions. Before us is the infallible and compassionate guide – Jesus Christ.





## Chapter 1

### To Bethlehem

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15 and 16

*“...there remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, “send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.”*

A few miles from Jerusalem, in a picturesque location upon an elevation, lies the little city of Bethlehem, which has become more famous in the history of the world than the capitals of the greatest empires.

In the times of which we speak, Western civilizations were non-existent, but little Bethlehem already had a history among the Hebrew people, and has an important one in the facts which we relate.

Although the events belong to a distant age, because of that life which is in the Sacred Scripture, the events present themselves lively and eloquent and always with new interest.

One morning, perhaps in the year 1065 B.C., there was seen on the road to Bethlehem an unusual but well-known traveler. Those who knew him stood aside with reverence and fear because they easily identified him by his deportment and his vestments. Even those who had not previously seen him identified him as the well-known

prophet Samuel. His residence was in Ramah. Bethlehem was not in his customary rounds; hence, the curiosity and fear of those who met him, thinking that this visit must be connected with denouncing some evil or threatening punishment.

If one had been able to guess, he would have discovered that behind the severe countenance of that old man there was the tender heart of a child. On that occasion, a mixture of tenderness and sadness was depicted on the face that showed a strength of will accustomed to yielding only to the command of God. One could see that the old man had lived a long life, and had seen and suffered much.

His manner of walking was slow, due less to the ravages of age than to a secret battle in his heart. He was going, one could say, unwillingly, like one who executes an order which is acceptable to him only because of the one who imparted it to him, and not because of the content of the order itself. He was carrying a lofty and painful charge in himself: crowning a king as successor to Saul.

Saul! Samuel had loved him and still loved him. From the day that God had rejected him, the prophet wept for Saul. God put in the mouth of the prophet the words: *“The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou.”* Although Samuel had shown himself to be severe he had not stopped cherishing affection and a special predilection for the man who had excellent qualities. The prophet had no longer seen him, and Saul had not repented of his disobedience, but continued to

demonstrate that he was not maintaining the kingdom as a representative of God. The prophet's venting of grief was human, but it lasted a long time, and therefore it called for a friendly reprimand. The Lord said to him: *"How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons."*

The king beloved by Samuel was still alive, in the prime of his life. But the other king had already been chosen. Samuel felt his heart break. In order not to refuse and not truly out of fear, Samuel answered: *"How can I go? If Saul hears it he will kill me."* But the Lord replied: *"Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shall do; and thou shall anoint unto me him whom I name to thee."* There was no need for a reply. The prophet bowed his head and set out on the road that took him to Bethlehem.

He had not yet arrived at the city gates when he saw the elders coming to meet him. On their faces was portrayed even more clearly the fear felt by those who had already met him. *"Comest thou peaceably?"*, they asked him. And he said: *Peaceably, I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice."* The prophet sent for Jesse and gave him orders to sanctify himself; also to have his sons sanctify themselves, and that they should all come to the feast of the sacrifice.

The family of Jesse was well known in the little village. The story of gentle Boaz and of courageous Ruth the Moabite, from whom Jesse descended, was held dear by the inhabitants. The family of Jesse, if not rich, was well-to-do. They lived in a pious atmosphere, mainly because of the influence of a holy woman. David, and later on Augustine also, had very pious mothers. In the Psalms, David speaks of the mother as the maid-servant of the Lord.

Samuel went to the place of the sacrifice and waited for the invited ones to arrive. The invited ones had sanctified themselves as commanded by the rite, and were washed and dressed in white. And Jesse came, followed by a fine group of sons whom he presented one by one to the prophet. That moment was solemn. Samuel remembered the words of the Lord: *"I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons...and thou shall anoint unto me him whom I name unto thee."* Samuel positioned himself to look attentively at the young men who were coming before him. The first of them, Eliab, was tall in stature and had a handsome aspect. He resembled Saul, tall and handsome like him. Samuel experienced a flash of joy, and immediately thought: certainly this is he, the new king-elect. But the feeling had only the duration of a flash, because a distinct and gentle voice said to him: *"No"*, and added: *Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him: for the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."* Samuel was disappointed that



the fine young man who was passing before him was not the anointed of the Lord. The translation of The Seventy (see Notes page) in this verse is very expressive, and suggests that Samuel should not inspect or contemplate that majestic stature and aspect with interest – almost as though it were a waste of time. And the imposing figure, but only in appearance, of Eliab, passed under the “No” that God had answered the prophet. Jesse called Abinadab. The same “No”. Samuel said: *“Neither hath the Lord chosen this.”* Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but in conclusion, the prophet said to Jesse: *“The Lord hath not chosen these.”*

And yet Samuel did not lose faith. He did not doubt the clarity of the message that the anointed one should be among the sons of Jesse. Although Jesse had presented his sons without saying that someone was missing, the prophet asked: *“Have all the young men passed?”* And Jesse said: *“There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he keepeth the sheep.”* An answer that seems to be of no significant importance was given to satisfy the question of the man of God. Jesse spoke as if all his sons were there. The other son was the youngest, and it was not even thought to make him come. *“Behold he keepeth the sheep.”* This was the answer of the father, but it was not what was in the mind of the prophet who, under the guidance of the voice of the Lord said: *“Tell him to come here. We won’t offer the sacrifice until he comes.”* The little absent one began to have such importance for Samuel that the feast and the invited ones all had to wait. Jesse had to inconvenience one of his seven sons and

send him in haste to the fields to take the place of the little shepherd. Without changing clothes, the little shepherd quickly and nimbly set out for the village.

On solemn occasions every delay is painful and keeps everyone in suspense. At a certain moment, a light and quick trampling could be heard and the figure of a young man was seen at the door. He was the only one in that place who appeared just as he was coming from work. The eye of the prophet sized him up in a moment: "*He was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance.*" This very vivid description enables us to read in the soul of the newly-arrived one that he had a pure and benevolent look. The secret of that serene aspect was in the beauty and goodness of his soul, and the prophet saw this. A voice that had become authoritative and irresistible made Samuel's ancient fire and urgency return. When the Spirit of God works in us, it drives us rapidly and surely to action. The command was brief: "*Arise, anoint him: for this is he.*" And Samuel arose and went to meet him, and the two beautiful figures met: the white-haired prophet and the blonde young man. That which follows is given in a few words: "*Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brethren.*" But he did not have anything special to say that could be heard by everyone, and said only a few words in the ear of the young man. Perhaps that which the young man heard and saw seemed to him like the vision in an audacious dream more than anything else. "*Keep yourself ready for that which the Lord expects from you*" had to be the meaning of the words of the prophet. "*So Samuel rose up, and*

*went to Ramah.*” He had come saddened and merely for obedience, and it did not seem that he was returning with joy. The particulars of the feast are not recorded, but it was not like the one which years before had accompanied the anointing of Saul. At that time, Samuel requested that the best portion be selected and he presented it to Saul. Nothing like that happened at David’s anointing. For the prophet it was the precise fulfillment of his duty. But his heart remained broken by the pain and disappointment of reports to him about Saul’s deportment.

It is truly rare that the soul reopens itself with renewed enthusiasm and joy. In truth, repeated bitter experiences crease the brow of even the best and they are able to resign themselves only with great difficulty to the new commands of Providence. But if the prophet showed himself to be less cheerful and demonstrative, the language used by the Lord was quite different from that used on the occasion of the anointing of Saul. Then the Lord said to the prophet: *“This same shall rule over my people.”* There was not one word showing Saul to be the man selected by Him. Saul was the king who had the approval of the people. In David’s case the language of the Lord is intimate: *“I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons.”* And when the young man appeared, the energetic command came: *“Arise, anoint him: for this is he.”*

David –“the beloved”- because this is the meaning of his name, was called to a high destiny and the anointing was the advance notice to keep himself ready for the calling of the Lord, to Whom he belonged completely from that

day on. The anointing had an effect on the heart of David because from that day forward, the Spirit of the Lord worked powerfully in him. However, although David was called to the kingdom, not even Samuel was told how and when it would come about. Saul was still king, but between the choices the Lord makes and the actions of His servants there is almost always a period of preparation and testing. In the case of David, we wait for God Himself to prepare and guide the events.



## Chapter 2

### The Player of the Harp

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 16: 14-23

David had been anointed king, but he was quite far from the throne. However, he had the faith to wait, and he returned to the fields to his usual trade of keeping the sheep. Others would have been tempted to hold the old profession in contempt, but he returned there joyfully, from whence Samuel had sent to call him.

But he went there with a new ideal. In the solitude he was drawing inspiration from the surrounding scenes which, from that time on, had a richer significance for him.

Near the flock he acquired experience in dangerous fights – so much so that later on he was able to say that he had rescued a sheep from a bear and another from a lion. He knew how to play the harp, and gifted as he was with a poetic spirit, he must have at that time composed some verses that later became part of some Psalms. And so the days passed between the constant and humble work and the music and the songs which attracted the attention of passersby, while elsewhere very important events were coming to maturity.

For some time all joy had disappeared from the Court of King Saul. The courtiers maintained a quiet behavior and only exchanged a few words among themselves in a

subdued voice. Saul, who was loved by the people, and who was victorious over the enemies was the object of these murmurings. His servants had seen his face becoming clouded little by little, and because of this the whole atmosphere of the Court was changing. At a distance he was envied, but to those who could observe him up close he was the object of pity. Saul passed long hours in silence and sadness, with fixed eyes and tightened lips, and at times he would fly into fits of rage. Now this was the cause of the change: "*Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.*" He had continued always more to harden his heart toward the Lord. From the moment that he heard from prophet Samuel that the kingdom had been taken away from him, he had not shown a single act of repentance, and finally he was abandoned by the Lord. The words of the Scripture that "*an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him*" give the idea that God permitted that Saul should be afflicted by an evil spirit. Truly, we live in the midst of a thousand dangers of which, oftentimes, we have no knowledge. We move forward under the attacks of the enemies as though protected by a wall around us. However, when we rebel, we need to be corrected and the Lord removes the protection, although in part, and the enemies break in. It is not God, therefore, Who sends them. The enemies were already around and were only impeded from entering. If then the heart is empty of the presence of the Lord, the place is occupied by the spirit of the evil one. So it happened to Saul: an evil spirit tormented him. The servants understood, and showing great loyalty, without any fear, they presented

themselves to him and said: *“See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.”*

The unhappy monarch was humbled by this, but even in the calm intervals that were granted to him, Saul did not think about seeking the Lord. He was constrained, however, to recognize that the servants were right and he accepted their counsel: *“Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.”*

The fame of the player of the harp had spread and reached the court. When we are in the place where God wants us there is always someone who thinks of us. The greatest eulogy that one of the servants of Saul attributed to David was: *“The Lord is with him.”* Saul owed his unhappy state to the fact that the Lord abandoned him. David owed his growing fame to the fact that the Lord was with him. Among the other painful consequences of sin is this: hearing comparisons, and seeing in others the good which we have forfeited. Saul listened and quickly showed himself to be desirous of being relieved of the evil but he did not have it in his heart to go to the source. God, who had abandoned him, would have received him in penitence, but even then Saul did not think of seeking the Lord.

*“So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, Send me your son David who is with the sheep.”* The prophet had

found David with the sheep and the messengers of the king found him in the same place. Jesse sent to get him and ordered preparations for his departure. In the Orient it is not acceptable to go to a leader or sovereign without some gift. "*Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul.*" David, with the harp around his neck departed for Gilboa, a few hours away from Bethlehem. The servants quickly led David into the presence of King Saul as ordered. The two were face to face and it seemed like the contrast between night and day; one with a dark and cloudy face that revealed the agitation and storms of the soul; the other, a budding youth whose face was irradiated by peace. One was abandoned by the Lord, the other was resplendent with the Spirit of God. "Play", the king said, and David politely began to play.

There are various types of music. There certainly was no lack of musicians in the court of Saul, but the servants meant to speak of a special music which is consecrated to God, and comes from souls in which He dwells. While David was playing it seemed that his soul was passing over the strings of the harp and the harmony was being lifted up like a prayer. Saul experienced a special fascination, and a calm would spread over his physiognomy and a smile would return to crease his contracted and livid lips. It seemed that, from the strings of the harp, something was going out of the person of David which, resting on the unhappy monarch gave him the comfort which for some time he despaired of having.



*“And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly...”*

The Scripture presents its characters in an indirect light. We are made to know David by that which others think of him. Up to now, from three impressions we gather the following images: the prophet saw him and read the goodness of his soul in his limpid eyes; the passersby in the region of Bethlehem saw him and spread his fame; the king had David before him and was drawn to love him. Therefore there had to be something in the soul of David that appealed to the hearts of others and it had to be more than the man himself; it had to be the presence of the Lord that, starting from his heart, shone in his face, serene and tranquil.

Saul needed David. He became very attached to him and felt a sense of calmness only in David's presence. David was Saul's armor-bearer. *“Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight. And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.”*

We do not know how long David remained in the court, but as can be reasoned from the rest of the narrative, he must have stayed there by intervals. Certainly he alternated staying at the court with returning to the fields, and after a certain time he took up his place in Bethlehem again, keeping the sheep.

In the time spent between the fields and Saul's palace, between the work out in the open and the music; between staying in the court and following the king, David was able to learn many things, and in that school he was able to observe the courtiers. But above all, in the case of that king, David learned that having a crown on one's head is not enough to make one happy; he learned that only the presence of God can give joy and peace. This was a precious lesson which remained engraved in David's heart and did not leave him in his long and stormy career. By means of this lesson, in the days of his old age, David was able to look back and see the chain of events by means of which God guided him, little by little, to a great destiny.

## Chapter 3

### The Giant Goliath

*“Thou comest to me with a sword and a spear, and with a shield but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.”* David had absented himself from the court of Saul, but in the meantime other events followed. The Philistines, ancient enemies of Israel had taken courage again and gathered their armies together at Shochoh and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah. We do not know if they were of an Asian or African race, but they certainly were a warlike people and had among their leaders a few from an ancient gigantic race. During the last days of Saul’s sadness the Philistines became more audacious and after various raids they finally encamped in the territory of Judah.

*“And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines.”* But Saul and his army were discouraged. The Israelites were poorly armed; in fact, in the whole army they had only two swords: that of the king and his firstborn son. And this was not even the main reason for their discouragement, but it was in seeing their king, who at one time had been bold and courageous, dejected and sad. To render the situation even more humiliating an event was added that culminated in bringing terror into the souls of everyone. *“A man named Goliath, from the city of Gath, came out*

*from the Philistine camp to challenge the Israelites. He was over nine feet tall and wore bronze armor that weighed about 125 pounds and a bronze helmet. His legs were also protected by bronze armor, and he carried a bronze javelin slung over his shoulder. His spear was as thick as a bar on a weaver's loom, and its iron head weighed about fifteen pounds.*" He was the last of a race of giants who took refuge among the Philistines after his own were scattered.

*"And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am I not a Philistine and ye servants to Saul? Choose ye a man for you, and let him come down to me. And he accompanied the invitation with curses and maledictions, after which he would add: I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together."* It was, many times, the custom of ancient armies to select two champions and to resolve the fight by the two fighting each other; but the invitation of the Philistine remained unanswered. The resounding voice reached the troops and Saul without any of these or others daring to step forward. Leader and army remained trembling behind the encampment.

At other times Saul, who was also of a good height and a man of valor would have stepped forward, but he had become fearful because he knew that God was not with him. Meanwhile the cry and the invitation were being repeated causing terror to increase always more on the one side and arrogance on the other.

Three of the sons of Jesse followed Saul to battle: they were Eliab the firstborn; Abinadab, the second, and Shammah, the third. David, the youngest, who must then have been twenty years old, remained to watch the sheep in the pasture. One day Jesse said to David: *“Take now for thine brethren a half-bushel of this roasted grain, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; and carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare and take their pledge.”* And David left the sheep still another time and went to the valley of Elah where the Israelite army was encamped. *“And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage and ran into the army, and came and saluted his brethren.”* David had not finished speaking with them when he heard a savage cry and noted immediately afterward, that a pallor spread on the faces of those who were near him and he saw men in flight on the side of the camp closest to the Philistines. *“Have ye seen this man that is come up? Surely to defy Israel is he come up and it shall be that the man who killeth him, that the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father’s house free in Israel.”* These were the words that the Israelites were whispering and that reached the ear of David unclear and confused, while the challenge of the giant was being repeated with a thundering voice. *“What is it? What is happening?”* David asked himself. And then he asked the men who were present with him: *“What shall be done to the man that killeth the Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the*

*armies of the living God? And the people told him the same things, saying: thus shall it be done to the man who shall have beaten him."*

It was a strange contrast - that of so many terrorized warriors with that of the bold young man who did not care about the danger because David, in fact, seemed to be the only one who was serene in the midst of the general fright. At this point, however, something happened which should have sufficed to cool down the most ardent enthusiasm. We read: "*And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men, wherefore his anger was kindled against him, and said: Why camest thou down hither? And with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle."*

We have already met this personage, the first of the sons of Jesse who passed before Samuel - tall of stature and with a magnificent bearing. The first words that we hear from this man show him to be of a proud heart, inclined to scoffing and to suspicion. He was surprised that David, whom he was accustomed to considering as a little servant had arrived there, and that he should be interested in the challenge of Goliath. He himself, Eliab, had heard the threats of the giant and had not had the courage to step forward, but he had courage enough to insult his young brother. It is a law of the human heart that no one attributes to others better motives than he has himself. You - here! Ambitious boy! And the few sheep in the

desert? But David did not let himself become discouraged by such language nor by the attitude of the scorner, but answered briefly: "*What have I now done? Is there not a cause?*" Eliab is thus described: he was a man of appearance and of words.

David, without wasting time continued to speak in this manner, that is, to ask about the repeated challenge. His words were reported to Saul who called David into his presence. "*And David said to Saul, let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.*" Such language could have seemed to be the effect of momentary enthusiasm, but the accent was so sure and revealed such a deep resolve that the king marveled. Yet he said to him: "*Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.*" At this point David thought to remember his past experiences and to use them for the glory of the Lord. "*Thy servant kept his father's sheep and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and smote him and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He shall deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*" Extraordinary was the attempt to wish to fight with the giant, but likewise extraordinary had been the work of killing, as a boy, a



bear and a lion. God, to whom the deliverance was attributed, certainly would deliver him from the giant. This was the logic of David's confidence. "*Go, and the Lord be with thee*", or as can be translated better, according to the version of The Seventy, "*God be one with you.*" David identified the cause with that of the living God. He had no armor and Saul armed David with his armor and put a helmet of brass on his head, and armed him with a coat of mail. "*And David strapped Saul's sword over the armor and tried to walk but he couldn't because he wasn't used to wearing them. And David said to Saul, I can't fight with all this, I'm not used to it. And he took it all off.*"

Saul's armor was certainly in good condition but of no use to little David. Each one, in fact, must stay in the armor that is suited to him and avail himself of his special gift. He who wants to fight using the armor of another will succumb because he does not know how to use it. Moreover, the conflict between David and Goliath is the image of the eternal antagonism of faith with brute force. Goliath's secret was force. David's secret was faith. If little David wanted to meet Goliath with force he would have been destined to lose.

David, therefore, kept those tools with which he was familiar. "*He took his staff in his hand and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scribe; and his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.*" That was a step that had to be considered



thoughtless and foolhardy. Perhaps there was no deliberation except for the trust in God guaranteed by past experiences. There are moments in life when too much reflection is of no use. For this reason, many times God uses those who are not wise according to the world. Certainty in God, hence therefore, the reflection of David. If he had begun to consider the armor of the giant, and to think that the stones and the staff could do nothing unless it should strike the only uncovered spot, and failing that, he would have lost, David would have done nothing. But he had absolute faith in the Lord. Because of this he advanced.

There are narratives that have become so familiar, that one can say they have lost their interest. We know the result of the fight between David and Goliath. We have heard about it so many times that it is difficult for us to consider the importance of the particulars. But if we transport ourselves with our minds to the men and to the places, we can see many things which in haste, many times have escaped us.

Two armies were face to face. The one, that of the Philistines, made always more proud by the sight of that giant champion who had gone out many times to challenge and to curse, without anyone daring to face him. The other was Israel with a trembling leader at the head and who did not have a single man to set against the adversary. Not even when David was advancing did the scene appear more encouraging. In fact, on the one hand there was force sure in himself – the giant enclosed in his armor and encouraged by the confidence his people had

in him. On the other hand a boy, poorly armed, if those few stones and a staff can be called armor, and not rendered happy by human encouragement, because David's people were always doubtful about the result. Think of that boy, and reflect upon how much his faith must have been tested. If his boldness had been the result of mere enthusiasm it would have vanished a long time ago. His brother scoffed at him and the people did anything but encourage him. Saul told him he was a child and the armor he tried on did not fit him well. All was contributing to make him draw back. But the discouragement and the doubt did not reach David's heart. If the atmosphere around him was frozen, David had in the depths of his being the fire of the presence of the Lord. Behind David there was fear; before him audacity and threats, but in his heart there was God, and he went ahead together with God.

*“And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog that thou comest to me with stones? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the field.”* Such language did not affect David. When plans come firmly from the heart, they become stronger as the solemn hour of the test draws near. David was more serene and firm than before, and so replied to the insolent one: *“thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the*

*Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.*” Take note: the same God whom you have defied, not another. “*This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord’s, and He will give you into our hands.*” God is at the head, in the middle and at the end of these words. David knew that he had the Omnipotent with him and therefore neither his voice nor his arm trembled. “*And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.*” “*And David put his hand in his bag and took thence a stone.*” No great excitement or anxiety. “*He took a stone and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him.*” He knew how to quickly profit from the victory. “*But there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore, David ran and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith.*” The outcome of the day was not in doubt. “*And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose and shouted and pursued the Philistines to the gates of Ekron. And David took the head of the Philistine, and*

*brought it to Jerusalem, but he kept his armor in his tent.*" These last words must certainly refer to a later time, when Jerusalem was conquered.

The lines that follow ( 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 17:55-58 ) have given rise to many comments: Saul asked Abner whose son David might be, and then he questioned David himself. It should be noted that Saul had surrounded himself with a large number of guards and with a company of pages, and that David had returned to the sheep some time ago. Besides, it is the name of the father for which Saul asked. It has also been said that previously when David had been in the court of Saul he had come before him to play the harp only in the moments when the king was afflicted by his excesses. To us it does not seem so surprising that a man like Saul, who had so quickly forgotten God, should have or pretend to have forgotten the young harp player and even whose son he might be. The forgetfulness of Saul leads us to think of how vain and fleeting is the favor of mortals; and that if men that we have met and helped can forget, God never forgets us.

That first conflict had a far greater significance than perhaps David himself attached to it. He had before him a great destiny, but trials were coming and his faith had to be subjected to continuous testing. The future king of Israel had to learn, and show that he knew by experience that trust and dependence comes from the Lord.

From the moment of the victory over Goliath, David's horizon was changed and another heaven opened before him, rich with new events and with new trials.

## Chapter 4

## Jonathan, Michal, Saul

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 18

*“Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” “Saul was jealous and suspicious of David from that day forward.” “And Michal, Saul’s daughter loved David.” (read 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 18)*

*“And Saul said to him, young man, whose son are you? And David answered: I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”*

On one side of the king was Abner, the head of the army. On the other side was a warrior, also handsome – Jonathan, firstborn son of Saul. The scriptures have already spoken of Jonathan in chapter 14 of the 1<sup>st</sup> book of Samuel, telling us how he, climbing with his armor-bearer in difficult places, penetrated the camp of the Philistines and brought back a victory of faith. *“There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few,”* he said. And it had been on that very occasion that Saul uttered an imprudent vow, that is -the people should not taste food until the evening. Jonathan, who had not heard it, went into a forest and seeing honey he tasted it, because he felt faint due to fasting, and in that day he would have died if the people had not interceded thus with Saul: *“Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel?”* Rather the people did not stop

at interceding, but showed themselves resolute to impede the death of their hero at any cost. *“As the Lord liveth, they said, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not.”* Jonathan was, as we can see, the idol of the multitude, but later on, the eyes of all had to turn to another, when a little shepherd made his way into the benevolence and general admiration of the people.

Jonathan was at the side of his father when David was speaking. If the speech of David had been limited only to answering questions asked by the king, we do not know. But perhaps David recapitulated the decisive moments of his encounter with the Philistine, and certainly he attributed the victory to the Lord. The fact is that while David was speaking, Prince Jonathan was observing attentively, reading his soul, and while he was studying David's natural behavior and actions, he felt a growing and deep admiration for him. He did not feel a single shred of jealousy for the new hero, and for the favor that began to surround him. Jonathan felt nothing but admiration and with the admiration he felt a tender affection rising in him, so much so that *“when David had ended speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”*

David, we have said and described it indirectly: the prophet saw him and read goodness and purity in his face; the field workers noticed him and spread his fame

which made its way to the court. In a moment free from jealousy, Saul met him and loved him. But above all, with the eye of unselfish and generous intelligence Jonathan saw him and loved him as his own soul. From these four impressions we can guess what showed through in David. But Jonathan also is revealed here. He appears to us as one of the most beautiful souls because of his admiration without scheming or jealousy, which later on would culminate in abnegation and in complete sacrifice.

The love of Jonathan was not only an emotion. In fact, we read: "*And Saul took David that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house, Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.*" In the Orient, even today it is customary to make brotherhood agreements, but the bond between the prince and the young shepherd made all social distinctions between the two disappear. And the love was not even limited to this. "*And Jonathan took off the robe that he was wearing and gave it to David together with his armor and also his sword, bow, and belt.*" Love, in fact, consists of undressing oneself in order to dress another. The robe was a signal of dignity, and the sword of power. Therefore it was as if Jonathan recognized that David was more worthy than he. And remember that only two swords were left in Israel, one for Jonathan and one for Saul, as the people had been disarmed in the defeats suffered at the hands of the Philistines. Love is not jealous or suspicious. Jonathan saw before him the hero worthy of admiration and the



man of the Lord and put aside personal considerations. He thought only to honor David's worthiness and to glorify God. Men who have opened their hearts to admiration and who desire the glory of God, do not become jealous. Thus, precisely near Saul, David found the best friend. David will meet many people later on who will be devoted and affectionate, but there is only one Jonathan in the history of humanity.

David rose quickly in fortune. *"And David went out wherever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely and Saul set him over the men of war. He was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants."* But it is in such conditions that one needs to be afraid of the contrasts of the evil one. Often the ascent is only the beginning of bitterness, and so it was for David.

*"And it came to pass when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing. And the women answered one another as they played, and said Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands."* It seems that they did not think at all about Jonathan, but the absence of praise did not bother the heart of the generous one, enjoying as he did the triumph of his friend. However, those enthusiastic shouts, perhaps a little imprudent, wounded another ear. *"And Saul was very wroth and the saying displeased him and he said, they have ascribed unto David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed but thousands."*

A thousand was a good number but one who is jealous always makes comparisons. And from this displeasure there was only a step to suspicion, although Saul was always unrepentant of the judgment of the Lord by the mouth of the prophet Samuel. *“What more can he have but the kingdom,”* Saul thought gloomily, but he hid the thought and in his troubled soul he dwelled on it from that time on always more intently. And he began to look at David with mistrust and to spy on him. *“And it came to pass on the morrow that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house.”* Although David had risen to the fame of a great warrior, he had not stopped playing the harp and was quickly summoned. He played as at other times, that is in the same spirit and with the same sweetness. At other times the music and the charm of the personality of the player had calmed Saul, but now a new demon, envy, had entered into his soul. Music can charm a snake but cannot calm a jealous soul. Jealousy and envy have only one remedy: penitence and prayer. But Saul had not repented and having remained in the evil he was abandoned to it. The more grace and ability he saw in the young player, the deeper and more acute was the remembrance of the words of Samuel that the kingdom would be taken from him, and moreover, a presentiment of terror that his rival was standing before him in the person of the harp player. And then, rather than reconciling himself with God, he tried to deter His plan by attempting to kill His elect. David was playing the harp and Saul had a spear in his hand. In a moment he made a terrible decision. *“And*

*Saul threw the spear. I will pin David to the wall with it, he said.*” “**I** will finish”, Saul said, but his ‘I’ had no value before the Lord. “*But David dodged each time.*”

The repeated and failed attempt added new terror to the soul of the unfortunate monarch. “*And Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him and was departed from Saul.*” In order to avoid the return of a new temptation, or more probably hoping that David would fall by other hands, Saul thought it best to send him away. “*So Saul sent him away and put him in command of a thousand men*”. But every tentative of Saul had the opposite effect. “*And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways and the Lord was with him. When Saul saw that David behaved himself very wisely he was afraid of him.*” Saul was alone in his hatred because “*all Israel and Judah loved David.*” Then a new plan took shape in the soul of Saul. Then Saul said to David, “*Here is my elder daughter Merab, I will give her to you as your wife on condition that you serve me as a brave and loyal soldier and fight the Lord’s battles.*” He was still able to mention the name of the Lord, while in his soul he was saying, “*Let not my hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be on him.*” The higher the honor, the better the thrust to glory and therefore, the greater the danger. David answered the unexpected honor with humility: “*Who am I? And what is my life or my father’s family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?*” But Saul did not keep his word and gave Merab to another.

The second daughter of the king had fixed her eye on the hero. “*Michal, Saul’s daughter loved David, and they told Saul and the thing pleased him*”- an occasion quickly intervening to rid himself of David. “*I will give her to him that she may be a snare to him and that the hands of the Philistines may be against him.*” Saul’s jealousy was stronger than his love for his daughters. Saul said to David: “*Thou shalt this day be my son-in-law.*” And he ordered a stratagem: he had his servants insinuate to David to present a bloody trophy, killing and mutilating one hundred Philistines. “*But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.*” But David did not perish. He killed two hundred enemies. David should not have gone along with this plot, and perhaps he would have spared himself much grief later on. However, in history we find only one who followed one line directly and surely, and that is Christ the Lord.

Saul gave Michal to David, and Michal his daughter loved David. Strange contrast – while everywhere there was affection and admiration for David, Saul’s sentiments persisted in hatred. Saul continued to fear always more, and was always David’s enemy. “*Then the princes of the Philistines went forth and it came to pass after they went forth that David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was much set by.*” He was the idol of the people, loved by Jonathan as his own soul, loved by Michal and hated by Saul. However, between the love of Michal and of Jonathan there is a difference that the scripture doesn’t hide. “*The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of*

*David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.*”  
“*Michal loved David.*” The scripture knows the degrees of love, and its language is always measured and precise. There is a love that surpasses all others, and binds itself like one’s own soul. Jonathan leads us to think of the love that should exist between the creature and the Creator; between us and Jesus Christ. And the love of Jesus for us is unselfish, not the fruit of emotion but an undressing of himself and to suffer for us. Michal loved David because David, the charming hero had attracted her. Later on we should return to speak of her, and from the scripture the little that can be extracted is that true loves that last and bring happiness are those that are based on a common ideal. Now the supreme ideal around which our relationships should be established is the love and the glory of God.

Not only was Saul unable to deviate the divine plan, but by wishing to destroy David he ended by lifting him up and bringing him closer to the throne to which God had destined him.

## Chapter 5

Growing hatred of Saul  
( 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 19 & 20 )

Up to now Saul had not revealed his designs against David to anyone. The fact that he tried to kill him while he was playing the harp could be considered a consequence of rage. To have exposed him to the risks of war had to be considered as a desire to raise his rank. But Saul's jealousy did not delay in manifesting itself in open persecution.

Saul had a long and bitter battle in his heart, but finally, in order to get rid of the enemy he felt the need to confide in someone. *"And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants that they should kill David."* He wanted to serve himself of another hand and the first to know it must be his son, as the one closest to the throne and the most interested. With what words he unveiled the dark proposition it is possible for us only to guess. To the son he must certainly have set forth the reason of the kingdom. The words of Saul had to have a great force of temptation, as can be deduced by that which is said subsequently – *"But Jonathan, Saul's son delighted much in David."* If there was temptation in the advice of Saul there was a great antidote: *"Jonathan delighted, or rather delighted much in David."* In certain extreme occasions a first degree of love and of sacrifice is not enough, as temptation could suffocate it. The *"delighting much"* was needed to overcome the great hatred of Saul

and the insinuation that could incite the personal interests of Jonathan.

Precisely because of the "*much delighting*," Jonathan not only did not accept the paternal advice but resolved to keep David informed of it. By doing this he fulfilled a truly extraordinary step; Jonathan could have kept his distance from the wicked deed but he was not satisfied to do only this. He wanted to speak to David of it and he must have suffered much when having called his young friend aside, Jonathan had to say to him: "*Saul my father seeketh to kill thee.*" "*My father*" - he was always Jonathan's father and Jonathan did not disown him, but the deed was clearly announced: "*Seeketh to kill thee.*" To the notice Jonathan added advice, not saying to him as many say, "*I have warned you, now I can do no more for you,*" but he continued: "*Now therefore I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning and abide in a secret place and hide thyself. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that will I tell thee.*"

"*And Jonathan spoke good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because he hath not sinned against thee. For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel. Thou sawest it and didst rejoice; wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?*"



Love is eloquent and knows how to call things by their name. It was a sin that Saul wanted to commit and Jonathan said everything with frankness, but in a gentle way. He loved his father; he loved David and spoke for the good of both. The behavior and the words of Jonathan won, for the moment, the heart of the king. *“And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan and Saul swore, as the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain.”* Saul believed he would be able to keep his promise and Jonathan did not doubt it. Happy for the obtained reconciliation, *“Jonathan called David, and Jonathan showed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul and he was in his presence as in times past.”* But the calm was not to last. Jealousy had remained hidden in the soul of Saul which needed only an occasion to ignite itself again.

*“And there was war again and David went out and fought with the Philistines and slew them with a great slaughter, and they fled from him.”* With the new victories, again the enthusiasm of the people, and again perhaps, those imprudent songs – David has killed ten thousand. Saul had promised without ever having repented, and it is vain to promise without repentance; therefore his condition became worse than before. *“And the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand, and David played the harp with his hand.”* The words of Jonathan and the promises and oaths of Saul were forgotten: *“and Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he*



*dodged and the spear stuck in the wall. David ran away and escaped.*” Saul did not stop at that attempt; rather he “*sent some men to watch David’s house and to kill him the next morning. Michal, David’s wife warned him, if you don’t get away tonight, tomorrow you will be dead. Michal let David down through a window and he ran away and escaped.*”

“*And Michal took an image ( it was a teraphim – an idol brought perhaps from the father’s house ) and laid it in the bed and put a pillow of goat’s hair for his bolster and covered it with a cloth,*” and to the messengers she answered that David was sick. “*And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying bring him up to me in the bed that I may slay him.*” But they found the statue. Then Saul, enraged, said to Michal: “*Why have you deceived me so, and sent away my enemy that he is escaped?*” “*And Michal answered Saul, he said he would kill me if I didn’t help him escape.*” Michal sought to protect herself with two lies and thus reveals to us the distance that existed between her and her brother Jonathan. Not one word in her that would make us think of the reverent and generous frankness of Jonathan.

So David fled that night. The first steps were taken in confusion and without any address, but after some time he paused and collected his thoughts and asked himself, “*where?*” And from the depths of his soul there arose an answer and an indication to go to the prophet Samuel, and he directed his solitary steps toward Ramah in search of the old man, the prophet Samuel. It is comforting to

have recourse to an old man of God. The venerable figure of Samuel had remained etched in the soul of David. The young man arrived in the little town of Ramah and went immediately to knock on the door of the house of the prophet. Samuel was seeing him again as a warrior and a hero. He had left him as a little shepherd. "*What happened?*" David caught his breath and recounted. Samuel listened, lifting his white head from time to time in order to look into the face of the narrator, and was sighing for Saul whom he still loved. David and Saul both belonged to him and he felt his heart breaking into pieces for that which was happening to the two of them. The report finished, the old man arose, hastened to comfort the pilgrim with food and then he went ahead asking the young man to follow him. He set out for Naioth. Naioth was a dependency of Ramah and had a flourishing school of prophets directed by Samuel – there they stopped.

The news reached Saul who had spies everywhere. "*Behold, David is at Naioth.*" And Saul sent messengers to take David. The messengers arrived and they found themselves at a grandiose scene. All the prophets, led by the old man Samuel, were as though enraptured in songs and the spirit of God was in those songs. The messengers, accustomed to venerating that old man, and reverent toward the religious scene were struck, rather they were almost infused by the spirit that was upon that reunion and they also began to unite their songs of joy and of praise to the Lord.

Twice more Saul sent messengers but likewise at these times they experienced the same outcome. They were enraptured by the majesty of the scene; they venerated the old man, and dominated by the spirit, they united themselves with the prophets. Finally, Saul decided to go himself. *“Then went he also to Ramah, and came to a great well that is in Sechu, and he asked, where are Samuel and David? And one said, behold they be at Naioth in Ramah.”* It seems that Samuel, from the moment that he arrived there with David had established a revival with songs, praise and prayer. And thus we explain how both the messengers who were sent and Saul himself found themselves in the presence of the same scene. Saul had not yet arrived when the songs and the praises of the prophets reached his ear. Certainly the spirit of God was in that place and the spirit subdued him. Saul was moved; he remembered his innocent past when he was associated with those places and with the old prophet, and without thinking began to sing some songs of other times that returned to memory. Saul arrived singing with an ever-increasing enthusiasm. He took off his mantle and joined briefly in the manifestation of joy and praise. At the end, exhausted and without strength to leave the place of the reunion, he remained on the floor all that day and all that night. The fact created a wide impression and it was said and repeated: *“Is Saul also among the prophets?”* When at the end he came to himself, he felt subdued and could not raise a hand against David and turned back. Samuel, the great man of God, had recourse to prayer, to songs and to praise to

God. The spirit of God had invested that place and the spirit of God had covered the fugitive.

## Chapter 6

### False Steps

But there are certain hard passages in the scripture. In 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, the end of chapter 19 is in sharp contrast with the beginning of chapter 20. In Naioth of Ramah the spirit of God had disarmed the enemy forces and it had been said: “*Is Saul also among the prophets?*” But David did not remain in Naioth.

“*And David fled from Naioth.*” Certainly there was in this flight an exertion of human prudence. David felt invigorated and felt that he had to do something. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of Samuel. “*He fled from Naioth*” where that stupendous manifestation of the spirit of God occurred and left without the advice of Samuel. To look into what might have happened if he had remained or had taken counsel from the old man seems to us to be idle talk; but it is not in vain to note the contrast between the recent manifestations that had saved him and quickly afterward fleeing in order to help himself, and the absence at this point of a last mention of Samuel. These are the highs and lows of human emotions and the fruit of our anxieties which many times keep us away from calmness and from prayer and therefore from the plan that God has for us. We are always tempted to run, to flee even after the excellent manifestations of the work of God. If instead there were in us the calmness that comes from trusting in the Lord and our every step was governed by meditation and by prayer, we would be

spared many griefs. But let us continue in the story of David.

Samuel remained in Naioth. David fled with the intention of looking for Jonathan. *“He came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? What is mine iniquity? And what is my sin before thy father that he seeketh my life?”* They were words of lamentation but they sounded almost like a reprimand. David said to Jonathan’s face: *“Thy father,”* as if it were not true that Jonathan, precisely for this reason, had warned David to go away telling him: *“Saul my father seeketh to kill thee.”* But our heart is such that we easily lose control even with the person to whom we should best show continual gratitude and reverence. Jonathan did not pay mind to the sullen and violent manner of his friend. There is a charitable generosity that tolerates the reprimand of an afflicted one – as we have the supreme example in Jesus who was always ready to comfort the anxious disciples. Jonathan answered with serenity and benevolence. *“God forbid that you should die. Behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will show it to me. And why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so.”* Charity thinks always of the good. Jonathan was mindful of the promise made to him by his father; notwithstanding the latest trials to the contrary, he hoped that by this time Saul’s wrath might have diminished, especially after the return from the school of the prophets. Jonathan had faith in the best that was in Saul. There are certain generous creatures that do not believe in evil until they touch it. However, Jonathan was not the

blind optimist. He was ready to be on the look-out when he was put on notice and saw the person of another at risk. Therefore, Jonathan listened to David with patience and gentleness. *“Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes, and he saith, let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved; but truly as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.”*

Optimism did not drive Jonathan into obstinacy, rather he quickly opened his mind and heart to the observation of David and he answered him: *“Whatever your soul desires, I will do it for you.”* And David already had his suggestions ready. *“Behold, tomorrow is the new moon and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat, but let me go that I may hide myself in the field until the evening of the third day. If your father at all misses me, then say: David earnestly asked leave of me so he could run to his city, Bethlehem, because there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. If he say thus, ‘It is well;’ thy servant shall have peace. But if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him.”* David could have been content with these suggestions, but he continued: *“Please do me this favor, and keep the sacred promise you made to me. But if I’m guilty, kill me yourself! Why take me to your father to be killed?”* It was a pathetic appeal – almost doubting, and that must have wounded the exquisite soul of Jonathan. But Jonathan did not become angry and answered with maximum patience and gentleness: *“Don’t even think such a thing! If I knew for sure that my father was determined to harm you,*

wouldn't I tell you?" And they both went out into the field and Jonathan said to David, "*May the Lord God of Israel be our witness! At this time tomorrow and on the following day I will question my father. If his attitude toward you is good, I will send you word. If he intends to harm you, may the Lord strike me dead if I don't let you know about it and get you safely away. May the Lord be with you as he was with my father.*" And here a sad smile passed over the face of Jonathan. He found himself between Saul and David, and alas he bore little resemblance to either Saul or David. "*The Lord be with you as he was with my father.*" He was not jealous like Saul nor was he wise and shrewd like David. He had a noble and generous soul, but was so pure-minded that he could not believe in evil, nor arm himself or defend himself against evil as David knew how to do. David was great – greater than Jonathan, but Jonathan was gentler and more tender. That flower was too delicate for the times of iron, and unsuited in the midst of the contrast between the persecutions of Saul and the resourceful fearlessness of David. Jonathan had an unhappy presentiment – he sensed the future of that young man on the run, and saw himself unable to prevent the evil and to do it, he would one day be at the discretion of David. "*And if I remain alive, please keep your sacred promise and be loyal to me.*" And the generous one thought of the tender children: "*but if I die, show the same kind of loyalty to my family forever. And when the Lord has completely destroyed all your enemies, may our promise to each other still be unbroken.*" He had read the future destiny of David, and he was in favor of that destiny



against his personal interests. The one who was strong and being appealed to for help took the part of the supplicant and the needy one. *“So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David. Jonathan caused David to swear again because he loved him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.”* It is noteworthy how the scripture insists on this love for David – *“as his own soul.”* Jonathan is one of the best souls that God put in David’s path. By the sacrifices of others, in fact, many great things are prepared and in that little that each one of us may be worth there is the effect of some self-denial encountered in our past. Let’s collect our thoughts, sometime, and look back.

However, we should not be silent that the scripture rightly does not speak here of the love of David. He had nothing to give but promises, but the scripture likes to speak of the love in the act that sacrifices itself. Therefore we will wait for another time in order to examine the heart of David in relation to, or in answer to the love of Jonathan.

Jonathan returned home and the following day he sat by Saul to observe whether he would ask for David. The first day – nothing, but the following day David’s place was still empty and Saul said to Jonathan: *“Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday nor today?”* The son of Jesse, not David, and he was always his son-in-law. *“And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem, therefore he cometh not to the king’s table.”* Then Saul’s

anger was kindled against Jonathan and he said to him: *“thou son of the perverse, rebellious woman, do not I know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own confusion and unto the confusion of your mother’s nakedness? Don’t you realize that as long as David is alive, you will never be king of this country? Now go and bring him here – he must die!”* But Jonathan still had hope for his father. *“Why should he die?”* Jonathan replied. *“What has he done?”* But he had to become aware how truly immutable the propositions of the king were. *“Saul threw his spear at Jonathan to kill him, whereby Jonathan realized that his father was really determined to kill David.”* Take note of the **whereby**. All that time and that series of tests was needed, one more serious than the other, so that Jonathan would come to believe that which he hated to suspect, that Saul had determined the death of David – **Whereby!** Oh generous and exquisitely charitable soul!

But if Jonathan has been optimistic and always hoping good of the father, now that he knows the truth he is not slow to take action for the benefit of his friend in his misfortune. *“So Jonathan got up from the table in a rage and ate nothing that day – the second day of the New Moon Festival. He was deeply distressed about David, because Saul had insulted him.”* The grief for David afflicted him more than the insult received. As he had established in advance with David, the next morning Jonathan looked for David in the appointed place. Jonathan had a little lad with him. *“And he said to the lad, run, find now the arrows which I shoot. And as the*

*lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And Jonathan's lad gathered up the arrows and came to his master."* That was a signal between Jonathan and David. *"Jonathan gave his weapons to the lad and told him to take them back to the town."* *"And as soon as the lad was gone, David got up from behind a pile of stones. He recognized the proved loyalty of Jonathan and fell on face to the ground, and bowed himself three times."* It was not necessary to tell each other that which the one had foreseen and the other had finally come to know. Without words they threw themselves into each other's arms and wept together. No questions; no answers. It was time to separate themselves and to think of the safety of David. Jonathan did not say one word about his father. *"Go",* he said finally to David. *"God be with you. The Lord will make sure that you and I, and your descendants and mine, will forever keep the sacred promise we have made to each other."* And the two separated, turning to look at each other many times until their figures vanished in opposite directions. Jonathan was returning with a grief-stricken heart near his father, always loved by him notwithstanding everything! And the other was fleeing, not knowing yet where, but always protected by the invisible hand of God.

## Chapter 7

### Imprudent Steps

In literature heroes are pictured as having a nearly perfect character, but the Bible presents men as they are, that is of a complex character. In a short span of time the same person exhibits various aspects: the heroic and the vile, the sublime and the base. The Bible does not extend an apology in passing from one figure to another, but allows the curtains to rise and the scenes to happen as they are, and depicts the human heart as it is and not as the fancy of the writers would like to consider it.

In this chapter we see David who at first trembles, then lies and then flees to the enemy of his country, and feigns – poor David, or rather poor us except for the compassion and patience of God!

In the moment that David separated himself from Jonathan he had to think of a place of refuge. He could have returned to the prophet Samuel but he selected another way. Always, however, he basically had the desire to seek sacred places. He set out for Nob to go to the priest Ahimelech. Nob was the city where the tabernacle was then located, and here David wanted to consult with the Lord. But it seems clear to us that the Lord, who had already protected David when he was with Samuel had already showed him His will. It seems

to us that the Lord did not go before David to prepare a reception for him with Ahimelech. In fact we read that *“Ahimelech came out trembling to meet him and asked, why did you come here all by yourself?”* In the face of the fear of the old man and of Ahimelech’s question David thought it unwise to explain the truth and resorted to a lie. *“I am here on the king’s business, David answered. He told me not to let anyone know what he sent me to do. As for my men I have told them to meet me at a certain place.”*

Men often believe a lie to be justifiable as being useful to their strategies, but most of the time lies come about because of previous mistakes. David was beginning to take recourse to his own means, but falsehoods quite often enter into the means that man has at his disposition. Therefore, among the prayers that we must make to God is that of the Psalmist: *“Deliver my soul from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue.”*

David asked for food and since there was only hallowed bread, he asked for it and received it. In taking hallowed bread he did not commit sin. The Lord Jesus recalled this incident without condemning David, rather drawing from it an argument to give emphasis to the value of human life. But he did not stop at asking for food – *“and David said to Ahimelech, do you have a spear or a sword that you can give me? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me because the king’s business required haste. And the priest said, I have the sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah; it is behind the ephod wrapped in a cloth. If you*

*want that, take it.*” The sword had been offered with a vow following the great victory of faith, by which the little shepherd killed the Philistine, although not having a sword. And now the same man was so troubled that he did not have spiritual discernment and wanted the sword of the Philistine. *“Give it to me, David said, there is not a better sword anywhere.”* Nor did he stop at this, but he went a step further to bring the day that had begun badly to a very bad closing. *“And David arose and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.”*

He saw nothing but Saul and because of that nightmare, David had, for the moment forgotten everything. He fled from Saul, and yet God watched him and in his terror David was not paying attention that he was going out of his own country, so much that he did not stop until he arrived in the territory of the Philistines, the obstinate enemies of Israel. And David went to Achish the king of Gath.

Hospitality is sacred in the Orient, and Achish offered asylum to the fugitive. But the tranquility of this fellow was not to last for long, because he could not enjoy peace close to pagan altars. It is always dangerous to have recourse to the children of this century – immediately the murmurings of the courtiers began around Achish: *“Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?”* The fugitive became aware that he was in danger, *“and was*

*sore afraid of Achish,*” thus experiencing various kinds of terror. But now, having taken the wrong path, clever and resourceful as he was, he resorted to an artifice. *“And he changed his behavior before them and feigned himself mad in their presence, and scribbled on the city gates, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard.”* From the version of “the Seventy” it seems that David simulated epileptic acts. In the Orient no one would have touched one who was insane or epileptic. Therefore *“Achish said unto his servants, ye see the man is mad, wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence?”*

David was fortunate that he was not abandoned by God who is faithful and bears long with us, and does not waver in His relationship with us, as we often do with Him. After several inglorious steps, David, with a broken and penitent heart, was able to flee again. Although he was facing a long discipline, David was putting himself back in God’s hands. But it is by means of contrasts and misfortunes that even the best grow and are strengthened. *“David therefore departed thence and escaped to the cave Adullam.”*

Chapter 8  
The Court of the Exiled One

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 22

*“And everyone who was in distress and everyone who was in debt and everyone who was discontented gathered themselves unto him and he became a captain over them.”*

Up to now no one had followed David in his flight and into exile. He arrived alone in the territory of the Philistines and alone he fled from it. Many times in the abandonment in which he found himself, David must have thought about the smiles of the courtiers who demonstrated friendliness toward him when he was the beloved of the court. The Lord, however, never abandons us and shows us that help and better company can be found, many times where we least expect it.

Having escaped from the court of the Philistine king by means of cunning play-acting, David must have felt uneasy about choosing a place to go, but an instinct brought him back to the country of Judah, not far from his native Bethlehem and precisely in the places that he must have seen from afar many times, or had heard speak of their wildness while he was tending the sheep. A short distance from Bethlehem there is a rounded hill that has in its sides a number of little grottos, six to ten feet high,



a solitary place, well known later on to the crusaders and hermits. In our time it is entirely covered by ruins. This uncivilized place was called the cave of Adullam. David stopped here and it was here he had the occasion to immediately form his camp. "*When his brethren and all his father's house heard it they joined him,*" and not only they, but many discontented persons began to flock around him. The camp became a sort of meeting-place of men, who like David shared the fate of flight and exile. The scripture says they were people who were indebted, therefore absolutely ruined; people in distress, embittered by deep sorrows, and all therefore, had tasted more or less, the disappointments and the bitterness of life. Those men gathered themselves around David, as if becoming one with David who was also sorrowful and a fugitive. About four hundred men gathered around David and David was their captain.

David was not ashamed of that association but began to study how to improve the conditions of those new companions. Those men had the great merit of being affectionate to him and they were courageous and sincere. And it was precisely those fugitives who later became the aristocracy of the court of David. So it happened centuries later, the first nucleus of disciples of Jesus who shared a common cause with Him, were for the most part, dissatisfied with this world. Mankind does not expect much from certain beings but the Lord looks at the hidden energies and for this reason He says that many sinners will go first into the Kingdom of Heaven.

David's first thought was to find a peaceful asylum for his old parents who would not have been able to comfortably follow that band of fugitives over steep places. For this purpose he headed south toward the country of Moab. Israel was then at peace with the Moabites, and in David's blood there flowed the blood of Ruth, a fearless great woman of Moab. "*And David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab, and he said unto the king of Moab, let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth and be with you, till I know what God will do for me.*" He remained a short time in that fortress, and we do not know if and how much longer he would have stayed if a messenger had not arrived. Because of the messenger's words David felt obliged to move again. The prophet Gad came – the scripture does not say from where. His office and the message are important, not the previous history of the prophet. Perhaps he came from the community of the sons of the prophets of Ramah. The interesting thing is that the Lord had sent him to say to David: "*Don't stay here; go at once to the land of Judah.*" The Lord knows that we are in danger if we remain too long in pagan territory. Therefore, He would rather that David would stay in the vicinity of the one who persecuted him than go outside the territory of Judah. "*Go at once to the land of Judah.*" And David recognized that that was the will of the Lord. Having separated himself from his old parents, David went into the forest of Hareth.

But right early he had to learn a sad story caused by his going to Nob, city of the priests. Saul, who had not

relented from his jealousy and from the desire to get rid of David had tried to discover by means of his servants what had become of the fugitive. *“Listen, men of Benjamin! Do you think that David will give you fields and vineyards to all of you, and make you officers in his army? Is that why you are plotting against me? Not one of you told me that my own son had made an alliance with David. No one is concerned about me or tells me that David, one of my own men, is right now looking for a chance to kill me, and that my son has encouraged him!”*

To the pathetic discourse of the wicked one there was an echo of a sinister voice – there arose from among the servants a wretched figure: Doeg the Edomite had been a silent witness of David’s going to Nob, and he said to Saul: *“I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”* And that wretched one did not mention how the old man himself had been deceived. Upon knowing this Saul wasted no time in carrying out his vengeance. *“The king sent to call Ahimelech the priest and all his father’s house, which were the priests that were in Nob, and they came all of them to the king.”* And Saul said, *“hear now”* – the repressed anger in these words is to be noted – *“hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I am, my lord. And Saul asked him, Why are you and David plotting against me? Why did you give him some food and a sword, and consult God*

*for him? Now he has turned against me and is waiting for a chance to kill me!"*

If we were to hear Saul for the first time it would seem to us that he was the persecuted one and not the persecutor. But the old Ahimelech answered him with a direct and courageous language in favor of the exiled one: *"David is the most faithful officer you have! He is your own son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard, and highly respected by everyone in the royal court. Yes, I consulted God for him, and it wasn't the first time. As for plotting against you, Your Majesty must not accuse me or anyone else in my family. I don't know anything about this matter!"* It was more than Saul could have expected. He did not answer nor did he give any reason for what he was going to do, but he said: *"Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou and all thy father's house."* And he commanded the footmen to kill the priests, *"but none of the servants, no Israelite, would fall upon the priests of the Lord."* However there was also present the now-famous Doeg the Edomite and the king said to him: *"You kill them."* By this time the two understood each other. *"And Doeg killed them all. On that day he killed eighty-five priests who were qualified to wear the ephod."* Saul was advancing well ahead in the way that leads far from the Lord. The sight of that blood inebriated him and he went to Nob, the city of the priests and committed a crazy and ferocious massacre - *"Saul also had all the other inhabitants of Nob, the city of priests, put to death: men and women, children and babies, cattle, donkeys and sheep - they were all killed."* This hecatomb of martyrs

slain along David's passageway makes us shudder and think of other martyrs who perished later on for the cause of Christianity, and would leave us perplexed concerning Providence if we did not know that in the beyond there is ample reparation and equalization of human injustice.

One escaped from the massacre – Abiathar, son of Ahimelech who fled to be with David, and reported to him how Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. In the face of this story that would have exasperated even the gentlest of people and caused even the most magnanimous persons to counsel violent retaliation, David vented only by exclaiming: *“I knew it that day when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul.”* And with an intense feeling of sorrow, in which there certainly was remorse for the unadvised steps toward Nob, between sighs he added: *“I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house,”* and unfortunately, we have to confess being, many times, the cause of the ill that others suffer. Then David addressed a word of comfort to the orphan and disconsolate fugitive. He said to Abiathar: *“Abide thou with me, fear not, for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life, but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.”*

And thus was formed the Court of the exiled one. They were all fugitives, even the priest who had escaped from the massacre. Later on others, men who would have a significant part in his future destiny joined him in exile. David's courageous nephews, Joab, Abishai and Asael, sons of Zeruiah went to him. Even some of the remaining Canaanites fled to him. And among others who went to

him was a man who was also courageous and faithful, Uriah the Hittite, who will play an important part in the life of David. The whole country contributed with an enterprising spirit. This band of fugitives formed a body of heroes who were always faithful and who rallied always closer around their captain.

It was during exile that David formed his court, and it is in the present time that Jesus, in exile by the majority of men, continues to select the elect who must be with Him in the new Jerusalem.

## Chapter 9

## In the School of Misfortune

( 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 23, 24 )

“...Ma profonda e troppo in lui la invidia...”

( Alfieri: Saulle Atto IV, Scena I )

( In him envy was indeed deep – Saul, Act 4, Scene 1 )

While David’s little army was moving toward the interior of Judah, he found out that just at that time the Philistines were fighting against Keilah. It was the first occasion that presented itself to that band to run to liberate someone. The cause evidently was just, but David, aware of recent mistakes did not want to move one step without asking the Lord. This was one of the great accomplishments of David’s life – he knew how to take advantage of mistakes.

We feel an admiration when we read about these men, who although having many weaknesses, possessed a simple faith. The scripture says “*inquired*” almost as allowing us to understand the great familiarity they had with the Lord and the habit of inquiring of Him. “*Shall I go and smite the Philistines? Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.*” However, his companions did not feel courageous enough to go, as they were few in number. “*Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the*

*Philistines?" "Then David inquired of the Lord yet again."* This was his method – when he fled he went toward sanctuaries; David's battles began by asking the Lord. *"I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand"* – thus answered the Lord. Because of the repeated assurances the little army moved and delivered Keilah, beating the Philistines with a great slaughter. They thought then they would be able to remain peacefully in the liberated city; but they were quickly disillusioned and learned not to trust too much in the gratitude of men.

In fact, *"it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah."* Saul had spies everywhere and had not lost hope of destroying his enemy; so much so that when he learned where David was he exclaimed with a triumphant air: *"God hath delivered him into mine hand."* These words ring like a curse in the mouth of Saul, and tell us that even wicked ones know how to take recourse in the name of God to cover their sinful ways. *"God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in by entering into a town that hath gates and bars."* Saul thought that he had caught David in a prison. *"And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men."*

*"Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, bring the ephod here."* Take note of that **now** that had the aim of disrupting Saul's plans. Saul's recourse was to armaments – David's recourse was to the Lord. *"Bring the ephod here."* With the ephod there was connected



the mysterious Urim and Thummim ( Lights and Perfection ) by which they asked the will of the Lord.

*“O Lord God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down? ...O Lord God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the Lord said, he will come down.”* It was left to David to trust in the inhabitants of Keilah! Therefore he asked again: *“Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, they will deliver thee up.”*

All that remained to David was to trust entirely and only in the Lord, and so he did. He did not have any bitter word for the inhabitants, but accepted everything as permitted by God for his discipline. *“Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go.”* *“Whithersoever”* – they had no definite place; they were wandering without a sure refuge, but precisely because of this, they were more obliged to trust in the Lord. They wandered in rugged places, then they lived in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph, about four miles below Hebron. Saul pursued him every day *“but God did not give him into his hands.”* This is the comment on the sacrilegious affirmation made by Saul some time before: *“God hath delivered him into mine hand.”* And it seemed to be so. *“But God delivered him not into his hand,”* notwithstanding that it seemed that David, from one moment to another would become powerless before Saul.

In the desert of Ziph David had a welcome surprise. "*Jonathan – Saul's son.*" Take note of the words "*Saul's son.*" "*Jonathan, Saul's son, arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.*" Jonathan was a generous and constant friend; he knew that it was time to give his friend a word of encouragement and advice, and perhaps a warning to flee farther. "*Strengthened his hand (comforted him) in God.*" Any help or comfort not in God is in vain, because true tranquility and peace come only when we are in harmony with the Lord. "*And he (Jonathan) said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee, and that also Saul my father knoweth.*" Running to counsel and comfort his friend, telling David that he would be king in his stead, this is the generosity of Jonathan. The two made a covenant between them, or rather renewed that which they already had made, and this time they separated never to meet again. "*David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.*"

Within the most stormy lives there occur pleasant moments that are like a glass of water to a pilgrim on a long journey, and serve to renew strength for new trials. After the ingratitude of Keilah, the generosity of Jonathan, and afterwards again a painful trial. "*Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strongholds in the wood? Now, therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul; and our part shall be to deliver him*

*into the king's hand.*" There are men who experience a certain pleasure in doing evil; and this explains the number of voluntary allies that bad people find. Hope was renewed in Saul's heart and he said to the Ziphites: "*Blessed be ye of the Lord ( still **the Lord** ! ) for ye have compassion on me. Go, I pray you, prepare yet and know and see his place where his haunt is and who hath seen him there; for it is told me that he is very cunning.*" And they arose and went to Ziph before Saul, but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon; and Saul, having heard it, pursued him into the desert of Maon.

*"And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them."* They were getting closer to David, encircling him, and any way of escape seemed to be shut off. David will fall in a little while into the hands of the enemy, all the plans built around him will vanish, and the comforting words and prophecies of Jonathan will seem to be a mockery. Saul already has him in his sight, in moments he will have him in his hands; he will certainly not let him escape. Finally, finally, and joy fills the soul of the king, finally, and he has a foretaste of vengeance. Always closer...but lo, a surprise – an unexpected surprise: a courier arrives from the plain that ascends to the mountain peak, heading toward Saul, panting as he speaks to him: "*Haste thee and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land.*"

God intervened at the last hour, sending against the enemy another enemy. While Saul almost has his hand on David, the Philistines are at Saul's back. And thus the "almost" remains almost. It is strange to say it and to think of it – it was the Philistines who without wanting to, helped David; and who later on removed other obstacles, those same Philistines who later on will have in David the strongest adversary in their history. The ways of the Lord are certainly marvelous, and He knows how to make even the work of the enemy result in the good of His children. Oh reader, if you are with God, bear in mind that while the enemy is about to put his hand upon you, another will put it upon him; and a wicked person will deliver you from another wicked person.

This deliverance remained unforgettable, and was celebrated by calling that place Selahammahlekoth which means "*rock of divisions.*"

That was only a reprieve and Saul would return after the fugitive. David went up and dwelt in strongholds at Engedi, a terrible solitude, burned by the sun, where later John the Baptist would roam, and later the Crusaders would arrive, and hermits would reside. In those harsh places, where it seemed that man could not set foot, hatred pursued David because hatred does not know obstacles.

*"When Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold David is in the wilderness at Engedi."*(There were always the reporters).

*“Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats.”* Inconveniences cannot stop hatred – you go among the rocks, I will follow you among the rocks. This new persecution, however, would offer David one of the most difficult tests of his life, and from which he came out victorious. Events, often trivial, are turned to great purposes, and it takes the Bible to tell everything just as it happens, without frills or secrecy. Here’s what happened: *“and he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.”* Saul was entering alone, and coming from the light, he could not discern those who were in the depths in the dark. *“And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee.”*

We feel duty-bound to stop a moment at this point, and travel with our minds to the times, places and circumstances, because only thus will we be able to evaluate the strength of the counsel given to David. They were fierce times. The wicked ones often find reasons for administering justice in a bloody way. David saw himself continuously exposed to danger, pursued closely many times to a point of falling into the hands of the enemy. On the other hand, he knew that he would reign instead of Saul. Saul happened to be alone in his hands; therefore could not that be the decisive moment designed by Providence? How indeed, would the plan of God be

fulfilled by Saul living, or worse yet, if David himself, as was to be feared, would finally fall into Saul's hands? The moment of justice had not therefore arrived to terminate that wandering about, and above all, of dragging behind him, from danger to danger, persons who were affectionate and faithful to him. On the other hand it seemed that the Lord was speaking to him in a clear way, by means of his friends: "*Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand.*" And yet David came out victorious from this which was among the most terrible temptations that he had in his life. Let us keep in mind that in the depth of this man's heart there was God; and although he had many defects, and although he might be impulsive and often was violent, the will of God was supreme in him, and this saved him.

David had to reflect only a moment and he knew what to do. "*Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.*" Besides, for this act which was so innocent David felt his heart beating; he, David who was fearless in dangers said to his men: "*The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.*" We don't read that he felt compassion for Saul, or that he spared him because he was his father-in-law. Nothing, the motive was one: he was not to take justice into his own hands, nor put his hands on the anointed of the Lord. The check came entirely from God, and not only did David abstain directly, but he impeded his men from using any

violence. We read between the lines that they wanted to make an end of Saul, and David could, after all, excuse himself by saying: it wasn't I, but he exercised his power and did not permit anyone to rise up against Saul.

Reader, pause for a moment and study at this point an outstanding side of the character of David: the man whose heart was toward the Lord and consider that God does not want us to commit a crime in order to hasten or to execute His plans. "*Saul rose up out of the cave and went on his way.*" David took advantage of that occasion to make a generous appeal to the heart of his persecutor. "*David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul saying, " My lord the king ( still **my lord** .) And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed himself.*" He considered himself a subject of Saul.

*"And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, behold, David seeketh thy hurt? Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord hath delivered thee today into my hand in the cave, and some bade me kill thee; but mine eye spared thee, and I said, I will not put forth my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand; for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and thee. After whom*



*is the king of Israel come out? After whom doth thou pursue? After a dead dog, after a flea."*

David assumes the most humble place and considers himself a nonentity. And he continued confidently: *"The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand."* How much veneration, and not even a direct accusation! In a few words, many times, David puts his case in the hands of the Lord upon Whom his eyes were fixed. This explains the patient faith that enabled him to triumph over fear. He was not impatient for the fulfillment of the promises. Magnanimity, mercy and patience all came to him from absolute faith in God. Here, the contrast between David and Saul appears great.

At the tender appeal Saul's heart returned to times when things were better. *"Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept."* And he said to David, *"Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shown me this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killed me not."* Saul was unable to understand so much graciousness: *"If a man find his enemy will he let him go well away? Wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done to me this day."* Saul attributed all to the heart of David and judged according to human opinion. In the words of Saul, for as much tenderness and emotion there might be, there was lacking any note of penitence



whatsoever. The Lord was invoked indirectly. Saul cried from emotion, but he never repented and had not understood that the Lord was all for David. Many, in fact, know how to recognize good, but continue in evil because they are not in harmony with the Lord. It was the David who had turned to the Lord who was more righteous than the adversary, but this was precisely what Saul did not want to understand; because he trusted in a natural goodness which fails as soon as circumstances change. Saul saw the day in which David would reign in Israel – *“And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand.”* And a tender thought arose in his soul, that of the children: *“Swear now therefore unto me by the Lord, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father’s house.”* This was a tender, pathetic appeal. Wicked ones quite often find expressions that touch the most sensitive chords of the heart. Saul was asking for mercy for his children and not to be exterminated. He did not find one thought that brought him to God! *“And David sware unto Saul. Then Saul went back home and David and his men went back to their hiding place.”*

David has appeared great to us in this chapter; but from him we like to turn our glance to the distant horizon, to his descendant according to the flesh – to Jesus, lifted up on the cross. David did not lay hands on the enemy because he was waiting for justice from God. Jesus prayed for His enemies and excused their actions to the Father: *“They know not what they do.”* Man, even at his

best, reveals that something is lacking. Absolute perfection is in Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God.

## Chapter 10

### Abigail's Mission

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 25

It was the year 1026 B.C. and Samuel, weighed down by years and afflictions had reached the goal of his pilgrimage. *“And Samuel died,”* says the scripture, *“and all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him in his house at Ramah.”* It is not told us what impression such a death left upon David, but how much he felt the effects of it can be surmised by the words that follow. *“And David arose and went down to the wilderness at Paran.”* *“He arose”* – in the version of *the Seventy* the same word is used for the resurrection. He arose, almost as from a sense of security, as though that death was a warning to make him stay at a greater distance from king Saul. And he went into the wilderness at Paran. It was a more solitary place. Jesus will withdraw there alone after the death of John the Baptist.

However, even in that retreat David had to learn something, and he had to play a part in events that would remain memorable. On the outer limit of the desert of Paran there are the ruins of a village, Kurmul and the Carmel of which the scripture speaks. The most important person of that place was a certain Nabal, a man of great wealth and likewise of a rough character and a vicious temper. By one of those contrasts often

encountered in life, near this man there was a woman who was quite different from him. Abigail, his wife, was wise and beautiful. Because of this the two spouses presented a contrast of light and shadow, like two different pictures, the one hanging beside the other. Even today in the Orient women have little opportunity to choose a companion. Often, and this happens even in other places, the marriage is concluded by an agreement with the parents of the bride. Nabal, rich as he was, and the chief person of that area, must have appeared to be a good match to more than one; and it must have appeared to be good fortune to the parents and to the public that the young girl Abigail should be selected by him to be his wife. However, only God reads the heart of man, and he truly knows those who are unhappy. It was not long before Abigail noticed that she had paid a dear price for her economic status, because she saw there was an abyss between her and her husband – as can be guessed from the few words of the Bible, which makes us think of more than one intimate tragedy that the world does not even suspect. Years passed and that marriage must have seemed to Abigail to be an irreparable misfortune. A woman of high sensitivity, she was condemned to live on the borders of the desert, having a very limited world, and with a man around her who was perhaps much older than she and of a difficult character and disposition. She therefore must have felt very unhappy and buried alive in the solitude of Carnet. But the good woman did not suspect that events would come about by which she would become aware that she had a mission to which God had destined her.

*“And David heard in the wilderness that Nabal did shear his sheep.”*

This has always been an occasion for feasting for the owners of flocks. David was in need and he grasped the opportunity to apply for Nabal’s generosity.

*“David sent out ten young men, and David said unto the young men, Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name, and thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity: Peace be both to thee, and peace be to thine house, and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers; now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there aught missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men and they will show thee. Wherefore let the young men find favor in thine eyes, for we come in a good day; give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David.”*

David had provided protection to the shepherds of Nabal against the brigands, who in certain places continually tormented the proprietors of cattle, but he wanted rather to appeal to the generosity of the rich man; and therefore by way of recommendation, he was presenting the occasion of the feast and his best wishes. David was assuming a subordinate role, and called himself a son, or if we wish to interpret the word in the sense that it is often interpreted in the Old Testament, as a sort of respectful dependent. “And when David’s young men

came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased.”

They had come happy with a gracious message, sure that they would receive a gift, and therefore did not suspect a refusal. The general happiness had not allowed them to notice the strange contrast that Nabal offered compared to those who were around him. So they did not immediately notice the closed, fat face, the small, half-hidden eyes, or the whole unattractive picture of that man; not immediately but they must have begun to notice before their message was terminated. While they were greeting him and making their request, a wave of anger was rising on the face of the owner and his little eyes began to open wide as if they would pop out, looking at them crosswise and contemptuously; and an explosion of repressed anger was in the making. As soon as he could, with a wagging of his head and a shaking of his hand, Nabal came out with this answer: *“Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?”* And with a smile between that of a stupid person and one who is mocking – *“there be many servants nowadays that break away from the hand of his master.”* Without knowing it, Saul found an ally in Nabal. And he continued, half-suffocating the irritable words:

*“Shall I then take my bread and my water, and the animals that I have butchered for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?”*

And he said nothing more but continued displaying a hard and haughty face while the messengers had time to

collect themselves from the unexpected storm which had left them with their mouths open and sort of stunned, while a sense of repressed disgust showed on the faces of those who found themselves near Nabal. The gracious little speech had only irritated the heart of the greedy one, and truthfully, the highest form of eloquence will not interest a greedy one when it's a question of money matters. Nabal had even known how to bring into the picture, indirectly, the name of Saul. He was refusing a slave who was rebelling against his master. He wanted the messengers to believe there was nothing left for them to do but to return. *"So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings."* The result of the expedition aroused David's anger so much more since the treatment received was diametrically opposite the gentle way in which he had sent the messengers. Anger led to a determination to do violence.

*"And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; And David also girded on his sword, and there went up after David about four hundred men."*

Among his qualities David had an arrogant character which often put him in danger. Fierce and determined, followed by men who resembled hungry lions, he undertook to go up rapidly toward Carmel. A harsh resolution could be read on their faces and certainly they were setting out to accomplish an act of violence that would have to involve many innocent people, because in anger, moderation will be lacking.

*“Now David said, Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him and he hath requited me evil for good. This and more also shall God do unto the enemies of David if by the morning light I leave one man-child of all that pertain to him.”*

And they were running to vengeance and a massacre. But meanwhile, by another way, Providence was working to avert a bloody work and prevented David from having to be sorry for his crimes.

We have noted that Nabal's rude act made an impression on his own servants. One of them, accustomed to regarding Abigail as the angel of the family hastened to look for her.

*“But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master, and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we anything as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the fields. They were a wall unto us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.”*

The servant knew the wisdom of Abigail, because he continued:

*“Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household : for he is such a son of Belial, ( wicked man ) that a man cannot speak to him.”*



A report and appeal that must have torn apart Abigail's soul and that made her see in a gloomier light the soul and character of her husband. But she did not say one word, believing it in vain to lament, wanting rather to repair the misdeed. Therefore,

*“Abigail quickly gathered two hundred loaves of bread, two leather bags full of wine, five roasted sheep, two bushels of roasted grain, a hundred bunches of raisins, and two hundred cakes of dried figs and loaded them on donkeys. And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal.”*

After these rapid and wise preparations which indicate the mind of a very good woman, Abigail set out to meet David in order to impede a mishap, demonstrating her readiness to intercede for others.

*“And it was so, as she rode on the donkey, that she came down by the covert of the hill, and behold, David and his men came down against her and she met them. And when Abigail saw David, she hastened and lighted off the donkey, and fell before David on her face and bowed herself to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid.”*

Noteworthy in Abigail's first act of intercession is the fact that she ascribed to herself the iniquity of another. Then she continued:

*“Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send.”*

And after a brief pause she continued: *“Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth...”*- there was, therefore, another Lord – *“and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand.”* These are great words which allow us to read the soul of that dignified and pious woman, and that likewise reveal her faith in a good outcome. *“The Lord hath withholden thee.”* She is aware that her intercession is a providential act, therefore not one word that reveals terror or doubt. The Lord sent her in David’s path thus preventing him from committing sins. She did not use palliatives regarding the possible act of David; she called it by its name – *“shed blood, avenging thyself with thine own hand.”* It was David who had to feel humbled and grateful, because Abigail, while appearing to be interceding, was in fact the benefactress.

After having touched a chord to which David was always very sensitive, *“the name of the Lord,”* she skilfully changed the discourse: *“And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought to my lord, let it even be given to the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid.”* She had the vision of the future greatness of David and added, *“or the Lord will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not*

*been found in thee all thy days.*” It is true she was calling David lord but she was adding an appeal to another Lord, on whom David himself was depending, always alluding, although indirectly, to a responsibility. Then she continued with words of comfort which had to be very beneficial to David in his current condition:

*“Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul, but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out, as out of the middle of a sling.”*

Therefore this exile would pass, and one day David would be secure. And she continued exhorting him to prepare himself well for the future.

*“And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that He hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel, that this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offense of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself.”*

Our actions do not end; they have long-term effects, among which is that on the memory – and the evil, even if forgiven, reappears to the imagination in the best moments of life with the dark reminder. One moment of vengeance, Abigail wanted to say, will bring you bitterness when all around you shall be peaceful and when you would give anything to undo what has already been done, but you will not be able to do so. Abigail's

intercession ended thus: *"When the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid."*

Such an appeal was not without effect, because David's heart was not hardened. He was capable of deviating, and he deviated many times, but he was always sensitive to the voice that prevented him from taking the wrong path. The encounter with Abigail prevented him from taking vengeance. The prudent Abigail had called him Lord, its true, but she had interwoven in her language words which clearly said that David could seem to be the lord, the arbiter of her life, but above all there was the only true Lord. The anger of the man of God was pacified. The Lord was speaking by the mouth of that woman and stopped him in the act of committing a great sin. Having been humbled, David listened until the end, then exclaimed: *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me."* God first in everything, but the person is not forgotten: *"and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand."* Abigail's words had touched him so deeply that he used her same expressions. And he was not ashamed of declaring what his intention had been. *"In very deed, as the Lord God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee...it was not a personal generosity, but the work of God...except thou hadst hastened and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal by the morning light any male."* *"So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house;*

*see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.*” The woman accomplished a great mission with dignity and courage and she hurried to return. *“And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken.”* Here is another facet of the portrait of the man – in the excesses of the feast, after the avarice. It must have been a sad spectacle for Abigail – “she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light.” She is always the same prudent woman. *“But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.”* Nabal was a victim of a stroke of apoplexy, the effect of his fury and his excesses. The scripture does not close the chapter here, nor can we close it.

*“And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the Lord, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept His servant from evil: for the Lord hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head.”*

Then, note how the Bible links events together – *“And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife.”* David sent for her. He was acting as an Oriental king. And Abigail became his wife. *“David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel; and they were also both of them his wives.”* Polygamy, tolerated by Oriental customs, had

been prohibited by the law of the Lord. "*David also took*" – it is a fleeting hint, a glimmer, which later on will give us greater light on one of David's greatest temptations, sensuality. We will return to this weak side. Sad note, at the conclusion of this chapter are the words: "But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim." Thus the singular book knows how to narrate the events and bring us to know its men. David was delivered from an excess of anger by the prudent work of a rare woman. The other weakness will one day be the cause of a tremendous discipline to him. However, in conclusion, he will be closer to his Lord.

## Chapter 11

## Generosity and Difficulty

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 26

This chapter contains incidents that are almost parallel to those of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 23. Yet, although they are somewhat alike, the circumstances are not the same and bring with them new dangers and new opportunities. The Ziphites, who at another time, had been swift in apprising Saul of David's presence in their borders, hasten again to let him know the place where David was hiding. "*Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon?*" a first act of informing against makes a second one easier; and likewise Saul, his first act of responding to reports, now finds him ready for a second chase. And in fact "*Saul arose, and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph.*"

After reading how David and Saul had parted the last time, and how Saul had lifted up his voice and wept, calling David "*my son*", we would not expect to see him any longer in search of David to take his life; but we must keep in mind that of all the passions, jealousy gives the least rest to the soul. A momentary emotion can silence it, it is true, but as this passes, jealousy returns again to the old intensity. Saul therefore arose, well accompanied also this time by three thousand select men.



*“And Saul pitched in the hill of Hachilah, which is before Jeshimon, by the way. But David abode in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him in the wilderness.”*

It was the first night of the encampment. David had the idea of going down, late in the night, in order to advance to where Saul, whose tent was surrounded by guards, was sleeping. In the encampment of Oriental kings it has been described that guards were posted in circles around the royal tent. Therefore, David could not, even late at night, reach Saul without incurring serious danger; but he had a gallant plan in his soul, and for this he trusted in the Lord. David asked: *“Who will go down with me to the camp?”* And Abishai said, *“I will go down with thee.”* *“So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him.”*

On another occasion it had been Saul who had by chance come close to David, now David had penetrated to the center of the camp. Yet, although there is a great difference between this and the first occasion, from the enemy's point of view the temptation could arise. In fact, the bellicose Abishai said to David: *“God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him a second time.”* Having obtained a victory over a temptation enables us to be stronger against a second assault; however we should not hide the possibility that the words of Abishai could find



acceptance in the soul of David because of various considerations: Saul had already been forgiven, but not only had he not repented, as much as he was ungenerously returning to persecute the one who had saved his life; therefore, after all, would it not be better to make an end of him? *“God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day”* are the echo of words that David had already heard another time, a dangerous echo, because they seem to say: understand once and for all! He could have believed that in this way he would attain the kingdom that had been prophesied to him. And in fact the profound sleep into which Saul and his warriors around him had fallen seemed to give credence to the words of Abishai and say to him: *“It’s time to end it.”* In fact Satan would always want to lead us to arrive at the end by means of shortcuts. But the words of Abishai did not move David who already had a clear vision of his own destiny, and did not wish to hasten it with his own hand. *“Destroy him not; for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless? As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish.”*

Thus David hastened to respond. He was expecting that Saul would die without his intervention; the Bible does not hide it. Other men, also excellent, in David’s place and in his conditions, would not have had greater virtues than he. It is dangerous to study the great characters after having fixed two or three extraordinary ideas concerning them, and wanting to weave their life’s history around them. The sentiments of our soul are, in fact, varied and

complex, even in the best moments of our existence. The words of David reveal a great virtue – the man of God is seen, resolved to wait for Providence to work, and ready to reject the trap of taking justice into his own hands.

Before going away, *“David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul’s bolster; and they got away, and no man saw it nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them.”* *“Then David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off; a great space being between them.”* Having placed himself at a safe distance, he began to cry out – the clear air, as it is in Palestine carries the voice far.

*“And David cried unto the people, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Answerest thou not, Abner? Then Abner answered and said, Who art thou that criest unto the king? And David said to Abner, Art not thou a valiant man? And who is like to thee in Israel? Wherefore then hast thou not kept the lord the king? For there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. This thing is not good that thou hast done. And now see where the king’s spear is and the cruse of water that was at his bolster.”*

From the shouting and from the answer, Saul awakened, *“And Saul knew David’s voice and said, Is this thy voice, my son David?”* He still calls him **my son** – *“And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king.”* *“And he said, Wherefore doth my lord thus pursue after his servant?”*

*For what have I done? Or what evil is in mine hand?"* He wanted to make one last appeal to the heart of Saul, even seeking to excuse him as much as was possible. *"Now therefore, I pray thee, let the lord my king hear the words of his servant. If the Lord hath stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods."* In order to understand these words we must remember that for the ancient Oriental changing one's country was like changing religion. On the other hand, the words: *"Go, serve other gods"* he put in the mouth of his enemies, not his own. David continued: *"Now therefore, let not my blood fall to the earth before the face of the Lord: for the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains."*

That appeal struck Saul who possessed an emotional and fickle nature, which was increasing little by little. In the answer of the king there is still tenderness, however something is lacking that was encountered before. On a previous occasion Saul had lifted up his voice and wept, now his tears had dried up. Nevertheless, he answered: *"I have sinned: return, my son David."* Always that pathetic **my son** – *"for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly."*

Finally Saul is conquered, a superficial reader would say, but David did not think so. The words *"I have sinned, I*

*have erred exceedingly*” had little effect on David. To say, I have sinned, to recognize one’s own folly is not all. Pharaoh also cried, *“I have sinned,”* and centuries later, in desperation, Judas Iscariot would cry *“I have betrayed the innocent blood.”* But these voices by themselves were not nor will be repentance. David was knowledgeable about men; the relationship that he had with them referred always to the relationship that they and he himself had with God. Between David and Saul there was lacking the common ideal upon which they could meet. Saul was emotional, easily affected, but without God in his heart; David was more balanced, perhaps less sentimental, but he had God in the center of his being. Therefore, the tender words of Saul - *“return, my son”* found no place in the heart of the fugitive.

If the one who sins does not set himself straight with God, we have no basis on which to place our trust in him. The trust that one can have in man is in the Lord that is in man because emotions disappear and the worst in us returns. Reciprocal faith must result from the faith of both in God; in Him we must meet; and in this way we must study our relationships with others and not trust those who are strangers to God even when they are ready to acknowledge their shortcomings in our relationships. *“Return because thou killed me not.”* But David answered and said:

*“Behold the king’s spear! And let one of the young men come over and fetch it. The Lord render unto every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the Lord delivered thee into my hand today, but I would not stretch*

*forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation."*

Always "the Lord" for David. And Saul answers with tender words but in which is lacking any mention of the Lord. "Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail." And thus, even this time, his emotion evaporated.

"So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place." His way – his place. For Saul "his place" because by hardening his heart every day, he was hastening to seal his own destiny. For David "His way", a symbol of discipline and trials, from which he will emerge stronger, always trusting less in men and always trusting more in the Lord.

## Chapter 12

### In Enemy Territory

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 27, 28 and 29

So David went on his way. After the events of the preceding chapter we would expect to see him remain in the borders of Judah, trusting his God Who has delivered him so well up to now.

But our heart is subject to various and unexpected changes, by which in moments of greatest enthusiasm, periods of sadness and discouragement often occur.

So it happened to David. He separated from Saul with his soul full of trust in the Lord, its true, but little by little, instead of letting calmness prevail and driving out every preoccupation about the future, he began to think about the obstinate persecution, and little by little David became pensive. With his head bowed he pondered in his heart all the possibilities that were before him, and to reason in himself. He saw before him a closed horizon, with spies and enemies everywhere! In conclusion David said to himself: *"I shall now perish me one day by the hand of Saul."*

It was David acting as a sad prophet to David and from the dark horizon he arrived at a desperate and foolish plan:

*“There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines.”*

And since the plan could have seemed absurd to him he found a way of excusing it.

*“Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coast of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.”*

The discourse within himself was finished, and the decision was made. His eyes turned downward, David had not noticed in the secret voices the tempter who was driving him into enemy territory, and he did not have recourse to prayer to be counseled by the Lord. After the soliloquy the action.

*“And David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men who were with him unto Achish, the son of Maach, the king of Gath.”*

This is probably not the same Achish that we mentioned in one of the previous chapters. In this manner David formed his own plan of salvation. In the words addressed to Saul he referred to the Lord; and in this *“I should speedily escape”* David referred to himself. We shall see the result of adopting his own plan of salvation instead of seeking only continued dependence on the Lord.

*“And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite, and Abigail the Carmelite, Nabal’s wife.”*

The Bible is inexorable in reporting a narrative; and is not content with referring implicitly to the family of David, but repeats *“his two wives”*, that is two families.

The first effect of the flight of David was this:

*“And it was told Saul that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him.”*

David appeared miserable to Saul because of that flight, after having proclaimed his trust in the Lord with a loud and sure voice. The first result of our wrong steps is the contempt we bring upon ourselves on the part of those who at first only hated us. Saul stopped being preoccupied with David. But once David found himself in the heart of enemy territory he felt uncomfortable there. He said to Achish:

*“If I have now found grace in thine eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there: for why should thy servant dwell in the royal city with thee?”*

In enemy territory, yes, but not right in the capital, as this would be compromising himself too much. Thus, many times, we agitate ourselves in our waverings between our plans and the fear of the Lord.



*“Then Achish gave him Ziklag. And the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months.”*

It was a time that was spent very badly, from mistake to mistake.

*“And David and his men went up, and invaded the Geshurites, and the Gezrites, and the Amalekites: for those nations were of old the inhabitants of the land, as thou goest to Shur, even unto the land of Egypt.”*

Those were the southern regions of Israel, and the inhabitants had to be driven out.

*“And David smote the land, and left neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish. And Achish said, Whither have ye made a road today? And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites. And David saved neither man nor woman alive, to bring tidings to Gath, saying, Lest they should tell on us, saying, So did David, and so will be his manner all the while he dwelleth in the country of the Philistines.”*

Sad story of cruelty and astuteness! One mistaken step had brought on others, and caused the misery of many innocent people. The desire to deceive Achish and to make him believe that the raids were against Judah caused him to make a complete extermination of the people in the places where he carried out the raids. Then he would give an equivocal report to Achish.

*“And Achish believed David, saying, He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant forever.”*

David was a man of valor and the enemy understood it.

God writes the story of even the best men faithfully. The stories that men write do not have these contrasts of light and darkness. What will happen now to David, as one excess leads to another excess? There are, alas, even in the lives of those most devoted to the Lord, moments in which it seems there is no more hope of rehabilitation, that all is finished; and all work would be finished if God, our Father, rich in commiseration and pardon, did not intervene with one of those unexpected acts of His providence that change the course of our history and bring us back into harmony with Him. David had not remained where the divine oracles wanted him; since the prophet Gad had said to him: *“Get thee into the land of Judah”* – therefore the people would not be impressed with his innocence. But David who had passed from discomfort and mistrust to cruelty and duplicity had not forgotten God. In the territory of the enemy he thought about his Lord, and must have felt the horror of the situation many times, without knowing, however, how to escape from it. He must have sighed often, at length and in secret. Meanwhile events precipitated in such a way that a crisis that would have ruined David seemed imminent, and so it would have been if God in His mercy had not watched over him.

The death of Samuel, which occurred a short time before, and Saul's state of agitation had revived the greediness of the Philistines who "*gathered their armies together for warfare to fight with Israel.*" These preparations had to scare David because of what might be expected of him. In fact, one fine day, Achish said to him, "*Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men.*"

This was a sad moment for David; at any rate he answered in an ambiguous way, and said to Achish: "*Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do.*" Achish regarded this answer as a promise of faithfulness and knowing David's valor he replied to him: "*Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head forever.*" In such a way the one whom God had called to be king of Israel had reduced himself to guarding the person of a Philistine king – "*David and his men passed on in the rearward with Achish.*" The Philistines had pitched camp in Aphek and the Israelites by a fountain which is in Jezreel. What will David's conduct be in the battle? We don't know David's feelings, but certainly the anticipation must have caused him much anguish. He would have had to fail in his faithfulness to king Achish, betraying him, or else render himself forever hated by his people for bearing arms against them. There could be no other solution. But God prepared a way of escape. When the princes of the Philistines saw David in the position of trust near the king, they were either suspicious or jealous and said: "*What do these Hebrews here?*" And although Achish spoke favorably of David, they said:

*“Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? Should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?”*

Although Achish suspected nothing, he was compelled to listen to his princes.

*“Then Achish called David and said to him, Surely, as the Lord liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight – nevertheless the lords favor thee not. Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines.”* “And David said unto Achish, *But what have I done? And what hast thou found in thy servant – that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the lord my king?”*

This was an unjust and dangerous question unless it is viewed as politically dictated. Fortunately, Achish stuck to his plan and replied:

*“I know that thou art good in my sight as an angel of God: notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle. Wherefore now, rise up early in the morning with thy master’s servants that are come with thee: and as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart.”*

David was deceiving Achish, while the latter placed great confidence in him. How many times people trust in us and we do not deserve it. The Lord often hides from others that which we are or do, because He wants to correct us, one on one.

*“So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return unto the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.”*

On the way back David must have thought that many times God used enemies to deliver him from a difficult moment which could have condemned him to ruin and infamy. David had to learn that one does not go far from where God wants us with impunity. Now he is free, but he is about to undergo a bitter discipline which will lead him back, closer to the Lord and trusting better and only in the Lord for his future.

## Chapter 13

## Fortifying Oneself in the Lord

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 30

Upon David's return to Ziklag he had to experience what it meant to have trusted in enemy territory. In going away from it he had left it defenseless; *"And it came to pass when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; and had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way."*

Therefore it was his turn to suffer that which he had made others suffer. There were no warriors in Ziklag; therefore the Amalekites had carried away the women and children to sell them as slaves.

*"So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep."*

David then felt the unfortunate effect of not having remained in the mountains of Judah, and of having trusted in the enemy. And not only this, but he had to

undergo a new and painful experience. The men who had up to now followed him faithfully, giving him undoubted proof of friendship and devotion, showed themselves changed toward him in a moment. As soon as the first outburst of tears had calmed down, David heard a murmuring, at first suffocated and restrained, becoming clamorous and distinct. *“The people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters.”* Before he was able to recover from the dizziness of the misfortune that had struck him, he found himself accused as the author of the ruin of the others, so that there was no one left in whom he could trust. He was now putting to the test his friends who had been afflicted because of him. In every friendship there is a limit beyond which it is not permissible to go. Nor did they stop at lamenting; starting from a few at first, then picked up by everyone, the voice: *“let us stone him, let us stone him because everyone was in bitterness of soul for their sons and their daughters.”*

Only one moment of abandonment and irresoluteness would have ruined, and closed tragically the career of David which was still at the beginning. But he was a man of great spiritual resource, exactly as are those who have God in the depths of their heart. David looked around him – no help from his own; no profit would be gained by crying. It was then that David lifted up his eyes to heaven and fortified himself in the Lord his God.

The outward circumstances had not changed; the ruins were still there, the loved ones still missing and the people in tumult; but a change had occurred in David's heart. Lost in the midst of so much misfortune he called on the secret resource to help him – he called for strength from the Lord, to which source one never applies in vain nor ever enough. He fortified himself in the Lord his God. His – God was not a stranger to David. He remembered the past blessings and they gave him hope for the future. It was as if there were two David's; David encourages David in the Lord. This faith in extreme moments when the world falls apart and our conscience bothers us, accusing us unrelentingly because we have repeatedly offended God; this faith in Him in certain dark hours of existence without any support from or any merit of our own, but entirely founded on His mercy, is truly a great faith. Because in certain gray hours when the soul is overwhelmed and those who have a rich and intense nature know it and one would want to end their ties to religion and to God, not because one has a complaint against God, but because knowing that one has offended Him too much, does not feel worthy any longer to go to Him, and says: it's too much, by this time it's finished for me; I can no longer enter into a relationship with the Lord. I promise and I fail, and I have failed so many times that it's no use to promise any longer. This happens a lot after great blessings are received from Him. But God is not man who gets tired; therefore if we find only a thread of faith which leads us back to Him, He has an ocean of mercy to always receive us. Discipline and



punishment - yes, but cast out – never, as long as we do not voluntarily cast ourselves out.

David saw all this in a moment and he fortified himself in the Lord his God. Another time he had talked within himself with his head bowed; now, with his eyes toward heaven he spoke with the Lord, and when he looked back down, his men saw the old man. No useless desperation or lamenting, but a resolute trust; a beneficent suggestion passed from David to those men who had always loved him and loved him still. The clamor began to subside. David understood immediately what he must do, that is to ask the Lord. *“And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech’s son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David inquired at the Lord, saying, shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And He answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.”* Therefore the Lord answered, oh infinite love of the Lord, and answered with a word of encouragement and not of reprimand!

David did not doubt for one moment: he went with six hundred men that he had with him; and when they came to the brook Besor he left behind two hundred men who were too tired. With four hundred men he continued in the tracks of the Amalekites.

Along the way they found a dying man. He was an abandoned Egyptian, a slave whom the Amalekites had left to die as they could no longer use him. *“They gave*

him bread and he did eat; and they made him drink water; and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him, for he had eaten no bread nor drunk any water, three days and three nights." "And David said, to whom belondest thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me because three days ago I fell sick. We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which belongeth to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire." And David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company? And he said, Swear to me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master and I will bring thee down to this company." David promised him. "And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah." Therefore it was easy for David to overthrow them and take back all that the Amalekites had taken; "and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor anything that they had taken to them: David recovered all." And he took also a great spoil of cattle.

When he met the two hundred men who had been too tired to follow him, David came near to them and greeted them. But some among his following said, "*Because they went not with us, we will not give them aught of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and*

*his children, that they may lead them away and depart.”* But here also David’s character had to shine. He had greeted the people who had to feel very humiliated for not having taken part in that endeavor; now he wants them also to have a portion of the spoil. *“Then David said, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that the Lord has given us, Who hath preserved us...For who will hearken unto you in this matter? But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.”*

*“And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoils unto the elders of Judah, even to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoils of the enemies of the Lord.”* He had been a fugitive, and now, the first time he had something to offer, he remembered his friends. This good experience happened to him after the saddest moment of the life he had lived up to now. The arrival in burned Ziklag had been a very dark hour; but it is precisely the darkest hour that precedes the dawn. It is nine years of exile – fleeing, suffering and mistakes, mixed in with generous acts and trust in the Lord. A long and useful discipline. But it can be said that the exile is finished as now we are approaching the completion of God’s design for David.

## Chapter 14

## Death of Saul and Jonathan

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 28 – 31; 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 1

( Oh my children!...I was a father – Here you are alone, oh king; you have no one left of so many friends and servants – Are you being paid by the inexorable wrath of God? But you still remain to me, oh sword: the last hope. Faithful minister, now come – Wicked Philistine – You will find me here dead, but at least as king.

(Alfieri – Saul, Act 5, last scene)

*“And it came to pass in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. Samuel was dead and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city.”* It is sad, this connecting of the record of the rising in mass of the Philistines to make war, with the death of Samuel; as if the presence of the great old man had up to now kept the enemies back from the borders of Israel, and after his death they had believed that the catastrophic hour of Saul had arrived.

The Philistines camped in Shunem. Saul also gathered all Israel together, and they camped in Gilboa. *“And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled.”* He felt discouraged and it appeared he would faint. The enemy was powerful and in a good position, but Saul, because of his state of mind, saw them to be predominant and completely invincible.

There remained to him the remembrance of old habits, of when he used to ask the Lord – and he wanted to ask even then, but the Lord did not answer, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Before him was the powerful enemy, terror was in his heart and the heavens were closed above. And yet, not even then did he have a cry of repentance. Saul wanted the victory, he wanted that God should speak to him, but he did not want to go to Him repentant. And since Saul wanted to know at any cost what would happen, he resorted to a desperate step, which was like the final epilogue which brought him entirely far from God and that marked his doom.

Saul had cut off fortune-tellers and wizards out of the land. He knew the clear will of God concerning this. But the desire to know what would happen to him was so strong that when God did not answer him he sought elsewhere for the information that he desired. And therefore he was not ashamed to ask his servants: *“Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her.”* Unfortunately, since the bad way is always easy, the servants answered: *“Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.”*

However, Saul still had a sense of personal dignity. He knew that as king, since he had condemned fortune-tellers, that he should not seek them; therefore he put on other raiment and disguised himself and went with two men. He sought the protection of night and went to the fortune-teller in Endor.

*“I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee.”* But the woman was afraid: *“Behold, thou knoweth what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land; wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?”*

Perhaps this was a voice of mercy – he had heard his name – *“Thou knoweth what Saul hath done.”* And this mention could still have touched his heart, to see that what he wanted was bringing him farther away from the Lord. *“As the Lord liveth there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing.”*

*“Then said the woman, whom shall I bring up to thee? And he said, bring me up Samuel.”* Samuel! Saul felt the absence of Samuel. The great old man had always loved Saul, and had prayed for him to the end. Something still kept Saul tied to the memory of the prophet. – *“Bring me up Samuel.”*

And the woman began her incantations and practices, but she herself was shaken by what she saw, because she did not expect to see Samuel. Therefore, when she saw

Samuel she cried with a loud voice and said to Saul; *“Why hast thou deceived me? For thou art Saul.”*

*“And the king said unto her, be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. An old man cometh up. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed himself.”* Now there unfolds a brief and unforgettable scene. It was the last voice that came to Saul, and it came from the other world. Samuel said to him: *“Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?”*

*“And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known to me what I shall do. Then said Samuel: Wherefore then dost thou ask of me seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the Lord hath done to him, as he spake by me; for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David: Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executed His fierce wrath upon Amalek. And tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.”* ( it means among the number of the deceased ) *“The Lord shall also deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”* And the shadow disappeared. *“Then Saul fell straightway all along the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of*



*Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night."*

In that state he inspired pity in the fortune-teller: "*Behold, thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice, and I have put my life at risk, and have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me. Now therefore, I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thy handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee; and eat, that thou mayest have strength when thou goest on thy way.*" He refused, but his servants compelled him and he arose from the earth and sat upon the bed. "*And the woman had a fat calf in the house; and she hasted and killed it, and took flour and kneaded it and did bake unleavened bread thereof.*" Sad and tender pity of the fortune-teller of Endor, which should have finally won the heart of Saul. "*And she brought it before Saul, and before his servants, and they did eat. Then they rose up and went away that night."*

They had gone by night and they returned by night. Saul had gained nothing, rather he had committed the sin which was the final cause of abandonment by God. God has given us sufficient guidance and doesn't want us to seek fortune-tellers; but Saul was obstinately sinning against the light; and not even in the extreme did he have a cry of repentance. Therefore, those who believe there is always time to repent deceive themselves, because when the light is repeatedly rejected, the heart becomes hardened. The heart can be broken in pieces and one can also faint because of terror but this is not repentance.



Saul returned with the irreparable news, and darker than the night was the tempest of confusion and fear in his soul.

About ten years had passed since the prophet Samuel had gone to tell him that God had taken the kingdom from him. The warnings of the prophets are exhortations to repentance. If Saul had repented, we do not know what God would have done for him, but we know that he is rich and has many kingdoms at his disposition. However, Saul went always farther from the Lord. All those past years God had patience, but the ruin finally came and it was irreparable.

With a leader paralyzed by fear one could not expect victory. The defeat was terrible. Here is how the holy writer narrates it: *“Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul’s sons.”*

It was tragic to see three sons fall dead one after the other, almost as if to give him time to measure his own destiny. *“And the battle went sore against Saul.”* He was reserved for last. *“And the archers hit him and he was sore wounded of the archers.”* Like a desperate wild beast he hastened his death. *“Then said Saul to his armor-bearer, Draw thy sword and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me.”* But he could not find even one

who would perform that duty for him . His armor-bearer would not. *“Therefore Saul took a sword and fell upon it.”* And he was not dead yet when he saw an Amalekite passing close to him and he asked him with a mournful voice to put his foot on the sword in order to hasten the suicide that was being slowly consummated. Saul’s armor-bearer also killed himself. *“So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, that same day together.”*

And the writer of the Chronicles says: *“So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; and inquired not of the Lord.”* ( 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 10:13 )

Saul ended by committing suicide, the proper symbol of his life, because he had ruined himself. A good beginning that had an unhappy ending.

The consequences of that defeat were disastrous: *“And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side of Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled.”*

At the ascension of Saul to the throne, only a small part of the country was in the hands of the Philistines; at his death the entire territory was at their disposition. But there is still another stroke of the pen to this dark picture:

*“And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in Mount Gilboa. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armor, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols and among the people. And they put his armor in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan.”* A tender act of heroism is recorded at this point: *“And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead”* – grateful for the memory of Saul, because at the beginning of the kingdom he had delivered them from their enemies – *heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; all the valiant men arose, and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh and burnt them there. And they took their bones and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.”* This courageous redemption of the remnants makes us think of our great Redeemer.

With this scene which is one of the most moving episodes of gratitude and of homage at the time of misfortune. With a ray of light, the first book of Samuel closes, and it is time to hasten to return to David.

The Philistines in the camp of Gilboa opened the door for David. On another occasion it was they who by rising against Israel had delivered David from Saul who had already had surrounded him. Thus the plans of God were fulfilled in a marvelous and unexpected way.

David was far; he had dwelt in Ziklag two days. On the third day the news was brought to him by an Amalekite who said to him that he had seen Saul upon his sword and caught in his armor, and that he had been begged to hasten his death and that he had done so by stepping on him with his foot. *“Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him. And they mourned and wept, and fasted until even for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel, because they were fallen by the sword.”*

At the end of the day David carried out an act which he thought to be one of justice, but which was perhaps due to excessive severity toward the Amalekite who had brought him the message. *“How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?”*- David said to him, because Saul, even though guilty, was never dissociated from the anointing in David’s mind; and David ordered that one of the young men should kill the Amalekite. We cannot have a clear light about this which we have called perhaps excessive severity because we do not know if it is true and how much truth there may be in the message of the Amalekite, or if he took the crown and the bracelet from Saul that he presented to David and made up the episode of having helped in the death in order to ingratiate himself with the future king of Israel.

Then David lamented over the fallen ones and especially over Saul and Jonathan. The words of this lamenting have been preserved for us and it is worthwhile to

transcribe them: *“The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places; how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished”!*

David found the best for a eulogy to Saul; in the face of death the best qualities of the deceased appear; compassion covers the rest. The remarks that refer to Jonathan are very tender, they wring our soul and obligate us to say yet another word on this generous one, dead on the field of Gilboa. Jonathan fell near his father, in his dutiful place; he died facing the enemy and as a hero. He is the son always devoted to the father and the

man devoted to his country. This tells us that the kingdom had a special importance for him, that he knew and wanted to defend it, and that he understood the sacrifice he was making by protecting David and making smooth the way to the throne for him.

But if Jonathan was a great warrior, he did not seem to be the right person at that time. Generosity has always been a rare fruit in every age and in every place. He is one of the most beautiful flowers of humanity.

Jonathan is one of the heroes who die young and is to be placed beside two others, Abel and Stephen. Abel, Jonathan and Stephen: too beautiful to remain long in the world. Providence has allowed them to show themselves to us for a short time and then has taken them away. All three finished in a violent manner, suffering and not making anyone suffer.

Oh generous soul of Jonathan, too great to survive, your memory will be sacred to your friend David, and will always be tender to all who read about you who was so gentle in the heroic times in which you lived!

## Chapter 15

## The Beginning of the Kingdom

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 2:3,4

David was by this time on the threshold of the throne, but one might say of a throne without a kingdom, because almost all the cities were in the hands of the enemy. Therefore he still had to fight. Before anything else he wanted to know what steps to take and not to act by impulse, but by direction; and therefore he wanted to ask the Lord. *“Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said to him, Go up.”* Not happy with knowing this, David continued to ask: *“Whither shall I go up?”* And the Lord said: *“Unto Hebron.”* Thus he was assured that the time had come for him to move and of the place where he had to go.

And he went up to Hebron with his people. *“And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.”* Worthy of note is the *“there”*. David had to first find himself in the place where God wanted him, and then receive the anointing to the kingdom. That was the second anointing. He had had the first from the prophet Samuel, as a promise of the kingdom; the second he had from the elders of Judah upon the entrance into the kingdom.



The first report made to the new king was this: "*The men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul.*" The motive dictating this report does not appear to have been legitimate. However, whatever the motivation may have been, David knew how to make it an occasion for magnanimity. "*And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing.*" We that read from a distance of time and know the importance of the persons in advance, very rarely understand the force of some temptations. Everyone knew how Saul had persecuted David; by that report, besides an accusation against those of Gilead, could ring out as a warning that the house of Saul still had faithful followers. But David did not want to feel anything but admiration for the courageous ones who had exposed their lives in saving the mutilated cadavers of the king and the princes. Such calm and justice came to David from the fact that he moved step by step under the direction of the Lord. To the same people of Gilead he skillfully announced his election as king: "*Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.*"

Except, however, that David had before him difficulties that were not so light. Saul had left only one son called Ishbosheth who was ill-suited to reign because of a weak



and timid character; but at the defeat of Gilboa the fierce and valorous Abner, Saul's cousin, who could still organize an army had survived. Abner saw in Ishbosheth the person who could serve him in opposing David: "*but Abner, the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim; and made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel.*" Only the house of Judah followed David. From this a civil war was born that lasted a long time. Joab, a man who had joined David in exile was at the head of David's army. Joab was courageous and daring. The first encounter between the two armies was in Gibeon. "*And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.*"

Joab had with him two brothers, Abishai and Asahel; Asahel was light of foot as a wild roe and he pursued after Abner. But Abner, having recognized Asahel, never wished to kill him and asked him to desist from pursuing him: "*Wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? How then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?*" It seems that Abner was feeling shame and pain to strike a young man, or perhaps he was meditating an understanding with Joab. But Asahel did not want to stop; and therefore Abner felt constrained to turn and put a spear through him. Joab and Abishai pursued after Abner; and the sun went down when they came to the hill of Ammah. The children of Benjamin gathered

themselves together after Abner, and became one troop and stood on the top of a hill.

*“Then Abner called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour forever? Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? How long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?”* And so Joab caused his people to withdraw; and the two armies withdrew; Abner’s army to Mahanaim, and Joab’s army to Hebron. *“Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.”* At this point the scripture opens a brief parenthesis in order to shed some light on the family or rather on the families of David and sends forth one of those flashes of light that seem out of place, but can be understood later on when other events are known.

*“And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess: and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital. And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah, David’s wife. These were born to David in Hebron.”* ( 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 3:2 – 5 ).

A sad parenthesis in a glorious story!

Poligamy – several children, several mothers, several religions and several systems of education. While David was being strengthened outwardly, he was becoming weak in the home and was sowing thorns that would wound his heart one day: Absalom, Amnon, Adonijah – the scripture observes everything.

In protecting Ishbosheth Abner had anything but justifiable motives, because he was thinking of himself: *“And it came to pass, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul.”* Poor Ishbosheth must have suspected that the aims of his protector were directed at the kingdom since he knew that Abner had gone into Rizpah, Saul’s woman, because possessing the women of the deceased king was the right of those that would occupy the kingdom. Ishbosheth lamented with Abner, but he only hastened his ruin. Because *“Abner was very wroth for the words of Ishbosheth and said, Am I a dog’s head, which against Judah do show kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me this day with a fault concerning this woman? So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him; to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.”* Poor Ishbosheth was terrified and could answer nothing. Nor did Abner stop with the threats. *“Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose is the land? Saying also,*

*make thy league with me, and behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee."*

David said: "Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face." In order to get Michal back again, David sent messengers also to Ishbosheth. "And Ishbosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish. And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned."

It seems to us that David wanted Michal, his first wife, back more than for affection, in order to have a connection with the cause of Saul, which had roots in the heart of Israel. Abner sought to persuade the elders of Israel and of Benjamin to nominate David king over all the country, and then he went up to Hebron. David made a feast for Abner and the men that were with him, and after promising that he would unite all the elders of Israel behind the king, Abner went away.

Joab was absent and upon returning he learned that Abner had just left Hebron; and after reprimanding David for letting him go, Joab had Abner called back again without David's knowledge. "And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother." When the news of such a betrayal reached David's ears, he protested: "I and my kingdom are guiltless before the

*Lord forever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it rest on the head of Joab."*

*"And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier. And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept."* David fasted all that day. David's behavior pleased the people who recognized that he had nothing to do with Abner's death. The king lamented with his servants: *"Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"* And he added in a tone almost of private confidence: *"And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruah be too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness."*

From this we see that Joab was very powerful in the Court. But from that day on David distrusted him, a distrust that continued to old age, and the execution of judgement for Joab was left to Solomon. However, it is sorrowful to note that David kept in service, as chief general, a man who had committed this betrayal. This constitutes one of the faults of the kingdom of David.

*"When Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled."* A short time after the death of Abner, another betrayal would follow. There is always someone who rushes to make the lot of one who is miserable more miserable, and to strengthen the strong one who has no

need. Two of Ishbosheth's captains – Baanah and Rechab conspired to commit a murderous betrayal of Ishbosheth. *“Rechab and Banaah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, who lay on a bed at noon...and they smote him under the fifth rib...and took his head and gat them away through the plain all night. And they brought the head of Ishbosheth unto David in Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ishbosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed.”*

But David was horrified and received them quite differently from what they expected: *“When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought me good tidings, I took hold of him and slew him...who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings. How much more when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? Shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?”* And he had them killed. *“They took the head of Ishbosheth and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron.”*

Ishbosheth was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years in the midst of continuous terror and woes, and at the end he fell victim to two unjust men, increasing the number of despicable people who are always ready to strike down the weak one in order to help the strong one. In all fairness, one must recognize that David's conduct had up to now been very

praiseworthy. He did not rejoice, neither for Saul, nor for Abner, nor for Ishbosheth. Having stopped in Hebron, he was sure that one day or another the entire kingdom of Israel would be his as the Lord had promised him.

## Chapter 16

## King of Israel – Seizing of Jerusalem – Victory over the Philistines

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 5

The death of Ishbosheth and the good report that David had given of himself in Hebron persuaded Israel to elect him king over the entire nation. *“Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron and spoke, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in times past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel.”*

He had been elected by God, and now also the people elected him. Coming to an agreement with the elders established a kind of constitution that distinguished it from that of the oriental monarchies. *“In the presence of the Lord”* king and people meet in the common ideal of wanting to please the Lord. *“In Hebron David had reigned...seven years and six months.”* When he began to reign he was thirty years old, and he was then in his 38<sup>th</sup> year.



Scarcely elected he began a bold and brilliant undertaking. In a naturally fortified place on the heights of Zion and Moriah, Jerusalem was situated. Those places were sacred in the memory of the Hebrew people. From Jerusalem, then Salem – city of peace, had come Melchisedec, king and priest, to meet Abraham, bringing him bread and wine. The hill of Moriah recalled the scene of obedience, of the sacrifice of Isaac. Jerusalem, on the border between Judah and Benjamin, was considered the most important fortress of Palestine. But centuries had passed since Melchisedec and Abram, and also since the conquest of the country by the Hebrews; and Jerusalem, central fortress, remained always unoccupied. God, however, abandons neither places nor people, and He had destined those heights of Moriah and Zion to great events; David was the right person to occupy Jerusalem. There, truly strategic, he fixed his eyes to make this place the capitol of the kingdom. At that time the city was occupied by the Jebusites, a people of uncertain origin who did not possess great courage, but who placed their pride and confidence in the natural fortification of the area. On his own, the enemy could be called insignificant, but they were set up in the principal fortress and this made them secure and audacious. The Jebusites let David know: *“Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking David cannot come in hither.”*

*“Now David had said: Whoever will be the first to smite the Jebusites will be leader and captain, and Joab, son of Seruia, went up the first, therefore he was made*

*captain.*” Joab, whom we have already met, was a fierce man, and sometimes also unscrupulous, had the merit of serving David faithfully and to be very devoted to him. Seizing Jerusalem was the greatest conquest. Up to now the Hebrews had gone around and had left the center in enemy hands; but that conquest was the beginning of a great national history and added a city, not only to the nation, but to the history of the world, because from that time on Jerusalem became important. *“So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David.”* But he did not want to trust only in the natural position and he fortified it. This fact signified an important step in his life; so that the scripture adds: *“David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him.”*

His fame began to spread always more. *“And Hiram, king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters and masons: and they built David an house. And David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted David’s kingdom for His people Israel’s sake.”*

At this point another of those parentheses by the sacred writer that seem like false notes next to beautiful narratives. We read: *“And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron”* almost as if to remind us that he already had several families in Hebron. *“And there were yet sons and daughters born to David.”* Next to reading that the Lord was with him, we find written that *“he took more concubines and wives.”* The enlargement of the

harem, due perhaps, principally to political aims, was weakening the private life of David. There is no advantage to disobeying the law of the Lord. It is true that the customs permitted polygamy, but David should have known, also in this, what was the will of the Lord, because even the king was not permitted to have more than one wife. The parenthesis is closed and we return to follow the rest of the story.

Next to the greatest triumphs there are the major attacks of the enemy. Privately, as we have seen, David yielded to the temptation of enlarging the harem. Now another attack comes from outside, and it is formidable. *“When the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David; and David heard of it, and went down to a fortified place. The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.”* David did not confide in his valor and strategy, nor in the ability and courage of his men, but he wanted to depend on the Lord. *“And David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? Wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up; for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.”*

After the assurance, He added the energy and the valor: *“And David came to Baalperazim, and David smote them there, and said, The Lord hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore, he called the name of that place Baalperazim”* ( the plain of breaches ). Take note of the language of the scripture –

David smote, but far from boasting, he attributed the fact to the Lord. *“And there they left their images and David and his men burned them.”* But those were not enemies who could be easily calmed down. *“And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.”* And David again asked the Lord. On the one hand, the persistence of the enemy in attacking; on the other the persistence of David in the confidence in God and in asking Him. It could have seemed superfluous to ask the Lord since it was a question of the same enemies, but David was not satisfied with past experiences, and wanted to ask another time. And it was good that he did, because he received an answer quite different from the first. Not direct action, but a patient tactic was required this time: *“Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then shalt thou bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.”*

Invisible forces had helped David to conquer the enemy, and the secret of the repeated victory had been the asking and asking again of the Lord, depending on Him step by step and doing as He had commanded. In fact, the secret of every victory of the children of God lies in this.

## Chapter 17

### Transport of the Ark

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 6 and 1st Chronicles 13, 15

For the children of Israel the ark of the covenant was the symbol and the token of the presence of God. It was constructed of shittim and acacia wood, overlaid with wrought gold within and without and contained the two tables of stone on which the law was written. For seventy-five years it had been neglected in Kirjathjearim bordering between Judah and Benjamin; but as soon as David was assured in Jerusalem, he devotedly turned his thoughts to the Ark of the Lord, and as a psalm tells us, he promised he would not rest until he had made a place for the Lord. Saul had not cared for the Ark but David wanted the great palladium in the midst of Israel.

For David, transport of the Ark was an event which should have made all the people happy. And for that reason he called a national assembly and said: *"If it seem good unto you, and it be of the Lord our God, let us send abroad to our brethren everywhere that are left in all the land of Israel...that they may gather themselves unto us and let us bring again the Ark of our God to us: for we enquired not at it in the days of Saul. And all the congregation said they would do so: for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people,"* because people, if guided well, like to serve the Lord. With great feasting,

therefore, they undertook the transport from the far hills of Judah, taking it from the house of Abinadab where it had been lodged.

Now it should be noted how in the joy of the preparations they committed an error: *"They carried the Ark of God in a new cart."* This was an imitation of what had been practiced by the Philistines about a half-century before when they sent back to Israel the Ark they had captured and could not keep in their midst. There was the method prescribed by God and man should not have changed it; it had to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites. In transporting the Ark, David was doing the right thing; but in using a cart he was using incorrect means; he adopted a method already used by the Philistines. But God must be obeyed in all the particulars of His commandments.

*"Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. And David and all Israel played before God with all their might and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals and with trumpets."*

At this point an event occurs which is apt to disturb the serenity of the superficial reader: *"And when they came to the threshing-floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand to hold the Ark, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzza, and He smote him because he put his hand to the Ark: and there he died before God."* The action seems strange but not for one who knows the laws and rites of the people of Israel and considers that Uzza should not have been ignorant of the

history of the Ark and how God had known how to protect it and bring the Ark back in a miraculous way from the country of the Philistines. There is always danger that man wants to take a step ahead of God; Uzza had put forth his hand to hold the Ark; but there was no need then for the hand of man and Uzza died for the presumptuous and irreverent act. We must take ourselves back to those times, and consider places and circumstances in order to evaluate events which to us seem to be unreasonable, and we must learn to keep our hands far from many things and use reverence in the service of the Lord. The unexpected event changed the feasting, *"and David was displeased because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzza: wherefore that place is called Perez-uzza ( the breach of Uzza ) to this day."* The frankness in assigning names that related to religious events to places is noteworthy. David was afraid to proceed: *"David was afraid of God that day, saying, How shall I bring the Ark of God home to me? So David brought not the Ark home to himself to the city of David, but carried it aside into the house of Obededom the Gittite. And the Ark of God remained with the family of Obededom in his house three months. And the Lord blessed the house of Obededom and all that he had."*

David and the people returned to Jerusalem in sadness to reflect on what had happened. But it was quickly reported and said to the king: *"And it was told king David, saying, the Lord hath blessed the house of Obededom and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the Ark of God."* David understood that he had been at



fault and decided to make better preparations. He prepared a place for the Ark of God, and pitched a tent for it. And then he said, *"None ought to carry the Ark of God but the Levites: for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the Ark of God, and to minister unto Him forever."*

The preparations were more solemn and more orderly than the other time. David gathered all Israel together to Jerusalem; he assembled also the children of Aaron and the Levites. He called for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Absaiah, and Joel, Shemaiah, and Eliel, and Amminadab, and said unto them, *"Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites: sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the Ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the Ark of the Lord God of Israel."* Take note of the phrase *"sanctified themselves"* which leads us to think of the purity which must always accompany and precede our actions, especially those that refer to our direct service to the Lord.

*"And the children of the Levites bore the Ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord."* The Ark had to rest on human shoulders! The choirs of singers were appointed. Quite possibly the twenty-fourth psalm was composed for this occasion and precisely for the



entrance of the Ark into Jerusalem: *“Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.”*

Special players blew the trumpets before the Ark of God. *“So David, and the elders of Israel and the captains over thousands went up to bring up the Ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obedom with joy.”* Although not everyone carried the Ark on their shoulders everyone felt as though they partook in its transport. *“And when those who were carrying the Ark of the Lord had taken six steps David sacrificed a bullock and a ram. And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bore the Ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they offered seven bullocks and seven rams.”* A sacrifice for every six steps and a greater sacrifice when the Lord permitted the tired Levites to stop. Thus everything inspired solemnity and reverence and the way in which the Ark was carried was being sprinkled with the blood of abundant sacrifice offered with joy, with songs and trumpet sounds.

*“And David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, and all the Levites that bore the Ark, and the singers; David also had upon him an ephod of linen.”* David was not dressed royally but intermingled with the others. *“Thus all Israel brought up the Ark of the covenant of the Lord with*

*shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals, making a noise with psalteries and harps. And David danced before the Lord with all his might.*" With this solemnity, never showing tiredness, rather with an increasing enthusiasm they reached Jerusalem and set up the Ark in the sanctuary prepared for it, passing under the house of king David.

But there is no calm day that doesn't have a cloud; in the midst of that universal joy a strident note did not delay in making itself heard. They had reached the window of the king's house. Michal, her head lightly bowed, was looking out a window at the king, spying his movements while on her beautiful and cold features there hovered a scornful, sneering smile. Thus she was looking at David who was dancing with all his might in the presence of the Lord. But the cold smile, even if noticed, did not impede the progress and did not affect the happy procession. "Thus", that is, always feasting, *"they brought in the Ark of the Lord and set it in its place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts."* Afterward he dispensed food among all the people: *"And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well as to the women as to the men, to everyone a loaf of bread and some roasted meat and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed everyone to his house.*

*Then David returned to bless his household.*” But here an unpleasant surprise awaited him.

The queen Michal came out to meet him. She had impatiently waited for him. Finally, when she saw him returning and moving lively, she could no longer refrain from going out to meet him, and, before saying anything to him she stopped him with a meaningful motion of her head accompanied by an ironic and scornful smile. David stopped and Michal stopped. Then Michal, lifting her head haughtily, said slowly to him: *“How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows uncovereth himself!”* And the last word was accompanied by a gesture of her hand and an always more cold and scornful smile. David did not lose courage but had a quick response for her: *“It was before the Lord, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over all the people of the Lord, over Israel: therefore will I play before the Lord. And I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be base in my own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honor.”*

Overall, a noble answer, except, in our opinion, for one point in which it would have been better for David to be silent; that *“your father, and all his house.”* But this shows us that no one, not even in the moments when one is closest to the Lord, has the right control of the tongue. The sum of the words reveals David as a man of the Lord, that every joy came from Him. *“I will yet be more*

*vile than thus.*” But that which you call debasement is not such. The answer closed the queen’s mouth, but did not pull out one word of excuse or penitence from her, because queen Michal was indeed far from having her heart toward God like David. The holy scripture adds a brief comment: *“Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.”* We permit ourselves to say another word about Michal and then we will no longer mention her.

Those who read about the bold and genial manner that the young princess Michal showed her love for David may be led to judge that that love must have been a great fortune for David; but those who think so are far from the truth. Michal had indeed fallen in love with David, conqueror of the Philistines. But between Michal and David there was an abyss – a lack of a common ideal. A common ideal is the only base on which great friendships can rest. David was the man after God’s heart; Michal, on the other hand, was a distinguished woman, a woman of the world. Therefore, harmony between the two could not last. Something of this not intimate accord can be seen starting from the first years of their marriage and can be surmised rather than read from David’s first flight; therefore we send the reader to chapter 5 of this book – David, the man after God’s heart, did not find in Michal the woman who would share his ideals. One misfortune brings another. When the serious temptations came, the heart of David, where family was concerned was empty; and a first step was followed by several. We certainly recognize one of David’s passions because of the

polygamy and sensuality; but we will not neglect to reveal the circumstances of his life and having tied himself at an early age to a soul who did not understand him and could not understand him.

Shall we excuse David? No, as God did not excuse him, and David did not excuse himself; rather, later on he accused himself. But it is justice that the one who studies lives of men should look deeply into the soul as much as possible, as only in this way can it be reasoned how some, in spite of great falls and severe counsels, may in the end be blessed by the Lord.

## Chapter 18

### The Two Houses

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 7

*“And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies, that the Lord said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God stays in a tent.”* “I” – *“the Ark of God.* David felt how unbecoming this contrast was, and was reprimanding himself for not having prepared a suitable house for the Ark. The prophet Nathan answered promptly: *“Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the Lord is with thee.”* However, that response by Nathan, however reasonable it may have seemed was dictated solely by human prudence. *“And it came to pass that night that the word of the Lord came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the Lord, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?”* Thus the word of God overturned the impulsive one of the prophet. The fact that David himself remembered some other thing told him by the

prophet Nathan from the Lord is worthy of note. In 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 22:8 we read these words repeated by David to Solomon: *“But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build a house to my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.”* Therefore: *“Shalt thou build me”*- take note of that *“thou”*- *“a house for me to dwell in?”*

And the Lord continued to speak to Nathan: *“Whereas I have not dwelled in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why have you not built me a house of cedar? Now therefore so shall you say unto my servant David, Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name like the name of the great ones of the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for my*

*people Israel, and will plant them so that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them anymore, as formerly, from the time I appointed judges to be over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that He will make you a house. And when your days are fulfilled, and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth out of your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him...and your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you: your house shall be established forever.”*

This word of God to Nathan upset entirely the advice of the man, and was aiming at a very wide horizon. As soon as it was day the prophet hastened to go to the king to tell him that the day before they had taken counsel too inconsiderately to build a house to the Lord. “According to all



*these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David."*

David did not get irritated by the disappointment and listened to the message of the prophet with silence and with respect. But it was too vast and profound to comprehend in one moment and therefore, after having listened he withdrew in a place apart "*and sat before the Lord*" in the state of a receptive soul, open to the voice of the Divine One, ready to listen to God. In the attitude of adoration and holy desire to be illumined, David meditated on the words of Nathan one by one. And we will follow him in his reflections for a moment.

David was smitten by all of the message. The words "*thou hast shed much blood*" remained impressed on his memory, and were the first of which he reminded Solomon. He thought of how God had identified Himself with His people Israel, not having a fixed dwelling. David reflected in his recollection to Solomon that God had taken him from the pasture – from following the sheep; and thought that above him, in God, Israel had the true Shepherd. Then he began to meditate on the second part of the message that

referred to the future, and here the words of the prophet must have seemed obscure at first – God Himself would build a place for the people, and would let them dwell in His house. Therefore, Israel was not yet in its own house, and it had not been built, notwithstanding the victories of David and the seizure of Jerusalem. They would have rest from all the enemies: this had to refer to another kingdom, very different from that of men, and David had the distant vision of the Messianic kingdom. Then the words: “*The Lord will make a house for you*” must have seemed more profound to him. David believed he had the house. He said “*I dwell in a house of cedar*” but neither that one nor similar ones was the house of which God was speaking. The house of cedar did indeed perish.

And even more profound was the promise that He would raise up a descendant after him. This could not be any of his sons, it had to be after him, but it had to be someone who proceeded out of his bowels. By means of this future person God would establish his kingdom. Therefore even the kingdom in which David believed himself secure was unstable. Outside of the promise, therefore, he had neither a house nor a kingdom that was secure. David had to reflect that all that which he

had believed to be glorious and sure was only temporary in comparison to this promise of the Lord. It had been as if to say to him: Look for another house, another kingdom; I will establish them.

And then the other prophecy: "*He ( David's descendant ) shall build a house for my name.*" What house was this – of wood, of stone? Did David have the vision of the faithful elect in the Messiah who would establish the temple of the Lord? God would establish the throne of this descendant permanently. He would be his father, and he would be His son. "*If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men.*" What do these words mean, that such a descendant would perhaps stain himself with iniquity? No, they mean that sins of others would be attributed to this descendant; he would become iniquity for others and the punishment would be vicarious. Did David then see, even faintly, the sufferings of the Messiah for the sins of others? Then the promise: "*my mercy shall not depart from him*", and then: "*Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you.*" Another would be king, not David, but the future descendant, and this king would never die, and the kingdom would

see no end in the sight of David. Therefore David must have had to live in that distant epoch; therefore there was a plan of God of which he had yet no thought and the present was only a weak image of a glorious future.

Would David then live? And if not living what about those promises "*before you?*" If the descendant was far off, David would be underground. Therefore, in order for the prophecy to have effect for him he would have to return from the dead. Did David see resurrection? And if he did not see it, how could he accept the message of Nathan? He saw it, the whole of his words tells us so. All this and other meditations had to pass through David's mind while he was repeating the words of the prophet that constituted a pact that God was making with him and for him with his descendants and with Israel. And after having meditated, he spoke thus to the Lord: "*Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God; but Thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? And what more can David say unto thee? For Thou, Lord God, knowest Thy*

*servant...For Thou hast confirmed to Thyself Thy people Israel to be a people unto Thee forever: and Thou, Lord, art become their God. And now, O Lord God, the word that Thou hast spoken concerning Thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it forever, and do as Thou hast said. And let the house of Thy servant David be established before Thee. For Thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to Thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto Thee."*

The grandiose promises of the Lord had emboldened David to pray as he was praying: and he continued; *"And now, O Lord God, Thou art that God, and Thy words be true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto Thy servant: Therefore now let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may continue forever before Thee: for Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it: and with Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed forever."*

David had heard with reverence the command not to build temples and he had received a great recompense. There was a house to be built; a

distant one and a close one, the distant one to be built by the Messiah, and the close one by the son of David, Solomon, a peaceful type of the Messiah. David had to renounce this material edifice; God looked in his heart and accepted the intention. It is a painful experience, but useful, when God declines our service. David had had a great cathedral in his heart and God measured it by the good intentions. Solomon, later on, will build, and David had had the design. But the design of David was not of less value than the work of Solomon.

However, the vision of David had to be based not on the material house that would be built, but on the whole of the message of the prophet who made him see from a distance another kingdom and another house which would have no end.

## Chapter 19

## Mephibosheth

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 8 and 9

By this time David was in the height of glory and fortune. Chapter 8 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Samuel is a rapid summary of victories and conquests. The Philistines, the hereditary and feared enemies of Israel are conquered and abased; the Moabites were subjected and made to pay tribute; Hadadezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah was smitten and thus the country up to the river Euphrates was reduced to obedience. The Syrians of Damascus were conquered. The Lord preserved David wherever he went. A great part of the booty was brought to Jerusalem; *“David took the gold shields that were carried by the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem.”* Other kings from afar, in order to gain his friendship sent him gifts which he consecrated to the Lord. Although he was busy with wars, David did not neglect good government. *“David reigned over all Israel and David administered justice and equity to all his people. Joab, son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud was recorder; Zadok, son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was the scribe; and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David’s sons were priests.”*

When David had brought peace to the kingdom he began to turn his thoughts to the internal care of the country, and among the first was this: *“And David said, Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I may show kindness for Jonathan’s sake? And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him to David, the king said to him, Are you Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there anyone remaining of the house of Saul to whom I may show the kindness of God? Take note, “kindness of God.” If there was kindness, David attributed it to God. “And Ziba said to the king, Jonathan has a son who is crippled in both feet.” Jonathan! At this name the king’s heart was touched and he added solicitously: “Where is he? And Ziba said to the king, He is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel in Lodebar. Then king David sent and brought him from the house of Machir.”*

The first mention of this unfortunate prince appears in the scripture as a parenthesis; in chapter 4 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of Samuel, on the occasion of the debasement of Ishbosheth, almost as if to tell us that all was going upside-down for the house of Saul. The brief clause obligates us to look back to those dark hours of the defeat and death of Saul and his three sons. Jonathan had left at home a son who was five years old, his only child, perhaps a beautiful and vigorous child. On the unlucky day of the defeat of Gilboa, he was in the care of a nurse, unaware of the destiny overhanging the entire family. And lo, she saw a messenger arriving in haste who appeared to be a bearer of bad news. Run, he cried to her,



run and put the child in a safe place. The king is dead and Jonathan is dead. Run! Perhaps it was someone who had fought next to Jonathan, and had taken to heart the prayer to have the little son placed in a safe place. The frightened nurse quickly took the child in her arms and began to run. But, poor woman, at a certain point, whether it was terror that prostrated her or tiredness and the weight, she let the child fall from her arms. The child became crippled from the fall. The horizon of that child had become dark in one moment. Without father, without family and also crippled; if an opportunity remained to him in life, he had lost it by being deformed, unsuited now for the kingdom or the priesthood, which required a healthy man with sound limbs.

Where had he been sheltered? Where did this unhappy one live? East of the Jordan at Lodebar, in the house of one called Machir. It is impossible to identify the place, and we know nothing of Machir; but this man accomplished an extraordinary act in taking a crippled and abandoned prince – and Mephibosheth ( thus was the prince named ) lived by the charity of another. The little crippled one on the other side of the Jordan grew up between the knowledge of his own misery and the sad story of his family, perhaps worried that one day he would pay the penalty with his head for having the blood of the house of Saul in his veins.

Several years passed. One day there arrived in Lodebar a messenger who announced that he came from Jerusalem, from the king, in search of Mephibosheth, the crippled

young man. The news was quickly brought to Mephibosheth who was perhaps poorly dressed. You are wanted in Jerusalem, they said to him. Mephibosheth felt terror and shame. What do they want of me?, he thought, but as best he could, he hastened to obey. Bashfully, he arrived trembling in the royal city and in the palace of the king. All were looking at him as he was passing as in a dream. The king will see you soon, and Mephibosheth was trembling as he was not ignorant of how the Oriental kings are tyrants and exterminate all the family of a sovereign whose place they have occupied. In one of the royal rooms they made him lie down on a footstool; a door opened and the king entered. Mephibosheth was not able to rise up in order to prostrate himself, and he let himself fall to the ground, on his face, and prostrated himself and remained like a rag before David.

Mephibosheth! Mephibosheth! It was the voice of the king who was calling him in a loving and merciful tone. The king was calling his name; and he had thought that no one in Jerusalem would care to call him by name. Mephibosheth, at the sound of David's voice and hearing his own name felt courage rise in him and found the words: "*Behold your servant!*" In the meantime a strong hand lifted him up. "*And David said to him, Fear not, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather and you will eat bread at my table continually.*" The cripple believed he was dreaming; he was afraid of finding death, and instead he was encountering favor and riches – "*For the sake of*

*Jonathan.*” He must have heard many times of the goodness of his father, but never had he heard so much tenderness as now. Only the name of Jonathan gave him, a cripple, entrance to the house of the king, a fortune and the permission to eat at the royal table.

And bowing down all he could say was: *“What is your servant, that you should look upon a dead dog such as I am?”* But by now he felt reassured because he could hear echoing in his ear those tender words: *“For the sake of Jonathan, your father.”*

*“Then the king called to Ziba, Saul’s servant, and said to him, I have given to your master’s grandson all that pertained to Saul and to all his house. You and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and you shall bring in the produce, that your master’s grandson may have food to eat; but Mephibosheth your master’s grandson shall eat bread always at my table. Then Ziba said to the king: According to all that the lord my king has commanded his servant so shall your servant do.”*

Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Micha. We can see now how the family of Jonathan did not perish, and as recorded in the book of Chronicles, had a great posterity.

*“So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king’s table and was lame on both his feet.”*

There has passed before our eyes a picture of misery and of pity which makes us think of our condition and of the grace of the Lord Jesus. Mephibosheth was expecting nothing for himself. He called himself a “dead dog”, but he benefited for the sake of Jonathan his father. Thus God regards us in Jesus Christ. It was not Mephibosheth who sought after David because he was afraid and ashamed. It was not we who sought for God, but it was He, that while we were dead, sought for us and sent His Son for us. Not only was Mephibosheth reassured that he had nothing to fear, but he benefited greatly. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ has not only said to us: Fear not, but has enriched us with His life, He has called us to a continued communion with Him, and has prepared for us a place of honor near Him in the kingdom of heaven.

## Chapter 20

## Uriah the Hittite – Bathsheba

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 11

Allow us to begin this chapter with a few words that Garlanda, one of the sharp researchers of William Shakespeare, writes in his comment on Antony and Cleopatra:

*“A weak point, a small fault, which upon enlarging itself a little at a time, at the time in which he ( Antony ) rests in his triumph will drag him to the bottom.”* In the walls of a solemn, majestic edifice at times there runs a vein, a thin fissure, almost invisible to the eye of a superficial observer that threatens the solidarity; one fine day, by an unexpected shaking, the grandiose edifice crumbles and is broken up.

*“...When the wars have ended, when Antony is resting oblivious and serene, secure in the midst of the glory, among the seductions of power, the attractions of leisure, a woman who is voluptuous and passionate presents herself, a type of woman who seems made to order to make a conquest of someone of a rich nature. Antony was forty-five years old. Mature in years, tired perhaps of political and military exploits, passion was ready to clutch him with the strongest of all forces. In this story lies the destiny of many lives that are ruined by a sweet temptation or soporific allurement.”*

Chapter 10 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel is another exposition of David's victories. David had arrived at the climax of his career; his is a vast empire and his enemies are subjugated; great riches have been brought to Jerusalem, where elegant palaces have risen. David's army was always victorious and he had trusted men in charge; the people were enthusiastic and everyone loved David. One must acknowledge that David, with an irresistible army was never tempted to abolish the constitution. Other kings, in positions less prosperous than his, had demanded adoration. But David was tempted in other things. Prosperity has its dangers more so than misfortune.

The bible does not hide the sins of its heroes. The brevity in speaking of the victories of David over his enemies and the precise tragic exposition of the sin that he committed is noteworthy. Already, several times, in the course of this story, we have noted brief parentheses, like glimpses that let us read into the heart of David; simple hints to one of his principal temptations – sensuality. We have read that David increased the number of his wives. Now these parentheses become broader. Up to now the continual situations and dangers have kept us from knowing entirely the weak side of the man. But with the throne assured, with his name more illustrious, and with the resulting prosperity, the brief parentheses open up in chapter 11 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, one of the most tragic and dark chapters in the bible.

It is noteworthy that even the best of men commit the most serious errors in the midday of their lives: the morning and the evening are tranquil. David is now in full midday at about the fiftieth year of a rich and abundant life.

*“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go forth to battle, David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.”*

David sent; he himself stayed in Jerusalem. Idleness, dangerous to everyone, is fatal for rich and generous natures. In David's periods of activity and dangers nothing is recorded that might be greatly detrimental to him. If his life had ended here it would perhaps have been less instructive, but his character would have come out as more upright.

One evening, and precisely at the vespertine hour, David rose from his bed. The scripture is precise in describing this behavior of an idle and comfortable life. Having risen from his bed, David walked on the roof of the king's house and allowed his idle and satisfied eyes to look over the beautiful city, and to one in another building, and stopped at one next to the royal palace and saw that which it would have been better to never have seen, or had not stopped to look; he saw, and stopped to look, to contemplate a woman who was immodestly washing herself without the due precautions. This woman had a very beautiful appearance.

*“And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, This is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”* By the description which David had given, the servants understood she was none other than the well-known beauty Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

Uriah the Hittite was an official of the “Gibborim”, or the group of valiant men that had residence on the slope of Mt. Zion, immediately under the royal palace. He was one of those who had joined David in the difficult times and had risked their lives for him many times. The Hittite was a stranger, but because of great admiration for David he had adopted the Hebrew religion and nationality. This man loved his wife tenderly, as can be understood from the first lines of the following chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. At the name of Uriah the Hittite every indecent thought should have fallen from the mind of David; but there remained in his heart the influence of that long glance and for that reason the name that at another time would be heard with esteem had no effect at all on him this time.

*“And David sent messengers and took her.”* An act of an Oriental despot. The Bible, the only book that knows how to say everything, is not silent about the consequences of that sending and taking her to his house. And it tells us how David sent to call Uriah the Hittite and the schemes he used to make the faithful official go home; but knowing that the Ark, and Judah and Joab and others were living in tents, Uriah refused to go to his



house. Then a sinister thought entered into the mind of David. He would never have suspected that he would come to such a point; but Satan knows how to use his artifices; he never proposes initially that which would frighten us and he knows how to enter the heart, and that little by little, he must harden the timid conscience against the horror of the crime. Satan does not attack boldly at first, like the lion, but lies in wait like the serpent. Vice has its progress as does virtue. The David resolved to do away with Uriah the Hittite. *“David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.”*

*“And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and then draw back from him that he may be struck down and die.”* He would die, but by the hand of the enemies. David gave that counsel and was not ashamed to unmask himself to Joab. The same hand that devotedly wrote the Psalms then wrote those lines. Uriah, faithful servant, hid the letter in his bosom and brought it to the general. Joab was devoted to David and, unfortunately, carried out the wicked order to the letter. Since Joab had the city under siege he put Uriah in a place where he knew there were valiant men. *“The men of the city went out and fought with Joab and there fell some of the people... (others were also involved in the ruin! )...of the servants of David and Uriah the Hittite died also. Then Joab sent and told David all the news concerning the war and instructed the messenger saying: When you have finished telling the king all the news about the fighting, then, if the king’s anger rises, and if he says to you, Why did you go so near the city to*

*fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? Why did you go so near the wall? Then you shall say, Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also."*

*"So the messenger went, and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. The messenger said to David, The men prevailed against us and came out against us in the field and we drove them back to the entrance to the gate. Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall; some of the king's servants are dead and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also."*

Uriah the Hittite! It was the end of the message that David was waiting for. He answered quickly: *"Thus shall you say to Joab, Do not let this thing trouble you, for the sword devours now one, and now another. Press your attack on the city, and overthrow it; and encourage him."* Uriah the Hittite had died as a hero in the place of the greatest danger and he had gone there without discussion, in obedience to his general, happy to give his life in devotion to his king, perhaps dying with the king's name on his lips. David, who had cried upon being notified of others who had died, had only joy for the death of one of his most devoted servants.

*"And when the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband."* It was the rite of mourning that lasted seven days. It is not said that she felt pain, but it is referred that she did not fail to fulfill what the proprieties required. She knew what would happen, and in fact *"when the mourning was passed,"*

that is, hardly seven days had passed “*David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son.*”

Many times our actions may not be approved by the Lord, and often they are not approved; we commit many errors, but there is one at the end, a precise sin, more delineated than the others, that wounds God’s heart more. David had made many mistakes, but this time he had filled up the measure. “*He took her to his house, she became his wife, and bore him a son.*”

“*But*”- and this is one of the great “*Buts*” of the bible: “*But the thing that David had done ( the version of the Seventies adds “in the presence of the Lord”) – But this thing that he had done displeased the Lord.*”

## Chapter 21

## The Prophet Nathan

*“And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.”*

We meet this important person on three prominent occasions of David's life. We have already spoken about when David wanted to build a house to the Lord; we should speak of him when we speak of David's extreme old age; and we will speak of him in the present chapter. The meeting that we have already had with Nathan and the other one that we will have at the time of the conspiracy of one of the sons of the king makes us guess him to be younger than David and an enthusiast of the king. But now we meet a man who towers over kings, and such a giant before whom David, for a moment, appears as a pygmy.

Perhaps two years had passed since the death of Uriah the Hittite; two years without repentance and without pardon in which David's rest had been broken, sometimes by distressing dreams and hours of tumult and agitation. David had become irritable, as though a salty humor was running in his veins. But he had not repented about the deed of Uriah. He had taken other wives before and thought to let the taking of Bathsheba pass like the others, notwithstanding the aggravating circumstances that had accompanied it. He had a son by Bathsheba and the shrewd woman knew how to put him in line for the throne. Therefore guilty hopes came together again on

the head of that little child while David was numbing his conscience and trying to suffocate the harassing thoughts when they tormented him. In the meantime, David's friends knew and kept silence, because there was no one who dared to accost the king who had reached the height of his glory, to speak to him, even indirectly, of the unfortunate Uriah the Hittite. Nathan also was silent. But one night the prophet was not able to sleep; a distinct voice was telling him that he could not go in and out of the royal palace and remain indifferent to the sin of the king; and with the voice came a direct command to go that very morning, Ambassador of God, to the sinner David. He had to take a very unpleasant step toward a man full of glory and very much loved. But Nathan was not in doubt. God was sending him and was ordering him to break the silence.

We are not always the same; Nathan had entered the palace other times, but that morning it was he who seemed to be the sovereign. The wake of the night, the communion of the Lord, the knowledge of a very high and difficult mandate had impressed upon his slightly flushed countenance a great firmness that rendered his countenance more solemn. As soon as he arrived before the king, Nathan made David understand that he had something important to communicate to him, and imposed, rather than obtained, a prompt and respectful audience.

Without preamble he began to speak, looking squarely at the king. He said: *"There were two men in one city; the*

*one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb which he had bought. He bought it and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him.*" The description of the relationship between the poor man and the ewe lamb was well-sculpted by the words of the prophet. "*But the poor man.*" There was a difference between the much of the rich man, obtained easily and without exertion, and the little of the poor man. "*One little ewe lamb, which he had bought*" – which leads us to think of painful sacrifices. And precisely because it was alone and bought the poor man nourished it, raised it and kept it as a daughter. There are nice lambs, raised and called by name. This is the contrast: the rich man many, the poor man only one ewe lamb. And now listen: Pronouncing the words slowly, Nathan added: "*And there came a traveler to the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to prepare for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.*" The emotional voice of the prophet became softer and ended in silence, but his eyes continued to question David. There was no interrogation in the words, but Nathan's bearing was worth a deep interrogation. Nathan was not demanding a sentence for justice, yet it was evident that justice was needed. The prophet kept silent and waited.

David listened attentively and at the conclusion of the brief episode he exploded in anger. "*David's anger was*

*greatly kindled.*” Take note of that “*kindled*” which makes us think that that impetus of anger was not entirely spontaneous. Yes, the anger was there, but kindled also by the will of David. And he said to Nathan: “*As the Lord lives, the man that has done this deserves to die.*” Now, forasmuch as the episode was moving, and there was an implicit emotional appeal for justice, precisely because justice was needed and not vengeance, that sentence of the death penalty was excessive. No law of the people of Israel threatened death for a like case. One had only to repay four for one; and David showed that he knew the law, because he added: “*And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.*”

It is noteworthy how unreformed sinners are severe; God deliver us from their judgment! David did not have a peaceful conscience and must have trembled at every occasion that someone might put the finger on the dark secret of his heart. Perhaps the presence of Nathan disquieted him that morning. But when he thought that the course of the conversation was quite far from his secret terrors, he felt reassured. Then precisely because that case was being referred to him in a moving way, he wanted to give it more weight, and with excessive zeal for the Lord... “*As the Lord liveth*”... David believed he would suffocate his own conscience. There are men who would like to occupy themselves about everything and everyone, except their own sin; hence the anger, and hence the vindictive sentence, which had to cover the



voice of his very heart: "*The man that has done this deserves to die.*"

And David believed he had shown zeal and had satisfied Nathan; but he must have been aware that the prophet had not finished but that with the patience with which he had presented the case an explosion was reserved for the end. Upon hearing the sentence, the countenance of Nathan which had been emotionally moved became severe and hard. The prophet stood up on his feet, fixed his inflamed and piercing eye on the eye of the king, stretched out his arm, raised his index finger and with an accent which must have possessed a metallic vigor and sharpness, he said: "*Thou art the man.*" And after a brief pause which served to allow the words to penetrate to the very marrow, Nathan continued: *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house; for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall*



*lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun."*

The savage cry of the giant Goliath, the persecutions of Saul, the past dangers all appeared as nothing before the tragic greatness of the language of the prophet, unarmed and yet so powerful. David felt as if he had been hit by lightning, and in one moment he saw the horror of the state in which he found himself. It is to his credit that David had not even one word for the threatened punishment. Saul and other sinners had not been concerned, nor will they be concerned except to ask that the punishment be dismissed; but David did not look at the punishment, but to the offense against the Lord. He did not seek excuses, nor did he cite the example of kings near or far from him; nor did he seek for one in the history of the ancient patriarchs of his people to find extenuating circumstances for the sin; but he saw only himself and his own conscience in the light of that message; and he covered his face with his hands, and between sobs he found strength only to cry out: "*I have sinned against the Lord*" and continued to cry.

And, wonderfully, the demeanor of the prophet then quickly changed. And Nathan hastened to exclaim: "*The Lord has put away your sin.*" Take note of the passage of time. The cry of the penitent one had not yet risen from his heart to his lips, that God listened and pardoned. God always listens to the cry of the penitent sinner. Of all

the appeals made to Jesus, the cry of the lepers found Him more ready, leprosy being a symbol of sin.

*"He deserves to die"*, David said, for a case that, in truth, as put forth by Nathan, did not deserve death. *"Thou shall not die"*, God said to a man who deserved death, but God is not a man.

There was contrition in the heart of David. Otherwise, only saying *"I have sinned,"* the saying of it would have no value for him. Contrition assumes faith, and David had faith deeper than the sin. Others would have thought: it is too much; let happen what will happen, and like so many sinners would have gone farther away from God. But David saw God greater than his fall. That was the highest proof of faith in his life and reveals to us that the man had learned to know God and therefore, in that decisive moment he knew how to find Him again.

*"The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die."* Blessed and glorious Lord! However, the prophet had not finished. *"Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die."*

The mercy of the Lord ought not to be at the expense of a good example. The punishment was needed to prevent those who would have liked to find in the case of David, and still today there are many who would like to find occasion to curse God. And the closest punishment was in direct relation to the sin. The important thing was the

*“you shall not die.”* The punishments are for this world, and it is good for us that they are. *“The child that is born to you shall die.”* Nathan’s commission was finished. He hastened to withdraw. *“And Nathan went to his house.”*

And the scripture continues: *“And the Lord struck the child...and it was very sick.”* A language that is alive and contrasting, that almost lets us hear at the same time the decreasing sound of Nathan’s footsteps and the wailing of the child who became sick at that very moment without hope of healing.

## Chapter 22

## The Death of the Child

Miserere2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 12:15 – 25. Psalm 51

God knows our hearts; He knows that generous souls would prefer to suffer themselves rather than see others suffer the consequences of sins they have committed. For some problems we cannot have the solution in this life and know why the sin of the father sometimes causes the innocent child to suffer. There is a compensation in the beyond; moreover, the death of a child, while it is punishment for the parent, is salvation for the child himself.

The prophet Nathan left and the child became sick with no hope of recovery. David was the only one in the kingdom who knew the reason for that sickness, so that while others were lovingly working hard around the bed of the little innocent one, he knew that his place was before the Lord from Whom alone he could hope for healing. That child was doubly loved because he had come to David when he was already well on in years, and because he was destined to the throne; and David was struck precisely in that little idol.

He did not doubt that Nathan had spoken by the will of God, but at the same time he had a long experience with

the mercy of the Lord and hoped that the prayer would change the destiny of that innocent one. *“David therefore pleaded with God for the child; David fasted, and went in and lay all night on the ground.”* He stayed in the room adjoining that of the little sick one, prostrated himself on the earth, fasted, and amid silent tears began to pray. The infirmity lasted seven days, and they were seven days of a slow and measured agony. The wailing of the little son was heard by the ear of the father; he heard each cry and the cries found an echo in his heart. And each one seemed to have a thousand voices that were crying out David’s crime to him. And so it went, day and night, with the tragedy of Uriah the Hittite before him. At a certain moment the wailing seemed to be transformed into the death-rattle of a man, those of the dying warrior, alone and abandoned on the battlefield. The heart of David was enveloped and squeezed on every side by a cloud of pain. In this state the best place that he knew was to *“lay... upon the earth,”* or as we can read between the lines, staying on the ground. He fasted day and night before God, persistently asking for healing for his son. The child was in agony and the father was agonizing in the next room.

This torment lasted seven days and, for David, it had the value of the penitence of centuries. It would have been better for David if he himself had groaned on a bed of suffering or to have faced grave dangers, rather than to remain in the dust unable to help while he could hear his conscience crying out to him: *“the cause of that wailing is your sin – Uriah the Hittite, Uriah the Hittite.”* Those

who have been the cause of the suffering of some loved person can, in part, understand the soul of David, sinner and penitent.

At the end the child stopped moaning and entered into a slow, last agony. David no longer heard him, but knew from the movement in the house that he was not yet dead, and therefore he still had hope. But suddenly David noticed a solemn quiet, that immediate and holy one that happens at the last breath of a moribund person, before the announcement is made to those who have lost him. The family was afraid to tell him. While the child was alive he had refused all comfort of food or words. Who would dare to announce to him: the child is dead? And they were coming and going, looking at each other and whispering among themselves. David understood. From the silence, interrupted by the slight whispering he understood that the child was dead, and like one to whom any announcement is superfluous, with dry eyes and a calm voice he asked the servants: "The child is dead? — Yes, he is dead."

He said not a word, did not lament nor did he shed a tear; he seemed to be another man. *"Then David rose from the ground, washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Lord and worshipped, he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate."* It would have been useless to consume himself in sorrow; there were great duties that he wanted to confront in a firm way. There is no other word on his sorrow. He sealed it

in the depths of his heart, never to speak of it to anyone and never to let it come out. The servants were unable to hide their amazement: *“What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died you rose and ate food.”*

And David answered: *“While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and 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.”*

In great sorrows there are special enlightenments; and David, at the death of his child, had another vision of the resurrection. Indeed, it would have been a vain comfort to tell himself that he too would go into the grave. He accepted the punishment and bowed his head, but he saw the beyond. There are revelations that are difficult to put into words, but David knew what was enough for him. The shepherd had taken the lamb and brought it to the other side of the river; the sheep had to follow him.

Permit us a reflection here: What sorrow did the death of Jesus Christ on the cross cost to God? David's child was innocent; and Jesus had not committed any sin. O father, learn how to know the sorrow of Your Father!

The same soil on which the greatest passions grow produces the greatest virtues. By reason of this, David is called the great penitent. His merit consists in having a grandiose faith in the darkest hour of life. He knew the

magnitude of the sin, but knew that the mercy of God was greater than the sin and it is never too much what one can expect to receive from His hands. Now for David to have faith in that extreme hour proves that above every sentiment and every remorse there was profoundly, in the depths of his heart, the sense of God's love. Others would have said: It is too much; how can I dare to appear again before the throne of mercy? How can I pray? But David prayed.

When did David write the Miserere? Perhaps after the death of the child; but perhaps its content came to him during those seven days of agony. The silence had not helped him. His own inward parts resented it; he had to give forth a cry of penitence and of trust. He could not be silent, and he was not silent. And the Miserere is a masterpiece of confession of sin and of trust in God.

With his memory, David returned to the past deeds of his life; to the transgressions for which he had not always answered to the purpose of the Lord; to the iniquities and rebellions, and, thrust in the middle of everything, in the center, with such dark and precise particulars, that last sin. And with the last sin, the whole of the guilt and transgression accumulated and formed "his sin."

He saw the abyss he was in; he saw the greatness of God. He did not promise anything, but cried: "*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. We*



cannot blot them out; they are written with indelible ink; only God can. There is no excuse, no extenuating circumstances. David is responsible, without excuse. The only right he has is the mercy of God.

And then this prayer: "*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*" A painful method. Wash me means more than cleaning the surface. It means to wash the material in which a thousand impurities have entered into the fabric. The laundry people put the cloths on a stone and beat them with a mallet. Wash me. This is an important prayer; the most intense cry is for holiness and not for pardon. Wash me thoroughly. Trust in the character of God. This is the greatness of true penitence: the certainty of God's love is the condition of our penitence. "*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You alone, have I sinned.*" And yet he had offended men. But any offense against a fellow man is, after all, rebellion to God. "*Behold, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.*" Behold: look with attention, O sinner, and learn. "*You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*" This man aspires no less than to be clean and white, and whiter than snow! This can seem to be too much, but let us keep in mind that he expects it from God. "*Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.*" He asks for joy, and to feel gladness. Is the criminal not content to receive pardon and to withdraw in silence? No, after the fall,

after having committed the greatest sins and after the greatest penitence, David asks for the greatest gifts. It is never too much to appeal to the mercy of God; one can never ask enough.

*“Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.”* That eye, that eye of God that sees me. *“Hide your face.”* But he is afraid that he will offend God again. Thus we are afraid, and we offend Him, after having been forgiven so many times. Therefore: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”* “Clean” is negative, without spots; “right” is positive, it is to do good. It is not enough not to commit sin; it is necessary to do good. And there is more: *“Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.”* Don’t remove your spirit. David remembered Saul who was abandoned by the Lord and prayed not to be abandoned. Let me suffer, but don’t let me be abandoned to myself. He is content to hear that tormenting voice that reprimands him. He trembles that God may abandon him to the tranquility and security of sin; and he wants the sting of penitence. The Holy Spirit sustains the penitent one and leads him back to God.

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation; and sustain in me a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways; and sinners will return to you. Deliver me from bloodshed.”*... That blood!... *“O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice;*

*if I were to give a burnt offering you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”* And he thought of Zion. *“Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.”*

This grandiose psalm has been the consolation of many penitent ones, and its words have been on the agonizing lips of many saints. It leads us to understand and put sin in relation to the mercy of God. The cross teaches us what sin is, and the consciousness of sin teaches us what the cross is.

*“And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon, and the Lord loved him.”* Thus, even from the human point of view, for that which could result in the great aims of the Lord, David had his consolation. And the same prophet went to David. It was Nathan who named the baby Jedidiah ( loved by the Lord ), because of the Lord.

## Chapter 23

## Rebellion of Absalom

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 15

In the course of this story we have made little mention of the family or families of David; but the time has now come to enlarge some of the parentheses that we have met here and there and that seemed out of place or put in at random. We have already mentioned one; it is in 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 3, with regard to the children born to David in Hebron. There were various mothers and many children. Among these, two are noteworthy: Ammon, the firstborn of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; and Absalom, the third son of Maacah, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. Almost all were children of pagan mothers and grew up apart from one another, in separate homes, in different circles. Occupied as David was, and distracted for various reasons, the children did not receive paternal upbringing. David had proved himself great in the kingdom, but weak in his private life. He had sown thorns, and he must reap them. The prophet Nathan had informed David that there would be bloody and shameful scenes in his own family. David prayed for mercy and God did show him mercy; but the ways of God are wonderful, because with salvation, He wants the transformation of the sinner. But transformation often supposes a long and painful process! David prayed: "*Wash me thoroughly*", and God listened to the prayer. David was beginning to grow old and the

years that remained to him would be years of trials and sorrows.

One of the darkest chapters of the Bible is the thirteenth chapter of second Samuel, which is almost a parallel of the other famous chapter that speaks of the duplicate sin of David. It is the incest of Ammon with his sister Tamar. David learned of the scandal and became very angry, but he did not punish his son, because a sinful father is always a weak father. Absalom, full brother of Tamar, decided to avenge her and ordered a great banquet to which he invited all the princes. During the banquet he had his brother killed. Then Absalom fled and went to Geshur. Now David, always too indulgent toward his sons, after the mourning for Ammon was over, was pining to see Absalom; but, watchful of public opinion, he continued, although reluctantly, to keep him distant.

Then Absalom, in accord with the astute Joab, resorted to an artifice. They sent a wise woman of Tekoah to David. She feigned to be mourning for her dead husband and recounted that she had two sons who quarreled and one killed the other. She succeeded in obtaining from David the statement that the killer would not be subject to the avengers of blood. The king said, *"As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."* Then with roundabout expressions the woman made David understand that he had decided a case of his own family. David said to Joab, whose fondness for Absalom he had noted: *"Very well, I grant this: go bring back the young man Absalom."* *"Joab...brought Absalom to Jerusalem."*

*And the king said, Let him go to his own house; he is not to come into my presence.*” Later, the half-measure of punishment was eliminated also because by another intervention by Joab, Absalom was readmitted to the presence of the king. *“And the king kissed Absalom.”*

That was a pardon without penitence and therefore at the expense of justice.

All the probabilities for the kingdom were for Absalom. But Bathsheba had been raised to the very important position of Queen Mother, and because of this, Solomon was the heir; hence the intrigues of the other princesses. But the worst intrigue was that which was made for Absalom, of which we will now speak.

*“After this, Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him.”* Before proceeding, it should be observed how the Bible points out the beauty of Absalom: *“But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty; from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.”* The Bible, which as a rule is not concerned with physical beauty, dwells, and not by chance, on the beauty of Absalom. Beauty without morality is always a cause for ruin.

Absalom was the type of a demagogue, vain, a flatterer, having uncommon tact and discernment. He understood that in order to dazzle the people luxury was needed and that he had to indulge their inclinations. Therefore, for

political aims, he furnished himself with chariots and horses. Owning horses was forbidden even to the kings of Israel as they had to trust in the Lord in battle and not in chariots and horses. Absalom surrounded himself with the luxury of Oriental kings and David did not know how to stop him and thus, without knowing it, David was helping the evil that was growing in that young man. Absalom thought that he had to captivate the soul of the people and, at the expense of his father, he began to do it skillfully.

*“And Absalom used to rise early, and stand beside the road into the gate, and when anyone brought a suit before the king for judgment Absalom would call out and say, From what city are you? When the person said, Your servant is of such and such tribe of Israel, Absalom would say, See, your claims are good and right; but there is no one deputed by the king to hear you.”* And after a melancholic reflection, with a sigh, he would add: *“If only I were judge in the land! Then all men who had a suit or cause might come to me, and I would give them justice.”* He was using a clever scheme saying that he wanted only to be a judge. *“Whenever people came near to him to do obeisance to him he would put out his hand and take hold of them and kiss them. Thus Absalom did to every Israelite who came to the king for judgment.”* Given the charm that he possessed and knew how to use, it is no wonder, that by such behavior, Absalom pierced the hearts of the Israelites because people stop at the outward appearance of things and are not likely to go to the hidden things. The prince waited a little time to make



himself well known and accepted by the majority of Israel.

After four years, Absalom said to the king: *"Please let me go to Hebron and pay the vow that I have made to the Lord."* Meanwhile, Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying: *"As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then shout, Absalom has become king in Hebron."* Then he had the shrewdness to have himself accompanied by two hundred of the chief men of the city; they went without knowing anything of the aims of the prince who used their presence to make an impression on the people. Having arrived in Hebron, Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gibeonite, David's counselor. Ahithophel was a man with a great mind; through his support the conspiracy became powerful, and the followers of Absalom went on increasing in number.

David, as happens to those struck by misfortune, was the last to know of the conspiracy, when it was no longer easy to repress it. He said to his servants: *"Get up! Let us flee, or there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Hurry, or he will soon overtake us, and bring disaster down upon us, and attack the city with the edge of the sword."* It was a tender thought to not want to bring down ruin on the holy city! *"The king's officials said to the king, Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king decides."* In the dark hour the servants proved faithful to David. *"And the king went forth, and all his household after him."* In the flight, without him wanting



it, there came about the selection of the true faithful ones; and with these he left Jerusalem.

It was the darkest hour of the life of the king. Crushed by his own conscience, he was fleeing without knowing what to do. At one point of the march they paused for a break. Six hundred men from Gath presented themselves to him. They were strangers who had become devoted to David. Moved by this, the king said to Ittai the Gittite, *“Why are you also coming with us? Go back and stay with the king; for you are a foreigner and an exile. From your home you came only yesterday, and should I today make you wander about with us while I go wherever I can? Go back, and take your kinsfolk with you; and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you.”*

A beautiful nature is that of David, that in misfortune, he did not want others to be involved in his ruin. But the Philistine captain, with tender devotion and soldierly ardor, intermixing two or three oaths in his answer, said: *“As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.”* Noble devotion and faithfulness, coming from one from whom it was least expected, and which makes us think of the faithfulness of the elect of the Lord Jesus, gathered among the Gentiles, in the midst of increasing unfaithfulness and apostasy! Something in David had impressed those rough but sincere souls!

David did not have the heart to refuse and accepted their service, and from that body of volunteers he formed the advance guard. While the six hundred heroes were passing before the king, he and the people were standing still, and crying with a loud voice. *“The king passed the Wadi Kidron, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.”* It seemed like a funeral procession.

Another pause!

*“And Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the Ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the Ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city.”* The Priests and Levites showed their devotion to David by which they acknowledged the man of the Lord. But the king did not want the Ark with him, and said to the Priest Zadok, *“Carry back the Ark of God into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it, and the place where it stays.* In the raging of the storm one can see David’s heart better. *“He will bring me again.”* *“But if He says, I take no pleasure in you, here I am, let Him do to me what seems good to Him. The king also said to the priest Zadok, Look, go back to the city in peace, you and Abiathar and your two sons. See, I will wait at the fords of the wilderness, until word comes from you to inform me. So Zadok and Abiathar carried the Ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there.”* The Levites and Priests left and they went on their way.

*“And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot.”* That was a great and sad spectacle: Such an illustrious king, conqueror of kingdoms, who being old, driven out by the betrayal of a son, was now running away barefoot and his head covered. The people who were with David also had their heads covered and went up weeping. At the corner of the road he had the last sight of Jerusalem, and here there was a more general and copious weeping.

That pathway of the Mount of Olives would be trodden many times by the solitary Son of Man; in sight of Jerusalem, He would, in a memorable day, weep copiously, not for himself, but for others. But Jesus did not have all the affection that David had. When He went to the cross, only a few women were weeping for Him.

And lo, while they were climbing, someone reported to David: *“Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.”* David felt this new betrayal deeply; but in the extreme abandonment he turned from the earth to heaven, from man to God: *“O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.”* And lo, immediately, comfort beside the sorrow. *“When David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, there came to meet him an old man with his coat torn, and dust on his head.”* He was an ancient and prudent servant, Hushai the Archite. As soon as David saw him, he said: *“If you go with me you will be a burden to me. But if you return to the city, and say to Absalom, I will be your*

*servant, O king, as I have been your father's servant in time past, so now I will be your servant, then you will defeat for me the counsel of Ahithophel.*" Sorrowful condition of the human heart that even in the moments of greatest faith in the Lord, even the best of men can't help but resort to some artifice! David had already asked God to disperse the counsel of Ahithophel. He added, speaking to Hushai: "*The Priests Zadok and Abiathar will be with you there. So whatever you hear from the king's house tell it to the priests Zadok and Abiathar. They have there with them their two sons, Ahimaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them you shall report to me everything that you hear.*" Hushai, faithful servant, hastened to return where the service to the king wanted him.

Just then, with luxury and a beautiful following, Absalom was arriving in Jerusalem without encountering any opposition. In the meantime, David was fleeing. But in the same Jerusalem, together with Absalom, there was arriving a neglected, raggedy and dusty and poor old man. It was Hushai, the faithful servant of David. The rebellious one was arriving trusting in his own power; the old faithful one with his devotion.

## Chapter 24

## Accusations and Maledictions

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 16: 1 – 14

And the procession with David continued: *“When David was a little past the top of the hill, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him with a couple of donkeys saddled, carrying two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred bunches of raisins, one hundred of summer fruits, and a jug of wine. The king said to Ziba, Why have you brought these? And Ziba said, The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride; the bread and summer fruit are for the young men to eat; and the wine is for those to drink who faint in the wilderness.”* David wished to ask about Mephibosheth: *“And where is your master’s son? Ziba said to the king, He remains in Jerusalem; for he said, Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather’s kingdom.”*

It is difficult, even for men of very great intellect, to preserve calmness and good judgment in great misfortunes. At the sad report, David did not know how to apply the consideration of justice toward the unfortunate prince, and hastily answered Ziba: *“All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours. Ziba said, I do obeisance; let me find favor in your sight, my lord the king.”* We have every reason to believe that Ziba was not telling the truth and that he wanted to enrich himself on the misery of his master, because he guessed that the

cause of David would triumph. In promising to Ziba the goods of the family of Saul, which were already given to Mephibosheth, David showed himself inconsiderate and ungrateful to the memory of Jonathan. But we must recognize that only Jesus never lost the right measure of justice in the most tragic hours of His life.

After that incident passed, after a short time another occurred as soon as the king reached Bahurim. Now precisely at Bahurim many years ago another sorrowful event took place. It was to Bahurim that Phaltiel, the second husband of Michal, was able to accompany her with many tears and had separated from her forever. It appears that Phaltiel loved Michal very much, and, strictly for political reasons, she was sent back to David. There is a retributive providence even in the places where certain events happen. They had arrived at Bahurim when, lo there appears at the top of the hill the figure of an irritated man. ... "*Shimei, son of Gera, came out cursing.*" A tradition, to which we do not know how much weight to assign would like to identify him with Nebat, father of Jeroboam. The long and repressed hatred of the tribe of Benjamin and of Saul's followers found expression in the maledictions of this man.

Shimei did not stop at some solitary expression, but always walking on the opposite hill, he went on hurling injurious words and stones against David and those who accompanied him. He cursed him thus: "*Out! Out! Murderer! Scoundrel! The Lord has avenged on all of you the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you*

*have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, disaster has overtaken you; for you are a man of blood.*" And he proceeded thus hurling stones and words.

This was one of the greatest trials in the life of David, to hear himself insulted and despised in a time of misfortune. But he was victorious in that trial, because he extracted comfort and blessing from it. There are flowers that grow in the glaciers of the Alps and under the sirocco wind in the Sahara; there are virtues that manifest themselves in the tragic hours of existence. No one can say that he knows himself if he has not passed through experiences of being wronged and misunderstood. Betrayed by his son and fleeing in silence is one thing; but to suffer the sneers of Shimei is quite another. It's worthwhile to study David in this point. It is one of the moments in which the heart of the man of God is revealed.

David's soul was weighed down with anguish; with every step of the slow ascent of the mount, he saw continually unwinding before his memory the panorama of his existence. Misfortune has a great enlightening power on the conscience, and David saw himself, from the first mistake that had begun to stain his innocence, up to the sin against Uriah the Hittite. The austere and devoted figure of this devoted captain must have reappeared many times to his imagination; and associated with it the unforgettable scene of that morning when the prophet Nathan told him that he would suffer for his sin.



Add to this the reflection on his families. The scandal of the unhappy Tamar; the assassination of Ammon; the rebellion of Absalom with the defection of many of the people and, most of all, the defection of his Chief Counsellor Ahithophel. That which was going through his soul he discussed with no one and he did not lament. In all that procession of those fleeing from Jerusalem, he alone saw the thread of events delineated, and above them, the finger of Providence that was working with a retributive justice. Under the accumulation of misfortune and accusation of conscience, David kept going as in a sorrowful dream, sometimes shedding tears in silence, sometimes sighing from the depths of his heart. And he never excused himself or accused others; he did not lament about God, but as a severe accuser of himself, he felt he deserved what was happening to him.

In this state of mind he was met by Shimei, who was hurling stones and curses at him. From the height of the opposite mount bitter words of insult were coming down together with stones and mud; from the depths of his conscience there were rising such severe reprimands that the insults of Shimei seemed as nothing before the cry of his conscience. The figure of David does not seem to be that of a man who is fleeing to save his life, but that of a penitent pilgrim, setting out for a sanctuary. He saw in Shimei an agent of Providence, and in that voice he heard the voice of many of his enemies and bowed his head with resignation.



There are some who have had this painful experience in their lives; they have been so oppressed by misfortune, and have felt so stupefied at times, and have felt their soul so oppressed by anguish, and their brain so inflamed, in which troublesome thoughts were whirling, that they have accepted a new suffering as a refreshment. Like when a man stunned by pain joyfully exposes himself to wind and storm. The external tempest silences that of the soul for a moment. And thus David, while accusing himself, was almost joyful that another was accusing him. It is just, he repeated mentally to himself, while he was passing under those curses. Please take note: it is not that the words of Shimei were just. Shimei was wrongly accusing David of the blood of Saul's family; he was wrongly saying that God had given the kingdom to Absalom, and that He had abandoned David. Nothing of what Shimei was saying was true. But it is also one of the secrets of Providence that we often suffer reprimands that we do not deserve, while the sins that we have committed are not thrown in our face. David understood this and understood that if the accusation "*murderer*" did not apply to him for the house of Saul, on the other hand, he deserved it for Uriah the Hittite, and he accepted it in silence, as if God Himself were reprimanding him. Whereas if Shimei had cried: "O assassin of Uriah the Hittite", David's heart would have broken. But God knows the limit of our resistance to pain.

Therefore, Shimei kept cursing and throwing stones. But someone became tired. "*Then Abishai, son of Zeruiah*

said to the king, *Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and take off his head.*” Thus thought Abishai, but not thus the king, who felt a repulsion to that proposal and said: *“What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, Curse David, who then shall say, why have you done so? And he bowed his head in resignation; and, after a little reflection, he raised it again, and continued to speak. “My own son...” Ah this was the true wound! “My own son seeks my life; how much more now may this Benjaminite? Let him alone and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him.”*

And David stopped again and thought; and he felt like a sweet comfort and a serene trust in the midst of the sufferings. He continued, more as though speaking to himself than to those around him: *“It may be that the Lord will look on my distress and the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing of me this day.”* With this trust the cursing of Shimei had lost its bitterness, rather it seemed to be a benefit. David was content to be insulted and cursed by a man; God would have compassion on him. *“And so David and his men went on the road, while Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, throwing stones and flinging dust at him.”* The enemy felt irritated by David’s patience and was becoming more insolent. Shimei was continuing, but David was persevering in the suffering.

Reader, perhaps you have suffered one day. One day, perhaps you will have to suffer the mud and the cursing

of one of your enemies in moments in which you have been least prepared. Do not be irritated by it; don't avenge yourself; don't hate him. Love that enemy and bless him. It depends on you to make that occasion of his cursing a cause for good. That is retributive justice; accept it with sweetness. All of us, more or less, one day or another, meet some Shimei. Blessed is the one who can say like David: "*...let him curse, for the Lord has bidden him.*" In the end God will change the cursing into a blessing.

## Chapter 25

## Death of Absalom

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 16:15 – 19:8

Absalom entered into Jerusalem, and with him Ahithophel. A little later Hushai the Archite presented himself to offer Absalom his services, but in fact, it was to neutralize the counsel of Ahithophel. The first counsel of Ahithophel was a masterpiece of iniquity and craftiness. The women in whose care David had left the house, should have been considered inviolable even in war. Now Ahithophel, in order to make the break between Absalom and David complete, counseled him to take possession of his father's harem, which was tantamount to taking possession of the throne. The words of the prophet Nathan were coming true to the letter.

Then Ahithophel gave another counsel: *“Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will set out and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged, and throw him into a panic; and all the people that are with him will flee. I will strike down only the king, and I will bring back all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace. The advice pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel. Yet Absalom wanted that Hushai the Archite should also be consulted. Hushai came and spoke thus: “This time the counsel that Ahithophel has given you is not good.*

*Hushai continued, You know that your father and his men are warriors, and they are enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert in war; he will not spend the night with the troops. Even now, he is hidden in one of the pits, or in some other place. And when some of our troops fall at the first attack, whoever hears it will say, There has been a slaughter among the troops that follow Absalom. Then even the valiant warrior, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt with fear; for all Israel knows that your father is a mighty warrior and that those who are with him are valiant warriors. But my counsel is that all Israel be gathered to you, from Dan to Beersheba, like the sand by the sea for multitude, and that you go to battle in person. So we shall come upon him in whatever place he may be found, and we shall light on him as the dew falls on the ground, and he will not survive nor will any of those with him.*

The cleverness of this counsel was the appeal to Absalom's vanity; not a war cut short from the very beginning with a rapid and decisive pursuit, as Ahithophel had suggested, but the leading of a large army with Absalom at the head, while time was given to the seasoned warriors, like those who were following David, to catch their breath and prepare their defense. The counsel of Hushai appealed to Absalom's vanity and he liked it. The fact is that the Lord had thus ordained to cancel the counsel of Ahithophel, which was better, so the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom. Afterward, Hushai quickly sent to inform David what had happened

and to counsel him to cross the Jordan River quickly with all his people. David did so at daybreak.

Ahithophel, seeing that the counsel of Hushai had been accepted, understood that the cause of Absalom was lost; that a vain and inexperienced young man with an undisciplined army recruited at random, would not be able to be victorious against veterans of many battles. *"When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his donkey and went to his home, to his city, and set his house in order and hanged himself; he died and was buried in the tomb of his father."*

*"Then David came to Mahanaim, while Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel with him."* Absalom set Amasa over the army and he camped in the land of Gilead. Also in Mahanaim David was the recipient of faithful devotion. They brought him food and things that he needed, because, they said: *"This people has suffered hunger in the desert."* David divided his army into three groups: one under the command of Joab; one under Abishai, and the other group under the command of Ittai the Gittite. He himself wanted to go out with his people, but the people prevented him and wanted him to remain in the city, from where he could eventually bring help to them. And David said: *"Whatever seems best to you I will do."* So the king stood beside the gate while all the people went out by hundreds and thousands. Seeing the heroes filing out, David did not doubt a favorable outcome, but his soul moved with compassion thinking about the possible end of Absalom. He called his three

captains, Joab, Abishai and Ittai, and said in a loud voice: *“Deal gently with the young man for my sake.”* The version of The Seventy has very tender expressions that sound more or less like this: “Forgive, don’t strike the young man Absalom.” David called Absalom a young man. He was obliged to fight but he wanted to save his son. The father is always the father, notwithstanding the rebellion of the son.

*“The battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim.”* As Ahithophel had foreseen, Israel was defeated. It was a total defeat. More died in flight in the forest than by the sword. While fleeing, Absalom was riding on his mule and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak tree. His head caught in the oak tree, the mule that was under him went on and he remained hanging by his head between two branches. A man reported the incident to Joab and he did not heed David’s recommendation. Joab understood that it was necessary to make an end of Absalom who had gone too much out of the way, and he hastened to go to the place. Absalom was still hanging; Although at other times he may have fascinated many, at that time he found no help. Absalom, abandoned as he was, makes us think of Saul, of Ahithophel and of the distant Judas Iscariot. *“Joab took three spears in his hand and thrust them through the heart of Absalom while he was yet alive in the oak. And ten young men who carried Joab’s armor gathered around and struck Absalom and killed him.”*



The battle had ended. Joab blew his trumpet and restrained his troops. All Israel had fled. *“And they took Absalom and cast him into a deep pit in the ground and erected over him a very great heap of stones.”* The Arabs throw stones on the tombs of those who have been beheaded. Absalom had prepared a splendid monument for himself, but his life was the true monument and the tomb that he had was all he deserved. It was necessary to send the news to the city, where the king and father was waiting. Two messengers were sent, one after another. Joab wanted the news of Absalom’s death to be brought by a Cushite slave. Ahimaz, the son of Zadok, outran the Cushite. *“Now David was sitting between the two gates.”* And the watchman saw a man running by himself, and then another man following him, also running. Later the watchman noted that the running of the first man seemed to be the running of Ahimaz, the son of Zadok. And the king said, *“He is a good man, and comes with good tidings.”*

Ahimaz said to the king: *“All is well. He prostrated himself before the king and said, Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men that raised up their hand against my lord the king.”* But David’s thoughts were fixed on Absalom, and he hastened to ask: *“Is the young man Absalom safe?”* Ahimaz avoided answering, saying he had seen a great tumult. The Cushite arrived and said: *“Let the lord my king receive good news, for the Lord has freed you this day from the hand of all those who rose up against you.”* The king asked the same question: *“Is it well with the young man*



*Absalom?"* But the Cushite, not considering David's feelings, answered: *"Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be as that young man!"*

Sorrowful victory that was for David. *"And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!. Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"* Words that have no need for comment. Absalom was always loved. And we think of God, our Father, who always loves us, and to whom our punishment causes pain. Sin kills; it is not God who kills. Judas strangled himself; Dante's damned run gasping to their destiny.

David had not expressed one word of satisfaction for the victory. Upon learning of the sorrow of the king, the troops entered into the city furtively as if coming from a defeat. David, always with his face covered, was crying: *"Absalom my son, Absalom my son!"* But that manifestation of sorrow, and giving that kind of reception to the soldiers appeared unjust to Joab. With courage and ability, he entered in to the king and said to him: *"Today you have covered with shame the faces of all your officers who have saved your life today and the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines, for love of those who hate you, and for hatred of those who love you. For you have shown today that commanders and officers are nothing to you; for I know this day that if Absalom were alive and*

*all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. So, go out at once and speak kindly to your servants, for I swear by the Lord, if you do not go, not a man will stay with you this night; and this will be worse for you than any disaster that has come upon you from your youth until now."*

Joab's counsel was right but the method of treating the paternal wound was rough. It is useless to answer; it is useless to open our heart to men; and David suffocated his feelings. To one who must give account to multitudes, too much manifestation of sorrow is not permitted. David cried for Absalom when no one saw him. He accepted Joab's counsel, and saw to his duty as king. "*So the king arose and sat in the gate. The troops were all told, See, the king is sitting in the gate, then all the troops came before the king.*"

## Chapter 26

## The Return of David

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 19, 20

The war ended with the death of Absalom, but the king was not returning to Jerusalem yet. Meanwhile, *“the people were quarreling throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, but now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. However, Absalom, whom we anointed over us, has died in battle. Now then, why are you silent about bringing the king back?”* These voices were coming from the tribes of Israel; but the tribe of Judah remained silent. Therefore David *“sent to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak to the elders of Judah, saying: Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house? You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?”* He also sent a message to Amasa, the general of the army of Absalom: *“Are you not my bone and my flesh? May God do so to me, and more also, if you are not the commander of my army from now on, in place of Joab.”*

*“Amasa turned the hearts of all the people of Judah as one.”* That which is hard bends; it seems that even after the victory, a certain coldness remained; everyone was affected by the fact that David was greater than his misfortunes and even with a victorious army, he wanted

to wait to be accepted by the people. Even the people of Judah sent to tell the king, "*Return, both you and all your servants.*" Israel, which had been the least close to David was the first to desire his return. It makes us think of the Gentiles who are the first to anticipate the return of Jesus. David, who went out as a fugitive, returned in triumph. It makes us think of Christ, who will return as king.

*"So the king returned and came to the Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over the Jordan."* And now a well-known figure appears before us: "*Shimei, the son of Gera, a Benjaminite, which was of Bahurim, hurried to come down with the men of Judah to meet king David; with him there were a thousand men of Benjamin. And Ziba, the servant of the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and his twenty servants rushed down to the Jordan ahead of the king.*" It is noteworthy that Shimei and Ziba were going together; the servant of Saul with the accuser of Mephibosheth; also noteworthy is the fact that Shimei, as if to demonstrate his importance, was accompanied by one thousand men.

As the king was about to cross the Jordan, Shimei, son of Gera, fell down before the king and said to him: "*Let not my lord consider me guilty, nor remember what your servant did wrong on the day when my lord the king left Jerusalem; may the king not bear it in mind. For your servant knows that I have sinned; therefore, see, I have come today, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king.*" Shimei showed himself

to be as quick and submissive as he had been insolent before. When we are with the Lord, and we are blessed by Him, our enemy is the first to humble himself.

But even in that moment David had to face a temptation: *“Abishai, the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord’s anointed? But David resisted the temptation as he had the first one: What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should today become an adversary to me?”* Satan is always ready to accuse. *“Shall any one be put to death this day in Israel? For do I not know that I am this day king over Israel? The king said to Shimei, You shall not die. And the king gave him his oath.”*

Later on, there was another encounter, and this encounter was pitiable. *“Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul, came down to meet the king; he had not taken care of his feet, or trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes, from the day the king left until the day he came back in safety.”* And he said: *“My lord, O king, my servant deceived me; for your servant said to him, Saddle a donkey for me so that I may ride on it and go with the king. For your servant is lame. He has slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore, what seems good to you. For all my father’s house was doomed to death before my lord the king; but yet you set your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right have I, then, to appeal to the king?”* It was a sad appeal and it indicated that Ziba had deceived and slandered him. But David did not

demonstrate to be up to his usual self this time, because he answered: *"Why do you still speak of your affairs? I have decided: You and Ziba shall divide the land."* It was an injustice toward the unfortunate one; it was forgetfulness toward Jonathan. The informer remained with half of the other's goods, and the unfortunate one remained under a veil of suspicion. But true justice can be expected only from the Lord Jesus Christ, at His return.

*"You and Ziba shall divide the land."* Thus had the king said, but the answer of Mephibosheth was much more noble: *"Let him take it all, since my lord the king has arrived home safely."*

*Now Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim; and he went on to the Jordan with the king to escort him over the Jordan. Now Barzillai was very old, being eighty years old. He had provided the king with food while he stayed at Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. The king said to Barzillai: Come over with me and I will provide for you in Jerusalem at my side."* But the good old man answered that he preferred to stay far from the court; that he would accompany him a little farther, and then he would return. *"Please let your servant return, so that I may die in my own town, near the graves of my father and my mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; do for him whatever seems good to you. Then all the people crossed over the Jordan, and the king crossed over; the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he*

*returned to his own home. The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him; all the people of Judah, and also half the people of Israel brought the king on his way.*

But there is no joy that is not accompanied by sorrow. The jealousy of the Israelites that had not accompanied the king was not long in manifesting itself. All the men of Israel came to David and said, *“Why have our brothers the men of Judah stolen you away, and brought the king and his household and all David’s men with him over the Jordan?”* Instead of an answer from the king which would have calmed the anger and the jealousy, emotions were rekindled by the imprudent language of the people of Judah. They spoke thus to the people of Israel: *“Because the king is a close relative to us. Why then are you angry about this matter? Have we eaten at all at the king’s expense, or has he given us any gift?”* But the men of Israel answered the men of Judah and said, *“We have ten shares in the king, and in David also, we have more than you. Why then did you treat us with contempt? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king?”*

But the sacred writer who rarely comments, adds a sad comment: *“But the words of the men of Judah were harsher words than the words of the men of Israel.”* This other spectacle of discord and bitterness must have torn the heart of David. The words did not remain mere words. Often, in a crowd of excited people, there is some one who gathers them, stirs them up, puffs them up, and



makes them turn words into deeds. *“Now a scoundrel named Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, happened to be there. He blew the trumpet and cried out, We have no portion in David, no share in the son of Jesse! Everyone to your tents, O Israel!”* It was the first cry of incitement to separation, and it was repeated later under Rehoboam. The people were excited and, therefore, that cry of Sheba had its effect: *“So all the people of Israel withdrew from David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri; but the people of Judah followed their king steadfastly, from the Jordan to Jerusalem.”*

Having arrived in Jerusalem, David told Amasa to call out the men of Judah within three days to go against Sheba. When three days had passed and Amasa had not returned, David repeated the same command to Abishai. *“So Joab’s men went out with him, along with the Cherethites and the Pelethites and all the warriors; they went out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba, the son of Bichri. When they were at the large stone which is at Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them.”* Joab had not resigned himself to allowing the supreme command to escape him and was plotting to get rid of Amasa, his new rival. *“Now Joab was dressed in his military attire, and over it was a belt with a sword in its sheath fastened at his waist; as he went forward, it fell out. Joab said to Amasa, Is it well with you, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa did not notice the sword in Joab’s hand; Joab struck him in the fifth rib and he died.”*



Abishai and Joab pursued after Sheba to the city of Abel of Bethmaacah and besieged it. Then, by the counsel of a wise woman, those of the city cut off the head of Sheba and threw it to Joab. *“So he blew the trumpet and they dispersed from the city, and all went to their homes, while Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.”* Even this time, Joab was not punished by David. Perhaps these two personages had a reciprocal fear and were united by politics, so that one could not seem to do without the other. *“Joab was over the whole army of Israel.”*

*“And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; Adoram was over the forced labor; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilad was the recorder; Sheva was scribe, and Zadok and Abiathar were priests.”*

## Chapter 27

## Let Us Fall Now into the Hand of the Lord

2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 24

Now the story of David runs rapidly to the end. For the most part, the last years of his life were somewhat peaceful and were used to accumulate treasures for the temple that his son Solomon would build. In this latter period of the kingdom, the scripture gives a list of David's companions; valiant men who had been bandits and fugitives at one time, but men who had contributed much to the establishment of the throne. This is an image of the army of redeemed who will be the Bride of the Lamb, and will contribute to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. In the list of David's valiant men, they do not all have the same status; there are the stronger ones among the strong; so it will be in the Messianic kingdom.

In the list of valiant men of honor, Joab, a voluntary hero, is not mentioned; many times, he was stained with serious sins. There is much work that God cannot approve; and one day the Lord will say to many: "I do not know you, you workers of iniquity."

David's old age was proceeding peacefully; the rebellion had been subdued; the people were in peace and it seemed that by now, nothing more should happen to disturb the man of God. Even in this late stage of his life,

David had to undergo another bitter experience, and learn how Satan never leaves us without tempting us. In the life of David, together with many errors and weaknesses, there are three prominent sins: the first was when he fled to the Philistines. He was persecuted by Saul, and Satan tempted him by making him see everything dark around him. In fact, Satan seeks to draw us into desperation. The second sin was adultery and homicide. David was tempted when he was in his greatness, in luxury and idleness. He was at an age when passions are still strong. The third sin, with which we are now concerned, is taking the census of his people. In David's old age, one of the gold-plated sins of human nature, pride, was his downfall. Pride caused the fall of Satan. David suffered much for each of these errors.

In the second book of Samuel, in the twenty-fourth chapter, in the first verse, we read: "*And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, Go, count the people of Israel and Judah.*" And in the first verse of chapter 21 of the first book of Chronicles, we read: "*Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel.*" There seems to be a contradiction between these two passages of scripture; but the apparent contradiction lies in the fact that ultimately the temptation is traced to its true origin, to Satan. In the other passage it said that the Lord was angry, and He said to David: "*Count the people of Israel and Judah.*" Rather, it is a consequence of the temptation of Satan, to which the soul of the king had begun to yield.

There is a moment in which it seems that the Lord abandons us to the opportunity to do evil. But the fact is that we have already begun to commit the evil; our heart goes after sin, and the Lord permits us to go forward in order to see at the end if we belong to Him or to Satan. By giving him money, the prodigal's father indirectly incited his son to go away from home; but for some time, the soul of the young man was far from the paternal roof; therefore, it was better to leave him to himself. Let's not forget that sin is consummated in the depths of one's being, and that God looks at the heart. In the case of Pharaoh, God gave liberty to the king, which is expressed by saying that He hardened his heart; but this was only when Pharaoh had shown himself to be an obstinate sinner.

Many details are sooner understood than expressed, but the devout reader sees everywhere that God's way is just and uniform. In David's case we can trace the events in this manner: David had decided to count the people and for many days, he lived in the intoxication of his pride. In Israel's case, it is said that the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israël. If the people did not share David's desire to know their exact number they had begun to decline and not remain faithful in depending on the Lord; this was due, perhaps, to their acquired glory or having no danger of enemies. So that, when God removed all restraints from David so that he might act, Satan had already worked; David, in his heart, had already counted the people; and the people and the king were already

invaded by a fever of pride and ambition. And then God removed His spirit of restriction, as if He were saying to David: *“Go ahead, count the people.”*

*“So the king said to Joab and the commanders of the army who were with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, so that I may know how many there are.”* From each of these words one surmises the deep sense of satisfaction that was in the soul of the king; he was not content to say “all the tribes”, he delineated the outermost boundaries, and added: *... “that I may know how many there are.”* Joab, the fierce Joab, sensed the unusual tone, and understood that the order to count the people was not good, and he did not hesitate to show his disapproval, and said to David: *“May the Lord your God increase the number of the people a hundredfold, while the eyes of my lord the king can still see it! But why does my lord the king want to do this?”* This hesitation in a man who had shown himself many times to be without scruples should have sounded a great warning to the king; but he had yielded to the serious temptation in the depths of his being. Satan knew how to get the best of him; Satan knew that David would not fall for the same things again; for every age and every condition, Satan had, as he always has, the special temptation. David had been tried by the fire of temptations like that which drove him to have Uriah the Hittite killed, but David still had a vulnerable side, and here the enemy assaulted him and succeeded in making him sin.

Joab had respectfully protested, but the word of the king prevailed in the order to Joab and the commanders of the army. *“So Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the presence of the king, to take a census of the people of Israel. They crossed the Jordan and began from Aroer and from the city that is in the middle of the valley, toward Gad, and on to Jazer. ...and they came to the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites, and they went out to the Neged of Judah at Beersheba. So when they had gone through all the land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.”* *“And Joab reported to the king the number of those who had been recorded...,”* or rather, the number of soldiers. As if to know how much power they could rely on; they, who by now should have been used to depending on the Lord for victories; and it is noteworthy that a separate count was made of soldiers in Israel and Judah, as if to make us understand the hidden thought of evaluating the separate forces of these two peoples for some eventual conflict between them. Joab made the report: *“There were in Israel eight hundred thousand soldiers able to draw the sword, and those of Judah were five hundred thousand .”* They were a great army.

But David did not rejoice in this report. He had a tender conscience. When we have tasted the grace of the Lord for a long time, and we yield to the enticements of the tempter, we cannot enjoy even the first fruits of sin. David's heart was touched. *“So David said to the Lord, I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O*

*Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have acted very foolishly.*” But the Lord did not answer him directly. *“When David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David’s seer, saying, Go and speak to David, Thus the Lord says: I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I may do to you.”* This time Gad, no longer Nathan, is the messenger. God does not always rebuke us by means of the same men. Perhaps Nathan, who had already been very severe for the case of Uriah, may no longer have had the same authority; perhaps the Lord, who knows all our doings, wants us to be disciplined now by one, now by others, in order to impede his agents from believing themselves too important, and to keep us from becoming familiar with the punishment.

This time, therefore, it was Gad and not Nathan. Gad did not have to tell David that he had sinned, because David already knew it. Perhaps Nathan would have been tempted to reprimand David for the first error and God did not want that. There is great mercy in Him, in that He does not expose us always to the same men, and does not punish us always by means of the same hand.

*“So Gad came to David and told him; he asked him, Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days’ pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to Him who sent me.”* Consider! And meanwhile the prophet remained standing, waiting, while the three



distinct propositions were resounding in David's ear. Three years of famine – a terrible and slow spectacle! Fleeing before enemies – David knew what it meant to flee; and he remembered Absalom, and he remembered the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and the insults of Shimei. Three days of pestilence – only three days, but alas, how much destruction in a pestilence even of only three days' duration! They were three specters, one more dreadful than the other.

Consider! But David did not have the strength to consider. He knew that it was necessary to accept a punishment, and by now he was used to fiery brands. Each fall had left a wound in him; this time, therefore, would not pass without a new sorrow. He did not dare to ask that the punishment be removed, because true penitent ones desire pardon and the face of God rather than removal of the punishment. But in David's heart there was a persistent trust in the Lord. I should select! Oh, I cannot. *"I am in great distress."* There was terror on every side. David added with words that reveal the heart of the man of God: *"Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."* In the hands of God, whatever may be His means of dealing with us: those who know God speak thus. In His punishment there is mercy. Men do not have mercy; they aggravate conditions. Humans have a passion for vengeance and exacerbate the misfortunes of others. There have been unfortunate people who, rather than fall into the hands of other men, have thrown themselves into the water or into the fire, or



have strangled themselves. Oh, the hands of men! But unfortunately, many times we are afflicted in punishment by the hand of other men!

David did not want to choose. *“Let us fall....”* As if he wished to say, let us take refuge, let us run to throw ourselves into His arms, even to receive punishment, but let us run to Him. Sinner, never flee from God, not even when He has to chastise you! And God chose for David.

*“So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand of the people died, from Dan to Beersheba. But when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented concerning the evil, and said to the angel who was bringing destruction among the people, It is enough.”* Merciful measure, merciful “enough”! *“And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the Lord when he saw the angel who was striking down the people, and said, It is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong; but these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and my father’s house.”*

The behavior of providence is mysterious. Others had to suffer for David. Were those people innocent? Did they have other offenses before the Lord? By death, were they delivered from future dangers? Questions are in vain, because we cannot answer, except to say that we see only, and in part, this side of the picture; God sees also the beyond and knows everyone’s story and the

compensation reserved to each one. *"I have sinned"* – take note of that insistent "I". *"Let your hand be against me, Oh Lord."* But David remains immune and others were struck down for him. How can all that be explained? Here's how: there is no harder trial for a truly great soul than to see others suffering for his guilt.

David fled to the Philistines and the population of Ziklag suffered; David caused Uriah the Hittite to be killed and his child agonized seven days and then died; David ordered the census, and seventy thousand men perished. Each time, in the sufferings of others, he must have felt thousands of stings of sin. Being struck directly would have seemed less cruel to David. And thus we can feel the enormity of sin by looking at the Cross where hangs the great Expiator!

*"So Gad came to David that day and said to him, Go up, erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. And David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the Lord had commanded. And Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants crossing over to him; and Araunah went out and bowed his face to the ground before the king. Then Araunah said, Why has the lord my king come to his servant? David said, To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be held back from the people. Then Araunah said to David, Let the lord my king take and offer up what is good in his sight. Look, the oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood."*

*“But King David said to Araunah, No, I will buy them from you for a full price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.”* Two men disputing as to who would give the most; one ready to dispose of his oxen and tools of work; the other who did not want to offer that which cost him nothing. *“So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. David built there an altar to the Lord, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord answered his supplication for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel.”*

That threshing floor served as a site for building the temple. The sacrifice was needed to stop the plague. Later there was needed Calvary and Christ for the sins of humanity.

## Chapter 28

## Adonijah

## Testament and Death of David

1<sup>st</sup> Kings 1 and 2; 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 23:1-7

The last years of David's life were spent in making great preparations for the temple, which testifies of the ideal of his life. Toward the end, lives that are focused on the beyond live between memory and hope; memory sees the past transformed and glorified, and hope illumines the future. The life of this man has been a heritage of memories that did good to many. David saw everything rosy at the beginning; but his kingdom was a sequel of storms that kept him agitated up to his advanced age. Even on the eve of his departure from this life, David's heavens are not free from clouds which are brought on by ancient faults and weaknesses. The last rebellion that he had to appease was a domestic rebellion.

*“Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, I will be king; he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen and fifty men to run before him.”* The scripture has this comment: *“His father had never at any time, displeased him by asking, Why have you done so? He was also a very handsome man, and he was born next after Absalom.”* The young prince who was beginning to follow in Absalom's footsteps and the old king who continued to show himself weak toward his sons are

pictured for us in a few words. Adonijah plotted a conspiracy with Joab and with the priest Abiathar, and they supported him. He prepared a great feast and invited the men of Judah who were in the service of the king. *“But Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and Nathan the prophet did not side with Adonijah.”*

*“Then Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon’s mother, Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king, and David our lord does not know it? So now come, please let me give you counsel so that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go at once to King David and say to him, Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne? Why then is Adonijah king?”*

And Bathsheba went to the king, and told him all that Adonijah had done. And while she was still speaking, the prophet Nathan arrived and came into the presence of the king and bowed with his face to the ground. Then Nathan said, *“My lord the king, have you said, Adonijah shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne? For he has gone down today and has sacrificed oxen and fatlings and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king’s children, and the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest, who are now eating and drinking before him; and saying, Long live King Adonijah!”*

Then David asked that Bathsheba be recalled, as she had distanced herself at the arrival of Nathan, and he vowed

to her: *“As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, as I vowed to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, your son Solomon shall be king after me.”* He had Zadok the priest recalled along with Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah and said to them: *“Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet and say, Long live King Solomon!”* Although David was weak in the body he still had a sharp mind; he saw the situation in the blinking of an eye, and found the remedy.

It was done as David had commanded: *“Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, Long live King Solomon! And all the people went up following him, playing on flutes and rejoicing!”* Adonijah and all the guests were finishing a prolonged banquet when they heard the noise and learned what happened and that Solomon was already sitting on the royal throne. Their boldness melted; the guests were terrified and they arose and each went on his way.

*And Adonijah was afraid of Solomon, and he arose, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. Now it was told Solomon, saying, behold, he has taken hold of the horns of the altar, saying, Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword. And Solomon said, If he will be a worthy man, not one of his hairs will fall to the ground; but if wickedness is*

*found in him, he will die. Then King Solomon sent to have him brought down from the altar. And Solomon said to him, Go to your house.*" This is a very beautiful figure of our own pardon and of our responsibility before the Lord. The horns of the altar were consecrated by the blood of the victims, and were the refuge of Adonijah. The past was covered, but King Solomon was asking for an account of the future. We have been forgiven, as if we should begin our existence over again; but from the moment that He has pardoned us, the Lord wants that we live a life consecrated to His will.

We have come to the last days of David. He was not very old; he was seventy years old. But a life rich in contrast and grief had prostrated him before the time. One day, feeling that the end was imminent, he called his son Solomon to come close to his bed. His last words are collected, and in them, there appears a sharp contrast between the man of God and the man of war. They are flashes of light of an intense life. He said to his son: "*I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn. Then the Lord will establish His word which He spoke concerning me, saying; If your heirs are careful of their ways to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a successor on the throne of Israel.*" Here the old man had to take a long



pause and then his countenance was clouded with sadness, because sad memories arose from the depths of his soul and his memory. He continued: *“Now you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner, and to Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed; he also shed the blood of war in peace. So act according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace.”* Then a gentle recollection crossed the mind of David:

*“But show kindness to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table; for they assisted me when I fled from Absalom your brother”* But to this recollection of the flight, another one was added: *“There is also with you Shimei the son of Gera the Benjamite, of Bahurim who cursed me with a terrible curse on the day I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, I will not put you to death with the sword. Therefore, do not let him go unpunished, for you are a wise man; and you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his gray head down to Sheol with blood.”*

This is the testament of David, and we can't help but say a word on it. First of all, we perceive the faithfulness of the scripture in presenting the human heart. A novelist would not have reported the words mentioned above from the mouth of a man of God, close to death. Is what we have read like a dutiful commission that David gave



Solomon, or a prophecy that Joab and Shimei deserved death? The words of David are also a prophecy; but they reveal how man is not silent, even at the extremity of life.

Joab served faithfully and contributed to saving the kingdom; but David did not forget the violent manner in which he had preserved his post as General. Perhaps Joab's sentence was secretly written in David's heart on the day of Absalom's death. And Shimei? David had bowed his head with resignation at Shimei's cursing.

It grieves us to hear these two heinous commands at the death-bed of a man like David. But let us remember that this was one thousand years before Christ, and even the best of men had errors and weaknesses until the end. The commission of vengeance which King David gave makes us think, by contrast, of the prayer for His enemies that Jesus made from the cross: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

In case we do not believe that the last words of David are not those that we have transcribed, but the other words that we read in the twenty-third chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, the sacred writer himself tells us: "*These are the last words of David.*" There is a moment in which the man of God reflects on all that which is in the world: the cares of the kingdom are no more, the commission to Solomon is finished; it is no longer either the king or the father who speaks. But it is "*the man who was appointed in high dignity, the Anointed of the God of Jacob, and the Composer of the exquisite songs of Israel.*" David says:

*“The spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: He who rules over men righteously, who rules in the fear of God, is as the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, when the tender grass springs out of the earth, through sunshine after rain.”*

Here David gave a backward glance. Life looks different to us when we look at it from a distance; many illusions disappear. David did not have an exaggerated esteem of his past. His was the life of an imperfect kingdom; that made him confess the failures of a life shadowed by infirmities and sins. Then he continues: *“Truly is not my house so with God?”* My house is not established with God by my righteousness. But it shall be established *“for He has made an everlasting covenant with me, ordered in all things and secure.”* For His part, God always fulfils His will in a perfect way. David looked at the past, and was dissatisfied with himself, but he saw a glorious future, and saw that at the end justice would reign: *“But the worthless, every one of them will be thrust away like thorns, because they cannot be taken in hand. But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they will be completely burned with fire in their place.”* These are the last words recorded of the old man, with David speaking of the grace and justice of God. *“Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David.”* David’s rest was in the company of his ancestors; his burial was in Jerusalem. It is helpful to make this distinction which makes us see the

true concept of death even in the Old Testament. "*He was buried in the city of David.*" The rule of burying outside the city was violated for David. The burial place remained sacred, but no one is now able to identify it under the ancient ruins.

*"The time that David reigned over Israel was forty years; he reigned seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem."*

## Chapter 29

### David

And now that the patient reader has followed us up to now, let us together, give a backward glance to the man whom we have studied in the salient moments of his life. If we wish to penetrate the soul of a man we must not rely too much on the commentator, but we must examine the man directly, remember what he says of himself, look at him in critical moments, study the influence he had on those who surrounded him and see what remains after him.

We recall that David is called “the greatly loved one”. At first sight this title seems to make us doubt the justice of God. From a superficial view, in many points Saul appears to be a better person than David; but that is only superficially. There are persons whom the Lord has rejected who seem good, and the cause of the rejection seems petty. And vice versa, there are others who have a tragic story, interwoven with great sins, but whom God has selected and preserved. What was there in the rejected ones to cause the apparent goodness to be ignored, and what was there in the selected ones that saved them from precipitating themselves?

Saul was gentle in the beginning; he hid himself when he was being sought; he was the hero, and he was rejected. David, notwithstanding his many errors, is preserved until old age with the promise of a throne in his

descendants. How can all this be explained? The true story of people is not composed of exterior facts but of what is deep in their hearts, where God reads. In the life of David, his sins are evident, and the Scripture has delineated them in detail; but constantly, in the depths of his being, asserting itself sometimes more, sometimes less, but always present is the intimate and rooted sense of the presence and sovereignty of God, which entitled him to be called "the man after God's heart". No matter how great the distance, the man whose heart is toward some ideal is closer than the one who, from nearby, goes away or remains still. In the journey that David is making toward God there are many pauses and many failures, but he is always looking ahead, in one single direction.

There are people who have in their hearts more tragic battles than others; it seems that they pay a price for the excellent gifts that they have received. One who has a calm temperament does not have to exert a great effort to show oneself patient; but a severe discipline of self-denial is necessary for a person of great sensibility having an impetuous character. David reveals continuously the intimate battle that travails him. He knew how to captivate the hearts of others, but it took a long time to know and captivate his own heart. David understood his weakness, and therefore a key point in his life is mistrust of himself. In his inner being he felt himself to be nothing, and therefore, he always wanted God and ran to Him.

We cannot even imagine what David's condition would have been if he had not had that sense of mistrust in himself and that direction that was always toward God. With an excitable, often violent character, with the authority that he had over people, perhaps he might have reached the greatest excesses of despotism. Throughout the scenes of his life, which at times appear to be disconnected, David's intimate battle face to face with the majestic presence of the Lord can be seen. We should not forget that David lived in difficult times, and man is not separate from his time. Yet his defects do not surpass those of his time, but his virtues appear very great to people of all time. David has been surpassed in many of his vices, but not, I believe, in his virtues.

Let us be cautious in judging people because we do not have the measure of their souls. God gave His judgment on David that he presents to us at a glance. "*The man after my own heart.*" This testimony is worth more than all human judgments. David was a great king in all respects. He was an able warrior and a great statesman. He was also a great poet. Probably eighty of the Psalms we have are by David. The image of his heart is often reflected in the Psalms through the various events, from memories of his youth to his old age. His song, although at times intoned with minor tones, rises always toward heaven. David lived in harmony with the priesthood and the prophets. Zadok and Nathan were both at David's deathbed; the prophets were figures of sacrifice and hope. David is the greatest example of the Jewish nation; or better yet, the greatest personification of his people.

His greatness appeared entirely after his death. The word is repeated from generation to generation, gathered by the prophets: "*For the sake of my servant David.*" He is the king par excellence, and in the New Testament, it is of the kingdom and the throne of David to be restored, that are spoken of. We hear from a distance, but always distinctly, the harmonies of his harp above the disharmonies of his heart. No one sang better of repentance than David. He remains "the man after God's heart", precisely because he looked to the Lord, conscious of his infirmity.

May the pages of this book we have written for those who want to draw nearer to the Lord, make the reader more sensitive to his own shortcomings, but more trusting in the Lord, and therefore more grateful for the love of God, manifested in Christ. Christ appears to us always higher and greater in the measure that we advance in years, and that we are divested of the illusions by which at one time we believed ourselves to be virtuous and strong and we founded our hopes on our justice.

Now we see only the completed work of Calvary and the mercy of God.

THE END







