

A PATRISTIC COMMENTARY

**THE SECOND BOOK OF
SAMUEL**

FR. TADROS Y. MALATY

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INTRODUCTION

As this book in the Hebrew origin, is a complementary to the first book of Samuel, we urge the reader to refer back to the introduction of that book.

According to the Jewish tradition, the authors of this book were the prophets Nathan and Gad, beside some of those who were raised in the school of the prophets, founded by the prophet Samuel. In the Septuagint version, it is called “The second Kingdoms book.”

WHEN WAS IT WRITTEN?

It was written after the division of the kingdom, and before the captivity. It embraces a complete record of the reign of King David (2 Samuel 5: 5); and mentions the kings of ‘Judah,’ as distinct from those of ‘Israel’ (1 Samuel 27: 6).

ITS FEATURES

1- Its topic was a survey of King David’s life, following his strife with king Saul, who was killed by the enemies at the end of the previous book; a narration of king David’s ascension to the throne, his wars, and the moving up of the Tabernacle of God to Jerusalem. It also gave a record of David’s fall in certain sins, with all the incessant troubles and grieves they entailed. In other words, this book represents the history of the people during the 40 years of king David’s reign. Its study is considered to be of special importance to everyone intending to comprehend David’s psalms.

We should not wonder about the dedication of such a voluminous part of the Holy Book to the life of one man as David, actually, was the true founder of the kingdom, and not Saul. He prepared for his son the proper materials and the atmosphere to build the temple of God; organized the services of worship; wrote the majority of the psalms; and prophesied about the Lord Christ, the desire of the nations, who came of his offspring according to the flesh.

2- This book included poetry, and songs written by King David, like: the song of the bow, a lamentation over the death of Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Samuel 1: 17-27); that mourning the death of Abner (2 Samuel 3: 33, 34); the praise for God’s deliverance (2 Samuel 22); and David’s last words (2 Samuel 23).

3- This book reveals, beside the exciting life of David, his weaknesses, and the detrimental fruits resulting from sin. It is as though, nobody could be justified before the Lord, not even His great men! This book represents a warning for everyone, particularly for dedicated ministers; and as said by the apostle Paul: “*Let him who thinks he stands, take heed lest he falls*” (1 Corinthians 10: 12). And that was what motivated **St. John Chrysostom**, amid his ministry to his people to care for the salvation of his own soul saying: [My words are of more use for my life, than they are for that of those who hear me¹].

ITS SECTIONS

(1) The victories of David.

1-10.

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|---|-------|
| 1- David’s victory over Saul’s household | 1-4. |
| 2- David’s victory over the Jebusites and the Philistines | 5. |
| 3- David brings up the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem | 6-7. |
| 4- David’s victory over the adversary nations | 8-10. |

¹ In 2 Thes. Pg. 62: 498.

(2) David's weaknesses and troubles.	11-24.
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Note: What came here about Israel in the Old Testament, became a heritage for "New Israel," namely the Church of the New Testament, and not for the nation of Israel.

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THE FIRST SECTION

THE VICTORIES OF KING DAVID

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| 2- David's victory over the Jebusites and the Philistines | 5. |
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In the previous book, the prophet David was introduced as a true man of God, who conquered and triumphed, not over others, as much as within his own life. King Saul, his pursuer, fell into his hands, at least twice, yet he refused to stretch his hand against the Lord's anointed. And when his anger was aroused against the foolish Nabal, and intended to avenge himself, he listened to the wise advice of Abigail, and blessed her because she kept him from shedding blood. Now, Saul and his three sons fell in the war, to reveal more, how David's heart was filled with pure love! He forgot Saul's wrong doings and his persistent persecutions. Instead of being preoccupied with his right to ascend the throne, he lamented Saul and his son Jonathan, only remembering their good parts, and describing how pleasant they were in their lives. He mourned them with his heart and tears, as well as by his tongue and lips.

This man of great heart, was found worthy to enjoy continuous triumphs over the adversary surrounding nations, to have his kingdom well established not only for his son Solomon to succeed him, but rather, for the Savior Messiah to come from his offspring, to reign forever over the hearts of His believers, setting in them the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 1

DAVID LAMENTS HIS PEOPLE

David conquered Amalek, recovered the captives, and came back carrying a plenty of spoil, to distribute some of them among the elders of Judah, and to restore the houses that were burned in Ziklag (1 Samuel 30). As for his heart, it was aflame for what befell his people, knowing how weak the army became, how the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul; while the armies of the Philistines were known for their might and discipline. By the third day after his arrival from Ziklag, an Amalekite lad came to give him the ‘good news’ about the death of Saul, the Lord’s anointed. He expected a reward, claiming that he killed Saul who was giving his last breath; but he was punished instead. David lamented Saul, Jonathan, and all the people.

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1. AN AMALEKITE BRINGS TO DAVID THE GOOD NEWS OF SAUL’S DEATH:

On the third day of his arrival to Ziklag, while preoccupied in restoring it, with his heart moaning over the affliction of his people, anticipating hearing any moment some expected news from the battle, it happened that a man came, with his clothes torn, and dust on his head, carrying the latest news.

We do not have to wonder, why David did not send his own spy to bring him news of the battle; as he knew beforehand what would happen; besides fearing that someone would wrongly assume that he was eager to ascend the throne, once he heard of the fall of Saul and his men.

Concerning the Amalekite lad, according to the Jewish tradition, he was the son of ‘Doeg’ the Edomite, who, feeling that David would inevitably ascend the throne, sent his son, as an Amalekite lad, to be the first to bring David the good news of the death of Saul and Jonathan, and provide him with the crown that was on Saul’s head, and the bracelet that was on his arm. Most probably, the lad’s report was fake; but his intention was to find favor in David’s eyes. On one side, he came to him with torn clothes and with dust on his head, pretending to be one of David’s subjects who was serving one of his worriers in the army faithful in his feelings, even after the death of his master. On the other side, he came to tell him of the death of Saul and Jonathan assuming that by that, David became the sole heir to the throne. And as it was only Saul who was pursuing David, and not Jonathan who was his true friend, he said about Saul alone: *“I stood over him and killed him;”* and when he saw signs of grief on David’s face, he went on to say: *“because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen.”* Finally intending to congratulate him as the sole heir of the throne, he presented him with Saul’s crown and his bracelet as his own right.

The Assyrian worriers were portrayed wearing special bracelets around their arms.

It is obvious that the lad’s report was fabricated; As it came in (1 Samuel 31: 3)

“Saul was severely wounded by the archers; Then he said to his armor bearer, ‘Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me.’ But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it” (1 Samuel 31: 3, 4). It was illogical for the king to ask a foreign passerby whom he did not know, to stand over him and kill him.

A shameful false story, fabricated by the lad or by his father, hoping for a reward with the assumption that David was waiting eagerly for the chance to ascend the throne. But David, sweet in his love and loyalty, condemned the lad, as his own mouth testified against him, that he killed the Lord’s anointed. The Amalekite lied and paid for his lies and greed, by his own life instead of getting a reward.

The Lord Christ spoke of the devil, saying: *“There is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it”* (John 8: 44); and it is said: *“Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord; But those who deal truthfully are his delight”* (Proverbs 12: 22)

❖ Lying is prohibited by strong words and warnings; like those of the prophet: *“The boastful shall not stand in Your sight”* (Psalm 5: 6); and: *“The lying mouth kills the soul”* (Wisdom. 1: 11).

Abbot Joseph¹

❖ From the first day that I was called a Christian, no lies came out of my mouth.

Anba Anub²

2- DAVID LAMENTS HIS PEOPLE:

David and his men did not rejoice for what happened to Saul, who, for so long opposed them; nor thought of who would ascend the throne after him and the glory that awaited them; but mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, who had fallen by the sword.

Solomon the son of David took after him those feelings of compassion, and said: *“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; Lest the Lord sees it, and it displeases Him, and He turns away His wrath from him”* (Proverb 24: 17, 18); and, *“He who is glad at calamity, will not go unpunished”* (Proverb 17: 5).

A spiritual man does not rejoice for the troubles that befall his enemies; but with his great heart, he will moan; not only with his human adversaries, but even with the harmful animals. He seeks peace and happiness of all creation! His heart is wide enough to embrace everyone and every thing!

Nobody mourned Saul, and lamented him from his depths, like the man whom Saul persecuted together with his men, for so many years. In this, David carried a shadow of the Lord Christ who wept for the fallen Jerusalem, that used every energy she got to destroy Him (Matthew 23: 37; Luke 13: 34).

Our enemies are more in need of our tears, than our friends; Loving them, we weep for their loss of salvation, because of their animosity and entreat God to work in everyone for the salvation of all.

We marvel at what David did - the true king, who was secretly anointed by the

¹ St. Cassian: Conf. 17: 15.

² The Sayings of Desert Fathers, Anba Anoub

prophet Samuel by God's command - when he heard the news of the death of the rejected king; Instead of condemning or defaming him, he mourned and lamented him. How great would be our sin, as we condemn others, especially the shepherds, set by God to minister to His people?!

3- DAVID PUNISHES THE AMALEKITE:

David wondered how any man would dare to boast that he killed the Lord's anointed, while wounded in battle; that is why he asked the lad: "*Where have you come from?*" To which he answered: '*I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite.*' And when he asked him: '*How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?*' As the lad did not expect that question, he kept silent; and by his silence he condemned himself; So David said: '*Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying: 'I have killed the Lord's anointed'*' (2 Samuel 1: 13-16).

4- DAVID'S LAMENTATION OVER SAUL AND JONATHAN:

Every faithful soul would stand in awe before that amazing lamentation song, to salute the true love springing from David's heart, toward his persecutor Saul, and his friend Jonathan. David's emotions were so shaken by that news, that he could not keep his tears from flowing, nor his tongue from uttering that touching song.

St. Ambrose says: [Sparing Saul's life, may be considered of less importance, compared to David's grief over his death in war; He mourned him with tears, saying: "*O mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, nor let there be no rain upon you ..., etc.*" (2 Samuel 1: 21). Can a mother mourn for her only son, as David did for his enemy?! Can man praise someone who did him good, as David did for him, who planned for his own destruction?! He mourned for him with all his emotions and deep feelings¹!]

David the prophet told the sons of Judah to teach their children the 'Song of the bow,' that was quoted in the Book of Jasher; a book of poetry and literature, and not one of the books of the Holy Scripture (See also Joshua 10: 13; 1 Kings 8: 35).

David called his lamentation, 'the song of the bow'; probably remembering the bow of Jonathan, his beloved friend (2 Samuel 1: 22). And probably that name refers to the description, saying, "*The Lord is a man of war*" (Exodus 15: 3); whose bow are His men, whom He uses to the account of His kingdom². That song by which David lamented Saul and Jonathan, is actually that of 'the bow of the Lord,' that creates a zeal in the life of every believer, to strive spiritually, to become a 'bow' in the hand of God.

This song or lamentation, is not a psalm inspired by God, but a poem that reveals feelings of love and loyalty³.

"The beauty Glory, O Israel lies slain on your high places!. How the mighty have fallen!" (2 Samuel 1: 19). Saul, his son, and his men, were mighty worriers who were not expected to fall so soon as they were a support for many; and when they fell, all fell after them.

"Tell it not in Gath; Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon-lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph"

¹ Duties of the Clergy 3: 9 (61).

² Cf. Nelson: A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, 1969. p 318.

³ راجع تعليقات على هذه المرثاة في كتاب "السنن القويم في تفسير أسفار العهد القديم": صموئيل الثاني.

(2 Samuel 1: 20). He chose 'Gath', being the greatest of the cities of the Philistines; and 'Ashkelon' where the greatest temples of the goddess 'Ashtoreth' were located, and where the armors of Saul and Jonathan were probably displayed (1 Samuel 31: 10).

“O mountains of Gilboa, Let there be no dew, nor let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings. For the shield of the mighty is cast away there! The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, From the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul, did not return empty” (2 Samuel 1 21, 22). These are all poetic expressions, that portray how serious the catastrophe that happened on the mountains of Gilboa, that were covered by royal blood, the blood of the mighty. He entreats God to let no dew nor rain fall on them, to let them turn dry and barren; to let no fields produce fruits, for offerings to the Lord, or on which tithes are due, because of their devastation. The weapons of the mighty fell; Saul's sword was not anointed with oil to fight with; He fell on it, and his blood anointed it instead of oil. The weapons of Saul and Jonathan, that were all the time busy fighting the enemy, are now fighting no more!

David remembered Saul's numerous triumphs over his enemies (1 Samuel 14: 47).

“Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions” (2 Samuel 1: 23). David revealed the purity of his heart, by not uttering a single word against Saul, but praised him together with Jonathan, his dear friend; He looked at both of them as beloved. Actually Jonathan loved his father, and remained a support to him in the royal court, faithful in his work, pleasant in his behavior, and closely attached to him, until the moments of death. Although he did not feel comfortable with his father's attitude toward David, and did not partake of his erroneous acts, yet he never betrayed him, but was always frank with him, and obedient to him in the truth. Saul, in his turn, dearly loved his son, doing his best to deliver the throne to him after his death.

David praised them for their swiftness and courage in battle, likening them to eagles and lions.

“O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel” (2 Samuel 1: 24).

Saul had his bad points and sins of rebellion, stubbornness, insanity and envy; Yet David disregarded all that in his song reminding the weeping women of his mighty achievements; He fought and conquered; and the land in his time settled down in peace, to let the women be clothed in scarlet, and adorned with gold, being secure from the enemies and from captivity.

“I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me; Your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women” (2 Samuel 1: 26). The love of women is so amazing in leaving the houses of their fathers and families, in getting attached to their men; and in serving them if they fell sick ... Jonathan's love was even sweeter. He stayed in his father's house, bore his reproaches for the sake of David. Although he was aware that David might take away his throne, he joyfully prepared the way for him to do that; even offering his own life for his sake. He was truly wonderful in his love! What could be more sweet than the true brotherly love, when man seeks, not what is his, but what is his friend's!

St. John Chrysostom comments on Jonathan's sweet love for David, saying:

[had Jonathan ever envied David? Definitely not; though there was every cause for envy. Although he realized during events, that the kingdom would surely cross over him to David, he did not harbor any feeling of envy toward him. He did not think one moment that David was going to deprive him of his right to his father's throne; but he actually preferred it that way and did his best to deliver it to him. Yet at the same time, he did not forsake his father for his friend! Do not think that he ever betrayed his father! He did not harm him, although he persistently opposed his unjust actions ... He did not allow his father to become a murderer; but, several times, he was ready to die for his friend's sake. His conscience was free ... And thus justice was connected to friendship¹].

As to how David exchanged Jonathan's love with his love, **St. John Chrysostom** says: {He did not get the chance to pay him back ... as Jonathan was slain before David ascends to the throne. Yet the righteous David proclaimed his friendship as much as he could; saying: [You have been very pleasant to me, my brother Jonathan.] [And he did more than that, by saving Jonathan's son as well as his grandson from danger; and remained for them the support and protector, as if they were his own children²].

¹ *In 2 Tim. hom. 7.*

² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

DAVID ANOINTED KING OF JUDAH

Although David was sure that he was the chosen king by the Lord, he inquired of the Lord, if he should go up to any of the cities of Judah. Then he went up to Hebron where he was anointed a king over the house of Judah. He did not forget the kindness that the men of Jabesh Gilead did to Saul, having buried him in their land. But Abner, the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ichbosheth the son of Saul, and made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and over all Israel. Abner started war against David's men, who defeated him; then demanded a truce for that civil war; that was temporarily agreed upon by both sides.

1- David anointed king of Judah	1-4.
2- David praises the men of Jabesh Gilead	5-7.
3- Abner sets Ichbosheth a king	8-11.
4- Abner arouses a civil war	12-17.
5- Abner kills Asahel	18-23.
6- Joab pursues Abner	24-32.

1- David anointed king of Judah:

After Saul and Jonathan died, the heirship came to 'Ichbosheth' the son of Saul. His name was originally 'Esh-Baal' (1 Chronicles 8: 33); namely (man of Baal) or (man of authority). But, as the word (Baal) referred to the god of the Phoenicians, his name was changed to 'Ichbosheth,' namely (man of shame), having been weak and incapable of action, a puppet in the hand of Abner the commander of Saul's army.

As for David, who was secretly anointed by the prophet Samuel a king among his brothers (1 Samuel 16), he was at the time Saul and Jonathan died, in Ziklag in the land of the Philistines. Although the way was paved for him to ascend the throne, he, prudently, did not hasten to claim the throne; but, feeling a great longing to minister to the people of God, he saw that he should not stay any longer away from home, after the death of Saul who was pursuing him. So he inquired of God, if he should go up to one of the cities of Judah, namely to his own tribe, that no doubt had stronger feelings toward him more than others. He inquired of God through the Urim, that was brought by the priest Abiathar.

According to human thought, for David, his family, his men and their households, to go to Judah, had been only natural, something that did not need thinking, praying, or seeking God's counsel; But David-as a man of God-knew the importance of seeking God's counsel, not only during time of affliction, when things are vague and confused, but even in moments of comfort, and when the way seems obvious. Leaning on God's chest, and seeking His counsel, is a feature of the children of God, who are bound to their heavenly Father, through the daring of deep love, and the permanent fellowship with Him.

The divine response was positive; namely that he should go up to Judah; and particularly to 'Hebron'-one of the greatest cities of Judah, built amid the mountains as natural strongholds.

'Hebron' means (union), (bond), (friendship), etc. ...; previously called 'Kiriath Arba' (Joshua 20: 7); and called nowadays 'El-Khalil,' as Abraham, God's friend, dwelt

near it, at ‘The terebinth trees of Mamre’ (Genesis 13: 18; 35: 27); there his wife ‘Sarah’ died and was buried; and he as well was buried in it.

David, together with his two wives, his men and their households went up to dwell in Hebron and its neighborhood; And there, the men of Judah came and publicly anointed him a king.

If ‘Hebron’ means (a bond), it would not be possible to anoint David a king, until he, together with his household and his men, went up to it, to be approached there by the men of Judah. I say, that we shall not enjoy the holy anointment, to be counted as “kings and priests” (Revelation 1: 6; 5: 10), unless we enjoy union with our Lord Jesus “The King of Kings;” offering Him our whole life-the soul together with the body, with all their possibilities and capabilities ..., to enjoy a fellowship with God, in His Son Jesus Christ, to reign together with Him.

Josabius the Caesarian¹, compares between the Lord’s anointed of the Old Testament: prophets, priests and kings and the Lord Christ Himself, to clarify that what the Lord’s anointed of the Old Testament, had got, was only a symbol; having been unable to set, out of their followers, any “Lord’s anointed.” The Lord Christ, on the other hand, has been the only One, whose followers were called ‘Christians’; as, in Him, they became “The Lord’s anointed”-kings and priests.

St. John Chrysostom² believes, that in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit granted some individuals the anointment, to set them kings, priests, or prophets; While, in the New Testament-in Jesus Christ-we were all granted anointment, for each of us to become a king, a priest, and a prophet: kings, having enjoyed the kingdom; priests, having presented our bodies a sacrifice (Romans 12: 1); and prophets, as to us, was proclaimed, what “*eye has not seen, nor ear heard*” (1 Corinthians 2: 9).

St. Ambrose³ states that he who seeks Baptism, will enjoy through the anointment, a spiritual priesthood, and a spiritual kingdom.

Here, we should distinguish between the spiritual kingdom, and that according to temporal ordinance, by which we submit to rulers and kings; And we should distinguish, as well, between priesthood, that is granted to carry out the holy sacramental work, and the (Laity priesthood), granted to all believers⁴.

Some believe that anointing David, a king over the house of Judah (2 Samuel 2: 4), by the men of Judah, revealed one of their weak points; namely, their tendency toward isolationism and individualism, away from the rest of the tribes, something that caused, later on, much trouble and dissension among the people; that led to the division of the kingdom into two kingdoms: the kingdom of Israel (10 tribes), and the kingdom of Judah (Judah and Benjamin) up till the days of captivity.

Here, we notice that David had been anointed a king, three times:

- a- Secretly in his father’s house (1 Samuel 16: 13)
- b- His anointment as a king over the house of Judah (2 Samuel 2: 4)
- c- His anointment as a king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5: 3).

What happened with David, symbolized what occurred with the Lord Christ, the King of Kings; His kingdom passed through three stages:

¹ *Eccl. Hist. 1: 3.*

² *In 2 Cor. hom.3.*

³ *On Sacraments 4: 1.*

⁴ *St Jerome: Dialogue against Luciferians.*

a- From eternity, He is the only-begotten Son, the King of Kings (1 Timothy 6: 15; Revelation 17: 14; 19: 16).

b- He reigned through the symbol and the shadow, over men of the Old Testament; as He did over the house of Judah (Matthew 21: 5).

c- He reigned, and still does , over His Church “Israel of God;” extending from one end of the earth, to the other end; as it has been said: “*The earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness*” (1 Corinthians 10: 26; Psalms 24: 1).

2- David praises the men of ‘Jabeth Gilead’:

The first thing David did after his anointment as a king over the house of Judah, was caring for those who took over themselves the burial of Saul and Jonathan. Knowing that they were the men of Jabeth Gilead, he sent messengers to them, saying:

“You are blessed of the Lord, for you have shown this kindness to your Lord, to Saul, and have buried him. And now may the Lord show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing. Now therefore, let your hands be strengthened, and be valiant; for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judas has anointed me king over them” (2 Samuel 2: 5-7).

That action by David, as the start of his royal duties, deserves some consideration:

a- He started his royal work by offering blessing: “*You are blessed of the Lord*” . How marvelous it is for man to start his life of faith (his royal life), by such sweet words of encouragement to others, instead of attacking them negatively.

b- He did not stop at praising, nor at entreating God to reward them but he also proclaimed his readiness to repay them himself for their kindness.

c- David, realizing the faithfulness and loyalty of those people to Saul, longed to use their energies for the edification of his kingdom. A successful leader is the one who does not concentrate all work on himself, but he who knows how to use the energies of all; and sets another row.

3- Abner sets ‘Ichbosheth’ a king:

God set David a king, being anointed by the house of Judah, to dwell seven and a half years in Hebron (2 Samuel 2: 11); then he was anointed a king over all tribes. On another front, Abner the son of Ner, the commander of Saul’s army, was preoccupied with recovering some of the cities that were lost during the battle of Gilboa. After five and a half years of strife, he set ‘Ichbosheth’ the son of Saul a king over Israel (except for the tribe of Judah); and brought him over to ‘Mahanaim’ as a capital of the kingdom. Ichbosheth was 40 years old when he reigned, and remained a king for two years, in continuous troubles.

Abner was aware of Ichbosheth’s weak personality; He did not fight together with his father and brothers in the battle of Gilboa; or he probably deserted the land of battle in the time of danger. Yet Abner set him a king, so as to be himself, the actual head of the kingdom, especially, that he was a cousin of Saul (1 Samuel 14: 15); He also feared that David might dismiss him from his position as the commander of the army.

Abner brought Ichbosheth over to ‘Mahanaim,’ as a capital of the kingdom. Its name meant (two camps)¹, and was so called by Jacob. It was located east of the Jordan,

¹New Westminster Dict. of the Bible, p. 580.

north to the River of Jabok; on the boundary of the territories of Gad and Manasseh; and was divided into two sections: one belonged to Gad, and the other to Manasseh. Gad gave its portion to the children of Merrari, to become a city of refuge (Joshua 21: 38). Some believe it to be 'Kherbet Mehna,' about 2 miles and a half north of Eglin; while others believe it to be 'Telal-El-Dahab' (the hills of gold).

4- Abner arouses a civil war:

David remained true and faithful to Saul and Jonathan; He never thought of taking the throne by force, despite the fact that he was twice anointed a king; being satisfied to work among Judah, his own tribe. Abner, Saul's cousin, on the other hand, intending to force Judah to submit under the reign of Ichbosheth, went out with the men of Ichbosheth from Mehanaim to Gibeon; which compelled Joab and the men of David also to come out without David, to confront them by the pool of Gibeon, five miles and a half north of Jerusalem¹; each party camped on one side of the pool. [Gibeon nowadays is called Kiriath El-Gib.]

It seems that the two parties did not feel comfortable to fight against each other ... And if the situation was left like that, both of them would have returned home, as Joab said later to Abner (2 Samuel 2: 27); All sat down on the two sides of the pool (2 Samuel 2: 13), uninterested to prepare for war. Intending to stir up the situation, Abner suggested that the young men from both sides should arise and compete. Twelve young men from each side arose; each one grasped his opponent by the head, and thrust his sword in his side; so the 24 men fell down together. That location came to be called 'Halket Hasorim,' that means (the field of sharp swords).

This ignited the emotions of the two parties; There was a fierce battle that day; and Abner and his men were defeated before those of David.

5-Abner kills Asahel:

Abner and his men were defeated, and Abner escaped; but Asahel (the word meaning 'God worked²'; son of 'Zeruiah' the sister of David, and brother of Joab and Abishai), intended to catch up with him and kill him. Asahel was the leader of one of the regiments, and although as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle, he was not as strong in war as his brother Joab, nor as Abner.

He chased Abner, depending on his natural swiftness, but, disregarding his little experience in war, compared to his opponent Abner. He probably was overcome with zeal, after his brother Joab defeated Abner, and wanted, by killing Abner, to put an end to the war, and to hasten to deliver the throne to his uncle David.

Abner looked behind him and saw Asahel; He did not fear him, but was apprehensive of the dangerous situation, that would come if he killed Asahel, which was a sure thing: Joab would surely avenge his slain brother by killing Abner, in which case, Ichobosheth would be destroyed, and the kingdom would definitely go from the tribe of Benjamin to Judah (to David). Abner looked behind him, and told Asahel to quit his pursuit of the commander, and turn to his right hand or to his left, and lay hold of one of the young men and take his armor for himself; but Asahel refused. Abner repeated his demand, and warned him, saying: "*Turn aside from following me; Why should I strike*

¹ *Ibid*, p. 329.

² *Ibid*, p. 66.

you to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab?.” However, when Asahel arrogantly insisted on following him, Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, as a kind of warning; but the spear came out of his back, and he fell down there and died on the spot. So it was, as everyone loved him and his brothers Joab and Abishai, as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, they stood still.

6- Joab pursues Abner:

Joab and Abishai, as was expected, pursued Abner to avenge the killing of their brother Asahel; and the sun was going down when they came to the hill of Ammah, which is just before Giah, by the road to the wilderness of Gibeon.

Now the children of Benjamin, who put their hope on the victory of Ichbosheth, gathered together behind Abner, and took their stand on the top of a hill to oppose Joab. There, Abner called to Joab and said: ***“Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?”*** (2 Samuel 2: 26).

Joab answered him, accusing him that he was the one responsible for what had happened: If he had not spoken by the pool of Gibeon, the 24 young men would not have competed, and men of the two sides would have returned to their camps.

Joab blew a trumpet to stop the fighting, and when they counted those slain, they found 19 of David’s men and Asahel; and 360 of Abner’s men. Those small casualties reveal that only very limited number of men on both sides gathered for war; and that they were reluctant to fight against each other. Joab’s consent to put an end to the war, despite the killing of his brother Asahel, was because he realized that his uncle David would not seek the kingdom through fighting his brethren, but was waiting for the calm work of God.

The dead were buried in the land of the battle, while they took Asahel and buried him in his father’s tomb, which was in Bethlehem (2 Samuel 2: 32).

Abner and his men went over to Mahanaim, while Joab and his men went to Hebron, where David reigned.

CHAPTER 3

ABNER JOINS David's FORCES

David reigned on the house of Judah for five years and a half, not moving to submit the rest of the tribes. He most probably dedicated his life, beside his responsibilities in that small kingdom, to a life of piety and worship. And when Abner moved to set Ichebosheth of Saul's house, a king over the rest of the tribes, David remained faithful to his promise to Saul and Jonathan, and refrained from attacking Ichebosheth, despite his weakness and frailty. Ichebosheth started the attack, persuaded by Abner, the commander of his army, having been like a puppet in his hands. David stayed calm, but when he had to defend himself, he dispatched Joab, yet not to attack but to defend. That situation did not last long; after less than two years, Abner reversed his loyalty, and held a covenant with David to deliver to him the rest of the tribes of Israel; while David still remained calm, contemplating in the exalted work of God.

1- War between the house of Saul and that of David	1-6.
2- Abner opposes Ichebosheth	7-11.
3- A covenant between Abner and David	12-21.
4- Joab murders Abner	22-30.
5- David mourns for Abner	31-39.

1- War between the house of Saul and that of David:

As Abner, a relative of Saul, made Ichebosheth a king over Israel (except for the tribe of Judah). David kept his peace, waiting for the hand of God, and for his true and faithful promises; He did not seek to submit the rest of the tribes under his reign, nor to oppose the new king. Ichebosheth on the other hand, started war, persuaded by Abner, who was keen on keeping the kingdom in Saul's house, although he knew that God vowed to give it to David (2 Samuel 3: 10, 11).

There was a long war between the house of Saul and that of David, who persisted on his position of not opposing the king, and of not doing anything wrong to the house of Saul. During that war that lasted about two years, David learned patience and waiting, with faith and confidence, for the realization of God's promises: "**David grew stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker**" (2 Samuel 3: 1). During that long war, God was working among His people, to draw them gradually toward David, not by force or through compulsion, but through David's calm and holy life.

The children of God need to enter into troubles, for God to transfigure in them, and to proclaim Himself through their conquest and inner triumph. With every tribulation, our depths get purified, and God's light is revealed in us, to gain many to the account of His joyful kingdom. The apostle Peter says: "*If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you*" (1 Peter 4: 14). It is as though, in the midst of suffering, we enjoy the Spirit of glory; and the dwelling of God in us, would be proclaimed. **St. Cyprian** says: [God wants us to rejoice and be filled with joy amid tribulations (Luke 6: 22, 23); As where tribulations are, crowns of faith are given, the soldiers of Christ are justified, and heavens will be opened¹].

¹ *Op. 55 (Oxford ed. Ep. 28).*

We often wish to reign in a hurry; Yet God wishes us to pass through the way of passion and tribulation, in order to enjoy the glory of God within us, through our fellowship with Him in His passion ... We tend to hasten things up, but God knows how to lead us with his exalted wisdom toward glory through passion.

Now, we go back to David, who remained in Hebron, reigning on Judah alone, not preoccupied with authority or greatness, but with the holy life. Six sons were born to him in Hebron:

His firstborn was ‘Amnon,’ who committed sin with his sister (2 Samuel 13), as a fruit of what David did with the wife of Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11, 12); He died during David’s life.

‘Chileab’, by Abigail, whose name originally was ‘Daniel’ (1 Chronicles 3: 1); He most probably died by the end of David’s life.

‘Absalom’; who later rebelled against his father, and has been a cause of bitterness to him; He also died during his father’s life.

‘Adonijah,’ who sought the heirship after the death of his father, having been the eldest of his then living children (1 Kings 1: 5).

Then, ‘Shephatiah,’ followed by ‘Ithream’.

2- Abner opposes Ichbosheth:

Although David reigned over just one tribe, and Ichbosheth reigned over all the rest of the tribes, David carried his glory inside him through his faith in God working in him; while Ichbosheth leaned on Abner his relative and the commander of his army. That is why the glory of the first grew from day to day; while the other’s collapse, also so increased. The first leaned upon God, walking according to His divine counsel; while the other leaned upon a human arm and walked according to human counsel’

Abner strived for several years, during Saul’s life, to save his life and those of his children, and failed; and tried for five and a half years, to recover the cities that were seized by the enemies, to pave the way for Ichebosheth. Here, Ichebosheth was finally reigning over Israel ... But Abner was turning against him.

Ichebosheth, of weak personality, fiercely came to admonish Abner who had gone in to one of Saul’s concubines; not out of zeal for the holy life, but because he assumed that Abner intended by that to act as a king. Abner did not receive that admonishment well, as he was the one who set him king; and as fiercely, he rebuked the king, saying to him: *“Am I a dog’s head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman?”* (2 Samuel 3: 8).

He probably said that, assuming that Ichbosheth was accusing him of treason, as though he, in so doing, had secretly joined forces with Judah. And probably, as Abner saw how David grew stronger and greater in the eyes of many, while Ichbosheth grew weaker, he was waiting for a chance to change sides; He probably began to realize that he was opposing God’s will by fighting David; So he said to Ichbosheth: *“May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the Lord has sworn to him-to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judas, from Dan to Beersheba”* (2 Samuel 3: 1, 10). Ichbosheth could not answer Abner because his personality was weak before him, before himself, and before all the

people.

Abner was so conceited with himself; as he recovered for Israel many of the cities that were seized by the enemies, at a time when no king was on the throne of Israel, except for the tribe of Judah on which David reigned. As he was the one who set Ichbosheth a king, he could also destroy him; And now in his speech, he assumes that he can do the same thing with David; namely, he can set him a king, and he can also destroy him. .. However, he could not realize, that before David was to be anointed a king over all the tribes, Abner would be dead. He represents the haughty human arm, who thinks himself able to set kings and destroy them; and does not realize that he is nothing more than a weak breath, that could be reclaimed in on a time he does not expect.

David probably gained, through Abner's relationship with Ichbosheth, a practical experience that would come to support him all the days of his kingdom; so he expressed in his psalms: "*Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he return to the earth ... Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God*" (Psalm 146: 3-5). "*It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes*" (Psalm 118: 8).

St. Jerome says: [There are many, who lean on a ruler, who is here today, yet tomorrow he is not; By day, he may be parading his troops; yet by evening, he may be lying dead in his tomb ... We have only one help, who is able to save¹].

3- A covenant between Abner and David:

Ishobosheth kept silent and did not utter a word before the threats of Abner, because he got the throne from his hand, and not from God's hand. As for Abner, he did not need more time to think the matter over, as the idea of forsaking Ishobosheth had actually taken root in his mind; So, he sent messengers on his behalf to David , saying: "***Whose is the land? Make your covenant with me, and indeed my hand shall be witch you to bring all Israel to you***" (2 Samuel 3: 12). Thus Abner promised-through his messengers-to bring all the tribes on to David, if the latter would have him in his service, and forgive every thing he did.

David accepted that proposition, but presented a condition for finalizing the covenant, that his first wife 'Michal,' daughter of Saul, who was given by her father to 'Palti the son of Laish,' would be returned to him (1 Samuel 25: 44).

Why did David put that condition?

Some believe that David sought her, not out of love, but for political reasons: to make it clear, that he was and before every thing else, Saul's son-in-law, which gave him before the tribes a kind of legitimacy to ascend the throne. While others see in that behavior, a personal satisfaction to David, whose wife was taken from him to be given to somebody else.

These two reasons, might have been on David's mind; But I think that He must have had other important ones.

He wanted to confirm, not just to Abner and Ishbosheth, but to all the tribes, that he was not keen about getting the throne, for the sake of gaining authority and temporal honor; He could have accepted the proposition, and after ascending the throne, he could have demanded Michal, with nobody standing in his way. But he wanted to make it clear

¹ On Ps. hom. 55

that he was still faithful to his wife Michal, whom he loved; and that was for him of more priority than receiving the throne; If he was not faithful to his wife, how then could he be faithful to all those people?

Michal loved him and saved his life from the hand of her father (1 Samuel 19: 11, etc.); and now, he was proclaiming his love to her as his wife, even on the expense of recovering his throne.

A successful leader cares for his inner life, and his hidden depths, being at the same time faithful in his love for those under his care and leadership. The apostle Paul says: “*For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?*” (1 Timothy 3: 5).

Whoever practices love in his house, and with his own friends, knows the concept of care through the experience of love; to say together with **St. John Chrysostom**: [I am a father, full of compassion¹], [I have nothing and nobody more beloved to me than you²]. So we admire in David that deep spirit, that reveals the holiness of his inner life, and his appreciation of his wife, more so than gaining any temporal honor.

Abner demanded from Ishbosheth, to send back Michal, David’s lawful wife to him; being the king and her brother; something he could not have opposed. So he took her away from her husband and sent her to David; her husband went along with her to Bahurim weeping behind her.

‘Bahurim’ means (youth)³; In its location nowadays is ‘Ras Tamim,’⁴ north-west of the Mount of Olives, on the way from Jerusalem to Jordan (2 Samuel 16: 5). At it, Shemei cursed David, while he was fleeing before Absalom; and in it Jonathan and Ahimaaz hid (2 Samuel 17: 18).

4- Joab murders Abner:

We would have expected David to hasten joyfully to seize that chance to gather all the tribes under his dominion; Yet it happened that he, lovingly and confidently, stood to contemplate God’s work with him. The one who hastened to move was Abner; who got in touch with the elders of Israel to set David a king, as they had previously sought, beside realizing the will of God. He spoke as well in the hearing of the tribe of Benjamin who listened to him, being one of them, and the most brave and loyal to Saul; They assumed that he came to despair of Ishbosheth.

It seems, due to Abner’s talk with the elders, that the tribes, in time past, had sought to set David a king over them (2 Samuel 3: 17); but Abner himself opposed them to establish Saul’s throne, until he finally came to despair of Ishbosheth.

So Abner took with him 20 men of the tribes’ elders, and came to David, who made a feast for them, as a sign of their union, and of the covenant made between them. Abner was so impressed by that encounter, that he requested David’s permission to go to make all the necessary arrangements to proclaim him a king over all Israel (1 Chronicles 11: 1-3).

Joab came back with his men from war; and when he heard of what happened between David and Abner, he got mad as he probably feared that Abner may replace him

¹ On Heb. hom. 23:9.

² On Acts. hom. 3

³ New Westminster Dict. of the Bible, p. 89.

⁴ J.L. Mckenzie: Dict. of the Bible, P. 77.

as the commander of the army. He rebuked David, claiming that Abner was a spy who intended to deceive the king, until he had the chance to go out to gather all the tribes against him. David held his peace, but not for fear of Joab, as Ishbosheth did before Abner, but, because he did not care for Joab's thoughts, and for his rash actions in several occasions.

Joab, behind David's back, sent messengers after Abner, to return from the well of Sirah to Hebron (the distance between them is about 2 1/2 miles); pretending that he (or the king) would like to discuss certain issues with him (2 Samuel 3: 26). Now when Abner did return to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there, stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother; and for fear that he might replace him as the commander of David's army.

It was not fitting for Joab, as a man of war, to kill someone who came in peace to negotiate with him; He should have challenged him to fight him openly if he wished.... Moses commanded the people, saying: "*Cursed is the one who attacks his neighbor secretly*" (Deuteronomy 27: 24).

5- David mourns for Abner:

David gallantly and nobly, both officially and personally, proclaimed his innocence of the murder of Abner, and his refusal of what Joab did, describing it as unfitting for a man of faith and a man of war; and that God would definitely punish him for it (2 Samuel 3: 29).

David officially confirmed his position by following Abner's coffin, and by commanding the people to tear their clothes, to gird themselves with sackcloth, and to mourn for Abner. He also personally proclaimed his innocence of that crime, by lifting up his voice and weeping at Abner's grave, and by fasting the whole day. His grief was shared by the whole people. David disregarded that Abner had been his enemy, and only remembered him as a great leader, whom he could have used to fight against the heathens.

In a magnificent lamentation, he said: "***Should Abner die as a fool dies? Your hands were not bound, nor your feet put into fetters; As a man falls before wicked men, so you fell***" (2 Samuel 3: 33, 34). He did not die in war as a weak man; as he was capable of fighting; His hands were neither bound, nor his feet were put into fetters; But he died through treason before the wicked men: Joab and Abishai.

Yet David did not relieve Joab from his command, probably because he could not be replaced as a great warrior; and probably also because he believed that Joab did it, according to his belief, that he was defending the kingdom of David, assuming that Abner was a spy and deceitful.

CHAPTER 4

THE END OF SAUL'S REIGN

By killing Abner at the hand of Joab, the kingdom of Saul came to an end, as Ishbosheth was not a real king. He was killed by the brothers 'Baana' and 'Rechab' while sleeping in his bed; to leave the kingdom with only one heir: 'Mephibosheth' the son of Jonathan; a lame kid, incapable of ascending the throne.

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|--|--------------|
| 1- Ishbosheth collapses | 1. |
| 2- Ishbosheth is murdered | 2-8. |
| 3- David avenges the murder of Ishbosheth | 9-12. |

1- Ishbosheth collapses:

"When Saul's son heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost heart, and all Israel was troubled" (2 Samuel 4: 1). Not mentioning his name, was a kind of despire; as Ishbosheth had already lost his dignity and strength having set his kingdom upon Abner, who was murdered by Joab. By that, the heart of the so called king was destroyed, and the whole people were troubled; The brave leader was dead, and they did not know what David was going to do to them.

2- Ishbosheth murdered:

Baanah and Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite (a part of Benjamin) killed Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 4: 2). Those brothers who were in the king's service, made use of his collapse, and of the people forsaking him; and intended to seek David's favor, by presenting him with the head of his competitor Ichbosheth. They betrayed the king who trusted them to serve in his court; beside having been from his own tribe, which made their treason more horrible.

Some believe that they were originally Canaanites, of the Gibeonites, with whom Joshua made a covenant (Joshua 9); then their land was given to the Benjamites. It seems that the Beerothites-among whom was Rimmon, the father of Baanah and Rechab-fled to Gittaim, when Saul killed some Gibeonites, to deliver their land to the Benjamites. That is why, although those brothers were serving Saul's son, they were harboring deep hatred toward Saul's household, which they revealed by killing the weak king. They set out and came to the house of Ichobosheth, who was lying on his bed, at about the heat of the day-between 12 Noon and 3 p.m. – pretending their desire to get wheat; They stabbed him in the stomach; then beheaded him and took his head and brought it to David in Hebron, presenting the following theological interpretation for their deed: *"The Lord has avenged my Lord the king this day of Saul and his descendants"* (2 Samuel 4: 8).

'Baanah' means (son of affliction) or (tribulation)¹; 'Rechab' means a (knight)², 'Rimmon' means a (Pomegrante tree)³; and 'Beerothite' means (wells), a city built at the foot of the plateau on which Gibeon was built; about 10 miles north of Jerusalem; called nowadays 'El-Beerah.'⁴

By killing Ishbosheth, the way before David became completely paved; as the only one remaining of Saul's household was 'Mephibosheth,' the son of Jonathan. who

¹ Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, art. 1195.

² Ibid, art. 7394.

³ Ibid, art. 7416.

⁴ Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 99.

had been 5 years old, when his father and grandfather were killed in war; and he was saved and taken away by his nurse. It happened, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, the bones of his legs were broken, and he became lame (2 Samuel 4: 4); unfit to ascend the throne, because of his physical handicap and his young age (12 years).

3- Avenging Ishbosheth:

David confirmed to the two wicked traitors, that he was in no need of their help, as he was leaning only upon the Lord, “*Who has redeemed his life from all adversity*” (2 Samuel 4: 8). He was against the killings of Saul and Abner, “*so how much more, when wicked men killed a righteous person in his own house on his bed?*” So he gave the command to cut off their hands that killed, and their feet that fled; to execute them, and hang them by the pool in Hebron; to let everyone know that David did not reign through shedding innocent blood. As to the head of Ishbosheth, it was respectfully buried in the tomb of Abner in Hebron.

That behavior pleased the heart of God who chose him a king as well as the hearts of the Benjamites, when they realized that David did not harbor any animosity toward Saul’s household, but only love and loyalty.

CHAPTER 5

DAVID ANOINTED A KING

David was at last, and after a long time, and in the right time, anointed a king over all the tribes of Israel, having practiced, along the past years, the persistent life of strife, humility-not to seek what is his, but what is others and love-not to avenge himself.

David has practiced works of true love to reign and conquer, despite the opposition of adversaries.

1- David anointed a king	1-5.
2- David's victory over the Jebusites	6-10.
3- Hiram's friendship with David	11.
4- David's kingdom established	12-16.
5- Opposition of the adversaries and their defeat	17-25.

1- David anointed a king:

That was the third time for David to be anointed a king; and it was high time for him to reign through a unanimous choice of the whole people of Israel. The elders of Israel came to the king in Hebron, and said: ***"Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the Lord said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel'"*** (2 Samuel 5: 1-2).

David was trained on strife and love: he knew how to deal with Saul's envy, with love and decency; and how to face the death of Saul, Abner, and Ishbosheth, with no delight, but to lament them, and to avenge the blood of the innocent. He readily received Abigail's counsel, to refrain from avenging himself; as it was expected from him, to give and not to seek what is his own.... By this spirit, he lived for so long years, and by those consistent experiences in the Lord, he received the elders in Hebron with love with no single word of admonishment. He did not say to them: 'If I am your bone and flesh, If I have been the cause of the triumphs of Israel; and if I have been chosen by the Lord a shepherd and a ruler, why then, have you pursued me all those years, and why have you not defended me before the rejected Saul? Why have you remained for more than 5 years almost without a king under Ishbosheth, set by Abner a king over you; Why have you disregarded my existence in Hebron?.'

David was a symbol of the true King, the Lord of glory Jesus Christ, who, though eternally anointed to reign, He came in the fullness of time, to walk humbly, along the way of the cross, ***"When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son"*** (Romans 5: 10); Without hurting our feelings, for our previous denial and opposition, in true love, He stood knocking on the door of our heart, to enter and reign, if we opened it up to Him, with our complete freedom.

At last, the elders of Israel realized who David was, and their relationship to him, saying: ***"We are your bone and your flesh."*** We also are proud of our relationship to the Son of David quoting the words of the apostle Paul: ***"For we are members of His body, of His flesh and His bones"*** (Ephesians 5: 30) ***Do not you know that your bodies are members of Christ? "***(1 Corinthians 6: 15); ***"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually"*** (1 Corinthians 12: 27).

The Word of God came incarnated, to reign in us, but not through authority or

commitment; but to set us as members of His holy body, and to carry the fellowship of His nature.

2- David's victory over the Jebusites:

'Jebuse'-the name of Jerusalem in the days of the Jebusites – had been of small size, compared to Jerusalem in the days of king Solomon¹. It was more convenient to become David's capital than Hebron: Firstly, because of its very distinguished location of high elevation (Psalm 48: 2); surrounded by mountains (Psalm 125: 2), and deep valleys on three sides, some 800 feet deep; And secondly, because it was located on the borders of the territories of Judah and Benjamin, to make both satisfied (the tribe of Judah, from which David came, and that of Benjamin, the tribe of Saul).

As to Jebusites², they were a Canaanite tribe, before Israel entered the promised land (Genesis 10: 16; 15: 21; Exodus 3: 8). During exodus, they were a mountain tribe (Numbers 13: 29; Joshua 11: 3); that joined forces with a number of kings against Gibeon, because it made a covenant with Joshua. Joshua defeated them and killed their king 'Adoni Zedek' (Joshua 10: 23-26), and gave their land to Benjamin (Joshua 18: 28); It was later taken over and burnt down by the men of Judah, having been on the border of their territory (Joshua 15: 8; Judges 1: 8). Nevertheless the Jebusites did not lose their stronghold, as claimed by Josephus³ but dwelt in it as strangers, together with the children of Judah and Benjamin (Joshua 15: 63; Judges 1: 21; 19: 11); and stayed there, even after David took over their stronghold (2 Samuel 24: 16-18; 2 Chronicles 3: 1).

The Jebusites were confident that David could never take over their stronghold because of its fortified location, even if it was dwelt by the blind and lame; hence they sarcastically said: "***You shall not come in here; (even) the blind and the lame will repel you***" (2 Samuel 5: 6).

David proclaimed that whoever would climb up by way of the water shaft, and defeat the Jebusites, (the shaft was the way to enter the stronghold), would be chief and captain (2 Samuel 5: 8; 1 Chronicles 11: 6). That had been realized by Joab the son of Zeruiah who entered the city and became the commander of the army (1 Chronicles 11: 6). David then dwelt in the stronghold, and called it 'the city of David.'

Concerning the taking over of Jebuse by David, we notice the following:

a- The Jebusites sarcastically said to him: "***You shall not come in here; (even) the blind and the lame will repel you***" (2 Samuel 5: 6). In other words, they wanted to say, that even if they were blind and lame, David with all his army, would not be able to take over their city. But, having just done that, David says: "There are no more blind or lame in the city;" a symbolic proclamation of the strength and wisdom of his men who were all capable of seeing and walking.

What happened with David, was a symbol of what was to be realized by the "Son of David;" The world was taken over by the devil, who was called "*the ruler of this world*" (John 14: 30); the world became a captive under his feet {'Jebuse' means (trampled under feet); and mankind was likened to the blind and the lame: their inner eyes blinded to behold the kingdom of heaven; and their inner feet crippled to walk along the royal way.... Despite this, those blind and lame thought of themselves as fortified, and

¹ The New Westminster Dict. of the Bible, p. 449

² Ibid.

³ Antiq. 5: 2: 2.

thought that the Son of David would not be able to establish His kingdom in the life of mankind. Yet the Son of David did enter 'Jebuse,' namely the world and set by the cross His kingdom; recovered the hearts on which the devil reigned; and took away all the blindness of insight, and the inability to walk; So that the true believers were able to see, and to hasten to walk toward the kingdom of heaven with no one among them, spiritually blind or lame.

b- Having taken over 'Jebuse,' and called it his personal city, that carried his name, it was said: "***Then David built all around from the Millo (the fortress) and inward***" (2 Samuel 5: 9). What is meant by "all around," is that the city became like a circle, with no point of start, nor a point of end; namely, it came to carry a new feature: exaltation above time, to turn into an eternal heavenly city, that death is incapable of ending its being. That is the Church of the New Testament, which, after having been a 'Jebuse'; namely, trampled under feet, became heavenly, through her heavenly Groom, and King (the Son of David). And as the apostle Paul says: "*He made us sit together in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ*" (Ephesians 2: 6). And St. Clement of Alexandria says: [The earth turns-for the believer with the spiritual knowledge (the Gnostic)-into heaven.

I wish the Son of David would take over our inner 'Jebuse,' to turn it into the 'City of David,' His personal (rounded) or heavenly city, driving away from it every blindness of insight, and every paralysis of feet!

c- The author ends his talk by saying: "***So David went on and became great, and the Lord of hosts was with him***" (2 Samuel 5: 10). David's greatness grew, not because he took over the fortified stronghold of 'Jebuse,' but because the Lord of hosts was with him. Here the Lord was called "the Lord of hosts,' due to the fact that He was, and is always, the real leader of His people who fought to grant them victory and glory. That was David's experience that he expressed in his psalms, saying: "*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?*" (Psalm 27: 1); and: "*He (God) is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God*" (Psalm 62:5, 6).

St. Augustine says: [The Lord grants me both the knowledge of Himself, and salvation; Who can take me away from Him? ... The Lord scatters all the attacks and snares of my enemy; I fear no one¹]. That is the secret of our growing and consistent glory!

3- Hiram's friendship with David:

With every true triumph, the believer confronts two situations: Opposition from the enemy that would lead him to further conquests; as well as the attraction of some, to God who works in him. Thus, as David grew in greatness, because the Lord of hosts was with him, the enemy was aroused to increase his opposition toward him; but at the same time, David drew to him some of the neighboring kingdoms, glorifying God in him as was demonstrated by the action of Hiram, the king of Tyre.

The king of Tyre, that was at that time in its peak of greatness, sent messengers to David and friendship grew between them, that endured up to the days of king Solomon

¹ On Ps. 27.

and even during the days of the prophet ‘Amos’ (Amos 1: 9).

Hiram realized that Israel would be in need of a great construction activity, after such continuous victories that were realized during David’s time; That was why he sent him cedar trees, and carpenters and masons (2 Samuel 5: 11). The two kingdoms cooperated together for their mutual benefit: Israel made use of Tyre, as a sea-side land, for its imports and exports; while Tyre made use of Israel, as a way for its commerce, beside importing from it its need of grains and other products.

Our peace with God inside us, produces peace with others, and transforms the circumstances surrounding us for our benefit and edification; Even the opposition of the wicked, will be transformed by God for our growth and our inner joy.

I say, How much we need, to solve our problems-whatever they may be-to start in the light of God’s work in us; hence, the grace of God would work in and by us to transform every thing for our good; to proclaim with the apostle Paul: “*All things (would) work together for good to those who love God*” (Romans 8: 28).

4-David’s kingdom established:

After 20 years of secretly anointing David in Bethlehem, it was said: “*David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted His kingdom for His people Israel’s sake*” (2 Samuel 5: 12).

David waited patiently all those years in faith, to be trained by the grace of God, on the care for the people of God. And now, God has established His Kingdom for Israel’s sake. It is thus fitting for us-whatever the extent of our talents and the greatness of our success are-to realize that all these are divine gifts, given to us for the sake of the edification of the holy congregation.

For the sake of mankind, the Lord Christ incarnated; For their sake He reigned on a tree, resurrected and ascended to heaven; and for their sake, he will come again, on the clouds to gather together His believers, and to lift them up to the bosom of the Father. So, being members of His body, it is fitting for us to carry His same thought, and to stare up all our capabilities for edifying others. The apostle Paul says: “*Love does not seek its own*” (1 Corinthians 13: 5).

5-Opposition of the adversaries and their defeat:

If David’s success gave him grace in the eyes of Hiram, king of Tyre, to send him cedar wood and masons, as a sign of practical friendship, on the opposite side, that same success doubled the intensity of the opposition of the adversaries. with every triumph , we should expect opposition and war if they are not from without, they will be from within; That is why ‘Ben Sirach says: [My son, if you decided to minister to God, prepare yourself for temptation (2: 1)] .

The enemies saw in the anointment of David as a king over all the tribes of Israel, and in his growing greatness, an eminent danger to them, especially that the whole people became as one heart with him. They did not fear him while he was in Hebron, a king over just one tribe; they took him lightly; But in ‘Jebuse,’ as he became independent, strong, and his star shined and glittered, they came after him. As for him, because he did not expect war, he went down with his personal guards to his old stronghold ‘Adullam.’ The Philistines searched for him, and deployed themselves in the Valley of Rephaim [Its location is not well known; but it is between Bethlehem and Jerusalem (Joshua 15: 8); known for its fertility (Isaiah 17: 5)].

In the stronghold, although he was joined by the children of Gad (1 Chronicles 12: 8-15), yet they were still few in number, compared to the enemy troupes. David inquired of the Lord through Abiathar the priest (1 Samuel 23: 11; 30: 7, 8); and the Lord gave him His consent to go to war. He went to ‘Baal Perazim,’ meaning (God or Master of defeats); an elevated position, north of the Valley of Rephaim; the same Mount of Perazim, mentioned in Isaiah 28: 11.

How much we need to lean upon the Shepherd of our souls, who proceeds His flock, that walk behind and with Him; saying with the Psalmist: *“I have set the Lord before me; Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved”* (Psalm 16: 8). St. Augustine says: [He grants me Himself, so that, in Him, I steadfastly dwell¹].

David, together with his men, went up, circled up around behind his enemies, and came upon them in front of the mulberry trees (**the weeping trees**); as he felt the presence of the Lord, who proceeded to carry him along the way of strife, granting him triumph through His grace. It is as though, if we want the life of triumph over the devil, we are committed to go down to the valley of weeping and tears, to encounter God, our strength; and to hear the Psalmist saying: *“Blessed is the man whose strength is in You ... As they pass through the Valley of Baca ; They make it a spring ... They go from strength to strength; Every one of them appears before God in Zion”* (Psalm 84: 5-7).

St. Jerome says: [Let us meditate for a moment, that we are in that valley; We are not on a mountain; ... We are not in the paradise of Eden; ...We are not on the Mounts of paradise; ... But we are in the lowest reaches of the earth; on the land that is cursed, that produces thorns and thistles...; and as long as we are in the valley of tears, it is not fitting for us to laugh, but rather to weep. The Lord says: *“Blessed are you, who weep now, for you shall laugh”* (Luke 6: 21). Now we are in the valley of tears; namely, in the world, a place for weeping and not for rejoicing ... The coming world is the one for joy ... The valley of tears is an arena for strife²].

David and his men went down to the valley of tears, to get the free gift of God, more and more; to set forth from strength to strength; He struck the enemy from ‘Geba’ as far as ‘Gezer’(2 Samuel 5: 25). In the valley of tears, his insight was opened to behold God proceed him, pave the way of conquest, and destroy the enemy before him. It is as though the divine presence that fills us with comfort amid the tears, equally terrifies the enemy and utterly destroys him.

The word ‘Geba’ means (a hill)³; It is a city in Benjamin (Joshua 18: 24); designated for priests (Joshua 21: 17), facing ‘Michmash’; Nowadays, the village of ‘Geba’-carrying the same name-is 6 miles north-east of Jerusalem. That means that the enemies fled toward north-east, and not toward their own land to the west, to take refuge in the stronghold in ‘Gebeah’ (1 Samuel 13: 3). Having found no refuge there, they proceeded toward their land as far as Gibeon (1 Chronicles 14: 16); and from it to the entrance of ‘Gezer’ [the word ‘Gezer’ means (portion), or (Bride’s dowry)]; It is on the border of their territory, 18 miles north-west of Jerusalem; 5 2/3 miles east of Ekron.

¹ On Ps. 16.

² On Ps. hom. 16.

³ The New Westminster Dict. of the Bible, p. 319.

CHAPTER 6

THE ARK BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM

Having become greater and the Lord of hosts was with him, granting him victory and triumph ; until he settled down in Jerusalem, as capital of his kingdom, David intended to confirm that the Lord is the real King; the administrator of the people's affairs, and the Grantor of their conquests. That is why he thought of bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, as a sign of the unseen power of God.

1- The procession of the ark	1-5.
2- Striking Uzzah	6-11.
3- Bringing the ark to Jerusalem	12-15.
4- Michal despises David	16 – 23.

1- The procession of the ark:

David gathered 30,000 of the chosen men of Israel, not to fight, but to celebrate the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem; to honor the Lord, the secret of joy for his people. Here the spiritual wisdom of David was apparent; as he did not want the people to get preoccupied by their victory over enemies, as a personal glory for them, but intended to draw their hearts to God Himself, to rejoice in the Lord their true Savior.

The ark of the covenant represented the divine presence, carrying the name of the Lord of hosts, as the true spiritual leader of His people; “*Who dwells between the cherubim*” (2 Samuel 6: 2); through whom, the glory of God appears, to proclaim His mercy to His people, as from the throne of mercy, or the chair of mercy.

God, the awesome Lord of hosts with His heavenly cart being the congregation of the fiery cherubim, dwells amid His people by His mercy, as a compassionate Father, to support them and to put joy in their depths.

The procession started from ‘**Baale Judah,**’ or ‘Baale,’ or ‘the village of Baal,’ or ‘the village of Jerarim.’ It was one of the cities of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9: 17), on the border of the territories of both Judah and Benjamin, where the ark was put after bringing it back from the land of the Philistines (1 Samuel 6: 19; 7: 2). It is probably the village of grapes or ‘Abagosh,’ 8 1/3 miles north-west of Jerusalem¹.

They set the ark of God on a new cart, probably following the lead of the Philistines (1 Samuel 6: 7); But by that they did not keep the law as it should have been carried on the shoulders of the sons of Kahath (Numbers 1: 51), and not on a cart.

Uzza and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab (most probably his grandsons) drove the new cart: Ahio went before the cart to lead it, while David and all the house of Israel played music before the Lord, on all kinds of instruments made of fir wood, on harps, stringed instruments, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals².

2- Striking Uzzah:

When the procession came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled; namely they got terrified, and started to run and kick. The anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, He struck him dead there, for his mistake.

¹ *Ibid*, p. 541-2.

² كتاب السنن القويم في تفسير العهد القديم - صموئيل الثاني ٦.

Why did God strike him? Was not that to be counted as a cruel chastisement?

a- The ark should have been carried on the shoulders of Levites, and not on a cart. God allowed the heathens to put it on a new cart, drawn by two oxen, as it symbolized the Church of the New Testament that carries the Person of Christ in us, being its Head. That Church embraces two peoples: the Jews and the Gentiles. The heathens, at that time, were not worthy to carry the ark of the covenant; as there is no fellowship between God and Bilaal (2 Corinthians 6: 14). But the sons of Kahath, represented the Congregation of believers, who became worthy of being a second heaven, carrying God in them; That is why they should have insisted on enjoying their right to carry the ark themselves, instead of the cart.

God does not seek a new cart, nor the offerings of this world, but He seeks the holy inner shoulders, that, like the cherubim, are worthy to carry God. God wants our hearts and not our capabilities.

b- Uzza should have known the law, especially that the ark was placed in his father's and grandfather's house for the duration of 70 years. He should have known that whoever touched the holy things would die (Numbers 4: 15).

c- Uzza, probably used to negligently put out his hand to the ark of God; before daring to do that publicly before the whole congregation.

d- God intended to confirm the need for the 'fear of God,' beside the 'love of God'; so that David and all the people would live in fear and dignity, beside love and daring.

The lesson was severe, to let all learn from it; like what happened with Ananias when he lied to the apostles (Acts 5: 5). **St. John Chrysostom** says: [That man Ananias was punished to benefit all ... and Uzza was punished, and every one was afraid¹].

David became angry because the joy of the people turned into grief and fear and because confusion prevailed, and everybody had to go home...David was afraid to move the ark of God with him into the city of David, before knowing for sure the secret of God's anger against Uzzah.

David took the ark aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite-most probably from Gath Rimmon, in the portion of the tribe of Dan in the south (Joshua 19: 45), given to the sons of Kahath (Joshua 21: 24). Obed-Edom (his name means 'Edom worships'), was a Korahite, a descendent of Kahath (Numbers 16: 1), who enjoyed the blessing of the presence of the ark of God in his house for three months.

We should point out here, that David did not inquire of God when he intended to move the ark to his city, although he was used to do that in every thing great or small. He probably assumed that God would definitely be pleased by that action, so there was no need to ask for His counsel. Or, probably because his great joy for moving the ark, and his wish for the divine blessing, led to that oversight. If he had asked for God's counsel , He would have revealed to him the mistake of moving it on a cart ... and hence, Uzza would not have died, and the joy of the people would not have turned into grief and fear.

David realized that Uzzah's death was not just because he touched the ark but, that behind that touch, there was rebellion and corruption; That is why he wrote the psalm 15, saying: "*Lord, Who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill / He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his*

¹ On Acts. hom. 12.

heart” (Psalm 15: 1-2)

3- Bringing the ark to Jerusalem:

Obed-Edom the Gittite received the ark of the covenant in his house with respect and reverence, so “*the Lord blessed Obed-Edom, all his household ,and all that belonged to him*”(1 Chronicles 13: 13, 14; 2 Samuel 6: 12); That is why David thought of bringing it into Jerusalem, as it was mentioned in detail in 1 Chronicles 15: When those bearing the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, they sacrificed oxen and fattened sheep-seven bulls and seven rams; a thanksgiving offering to the Lord who helped them and did not strike them as He did with Uzza.

David danced before the Lord with all his might;. He took off the royal robe-a sign of greatness and haughtiness, and put on a linen ephod-a sign of purity, and a proclamation of humility, and rejoice before God’s presence.

David danced before the ark, expressing his inner depths that were shaking in rejoice before the Lord. We did not hear that the prophet Samuel ever did that not because the latter did not rejoice in his depths, but, every believer would express his love and joy, according to his circumstances. **St. Ambrose** says: [When David danced before the ark, while Samuel did not, David was not blamed, while Samuel was commended¹].

The blessed David expressed his joy with the ark in his thirtieth psalm; saying:

“For his anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning ... You have turned for me my mourning into dancing. You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, To the end that my glory may sing praise to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever” (Psalm 30: 5-11)

Those amazing phrases reveal the extent of joy and gladness in David’s heart not only caused by the events he lived through, while bringing the ark into his city, but also, in a greater form, by the dwelling of the Savior Messiah Himself, in the inner city of the soul; namely, by the dwelling of the Lord in the heart, to set His Kingdom within us (Luke 17: 21).

The Psalmist David says: “*For His anger is but for a moment; His favor is for life*”; referring to the divine wrath, as Uzza was struck dead before the ark, when he dared to touch it. That was only for a moment; Yet, the people, through that ark, enjoyed life, as they gained the pleasure of God. That was a symbol of what happened with Jesus, the Lord of Glory, as He bore the divine wrath on the cross; it was said: “*It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief, when You make His soul an offering for sin. ... For He shall bear the iniquities of many*” (Isaiah 53: 10, 12). As His wrath was only for a moment, as our iniquities were put on Him; He rose and caused us to rise with Him, granting us life in His pleasure.

What happened with Uzza was in the darkness of the evening; and what happened with David, as he brought up the ark, was in the light of the morning: “*Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning*” . That was strongly realized, when weeping prevailed, as the Lord delivered His Spirit on the cross; But by the dawn of Sunday, the Church rejoiced by His resurrection to remain forever enjoying the life resurrected in Him.

The Psalmist says: “*You turned for me my mourning into dancing*” ... He mourned

¹ Duties of the Clergy 1: 43: 23.

internally as Uzza died, and was utterly confused; But he danced in his depths like the dance of John the Baptist in his mother's womb, as he realized the incarnated Christ in the womb of the virgin St. Mary. David danced before the ark, as he saw it as a symbol of Christ, coming to the world, to dwell among mankind, to turn people to life after death, and to grant them joy in place of grief.

He says: "*You have put off my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness*" ; If he took off his robe of greatness and girded himself to dance before the ark, it was because he saw in this a symbol of his casting off the works of the ancient man; namely his corrupt nature, to enjoy the girdle of gladness, or the new man, or the renewal of human nature.

Therefore in his thirtieth psalm, David connects between his dancing with joy for bringing the ark of the covenant, and his rejoicing for the coming of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, and the Renewer of human nature, through its enjoyment of His resurrection in it. **St. Augustine** says in his interpretation of this psalm: [It is the psalm of rejoicing for the resurrection, and the change, and renewal of the body to a state of eternity; not only for the Lord, but for the whole Church¹]. And he also says: [*You have turned for me my mourning into dancing*"]; namely, you have taken away the veil of my sins, and clothed me with the first robe, the eternal joy²].

David wrote a special psalm for the celebration of bringing the ark of the covenant into his city which he opened with the traditional text, that the congregation used, every time they set the tabernacle: "*Let God arise; Let His enemies be scattered; Let those also who hate Him flee before Him*" (Psalm 68: 1; and Numbers 10: 35). That psalm strongly expressed the blessings of the dwelling of the Lord in the midst of His people, as the secret of joy and rejoice (Psalm 68: 3, 4), and of the care for His people, especially for the fatherless and the widows, being "*A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows* (Psalm 68: 5); "*Provider for the poor* " (Psalm 68: 10); "*The God of our salvation*" (Psalm 68: 19); "*Who gives strength and power to His people*" (Psalm 68: 35); He scatters evil, the way wax melts before fire, and smoke is driven away (Psalm 68: 2); "*Before Him the earth shook*" (Psalm 68: 6); and "*The kings flee*" (Psalm 68: 12).

He also wrote psalm 24 to proclaim that his great gladness for the ark of the covenant, does not imply that God can be confined in a certain place; but it is a symbol of God's care for the whole humanity saying: "*The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein*" (Psalm 24: 1). At the end of that magnificent psalm, the prophet David sees in the entry of the ark into Jerusalem, a symbolic portrait of the ascension of the Lord Christ to the Higher Jerusalem, after His triumph in the battle of the cross saying: "*Lift your heads you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty; The Lord mighty in battle ... The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory*" (Psalm 24: 7-10).

4- Michal despises David:

The ark was brought into the city of David; namely, into the upper section of the south-west of Jerusalem, where the stronghold that David seized from the Jebusites, was; beside the dwelling place of David; and the Sanctuary of the ark, until the day it was

¹ On Ps. 30 (29).

² Ibid.

moved into the temple that was built by King Solomon.

Michal loved David (1 Samuel 18: 20), and saved him from the hand of her father (1 Samuel 19: 13); But she was given by Saul as a wife to 'Paltiel the son of Laish'; then was given back to her first husband David. ... But as she was incapable of sharing his love of God, his zeal, and faith, she saw in his taking off his royal robe, and his dancing before the Ark of the Covenant, a shameful act that is not fitting for a king. She received him with despise, and said to him sarcastically:

“How glorious was the king of Israel, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself! “ (2 Samuel 6: 20)

What a great difference between David and Michal! The former withdrew with all his inner being, to see through the ark, the incarnation of the Word; the dwelling of the Messiah among His people; and a presentation of His salvation work. While Michal's heart, on the other hand, was attached to the royal robe, that David took off, to see him shamefully naked, as she said to him!!!

It seems that Michal expected to see her man, the king, stay in his palace, waiting to receive those who come to congratulate him for the arrival of the ark and not to get down from the place, take off his royal robe, and dance before the ark in the presence of the whole congregation. Michal represents the 'Ego,' retired and closed in within the soul; seeking what is hers, and not opening to God and men; Hence, her insight became blind, her heart turned stony, and her inner sense of the exalted divine work, was lost. The blessed David, on the other hand, represents the soul that takes off the worldly haughtiness, and opens up by humility filled with love toward God and men; to turn from the sackcloth of grief, to the girdle of joy; and to cross over from the mourning of the evening, to the joy of the morning of resurrection.

On the arrival of the ark, burnt offerings and sacrifices of peace offerings, were presented (Leviticus 1 and 3); It is as though the ultimate goal of the incarnation of the Word, was the sacrifice of the cross, which is the subject of pleasure to God the Father; and capable of our salvation.

David then blessed the people, and gave to everyone of them, a loaf of bread, a cup of wine, and a cake of raisins: A loaf of bread refers to the unity of the Church, and the exchange of love among its members; as the grains are gathered together in one loaf of bread; the cup of wine refers to the communion of joy by the Spirit; while the cake of raisin refers to the sweetness of the Church by its unity¹.

David returned to bless his household; but Michal received him scornfully; while he firmly rebuked her for her unfaithful views.

The chapter ends by saying that Michal had no sons from David till the time of her death which was considered to be a disgrace in the Old Testament, a sign of God's wrath as every woman believer was anticipating the coming of the Messiah from her offspring. The barrenness of Michal was probably a fruit of her pride and rebellion against the Lord.

¹ راجع: من تفسير وتأملات الآباء الأولين: هوشع (الأصحاح الأول).

CHAPTER 7

DAVID'S LONGING TO BUILD A HOUSE FOR THE LORD

In acknowledgment of God's goodness to him, David wanted to build Him a house considering it unfitting for himself to dwell in a house of cedar, while the Ark of the Covenant dwelt inside tent curtains.

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|--|--------------|
| 1- David's wish to build a house for the Lord | 1-3 |
| 2- A son of David's seed would build that house | 4-17 |
| 3- David's thanksgiving to God | 18-29 |

1- David's wish to build a house for the Lord:

The author of this book was not committed to the chronological order of events with the intention to reveal David's heart wish: to build a house for the Lord to replace the tabernacle. He mentioned this wish directly after he mentioned the episode of bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the city of David. What came here, was most probably realized after the war that was mentioned in the following chapter; and after: *"The Lord has given him (David) rest from all his enemies all around"* (2 Samuel 7: 1)

There is no doubt that this thought was in the depths of David and he most probably yearned to build a house for the Lord before building his own house ranking God above all aspects of his life. Although this thought grew more intense, when he brought the ark of the covenant into his city, he did not talk about it to the prophet 'Nathan,' until he got rest from wars intending to build a house so huge, that required long years of peace; namely, with no distractions by wars.

Nathan had been a special respectful prophet, faithful to God and to the king who, firmly and bravely, yet decently, rebuked the king when he committed adultery with the wife of 'Uriah the Hittite' (2 Samuel 11: 1-15). He, together with 'Gad' the seer, organized the service in the house of the Lord (2 Chronicles 29: 25). Nathan also helped 'Bathsheba to give the throne to 'Solomon' (1 Kings 1)

Nathan at first approved David's request to build a house for the Lord, considering it to be a good and fitting request. Yet, when he sought the counsel of God, he was told to leave this to David's son after him.

2- A son of David's seed would build the house of the Lord:

It seems that God talked to Nathan in a vision at night (2 Samuel 7: 4, 17). God rejected David's request to build him a house, arguing that God had not dwelt in a house since the time that he brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, and had not demanded that from them; He is not a man to need a house (Isaiah 66: 1). God so confirmed, to keep his people from assuming that he realized all those victories, to make them build a great temple for Him; and also to keep them from getting preoccupied, later on, with the house of God as a great building. He wanted to confirm that they are themselves His living house; His wish is to dwell among them, and to proclaim His perpetual presence in them, through their holy life. That was expressed clearly in the New Testament, when the disciples asked the Lord Christ to behold the great buildings of the temple; to be told that *"Not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down"* (Matthew 24: 1); He talked as well, of the temple, being the temple of His

body, that the Jews would destroy on the cross and in three days, He would raise it up (John 2: 19); granting us the risen life through our unity with Him. St. Peter likewise told us about the living temple, built by living stones, which are the congregation of believers (1 Peter 2: 5).

I have talked, in the book “The Church as the house of God,” of the connection between the Church building and the inner life in which I quoted some of the following words of the **scholar Origen**:

[Let me, O Lord Jesus Christ, be worthy of participating in building Your house ...I wish I could provide gold for the mercy seat (Exodus 25: 17), for the ark of the covenant, for the lamp stand, or for the lamps! ... Let us build the tabernacle of the God of Jacob, our Lord Jesus Christ, and adorn it¹].

[Let there be an altar for the soul in the middle of the heart; on which to offer the sacrifices of prayers and the burnt offerings of mercy; On it, let the oxen of pride be slain by the knife of meekness; and the rams of anger, with the goats of luxuries, be killed....

Let the soul know how to set, within the holy of holiness of its heart, a lamp stand, persistently giving light²].

What glorifies God are not the huge stone buildings, but the living souls , risen from the dead by the Lord Christ; that proclaim His presence and kingdom in them. That is why God made prominent, His dealings with David: How “*He took him from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over His people, over Israel*” and how “*He has been with him wherever he has gone; and has made him a great name*” (2 Samuel 7: 8, 9).; As though, together with every spiritual conquest, and every inner success, the glorified house of God is proclaimed in us.

Anyway, David’s heart request was not altogether denied; but the Lord promised to realize it through a son of his seed giving a reason for that which was “*he has shed much blood and has made great wars;*” So it was fitting for the house of God to be built in the days of Solomon, “*For I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days*” (1 Chronicles 22: 8, 9).

The house of God would be built by Solomon, a symbol of the Lord Christ, the Son of David according to the flesh, Who set the Church of the New Testament, a spiritual house, and dwelt in it by the Holy Spirit.

St. Augustine says: [Who thinks that that great promise (2 Samuel 7: 12-16), was realized in Solomon, makes a great mistake; as he listens to the words “*He shall build a house for My name*” ; but he does not listen to the words: “*He shall be My Son, and I will be His Father; and I will establish the throne of His kingdom over Israel forever*” (2 Samuel 7: 10). Let him hearken and meditate in Solomon’s house, full of foreign women, who worshipped foreign gods; and the king himself, who had once been wise, then was deceived by his women, and had even fallen to worship their idols. Let nobody dare to assume that God promised that in vain; or that He had no prior knowledge of what would be of Solomon and his house.

Therefore, it is fitting for us not to doubt, that these things were actually realized in our Lord Jesus Christ, who came of David’s seed according to the flesh (Romans 1: 3); so that our view here, would not be as vain as that of the carnal Jews, who, although they

¹ On Exod. hom. 13.

² Ibid hom. 9.

realize that the son mentioned here, and the one promised to David, is not Solomon; but nevertheless, through their strange blindness (to Christ, the promised and proclaimed), they claim that they are waiting for somebody else.

In Solomon, a portrait of what to happen later on, indeed appeared; He built the temple, and had peace like his name (Solomon means 'at peace'); and in his first days, he was amazingly worthy of commending; and although he seemed a shadow of our Lord Jesus Christ, he was not that in his person¹].

In God's promise given to David, that his son is to build His house, we notice the following points:

a- ***"I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever"*** (2 Samuel 7: 13): Although Solomon reigned 40 years; and his descendants reigned up till the end of the kingdom, the Lord Christ is the One with no end to His kingdom (Psalm 89: 27, 36, 37). ***"The tabernacle of David has fallen down"*** (Amos 9: 11); But the kingdom of Christ will never do.

In Psalm 72 : 8, it came that Solomon ***"shall have dominion from sea to sea; and from the River to the end of the earth."*** Solomon here, is a symbol of the Lord Christ who reigns from the River; namely, through the Jordan-the water of Baptism; where He sets His kingdom in the hearts of those baptized, as members of His body, submitting to the Head.

b- ***"I will set up your seed after you ..."*** (2 Samuel 7: 12): **St. Augustine** believes, as Solomon reigned during the life of his father David, before his death that this promise, in its essence, applies to someone else: to Christ who built the spiritual temple (1 Corinthians 3: 17).

Father Lactanius says: [Solomon received the kingdom from his father himself while the prophets, as they spoke of him who would build the house, said that he would be born after David's death. Solomon's reign was not forever, having reigned only 40 years. Solomon was never called 'the son of God,' but 'the son of David'; and the house he built was not established forever, not like the Church, which is the true temple of God; that was not built of stones but of hearts (1 Peter 2: 5), through the faith of those who believed in Him, who were called believers.

As to the temple of Solomon, it was built by hand, and destroyed by hand. Finally, his father David prophesied in psalm 127, about the work of his son (according to the flesh): ***"Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain"*** ²].

c- The temple of God, is not the temple of Solomon, that was destroyed by Nebuchednezer, but it is the body of Christ (John 19-21), who has dwelt among us, and ascended to heaven to set us eternally in Him; By Him we have become fellows in the divine nature (Revelation 21: 3).

d- ***"I will be his Father, and he shall be my son"*** (2 Samuel 7: 14). Solomon became like a son, and later on he needed to be chastened; But the Lord Christ, is the eternal Son, in Whom we were granted the sonhood; and through whom, the divine mercy will not be denied to us. Yet ***"if we commit iniquity, He will chasten us with the rods of men, and with the blows of the sons of men"*** (2 Samuel 7: 14).

¹ City of God 17:8.

² Lactantius: The Divine Institutes 4:13.

St. Augustine says: [As to Christ Himself, the Head of the Church, In Him there would never be any iniquity, that may need divine chastening, nor by the rods of men (2 Samuel 7: 14). ... But iniquities might be in the members of His body; namely in His people as said in psalm 89: “*If his sons forsake My law ...*” (Psalm 89: 30)¹].

We end our talk about the divine promise to David, concerning the building of His house by his son’s hand, by the following remarks:

a- In His talk, God says: “***Have I ever spoken a word to anyone from the tribes of Israel, whom I commended to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’***” (2 Samuel 7: 7). It is as though, building a house for the Lord, that would give Him pleasure, is to care for His people, to walk with them, and to protect them, like a shepherd cares for his flock.

b- To spare David the assumption that not building the Lord’s house would reduce his status in the eye of the Lord, God said to the prophet Nathan: “***Thus shall you say to My servant David***” (2 Samuel 7: 8). God refers Himself to David personally; a sign of endearment.

c- Not building the house until the days of Solomon, does not imply a rejection by God of His people; as He cares for them, and has even appointed a place for them: “***I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more***” (2 Samuel 7: 10). So would be the steadfast house of the Lord: The holiness of life of His believers.

3- David’s thanksgiving to the Lord:

David most probably sat on the ground, and bowed his head before the Lord, to thank Him for the promise He gave him, saying:

“***Who I am, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?***” (2 Samuel 7: 18). He realized that it was not due to his personal worthiness, nor the dignity of his father’s house, that he was granted that divine promise; but it was an abundant divine grace, that brought him up to the royal throne, to be in the presence of the Lord, to enjoy His dwelling with him, and the abundance of His grace on him.

How much we need to sit in inner tranquility before the Lord, to hear His joyful promises, and to talk to Him realizing the greatness of His free gift, having set us up from corruption, to make of us kings and priests, and count us as His sons, to enjoy the fellowship of His glories.

“***Now what can David say to You? For You, Lord God, know Your servant***” (2 Samuel 7: 20). David thought himself unworthy to talk to God, who thoroughly knew his weaknesses, sins, and humiliation; as well as his love, zeal, strife and endurance.... Nothing is hidden from Him.

“***For Your word’s sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all those great things, to make Your servant know them***” (2 Samuel 7: 21). The exalted gifts You gave, were not for the sake of self righteousness in man, but for the sake of Your divine promise, and Your word, that abide forever. According to Your everlasting love, You are giving Your servant those great promises.

Because of His promises to His people, God granted David numerous gifts. He set for Himself a people to redeem, as their own God, who is glorified in them. For the sake

¹ City of God: 17:9.

of the holy Church, that carries the name of Christ, He grants His exalted sacraments to His believers.

David ends his prayer by asking God's blessing: "***Now therefore, let it please you to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You; For You, O Lord God, have spoken it, and with Your blessing, let the house of Your servant be blessed forever***"(2 Samuel 7: 29). That is the blessing for man to be forever before the Lord.

CHAPTER 8

DAVID'S FURTHER CONQUESTS

David was not preoccupied with his own glory, or with the extension of his kingdom, but with the kingdom of God. Hence, he did not seek to submit the tribes under his authority, as much as he was preoccupied with serving and caring for all, being the people of God. Now David entered into several wars, and again these words were said: *“And the Lord preserved David wherever he went”* (2 Samuel 8: 14). He got gifts and spoils, that he dedicated to the house of the Lord.

As a prudent man, caring for the kingdom of God, his preoccupation with the outside wars, did not make him disregard the affairs of his inner kingdom.

1- David's conquests over the surrounding nations	1-8
2- 'Toi' king of Hamath sends gifts to David	9-10
3- David dedicates the gifts and spoils to the house of the Lord	11- 14
4- David administers judgment and justice to all his people	15-18

1- David's conquests over the surrounding nations:

David's wars against the pagan nations, that utterly deviated to abominations beside violence, refer to the strife of the believer against sin. David struck:

a- **The Philistines:** *“David took ‘Metheg Ammah’ from the hand of the Philistines”* (2 Samuel 8: 1); namely, he took ‘Gath’ and its villages; that were like the bridle, and the scepter of authority of their nation, over the tribes of Judah and Dan; as ‘Gath’ was located on the border of Judah, and close to Dan. David seized that bridle in his own hand to control them instead.

b- **The Moabites:** It happened previously that David left his parents under the care of the king of Moab (1 Samuel 22: 3, 4). We do not know when that friendship turned into animosity; But we can presume that Moab supported David when he was persecuted by Saul, aiming to oppose Saul as the official king; But, as David became king, the tribes were unified together under his authority, and his kingdom was established, Moab started to oppose him.

David struck their city; killed 2/3 of its inhabitants, and spared 1/3 to run their affairs, and to bring him tribute. By that the prophecy of Belaam was realized: *“A scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab”* (Numbers 24: 17). Moab kept on paying the tribute, until the death of Ahab, when the king of Moab rebelled against Israel (2 Kings 3: 3, 4).

c- **The Syrians or Aram:** Aram used to embrace two prominent kingdoms in the north: ‘Aram Zobah,’ its capital was ‘Zobah,’ thought to be ‘Homs’ nowadays; and ‘Aram Mesopotamia’; its capital was Damascus.

David started by fighting ‘Hadadezer’ the king of ‘Aram Zobah¹,’ that, in the days of David and Solomon, was a strong kingdom west of the Euphrates, whose authority extended one day to the border of Hamath to the north-west; Damascus was south or south-west of it, as ‘Berothai,’ one of its cities, was located between Hamath and Damascus.

David struck him from the west in Hamath (1 Chronicles 18: 13), and struck the

¹ *The Westminster Dict. of the Bible, p. 57.*

king of Aram Damascus when he came to help him [Some believe that Aram Damascus is itself Aram Mesopotamia; located at 'Faddan Aram, where the early fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived].

By striking Aram Zobah, and Aram Damascus, David devastated all the great kingdoms of Aram; And to keep their armies from gathering together again to fight him, he put garrisons in Zobah and Damascus, and obliged them to pay tributes.

David seized shields of Gold (gold plated), that belonged to the royal guards, and brought them to Jerusalem; and brought as well a large amount of bronze from 'Tibhath' and 'Chun' (1 Chronicles 18: 8). 'Tibhath' means (confidence)¹; it was between Eleppo and Hamath. 'Chun' is believed by some to be 'Beyrouth'; and by others to be 'Brithan,' 6 miles south-west of 'Baelbeck' ['Berothai' means (wells)²].

Solomon used the bronze to make the bronze sea, the pillars, and the articles of bronze in the temple.

David wrote his sixtieth psalm, when he fought and defeated Aram Zobah and Aram Mesopotamia (Damascus). St. Augustine comments on the title of this psalm, saying that it carried a prophetic spirit proclaiming, through the symbol, what would happen in the future³.

The title of this psalm, according to the Septuagint version, is:

[To the chief Musicians, Set to 'Lily of the Testimony.' A Michtam of David. For teaching. When he fought against Mesopotamia and Syria of Zobah, and Joab returned and killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt].

St. Augustine presents us with the following allegoric interpretation of that title:

❖ This psalm was written for the sake of those, whose life, Christ, the Son of David, changes, for His own sake. .. It is as though the Lord Christ is the One who changes and renews our life. The goal of this change is to learn how to encounter Him, as the goal of the law, or the commandment, or the teaching; He is the Teacher, the Renewer, and the goal.

❖ How does this change happen?

a- By burning up 'Mesopotamia'-Aram Syria: **St. Augustine** believes that 'Syria' means (Haughtiness), and 'Mesopotamia' means (a call). It is as though, for our life to be changed, God burns up our haughtiness and arrogance, to let us enjoy His humility. He has sent His fiery Holy Spirit to the world to burn up every corruption, renewing our nature (in the water of Baptism). Instead of bringing the world into fire, and burning it, He has sent His fire to the world to renew it, by burning up the works of the (old) man, and granting the new inner man, or the new life, which is in Christ. I wish we do not fear the fire of Christ; because, although it burns, it burns every thing old in us.

b- By the returning of Joab: According to St. Augustine, the word 'Joab' means (enemy); It is as though the Christian returns to the victorious Son of David, after having been an enemy of God... Let us return to our Christ as beloved, after that old animosity.

c- By killing twelve thousands Edomites in the Valley of Salts. If 'Edom' means (earth), All what is earthly in us, will be changed to what is heavenly. "*As we have borne*

¹ *Ibid*, p. 105.

² قاموس الكتاب المقدس، ص ٢٠٧.

³ *On Ps. 60*.

the image of the man of dust (the first Adam), we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man (the second Man)” (1 Corinthians 15: 49).

2- ‘Toi’ king of Hamath sends gifts to David:

’Toi’ king of Hamath sent his son to David to greet him and bless him, because he fought against, and defeated Hadadezer, who was an enemy of ‘Toi.’ The son brought with him articles of silver, articles of gold, and articles of bronze all of which David dedicated to the house of the Lord. David accepted that gift, to proclaim that he preferred peace to war.

3- David dedicates the gifts and spoils to the house of the Lord:

David prepared the way for his son Solomon, to build the house of God, on two fronts:

a- By subduing the adversary nations like Aram Mesopotamia, Aram Zobah, and Edom; and creating friendly relationships with the peaceful nations, like the kingdom of Hamath, to provide Solomon with the right atmosphere to build the house of God in peace.

b- Preparing the possibilities for construction; David did not use the gifts and spoils for his own benefit, nor that of his family, or his tribe, but dedicated them to build the house of the Lord.

David separated the golden statues from the golden vessels; He burnt the first (2 Samuel 5; 21), and dedicated the second to the service of the house of the Lord. The first, namely the idols, refer to evil, that should be utterly destroyed; as God is in no need of gold or silver ...; and the second, the vessels, refer to transforming the energies and talents, used for evil, to energies and talents used to the account of the kingdom of God. God rejects evil, and sanctifies what we have defiled through evil; He hates sin but not sinners.

“And David made himself a (memorial) when he returned from killing 18,000 Syrians in the Valley of Salt” (2 Samuel 8: 13). He made himself a (memorial) to proclaim his destroying Edom (namely everything earthly) ... What is that (memorial), but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has turned us away from the worldly things to the heavenly ones. . It was said in the sixtieth psalm, written by David after striking Edom and Aram: *“You have made the earth tremble; You have broken it; Heal its breaches, for it is shaking... Over Edom I will cast my shoe ...” (psalm 60).* By the cross of our Lord, all the earthly thoughts in us tremble, to trample them under our feet!

4- David administers judgment and justice to all his people:

As David managed to subdue the adversary nations, and to gain the friendship of the peaceful nations, he also managed to care for his inner kingdom, and the people of God, not like Saul, who was strong in wars, and a failure in his internal policy.

(1) *“David reigned over all Israel; and he administered judgment and justice to all his people” (2 Samuel 8: 15)*

It was mentioned in psalm 72: *“He will judge your people with righteousness; and your poor with justice. The mountains will bring peace to the people; and the little hills, by righteousness. He will bring justice to the poor of the people. He will save the children of the needy; and will break in pieces the oppressor” (Psalm 72: 2-4).*

(2) He managed to distribute responsibilities on assistants to help him; So he

designated:

- a- Joab the son of Zeruah, over the army;
- b- Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, a registrar (to write down and keep the king's orders)
- c- Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests
- d- Seraiah, was the scribe; namely a minister of state.
- e- Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; namely executioners of punishments; as well as king's guards (2 kings 11: 4). Kings in these days preferred to use foreign guards, to avoid their bias to their native people in case of revolts.
- f- Sons of David were chief ministers, namely royal advisers to present to their father the real request of the people, and to intercede on their behalf.

CHAPTER 9

DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH

When man rests and settles down, he usually forgets the past with all its sufferings, and disregards the feelings of others. Yet, David, with his big heart, was more motivated by his success to seek the comfort of others. God had relieved him of all his enemies. And after 15 years of the death of Saul and Jonathan, he did not forget his covenant with Jonathan (1 Samuel 20: 14-17); So he started to ask if there was still anyone left of the house of Saul, that he might show him kindness for Jonathan's sake. He heard about Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, who was lame in his feet. He sent for him to restore to him all the fields of Saul his grandfather; and to let him eat bread at his table continually, as one of his own family.

1- David sends for Mephibosheth

1-6

2- David restores all the lands of Saul to Mephibosheth 7-13

1- David sends for Mephibosheth:

It was the custom in the old days, that the new king would kill all the descendants of the previous king, to spare himself any possibility that they might oppose him and claim the throne for themselves (2 Kings 11: 1). But David realized that he did not receive his throne from the hand of man, but from God Himself. And as he did not put his heart on the glories of the world, but on the glory of God, he did not worry about his throne, and did not seek to kill Saul's descendants; but, on the contrary, as he settled down, he started to look for anyone who was left of the house of Saul, that he might show him kindness (2 Samuel 9: 1).

He sent for 'Ziba,' a servant of the house of Saul, and his steward before his death, who told David that there was still a son of Jonathan, lame in his feet (2 Samuel 9: 3); and that he was in the house of a rich man named 'Machir the son of Ammiel,' in Lo Debar, in Gilead, east of the Jordan ['Machir' means (bought).]

'Ziba' is an Aramite name that means (a branch)¹; He was a servant or a slave in Saul's house; probably set free² when the Philistines defeated Saul; and was the father of a big family, and acquired many slaves.

2- David restores all the land of Saul to Mephibosheth:

David, the prophet and king, had been very noble in dealing with Mephibosheth, and generous in his giving:

a- Although, he was a young lad, and lame in his feet, David talked to him as someone dignified and to be admired His encounter with David was to him, of much more value than the lands he restored to him; as that encounter comforted and fulfilled his inner soul, something that all the world possessions could not give to man. That is what made the apostle Paul, ask us to offer our heart (love) to the needy, before offering them any material gift. He says: "*Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing*" (1Corinthians 13:3).

¹ The Westminster Dict. of the Bible, p. 1023.

² Joseph Antiq. 7: 5: 5.

b- It seems that Mephibosheth was afraid, that the king might have sent for him, to kill him; so David assured him, saying: ***“Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father’s sake”*** (2 Samuel 9: 7). What Jonathan sowed, of pure love and faithfulness in his friendship with David, was what his son now reaping, many years after his father’s death

c- David presented to the lad practical love; ***“I will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather”*** (2 Samuel 9: 7), and commanded Ziba, together with his sons and his servants, to work the land for him (It seems that Ziba was a greedy wicked man, having tried later on to take these possessions for himself).

d- Finally he counted him as one of his own household, and said: ***‘And you shall eat bread at my table continually’*** (2 Samuel 9: 7). Mephibosheth was so emotionally overwhelmed by that unexpected great generosity and love, that, though lame, ***“He bowed himself and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I’*** (2 Samuel 9: 8).

In the past, David prostrated before Jonathan, then, the crown prince (1 Samuel 20: 41); and here, the son of Jonathan prostrates before David, the king.

David, in his generosity, symbolizes the Lord Christ, who calls us to encounter Him as His beloved; takes away our fear; restores to us what we have lost (the good nature with which we were created); and grants us the honor to sit at His heavenly banquet, to have communion of His body and blood, given as a secret of enjoyment of the everlasting life.

CHAPTER 10

THE NEIGHBORING KINGS GATHER TOGETHER AGAINST DAVID

David with his big heart, wanted to show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to him; But the counselors of Hanun misinterpreted David's intentions, and stirred up their master's rage against him, claiming that David sent his servants, not to comfort him, but to search the city, to spy it out, and to overthrow it. Thus Hanun joined forces with the surrounding kings to fight against David, who defeated them.

Those wars, and others like them, were chances for David, to utter some of his psalms (Psalms 2; 20; 21; 60; 110), that prophesied the rebellion of nations, and the gathering of the princes against the Lord Christ, to crucify Him. The wicked keep on joining forces against His Church, for the Lord Christ to be glorified in His persecuted Church.

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1- Hanun disgraces David's messengers | 1-5 |
| 2- victory over the Ammonites and the kings of Aram | 6-14 |
| 3- triumph over Hadadezer | 15-19 |

1- Hanun disgraces David's messengers:

Hanun's counselors misinterpreted David's intentions, and saw his messengers as spies on the city; and through their wicked counsel they started a war that led to the perdition of many. Misinterpretation can have drastic effect on our life.

David's messengers came to the city of 'Rabbah' or 'Rabbah of Ammon.' The word 'Rabbah' means (great) or (capital)¹. This is not 'Rabbah,' that is on the mountains of Judah (Joshua 15: 6), close to Jerusalem; But it is 'Rabbah of Ammon' located at the source of the River Jabok, 23 miles east of the Jordan. Ptolemy Philadelphus (285-246 BC) beautified it, and it was named 'Philadelphia' after him. Nowadays it is 'Amman, the capital of the country of Jordan, through which the trade route between Damascus and the Arabian Peninsula crosses.

Hanun listened to the counsel of his servants, took David's servants, shaved off half of their beards, cut off their garments in the middle, at their buttocks, and sent them away. This action was considered by the Hebrew then, to be a great insult. When David was told, he went to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed, and told them to wait at Jericho, before returning to Jerusalem, until their beards had grown, to spare them further disgrace. How considerate David was! caring for the feelings of every one.

2- victory over the Ammonites, and the kings of Aram:

The people of Ammon realized that disgracing David's messengers, was something directed against the whole nation of Israel-king and people; and expecting a reaction from David, they hired the Syrians of the kingdoms of Aram; joined forces with those of Beth Rehob, of Zobah, of Maachah, and Ich-Tob to fight against David. Thus the misinterpretation and bad counsel, led to a fierce war between many nations and kingdoms.

¹ *The Westminster Dict. of the Bible*, p. 788.

‘Beth Rehob’: is a Hebrew name, meaning (a spacious or open plaza)¹; a city in the north of Palestine, in the upper Valley of the Jordan (Numbers 13: 2); inhabited by the people of Aram (the Syrians); located close to ‘Dan’ or ‘Tel-El-Kadi’; where ‘Banias’ is now located.

Zobah: (Please refer to the interpretation of the eighth chapter).

Maachah: One of the kingdoms of Aram; called ‘Aram Maachah’ or ‘Syrian Maachah’ (1 Chronicles 19: 6-7), on the border of north eastern Palestine, between ‘Argob’ on the west and the wilderness on the east; was inhabited by the descendants of ‘Nahor’ (Genesis 22: 24). [The name ‘Maachah’ means (idiot)²].

Tob: means (good)³, a region located east of the Jordan; to which ‘Jephthah’ fled, when his brothers deprived him of inheritance (Judges 11: 3-5). It is probably the land of ‘Tepias’ (1 Mc. 5: 13; 2 Mc. 12: 7); or ‘El-Teba,’ 10 miles south of ‘Gadara’ (Nowadays ‘Um-Keis’ or ‘Machis’).

Hearing of the gathering of those kings, David did not fear, but held fast to God’s promises to him; So he prepared for war, leaning upon the power of God Himself; saying in his psalm:

“The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together; against the Lord and against His Anointed ... He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision... I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to me: ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten you. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance; and the ends of the earth for Your possession ... Now therefore, be wise, O kings ...’ “ (Psalm 2).

It was not possible for David, with his foot soldiers, to oppose those nations, that gathered to fight against him: the Ammonites, and the Aramites, with their chariots and horses ... But he leaned on the might of God; saying:

“The king shall have joy in your strength, O Lord; And in your salvation, how greatly shall he rejoice! (Psalm 21: 1).

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20: 7).

Through that battle, the two parties of which were: God Himself, and the hosts of the darkness-namely, the devil-David saw the battle of the cross, when the hosts of darkness gathered together against the Only begotten Son; so he said:

“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Psalm 110: 1).

The men of Ammon came out and put themselves in battle array before the gate of the city; most probably ‘Rabbah’; while the men of Aram (the Syrians) came and encamped in the valley before ‘Medeba’; to make it easier for their chariots to maneuver.

If Joab had gathered all his men to fight against the men of Ammon, going toward the south, the far stronger men of Aram could have struck him from the back in the north. But prudently, Joab divided his army into two divisions: set under his command, some of the chosen men of Israel, in battle array against the Syrians; and the rest of the people he set under the command of Abishai his brother, in battle array against the people of Ammon. They agreed that if one division was weakened, the other would come to help.

¹ *Ibid p. 111.*

² *Ibid p. 574.*

³ *Ibid p. 954.*

When the hired men of Aram could not stand against Joab and his mighty men, men of Ammon, in their turn, were overcome by fear, and fled before Abishai, and entered the city of 'Rabbah,' even before Abishai started to confront them. They were not pursued by Abishai nor Joab, who preferred to postpone the war for a full year (2 Samuel 11: 1).

The accord between Joab and Abishai to be prepared to help one another in the time of need, reveals one of the aspects of living spiritual strife; namely, members should so support one another. That is why the Lord Christ commended his disciple Peter, saying: "*But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have turned back, strengthen your brethren*" (Luke 22: 32).. If God is the secret of our victory and our strength, we, in turn, should support the weak. The apostle Paul says: "*Uphold the weak*" (Thessalonians 5: 14).

3- Triumph over Hadadezer:

The men of Aram, trying to mend their reputation and regain their self respect, gathered again to fight against David; And 'Hadadezer,' the king of Aram sent them 'Shobach' the commander of his army (2 Samuel 10: 16); But David conquered them, and 'Shobach' was killed in war. The kings who were submitted to 'Hadadezer' got terrified, made peace with and served David; and helped the people of Ammon no more.

THE SECOND SECTION

THE TROUBLES AND WEAKNESSES OF DAVID

- | | |
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| 6- A praise to God by David, and his last words | 22-23 |
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The Holy Book presented us with an actual portrait of the personality of David, the prophet and the king. Since his boyhood, he lived, in purity, and with an open heart toward people; and yearned to glorify God and minister to Him, with a fiery zeal; and to give his life for the sake of faithfulness, as he used to care for the dumb sheep. God rewarded him for this serious and holy life, by granting him every success and triumph, until he became very great; The Lord of hosts was with him.

David managed to kill a lion and a bear, to save one or more of his sheep; and with just a smooth pebble, he managed to kill the mighty Goliath, who kept reproaching the people of Israel, and blaspheming God. He dealt with Saul's persistent opposition and pursuit, with a heart filled with forgiveness and wisdom. He received God's promises with patience and prudence, with no hastiness to acquire the glory of the throne. When Saul, his pursuer, or Abner, his adversary fell, he nobly, did not rejoice for their death, but mourned Abner as a brave warrior, and lamented Saul as beloved to him.

This sweet and unique biography, is revealed through the psalms he sang, by the Spirit of God, to remain a treasure for believers, and a help to them in their holy life in the Lord.

But now, having become a king over all the tribes, his kingdom well established, and the ark of the Lord brought up to his city, in a moment of weakness, he became slothful, and fell, and the human nature of his life was revealed with all its weak depths. This mighty man collapsed, and consequently deteriorated from one sin to another ... He assumed that he could conceal his weakness, only to have it exposed before us all, along the generations; He had been bitterly chastised, and suffered successive grieves for the rest of his life.

The divine inspiration recorded those falls in some detail, without concealing the weakness or covering it up for us to realize the need for a complete renewal of our human nature; and for the intervention of the Creator Himself to make this renewal possible.

The falls of David are a wake-up warning bell, that rings high along the generations, for every believer and for every minister-whatever his spiritual stature is, or the extent of his experience-to beware of falling.

David's falls filled him with bitter grieves, but through repentance, they were transformed into glories; His biography and his psalms of repentance, became the secret of correction of the paths of many, who were devastated by sin, and broken down by despair.

CHAPTER 11

DAVID'S FALL WITH BETHSHEBA

The people of Ammon fled before 'Abishai,' and retreated to their fortified city 'Rabbah.' Ample preparations were taken to have them destroyed in their city, so as not to represent any more danger to the kingdom of David. David's men, led by 'Joab,' devastated the cities and villages of Ammon, and besieged their fortified city 'Rabbah.' As for David, he remained in Jerusalem; and it so happened, that one evening he arose from his bed, and slothfully walked on the roof of the king's house; and from there, he let his eyes wander without control, to look with lust to the wife of (his brother); then, he gradually went down the slope, to commit horrible sins.

1- The slothfulness of David	1-2
2- The gradual fall	3-4
3- His human dealing with the situation	5-13
4- Delivering 'Uriah' to his death	4-25

1- The slothfulness of David:

The first step in any fall is slothfulness and negligence. David never fell in such a horrible sin (adultery), in his boyhood and youth, when he was shepherding the sheep; when he worked in the royal court; when he was a fugitive, and pursued by Saul; when he became a king over just one tribe; and even as he strove for the salvation of all the tribes of Israel. But now, as his kingdom got well established, increased in glory and got his own house of cedar, he forsook the war to Joab, the commander of his army, and slothfully relaxed in his house in Jerusalem.

In the time of the evening, instead of praying for the sake of his men fighting the war of Israel, he arose and walked on the roof of the king's house, "*and he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold*" (2 Samuel 11: 2). Life of slothfulness creates a void in the heart and senses, for man to seek fulfillment of his senses through an outer beauty.

St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian, often talked about the danger of slothfulness and negligence in the life of the believer, as well as in the life of the spiritual leader; Of his words are:

[The slothfulness of body members will be followed by distraction of thoughts¹].

[When the body takes interest in worldly things, and leads a slothful life, the lust in him will turn aflame²].

[Slothfulness and negligence do not only harm a leader, but also those under his command³].

[A man, entrusted with a treasure, should never fall asleep. If we faithfully follow the law of watchfulness, and knowledgeably practice discernment, from which we would reap the fruit of life, the attacks of lusts will never approach our minds⁴].

2- The gradual fall:

¹ *The Ascetical homilies, hom. 22.*

² *hom . 37.*

³ *hom . 48.*

⁴ *hom . 62.*

“So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, ‘Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?.’ Then David sent messengers, and took her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house” (2 Samuel 11: 3, 4)

David was once strong; never fell since his boyhood to adultery; never offensively killed anybody; and never swayed to the right or to the left, in things concerning the law, save in few moments of weakness. How then, was he falling now, after he became a strong king, a selected prophet, and a just judge of his people?!

David probably did not imagine that he could fall in such a dreadful way; “But sin is very sinful” and very deceptive; It knows how to cast its nets and lay its snares, to catch the mighty gradually. David started, in Jerusalem, by becoming negligent in the time of strife, by sleeping on the bed of slothfulness in his house; then by walking on the roof of the king’s house, instead of praying in contrition for the sake of his men. From the roof he saw a woman bathing in her house. He inquired about her , probably assuming that she is a virgin, to take her as his wife; Yet, having been told that she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who was fighting for his country, he sent messengers and took her, and fell with her.

David’s reason and good sense, paralyzed by his lust, overlooked the following facts:

a- Having been granted the great divine grace of being the Lord’s anointed and prophet, he should not have destroyed the holiness of his inner life in the Lord.

b- His country was in a state of war; and it was his duty to go to battle, as he used to do, to give joyfully for the sake of the glory of God and the edification of his people; and not to seek the fulfillment of his body lusts.

c- By committing adultery with another man’s wife, he broke the law, that condemns to death both the adulterer and the adulteress (Leviticus 20: 10).

d- He betrayed a faithful hero, who was fighting for his country—a Jew of foreign origin.

The secret of this fall is those “little foxes that spoil the vine” (Songs 2: 15). A big sin starts as a little negligence, that gradually drags man into an endless series of sins. It was in the evening (2 Samuel 11: 2), as David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of his house, to see a woman bathing. It was the right time to fall because the “Sun of Righteousness” set on him; and the darkness prevailed around him; as though at night.

As long as our Christ—the Sun of Righteousness—is shining in us, there will be no night, , and no darkness shall prevail; We shall rather be the children of light, kept from falling by His grace. The apostle Paul says: *“But you, brethren, are not in darkness; ... You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness; ... But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope for salvation”* (2 Thessalonians 5: 4-8).

Our bond with the Lord Christ sheds light in our depths; so that no evil thought will ever crawl to us, nor a thief will get through into our hearts.

An evil lust crawled into the senses of David in that evening; It came—according to the prophet ‘Nathan,’ as (a guest) who seeks to be fed and get fulfilled. David sent messengers to the house of Uriah the Hittite, and took his only wife ‘Bathsheba’; He sought her to fulfill his wicked lust, although he already had many women. ...; His lust (devoured) her, as well as himself!

The Book says, “*She came to him*” (2 Samuel 11: 4). The woman, feeling what he had in his heart, might have contributed to stir up his lust; probably counting it an honor, to be sought by such a great king ... Yet, in spite of this, David was not justified nor excused, as he was the one who sent for her. As a boy, he could kill the mighty Goliath, terrify the heathens, and give back to the people their dignity. But here, he was broken in humiliation at the hand of a woman!

St. Augustine comments on the fall of David before his carnal lust, saying:

[Carnal weakness should be taken into consideration. Let us recall the words of the apostle: “*Do not let sin reign in your mortal body*” (Romans 6: 12). He did not say: “Let no sin be in you,” but: “*Do not let sin reign.*” There will be sin in you, when there is pleasure; But sin will reign in you, when you give it your consent. It is fitting for you to rein the carnal pleasure, springing from an illegal foreign source; and not to let it loose. Tame it and control it; Do not let it control you. ... Are you stronger than David?!

That sin was not committed by David when Saul was persecuting him ... and when he was confused because of his enemies, fleeing from place to place to avoid falling into their hands. He never coveted what belongs to others; and never killed a man for his wife, after committing adultery with her. He was weak and miserable because of his troubles; yet he was attached to God. How beneficial are the temptations; they are like the scalpel of a surgeon¹].

3- His human dealings with the situation:

According to the law, Bathsheba, if found pregnant, had to be put to death (Leviticus 20: 10); So she sent and told the king, to find a way to save her from death. David instructed Joab to send him Uriah the Hittite from war, to go down to his house so that the pregnancy would be counted as though from him, and so the crime would be concealed. But Uriah refused to sleep in his own house, as long as his brethren were fighting in the battle field. God rebuked David on the tongue of Uriah, unknowingly, who said:

“The ark and Israel and Judas are dwelling in tents, and my Lord Joab and the servants of my Lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife?! As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing” (2 Samuel 11: 11). ‘Uriah’ decided that his faith in God, the holiness of his life, his humanity, and his honor as a man of war, forbid him from entering his house, to eat and drink, while the battle was going on. He counted it as an insult: to God (symbolized by the ark), to the people (Israel), to the king’s tribe (Judah), to his commander (Joab), as well as to his brethren in the battle field (servants of David); to go to his house to practice what was his lawful right ... It was time for giving and striving, and not to enjoy personal privileges! That was a rebuke to David who, by his fall, insulted God, his people, his tribe, his fighting men, as well as friendship, and even himself.

David used every way possible to cover up his crime; He called the man, hoping that he might find in that call a chance to practice his lawful rights with his beautiful wife. He even gave him an order to enter his house, but the man refused, for the love of God, of David, of his people, and of the honor of his brethren in war. Finally he made him drunk ...; but even then, he refrained from going down to his house (2 Samuel 11: 13).

¹ On Ps. 50 (51).

4- Delivering Uriah to death:

When the situation got too much to bear, the mighty David started to go down into a series of horrible sins; He gave his faithful hero a concealed message to carry to Joab, to have him killed by the hands of the enemies.

Previously, David could defend the truth, and fight against the pagans, to give the people back their dignity, even at the expense of his own good; But now, he took the justice lightly, and despised the spirit of honesty and loyalty, delivering the faithful warrior together with other innocent souls, to death by the enemies hands, for no reason but to cover up his disgrace, and to conceal the truth.

Did 'Joab' realize the secret behind David's message?

Although he probably did not realize it in the beginning, he had to obey his master's command; but he definitely understood what was behind it, when David married the wife of that man, directly after the mourning period was over. 'Joab,' could have harbored some doubt, that behind that message, there had to be a serious secret; and that 'Uriah' would possibly be the victim of that mysterious decision; that had him killed with no trial, and no defense on his part.

But, for 'Joab,' it was a precious chance, to realize the king's purpose, and to spare himself being humiliated for having killed his rival 'Abner' (2 Samuel 3). David was kept feeling a kind of humiliation before Joab; that led Joab to dare to talk to him with haughtiness, after killing David's son 'Absalom' (2 Samuel 19: 5-8). David intended in vain to fire him from his command; then he finally told his heir and son Solomon to have him killed (1 Kings 2: 5, 6).

The Unjust killing of Uriah, together with some men of war, occurred because of a sin of adultery; thence, violence is always wielded with defilement. We find a person who is falling under the heavy weight of abomination, to be fierce in his depths, even if he looks gentle and meek; and we find a person, who is fierce in his depths, to collapse miserably before his body lusts. Violence and adultery are like two brothers, going hand in hand, and supporting one another. Many fell into body lusts, because of their violence; When man is violent with his parents, brothers, relatives, or colleagues, he will definitely drink of the fruit of his behavior; his body will turn violent against him, to oppose every purity or chasteness; and as said by the prophet Obadiah: "*As you have done, it shall be done to you*" (Obadiah 15).

Going back to David, we find his anger rising , because Joab approached so near to the Ammonite city of 'Rabbah,' disregarding what previously happened to Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth, who died because a certain woman cast a piece of a millstone on him from the wall (Judges 9: 5-54). Yet when he was told that Uriah the Hittite died, his anger subsided!

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned him 7 days, as was the custom in those days (Genesis 50: 10; 1 Samuel 31: 13); after which David took her as his wife, and assumed that a veil was finally put over his crime forever; Yet his conscience rested for just one year, because. "***The thing that David had done displeased the Lord***" (2 Samuel 11: 27)

God has no partiality; If David had much strived for the sake of God, and for the edification of his people, that would never cover up such a horrible crime and such an evil act, ... God waited for David to repent; but as his conscience did not come to wake up, He sent him someone to wake him up and to rebuke him.

We end our talk by quoting **St. Augustine** in his homily on psalm 51: {The woman was far, but the lust was close at hand (see Romans 6: 12); It is as though the sins that we commit, are not the fruit of circumstances; but because we have the sin in us, it drags us on to wherever it chooses}.

CHAPTER 12

DAVID'S CONFESSION

David lived a whole year with his sin, with no reproach from his conscience, despite his spiritual experiences, his knowledge of the law, and his position as a judge of the people. He was in need of the prophet 'Nathan' to rebuke him, and to get him to confess what he had committed.

1- Nathan rebukes David	1-9
2- The chastisement of David	10-12
3- David's repentance	13-14
4- The death of Bathsheba's newborn child	15-23
5- The birth of Solomon	24-25
6- David defeats Rabbah	26-31

1- Nathan rebukes David:

The Lord sent Nathan to David to wake up his conscience; He told him the story of the rich man who refused to slay one of his ewe lambs for his guest; then took the only little ewe lamb of his poor neighbor, that grew up together with him and with his children; ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and laid in his bosom; that was like a daughter to him. David's anger was greatly aroused against that man, and gave his verdict: "*As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. Then Nathan said to David, 'You are the man'*" (2 Samuel 12: 5, 6)

The hungry guest was David's lust that was aroused in him, through his slothfulness and negligence; and had to be fulfilled by raping 'Bethsheba,' very beloved to her man; who shared his life, food, drink, and bed; who for long had lived with him, with all her feelings and emotions; to be raped by the very rich David, the king and judge, who broke the law by marrying numerous wives. The book says that David grew in his greatness every day, because the Lord of hosts was with him (2 Samuel 15: 10); The Lord wished to give him more; but he closed before himself the door of that flow of free graces.

According to the law, a thief is not to be put to death, but he has to restore fourfold (Exodus 22: 1; Luke 19: 18). But the circumstances of the theft, as described by Nathan (and which applied to David), strongly aroused the anger of David, that he sought the execution of the man, unaware that he was condemning himself; especially that he did not steal just an only ewe lamb, but the wife of an honest and loyal man; whom he raped in circumstances of war, and had her husband killed ... What then did he deserve?

It is fitting for us to look at the behavior of Nathan that was wise, straightforward, firm, and full of love. He did not fear to speak daringly, frankly, and firmly, to the king who tried to conceal his crime by having Uriah the Hittite killed; and it was possible for Nathan to face the same destiny. As it came in the apostolic statutes directed to a Bishop: [Be completely impartial when you rebuke for sins; be like Elijah; like Micah with Ahab (1 Kings 18: 21, 22); like Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian with Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38, 39); like Nathan with David (2 Samuel 12; and like John the Baptist with Herod (Matthew 14)¹].

¹ *Constit. Of The Holy Apostles 7: 1.*

He was frank, firm, yet compassionate ..., and opened the doors of hope before David.

Nathan came to talk with him in secret, and did not defame him publicly though God allowed the whole thing to be widely publicized for the sake of our salvation. It is likewise fitting for us, when we get to rebuke others, to do that within the limits of love and friendship, and not to defame them publicly in their presence or in their absence. **St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian** says: [Who corrects his brother in his secret place, will cure him from evil; while he, who accuses him in a public gathering, will cause his wounds to bleed even more. Who cures his brother secretly, proclaims the extent of his love; while he who disgraces his brother before his friends, will proclaim the extent of his own envy. The friend who firmly, but secretly, rebukes another, is a prudent physician; while he who does that before the eyes of many, is in truth, a defamer¹].

2- The chastisement of David:

God, through His love for David, sent Nathan to him to wake up his conscience secretly, and to chastise him publicly. It is better for him to be exposed here in this world, to get the chance to repent and return to God, than to have the wounds of his soul covered up, leading to his eternal perdition. That is why the prophet Nathan said to David: *“Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me (God), and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from 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 sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun”* (2 Samuel 12: 10-12).

This chastisement may seem too harsh, but it was necessary for his own salvation and that of others:

a- He made it clear that that chastisement was a natural fruit of sin. to have this realized in David’s own house: His newborn child from Bathsheba died; his son Amnon raped his own sister (2 Samuel 13: 1-22), to get killed in revenge by her brother Absalom (2 Samuel 13: 23-38); Absalom rebelled against his father David, to get the kingdom from him, and went in to his father’s concubines before the eyes of all Israel (2 Samuel 16: 22); sought his father’s life (2 Samuel 17: 2), to be himself killed (2 Samuel 18: 14, 15); and Adonia the son of David was killed by the order of his brother Solomon (1 Kings 2: 25).... .

God allowed all that to take place in David’s house, to confirm that this was the natural fruit of the corruption which David adopted by his own will.

b- Through the chastisements of David that occurred in his house, the Holy Book demonstrated the importance of the role of the family and its sanctity; What David committed gave fruit in the life of his children. Although they were not punished because of his sin, here, they tasted the bitterness of what they inherited from their father. Corrupt fathers present corruption to their children, and the blessed fathers present them blessings.

c- David’s chastisement was severe and twofold, because of his position as a leader, who should be a living role model to his people. Punishment is not a price equal

¹ *The Ascetical homilies, hom. 48.*

to transgression, but it is a chastisement to correct the path of the sinner and of those around him; that is different according to circumstances of every man. **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Punishment is not the same for all sins; but they are numerous and different, according to times and to the stature and understanding, etc. of the persons concerned¹].

d- To confirm that there is no partiality in God; David, although set a prophet, king, and judge, and got a glorified history of holy life, when he sinned, he deserved to be chastised. St. Erinaos says: [Because God does not look at the faces; He puts the right punishment on things that do not please Him. David, who suffered Saul's persecution (1 Samuel 18) for the sake of righteousness, who fled before him and refused to stretch his hand to the Lord's anointed, who prophesied the coming of Christ, who taught the nations the wisdom, did everything by the Holy Spirit, and pleased the Lord, when his lust motivated him to take the wife of Uriah the Hittite, the Book says: "*But the things that David had done displeased the Lord*" (2 Samuel 11: 27). God sent him the prophet Nathan to confront him with his crime, to let him judge and condemn himself; in order to regain from the Lord mercy and compassion²].

3- Repentance of David:

The prophet David entered into his depths to discover his weaknesses, without giving himself any justifications. He felt that he erred with no excuse; and counted his sin, as not directed against Uriah the Hittite, nor against Bathsheba, but as against God Himself. He did not hesitate, despite his position as a great king, prophet, judge, and a spiritual leader, to confess his sin to the Lord, before the prophet Nathan, saying: "*I have sinned against the Lord*" (2 Samuel 12: 13).

He felt that the sin inside him was extremely bitter, that he had to (vomit) it; and as **St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian** says: [Remember that the fulfillment of every lust is always followed by disgust and bitterness, as close companions³]. David vomited the bitterness inside him, out of shame of himself and his transgression; and not because of his embarrassment to confess before Nathan.

Nathan's response came to proclaim God's exalted love: "*The Lord also has put away your sin; You shall not die*" (2 Samuel 12: 13). According to the statutes of the Law, he should have been put to death; Yet God spared him that punishment; By repentance, he would also enjoy salvation-through the Holy sacrifice-So he would not die, but would enjoy the life that overcomes death.

Through that true repentance, the prophet David presented us with the "psalms of repentance," like: Psalms 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143, crowned by Psalm 51 that we sing with every prayer, asking for God's mercies, through our true repentance.

❖ Whoever you are, who sins, and hesitates to repent for your transgressions, listen to David's moans. It is not Nathan who is sent to you, but it is David himself.

Listen to his cry-outs, and cry-out with him!

Listen to his moans, and moan with him!

Listen to him crying, and mix his tears with your tears!

Listen to him trying to correct himself, and rejoice with him!

¹ On Matt. hom. 75.

² Iren. Ad Haer. 4: 27: 1.

³ hom. 32.

If the sin is not put away from you, keep your hope for forgiveness!

When Nathan was sent to that man, Notice the humility of the king, who did not despise the words of advice given to him; and did not say: “How dare you speak to me, the king”? The great king listened to a prophet; I wish the humble people of Christ, listen to Him.

❖ *“For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me”* (Psalm 51: 3).

His sin was not previously before him, but behind his back; He was not acknowledging his transgressions ... But the prophet Nathan was sent by God for this purpose: to take his sin from behind his back, and place it before his eyes; to see the verdict proclaimed against him; to open up the wound of his heart to heal it; He used for this the scalpel of his tongue.

St. Augustine¹

❖ David transgressed; Let us now see how he repented ... He cleansed his sin by humility, by contrition of heart and soul, by not falling again; by always remembering his sin; and by accepting all what happened to him. By contrite heart, he enjoyed the cleansing of his sin through repentance and confession.

St. John Chrysostom²

❖ He got rid of the burden of his sin, through a complete confession-of one sentence.

St. John Cassian³

Through God’s love for his believers, He chastises them for the sake of their edification.

❖ Do not think of God just as a Condemner; He is all goodness!.. Think of Him when He shows mercy! Together with His firmness, put into consideration His compassion!

Scholar Tertullian⁴

❖ Chastisement of love, is for the sake of correction, and not for revenge. A prudent and a righteous being , like God, does not chastise man to pay back his evil, but to correct him, and as a warning to others.

St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian⁵

God loves His children; and in his love He allows for their chastisement, to let them realize how much He hates sin; He allowed for the death of the child who came as a fruit of David’s sin (2 Samuel 12: 14); not because something that child had committed; but so that those around him-especially the pagans-would not assume that God is partial.

4- Death of the child of Bathsheba:

The Child got very sick; So David humiliated himself for his sake; and for feeling that his death was a sign of God’s wrath on his parents. He pleaded with God for the child, fasted and went in and laid all night on the ground (2 Samuel 12: 16); and when the elders of the house arose and went to him, to raise him up from the ground, he would not,

¹ On Ps. 51 (50)

² In 2 Cor. hom. 4.

³ Institute 12: 11.

⁴ Ad Marcion 2: 17.

⁵ hom. 48.

nor did he eat food with them.(2 Samuel 12: 17).

On the seventh day, the child died, and the servants of David were afraid to tell him, because of his grief. When David saw them whispering, he realized what happened; and when he knew from them that the child died, he arose from the ground, washed ,anointed himself, ,changed his clothes, and went into the house of the Lord and worshipped. Then he went into his own house, and requested to eat.

How marvelous was David’s complete delivery to the will of God. He, at first, humiliated himself before God, seeking mercy; Yet, once the child died, he submitted to God’s will and said: “*Now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*” (2 Samuel 12: 23).

He anointed himself, as a sign of joy; **St. John Chrysostom** says: [It was the custom of people in the old days to anoint themselves when rejoicing, as noticed with David and Daniel (Daniel 10: 3)¹. As much as David humiliated himself when his child was sick, he rejoiced when God chose to take him]; and [That is real wisdom! That is love! Whatever great is your love to your son, you will not love him as God does²].

The heart, that is open to heaven, does not fear death, but receives it with joy, as a ‘set forth’ toward Christ.

❖ Do not fear death; as God prepared for you to rise up overcoming death³!

❖ Fix the fact of your departure in your heart, O man; Say to yourself all the time:

“Behold, the messenger is at the door; Here he comes to me, why am I slothful?! My departure is everlasting; There, there is no return! “

Tonight, meditate in this; Tomorrow, meditate in it; And when it is time to go, greet him with Joy, saying: Come in peace; I knew that you are coming; so I did not neglect to do something to help me on my way⁴.

St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian

5- The Birth of Solomon:

David comforted Bathsheba; He did not send her away, on account that she had been the cause of his grief and troubles. She bore him another son, and he called his name ‘Solomon,’ meaning (safe) or (Peace maker)⁵; as in his days, “*God gave peace and quietness to Israel*” (1 Chronicles 22).

David chose this name to proclaim, that although sin has stirred up many storms in his life, , by true repentance, and leaning upon God’s mercies, he restored his inner peace through gaining forgiveness, despite the chastisements he had to bear from all sides.

God loved that child, and sent Nathan to name him ‘Jedidiah,’ meaning (God’s beloved) to confirm to his parents that, although the first child died for the sake of chastisement, the second proclaimed God’s love for them, and His forgiveness of their sin.

6- David defeats ‘Rabbah’:

¹ On Matt.

² On Colos. hom. 8.

³ hom. 48.

⁴ hom. 64.

⁵ St. Augustine: On Ps. 127.

The author got back to the news of the war against the Ammonites, which he started in (2 Samuel 11: 1). When Joab defeated 'Rabbah' the capital of the Ammonites, he sent for David to come and enter the city, so that the conquest would be referred to David as a conqueror and victor. That David did; He went , fought, and took the city, and took the king's crown from his head; its weight was a talent of gold (about 18 Libra) with precious stones. It was set on David's head with the help of two of the elites, as a sign of his dominion over the kingdom of the Ammonites.

David enjoyed an abundance of spoils, after killing all the people of the city.

CHAPTER 13

AMNON AND TAMAR

David committed his crime with Bathsheba in secret; and although the matter remained concealed for some time, the smell of corruption started to get exposed in the house of David, in a horrible way. David's son Amnon fell, with all his freedom, in lust for his half-sister, on his father's side. He was so obsessed by his love for her, that he became sick; and when he got what he wanted from her, he humiliated her, then he hated her exceedingly, and sent her away.

You can imagine David's condition, and his reputation among his men and the rulers of his people, when that incident became known!

Amnon's behavior aroused the anger of Absalom for the sake of his sister Tamar. After two years of planning, he managed to kill him, and then fled; So David lost the two of them!

1- Amnon fell in love with his sister Tamar	1-11
2- Amnon's exceedingly hates Tamar	12-19
3- Absalom plans revenge against Amnon	20-27
4- Absalom kills Amnon	28-33
5- Absalom flees	34-39

1- Amnon fell in love with his sister Tamar:

This episode of Amnon and Tamar remains along the generations, a live portrait of how love differs from lust¹. Love is getting free from egoism, for man to give himself for the sake of his own edification, and that of others; to deal with others-specially the opposite sex-as persons who have their own dignity; While lust, on the other hand, is retiring into one's shell around his ego, seeking the fulfillment of his own self or dignity, etc.; and dealing with others as tools for his own fulfillment. Love grows every day, and makes the heart more spacious for all; while lust destroys man, narrows his heart, and will soon turn his lustful love into hate.

Amnon so much loved Tamar, to presume that only she was the secret of his happiness, who was able to fill the void in his heart. Through his lust, he was captivated by her beauty...; but once he realized his wish, and did not find the fulfillment he thought he would get, he hated her exceedingly, so that the hatred, with which he hated her, was even greater than the love with which he had loved her. Amnon can be likened to Potiphar's wife, who thought that Joseph's body was the only source of her pleasure and fulfillment; and because of her great love for him, she disregarded her position as a lady before a slave, her dignity as a woman, and caught him by his garment, to force him to lie with her; ... When he refused to sin before the Lord, she unjustly, delivered him to prison and disgrace!! This is the killing lust that is centered on the ego!

'Amnon,' a Hebrew name meaning (honest)², the firstborn son of David, and the crown prince (2 Samuel 3: 2), was born in Hebron (2 Samuel 3: 2'; 1 Chronicles 3; 1), around the year 1000 BC³; His mother was 'Ahinoam' the Jezreelitess. Tamar,' her name

¹ راجع كتابنا: الحب، مفهومه ودرجاته (الحب والشهوة).

² McKenzie: *Dict. of the Bible*, p. 26.

³ Unger's *Bible Dictionary*, Chicago 1966, p. 45.

means (a palm tree), was the sister of Absalom the son of David from 'Maakah,' the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (2 Samuel 3: 3; 1 Chronicles 3: 2).

Amnon loved Tamar very much; he loved her beauty and body, and not her person ; and he coveted to fulfill his lust with her. As she was his sister, he could not marry her (Leviticus 18: 9); nor do anything improper to her (2 Samuel 13: 2). Tamar as a virgin, dwelt in the women's Suit of the royal palace.

Amnon was so distressed over his lust for his sister Tamar, that he became sick, and grew thinner day after day; something that troubled his friend, and cousin, 'Jonadab' the son of Shimeah (or Shammah), David's brother (1 Samuel 16: 9); who was very crafty, and capable of both good and evil thoughts. When Jonadab asked Amnon about his problem, he said: "*I love Tamar, my brother Absalom sister*" (2 Samuel 13: 4). Jonadab gave him the following counsel: "*Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and give me food, and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand'*" (2 Samuel 13: 5).

Amnon followed this wicked counsel; Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was lying down. Then she took flour and kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes, and she took the pan and placed them out before him, but he refused to eat. Then Amnon said, 'Have everyone go out from me,' and they all went out from him. When he took hold of her trying to rape her, she, with chastity said to him:

"No my brother, do not force me, for no such thing should be done in Israel. Do not do this disgraceful thing! And I, where could I take my shame? And as for you, you would be like one of the fools of Israel.

Now therefore, speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you" (2 Samuel 13: 12, 13)

Prudently, Tamar spoke to her brother Amnon:

a- She revealed to him that doing this thing was not fitting for a holy nation; as it would bring wrath over the whole people; not on account of being the children of the king, but of being members of the congregation of Israel. As a believer is a member of the congregation, every growth in his life, will be reflected in the growth of the others, and will draw, by his life, many toward the heavenly things . Every fall and deviation, on the other hand, will cause the others to stumble and get destroyed. A believer, will either be, the secret of blessing or of destruction to his congregation.

b- Sin destroys those who commit it; Tamar counted it a shame for herself, and a destruction for Amnon; She would be disgraced, and Amnon would be counted as one of the fools.

c- She begged him to ask the king to give her to him in marriage; She probably meant to flee from his hands; or assumed that marrying a half- brother, would be more acceptable than falling in adultery.

Amnon did not heed her voice, as lust so corrupted his mind, and took away his humanity, that he raped his own sister.

2- Amnon exceedingly hates Tamar:

Having fulfilled the lust of his body, Amnon hated Tamar, that, "*The hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with he had loved her*" (2 Samuel 13: 15). When she humiliated herself before him, begging him to marry her, and not to throw her

into disgrace, he ordered the servant to put her out, away from him, and bolt the door behind her.

As we said before, lust and violence are two close companions; both of them are the fruit of taking away the grace of God from man, and lead to his deprivation of his existence with God. Lust, may sometimes, provide man with an outer mildness, yet it harbors violence within. Violence, on the other hand, produces lust and ecstasy, man seeks what is his, and not what is others.' Potiphar's wife had been very delicate before Joseph; yet she could not hide her violence, when he refused to surrender to her wish, she threw him in prison; While he on the other hand, despite his firmness in refusing the sin, was very decent to her. He did not avenge himself, nor defamed her, even when he came to enjoy glory and authority in the court of Pharaoh.

Solomon the wise, connects between adultery and cruelty, saying: "*For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; Her steps lay hold of hell*" (Proverb 5: 3, 4).

Lust gave forth violence in Amnon's life that he ordered his servant to put his mistress out, and to bolt the door behind her; As for her, she put ashes on her head as a sign of intense grief (1 Samuel 4: 12), as though in a funeral; and tore her robe of many colors, the apparel worn by the king's virgin daughters; a sign that she lost every glory, and got shame and disgrace instead; laid her hand on her head, and went away crying bitterly.

It is a bitter portrait of a soul, devastated by sin, aimlessly going on her way in humiliation, as though driven out of the house; the soul losing, her dwelling place in the bosom of God, wanders alone, with nobody to support, nor to share the depths of her feelings! to look back to see the door bolted behind her!

She put ashes on her head as despair destroyed her mind, and deprived her of her hope, peace, and inner joy!

The robe of many colors was torn; that refers to the body with all its energies. The body that seeks fulfillment of its senses through lust, will lose its holiness, and will have its senses defiled!

She lays her hands over her head; as a sign of her inability to act or to react.

She went her way bitterly crying, as though she lost the joyful royal way!

3- Absalom plans revenge against Amnon:

Absalom asked his sister to hold her peace, to give himself the chance to plan for revenge. He said to her: "*But now hold your peace my sister. He is your brother; do not take this thing to heart*" (2 Samuel 13: 20).

He asked her to keep silent and quiet; not the silence and quietness that bore peace, but that concealed craftiness and intention of revenge against his brother Amnon.

Indeed, how sweet is the silence and quietude, if they bear genuine inner peace; But if they are veils that hide inner bitterness, it would be more violent and cruel than loud harsh words. That is why the holy fathers discern between the holy constructive silence and the wicked and destructive silence as they discern between the good and the bad talk.

Tamar remained desolate and in disgrace in her brother Absalom house; not fit for marriage, for no guilt on her part. When David heard of all these things, he was very

angry; yet he did not punish Amnon. He probably thought of his own crime with Bathsheba, clearly demonstrated in the life of his firstborn son.

Absalom waited patiently two years without taking any action, to let Amnon and David assume that he forgot about the whole matter. And when it was the time for sheep sheering, a time for joy (1 Samuel 25: 7, 36), in Baal-Hazor, Absalom planned to carry out the murder of his brother Amnon.

‘**Baal-Hazor**’ means (a fenced sheephold)¹; near Ephraim, the place where Gabal Qosur’ is nowadays, 4 1/2 miles north-east of ‘Bethel’ and 15 miles north-east of Jerusalem.

Absalom invited his father and all his brothers, trying to conceal what he harbored in his heart; and as the king did not want to come, he urged him to send Amnon, the crown prince on his behalf. David approved after some reluctance, not sure of Absalom intent.

4- Absalom murders Amnon:

Absalom set his plan; When Amnon’s heart became merry with wine, Absalom servants killed him as their master commanded. Then all the king’s sons arose, got on their mules and fled. While they were on their way, the news came to David that Absalom killed all the king’s sons, and not one of them was left. So the king arose and tore his garments and lay on the ground, and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn. But Jonadab the son of Shimeah, David’s brother, told David that Absalom killed only Amnon as a revenge for what he had done to his sister.

Amnon reaped the fruit of his dirty act, and also of his drunkenness. The wise Solomon says: “*Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red; when it sparkles in the cup; when it swirls around smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper*” (Proverbs 23)

Absalom offered Amnon wine that carried the poison of death; While our Christ, offers Himself, the true vine that produces the wine of life, by which the heart gets glad with divine love; rejoicing by life with Him in heaven. That is why it is said: “*Wine that makes glad the heart of man*” (Psalm 104: 15). **The scholar Origen** says: [If the heart is the rational part of man; and what makes it glad is the “Word,” Who gives more joy than any wine; takes away from us, human worries; grants us the feeling of inspiration; and makes us drunk with a divine wine-I can realize what Joseph did, when he fulfilled his brothers with wine (Genesis 43: 34) ... Christ is the true vine, the clusters it bears, is the Truth; and the disciples are its branches; those who produce the truth as their fruits²].

5- Absalom flees:

Absalom fled to his maternal grandfather, ‘Tamai’ the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshor. ‘Geshor’ meaning a (bridge); is a province located between Harmon and Bashan, close to Argob, east of the Jordan; On its boundary, there is a bridge over the River Jordan, between Tabariah and Hola, known as the bridge of Jacob’s daughters (Gesr Banat Jacob). After three years of Absalom absence, having been comforted, as far

¹ *The Westminster Dict. of the Bible*, p. 83.

² *Origen’s Commentary on John*. 33.

as Amnon was concerned, David longed to see Absalom, whom he loved very much (2 Samuel 18: 5, 33); But he feared the criticism of his people, who knew that he killed the crown prince.

CHAPTER 14

ABSALOM PARDONED

For various reasons, Joab wished to reconcile David with his very beloved son Absalom; That is why he set a plan, that could be acceptable to all parties: the king, his son, and the people, to bring Absalom back from Geshor to Jerusalem. But although the king approved his return to Jerusalem, he insisted on not seeing his son for the duration of two years; for which Absalom had to use violence to press Joab to hasten to intercede for him.

1- Joab sends a wise woman to David	1-11
2- The woman opens her heart to David	12-20
3 Joab intercedes for Absalom	21-24
4- Absalom good looking appearance and his appeal to the people	25-27
5- Absalom applies pressure on Joab	28-33

1- Joab sends a wise woman to David:

Joab wished to be the intercessor to reconcile David with Absalom for the following reasons:

a- He knew for sure that David loved Absalom very much, longed to bring him back to Jerusalem, if it was not for his fear of criticism; That is why he found a way to realize that reconciliation, or at least to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem; something that would please David's heart, even if he pretended otherwise.

b- He knew that sooner or later the two of them would definitely be reconciled; So by achieving that role, he would gain favor with both parties.

c- He knew that Absalom was very popular among the people; So if David died, people would be divided, between those who wanted him a king, and those who would harbor some doubts, on account of his father's wrath on him, because he murdered his older brother Amnon ... Here a dissension with unpredictable results, would be inevitable.

d- The return of Absalom, the murderer of his brother, after David pardons him, would alleviate David's bad feelings toward Joab, because of his crime against Abner.

All these reasons, made Joab resort to a wise woman from Tekoa, a village in Judah, close to Bethlehem, south-east of Jerusalem, that was the village of the prophet Amos. As Joab was from the same village, he heard about that woman, and made her acquaintance. He thought of a plan to keep David from discovering the real mission of that woman.

Joab was aware of David's heart, filled with love, especially toward the grieved and the afflicted; and in particular, the widows and orphans. That is why he planned for that woman to play the role of a mourning and very sad widow; She came to David, as though mourning for the dead; put on mourning apparel, and did not anoint herself with oil. She started telling the king her presumed story, made up to apply to Absalom condition, from numerous aspects; in order to draw from his mouth a promise and a vow of pardon, that would apply to both her fake son, and to his son Absalom.

The woman of Tekoa fell before the king, on her face to the ground, and prostrated herself, and asked him for help. She told him that she was a widow; that her two sons fought with each other in the field, and there was no one to part them, so one struck the other and killed him. Now the whole family had risen up against her,

demanding the delivery of the killer, to execute him for the life of his brother whom he killed; and by that they would destroy the heir also; aiming to confiscate the inheritance.

She begged for mercy for herself, and for a pardon for her son; as executing him would extinguish her amber that is left, and leave to her husband neither name nor remnant on earth. To that the king showed compassion, and promised to give orders concerning her (2 Samuel 14: 8).

The woman was not satisfied with that reaction, but wished for a confirmation of a pardon, that would imply a cancellation of the Mosaic statute concerning the killing of the killer, saying: ***“Let the iniquity be on me and on my father’s house, and the king and his throne be guiltless”*** (2 Samuel 14: 9). The king promised her a pardon, saying to her: *“Whoever says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall not touch you anymore”* (2 Samuel 14: 10).

Yet she was not content pretending to be in fear of the avenger of blood, lest he would destroy her son; to this the king swore: ***“As the Lord lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground”*** (2 Samuel 14: 11). **By this vow, the verdict was issued from the mouth of king David, to pardon his son Absalom, the killer of his brother Amnon.**

And the woman managed to draw from David’s mouth successively:

- a- A promise to give orders concerning her (2 Samuel 14: 8).
- b- A verdict on the spot to her benefit.
- c- A promise to protect her from anyone who would try to harm her.
- d- A pardon for her son, and a protection against the avenger of blood.

2- The woman opens her heart to David:

The woman from Tekoa managed to perform the first part of her act, drawing every thing she wanted from the mouth of the king; namely a complete pardon for the killer of his brother. Here, she took off her mask, to tell the king that, if he would give this judgment for someone of the people of God, so why did not he bring his banished one home; namely his son Absalom.

Although the king was astonished for what the woman did, it found favor in his eyes, for the sake of his love to his son Absalom. The woman likened the people to a loving mother of her son Absalom, but without disregarding her murdered son Amnon. The king, though the avenger of blood in that case, and had the right to seek blood, he was committed to have compassion on the loving people, who demanded to pardon Absalom on his crime of killing Amnon.

David could have debated with the woman, to reveal that her condition, on many aspects, did not apply to that of Absalom; that Absalom did not kill his brother during a sudden rage and temporary anger, but through a well planned plot; and that he could have reconsidered his action, or sought the counsel of someone; and that Absalom, was not alone, but had many brothers, who could inherit and bear their father’s name. Not trying to debate with the woman reveals a hidden wish in David’s heart, to bring his son back to Jerusalem.

To confirm the necessity of bringing back Absalom, the woman offered David the following grounds for her requests, she said to him:

a- ***“Why then have you schemed such a thing against the people of God?”*** (2 Samuel 14: 13). It is as though she is saying to him: If you are having compassion on a

widow, to pardon her killer son, how much more it is fitting for you to care for the feelings of the whole people of God, who love Absalom, and to give it some consideration!

b- **“For we will surely die”** (2 Samuel 14: 14). By that She probably meant that, as our days are very few, we should bear with each other and forgive one another; Let us live our days in peace and joy, for the edification of the congregation. Or she probably meant that all will die; and Amnon had to die. He was murdered; yet even if Absalom did not kill him, he would have died just the same. So forgive, as Amnon will never return to life in this world; and Absalom exile would not solve the problem.

c- **“God does not take away a life”** (2 Samuel 14: 14). She meant that, as natural death is inevitable in its unknown time, God wants mercy, and does not want us to take away the life of any of our brethren. She is probably also referring to David himself, who, though deserved to die, God did not take away his soul but forgave him; So we also, should forgive each other.

d- **“Because the people have made me afraid”** (2 Samuel 14: 15). The people representing the mother who lost her beloved son Amnon, were demanding the return of her other son Absalom; and (made her afraid) lest she would fail in her appeal to David.

Wisely, the woman ended her talk by praising him, saying: **“The word of my Lord the king will now be comforting; for as the angel of God, so is my Lord the king in discerning good and evil. And may the Lord your God be with you”** (2 Samuel 14: 17).

Here, David doubted that Joab’s hand must be with that woman in all this. and asking her, she , in humility and wisdom, told him the truth, lest the king’ anger would arise against Joab, she said: **“He put all these words in the mouth of your maidservant. To bring about this change of affairs, your servant Joab has done this thing; but my Lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel, to know all things that are in the earth”** (2 Samuel 14: 20).

No doubt, that woman deserves to be commended, for her wisdom melded with humility, by which she could get her heart wish, not for her own benefit, but for the sake of the peace of the congregation, and to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem.

St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian talks to us about the necessity of mixing wisdom or discernment with humility; saying: [Humility with discernment is a true knowledge....

The true knowledge is the fountain of humility ... He, who is humble in heart, is humble in flesh¹].

3- Joab intercedes for Absalom:

The king commanded Joab to carry out that matter, for which he sent the woman to him. Joab expressed his gratitude by falling to the ground on his face and bowing himself before the king; counting it as an honor that the king had fulfilled his request, and had commanded him to carry out the matter by himself..

In our previous talk, in the same chapter, about the reasons for which Joab requested the return of Absalom to Jerusalem, we did not mention among them, that Joab ever loved Absalom; But the matter had been all political: to gain the friendship of the king and his son, and the admiration of the people; That is why we do not marvel, to see him, eventually kill Absalom (2 Samuel 18: 14), then rebuke the king for his intense

¹ hom. 64.

mourning for him (2 Samuel 19: 5,7).

The king ordered the return of Absalom to his house, but with a condition that he should not show his face to the king (2 Samuel 14: 24); for the following reasons:

- a- Lest the people would see the king as not caring for Amnon's blood.
- b- To let Absalom know that he should first humiliate himself, and present repentance.
- c- He feared that Absalom, by going in and out, would attain publicity that may support his claim for the throne after him; as he has promised Bathsheba that her son Solomon would be the one to ascend the throne.

4- Absalom good –looking appearance and his appeal to the people:

Absalom was not commended, except for his good looks that captivated the hearts of people: *“In all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him”* (2 Samuel 14: 25). His hair was very dense and beautiful; he anointed it with oils, and probably adorned it with gold powder, that added to its beauty and weight. Each year, he used to cut it and weigh it, as was the custom and religious practice among the Philistines of those days.

Absalom attained publicity through the beauty of his body, and not through the holiness of his soul, and the purity of his heart. That is why that publicity did not last long, and he did not benefit from people's praise; On the contrary, that was the cause of his destruction as we shall eventually see.

St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian tells us about the importance of caring for the beauty of the soul, rather than for that of the body, saying: [The soul looks at the heavenly beauty inside it, as though in a perfect mirror; Through its absolute purity, it reflects the beauty of people's faces. It is said: ‘Sanctity is fitting for the saints’¹].

St. Clement of Alexandria wrote a complete chapter on ‘The true beauty,’ in his work ‘The Bedagog’ , saying:

[A man, in whom the Word dwells, does not adorn himself (by outer jewelry); nor invents something for himself; as he already possesses the figure of the Word, and is created according to the likeness of God; He is beautiful, so he does not need to adorn himself; He has got God-the true beauty² ...] .

[There is another beauty for man: Love³].

[It is not the concern of the outer man (the flesh), to adorn himself by the jewelry of goodness; but it is the concern of the soul⁴].

5- Absalom applies pressure on Joab:

Absalom, though dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, did not see the king's face; Yet, in those years, he did not learn how to acquire pardon through humility, but remained violent in his depths.

It seems that Joab refrained from coming to Absalom, lest he might arouse David's anger. When Absalom sent twice to Joab to reconcile him with the king, but with

¹ *The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian, 1984, p. 395*

² *Paed. 3:1.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid. 3:2*

no response, Absalom commanded his servants to set Joab's field on fire. When Joab arose and came to Absalom's house to complain, the latter asked him to intercede on his behalf to the king, to look into his case; and either to pardon him, or execute him. Absalom was aware of the weakness of his father toward him: He would never execute him; and would fear, if he condemned him, that his son might defame him because of his crime against Uriah the Hittite.

When Joab went to the king and told him the words of Absalom, he called his son, and proclaimed his pardon by kissing him.

Absalom managed to return to the royal palace, probably to plan for taking away the throne from his father.

CHAPTER 15

THE REBELLION OF ABSALOM

Absalom returned to Jerusalem, not for the sake of his longing for the forgiveness and love of his father, but to prepare the way to take away his throne, whatever the cost would be:

1- Absalom prepares the way for himself	
2- Absalom flatters the people	2-6
3- Proclaiming Absalom a king	7-12
4-The escape of David and his men	13-17
5- The escape of Ittai the Gittite	18-23
6- The ark of God remains in Jerusalem	24-29
7- The return of Hushai the Archite	30-37

1- Absalom prepares the way for himself:

“Absalom provided himself with Chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him” (2 Samuel 15: 1).

This behavior reveals the goal of Absalom in returning to Jerusalem; as he carried within himself the flame of vain glory. He got reconciled to his father, not for the sake of gaining his favor, nor of paying back his fatherly love with his pure love as a son, but in order to plan to take away his throne. With a spirit of arrogance, he pretended to be a great man, who used a royal chariot, and before whom, fifty men ran.

God set the kingdom for David, through several years of trouble and affliction. While Absalom prepared himself, through outer appearances of greatness and vain glory. He learned from the king of Geshor, his maternal grandfather, the use of a royal chariot, horses, and men running before him, something that the prophet Samuel warned the people against, when they asked him to make a king for them like the other nations, saying: *“He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariot”* (1 Samuel 8: 11).

So Absalom followed the example of the kings of nations for vain greatness while his own father used to ride a mule in simplicity and humility. Yet those outer appearances, beside the good looks of Absalom, found favor in the eyes of many, and his publicity increased; as some considered him as more fitting for the throne.

Absalom sought the vain glory to receive the throne, not realizing that he was by that, chasing his own spiritual and physical perdition, to lose both his eternity and his life.

The saintly fathers talk to us about the importance of humility, as a way to glory and the danger of vain glory:

❖ Be humble in your own eyes, to behold the glory of God within you.

Where humility takes root; there, the glory of God sets forth.

If you strive to be despised by everyone, God will glorify you.

If you have humility in your heart, God will reveal to you his glory in your heart.

Be despised in your greatness; and not great in your lowliness

Do not seek to become dignified, while you are full of wounds inside.

Reject dignity, to become dignified; and do not love it, lest you become rejected.

Whoever seeks dignity, it will run away from him; and who runs away from dignity, will be chased by it; and everyone will proclaim his humility.

Run away from vain glory, to get glorified; Fear pride to get great.

St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian¹

- ❖ I believe that the simple spiritual work, when practiced with humility, will get us to be with the saints, who strove to become true ministers to God.
- ❖ There is a true way for growth: By growing in humility, man gets to the true divine glory.

Father Dorotheos²

2- Absalom flatters the people:

To take away the throne from his father, Absalom did not stop at making use of his physical good looking appearance, and the appearances of greatness and luxury, but, in deception, he flattered the people. He would rise early and stand beside the way to the city gate; So it was, whenever anyone who had a lawsuit came to the king for a decision, he would pretend to care for him, ask him about his city and tribe, and would deceptively say to him, without even examining his case: ***“Look, your case is good and right, but there is no deputy of the king to hear you”*** (2 Samuel 15: 3). So, he said to both opposing parties, to let all rebel against his father, And to motivate them to set him a king and judge in his place; he adds: ***“Oh, that I were made judge in the land, and everyone who has any suit or cause would come to me; then I would give him justice”*** (2 Samuel 15: 4).

And in false humility, whenever anyone came near him to bow down to him, as the son of the king and the crowned prince, he would put out his hand and take him and kiss him as though he was his personal friend. ...; in this manner, Absalom managed to steel the hearts of the men of Israel, to make him a king in his father’s place.

St. John Chrysostom says: [Look how Absalom was crafty in his deception, to steal the hearts of people, unlike the honesty of his father! But you should also look to the end of each of them: Look how Absalom, in absolute folly, was only planning to harm his father, to end up becoming blind in every thing else; While David was the contrary to that; For ***“He who walks with integrity walks securely”*** (Proverb 10: 9)³].

3- Absalom proclaimed a king:

That took place, 40 years after David was anointed a king by the hand of the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16: 1). Some believe, that 4 years after Absalom became reconciled to his father, he prepared the way for himself to become king.

He asked his father, to let him go to Hebron, and pay the vow which he vowed to the Lord while he dwelt at Geshur in Syria; saying that if the Lord brought him back to Jerusalem, then he would serve the Lord (2 Samuel 15: 8). Although that was most probably a deception, his father, who was seeking the integrity of his son, was pleased to hear that he wished to worship the Lord in Hebron, his birth place; and he readily allowed him to go.

Absalom planned the whole thing with some of his counselors, according to the following broad lines:

¹ hom. 5.

² On Humility.

³ On Ephes., hom. 15.

a- To proclaim his reign in Hebron-one of the cities of Judah-where David resided for sometime, as the king over the tribe of Judah, and made it the capital of his kingdom. In Hebron-far from Jerusalem --Absalom could gather together all talents and leading personalities, to support him against his father, especially, that the men, were feeling hurt and angry on account that David moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem.

b- Absalom sent spies (as their mission was secret) to all tribes; to let them all proclaim him a king at the same time; to give David no place to go for refuge.

c- Absalom took with him 200 of the prominent personalities, whom he invited for the sacrifice, while they knew nothing about his real intentions. Their presence together with him in Hebron, would give the impression to the tribes, that the elite of Israel have forsaken David to support Absalom; and that they came with him for that purpose. That, and drawing all of them to Hebron, would close the door before any chance for them to counsel David about the rebellion of Absalom; and would give them no choice, but to accept the new king.

d- Then Absalom sent for ‘Ahithophel’ the Gilonite (2 Samuel 15: 12), as he saw in him both the wish and ability to betray David; In that, he was like Judas, in his treason of his Master (Christ), and was like him as well in the manner of his death (Psalm 41: 9; John 13: 18).

‘Giloh’ was a village on the mountains of Judah; that probably is ‘Kherbet Gala’ nowadays, 15 miles north-west of Hebron¹.

So, Absalom humanly set his plan; and David had no choice, except either to escape or to surrender, to get killed by the hand of his own son.

4- The escape of David and his men:

David realized the danger early; and probably recalled his sin, and the words of the Lord to him saying: *“The sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me; ... Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house”* (2 Samuel 12: 10, 11).

David had compassion on the city, and feared that Absalom would probably strike it with the sword because of him; That is why he said to all his men: *“Arise and let us flee, or else we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtakes us suddenly and brings disaster upon us, and strike the city by the edge of the sword”* (2 Samuel 15: 14).

Then the king went out with all the people after him, and stopped at the outskirts, where all his servants passed before him.

David’s soul was embittered by the treason and rebellion of his son; Yet his heart was filled with hope in the Lord his Savior. By the spirit of prophecy, David realized that what befell him by the treason of Absalom and Ahithophel, is a symbol of the treason of Judas to his master, the Lord Christ.

As David fled, He sang the third psalm: *“Lord, How they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say to me, ‘There is no help for him in God.’ But You, O Lord, are a shield to me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the Lord sustained me”* (Psalm 3: 1-5).

St. Augustine comments on this psalm, saying: [The words: *“I lay down and*

¹ Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 407.

slept; I awoke , for the Lord sustained me,” lead us to believe that this psalm applies to the Person, passion and resurrection of the Lord Christ, more than to the events of David’s escape before the face of his rebellious son ... As it was written of the disciples of Christ: “*Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?*” (See Matthew 9: 15); we should not marvel if David’s rebellious son here, refers to the disciple who betrayed the Lord Christ. His escape before his son’s face, is historically interpreted by the fact that the Lord, once the traitor left them, drew the rest of the disciples to the mountain; and is spiritually interpreted by the fact that the Son of God, the power and wisdom of God, forsook Judas’ mind, as his heart got occupied by the devil. We should not understand from that, that Christ left his place to the devil, but as Christ forsook him, the devil reigned in him...

The Truth forsook the mind of Judas, when the Truth enlightened it no more.

The name ‘Absalom’ is interpreted in Latin, as ‘Patris Pax,’ meaning, (Peace of his father). It is difficult to see the (Peace of his father), neither in the history of kings in the Old Testament, when Absalom made war against his father; nor in the New Testament, when Judas betrayed the Lord Jesus. But who reads carefully, will realize that David was in peace with his son even during their war; having said when he died: “*O my son Absalom-my son, my son Absalom-If only I had died in your place!* “ (2 Samuel 18: 33). And in the history of the New Testament, through His amazing long-suffering, the Lord bore with Judas, as though he was a good man; Although he was aware of his thoughts, He let him join the last supper ..., and finally he received his kiss at the climax of his treason. We can easily understand how the Lord Christ showed peace toward His betrayer¹.....]

5- The escape of Ittai the Gittite:

When David fled before the face of Saul, he dwelt in ‘Gath,’ and organized a regiment of 600 men, and appointed Ittai the Gittite as their commander. That regiment stayed with him as he became a king in Hebron, and also in Jerusalem; They were Israelites with a few Gittites.

Of the most admirable attributes of David, is not thinking of his own good, even in the bitter moments of affliction; and not seeking to force others to serve him; That is why he requested from Ittai the Gittite to put himself at the disposal of Absalom as the new king; wanting to spare him bearing what is more than he could, having been of foreign origin; So he said to him: “***Return and remain with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your own place. In fact you came only yesterday, should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I go I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you***” (2 Samuel 15: 19, 20). But Ittai, the foreigner refused to leave David in the time of his affliction, but spoke to him with the spirit of love and loyalty; the way Ruth the Moabite spoke to Naomi her mother-in-law (Ruth 1: 16).

God wanted to comfort the heart of David; when his own son was betraying him and trying to take away his kingdom, and even to kill him, a man of foreign origin attached himself to him in his affliction, and shared his troubles.

Absalom represented the congregation of Jews, Jesus Christ’s own, who persisted on denying him, even after He provided salvation on the cross. While Ittai represented the

¹ On Ps. 3.

congregation of the Gentiles, who attached themselves to the Son of David, and accepted to sojourn together with Him; “*Going forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach*” (Hebrew 13: 13).

Ittai, who is mentioned here, is not the same ‘Ittai’ mentioned in 2 Samuel 23: 29; 1 Chronicles 11: 31, who was from Gibeah of the children of Benjamin; who was one of the heroes of David.

The king crossed the valley, between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives where there is no water except in the time of winter. The Lord Christ crossed that same valley on the night of his passion, to enter the garden of Gethsemane (John 18: 1).

6- The ark of God remains in Jerusalem:

David wanted all his movements to be under the shadow of the Lord Himself as his Savior; So he asked ‘Zadok’ the priest and the Levites to bring the ark, until all the people had crossed; Yet once the crossing came to an end, he did not want to take it with him out of Jerusalem, but requested its return , believing that God, if it pleased Him, would allow him to return to where the ark was-- as the symbol of the divine presence.

Despite his feeling of his sins and his unworthiness, David demonstrated a complete deliverance of his life in God’s hands; That is why he returned the ark with Zadok the priest, together with Ahimaaz his son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar; counting their presence in Jerusalem as a support for him beside fearing that something might happen to the ark.

He realized that he was passing through a temporary period of divine chastisement ; But his heart was attached to the Lord, to His people, to the ark of God, and to the holy city of Jerusalem. He also asked the two priests to send him their two sons, while he was in the wilderness, to inform him about the news of Absalom and his men, as they entered the city.

7 - The return of ‘Hushai the Archite’:

David ascended the Mount of Olives, one mile east of Jerusalem; weeping, his head covered, and barefoot; with all the people doing the same; and once he reached the top of the mountain, “*He worshipped God*” (2 Samuel 15: 32); He used to worship God and give Him thanks amid his afflictions. **St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian** says: [The heart that always moves with thanks, is a guide that leads to God’s gifts to man¹].

On that same Mount, Jesus, the Lord of Glory, stood looking at Jerusalem and weeping, because of the rejection of its people, of God’s care and fatherhood (Matthew 23: 37; Luke 13: 34).

What increased David’s grief, was hearing that his best friend ‘Ahithophel,’ well known for his wisdom, betrayed him, and was among the conspirators with Absalom. That is why he cried out, saying: “*O Lord, I pray, Turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness*” (2 Samuel 15: 31).

David requested from ‘Hushai the Archite’ to return, lest, being an old man who could not possibly bear the troubles, he would become a burden on him, From another aspect, being an honest and a faithful man, and through his friendship with Absalom, he could counter the counsel of Ahithophel.

It seems that Hushai was absent when David fled; and when he heard he hastened

¹ hom. 48.

to join him, but David would rather have in Jerusalem. Hushai's love and faithfulness was like a balsam to David's soul, embittered by the treason of Ahithophel. David expressed the bitterness of his soul, because of the treason of Ahithophel, and, at the same time, his rejoicing for Hushai's loyalty, in psalm 41; saying: "*Blessed is he, who considers the poor; The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble ... The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; He will sustain him on his sickbed; Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me*" (Psalm 41).

By "the poor," he probably meant himself, having turned into a fugitive whom Hushai (considered), despite his own old age and the feebleness of his body; So God will support and help him the rest of his life. As to his own (familiar) friend, it was Ahithophel, on whom David granted, beside his love and friendship, a lot of material gifts; and now, he destroyed the trust, and lifted [up his heel) to harm him; to become a symbol of the traitor Judas.

CHAPTER 16

DAVID, A FUGITIVE AGAIN

David's soul, this time was more bitter, as he was not fleeing before the face of Saul, the king, who feared that David was after his throne, but before his rebellious own son, who took away his throne and aroused the people against him. What made him bitterer was that some found it an opportunity to insult and curse him; besides his feeling that what befell him was a fruit of what he committed against God, and against Uriah the Hittite.

Anyway, the psalms he wrote and sang during his flight reveal that he did not lose his hope in God, realizing that what befell him, was a fatherly chastisement from God, his Savior.

1- David's encounter with 'Ziba,' Mephibosheth's servant	1-4
2- 'Shimei' curses David	5-14
3- Absalom proclaimed a king	15-19
4- Absalom and his father's concubines	20-23

1- David's encounter with Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant:

Ziba, coveting to take over the possessions of his master, Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, instead of just managing it together with his sons, found it an opportunity to arouse David against Mephibosheth, to issue an order to transfer those possessions to him.

Ziba, realizing how David was both wise and strong and that the affliction he was going through was but a temporary thing, to be followed by a sure victory, made haste to encounter him amid that affliction, while he was on the top of the Mount of Olives, taking with him a couple of saddled donkeys, and on them 200 loaves of bread, 100 clusters of raisins, 100 summer fruits, and a skin of wine. He told David that the donkeys were for the king's household, and the food and drink for those who would get faint in the wilderness.

When David inquired about Mephibosheth, Ziba answered craftily: "*Indeed he is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore the kingdom of my father to me'*" (2 Samuel 16: 3). So Ziba distorted his master's image before David, who gave Mephibosheth every goodness. Ziba's words were unacceptable, as how could such a lame man, have the throne from Absalom with all his good looking appearance, strength, and might, who managed to take it away from David himself! Because David had much on his mind, and did not see in Mephibosheth any danger on him or on his son, he, in a hurry, hastened to count Mephibosheth as a traitor, and issued an order for Ziba to get all what belonged to Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 16: 4). Ziba said to him: "*I humbly bow before you, that I may find favor in your sight, my Lord, O king*" (2 Samuel 16: 4).

God allowed it for David to go through that difficult temptation, namely, feeling that Mephibosheth betrayed him, something he never expected, for his own good and edification from several aspects, of which:

a- It was imperative for David to drink from the same cup that he himself filled; as he betrayed his faithful man Uriah the Hittite, after which his conscience relaxed for a while. That is why God wished for David to taste the bitterness of treason, through that of

his own son; of Ahithophel; of Mephibosheth, and of many others; those for whom he had done good, were doing him more harm than the enemies.

b- God turned this temptation to David's own good; as he, and all those with him, were in bad need of that gift, brought by Ziba. God sustains us by all means: the way He sustained Elijah by a raven, and sustained David and his men through the craftiness of Ziba.

C- David discovered later on, Ziba's deception, and learned that he should not have issued his judgments in haste. He unjustly condemned Mephibosheth, and deprived him of his grandfather's possessions.

2- Shimei curses David:

From Behurim, came Shimei the son of Gera, from the family of the house of Saul; He came out cursing and throwing stones at David and his men. As there was a valley between him and David and his men, his stones could not reach them, but his curses did. He was cursing David saying:

“Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, You rogue! The Lord has brought upon you all of the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!” (2 Samuel 16: 7, 8).

Shimei was throwing stones at David as though at a dog, but his words were like fatal arrows, carrying hatred together with lies. David had never fought the house of Saul to take away his throne. But, on the contrary he countered Saul's pursuit with forgiveness. He never stretched his hand to Saul, his children, or his grandchildren; but sought to do them favor.

Zealously, Abishai, wanted to go over to kill that man, counting him as a dead dog; but David stopped him, counting that insult as a chastisement from the Lord because of his old sin saying to Abishai:

“What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David.’ Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so? ... See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life, How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the Lord has ordered him. It may be that the Lord will look at my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me for his cursing this day” (2 Samuel 16: 10-12).

Saying, “Because the Lord has said to him, ‘Curse David’,” does not mean that literally, but God allowed it for the wicked will of Shemei to realize it, to consummate the divine justice, as **St. Augustine**¹ says: [God uses the wicked; and even the devil himself, for the sake of testing the faith, and piety of His good servants.]

Those curses could never harm David, but for him they were like medicine he took readily and with thanks, to gain the divine mercies. While the flattering words of Ziba, harmed David, who hastened to issue a wrong and unjust decision against Mephibosheth, the insulting curses of Shemei, gave him the opportunity to truthfully condemn himself. Indeed the words of flattering, are more dangerous on the life of a believer-especially a leader-than those of insults. And as one of the fathers of the

¹ *On Grace & Free-will ch. 41.*

wilderness says: He who is not capable of bearing the words of cursing, how can he bear those of flattering?!

David received the words of cursing with joy, as some healing medication for his inner depths; But he got angry, and spoke firmly to Abishai, as he intended to avenge him.

❖ David moved with piteous anger against the suggestion of Abishai; and so firmly kept the fitting measure of humility and patience.

St. John Cassian¹

❖ Just listen to David, who became particularly famous for his soul contrition; how, after doing all those good things; while he was a fugitive from his land, his home, and even from life itself; in his time of affliction, he had to listen to the curses of a silly man, and not only refrained from insulting him back, but stopped one of his commanders from killing him saying: *“Let him curse, because the Lord said to him, ‘Curse David’”*.

St. John Chrysostom²

How amazing was the heart David, so spacious with love toward his afflictors; we never see him seeking revenge. His inner feelings were probably aroused at first; but God filled his heart with exalted comforts, based on:

a- He felt that those curses were allowed by God to chastise him, because he was bloodthirsty; not through killing Saul or one of his men, as Shemei claimed, but through killing Uriah the Hittite.... Thus it was fitting for him to receive the insults with joy, as though from God Himself. And as **St. John Chrysostom** says: [If someone insulted you saying, ‘You adulterer!’, Why should you become angry? Haven’t you ever had a thought of adultery or of a wicked lust in your youth? Count that as a chastisement for the thoughts of your youth.

b- If Absalom, David’s own son, rebelled against him, and took away his throne, and yet he did not harbor any wish to avenge himself So how could he avenge himself against a Benjamite, who cursed him, but did not take away anything from him?!

c- David counted those curses as an opportunity for humiliation, as a way to gain the mercies of God.

3- Absalom proclaimed a king:

Absalom came, together with his men-especially of the tribe of Judah-to reign, without shedding any blood; as David and his men fled, to spare anyone getting killed on his account.

Absalom was astonished to see ‘Hushai the Archite,’ David’s friend coming to him, saying, *“Long live the king! Long live the king!”* And when Hushai noticed Absalom’s reaction he said to him: *“Whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his I will be, and with him I will remain. Furthermore, whom shall I serve? Should I not serve in the presence of his son? As I have served in your father’s presence?”* (2 Samuel 16: 18, 19).

Such were the excuses Hushai gave for not fleeing from Jerusalem, to gain the confidence of Absalom, in order to be David’s eye in the royal palace.

¹ Institutes 8: 8.

² In Matt. hom. 3.

4- Absalom goes in to his father's concubines:

Ahithophel acted as a counselor to Absalom; his counsel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God (2 Samuel 16: 23); though it was wicked as though from the devil, bearing earthly sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 5: 1).

Ahithophel's first counsel to Absalom, was to go in to his father's concubines, whom he left to keep the house. Absalom did that on the roof, for everyone to see, and to make sure that his hatred against David has reached its climax, and that there would be no chance for reconciliation with him.

Ahithophel probably gave that counsel to Absalom, out of fear that one day both father and son would reconcile; to make Ahithophel's position embarrassing before his old friend David; He was a traitor who could not confront David!

All that took place on the same roof where David walked, to sneak a wicked look at a foreign woman; and now, here, on the same spot, was his own son going in with his concubines.

CHAPTER 17

AHITHOPHEL'S COUNSEL DEFEATED

David remained seven and a half years in Hebron, as a king over the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 2: 4); until men from all the tribes, together with Abner, came to ask him to reign over them; Then he moved to Jerusalem, as the capital of all Israel. Absalom, on the contrary to his father, sent messengers to all the tribes, to proclaim him a king; and hastened to move from Hebron to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 16: 15). Yet, he did not find comfort, although he got the kingdom in a hurry, without any struggle against his father and his men. Now, Ahithophel came to him with a counsel, though wicked, yet counted good enough to realize the goal of Absalom. But God defeated that counsel by another one presented by Hushai the Archite.

1- The counsel of Ahithophel	1-4
2- The counsel of Hushai defeats that of Ahithophel	5-14
3- Two messengers are sent to warn David	15-22
4- Ahithophel hangs himself	23
5- Absalom gets ready for war	24-26
6- David in Mahanaim	27-29

1- The counsel of Ahithophel:

Ahithophel , as the king's counselor, came to Absalom with a plan to realize his goals. His counsel was, to pursue David and his men, while they were weary and weak with the factor of surprise, and before David had a chance to organize his troops, confusion would prevail, and all his men would flee, leaving David alone to be killed; All the people would then return to Absalom with no significant effort. According to Ahithophel, the matter did not require more than 12,000 selected men, to move that same evening, and return with certain victory.

This counsel was considered to be 'good' (2 Samuel 17: 14); not that it embodied any good, but because it was good enough to realize the goal of Absalom. In it, we can notice the following:

a- It came as a symbol of the counsel of 'Caiaphas' the chief priest, against the Lord Christ, the Son of David; who said: "*You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish*" The evangelist comments on this saying: "*Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation; and not for that nation only, but also that he would gather in one the children of God who were scattered abroad*" (John 11: 49 -52).

Although 'the name 'Ahithophel' means (brother of foolishness)¹ God with His goodness, makes use of that foolish and evil one, as a tool to prophesy through him; as He did before with 'Belaam' the diviner (Numbers 23: 24). . Here, he makes use of Ahithophel, to proclaim that David had to die for all the people; "***then all the people would be at peace***" (2 Samuel 17: 3). That was realized in the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered himself as a "*Propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the whole world*" (1 John 2: 2).. That is why He provided us with his body, as a secret of

¹ Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, art. 302

salvation for all. **St. Jerome** says: [Let us eat the body of the lamb-with no blemish; that takes away the sins of the world. Let us eat it in one house; namely, in the (catholic) Church spattered with love that carries the weapon of virtue¹].

b- Ahithophel portrayed David and his men as outlaws against king Absalom ...; by his evil eye, as a traitor, he saw in David a rebel and an outlaw!

2- The counsel of Hushai defeats that of Ahithophel:

God sends with the temptation, an opening; In every age, there were those opposing the truth, together with those set by God to destroy their opposition, or turn it to edification. When He set Pharaoh as a tyrant, He sent Moses as a strong leader. And when the devil set Ahithophel, God sent Hoshai. And When the antichrist comes at the end of time, God will send two prophets to destroy his deceptions.

Although he was pleased with the counsel of Ahithophel, Absalom called Hushai the Archite to hear what he had to say too, to make his final decision. Wisely, Hushai said that the counsel of Ahithophel was not good this time. ; and gave another counsel, that though seemed a better one; its goal was actually to rescue David with the following broad lines:

a- According to Hushai the Archite, David, as a man of war, would surely anticipate what Ahithophel had suggested; would not encamp with the people that night but hide in some unknown pit, where Absalom's men would not find him. In that case a fierce battle would take place, in which many on both side would perish; but David would stay alive, as a thorn in the side of Absalom.

b- Absalom would be facing David, a wise and experienced man of war, who could plan well with few, yet strong and valiant men. That is why doing things in a hurry was not to the benefit of Absalom; but he needed to slow down, think more carefully, then move seriously, and on a large scale, to avoid defeat and loss of people's trust.

c- Absalom's people were stretched beyond counting, like the sand that is by the sea for multitude, all over the way from Dan to Beersheba; So why would not he make use of these possibilities, and restrict himself just to 12,000 men?! He was capable of coming upon David, and, *"fall on him in any place he may be found, as the dew falls on the ground. And if he has withdrawn into a city, then all Israel shall bring ropes to pull that city into the river, until there is not one small stone found there"*(2 Samuel 17: 12, 13).

Thus, after terrifying him from David, he again started to praise Absalom's capabilities, lest he might think that Hushai despised or underestimated him. Though he was backing him, he asked him to think carefully and with no hurry. ... He had to give Absalom some praise, to let him accept his counsel.

d- Killing David alone would not solve Absalom's problem; He had to get rid of all his men, in order to have peace saying to him: *".. of him and all the men who are with him, there shall not be left so much as one"* (2 Samuel 17: 12). This view appealed to Absalom as he did not like David's men all the same.

e- As this war would be the first for Absalom as a king, he would have to go with his men? *"and you go to battle in person"* (2 Samuel 17: 11). Hushai probably hoped by his counsel that Absalom would be killed in war, to avoid any future recurrence.

¹ من تفسير وتأملات الآباء الأولين: الانجيل بحسب مرقس، ص ٢٥١.

These points put the fear in Absalom's heart against any haste of action, but , at the same time, satisfied his pride; If he acted with prudence, he would gather all Israel together under his leadership, to make war, serious and fierce enough to put an end to David and his men.

Absalom did not realize that although there might be many who praised and flattered him, there were also many who still loved David his father; and that gaining the support of all the people of Israel, needed a long time. That was apparently the counsel of Hushai; but actually, the hidden secret behind it all, was God, the true factor to rescue David. He let Hushai have favor in Absalom's eyes; as is said: "***The Lord had purposed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring disaster on Absalom***" (2 Samuel 17: 14).

God, who allowed Ahithophel to give his counsel, had Himself defeated it through that of Hushai, to grant David and his men victory over Absalom. This is the hand of God working along the ages, to His believers' account, especially, as the Son of David-the incarnated Word of God-descended to our world to destroy every plan of the devil. **St. Jerome** says: ["*Your way was in the sea*" (Psalm 77: 19); namely through the waves; through the bitter waters where the dragon dwells ... You are in heaven, and descended to the earth ... The fountain of life came to transfer the bitter and dead sea into sweet water¹]

"Hushai" is a name that means (hasty)². He hastened to David to join him during his time of affliction, despite his old age; but David asked him to stay in Jerusalem, to support him; And there he hastened to his rescue, by giving Absalom a counsel that defeated that of Ahithophel; beside sending David information about every thing going on.

3- Two messengers are sent to warn David:

Hushai had, through the priests, to inform David of what happened; God made use of both the priests and the people, men and women, elders and youth, to realize this goal, to proclaim that the Church is one body, with all its members moving by one Spirit; every member has his own effective role³.

a- Hushai sent to the two priests: Zadok and Abiatjhar, to inform them about what happened concerning Ahithophel and himself, to let them act accordingly. He asked them to send a word to David in the plains of the wilderness (2 Samuel 15: 28); namely, in the west bank of the Jordan, lest he and all the people with him would be swallowed; in case Absalom would happen to change his mind and accept the counsel of Ahithophel, and attack David that night.

Hushai represents the People's leaderships who are committed to work with those of the Church, with the Spirit of unity and cooperation, as members of one body, to exchange love, and consummate the one work of the Church.

Any selfishness on one of the two fronts, would lead to the destruction of the church; The Bishop; according to **St. John Chrysostom**, is a Bishop by his people; and the people work in harmony with their Bishop; so the blessing would come, and God would work through all.

'Hushai,' symbolically meaning (hasty) hastened to 'Zadok,' meaning

¹ On Ps. 12.

² Strong ..., art. 2365.

³ راجع أقوال الآباء في هذا الشأن في كتابنا: "الحب الجامع أو دور الشعب كنسياً".

(righteous)¹, and to ‘Abiathar,’ meaning (father of riches)²-the two priests-to consider what they should do under the circumstances. The two priests, in cooperation with the people, represent the priestly role in ministry; namely, the work through the righteous or sanctified life in the Lord; beside the fatherhood, rich with love. In other words, if the people hasten to the priests, this is because they expect to find in them, before anything else, the sanctity of life, and the true fatherhood, full of love and compassion.

b- A maidservant set forth to carry the message of the two old priests Zadok and Abiathar, to their young priest sons: ‘Jonathan,’ meaning in Hebrew (Gift of Jehovah)³, and ‘Ahimaaz,’ meaning (brother of anger)⁴; who were staying at ‘En rogel,’ meaning (traveler’s eye)⁵, waiting for the message. The Church is in need of all its members and its priests; It was not possible for Hushai to realize his mission without the poor maidservant; and for the old priests to act without the two young priests. I wish the rich feel his need for the poor; and the old priest, would not take the young priest lightly!

The names of those young men, bear a symbolic meaning; It is fitting for the old and mature people, to regard the youth, through two angles: The first angle, is that they are a gift from God (Jonathan); A young man is not a tool in the hand of the old, but he is a man of God, with his own personality, talents, and thoughts; things that the old should acknowledge; and not seek to pour the youth in molds, according to their own minds⁶. The second angle is , that we should accept the youth, known for their natural quick temper and anger, as brothers (Ahimaaz = brother of anger), to transfer their flaring emotions, into edification, through sanctifying, and not destroying them.

The two young men were staying at ‘En Rogel,’ or (traveler’s eye); as the youth tend to prefer continuous movement to relaxing and stationary life. It is not fitting for the old to attack the youth on account of their actions, but to support them with love and care and wisdom; so that all will proceed together in growth for edification.

c- The two young priests dared not be seen coming into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 17: 17); being known to be followers of David. However, a lad saw them and told Absalom. It is as though, with every action on our part, we should expect an unforeseen opposition by the devil; That is why, no human plan will ever succeed, however intact it is, unless it is supported by God’s care and grace.

d- The two young priest set forth and came to a man’s house in ‘Bahurim,’ meaning (youth)⁷, the same city from which, ‘Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjamite,’ came to curse David and throw stones and dust at him (2 Samuel 16: 5, 6, 17). The city, from which came a man to oppose David, there was a believing woman who worked for him; She hid the two men in a dry well, placed a covering over the well’s mouth, then spread ground grain on it. We can say that the same city that produced someone to insult David, who bore with him with a big heart, also produced a woman with an equally big heart toward David and his men. God has listened to the words that David uttered there:

¹ Strong, art 6659.

² Ibid. art 54.

³ Ibid. art 3129.

⁴ Ibid. art 290.

⁵ Ibid. art 5883.

⁷ Strong, art. 980.

⁶ راجع كتابنا: دعوني أنمو، ١٩٨٨، باب ٣، ٦.

“It may be that the Lord will look at my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day” (2 Samuel 16: 12).

Wherever there is a peaceful bearing of insults and curses, there will be salvation!

The man cursed David, while the woman worked to rescue his life ... I wish both sexes realize their positive roles in working to the account of God’s kingdom.

The man who cursed David, probably refers to the congregation of the Jews, who denied and rejected the Savior; while the woman refers to the congregation of the Gentiles, who accepted by faith, the holy well of Baptism, covered with divine love through the blood shed on the cross.

e- When Absalom’s servants searched and could not find the two young priests, she said to them, *“They have gone over the water brook”* (2 Samuel 17: 20). In that, the woman lied, as did ‘Rahab’ (Joshua 2: 1-7), Michal (1 Samuel 19: 12), and Hushai (2 Samuel 15: 34). This is unjustified human weakness.

f- They came up out of the well, and set forth to David, to tell him to hasten to cross with his people over the water, whatever the difficulties might be. So David and all the people who were with him arose and crossed over the Jordan. By morning light not one of them was left who had not gone over the Jordan (2 Samuel 17: 23).

4- Ahithophel hangs himself:

Absalom did not follow the counsel of the arrogant Ahithophel; who set forth to his house, where he hanged himself and died, after putting his household in order (2 Samuel 17: 23)

He did that for two main reasons: Firstly, for the sake of his personal dignity and his feelings having been hurt by the acceptance of the counsel of someone else. And secondly, because he realized that Hushai’s counsel would definitely lead to the destruction of Absalom; in which case the return of David to his throne, would imply his execution as a traitor.

Hanging himself in his house, refers to the fact that what befell him is a natural fruit of the ‘self’ or the ‘ego,’ he shut himself in, with no opening of heart nor love for others. **St. Macari the Great** confirms in the homilies referred to him, that there is no salvation outside the others. And **St. (Mar) Ephram** says: [Who lends his arm to help his brother, will have the arm of the Lord to help him¹].

Ahithophel turned into a symbol of Judas, the traitor who likewise, hanged himself

5- Absalom gets ready for war:

David and his men crossed over the Jordan to ‘Mahnaim,’ a city of Levites at the northern boundary of the Gad territory (2 Samuel 2: 8); It was a location convenient for David, because it was fortified.

Absalom also crossed over the Jordan with his troops under the leadership of ‘Amasa,’ meaning (burden)², who had the same relationship to Absalom as his cousin ‘Joab.’ Actually ‘Amasa’ turned to be a real (burden) on Absalom, and not a help for him; as Absalom was killed in the only battle he went through against his father, with

¹ *Ibid. hom. 48.*

² *Strong, art. 6021.*

‘Amasa’ as a commander.

6- David in Mahnaim:

David and his men came to Mahnaim, where ‘Shobi’ the son of Nahash, ‘Machir’ the son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite, brought provisions as an offer of love, that David accepted amid his affliction and troubles. That is why he sang his 23 rd. Psalm saying: “*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*”

He was offered a practical jest of love in Mahnaim, far from the capital of his kingdom, when several of his friends opposed and betrayed him.

David taking refuge in ‘Mahnaim,’ meaning (two camps), refers to Lord Christ’s transfiguration in his Church of the Old and the New Testaments. In Mahnaim, there was ‘Shobi,’ meaning the (captor)¹; ‘Machir,’ meaning the (salesman)², from ‘Ammiel,’ meaning the (people of God)³; and ‘Barzillai,’ meaning (Iron- heart)⁴. All these ministered to David by offering him and his men equipment and different kinds of food, amid their afflictions and troubles.. It is as though, it is fitting for the believers of the two Testaments: the Old and the New, to acquire the following attributes:

a- To be ‘captors’ and not ‘captives’; who know how to have their life and feelings, led by the power of the Spirit, not enslaved to carnal lusts; holding in their hands, the inner leadership, by the Holy Spirit in them.

b- To be ‘salesmen’; namely, to have a positive role in the Church; feeling a kind of freedom, as true members of the congregation of God.

c- To have the ‘Iron-heart’; not overcome by fear, worries, or lusts; but to have the Spirit of victory, and conquest, by Christ Jesus, the leader of the spiritual procession.

¹ *Ibid.* art 7629.

² *Ibid.* art 4353.

³ *Ibid.* art 5988.

⁴ *Ibid.* art 1271.

CHAPTER 18

THE END OF ABSALOM

After few days of setting Absalom, the arrogant rebel, on the throne as a king of all Israel, he gathered his great army to kill David ... He entered into a battle that was a shadow of the battle of the cross; in which David and his men came out victorious, while Absalom and his men were destroyed. David was a symbol of Christ, the living victorious while Absalom was a symbol of the devil, which the Lord killed on the cross and whose authority He destroyed.

1- David organizes his troops	1-5
2- The defeat of Israel	6-8
3- The end of Absalom	9-15
4- The return of David's men	16-18
5- David mourns for Absalom	19-23

1- David organizes his troops:

After Absalom the rebel was set on the throne, he gathered his great army, and crossed the Jordan to fight against David and his men; seeking to kill David. In this he symbolized the Devil, who, with his deceit and pride, became the ruler of this world (John 14: 30); who gathered together all his followers to get rid of the Messiah.

At the same time, David numbered the people who were with him, to organize his troops in Mahanaim. The historian Josephus estimated their number to be 4000 men, which was very small compared to Absalom's army. Following the example of the prophet Moses (Exodus 18: 25), and that of Saul (1 Samuel 22: 7), David set captains of thousands and captains of hundreds over them. He then sent out one third under the hand of Joab, one third under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third under the hand of Ittai the Gittite, who showed his loyalty in the time of affliction, refusing to stay in Jerusalem with Absalom, to partake of David's sufferings and sojourn (2 Samuel 15: 18).

David intended to be the supreme commander of the three divisions, to lead them by himself ; but the people who heard about the counsel of Ahithophel, and realized the intentions of Absalom to concentrate on killing David, asked him not to go out; as his death would bring about the fall of the whole army (2 Samuel 21: 17); while if he stayed back, he would support them with his counsel and planning.

By organizing his army, David represents the Lord Christ, who sets His men as spiritual soldiers to wrestle till the end to destroy evil and the devil ... to destroy the sin, but not the sinners; the corruption, but not those deceived by corruption. The apostle Paul says: "*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 6: 11, 12); and: "*You therefore, must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in Warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier*" (2 Timothy 2: 3, 4).

The saintly fathers believe that the Lord Christ is Himself, our weapon in the battle. **St. Ambrose** says: [As long as Christ is there, we have got a defense toward our

salvation¹]. And **St. Augustine** says: [Our armory is Christ²].

David listened to their quest and stayed back in the city; but with compassion he commanded his three captains: “*Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom*” (2 Samuel 18: 5). This was not the command of a war leader, but that of a compassionate father, who saw his rebellious son as a lad who needed fatherly compassion. This is how many of the fathers of the Church see every angry man of their flock—a little lad who needs love more than anything else.

If this is how the human father feels toward his rebellious son, and the Bishop or the Priest toward one of their congregation; how would our heavenly Father the Lord Jesus Christ, feel toward the sinners?! He seeks us all, and with compassion, he waits for a sign from us, to receive our life, and to dwell and find comfort in our hearts. He has prepared the banquet, and has set the first garment, and the ring of son hood, waiting for every rebellious son to return to him.

There is no comparison between David and Absalom: David who loved all the people, cared only for his rebellious son; while Absalom came by himself to battle, with one goal, which was to kill his father!

2- The defeat of Israel:

As Absalom came into battle, David had to command his men to move out of Mahanaim; to spare its inhabitants, who gave him and his men hospitality, any unwarranted suffering. Such was David’s gentle feelings and care to spare everyone any harm on his account.

The battle was in the woods of Ephraim, east of the Jordan; and not the woods west of it (Joshua 17: 18), where the Ephraimites were defeated before ‘Jephthah’ and the people of Gilead (Judges 12: 6). Absalom and his mighty army were defeated before the much fewer number of David’s men. Israel was scattered all over the woods, followed by David’s men, who killed 12,000 of them; and the woods devoured more people that day, than those whom the sword devoured (2 Samuel 18: 8). It is as though nature itself fought against that wicked man, as it did during the crucifixion.

Their fall was a symbol of the fall of those who denied faith and rejected the heavenly Son of David, to live according to their earthly thoughts and their bodily lusts, following the arrogant Absalom (the symbol of the devil). **St. Augustine** says: [*All those who go down to the dust shall bow before him*] (Psalm 22: 29). Only our Lord Jesus Christ will see how those who forsake the heavenly way of life, and adopt the earthly choice, will fall; to look before other people, who cannot see their fall (their perdition), as though happy³].

3- The end of Absalom:

Absalom rode on a mule though he used to ride on chariots and horses; and under the thick boughs of the woods, his long and dense hair, caught in the branches of a terebinth tree; and as the mule which was under him went on, he was left hanging between heaven and earth. Now a certain man saw this and told Joab what he saw to be scolded by Joab for not striking him there to the ground; he would have given him ten

¹ *Conc. Virgins 2:29.*

² *adv. Jovinianus 2:3*

³ *On Ps. 22.*

shekels of silver and an adorned belt. But the man said to Joab, “*Though I were to receive a thousand shekels of silver in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king’s son; for in our hearing the king commanded you, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, ‘Beware lest anyone touches the young man Absalom’*” (2 Samuel 18: 12).

Joab took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom’s heart, while he was still alive in the midst of the terebinth tree. And ten young men who bore Joab’s armor surrounded Absalom, and struck and killed him. Joab disobeyed David’s command, because he felt that Absalom’s life represented danger against David himself, as well as against the whole kingdom.

As we previously said, that the end of Absalom symbolizes, as far as the believers are concerned, the battle of the cross, in which the powers of the devil were completely destroyed by the crucified Savior; according to the following aspects:

a- David’s men went outside the city of ‘Mahnam,’ to enter into a fierce battle against Absalom and his men --more numerous and far stronger. In a similar way, as our Christ was lifted up on the cross out of Jerusalem; the apostle Paul calls on us “*to go forth to him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach*” (Hebrew 13: 13); to enter into a battle against the very fierce devil, together with his uncountable and equally fierce and violent hosts ... Yet, in Jesus Christ, we shall attain conquest and victory, destroying all his deceptions and tricks, and all his power and might. He will become very weak, he and all his evil works, if we hide in our victorious Christ.

b- Absalom used the mule that belonged to his father, instead of the horse he used to ride. While David used to ride that mule to war to conquer, that same mule went on under Absalom, leaving him hanging between heaven and earth. We can say with the **scholar Origen**: [The Lord Christ was lifted publicly on the cross; yet it was the devil, who lost his authority, and had his possibilities crucified. On the same cross Christ reigned, and the devil was destroyed; The apostle says: By the cross, “*He disarmed principalities and powers. He made a public spectacle of them triumphing over them in it*” (Colossians 2: 15).

❖ He conquered the whole world as we can see brethren ... He conquered ..., not by military power, but by the ignorance of the cross!

St. Augustine¹

❖ The Lord disarmed principalities and powers by his cross; That was why our Lord came: to cast them away, to get back man-His home and temple

St. Macari the Great²

❖ The same tree, by which the devil conquered us, the Lord rescued us.

Blessed is He, who, as a true lamb, saved us, and destroyed the one who destroyed us; like what happened with the idol ‘Dagon’.

St. (Mar) Ephram the Syrian³

c- The beautiful and dense hair of Absalom, that drew many to set him a king (2 Samuel 14: 25-27), caught in the terebinth, to leave him hanging between heaven and

¹ الحب الإلهي، ص ٤٦٧، ٤٦٨.

^٢ الحب الإلهي، ص ٤٦٩.

^٣ الحب الإلهي، ص ٤٦٩.

earth, unable to escape death. So is the body, with all its good members, emotions, and feelings that God made in us, if they go astray, will turn to become the cause for our perdition. The fault is not in the body, nor in its energies-as all are the work of a good Creator, but the fault is in us, who turn what is good into a cause for our perdition.

d- Absalom was left hanging between heaven and earth; referring to the devil, destroyed by the cross, to find no comfort in heaven, where he has no place, nor on earth, that will not last for him ... he will fall to where he will neither enjoy heaven nor earth.

e- Absalom's heart was thrust with spears while alive, by the hand of Joab, as well as by his young men. Joab represents the congregation of saints, mighty in faith, who destroy the devil, thrusting spears into his heart; while the young men, refer to the simple believers, who persist on fighting the devil, who, for them, has lost his ability to move. **St. John Chrysostom** likens him to the dog who barks before its home, but turns into a coward before an innocent kid.

4- The return of David's men:

Once Absalom was dead, Joab blew the trumpet to hold back the people and to put an end to the fighting. It is the trumpet of the Word of God, uttered by believers, through which to proclaim the life of conquest, and the end of the devil.

Absalom's body was unceremoniously cast into a large pit in the woods, disregarding his dignity as the son of a king. He sought temporal dignity with all his energies, to lose it when dead, and even after death. He became a lesson to every soul that rebels against God-its Father. They laid very large heap of stones over him; as though stoning him, for his rebellion against the statutes of the law (Deuteronomy 21: 20, 21). In some parts of the east, there is still a custom, for passersby to cast stones on the tombs of criminals.

Absalom died only few weeks after he ascended the throne; his three children (2 Samuel 14: 27) had died during their father's lifetime. A memorial pillar called 'Absalom's hand' was set up in the king's valley; as a message to anyone who thinks of practicing rebellion.

5- David mourns for Absalom:

Joab expected that the king, so fond of his son Absalom, would not receive the news of victory with joy, because of the death of his son; So he did not want Ahimaaz the son of Zadok the priest, to take the news to the king; but sent a Cushite slave instead. Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain; namely the Jordan valley, to Mahnaim, and outran the Cushite, who took an easier but a longer way.

Ahimaaz reached David, who was sitting between the two gates; namely on a roof connecting a gate toward the wilderness, and another toward the city; where a watchman went up to tell David what he saw.

Ahimaaz gave David the good news, but did not add a single word concerning Absalom. David realized from the report of the Cushite that his son died; He was deeply moved, and wept bitterly; probably for the following reasons:

a- Natural fatherly feelings of compassion; especially that David was known for his tender soul.

b- Having had for Absalom a special feeling; expecting his personality to get mature with time, and through continuous experiences.

c- Feeling that Absalom was not ready to die; having not yet repented.

- d- Feeling that he had not properly raised his children.
- e- Feeling that what happened to Absalom, was the fruit of his own old crime.

CHAPTER 19

DAVID RETURNS TO HIS THRONE

Absalom's rebellion, beside the war between Israel and David's men, created several wounds, on the level of certain prominent personalities, as well as in between the different tribes. Some people were exposed as traitors to David; while some others betrayed him under pressure. Returning to the throne, needed from David, to be prudent in action, beside carrying out certain important connections.

1- Joab gets David out of his mourning for Absalom	1-8
2- The tribe of Judah's encounter with David	9-15
3- Shimei and Ziba's encounter with David	16-23
4- Mehibosheth's encounter with David	24-30
5- Barzillai's encounters with David	31-40
6- A dispute between the tribes	41-43

1- Joab gets David out of his mourning for Absalom:

David's great grief and mourning for his rebellious son Absalom, was considered by Joab, to be an insult to the people who risked their life for his sake; and who expected a word of thanks, and a joyous celebration of the victory. That is why Joab came into the house of the king to talk to him in a way, and with words, that should not be addressed to a king; saying to him: *"Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives, and the lives of your concubines, in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; For today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well"* (2 Samuel 19: 5, 6)

Joab exaggerated in what he said: that David loved his enemies who hate him, and hated those who loved him. If Absalom happened to conquer, he would have killed David, his children, wives, men, and particularly the mighty warriors like Joab; And David, did not hate those who loved him.

Daringly, Joab, for fear, lest the people would forsake David, and look for another king, on account that he preferred his rebellious son on all of them, requested from David: *"Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants"* (2 Samuel 19: 7).

We can not deny David's delicate feelings toward everyone, particularly his son Absalom; Yet, he should have gone beyond personal and familial relationships, for the sake of his love and care for his people; His extreme grief for his rebellious son, actually hurt the feelings of his men, who did not expect that from their king. Anyway, the Holy Book intended by that, to demonstrate, that it is difficult for man, to rid himself of personal and familial emotions, even as far as the greatest of prophets and saints are concerned.

2- The tribe of Judah's encounter with David:

The situation was confusing throughout Israel. All the tribes recalled David's role, since his childhood, in defending them, in the days of King Saul; beside his splendid record as a king. Yet, when his son rebelled against him, and many people joined him; ...

there he was, mourning his death... Now Absalom was dead; they became with no king; and did not know what to do; especially the tribe of Judah, who backed Absalom in his rebellion, and were fearing retaliation by David.

So David dispatched Zadok and Abiathar the priests to the tribe of Judah, to hasten to proclaim their submission to David; And in order to wipe away their embarrassment, he reminded them that they were his brethren, his bone and his flesh. He dispatched them as well to Amasa, the commander of Absalom's army, with a promise to appoint him the commander of his army in Joab's place; in order to gain back the people who supported Absalom; and at the same time, to get rid of Joab, who killed Abner and Absalom, and talked harshly and indecently to David, beside harboring certain embarrassing memories concerning his crime against Uriah the Hittite.

Then the king returned and came to the Jordan; and Judah came to Gilgal (between Jericho and the Jordan), to go to meet and escort the king across the Jordan.

Although David acted wisely to regain the hearts of Judah, his action had its negative aspect; having alienated the rest of the tribes, who assumed that Judah felt a kind of isolationism and superiority, counting David as their personal king, being from their tribe.

David dispatched the two priests: 'Zadok,' meaning (righteous), and 'Abiathar,' meaning (father of wealth); to draw, by love, his own tribe to him. And in the fullness of time, the Son of David, Himself-the incarnated Word of God-came to us to draw us to Him, through His exalted Holy life, and His divine Fatherhood, rich in love; to set us, as members of His body, His bone, and His flesh; His holy Church.

Who, among us, like 'Amasa,' had an evil role of leadership to the account of Absalom (a symbol of the devil), will be transformed by His divine grace, to become a leader to the account of the kingdom of Christ; the same way he did with 'Saul' of Tarsus, who used to persecute the Church, to become by His grace, a faithful apostle and a preacher for Christ.

As David cared for Judah as a tribe, and for 'Amasa' as an individual, so also the Lord Christ cares for His Church, as a holy congregation-His only bride; without disregarding any single member in it. The edification of the Church is to the account of the growth of every member in it; and likewise, the edification of every member, is to the account of the congregation as a whole; with no separation between the collective Church, and the personal experience of each one of its members.

3- Shemei and Ziba's encounter with David:

Shemei and Ziba, hastened to meet David: the first cursed him while fleeing from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 16: 5-13); and the second deceived him, when he claimed that Mephibosheth coveted his throne (2 Samuel 16: 1-4). The first came with 1000 men from Benjamin; and the second came with his 15 sons and 20 servants; They all crossed the Jordan to meet the king.

While Abishai considered it the right time to put Shemei to death, because he cursed the Lord's anointed, David, on the other hand, counted it a time for joy, for healing wounds, and for dealing with everyone with love, big heart; and forgiveness.

How amazing is David's personality! With every success or conquest, he does not seek authority that when he gets, he does not abuse it; but transfers it to love and care. He sees the royal throne as way to gather together, to reconcile, to unite; and not to create

more dissension. By forgiving Shemei, he swayed to himself the hearts of all the tribe of Benjamin; and all the other tribes as well, had their hearts comforted by such forgiving spirit.

If we say this concerning a king, what would we say concerning the Bishop or Priest, or any spiritual leader?! Clergy is fatherhood and care, rather than authority and dictatorship; is love in Christ, and not arrogance, and temporal dignity!

❖ The honor of clergy is great. Yet if a priest abuses it, his perdition will be horrible.

❖ A priest is not saved for his honor; but for his actions, according to the ways fitting it.

St. Eronimos¹

4- Mephibosheth's encounter with David:

Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, came from his house in Benjamin to Jerusalem to meet king David; He had not cared for his feet, trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came back in peace; to find the door open before him! David's heart, together with the doors of his palace, were open before everyone, even before his adversaries and opponents. He encountered Shemei, who cursed him; Ziba, who deceived him; and here he encountered Mephibosheth, who made it clear to him, how Ziba deceived him, took away his donkeys, and left him lame and helpless (2 Samuel 16: 1-4). David admonished Mephibosheth for not going with him; yet gave him the chance to defend himself; and when he realized that he was abused by Ziba, he forgave him, and gave his order to divide the land-or most probably the crops-between Ziba and Mephibosheth. He did not condemn Ziba, nor dismissed him from Mephibosheth's service, because he did him a favor in the time of his affliction.

Mephibosheth was so moved by David's words, that he proclaimed to the king, that his pleasure for his coming back in peace to his kingdom, was more important than getting back half of his possessions and could not be compared with any other gain.

David was a symbol of the Lord Christ, who came to our world through a manger, with no doors or bolts; open before all to enter and talk to him; And as we hear His voice, we count His coming to our inner Jerusalem, better than any blessing or gain, we may get! His dwelling in us, is incomparable to any blessing, whatever its value is! Our Christ dwells in our hearts, to fulfill all our needs.

5- Barzillai's encounter with David:

Barzillai the Gileadite, a very aged man, 80 years old, came down from Rogelim, and went across the Jordan with the king, to escort him across the Jordan. The King proposed that if he would come across with him to Jerusalem, he would provide for him there; to pay him back for what he did to him, as he fled and came to Mahnaim, when , together with Shobi the son of Nahash, and Machir the son of Ammiel , brought earthen vessels and wheat, barley and flour, parched grain and beans, lentils and parched seeds, honey and curds, sheep and cheese, for David and the men who were with him to eat (2 Samuel 17: 27, 28).

Barzillai refrained from heeding the king's proposition, on account of his old age, that did not let him anymore discern between good and bad food, nor hear any longer the voice of the singing men and singing women; and he would rather die in his own city,

¹ الحب الرعوي، ص ١٤٧.

and be buried by the grave of his father and mother. But he suggested to the king to let his son Chimham cross over with the king, and to do for him what seemed good to him. David commended him to his son Solomon (1 Kings 2: 7); who probably made him a governor over Bethlehem (Jeremiah 41: 17); and according to some people, the Lord Christ was born in his house.

Through all the encounters mentioned in this chapter, we see in David a symbol of the Lord Christ, who encountered the following:

1- With the Church as a whole, symbolized by the tribe of Judah, to enjoy the union with Him, as His one body; while at the same time, caring for 'Amasa,' as a sign of His care for every single member.

2- With the fallen repentant souls, as Shemei who previously cursed David.

3- With the souls that lied and deceived; and now are coming with repentance, as Ziba.

4- With the broken and afflicted souls, as Mephibosheth.

5- With the pious souls, that only care for departing from the world, as Barzillai the Gileadite.

6- The souls, new to faith, as Chimham the son of Barzillai, to grant them authority and to dwell inside them.

6- A dispute between the tribes:

The king dispatched the two priests: Zadok and Abiathar to motivate the tribe of Judah to hasten to come to the king; intending by that to sway back their hearts to him, after being exhorted by Absalom against him. They came to Gilgal; beside some Benjamites who came with Shemei; together with some of those who were dwelling east of the Jordan, from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. The rest of the other tribes, far in the west, came a little later, and counted the going of the tribe of Judah before them, as an insult and degradation. To that, the men of Judah answered, that they did not do this for their own benefit, as much as because of their closeness to the king geographically; saying: "Have we ever eaten at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?!"

CHAPTER 20

THE REBELLION OF SHEBA THE SON OF BICHRI

The sword was never to depart from David's kingdom as a divine chastisement for killing Uriah the Hittite; Thus, for no obvious reason, Sheba the son of Bisri, the Benjamite, rebelled against him, and persuaded 10 tribes of Israel to follow his suit, to leave only Judah with David. God proclaimed his strong hand, as victory unexpectedly was realized for David, and with no bloodshed, except for that of Sheba himself. So God allowed for chastising David by that temptation, although He also created the way out. .

1- The rebellion of Sheba son of Bichri	1-3
2- Joab murders Amasa	4-10
3- Killing Sheba son of Bishri	5-22
4- David's government organized	23-26

1- The rebellion of Sheba son of Bishri:

'Sheba,' a Hebrew name that means (seven) or (oath)¹, was a Benjamite by birth (2 Samuel 20; 21); He, and Shemei were of the tribe of Saul. Sheba might have had an apparent or concealed role in the rebellion of Absalom against David his father.

The Benjamites came to escort David across the Jordan, but became angry because of what the men of Judah said (2 Samuel 19: 41-43); and for a trifle reason, Sheba blew a trumpet, and the men of Israel (10 tribes) returned to their land in rebellion against David; Yet instead of doing that, they came back to gather together to make a new war under the leadership of Sheba (1 King 12: 16).

It is obvious that what was happening was not natural: the people were changing in an amazing way: They were first with David; then followed Absalom; then returned to David; and now they were leaving him to follow Sheba. Most probably, the great majority of them, did not know the reason of following or leaving somebody ... There must be a hidden hand behind those incidents; namely the "divine will," for the sake of chastising David.

David did not find rest after the rebellion of his son Absalom, to see Sheba playing the same role, gathering 10 tribes around him. It is as though God's intention was not to let David have rest from affliction; nor the bitterness of his sin to leave his mouth.

David came to his house in Jerusalem ; took the 10 concubines whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in seclusion, and supported them, as it was not fitting for him to go in to them after Absalom did (2 Samuel 16: 22).

2- Joab murders Amasa:

The king commanded Amasa (David's nephew, and Joab's cousin), to gather the men of Judah within three days; It was a very short notice, yet the situation was too dangerous for any delay; as David intended to strike Sheba, before loosing the whole kingdom.

David disregarded Joab, and appointed Amasa a commander of his army for several reasons:

a- David used to keep his promises whatever the circumstances were; He had previously sent for Amasa to return to him, and promised to set him a commander instead

¹ *The Westminster Dict. of the Bible*, p. 860.

of Joab (2 Samuel 19: 13).

b- If Sheba gathered together all the tribes except for Judah, appointing Amasa, the previous commander of Absalom's army, would send the message that David was opening his arms for everyone to work with and in them.

c- For those old disputes between David and Joab, with which we already dealt (see 2 Samuel 19).

Because Amasa delayed longer than the set time which David had appointed him, David commanded Abishai the brother of Joab, to pursue Sheba ; which he did with his brother Joab and his men.

As Joab, together with his men of Judah and Benjamin, encountered Amasa at the large stone which is in Gibeon; He took Amasa by the beard with his right hand, as though to kiss him, and struck him in the stomach, with a sword he hid in his left hand. Amasa died, and was left wallowed in his blood in the middle of the highway.

Joab proclaimed before the people, saying: "*Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab*" (2 Samuel 20: 11). As though he wanted to confirm to them, that he killed Amasa because of his treason against David; and that he (Joab) was David's first and faithful man. By that he drew even Amasa's men behind him and Abishai, to pursue Sheba the son of Bishri; leaving behind, Amasa wallowing in his blood, after moving his body from the highway, and throwing a garment over him.

Joab's personality remains peculiar and confusing: From one aspect, he was true in his faithfulness to David. Although he differed from David in their ways of thinking, he never betrayed him, nor was slothful in giving all his energy for the sake of establishing his kingdom. He accompanied him all the way, but was hasty to realize his peace, through actions, that David considered rash, as for example killing Abner and Amasa ... There was probably a hidden motive behind that; namely having been jealous of them as mighty commanders of the army; so he intended to get rid of their competition. He also killed Absalom, disregarding the king's orders; as long as that was for the sake of the peace of the king and the kingdom. He did not care for the means, as long as it realizes the ultimate goal.

3- killing Sheba son of Bishri:

The people, led by Joab and his brother Abishai, proceeded toward the north, until they reached 'Abel and Beth Maachah,' meaning (Pasture of the house of injustice)¹ or (Pasture close to Beth Maachah)²; a fortified city in the territory of the tribe of Naphtali, known for the wisdom of its inhabitants, and their abidance to Jewish traditions. Probably in its place nowadays is 'Tel Abel' or (Hill of wheat), a village west of the Jordan, on a plateau over the valley; 12 miles north of the lake of 'El-Hola' facing Dan; surrounded by a fertile plain, with plenty of water sources, called 'Abel Maim' or (Pasture of water) (2 Chronicles 16: 4). Joab and his men cast up a siege mound against the city (a kind of wall or dirt sill to protect them), and besieged it. All the people who were with Joab battered the city wall to throw it down.

The prudent inhabitants of the city realized the danger they were facing; Then a wise woman cried out: "*Hear, Hear! Please say to Joab, 'Come nearby, that I may speak*

¹ قاموس الكتاب المقدس، ص ١ .

² *The Westminster Dict. of the Bible*, p. 3.

with you' " (2 Samuel 20: 16). When he had come near to her, the woman said to him: "They used to talk in former times, saying, 'They shall surely ask counsel at Abel, and so they would end disputes'" (2 Samuel 20: 18). That was a famous quotation that implied that 'Abel' was known for its wisdom, that many people used to come to seek its prudent counsel, to end their disputes. It is as though she was saying to him: "Why haven't you come to us to negotiate; knowing that we are peaceful and prudent?! And she added: "Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the Lord? " (2 Samuel 20: 20) meaning: "You are attacking and destroying a city, that was a gift from God to its inhabitants" {According to the law, he was supposed to offer peace, and negotiate before attacking (Deuteronomy 10: 10).] Joab answered and said: "Far be it; Far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bishri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city" (2 Samuel 20: 21).

By her wisdom, she could convince her people to cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bishri, and threw it out to Joab, who then blew a trumpet, and withdrew from the city.

'Sheba' symbolizes (pride); when man assumes that he is in need of nothing; a sickness that affected the Bishop of the Church of the Laodiceans, to be rebuked by God, saying: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'-and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3: 17). Feeling of self fulfillment, and of not needing God, destroys all possibilities of man, to become wretched and miserable, etc.... That was what Sheba did, as he gathered together around him, 10 tribes, to create a kingdom for himself against David; if it was not for the wisdom of that woman who cut off his head, and threw it over the city wall, to restore peace to the kingdom of Israel.

If the kingdom of God is within you (Luke 17: 21), pride would otherwise be capable to destroy all your energies, feelings, emotions, talents, and capabilities, for all to work through it, against the Son of David; to set an adversary and opposing kingdom. We need wisdom, the wisdom of the cross, capable of striking pride, of cutting off its head, and of throwing it outside of us in order for us to restore our peace and have the Son of David back to reign in us.

CHAPTER 21

A FAMINE BECAUSE OF THE GIBEONITES

Saul did wrong by persecuting the Gibeonites, for whom 'Joshua the son of Nun' vowed not to kill them; and it was the people who reaped the fruit in the days of David, through a famine that lasted three years. Inquiring of the Lord, He revealed the reason behind it; and there was no way to put an end to it, except to deliver seven of Saul's descendants to the Gibeonites, who hanged them.

1- A divine chastisement because of the Gibeonites	1-2
2- David makes atonement to the Gibeonites	3-8
3- Hanging seven of the descendants of Saul	9-14
4- War against the Philistines	15-22

1- A divine chastisement because of the Gibeonites:

A famine, because of a draught, happened and lasted three years; and when David inquired of the Lord, He answered him, saying: "*It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites*" (2 Samuel 21: 1). Saul killed them out of ignorance and zeal, for his tribe to confiscate what was theirs, disregarding Joshua's vow to them (Joshua 9).

That famine, most probably happened after the events of the ninth chapter; namely before the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 15). That was probably why Shimei reproached David, calling him: "*You bloodthirsty man!*" (2 Samuel 16: 7); referring to the seven men of Saul's descendants, whom David delivered to the Gibeonites to hang.

The Holy Book did not mention anything about the killing by Saul of the Gibeonites as it did not intend to give a detailed history of the kings, but to present what would concern our edification and salvation.

Indeed David realized that there must have been a secret behind the famine; so he inquired of the Lord; Yet he delayed in inquiring. If he had inquired at the beginning of the famine-the first or the second year-he would have spared the people much suffering. Unfortunately, we do not hasten to resort to the Lord; but linger, until we are out of our tricks, wisdom, and power, and still have no solution; only then, we resort to God, our Father who cares for us. How hard are our hearts! We forget God during our joy; and even during our affliction, until we grow faint.

If God has set for Himself a people in the Old Testament, to become a yeast of faith, and to prepare the world to receive the Savior Messiah, every now and then, and in different ways, He confirms that the door is open before the Gentiles; and that with God, there is no partiality. Saul, the king of Israel, did the Gentile Gibeonites wrong, then died, and the people forgot what he did; but God did not forget. God chastised the whole people by famine, although they were His own people, living in the promised land, that flow of milk and honey, and were under the reign of a pious king (the prophet David). In the climax of his glory, God allows for chastisement, for all to realize that what happens is not haphazard, nor due to mere natural factors but, behind it there was the hidden hand of God, for the edification of His people.

Saul symbolized the arrogant and faith-denying congregation of the Jews; while the Gibeonites symbolized the Gentile congregation that entered into a covenant with the true Joshua, our Lord Jesus. The Gentile Church suffered much from the Jews, the

deniers of faith; God allowed that, yet in due time, He moved even nature (rain) to support His little flock; while the deniers lost their life.

2- David makes atonement to the Gibeonites:

David felt the need to make atonement to the Gentile Gibeonites, for God to respond to his prayers; So he said to them: *“What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord?”* (2 Samuel 21: 3).

He asked them to bless the people of God-the inheritance of the Lord!!!

The Gibeonites had suffered much from Saul and his men; who killed many, and put the rest out of their land, breaking the covenant made between the two peoples in the days of Joshua. Their quest came to reveal certain good points in their life because of which, God probably intervened on their behalf among which were:

a- They did not misuse the situation for any material benefit; though the king was ready to compensate them; Yet all they said was: *“We will have no silver or gold from Saul or from his house”* (2 Samuel 21: 4). They, and their fathers, were enslaved; However, they refrained from asking for a material compensation.

b- They were peace lovers; and did not seek to shed any innocent blood saying: *“nor shall we kill any man in Israel for us”* (2 Samuel 21: 4).

c- They asked for chastising only the household of Saul saying: *“As for the man who consumed us, and plotted against us, that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the territories of Israel; Let seven men of his descendants be delivered to us, and we will hang them before the Lord in Gibeah of Saul whom the Lord chose”* (2 Samuel 21: 5, 6).

David proclaimed that he was ready to make atonement (2 Samuel 21: 3); namely to compensate them for the damage they suffered; yet they refrained to ask for any material compensation, nor to avenge themselves, but asked only for God’s justice. As the killers were Saul and his house, seven of his descendants had to be delivered to be hanged on a tree of curse (Deuteronomy 21: 23; Galatians 3: 13); So God would alleviate his wrath.

It should be noticed that in their request, they tried to spare David any embarrassment:

a- They did not ask for any of the seven men by name ... So they gave David the chance to save Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, for the sake of his father, and spared him betraying his vow to Jonathan, and breaking their amazing friendship.

b- They spared David the embarrassment of executing the hanging by himself; as the victims whereof his own people; while the Gibeonites were of the Gentiles.

c- They requested that the hanging be executed in ‘Gibea of Saul’; so that the people would realize that they did not mean to avenge themselves against the whole people, but only against Saul, whom God chose; hence the severity of the punishment.

3- Hanging seven of the descendants of Saul:

David delivered seven men of the descendants of Saul to the Gibeonites, to hang them, not as a sacrifice, but to realize justice. Those seven were: Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah, a concubine; whom she bore to Saul; [and because of whom King Mephibosheth rebuked Abner for going in to his father’s concubine, with the intention of confiscating the throne (2 Samuel 3: 7-11)]; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, who bore no children for David (2 Samuel 16: 23);

but for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite (believed by some to be the sons of her deceased sister Merab, whom she adopted).

Rizpah came to the place of hanging; took sackcloth, spread it for herself on the rock, and stayed there from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven; She did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. She watched the whole months of summer¹, how the bodies of the seven men were destroyed by corruption, day after day; among whom were her own two sons, whom she hoped to become her comfort in her old days; yet because of sin, they turned into the cause of bitterness and grief.

David was considerably moved by what Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done; And in order to show that he DID not harbor any hatred or grudge toward the house of Saul, he took the bones of Saul, and the bones of Jonathan his son, that were secretly buried under a tree (1 Samuel 31: 12, 13) in Jabish Gilead; and gathered the bones of those who HAD been hanged, and buried them all in the tomb of Kish, Saul's father, in the country of Benjamin in Zelah (meaning rib)², that is most probably nowadays 'Kherbet Salah, north-west of Jerusalem.

4- War against the Philistines:

David together with his men went down from the mountain of Judah to the plains, and fought against the Philistines; He was almost killed, as he grew faint, if not rescued by Abishai. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, 'You shall go out no more with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel.'

Because of his great humility, **St. John Chrysostom** admired in the men of Judah, their loyalty and love for their king David; and wished from his own congregation to have such kind of love for him, caring for his spiritual life, and persisting on praying for him saying to them: [I am in great need of your prayers; I wish you never deprive me of this pledge (to support me by your prayers³].

I wish we support our shepherds by praying for them; as if they happen to fall, this will lead to the perdition of their flock.

Again there was a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan Goliath the Gittite was killed (brother of Goliath who was killed by David) (1 Chronicles 20: 5).

¹ *In Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 178.

² *The Westminster Dict. of the Bible*, p. 1020.

³ *In 2 Thess. hom. 4.*

CHAPTER 22

PRAISE FOR GOD'S DELIVERANCE

We were expecting to see this song-almost identical to Psalm 18-at the end of the talk about David's conquest, and before the talk about his fall in sin, and its bitter consequences; as in it he mentions his righteousness, the cleanness of his hands, his keeping the ways of the Lord, and being blameless before him-namely, we expected it to come between the tenth and the eleventh psalms; and to have here instead, psalm 51 (50), concerning the repentance and confession.... But the divine inspiration, intended to confirm that life of praise, and feeling of conquest, remained for David, up till his last breath. Although he fell, yet with repentance and confession, he kept on singing the psalm of victory.

In his interpretation of psalm 18-which is itself the present psalm of conquest **St. Augustine** says that this psalm concerns the Lord Christ Himself, who speaks in His Name, as well as on behalf of the Church, His body, being her head; The victory He enjoys is to her account.

We can say now that it is the song of the Church, victorious by Christ the leader of her procession; seeing in God the secret of her salvation, her light, and her strength...; By Him, she draws the nations to faith, to partake of her joy of salvation.

1- The occasion of the song	1
2- The Lord is my Rock	2-4
3- The waves of death encompassed me	5-7
4- He bowed the heaven, and came down	8-16
5- The realization of deliverance	17-21
6- Walking blamelessly	22-25
7- Like what we do to others, so it will be done to us	26-28
8- God, the lamp of the soul	29
9- God, strength and power of the soul	30-43
10- Calling the Gentiles to salvation	44-56

1- The occasion of the song:

With every victory , David felt the faithfulness of God, as though new every morning (Lamentations 3: 23); he realized the amazing power of God working in his weakness; granting him the holy life, and the victory over evil; and opened his heart to others with love ... That is why, he felt himself indebted to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise; as a natural action, emerging from a soul rejoicing within, and a body trembling with all its feelings, as though it is the guitar of the Spirit.

It seems that the prophet David kept on singing this and other psalms of victory, with each of his victories; as it is said: *“David spoke to the Lord the words of this song, on the day when the Lord had delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. And he said ...”* (2 Samuel 22: 1, 2)

2- The Lord is my rock:

*“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
The God is my strength, in Him I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation;*

*My stronghold and my refuge;
My Savior, You save me from violence;
I will call upon the Lord, ... so shall I be saved from my enemies” (2 Samuel 22:
2-4).*

If the ancient serpent-the devil-is the real enemy who wants to devour us; the serpent is not able to climb a smooth rock; The Lord Christ presents Himself as the Rock, by which we are lifted up, so that the serpent can not reach us; He is “*the Rock*” (1 Corinthians 10: 4), in whom we find refuge, and by whom we are saved from our enemies.

If Saul-like the other enemies-had done his best to kill David; yet despite all his military possibilities and might, he could not harm him, but his persecution turned for David, into glory and edification ...; Thanks to God, the Rock, the Stronghold, and the Deliverer of David’s soul.

❖ The enemies besieged me; therefore You are my Fortress.

St. Jerome¹

❖ “*You are my Shield; and the Horn of my salvation*”

You are my Shield; I am not depending on myself, arrogant with my horn of pride; But I find You the true Horn; where the definite exaltation is; and to achieve this, You are my Savior.

St. Augustine²

❖ O, divine Leader, give me strength.

❖ You embrace my being with your perfect overall care; you always embrace me, as though you see nobody but me.

You watch over me; as though you have forgotten all the other creation.

You grant me your gifts; as though I am the only subject of your love.

St. Augustine

3- The waves of death encompassed me:

God-with His love for David-did not rid him of his adversaries; but, on the contrary, allowed afflictions to come over him, until death almost encompasses him; in order that God, the Grantor of life and resurrection, would transfigure in him; That is why he cries out, saying:

“When the waves of death encompassed me;

The flood of ungodliness made me afraid;

The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me;

The snares of death confronted me;

In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried to my God.

He heard my voice from His temple;

And my cry entered His ear” (2 Samuel 22: 5-7).

David is greatly belittled before the bitter afflictions that befell him, and almost killed him; He counted himself as though, surrounded by waves that destroyed his energy; swept down by floods to a bottomless abyss; surrounded by mighty mountains

¹ On Ps. 90 (91).

² On Ps. 18.

that blocked all ways to salvation around him; and confronted by the snares of death ... Yet, he was not without help; as the Lord heard his voice from His temple, and inclined His ears to his cry, as though His personal friend!

As **St. Augustine** looks into the inner conflict between the soul and the evil one-the devil-Here he sees, that death is not the separation of the soul from the body, but the death of the soul itself. That is why the soul cries out, to be heard by God Himself, and not by humans; by words and cries that reach Him from the depths of the soul, being a sanctuary and a temple of God.

- ❖ He hears the voice that comes out of my heart, where He Himself dwells!
- ❖ The cry that I utter, is not intended for the ears of men; but it is an internal cry, that I present before Him, to enter into His

St. Augustine¹

4- He bowed the heaven and came down:

The opposition of Saul and the other enemies to David proved to be a splendid atmosphere, through which he got in touch with God's exalted love; and got to know God more and more. Through affliction, God transfigures with His love in man's life, to find in Him the compassionate Father, and Savior.

Through the opposition of enemies, David saw --by the spirit of prophecy-the perdition that befell man by the envy of the devil; and how God, the Word Himself descended from heaven, to proclaim His fiery love toward men; something for which all the world: heaven and earth marveled. He says: "***Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was angry***" (2 Samuel 22: 8). What the sin has done with man's life and nature, through the envy of the devil, aroused the wrath of God; Heaven trembled and earth shook, before His exalted love; as He "***Bowed the heavens, and came down***" (2 Samuel 22: 10). The apostle Paul says: "*Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh*" (1 Timothy 3: 16). It is a mystery, beyond comprehension, that creation could not realize its significance: "*With dark clouds under His feet*" (2 Samuel 22: 10); Dark clouds mean obscurity and incomprehension.

His love is a consuming fire; David sees "*devouring fire coming out of His mouth, and smoke from His nostril*" (2 Samuel 22: 9); and St. John sees "*His eyes like a flame of fire*" (Revelation 1: 14) ... It is the exalted love that consumes and destroys the evil one; and puts the heart of man aflame with divine fire "*that many waters cannot quench*" (Song 8: 7); So He says: "*I will be a wall of fire all around her*" (Zechariah 2: 5).

He is "*The sun of righteousness*" (Malachi 4: 2), who sends the ray of His fiery Holy Spirit on us, to set in us a flame of fire, like what happened in the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2: 3).

His words on the cross were like thunder and lightening, that disturbed the Devil (Colossians 2: 14); and like arrows they killed him. Yet for us, they are themselves a source of life, and a cause for permanent praise.

St. Augustine² presents us with an allegoric interpretation for the text on our hand, to see the earth that trembled and shook, as representing the sinners who became

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

like earth that trembled and shook, when the Son of Man came to be glorified on the cross.

We say that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ-the Grantor of victory-shakes the whole being of our body, with all its feelings and emotions; yet not to destroy, but rather to sanctify it; and touches our inner souls, to renew its nature. That is what David the Psalmist meant by earth (the body) and heaven (the soul).

What are the smoke going out of his nostrils, and the fire coming out of his mouth? **St. Augustine** says that it is the fire of love and the light of righteousness, of which the sinners are deprived, having lived for long in the cold and darkness; Then, comes the Savior to set their hearts aflame by the love of goodness, and to grant them an inner enlightenment, after having granted them the new life.

❖ *“He bowed the heaven and came down”* ... The righteous in humility, descended to the weakness of mankind.

And *“With dark clouds under His feet”* ... The wicked who find pleasure in temporal things-in the darkness of their greed-do not recognize Him as they are like earth under His feet, like His feet stools.

“He rode upon a cherub, and flew; and He was seen upon the wings of the wind” ... He was glorified beyond the fulfillment of knowledge (cherub); No one can reach Him except through love; as *“Love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Romans 13: 10).

He may seem incomprehensible; beyond the power and capability of the soul; yet it (the soul), by the wings of (the Spirit), will be lifted up from the earthly fears to the air of freedom....

“He sent out arrows and scattered them; lightening bolts and vanquished them” ... He sent His Evangelists, provided with the wings of power, His power, and not their own ... ; to become *“the aroma of life to life; and the aroma of death to death”* (2 Corinthians 2: 16). By them he made wonders (lightening) to vanquish them.

St. Augustine¹

In short, the psalm of deliverance, deals in essence, with the work of salvation of God: The Word of God bowed the heaven by His incarnation, to come down to us; shining as the sun of righteousness over those who sit in the darkness. Before Him, all what is temporal in us will tremble, to sanctify our inner heavens (soul) and our earth (body); scattering the darkness of ignorance that dwelt in us. He rode on clouds as though on charubs, and ascended to lift us to Him, and to get us to sit in the heavenly places. He sent His disciples and apostles like arrows, to pierce the hearts by their preaching; and to shine in them like lightening, the light of knowledge, to shake up every evil, and to set in them the kingdom of God.

5- The realization of deliverance:

The prophet David proclaims in his psalm of deliverance, the goal of God's descent from heaven-namely His incarnation; which is delivering man from affliction, and lifting him up to heaven, to the Father's bosom:

“He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy ... He also brought me out into a broad place” (2 Samuel 22: 17-20).

¹ *Ibid.*

St. Augustine believes that, the Church of the Gentiles, speaks here of the work of God with her. God the heavenly Savior called it out of many waters; gathering it from among different peoples and nations, to become His glorious Church “*not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but ... holy and without blemish*” Ephesians 5: 27). He delivered it from its strong enemy; having been weak before faith; captivated by the bonds of world love. Now, the Savior brought it out into a broad place; brought it out of the narrowness of carnal life, to the broad place of the spiritual faith; It set forth to the freedom of the Spirit.

If Moses was put by his mother in a narrow ark of bulrushes, daubed with asphalt and pitch; and laid in the reeds by the Nile bank; to be taken out by the daughter of Pharaoh to her broad palace; so the Church of the New Testament, was drawn out of many waters, from among the nations, delivered from the inner narrowness, to enjoy the broad heavenly life, by the work of the Holy Spirit, that dwelt in it through Baptism.

6- Walking blamelessly:

We do not marvel to see David, known for his great humility, even before Saul his pursuer, calling himself ‘s dead dog,’ ‘a flea’ (1 Samuel 24: 21); to see him here speaking of his righteousness, cleanness of his hands, keeping the ways of the Lord, and of being blameless before Him

The Holy Word of God came down to the world; carried us in Him, to become members of His holy body, to stand before the Father, as children, justified in the precious blood; as though blameless, carrying in us the perfection of Christ. This is salvation, and this is the message of the cross: to carry us to Christ, to hide in him, and be covered by His blood, justified and sanctified in and by Him.

Who is He, who is righteous, with clean hands, who keep the ways of the Lord, who had not wickedly departed from the divine statutes and judgments, who is clean before God? Who is He, but the Son, who is the only One without iniquity ... David is here speaking with the Spirit of prophecy, on the tongue of the Savior! Now, His Church-His holy body-can utter these same words, as though hidden in Him.

7- Like what we do to others, so it will be done to us:

If the Savior God is the secret of our righteousness and sanctification, we, by and in Him, will attain the new holy nature; We will become merciful, perfect, pure, and humble, to enter into a new relationship with God the Father saying to Him: “*With the merciful, You will show Yourself merciful; With a blameless man, You will show Yourself blameless; With the pure, You will show Yourself pure; And with the devious, You will show Yourself shrewd. You will save the humble people; But Your eyes are on the haughty, that You may bring them down*” (2 Samuel 22: 26-28).

It is as though we are saying: By You, we became merciful to others, that you have mercy on us; and by You, we became blameless, that you will show Yourself blameless, etc. ... As to the evil one, as he is devious and haughty, God shows Himself to him as shrewd, to bring him from the pride of his glory, down to the abyss.

St. Augustine believes that God, the holy in His nature, shows Himself holy to the saintly man, as He makes him holy; Namely, whoever seeks perfection, the perfect God will grant him perfection; while the devious man, although God will not harm him, yet, “*his own iniquities entrap him*” (Proverbs 5: 22).

8- God, the lamp of the soul:

“For you are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord shall enlighten my darkness” (2 Samuel 22: 29).

St. Clement of Alexandria, and also the Scholar Origen say, that, because darkness came to the soul, and made it ignorant; so the Word-the Teacher-came to shine on it with the saving spiritual knowledge, to enlighten its inner depths.

- ❖ O, the unseen light; Grant me eyes that can behold you!
- ❖ O, the light that enlightens the soul, the glamorous Truth, the true enlightening Splendor, You who shines on every man coming to the world; You came to the world that did not love You.

O, My God ... scatter the dense darkness that dwells in my soul; to behold You, as it comes to recognize You; to know You, as it comes to accept You; and to love You, as it comes to know You

St. Augustine

9- God, the strength and power of the soul:

*“For by You, I can run against a troop;
By my God, I can leap over a wall; ...
He is a shield to all who trust in Him;
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and sets me on my high places;
He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze;
He enlarge my path under me, so my feet did not slip;
I have pursued my enemies and destroyed them” (2 Samuel 22: 30-39).*

If the enemy comes to oppose me like a strong army, You are my strength; you have become for me like a wall of fire to protect me; and like a shield to confront all the arrows of the enemy; have strengthened my feet to become as swift as a deer; have set me on high places, to keep any harm away from me; have strengthened my arms to fight against the devil; and enlarged my path under me, to pursue my enemy and to destroy him by the cross.

- ❖ Oh! Hasten to turn my soul into a dwelling place for You; and my heart where to settle down! Come ... I am sick with love. Being far from You is like death to me; ... Your remembrance revives my soul!

Your fragrance restores my strength; Your mention alleviates my sufferings; ... Your appearance is fulfillment to me.

St. Augustine

10- Calling the Gentiles to salvation:

*“You have also delivered me from the strivings of my people;
You have kept me as the head as the head of nations.
A people whom I have not known shall serve me.
The foreigners submit to me; As soon as they hear, they obey me. ...
Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles;
And sing praises to Your name” (2 Samuel 22: 44-50).*

The Psalmist ends the song of salvation, by inviting the Gentiles to salvation. That was what brought joy to David’s heart; that his fight against the Devil, had not saved him

alone, but also saved the Gentiles together with him; to bring to the Messiah, people he did not know; people who did not enjoy the law; who did not speak with the prophets, and did not come to know the divine promises ... Those people, of heathen origin, came to worship God; having heard about Him only through the word of preaching; but had not seen Him by their eyes, as the Jews did, from among whom the Savior came; before whom He made wonders without number; and talked to them mouth to mouth; Yet they opposed and denied Him, instead of believing in Him.

CHAPTER 23

DAVID'S LAST WORDS

David could have presented us in his last words, with a plenty in every aspect of life. He lived under several circumstances: He experienced life of richness, and tasted poverty; He enjoyed glory, and humiliation; was loved by many, and hated by some, to turn into a fugitive; led a life of righteousness, and experienced fall, repentance, and chastisement. He lived as a prophet, a king, a judge, a man of war, a psalmist, a husband, a father, a shepherd of a few sheep, as well as a king over an extended kingdom... . Yet he made his final speech a very concise one; and ended it with the names of his mighty men and their works (2 Samuel 23: 8-39). This was not without reason; for the Holy Book intended to confirm that, of the most prominent attributes of the prophet David, was making use of all the energies within his hands. This is the role of the prophet, as well as of every true spiritual leader; of the father and the mother; of the young man and even of the child; Everyone should do his best, not to be self-centered, but to motivate others to work, with no isolationism of thought, nor individualism, or selfishness.

1- David, the sweet psalmist of Israe	11-2
2- Ruling in the fear of God	3-4
3- Entering into an everlasting covenant	5
4- The perdition of the sons of Bilaal	6-7
5- David's mighty men	8-39

1- David, the sweet psalmist of Israel:

“These are the last words of David: The oracles of David the son of Jesse; The oracles of the man exalted by the Most high; The man anointed by the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23: 1).

He calls his words “oracles,” having uttered them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; given to David the son of Jesse; to the man exalted by the Most High; the man anointed by the God of Jacob! What does this mean?

He was the son of Jesse; He would not forget his origin and his status: the youngest son, a shepherd over his father's sheep; unknown to people, and not acknowledged even among his own family (1 Samuel 16: 10, 11). He was unknown to men, but known to God “the Most High;” had his mission and work assigned by god. He was the anointed by the God of Jacob; as the Lord said to the prophet Samuel: *“Arise, anoint him; for he is the one”* (1 Samuel 16: 12).

He was called, *“The sweet psalmist of Israel”* (2 Samuel 22: 1), for he was sweet in his psalms, being praises, Thanksgivings and prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, for the Church to subsist, all along the Old and the New Testaments, and to sing in its prayers. David's life in its wholeness came as a spiritual guitar, on whose strings the Spirit of the Lord played, to present to us a flood and a treasure of praise for believers; to insert in them the spirit of Joy in the Lord.

Thus David demonstrates three aspects in his personality:

a- His humble origin as the son of Jesse; so as not to feel exalted, or haughty.

b- His anointment for the ministry of God's people *“The anointed of the God of Jacob”* ; If God anointed him a king, and granted him such a great glory, this was all for the sake of God's people; for the edification of the holy congregation; and not to be used

for his own account or for that of his house.

c- He had a pious mission “*the sweet psalmist of Israel;*” to lift the people up to the heavenly life, of persistent praise.

He called the Spirit of the Lord that worked in him, and uttered through him, “*The Spirit of the Lord ... The God of Israel ... The Rock of Israel*” (2 Samuel 22: 2, 3); demonstrating the work of the Holy Trinity in his life: The Holy Spirit, which is *the “Spirit of the Lord,”* who speaks through the prophets, inspired the psalms to him; to proclaim to him, God the Father “*The God of Israel*” by the Son “*The Rock of Israel.*”

St. Athanasius says: [For, from God the Father, one grace sets forth, by the Son, in the Holy Spirit. There is one divine nature, and one God “*above all, through all, an din all*” (Ephesians 4: 6)¹].

2- Ruling in the fear of God:

If David was glorified, and was granted authority, that was through his fear of God; who gave him enlightenment, to give light like a shining sun in the morning after hours of darkness; and like a soil starting to grow weeds soaked by divine rain. What he had of strength, greatness, and fruition, were all a gift from the sun of righteousness (the Lord Christ), and the divine rain (The Holy Spirit), that he enjoyed through fear of God saying: “***Ruling in the fear of God, He shall be like the light of the morning when the sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass, springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain***” (2 Samuel 23: 4).

In other words, no believer will enjoy the shining of the sun of righteousness in him, nor the fruits of the Spirit (the rain), unless he enjoys the fear of God. **St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian** speaks to us about the blessings that come of the fear of God, saying:

- ❖ Fear of God is the beginning of virtue; It is said that it is the daughter of faith².
- ❖ The real beginning of man’s life is the fear of God that will never dwell in a soul that is distracted by external concerns³.
- ❖ Be prudent; If you put the fear of God as the foundation of your trip; within few days it will bring you to the gate of the kingdom, without any detours on the way⁴.
- ❖ Fear of God is the paternal rod that guides us on our way, until we reach the spiritual paradise of goodness; after which, fear will then leave us and turn back. The paradise is the love of God⁵.
- ❖ Repentance is the ship; fear is its skipper; and love is the divine harbor. Thus fear would bring us to the ship of repentance; cross with us over the sea of dirt of this life; and lead us to the divine harbor, which is love⁶.

St. (Mar) Isaac the Syrian

The saintly fathers discern between fear out of love – the love of children who care not to hurt the feelings of their parents; and the fear of a laborer; out of his apprehension that he may lose the reward or the wages; then the fear of slaves from their

¹ *Ep. ad. serap. 1: 14.*

² *hom. 1: 1.*

³ *hom. 1: 10.*

⁴ *hom. 1: 21.*

⁵ *hom. 46.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

masters. By union with our Lord Jesus Christ, we enjoy the fear of children, said to carry the fear of God.

3- Entering into an everlasting covenant:

The goal of the men of the Old Testament-the patriarchs and the prophets-was to enjoy a covenant with God, a symbol of the everlasting covenant that was realized through the blood of Christ; in which an everlasting reconciliation between God and man, was consummated; and by its worthiness, man became a dwelling place and a sanctuary for God.

David says in his last words: *“Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure. For this is all my salvation and all my desire”* (2 Samuel 23: 5).

David felt his unworthiness to enjoy that everlasting covenant with God; as his house-his parents and brothers; and his children in particular – did not walk with the fear of God. The divine covenant is a free divine gift!

4- Perdition of the sons of Bilaal:

“But the sons of rebellion shall all be as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands. But the man who touches them must be armed with iron and the shaft of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place” (2 Samuel 23: 6, 7).

David had fear that any of his descendants, or of those who would succeed him on the throne, would become a son of Bilaal; in which case, neither his relationship to David, nor his position as a ruler over the people of God, could intercede for him; But he would be thrust away as useless thorns, to be burned with fire; They would perish by divine justice.

These words may carry a sort of commandment to the kings, rulers, and all those of authority, to be alert, lest they become chastised by a hand of iron, and a shaft of spear.

St. Jerome believes that the wicked of the world (sons of Bilaal) are to be uprooted, to have no place in the Church, the city of the Lord; He says: [The city of the Lord is the Church of the saints, the congregation of the righteous¹].

5. David’s mighty men of war:

If David, in several events, symbolized the Lord Christ; his mighty men, likewise, symbolized the men of faith affiliated to the Lord Christ. Their names (that differed from time to time) were mentioned here for the following reasons:

a- To be mentioned in the Holy Book, is considered as the greatest of rewards; like what the Lord Christ said about the woman who poured the fragrant oil over his head: *“Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her”* (Matthew 26: 13); and as He said to His disciples: *“.. But rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven”* (Luke 10: 20).

Whoever attaches himself, as a good soldier, to our Lord Jesus, and canonically strive, will enjoy this honor: to have his name written in heaven.

b- This list is considered as glory to David himself, who trained them on strife and conquest ... Every victory and conquest we get, is to the account of our true king, the Son

¹ On Ps. hom. 27.

of David. And as said by the **scholar Origen** , He is the One who calls us to strive, and He is the One who works striving in us; He presents the crown to us, and accepts it in us! And on the contrary, every failure and slothfulness in our life, will become a cause for blasphemy on Him.

c- This list is considered to be glory and honor to the mighty men concerned, who strove with David, to establish his reign; And at the same time, it is considered to be an invitation for men along the ages, to have the Son of David reign over their hearts, and to have His kingdom established in them.

d- Mentioning their names, is not based only on their military excellence; but that, and their courage went had in hand with their faith. So we do not marvel to notice that the name of 'Joab'-David's highest commander-is not on this list; as he has lost his crown, because of his persistent evil actions, emerging from his hate and envy; having killed Abner and Amasa, and dared to talk indecently to David, his king.

In this list of mighty men, we notice the following:

a- They are from different tribes and families, like Judah, Benjamin, Gath, and Ammon ...; Likewise, the great men of faith, come from several nations and various peoples; and include as well, men, women, children, youth, elders, etc.

b- Those mighty men are classified into three ranks or categories:

* The first three: Josheb, Eleazar, and Shammah; who refer to the early fathers, prophets, and people of the Old Testament.

* The following three: Abishai, Benaiah, and a third whose name was not mentioned; these refer to the disciples, the apostles, and people of the New Testament.

* Thirty ... who refer to the congregation of believers.

CHAPTER 24

THE CENSUS AND THE PLAGUE

In chapters 11-21, the Holy Book talked about the fall of David, as a result of his slothfulness with sin for a few moments to remain for long years reaping its bitter fruits; although that bitterness turned into his glory, and the edification of many, through his consistent repentance. Now the Book ends with another serious fault, committed by David; namely, ordering a census of the people, to know the number of men who “drew the sword;” without seeking the counsel of God. As a result of his action, a severe chastisement came upon the people, that shook the depths of David; yet he knew how to regain the mercies of God.

1- Numbering the people	1-9
2- David realizes his transgression	10
3- The prophet Gad reviews God’s chastisements	11-14
4- A plague comes to Israel	15-17
5- The prophet Gad comes to David	18-25

1- Numbering the people:

God’s anger against David was not because of the census in itself; as the prophet Moses did the same three or more times (Exodus 38: 26; Numbers 1: 2, 3; Numbers 26). our God is a God of order and not of chaos. God’s anger was because of the following reasons, or some of them:

- a- David did not seek God’s counsel as he usually did.
- b- David started to lean upon the number of his men, and upon his own capabilities; While, if he was to consider his whole life, since his youth, he would find himself going from caring for a few of his father’s sheep, to receiving a whole kingdom, by divine power, and not by his arm or that of others. In several situations, in his strife against enemies or adversaries, God interfered unexpectedly; which was often expressed by David in his psalms.
- c- David probably intended by that census, to start new wars, for the sake of extending his kingdom, and increasing his own glory.
- d- He probably intended to get the people to pay a heavy tax to his own account, or to that of the treasury, and not to the account of the tabernacle of meeting-the house of God
- e- It seems that his main motive was to proclaim his greatness, his capabilities, and resources; the way the surrounding kings used to do, to let the neighboring nations fear them. Because the people shared this spirit, that sin was counted for them as well, and not just for David; though David, with his compassionate heart, tried to refer it to himself and to his father’s house, and to concentrate the chastisement on him to spare his people.
- f- The people were in need to be chastised; God sometimes allows for a shepherd to err, in order to chastise his flock; the Book says: “*Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, ‘Go number Israel and Judas’*” (2 Samuel 24: 1).
- g- Some scholars believe that David’s fault lied more, in his command to ‘Joab’ to include in his census those younger than 20 years, if their appearances and energies

seemed adequate for service; That action was against the law and statutes (1 Chronicles 27: 23-24).

h- His fault was also demonstrated in not taking the half a shekel to the account of the tabernacle, as a ransom, in case a census is taken (Exodus 30: 12).

Joab realized David's fault, and tried to draw his attention to it, but David insisted. He said to him: *"Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundredfold more than there are, and may the eyes of my Lord see it. But why does my Lord desire this thing?"* (2 Samuel 24: 3).

Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army; so they abided by his orders.

2- David realizes his transgression:

Probably one of the best of David's attributes was that, once he realized his error, he did not try to cover it up or to justify it to the Lord; but in the simplicity of heart, together with plainness and hope, he quickly cried out and confessed his sin, with no hesitation: *"So David said to the Lord, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done; But now, I pray, O Lord, take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly'"* (2 Samuel 24: 10).

3- Gad the prophet reviews the divine chastisements:

Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to the king (2 Samuel 24: 9); But instead of thinking about them, and contemplating in his goals of getting them, David's heart condemned him (2 Samuel 24: 10). He stayed the whole night in bitterness, anticipating the fruit of his serious iniquity. When he arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to him through the prophet Gad, David's Seer, giving him the choice of one of three things: Seven years of famine; fleeing three months before his enemies, while pursuing him, or three days' plague in his land.

David, in great distress, said to Gad: *"I am in great distress; Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; But do not let me fall into the hand of man"* (2 Samuel 24: 14).

So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel from the morning till the appointed time. From Dan to Beersheba 70, 000 men of the people died. And when the angel stretched out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the destruction, and said to the angel: *"It is enough; Now restrain your hand"* (2 Samuel 24: 16). The angel of the Lord was then, by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite; Some scholars believe that he was on the same Mount of Muriah, where Abraham offered his son Isaac a sacrifice to God...; as though the end of perdition was through the sacrifice of the beloved Son.

4- The plague came to Israel:

Amid that severe and bitter chastisement, the Holy Book revealed David's great love toward his people; when he saw them under affliction, he cried out to the Lord to let His hand be against him and his father's house, instead of against the people. He, like His Master (The Lord of glory Jesus), was ready to bear the afflictions in place of his flock; and not to hide among them, seeking their care for his person.

❖ When he came to chose one of the chastisements, he did not choose the famine nor to flee before the enemies, but the plague sent from God. He hoped for all to be safe; and to carry on the chastisement by himself; But when he found out how the people were

afflicted, he cried out, saying: “*Let your hand, I pray, be against me and against my father’s house.*” He confessed that he, as their shepherd, had sinned and had done wickedly; and even if they did sin, it was he who should be punished because he had not managed to straighten their path; How great it is to confess one’s iniquity¹!!

- ❖ Abraham, likewise, did not seek just his own benefit, but that of many; He exposed himself to danger; and asked the Lord for those who do not belong to him (the people of Sodom and Gomorrah)².
- ❖ I wish we seek punishment for ourselves, when we sin against Him, whom we should not sin ... If we love Christ as we should, we are committed to seek punishment for ourselves when we sin³.

St. John Chrysostom

5- The prophet Gad comes to David:

God listened and responded to David’s cry out, full of love toward the people of God; He sent to him the prophet Gad, to instruct him to erect an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Aruanah the Jebusite, where he saw the angel of the Lord; confirming the following to him that:

a- David was reconciled to the Lord; as the erecting of an altar, offering a sacrifice, and accepting it by the Lord, imply the realization of reconciliation.

b- The reconciliation was realized through the sacrifice; a symbol of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

When Aruanah - a foreigner and a Jebusite-saw the angel; then saw the king coming toward him, he got very confused; and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. Asking him why he came, David told him, “*To buy the threshing floor from him, to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be withdrawn from the people*” (2 Samuel 24: 21).

Aruanah wanted to offer the threshing floor free, together with oxen for the burnt sacrifice, and threshing implements, and the yokes of the oxen for wood; But David rejected the offer, and insisted on paying 50 shekels of silver; refusing to offer free burnt offerings to the Lord.

The figure 50 refers to the freedom that man enjoys within by the Spirit (the Jubilee and the feast of Pentecost); Thus the altar, and the sacrifice, are connected to the Holy Spirit, the Grantor of freedom.

On the same site, the temple of Solomon was built.

Although Aruanah was a Gentile, he enjoyed seeing the angel. Because he was characterized by humility, love, and giving, the temple was erected on his land ... I wish our inner man, to be like Aruanah the Jebusite; to be worthy of having the temple of the Lord erected in us.

¹ On Rom. hom. 29.

² On 1Cor. hom. 25.

³ On 2Cor. hom. 11.